

Drag Artist Interviews, 2020

To cite this dataset as a whole, the following reference is recommended:

Baxter, Destiny, Ezra Temko, and Adam Loesch. 2021. "Drag Artist Interviews, 2020."
Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Available URL
(<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/interviewtranscripts/>).

To cite individual interviews, see recommended reference(s) at the top of particular transcript(s).

These eight interviews used the same questionnaire instrument as the 22 interviews conducted in Spring 2019, which can also be found at <https://ezratemko.com/drag/interviewtranscripts/>.

Table of Contents: Interview Participants

Amoura Teese	1
Bella Noche	14
Die Anna	25
Gigi Gemini	34
Mick Douch	48
Tomahawk Martini	58
Twinkie LaRue	74
Wendy Warhol	83
Appendix: Interview Questions	96

For more information on this dataset or research, contact Ezra Temko at etemko@siue.edu

Interview with Amoura Teese

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Baxter, Destiny. 2020. Interview with Amoura Teese. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 13. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/amoura-teese/>).

Audio of interview is also available at: <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/amoura-teese/>

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

Interview with Bella Noche

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Baxter, Destiny. 2020. Interview with Bella Noche. *Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville*, February 12. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/bella-noche/>).

Audio of interview is also available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/bella-noche/>

Interviewer: Did you get a chance to look at that consent form I sent you?

Bella Noche: I did, I did skim through it and everything sounded fine with me

Interviewer: Okay, no questions or anything?

Bella Noche: No, just pretty standard

Interviewer: Okay, let me get started then, my first question is when did you first hear about drag?

Bella Noche: Um, that's an interesting question. I think I had been exposed to different types of drag before I understood what drag was. I guess my first exposure to drag in its most basic form would be seeing like old Looney Tune cartoons, like Bugs Bunny was my favorite cartoon character growing up and he would dress up as a woman all the time, for like, to do various cartoons. So, I guess that would be the first time I ever really saw drag, but I didn't even know what drag was back then.

Interviewer: When would you say was the first time you experienced drag where you understood?

Bella Noche: Okay, I would probably say my senior year in high school. I grew up like very conservative, my family is very religious, and so high school was the first time I actually went to a public school and it took me a couple years but I finally came out to my friends and started meeting other queer people and in sophomore no - I think it was junior year actually, it was in junior year that we had like a little queer party and one of the guys came dressed up as a girl, in drag. And I was just like "Oh, okay!" And yeah, I think that was the first time I understood what drag was.

Interviewer: What would you say was your initial reaction to that?

Bella Noche: I mean, I wouldn't say that it was like you know super embracing, but at the same time, they were like my friends so I knew this person, you know? it wasn't like a stranger just showing up randomly in you know another gender's clothes, so there was already like a kinship there and I think that also kind of colored it a certain way. So I mean, it didn't come off as like you know, it definitely was out of the ordinary but wasn't anything that was like "Ooh what the hell are you doing" you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, when did you start performing as a drag artist?

Bella Noche: I started performing in 2016, I had been working in night life for almost a year and I had made a lot of drag queen friends and one in particular used to do a show twice a year called "the first timer show" where guys would get into drag for the first time and like do a performance and you know, that would be the show. It was coming up, and she said "You know, I think you should do it" and I was just like "Yeah," and a couple of my friends at the time were like "Yeah! You should do it, you should do it!" And I only planned to do it once and at that point I had seen good New York City drag, so, I wanted if I was going to do it once, I was gonna do it right and so I had someone help me with my hair and my make-up and I ordered my heels way in advanced, and I planned like a reveal and choreography, so I was like "If I'm gonna do it once I'm gonna do it right." So, I did it and that first night I preformed I got booked as a guest at another bar the next week and it kind of just snowballed from there.

Interviewer: That's awesome, how was that first experience, do you remember that?

Bella Noche: Oh my gosh yes, I absolutely remember that! So many people that I loved and cared about were there, it was you know, not to be too vein cause I was with four other performers that night and it was clear that I was like the favorite of the night, and it was just unlike any experience, it was just ultimate and total freedom cause, you know, cause you're not yourself, you're just free to be this other character and person and you now I had so much fun that night it was so memorable and I look back and I still like kind of cringe, I'm like "ooh!" compared to what I am now but yeah, it was absolutely amazing and I mean if I didn't have a good time I wouldn't have continued doing it.

Interviewer: That's awesome, so you said your family is conservative, how did they receive you becoming a drag artist?

Bella Noche: They don't know I do drag currently

Interviewer: Okay, what about your friends, were they supportive of you in this?

Bella Noche: My friends were very, very supportive, a couple of - one of my best friends, she was just like "Yep! I've seen this coming for a while" so they were - yeah, I had immense support outside of that.

Interviewer: That's awesome, would you like to speak any more about your family situation or anything like that?

Bella Noche: Sure, yeah, I'm open about that

Interviewer: So anything you like to share in terms of that lack of support or anything, I don't have any specific questions on that?

Bella Noche: Yeah. So, I grew up in a Pentecostal family here in New York City of all places, and very conservative, very like right is right, wrong is wrong, and one of the things that was wrong is wrong was about homosexuality and anything that had to deal with it. At 19 I came out and was kicked out of the house and it's been a long journey to get my family back into my life, and now I'm 30 and it took 10 years for me to like reestablish and repair the relationship with my family, my mother more specifically. But I made so much progress with them and it's taken so long and

I don't feel like telling them I do drag right now would be most you know, opportune, you know, especially that like I'm not like on an international stage yet or anything like that where, you know, if you google me my face will pop up. I mean it is eventually something that, a conversation we'll have to have, I think the main reservation I have is when I was coming out about being gay, my parents thought that meant that I wanted to be a girl and I was very in fact, no I don't want to be a girl, that is a completely different thing. And now I feel like you know, now that they have - they haven't really accepted the gay thing but it's like something that is like no longer a big problem. I think that adding drag, they would be like "Wait, I thought you didn't want to be a girl" and it would just kind of add another level that we're gonna sit down and talk about this and have questions, so I'm kind of just enjoying the having an uncomplicated relationship with my parents again and we'll cross that bridge when we get there.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's completely understandable. Would you say that your religious upbringing has impacted your drag experience in any way?

Bella Noche: Oh my gosh, immensely. There are a lot of, I would say, I guess influences, you know! I grew up very, very, indoctrinated in the church, I still know all 66 books of the bible from front to back, it just doesn't go away. And I definitely think that there, whenever, - cause my drag style, I do all kind of drag, I can do like PG drag for three-year-olds and I do like X-rated drag for like porn stars, so you know, it's a very large range and a lot of times I will find myself, like if I'm doing like, extra-raunchy, or something sacrilegious, I always think of like my mom or like you know, "Oh my God if my mom saw this she would absolutely kill me." So yeah - a little.

Interviewer: So you kind of spoke just now a little about it, there's so many different types of drag, glamour queens, male-impersonators, comedy queens, - so many, what kind of drag would you say that you do, what's your style of drag?

Bella Noche: Its interesting because I really haven't been able to pigeon-hole myself into anything, I kind of just do me. So I am known as The Mermaid of New York, I'm New York's premier mermaid drag queen, that's just a character I built and the image that I built, and I do a lot of lip syncing, I do comedy, a comedy lip sync, I do stand-up comedy, I've been known to live sing a couple things, I also do burlesque, and I also do things like drag queen story hour where I'm going to libraries and museums and reading to 3- year-olds. I've gone and I've hosted the Queens College Pridefest, this year coming up will be my third year doing it and that's, you know, for college kids, so my drag is very, very, like I know my audience for whatever the show is and I try to design a show that would be, not only appropriate for the audience, but the audience would actually engage and react to. I'm a writer by trade, so I'm very well versed in like analyzing what an audience is and like figuring out what exactly it is they want and then capitalizing on my strengths to deliver a really good show.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awesome where does your drag name come from?

Bella Noche: So funny enough, I'm really bad with names and titles, and I was racking my name for a drag name before that show I told you about - the first timers show, and I was just like "I don't know what to do" and I'm a Disney lover, and I was watching Lady and the Tramp and you know that scene with the spaghetti and meat ball? and the guy is singing "Bella Notte" and I was like

“Ooh that's pretty, but I'm Puerto Rican” so I changed "Notte" to "Noche" and that's where I got it.

Interviewer: I love that, who or what has influenced your drag?

Bella Noche: Well I was first and foremost like I - Disney is like a huge thing, Disney has kept me like young-spirited and imaginative, The Little Mermaid especially is, like my favorite, and has helped me, you know, be more creative and was, you know, the reason why I have like the mermaid character in itself, from a young age I really liked mermaids because of Ariel. But then outside of that - I really like, one of my comedic inspirations, especially when I'm like talking into a microphone, is Joan Rivers. I really, really, enjoy like her delivery, the way she does, and she'll like - her, the way she delivers a joke, I just think its hysterical so a lot of times when I'm writing jokes, I deliver them kind of the way she would, so she's definitely influenced my drag. And I would say one of the biggest influences, cause my drag is most of the not very feminine, and very Latina and my aunt Arlene she's been like my favorite family member ever since I was a baby, we just had like a special bond, she's the one who introduced me to The Little Mermaid, I actually called her my little mermaid. So designing my character, she's very like, very much like a Latina club girl, red lips, hoop earrings, curly hair, always has perfume, always in heels, so my idea from a young age of like, you know, heightened femininity was her, so she's absolutely probably, as far as a physical representation or manifestation, in real life, she's probably my biggest inspiration.

Interviewer: That's awesome!

Bella Noche: It's funny you say that - today is her birthday!

Interviewer: Happy birthday!

Bella Noche: Yeah! I'll tell her, I called her this morning.

Interviewer: So, kind of tell me in general, about what your life is like as a drag artist.

Bella Noche: Busy! So it's interesting, life as a drag artist, it's very, I would say, unpredictable, and not necessarily in a bad way- I'm never bored, I'm never bored, you know, whether it's like going to a gig, you never know how a show is going to go, who's gonna show up, how good its gonna go, how much money you are gonna make, if there's gonna be technical difficulty, you know, it's always a little adventure. And as far as schedule, like schedule is all over the place, you just kind of say yes to everything if you're not already doing something, like today I, out of nowhere, I got an email like 'hey we have this urgent gig for Friday out in the Hamptons , can you do it?' and I was just like “Ope! Guess I'm not off on Friday.” So, it's, it's unpredictable, but in the best way - I hate being bored.

Interviewer: Yeah, how often do you perform drag?

Bella Noche: Anywhere between 3 and 6 times a week

Interviewer: And where do you preform, I know you've mentioned - it seems like just kind of everywhere, do you have a place -

Bella Noche: It is kind of everywhere, so for the first three years I was exclusively in New York City, that's where I got my start, I grew up in the New York City scene and became established and developed my character and started, you know, establishing who Bella was, and then after that, you know, I started networking more and you know, going out of the Manhattan circle, and people were like really accepting of my drag, and now here in Long Island, I am the most booked drag queen out in Long Island, like statistically, you know I'm not even bragging about that but I've performed a lot of places, I do shows regularly up in Connecticut, New Hampshire. I've performed in Canada, next week I'm actually leaving for Florida for two weeks to go do a two-week tour down there, so yeah I'm performing a lot of different places.

Interviewer: That's awesome

Bella Noche: Yeah, thanks! I'm really excited about that, it's the first time I'm actually going for like a long period of time to do different cities and different venues for like a set amount of time, I'm nervous but I'm excited about it

Interviewer: You'll do amazing, that's awesome.

Bella Noche: Aw thank you.

Interviewer: Do you think that there's anything unique about the New York City drag scene compared to other places in the country or the world?

Bella Noche: Absolutely, I would say that New York City is, I mean I'm biased when I say that so anyone could argue, I say that New York City has the best drag in the world, and if not the best drag in the world, like top three, like if you rate cities all over the world and you know that there's drag there, New York City is absolutely top three. And it's, I'm very, very, grateful for growing up in the New York City scene, because if you're not good, they won't book you, and you have to like learn very quickly and evolve and always making new numbers so that your audience comes back and doesn't see the same thing over and over, and you know, you have legendary queens who perform in New York City who have been doing drag for 8-10 years, and then here you come you've been doing drag for 6 months and you have to prove to them why they should book you again, so it's very competitive but if you're good at it, and if you have the passion to like learn and grow, and also have the work ethic to make a career out of it, it's the best place to come up in drag, cause anywhere else you go, you will blow everyone else out of the water.

Interviewer: Are you part of a drag family or a drag house or collective?

Bella Noche: I am not, I do however have a very close-knit group of drag sisters that we are constantly in each other's lives and helping each other, doing shows together, but it's not like a house officially.

Interviewer: Do you think that - is there a specific reason why you don't do that?

Bella Noche: Well it's interesting, I was a drag orphan for a while, for the first couple years, I like learned myself and I had what I would call drag aunts or big sisters, that like you know would occasionally help me with something, but I tend to be a little too independent sometimes, you

know being out on my own as young as I was, and like putting myself through college and learning how to pay bills I learned how to be very, very, independent and self-sufficient and my drag was no different. I would do my own research, I would watch, I would try and learn, and there were some people who helped me but I really didn't, I guess I feel like I didn't need a family to be successful since I didn't have like the real-life family, so it was never something I was like "Ooh I want to be in a house, ooh I want to have a drag family or a drag mother," it was never something I actively sought after. But I do have a drag mother now and she adopted me two years ago and but at that time, Bella was already a thing so it was more like we were friends and she was older than me and she really liked my drag style, and you know, how I was doing - she said I reminded her of her when she was younger so it was more like a love thing rather than her like teaching me stuff, you know?

Interviewer: What are the biggest challenges for you personally to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Bella Noche: I get tired, and before drag, I had you know, a 9-5 job, I had a like solid schedule, now you know, I could be performing you know all hours of the night on random days, and I wake up and I don't even know what day it is sometimes, it all just kind of blends together. But on top of that, I think personally my biggest challenge as a boy, as we all do, we have a lot of insecurities and self-doubt and the things that help me start addressing those things in my adult life and trying to fix them and you know, for me I think the biggest challenge is making sure that I'm doing the drag that I want to do, you know, with the now that drag has become a bit more mainstream and is available for you know, most, not just the queer community but for a lot of the straight community as well. You know with the rise of Drag Race, and all of these things, it's you know, making sure that I am doing my drag and I'm not doing a certain type of drag because it's on TV, or because you know, - like the biggest thing for me is just like everyone loves drag queens that do death drops and stuff like that, I do not do death drops, and there was a point in my time where I tried and I wanted to and like I was leaving gigs with bruises and shit like- there was one time I did a show and like I actually cut my knee through my tights cause I landed on the floor and it had like a little corner on it, and so I was just like - and it wasn't me, like I don't need to do a drop death to be entertaining so part of the lesson is just remaining true to yourself and not allowing your peers or what mainstream drag on tv saying is good drag to take away what you know that's yours.

Interviewer: Would you say that drag has impacted your confidence as a person when you are outside of drag?

Bella Noche: I think so, yes it has, it's very easy to forget that sometimes, it's easy to- wouldn't say forget, but sometimes I'll be out as a boy and you know, I'm Isaiah as a boy is a very different characteristically than Bella, and there a lot of times where I'll be out at a bar and something will happen and I'll say, Bella will respond and not Isaiah, you know, and it's not the typical way that Isaiah would normally, so there's been a lot of confidence growth and things that I've now will vocalize and will be confident as a boy that I probably wasn't before I did drag.

Interviewer: So then what pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Bella Noche: In drag, it's she/her, out of drag it's he/him, but I mean I kind of, as such as a boy, I kind of respond with - all my friends call each other girl anyways, so like, but yeah definitely in drag she/her, and as a boy, if someone asks me I would say he/him

Interviewer: So, has drag influenced how you think about gender?

Bella Noche: Oh 100% yes, especially not even just my own stuff, just the people that I've met through drag, and all the different types of genders and non-genders, and sexuality that are out there and that you know, you being a drag queen, people want to talk to you, people want to share with you, you're more approachable, people, you know, they identify with some of the things you do. So, I've met some amazingly unique people through my drag and in turn, me being a gender illusionist, especially one that a lot of times people who wouldn't know that I'm a drag queen have to double-take before they realize I am one. It's very interesting, I've also learned a lot about being like a woman socially. Growing up, the majority of my friends were girls. I love women, I love girls, out here in Long Island I would say my audience and fans are about like 85% female. It's just been fascinating just, you know, walking down the street and - I remember the first time I like cat-called, like I didn't even know what to do and I was just like my girlfriends tell me about this all the time and I'm stunned and I don't know what to do, I just kept walking and didn't say anything and I was just like – “Huh, so that's how that feels,” you know? it's definitely been a learning experience in so many ways.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's definitely really interesting, has drag influenced your own gender identity?

Bella Noche: I don't think it's influenced my own sex and gender other than showing to myself like I can have a very strong masculine side and a very strong feminine side and like, express them in very different ways. So, I guess maybe insofar, saying that it's showed me that I have a larger gender range than I thought I did, I would say.

Interviewer: So I'm curious if and how your other social identities have impacted your experience of drag, so different things about you know, your race, your class, your age, do you have any examples of how drag has impacted your experience or vice versa how those experiences-?

Bella Noche: Yeah, I would say race most definitely. So I'm Puerto Rican, and but if you weren't Puerto Rican, you probably wouldn't know I'm Puerto Rican, I'm very white-passing if you didn't know, you might think I was Italian or maybe Colombian as I have a bit of fair skin and in drag, I'm able to play up the you know, the Latin heritage even just my namesake, like as soon as you hear "Bella Noche" it's like - oh, she's Latina somehow. So, it's definitely been nice you know, cause like I'm very proud of my heritage and I love being Puerto Rican and it's nice to like wear that as a badge with my drag.

Interviewer: Yeah that's awesome, would you consider your personal drag to be political?

Bella Noche: I think drag in itself is a political statement. If you can dress up and summon the confidence to go out in public as the gender that wasn't assigned to you at birth, that in itself is a political statement. So, drag in itself at least should be a political statement. However, when it comes to actual politics, yeah, I have a few political numbers and things like that, I don't do that very often. I think politics is very touchy and very personal, and me as a drag performer, I am

there to make you forget about the crappy stuff that's going around in the world, and a lot of that is due to politics. So, I do try to leave politics out of my shows as much as I can for that reason alone. I want you to come and like forget about all the stupid stuff in the world, I want you to come have a good time, and forget, you know, who's president.

Interviewer: Definitely. How do you yourself define drag?

Bella Noche: I think drag is when you become a character that you did not wake up in the morning as. Drag is a total transformation, not just a visual one, but personality, creativity level, things you wouldn't do or feel if you were your alter ego, that's the whole point of an alter ego - it's supposed to be a flip side, a completely different thing, cause anyone can put on you know, any guy could put on a dress, make up and heels, but are you a character or are you just wearing a dress, you now?

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

Bella Noche: I think the purpose of drag is self-expression at its core. I've met so many insanely talented and creative people who have used drag to showcase their gift for the world. So, absolutely first and foremost it's just personal self-expression.

Interviewer: Do you think that drag is sexual?

Bella Noche: I think it can be. I think there are a lot of queens who aren't sexual with their drag, but then there are a lot of queens that are.

Interviewer: Would you like to maybe explain different ways in which it is and which it isn't?

Bella Noche: Well so, you know, I'll use myself for example. So, like, when I'm going to a library or a museum to do a drag queen story hour reading, like there's not sexual component to that. It's solely for education and entertainment, it'd be the same as someone dressing up as a Disney princess to come read a story to kids. But you know then on another night I'll go do a burlesque show at a gay leather bar, and yes that's definitely sexual. So, it really depends on the audience and message you're trying to send.

Interviewer: Definitely. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Bella Noche: Um, I actually love RuPaul's Drag Race I'm not even gonna lie about that. I didn't watch RuPaul's Drag Race until season 6 actually because I was acquaintances with Bianca Del Rio, I did a story on her, my actual first ever two-spread page was on her before her season of Drag Race aired, cause I was acquaintances to her, and I pitched the story to her and she was working at a venue that the PR I was at was representing and I just got to sit and talk with her and she said she was going on Drag Race and because I like had this great rapport with her I ended up watching that season of Drag Race and was rooting for her the whole time and I don't know if you're familiar but she did win that season.

Interviewer: Oh, I'm actually watching season 6 right now.

Bella Noche: Oh, I'm sorry!

Interviewer: No, no, no, you're completely fine!

Bella Noche: I'm so sorry, I hate spoilers

interviewer: You are fine, it is so fine

Bella Noche: It's still good, watch it! it's very, very, good.

Interviewer: Yeah, I love it.

Bella Noche: So I watched season 6, and I was just like "This is season 6" so I went back and binge-watched everything and I like "Okay! When's season 7" and I just yeah, I watch it, my boyfriend I think he's like done with how much I watch Drag Race, I just think not only is it an amazing platform that opens so many doors for not just for drag performers but the queer community in general, and it continues to just be good TV, it's entertaining. Say what you want about Drag Race, it's entertaining.

Interviewer: Very true. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, drag community, what would it be?

Bella Noche: I wish that the performers who have very rigid of definitions of what good drag and what valid drag is didn't have that. There are so many amazing unique and different types of drag, and I think there all valid if you're doing it for the right reasons. But I do know, and know of many, many, drag artists who their definition of drag is very rigid and very defined and if you're not doing that, you're not doing "drag" and I wish that wasn't the case.

Interviewer: So, what do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag?

Bella Noche: Well. I think first that the biggest misconception is that you have to be a man dressing up as a woman. That is one form of drag, but that's not necessarily has to be the case in order to do drag. Right then and there, I think another big one of the misconceptions is that if you do drag, and if you're dressing as a different gender, you want to be that other gender. That's also not necessarily the case, even though, yes, there are a lot of transgender drag artists where that is true, but I think there's, I think the majority of drag performers don't want to be the other gender, they just enjoy pretending to be.

Interviewer: And then going back to the last question, I'm sorry, what do you think are maybe some negative consequences of those rigid definitions of drag -

Bella Noche: You know, we're a community and we're a community that needs to stand together especially in these times, and we should not be drawing lines in our own community especially drag artists of what drag is valid and one drag artist telling another "Your drag isn't valid," that's so - not only is that demoralizing on a human to human level, that's like destructive to like the strength of our own drag sisterhood, and even further back the queer community as a whole, you know. One of the biggest issues that the queer community has is within itself of standing together and realizing we're all in the same thing together, like we're all queer, we're all nervous about various things happening in the country right now, and the last, the very last thing we should be doing right now is drawing lines that separate ourselves even further

Interviewer: Definitely. I love that. So, and then, as far as the next question, where do you think that those different misconceptions, as far as thinking it's a man dressing only as a woman, where do you think those come from?

Bella Noche: Well, you know, the history of drag was much, much like the history - a lot of history was conservative, very conservative, compared to what the definition of what is drag today. Back in 60s and 70s, especially New York City, like drag was like you are a man that looks like a woman. If you didn't look like a woman, you were not doing drag. Like the pageant scene was like it for drag. I don't know if you're familiar with that documentary "The Queen." It's on Netflix right now, I would highly encourage you to watch it especially for this project. It is about a I believe it's late 60s, it's a late 60s drag pageant and it shows like what it was to like, what drag was back in the late 60s and the whole pageant scene, it was just like nope - you had to look like a woman to be considered a good drag queen and that is definitely not the case today, so I think it has a lot to do with where drag came from. And then you know, everyone has their own opinions, everyone has their own likes, dislikes and the bigger platform you have, the more power your opinion has.

Interviewer: So, what do you think are some different ways that we could help change those different ideologies?

Bella Noche: I mean the easiest one is just for all drag performers and artists to just be yourself, don't try to go into a box, don't try to put yourself into a hole that you feel like you should belong in, labels are like, so like, 90s, like, no one should have a label of what they are anymore, unless it's like you know, a label suggesting what their pronouns are. It's I just feel like if everyone just allowed themselves to be creative and unique, it - we wouldn't have to discuss why we're different, everyone just accepted that "Yeah we're different, we should be different and that's awesome."

Interviewer: Yeah, and as far as people who have misconceptions about drag who are not drag artists, what do you think we can do to help change those misconceptions?

Bella Noche: Well, I have - it's interesting, there are so many - I've talked to so many people who because they watched all the seasons of Drag Race, they think they're experts in drag without ever having to do drag once themselves. So, I would encourage people like, first of all, if you haven't tried drag ever - you should try it. I think everyone should try drag at least once in their lives, I'm not saying everyone should be a drag queen, I think that everyone should try drag. And I would encourage people who haven't ever done drag to, you know, think about what you say before you say it. Is what you're about to say or comment or write on Facebook meant to encourage someone, meant to make them stronger, meant to bring the community together? No? Then don't say it.

Interviewer: Definitely. If you could choose one thing you want people to know about drag or learn about drag, what would that one thing be?

Bella Noche: Drag is for everyone.

Interviewer: And then did you have any other ways you wanted to share in how drag has impacted your life?

Bella Noche: I think we - I mean you know, other than being a more confident person, and I genuinely feel like an artist now, like I'm a full-time queen, a full-time performer. When I'm not at a gig, I'm prepping for the next one, doing hair, doing costumes, cleaning the undergarments, you know drag is my life now. But, just as a whole, drag has allowed me to pass into my sole potential, you know. I was always a creative kid and I was always good at these random little things, and every time I would try for something, I was never the best at just this one thing, but I was good at all these random little things that I thought I would never have the use for. When I discovered drag, I realized why I had all those little skills and talents and every single little thing that I was good at that I thought I would never use came together and is why I'm a full-time queen right now.

Interviewer: That's amazing, and then did you have any other experiences, thoughts, anything else you'd like to share?

Bella Noche: I mean my drag journey in itself has been a wonderful, unpredictable roller coaster of a ride and I am not getting off any time soon, and I'm just, I'm - if you would've told me four years ago that I would be where I am now, I would've laughed in your face. It's absolutely astounding the things that drag has allowed me to do, the people that drag has allowed me to meet, the platform that drag has allowed me to gain and I am just so excited for this upcoming year because I have no idea what's going to happen.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time to your younger self, is there any advice you'd give yourself?

Bella Noche: I would yeah - I would tell my younger self it's okay to like the things you like, I know that you feel like liking pretty things and Disney princesses and glitter, everyone tells you that it's wrong and no one knows why you're such a perfectionist, no one knows why you like talking to everybody, no one knows why you like lip-syncing in the mirror, and all those things that people are like "That's weird, stop doing that" don't stop doing that because, they're gonna make you so happy in the long run.

Interviewer: Thank you so much, this has been awesome, if you don't have anything else to add -

Bella Noche: This has been great, thank you so much!

Interviewer: No problem, thank you so much - you have a great night!

Bella Noche: you as well, I'd love to see stay in touch and I'd love to see the final product

Interviewer: Definitely, if you'd like to email me some of your favorite pictures and I can make sure that once that's all uploaded, I can send you the site and everything.

Bella Noche: Fabulous, yes, I'll shoot some pictures right now!

Interviewer: Thank you so much you have a great night!

Bella Noche: You as well, bye-bye!

Interview with Die Anna

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Baxter, Destiny. 2020. Interview with Die Anna. *Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville*, February 12. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/die-anna/>).

Audio of interview is also available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/die-anna/>

Interviewer: And then, were you able to take a look at that consent form I sent you?

Die Anna: Yes

Interviewer: Did you have any questions or anything?

Die Anna: No, it seemed pretty straightforward

Interviewer: Okay well, if you don't have any questions, I guess I will just get started. So, the first question I have is, when did you first hear about drag?

Die Anna: I originally heard about drag first when I was about six years old through like weird internet searches. And then later I rediscovered it through RuPaul's Drag Race, season one when it came out. I was like nine years old, or 10.

Interviewer: What would you say was your initial reaction to it?

Die Anna: I was kind of amazed but also kind of scared of it, because everyone on the screen was huge, but they were also colorful and bright and creative, full of personality and talent.

Interviewer: And why would you say that you were scared of it?

Die Anna: Because as like a little kid seeing people that are like huge, larger than life characters with giant hair and costumes were always kind of intimidating to me.

Interviewer: Definitely, do you want to explain more about why maybe intimidating?

Die Anna: I believe it could be more intimidating for people that don't understand it or who are not like, exposed to it at an early age. They don't know what it is. But the fear of the unknown more so than fear of the actual people?

Interviewer: Definitely, when did you start performing as a drag artist?

Die Anna: I started on May 12th, 2018, I still remember because it's Mother's Day.

Interviewer: Okay, do you want to explain maybe a little bit more about your first experience?

Die Anna: Okay, so my first experience was in Los Angeles, California in a bar called Bar Manichean which no longer is open for business anymore. But it was a competition. Hosted by a queen

named Pickle. And I competed against I think three or four other newer drag queens at the time. And I got second place, which was really exhilarating for me as a brand new performer

Interviewer: Yeah that's awesome, why would you say that you started performing drag?

Die Anna: I would say I started performing because, eventually over time between ages of like nine and 20 years old, they just kept like, a lot of the different points of my life kept leading me back towards the art form. It's like painting or music or designing or hair styling. It just kept bringing me back towards like that sort of concept. And it became more fun when I realized I could create my own persona and my own character and look and performance style.

Interviewer: That's awesome. How did your family, friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Die Anna: At first my family was, well, actually, my family wasn't really shocked in any capacity because I always had like a big, weird personality growing up. And it seemed like, I guess the logical step forward or I guess in their case, nothing that would have been too out of the way for who I was my entire life.

Interviewer: Okay, so would you say that they're supportive of this.

Die Anna: Yeah, they're very supportive. I've had family members come to my shows when I'm performing around the country if they can.

Interviewer: That's awesome, where does your drag name come from?

Die Anna: I'm very inspired by Princess Diana. Diana Ross. Pretty much anybody that was like big in the 90s, and previous to that, but also I'm really inspired by like goth 90s culture and rave culture and things that are that can be seen as very dark and heavy. So instead of like Diana traditional spelling, I just spelled it D-I-E Anna.

Interviewer: Oh, okay so it is Die Anna, I've been calling you Anna, I'm sorry.

Die Anna: Oh, no, it's okay. A lot of people surprisingly get confused by that. Because one is a name and one isn't. But it just is all one thing

Interviewer: Okay, I'm sorry about that. So, there are a lot of terms and types of styles of drags from like, drag queens, drag kings, glamour queen, comedy queen, bearded queen. What kind of drag do you do? What's your style of drag?

Die Anna: I would say primarily, I'm a drag queen, but I do some male presenting performances as a drag king, I would say like alternative drag performer is like the overarching name for what I do.

Interviewer: okay, do you want to speak more about like your drag king performances because I've never heard of alternative drag performers.

Die Anna: So, I would say I would consider alternative drag performance, anything to be that - Well, anything that is not traditionally associated with drag. So, for me, my fashion style is darker, more gothic, edgy, leather, lace, like latex, things like that. But with my performance style, I

don't really - I perform music that's more heavy or gothic or strange or alter, like an alternative pop music and things like that

Interviewer: Okay, does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist?

Die Anna: Yes, I would say it does sometimes make it a little bit harder to receive work or be hired for shows. Because either I don't fit in with what is like being looked for. And like a casting situation. Or I would be booked with a lot of people that are a lot more alternative than me. I wouldn't be seen as alternative enough, if that makes sense - I'm like in a weird middle ground.

Interviewer: How have you dealt with then finding performances, do you have to take additional steps or-?

Die Anna: For me personally, I just don't let it bother me. So originally, when I started drag, I was afraid- more afraid of not getting as much work because of like, my racial background or my gender identity or things like that. But then I just had to pull up, put all of those things to the side and just work on my craft itself. And the people that will, you know, hire me for an event will still hire me whether, whether it's don't hire me based off of my work ethic, rather than what can be seen as my presentation.

Interviewer: Do you consider your drag to be political?

Die Anna: Oh, absolutely. I would consider my drag to be political. In some instances. I would say less about my performance style or my performance content, but with how outspoken I am via social media on issues that matter to me.

Interviewer: Do you want to speak a little bit more about that then your stance on how you use drag in a political sense, even without your performances?

Die Anna: Yes, so like through social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, I'll usually post, on a day to day basis I would post resources for homelessness, for trans wellness and other things like that. And usually more so on Twitter I would more actively speak on topics that pertain to me with like racism in America or random new topics like with Dwayne Wade's daughters, I am here just to let people know that hey, black drag queens really have a voice and we can't really be silent

Interviewer: So, I guess my next question will kind of build off that. So how have your different social identities so your race and gender everything like that, how has that impacted your drag?

Die Anna: I would say, in a really strange way. I probably I didn't start my transition into womanhood, until I became stable on my drag career, because I've always have the apprehension that because people view with like, actual like women, people that identify as women as drag queens, that it would be seen as not as impressive or not as widespread and not as respected, but eventually I just had to come to terms that if I'm not being hired for an event or a party, that I probably shouldn't work with them to begin with if they can't respect who I am.

Interviewer: Definitely, how has your social identity in terms of race? What do you think impacted your drag or drag has impacted your terms of race?

Die Anna: I would say that - I'm also very lucky in the sense that I've been working and performing in downtown Los Angeles and more so in like spaces that are run by people of color at all times. So, I have to worry less about not receiving a booking for a show due to my race. But I don't know it's a conversation that's kind of like, in the moment I would have with people who are the ones that are producing content with me, if that makes any sense. It's more of a case by case basis.

Interviewer: How do you personally identify in terms of your sex?

Die Anna: I would say that I am a transgender woman.

Interviewer: Okay and then is that gender expression inside and outside of drag then?

Die Anna: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, so can you talk to me just in general what your life is like as drag artist?

Die Anna: As a drag artist it is - I'm usually in drag about three days a week, I would say. It obviously depends on how often I'm working or how often I'm just going out for fun while doing drag, but I was - yeah, overall about three days a week- three, four days a week I would be in drag

Interviewer: And are those three four days do you are those performance days are you just the whole day you're in drag?

Die Anna: I would say they're usually performance days. But sometimes I'll go out to night life events that I frequent just in drag because it's more fun to party as a cartoon character essentially than it is to be, you know, a normal drunk person in everyday life.

Interviewer: So, what goes into getting ready for a performance for you?

Die Anna: For me, I don't do as much preparation as I probably should, and as many of the people around me do, I would just pick a song that fits the theme of the performance like the show that I'm performing in, or I'll just click shuffle on Spotify until I find something that fits my mood for the day of the week, the month or pertains to, like the things that I'm going through in that week.

Interviewer: Yeah. What would you say maybe additional things that go into your performance as far as appearance or -

Die Anna: I would say I take about an hour doing makeup. I'm really impatient usually. So anytime that I'm doing makeup or getting ready in any capacity for longer than that amount of time. I just get frustrated and it's pretty much scribbling on my face like a kid.

Interviewer: I actually understand that, are you part of a drag family or drag house or collective?

Die Anna: No, I do have a lot of friends that are drag queens and I would say the majority my friends, like maybe 90%, are also in the drag community, but I don't have a proper drag family as of right now

Interviewer: Is that like a personal choice? Or is that something you see changing in the future?

Die Anna: I would say I could see that changing in the future because I do like mentor partially some, like newer drag performers that I care about very much so, but I wouldn't necessarily take on a family role in my mind, I think. I feel like I would have to be more established as a drag performer before that happened

Interviewer: You do see that happening, maybe once you're more established in the future?

Die Anna: Yeah, yeah, maybe in like a year!

Interviewer: Okay, what do you think maybe are like the benefits to having like a drag family or a house or collective, do you think there are benefits to that?

Die Anna: Oh, absolutely. Um, usually there are more than - like more minds are better than one I would say. So if you have one idea and you're sitting at home, thinking about that for a month, and then you execute it it's going to be very different than if you were to talk to, let's say two or 10 people who are like looking out for you and looking out for the best for you, giving you constructive criticism of what you can improve or take out or change about a performance, or look or anything that you're doing.

Interviewer: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist for you personally?

Die Anna: For me, personally, I do deal with a lot of insecurities, sometimes where I can be booked for an event, and then I would look at the lineup, or I would look at the amount of people that are there and I would feel like I'm not equal to the people that are around me. But then like once I perform and once I get onstage and show people what I do specifically, it doesn't really match up with pretty much anyone that I work with. It just makes me feel more unique and more powerful.

Interviewer: Yeah that's awesome, would you say that - or is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in you know, the United States or even the world?

Die Anna: I would say definitely, um, LA has a completely different mindset to their drag community, I think because we are in like a huge media hub of like, movies, music, all that. So a lot of the drag queens that I know, are professional actors in their day to day lives or they are like singers, dancers, like people that are already in the arts community. Also, since a lot of people move in and out of LA so frequently, the scene changes month by month, day to day. Honestly, diversity

Interviewer: Definitely, how has drag impacted or changed you?

Die Anna: I would say I went from being an audience member and a fan of something that is like really special and I started watching drag in person at about 18 years old. So, I went from about three years of me just watching and taking in the content and learning and appreciating to essentially just throwing myself in at a set- like pretty much around my 21st birthday. And just taking all of that and learning every single time I do it until it got me where I am now.

Interviewer: Yeah, has drag impacted your confidence as a person?

Die Anna: Oh, definitely I probably wouldn't even be able to do this phone interview about a year ago because I have severe social anxiety. And I think drag definitely, like helped me like leave my house more and gain more I would say even respect for myself, like beforehand, I wouldn't really

see myself as an equal person to the people around me. But now I feel like, with the armor of a character, or persona or like an intimidating look, just even being seven feet tall, walking around my city, just makes me feel more confident.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awesome. Would you say that your confidence has improved even when you're outside of drag too, because of your -

Die Anna: I would say it depends. There are some days, obviously, like everyone has, where I'm completely unconfident in myself or my abilities or my talents or just generally who I am as a person. But then I just have to look back and say, "Hey, I've created an entire new world for myself in the last like two years almost". And like that, those are the things that like, mean a lot more to me than being like sad in the moment, you know?

Interviewer: Has drag influenced how you think about gender?

Die Anna: No, not really I always felt like gender isn't, I wouldn't say it isn't real, but definitely is not the most important factor in human life. But I will say that, for me, it allowed to, like live an idea of a female gender before I started transitioning.

Interviewer: How would you yourself define drag?

Die Anna: I would define drag as pretty much anything, I would say movies are drag, music is drag. It's just about creating a character that isn't 100% yourself but somebody that you may aspire to be or aspire not to be?

Interviewer: And then you spoke on a few different influences, would you have any additional people or things that have influenced your specific type of drag?

Die Anna: I would say music artists like Lana Del Rey or anybody that kind of makes music that is intense emotion. I also really like Winona Ryder, like 90s cartoons from like Nickelodeon. And supermodels like Naomi Campbell or Beverly Peele or, you know, people that - people I think I would say people that existed in this space of the 90s, like right before I was born inspire me the most.

Interviewer: Awesome, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Die Anna: I don't think it necessarily has a purpose. It's just a fun activity and a fun life path that people decide to take. If they think that their creativity can push the boundaries.

Interviewer: Would you say that drag is for everyone do -

Die Anna: Oh absolutely, I don't think there's any limitations with age or race or gender identity or even ability. I know there's like there's a movement of disabled drag performers across I think Europe and the UK specifically. But I know that there even some programs where there are like, 17-year-old, 18-year-old drag performers doing makeup lessons or helping out other people who don't may not have the ability to do it themselves.

Interviewer: Do you think that drag is sexual?

Die Anna: I believe that it can be and sometimes in my performances, there is a sensual or sexual element. But I don't believe that that's a requirement for people to perform with. Like, I feel like some people do depend on it out of laziness versus intention, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, how would you say drag is sexual?

Die Anna: I would say that drag can be seen as sexual to people who over sexualize - Well, I'll reiterate that. I'll say that if people believe that womanhood is inherently sexual, then they'll see drag queens as sexual, and vice versa, people who use drag as a means to feel more confident about themselves which can lead to sexual liberation. But I wouldn't say it's the focal point of the art form. More so than like painting or making music is.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, I like that. In terms of drag kings then, how would you apply, do you think it has the same sexual connotations?

Die Anna: I'll say that with drag kings, especially with drag kings I know, they make fun of the idea of male sexuality and the male gaze. So, with a lot of the drag kings that I know like Clit Eastwood, or Skirt Cocaine. These are people that I know. So, my friend Johnny Gentlemen, and NSFW, and Malcolm Ecstasy, they'll use a flamboyant element to their characters where it can be perceived as male, but it's also not intentionally, it's an overdramatized version of the male identity.

Interviewer: So, I know you mentioned that you have seen it, how do you personally feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Die Anna: I've seen pretty much every episode of the show multiple times. But I wouldn't say that it is the pinnacle of drag identity and that most people who do drag probably don't aspire to it. And I would include myself in that demographic of people.

Interviewer: Would you want to elaborate more so on that?

Die Anna: Yeah, I would say that it's, it's a goal for some people just like, getting on any type of reality show is but at the end of the day, you're putting your hands I mean, you're putting your art in the hands of a production staff who wants to make a TV show, not necessarily give you the best opportunities for your life going past that.

Interviewer: Definitely. If you could change one thing about drag or the drag scene, the drag community, what would that be?

Die Anna: I don't think that I would change anything besides making sure that everybody takes their art more seriously and not seriously at all the same breath. Put in the work and the effort but not necessarily be the most serious all the time about it.

Interviewer: What do you think are some misconceptions that people have about drag?

Die Anna: People believe that drag is like an overly sexualized thing for queer people to have in order to - what was the question again? I'm sorry

Interviewer: No, you're fine, what do you think are some different misconceptions that people have about drag?

Die Anna: Okay, so the biggest misconception is actually a problem that's been going on recently with the idea of drag queen story times that have been taking place all across America in the last couple of years. The drag entertainer will go in full character to events, like to a library or like a school, and they'll read a book much like 15 years ago when a firefighter or construction worker would do it and it'd be pretty much accepted. But because somebody is dressed as a character it's, for some reason, to like a religious or conservative people, it's seen as scary or intimidating, or as if the readers have ulterior motive that is like negative or harmful to children which it definitely isn't.

Interviewer: Yeah, where do you think that that like misconception comes from?

Die Anna: I would say that people believe, like a lot of straight people and a lot of Christian or religious people believe that queer people inherently want to prey on children which, even statistically is not the case. Across all - for all countries and all demographics usually like cis white men that do that or cis men in general that are straight.

Interviewer: What do you think are some things that would help change that mindset? Do you think you have any ideas?

Die Anna: Personally, I would say like, and this applies to most people, just learn about other people that are not in your - not in your social circles are not generally in the areas that you live or operate in it. Just to like, you know, educate yourself on how many people are actually in the world and what they look like and what they do and what they actually intend to do with their creativity.

Interviewer: Definitely, do you have any other thoughts on different misconceptions that people have about drag?

Die Anna: At this time, no, I can't think of anything off the top of my head

Interviewer: If you can go back in time, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Die Anna: I would tell myself to start drag at a much earlier age. I would say that I am 22 years old and I started drag technically like the last month of my 20th year. I would say just do it at 16. Like, who cares? If somebody has to say something about you, like, you have the support system behind you to do whatever you want to do.

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for maybe drag artists that don't have that same support system?

Die Anna: I would say save up enough money to leave whatever toxic situation you're in. And if you can't, stay in your bedroom and be safe and like, promote your creativity through the internet.

Interviewer: If you chose one thing you want people to know about drag or to learn about drag, what would that one thing be?

Die Anna: I would say that drag is about spreading love, and compassion and spreading create- like personal creativity, of each individual person. That's about it.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, did you have any other additional comments or anything else you'd like to share, because anything is helpful.

Die Anna: No, but if you have any more questions, feel free to call me.

Interviewer: Okay, that concludes my interview questions feel free to, we want to publish this and put this on, to like send pictures that you'd like to include to me as well, okay?

Die Anna: Okay

Interviewer: Okay, well thank you so much, you have a good night.

Die Anna: You too, bye.

Interview with Gigi Gemini

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Baxter, Destiny. 2020. Interview with Gigi Gemini. *Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville*, February 12. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/gigi-gemini/>).

Audio of interview is also available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/gigi-gemini/>

Interviewer: Hello, how are you doing today?

Gigi Gemini: I'm doing good, how about yourself?

Interviewer: I'm good, thank you. Did you get a chance to look at the consent form I just sent you about 20-30 minutes ago?

Gigi Gemini: Oh no, it's not in here, let me open it now.

Interviewer: Okay, that's fine yeah, it's just explaining your rights as a participant and everything like that. And as you're looking, feel free to ask any questions or anything like that.

Gigi Gemini: Okay- it's downloading it now

Interviewer: Sorry again!

Gigi Gemini: That's alright, I got caught up in a YouTube hole and my ringtone is on vibrate

Interviewer: I do the same thing - even just this morning - YouTube

Gigi Gemini: Yeah, I was watching those Trixie and Katya talk videos.

Interviewer: I don't think I've seen those

Gigi Gemini: They just like - when they just sit there and just talk about stuff for like 10 minutes, but they never end up staying on topic... Reading it now

Interviewer: Oh yeah, you're fine, I'm sorry again for not sending it earlier.

Gigi Gemini: Okay.

Interviewer: Do you have any questions or anything?

Gigi Gemini: No - it all looks good to me.

Interviewer: Awesome. I will go ahead and get started. My first question is when was the very first time that you heard or saw drag?

Gigi Gemini: The first time I ever heard or saw drag I was 18 years old. I grew up in Orlando, Florida, and I hadn't left home yet. I lived down the street from the University of Florida and this was 2004 or 2005.

Interviewer: And then, like, what was your initial reaction to that? Do you remember that experience?

Gigi Gemini: I remember just being in awe cause I had, like, my mom, she was always supportive, I came out at 13 years old, first as gay and then when I was 19, I came out as trans, but this was prior to transitioning. But growing up my mom was always really supportive, and I always felt safer around her, talking about like gay stuff because, like, she was the one who introduced movies like Birdcage, To Wong Foo, Paris is Burning, stuff like that. So, the first time I saw it in person, I felt like I felt like I was watching celebrities because the only time I had ever seen drag was in movies. And then I saw one of the performers at that show at UCF that year, they would put it on once every year and it was called Diva Invasion and it was - they would do it to raise money for the Gay/Lesbian Student Union. But I saw one of the entertainers - her name was Danielle Hunter. She's a trans woman who does drag and I saw her and I was like, wait - I can look like that? And then when I transitioned later on - I always thought about doing it but I was - But, I had too much stage fright to actually perform. So, I would just go to the club like in drag looking what I thought was cute at the time, I look at pictures now and was like "Oh god," but I thought I was cute at the time. When I'd go out in drag, just in really bad drag. Then I've been in transition about 10 - I transitioned about 10 years, so I was like 28, 29 at the time when I started thinking about it.

Interviewer: When did you start performing as a drag artist?

Gigi Gemini: In 2017, I was 30 years old at that time and then I started performing, so this is like three years ago, and it was like once I started performing, it was just - I had to learn how to be on stage first and not be terrified. Like the first year I would be blitzed drunk before I got on stage, because I would just I would get really, I would get real drunk, like, three sheets to the wind and then I'd hear my song come on and then I would just like immediately go into a character and do the number, you know. And then I'd get off stage, then stumble back to the dressing room, I might go get another drink and wait for my next song to come on.

Interviewer: So, in that time period, what changed to make you start performing drag?

Gigi Gemini: Well, I had known my drag mother at that point for about 10 years. That was like - she's a drag performer, she's a transwoman who does drag. And she had, in 2016 - she was the winner of the Miss Gay United States Pageant. Seeing that as a transwoman doing drag, you can still get really far in the art of drag, without having to go on something - without having to go on a TV show. You know, which is, unfortunately today, that's like where a lot of girl's minds are when they start doing drag. They're like, oh, well, I want to get on Drag Race. So, they start doing it, thinking that that's how local drag works and is ran and, like, as far as the attitudes and competitiveness that the girls have on the show.

Interviewer: So, you spoke about having a drag mom, are you part of a drag family then?

Gigi Gemini: Yes, so my full drag name is Gigi Gemini. So Gemini is my drag family's name.

Interviewer: Did you want to speak a little bit more about your drag family and maybe like the benefits to having a drag family versus not?

Gigi Gemini: I mean I could talk about the benefits of having a drag family. My drag family is uh - Raja Gemini is my - she's the mother of the house, like the matriarch. She was this, the Season Three winner of Drag Race. And, and then my mother is Bionka Simone, her drag name was Simone Gemini, and then at one point, she was on a show called Transcendent on the Fuse Network and they credited her with the name "Bionka" so she's changed her drag name to Bionka Simone and that's my mother.

Interviewer: How, you spoke a little bit about your mom, how did your family and friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Gigi Gemini: I mean, for the most part, the family that I still talk to, just because, not because, I'm really lucky in the sense that majority of my family is very supportive of me as a trans person. So, it was like more so when I started doing drag, they were just kind of like okay, but can you not like, be slutty? And I was like, "Sorry! Bold of you to assume I wouldn't take my clothes off."

Interviewer: So, there are a lot of terms and types and styles of drag there's you know, glamour queens and impersonators, comedy queens etc. What kind of dog do you do? How would you characterize your drag?

Gigi Gemini: I would say like equal parts body queen and look queen. I used to dance a lot more, but on New Year's Eve, I got very, very, drunk before I even left my house. So drunk that I don't remember leaving to go to the bar that I was working at for the New Year's Eve Party and never

ended up making it, because, I walked out of my apartment and I was in like full drag. Usually, when I leave my apartment to go do a show, my makeups fully done and my lashes and my hair is on, but I mean in like flats and UGG boots. So, I'm not used to going down the stairs from the first floor to the second floor in my complex in heels, and bright idea - I was wearing six-inch heels with platforms on the front. And I fell down the stairs and sprained my ankle.

Interviewer: Oh no, I'm so sorry.

Gigi Gemini: I had to take two months off to be fully healed to be able to perform again. So, I like just started performing at the beginning of March.

Interviewer: Are you facing any restrictions on performing because of everything that's going on right now?

Gigi Gemini: Yeah, currently Vegas is on a 30-day lockdown, all non-essential businesses are shut down. I believe schools are closed and stuff like that. So, it's like, only essential businesses are open right now. Like medical, government, restaurants that have takeaway or delivery and stuff like that. Markets, stuff like that, that's all that's opening. Gas stations. Everything else is shut down. So, all my gigs for the next 30 days have been postponed or canceled.

Interviewer: So sorry to hear that.

Gigi Gemini: But like, the performance side of it being postponed and everything is upsetting, but I also understand why it has to be done and what I'm doing now, honestly no different from a normal day when I'm not doing a show because, since I don't work out or anything, if I do two shows in a row, I am like wiped for like three days because I don't have the endurance that I would have if I worked out and didn't smoke cigarettes. So, it's like, I just started coming back performing, and I'm having to relearn my body while I'm on stage. And then now all of this happens. I'm like, okay, I guess it's time for me to just start doing - practicing at home.

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely kind of viewed as a month to practice.

Gigi Gemini: Yeah cause it's like I understand why it's all on lockdown, and I'm like in full agreement like "Yeah, we need this lockdown."

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely stay safe. So, the type of drag, you said body queen and look queen, that you do affect your life as a drag artist and if so, how so?

Gigi Gemini: Um kind of because they're - specifically living in Vegas because the first few years as a performer, I was living in San Francisco. And then I moved to Vegas about a year ago. So like, drag queens, I've learned, can be drastically different from city to city, and therefore that affects

how your drag is perceived and I mean, I'm received and how often you will or will not get booked. What I've learned here in Vegas is while they like a body queen who can serve a good luck and be entertaining during the number. What they really liked out here is like stunt queens. So, the girls who do like splits and dips which are incorrectly referred to as death drops. But so the girls that do splits and dips and flips, and cartwheels and somersaults and stuff, those girls tend to get booked more often. Whereas, like, if you just if you don't do all that, then you'll get booked because like, I'll dance during my numbers, I'll do some light choreography but it's - I basically - because I would do J.Lo all the time, because people will tell me I resembled her. And then after my ankle got sprained, I was like, "Hey girl, tend to start doing Mariah Carey since all of your wigs are the same hair color," and just stand there and look cute.

Interviewer: Would you say there's anything unique to the drag scene in Las Vegas compared to other places like San Francisco or the other country?

Gigi Gemini: What I would say is unique is that there is, because what they appreciate out here is so niche, because it's either the stunt queens which get booked a lot, or the other big thing out here is also celebrity impersonation. And if you can do both, then you hit a sweet spot. So, it's a like, I have a friend who is a Britney Spears impersonator. And she does all the stunts and stuff like that. But she also - she resembles her very much so and does all the choreography perfectly and executes the look perfectly. She gets booked constantly. You know, I have another friend that does Beyoncé and she's constantly booked too because she learned - my friend who does Beyoncé, she gets it down so perfectly, so like, if you hear a breath on the audio she makes - she breathes. You know, she has the fan and everything. So, it's like that definitely out here is much more appreciated. But because it is, I have seen some of the best artists in the in that niche fields out here, which in San Francisco impressions was kind of regarded as lazy. You know, they look for something, they look for more artistic takes on things and stuff like that.

Interviewer: So, who or what has influenced your drag?

Gigi Gemini: When it comes to like the look in drag, definitely my drag mom, but also 90's supermodels. Especially Naomi Campbell, like the power that she would have with her walk and her confidence and stuff like that I would draw from a lot. I would draw from J.Lo's looks a lot. To the point that once I saw her makeup artist in that video breaking down how he does her makeup. I started doing my drag makeup like that just slightly heavier. You know it's like, so definitely, so Scott Barnes makeup. The way he does makeup has definitely influenced my drag. J.Lo also influenced the way that I wear my hair a lot, even regardless of color, like, styles that I use and my style choices with looks. When it comes to like the humor I have when I'm in drag, I've been influenced by like Kristen Wiig. by other drag queens too like Coco Peru who is a drag legend - I've been influenced by her humor a lot. I think with my humor, though the biggest influence would be my mom because a lot of the stuff that I say that apparently people think is

the funniest shit that I say is stuff that I learned talking to my mom, you know, and I'm like, "If you think I'm if you think I'm bad, my mom is worse." Because everybody's like, "Oh my God, we gotta meet your mom." And I'm like, "Oh, shit, y'all are not prepared. Y'all will all have an asthma attack. And how many of you actually have asthma?" like oh my god.

Interviewer: Do you consider your drag to be political?

Gigi Gemini: I mean I think in some baseline all drag is inherently political, simply because at its core drag is like a middle finger to gender period. You know? So I do think that's inherent in it, also as a trans woman doing drag, and the kind of drag that I'm doing, cause I know a lot of transwomen who tend to like go for like dramatic makeup that doesn't look anything like them when they're out of drag. There's like the exaggerated eyes and extreme arched eyebrows and extremely overdrawn lips and stuff like that the big hair and they go straight for like the comedy queen route. Whereas like, I go for the I like - like I typically, like to give my drag a very short description, I call myself a lip-synching stripper. I go out there in a lot of like bikinis or bra and panties, lingerie, stuff like that. Or body suits that have a nude illusion to them, so it looks like I'm naked but, but, I am fully covered up and then rhinestones everywhere. Kind of like what Britney wore in the toxic video or a lot of J.Lo's tour costumes, um like that kind of look. And the way I worked the audience and everything is very much like a stripper just going up and being sexy and like "Yeah, you know, I'm going to get your money so just hand it over," you know.

Interviewer: How often would you say that you perform?

Gigi Gemini: In Vegas I perform a lot more often. All last year up until I sprained my ankle, I was doing anywhere from two to four shows a week. Especially when I first moved here and started performing at FreeZone I had auditions and they had me once a week for a while and then twice a week and then four times a week. And then the four times a week was for like, three, four months. And then it went down to twice a week, and it was like that until December. And then I sprained my ankle, and then now as I'm getting back at kind of - I was kind of like getting bookings where I could where my friends would have space to put me in either for a pay spot or a tip spot. And then I had like, just last week started a gig co-hosting a Drag Race viewing party. So, it was like that was gonna be a weekly thing. So - but I was performing considerably more often in Vegas than I was in San Francisco.

Interviewer: So, what all goes into getting ready for a performance for you?

Gigi Gemini: For me first I have to - When I get booked for a show, the first thing I ask is if there's a specific theme like is it a Latin night? Or is it, do you want me to do only country, or hip-hop, R&B? Like, what kind of, is there a specific kind of music that's required or preferred for the

show? And then I pick my songs based off that answer. For me, it's like I have to find songs within the genre that I'm like, "Okay, I actually like this." But if there is no specific request for songs, then I typically do like pop music. So, I have some like go-tos when it comes to just whatever I want to do. Yeah, so then it's picking the music, if it's songs I've never done before, and then learning the lyrics. So that usually I start doing that about a week before the show, but then the day of, based off my call time, I want to wake up anywhere from six to eight hours beforehand. Cause when I wake up it takes me about an hour or two to like really wake up, wake up. And then I shower, shave whatever I need to shave from, brush my teeth and then I start flirting with the makeup. If I'm in a rush I could do my face in 45 minutes to an hour and it'll look good. You know it's possible for a show. But if I -that's typically like if I wake up late and I have three hours to get ready, which I don't like. I like to take six to eight hours to get ready because I can just take my time, play some music, maybe brush up on my songs if it's songs that I haven't - that I am still learning. Then I like to pick out my costume. But on the days when I can do that, when I can take the 6-8 hours, I'll spend about three to four hours on my makeup alone just because I just get really into the details of it and that's usually when I really love my makeup the most. But like, yeah. Make up and then I gotta, I especially need the six to eight hours if I have to restyle the wig and I've procrastinated all week and not done it when I've had ample time. So, if I am going to be doing that night, then you need two hours for the hair minimum. Just because I refused to go on stage with a thirsty, fried, dry, matted wig. And I always want it to look fresh and new and I prefer using synthetic wigs for drag because the way I perform, wigs take a lot of abuse, the way I style them and perform. They do move my hair around a lot and stuff like that and with synthetic hair, that can come with a lot of wear and tear. So it would be very easy for my wig to suddenly look disgusting. But I tend to prefer them older because then when I restyle them and stuff like that, people tend to assume that it's human hair. Because of the way that I because the way I style it, and the way I cut them allows them to move in a certain way. But yeah, so that's two hours minimum for the hair. And then I never eat before a show. Because if I do that, I end up with a little potbelly. And I don't have a cincher, so you see it through all my costumes. So that's why I'm like "Oh no ma'am," so yeah so then - after that, I usually time it like this way so right after my hair I have enough time to smoke a bowl, smoke a cigarette, get to the front of my apartment complex and call a car to take me to the gig.

Interviewer: What would you say are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Gigi Gemini: Honestly, I would say, at least here in Vegas, you have to have a really thick skin.

Because, if for whatever reason, another queen feels threatened by you or jealous of you or anything negative about you, they will go out of their way to prevent you from getting booked anywhere in the city. They are extremely competitive, and they will come at you and say a lot of really messed up stuff to your face to try to break you down and make you quit, because that way you're no longer like an element, you know.

Interviewer: Would you say that that is different in like Las Vegas compared to San Francisco, or is that the same everywhere you'd say?

Gigi Gemini: I've noticed that more here in Vegas than in San Francisco - in San Francisco the drag scene is extremely supportive. Because they're always like, "We're not going to try to criticize your specific kind of drag." If we do have any critiques, it'll typically be about like, helping you boost your confidence before a number or, "Hey, if you if you're starting out, you need help with makeup or hair, I can teach you stuff" you know, it's like in San Francisco feels like much more of a sisterhood. Whereas in Vegas, you don't really have that feeling of sisterhood. It's more like every girl for themselves, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah. So how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression outside of drag?

Gigi Gemini: I'm a transgender woman.

Interviewer: And then what pronouns do you use? Do you use the same pronouns inside drag then?

Gigi Gemini: Yes, always she/her.

Interviewer: Okay, has drag influenced how you think about gender at all?

Gigi Gemini: I think it was kind of the other way around, for me, because by the time I started doing drag I had already - it was already after the whole social justice movement had kind of become really prevalent online. So, because of that I had kind of learned a lot about gender that I hadn't previously thought to consider anything. I was just kind of like what was best and got that and then just moved on with my life and then when all this new information about gender and stuff like that it started to really hit the internet in a big way. I started like reading up on it and meeting people who were all these different identities and then real like that really expanded my worldview of gender. So, by the time I started doing drag, I was just kind of like, hey, it is what it is, you know?

Interviewer: Has your gender identity influenced your style of drag at all? If so, how?

Gigi Gemini: Oh definitely, I know it's a term that is controversial because the perceived intention of it or root of it, versus like the actual root of it, as far as my understanding, because I went there in my everyday life, walking around and existing in society. My goal is to be as feminine as possible, just because I like feeling pretty and you know, feminine and stuff like that. So, it's like because of that my style of drag, especially my makeup is much closer to like a glamour beauty face with a lot more glitter or brighter color and a slightly more arched brow and a slightly

bigger eyelid, and way more highlighter, and a lot more glitter. But it's like - I would say that my gender has definitely influenced the way I perform drag because even when I'm performing drag, I don't have it in my head about people being like oh, like they if they have a small understanding of drag, "Oh it's a man dressed as a woman," I perform life as a woman.

Interviewer: Definitely and then has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Gigi Gemini: Oh definitely. Definitely just because I think it's ever since I moved out here with performing a lot more often, after the show I would go out to like the nearby bars and stuff like that so I was meeting a lot more people a lot more often. So a lot of them because they knew I performed, what I will say out here is that like, people who don't perform better out at like of the gay clubs and stuff like that, if they find out you're drag queen, they automatically like, the way they treat you is like, amazing, I live for it. It's like you're a celebrity. So, it's like, because of that, it has definitely boosted my confidence cause now when I go out, even if I'm not all made up, and I'm like in bummy clothes and stuff like that. Now, I'm realizing I have to still be like, somewhat presentable, at least like comb your hair, draw your eyebrows, and make sure you don't have hair on your face because now because people know my voice, I'll be somewhere and I'll be talking to somebody and they're like, "Oh my god, are you Gigi Gemini?" And I'm like, "Yeah?" which is weird for me because it only started happening like within the past two months, and I've never dealt with that before, so it's like a little creepy sometimes. But other than that, like, when I do like it is when I go to the bar, then people recognize me because most of the time they're like, "Oh let me buy you a drink," and I'm like, "Oh, okay sure I'll take a drink. Thanks." I'm not gonna say no to a free drink as long as I am there when it is ordered and straight to me.

Interviewer: Very smart. So, can you share a little bit about how one or more of your social identities such as your gender, your race, your class, age, etc., or the interaction of these social identities have experienced your drag or have like shape your experience of drag or like vice versa, how drag has shaped those experiences?

Gigi Gemini: For me it's more so because the identity that I predominantly identify with like ethnically is Puerto Rican, because of the culture I was raised with. My racial identity though, is I'm very mixed. My dad is Afro-Latino, and Italian. And my mom is Puerto Rican and based on what I see in the family, they're also mixed, like my mom and her three sisters are three different colors, they look like Neapolitan ice cream. So, it's like I can see in that family tree it's mixed, and then my dad looks like Carlton from the Fresh Prince and base just off what I see in the mirror, when I look in the mirror. I think looking at myself, I'm just a very light skinned black person, but because of the way I speak, and I was raised with, like the Latino folk, like I'm Afro-Latino, I'm just really light skinned. But because I'm so light skinned when I put on my wigs and stuff like

that, people tend to assume that I'm not black. Which then translates to I can't do certain music, because then the perception is why is this Latina girl doing a black girl song? You know and I've seen it happen to other performers too, like I've seen - I've seen black friends of mine like, doing drag and they'll use Spanish music and then they'll get racist messages on their social media telling them not to do it. You know it's like I've gotten messages when after - there was one time I had a show and I did Beyoncé, I did Sweet Dreams by Beyoncé and I didn't have enough time to style my wig that night so I just wore my natural hair because my natural hair goes down to like my mid chest but the texture is - if I take a shower and wash it and condition it and let it air dry, I have an afro like a big ass afro, so I wore my natural hair for the show and I got messages the next day on my social media calling me everything but a child of god. And that because I am not black, I can't do Beyoncé. And I'm just thinking to myself, but I am you know, but because I know that's the perception now, I just don't do the music because I'm like, it's not worth that. It's not worth me getting those kinds of messages.

Interviewer: How would you, yourself define drag?

Gigi Gemini: For me, it's like everybody's chance to be a rock star. Because it's, to me it's similar to stand-up comedy like I remember hearing a comic back in the day, I can't remember their name and he had said that stand-up comics are failed rock stars because they couldn't sing or play an instrument. And to me, drag is very much the same way. Because it's very rare that you'll find a drag queen who actually can sing or do something other than lip sync and dance, you know, so it is very rare to find that so we're kind of a family, we're like all failed popstars because we weren't hot enough to get a record deal and none of us actually sing, although the same can be said for a lot of actual popstars today

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

Gigi Gemini: I think that changes based on the performer. For me the purpose is twofold, because it has a selfish purpose for me of letting me live my Hollywood fantasies and feeling like I'm a celebrity. Because, with the way the internet is these days, I'm glad I never decided to pursue getting famous like I wanted to when I was younger. Uh-uh I would not be able to handle the way social media deals with these celebrities today. So it allows me to live that celebrity fantasy but I think another purpose of drag for me is also to give the people in the show watching let them have an escape similar to like if they're going to the movies or a concert or something, just give them something to let them really make them really feel good for the hour or two hours of the show, you know. And then when you're out there, you're interacting with people and stuff like that. To me the whole purpose of drag in that capacity when you're just out in a look, or if you're out after the show at the bar, you're just hanging out and stuff like that, the purpose of that is to continue to help keep everybody in the club in a good mood feeling good. You know if they have a problem, try to figure out who can solve it and like try to direct them that way. You know,

it's like, it's kind of like, guest service at a park you know? And I'm like, simultaneously a character and guest service.

Interviewer: Do you think that drag is sexual?

Gigi Gemini: I think it can be. I think like any form of entertainment, drag can be very sexual. It can be very explicitly sexual in many instances, but I think it can also be very, very innocent. You know, it all depends on the specific performer and performance.

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

Gigi Gemini: I think overall, it's given drag a great platform, you know, and it's done a lot for the art of drag in the sense of really educating - like teaching a lot of people that drag is not this scary thing that people try to make you think it is. It's honestly good entertainment, you know, drag is good entertainment the people who create it are, in many instances, great people. So, I think Drag Race is- the thing I think that's really good about Drag Race is that it's brought a lot of this to the mainstream. I think on the flip side, unfortunately, due to the fact that they won't cast people who are assigned female at birth, or trans women or trans men onto the show I think really hinders mainstream understanding the whole breadth of drag and everything there is to it. And all the artists that contribute to it and all the different styles of drag, you know, I think, unfortunately, because of drag race a lot of people who that's their understanding of it, think that's the only kind of drag that's real.

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

Gigi Gemini: More sisterhood. Just across the board, it shouldn't be that you have to find the right city to find that energy. I think no matter what city you're in, that should just be a thing with drag, you know, like that it is a sisterhood, and there's room for all of us to shine. We all just kind of you know, lift each other up, you know? So basically, more Lizzo energy.

Interviewer: True. What do you think are some misconceptions that people have about drag?

Gigi Gemini: That it's perverted or inherently sexual or that it's mental illness and stuff like that, like I, because I've seen, I've seen those hot takes on the conservative side, you know, or that I really wish people didn't automatically assume that like the Drag Queen Story Time where the drag queens are reading like, children's books to children, they just happen to be in drag, I really wish people would stop thinking that that was like some kind of indoctrination or proselytizing or anything like that. It's literally just a drag queen sitting there, no different than if it was frickin' Big Bird reading stories to kids, you know. Yeah, like I really wish people didn't automatically

assume It was just yeah like something perverted or sexual or anything like that it really just like I said it's just, just, like movies or TV shows or music or anything, it can be very, very, innocent all the way to triple-x rated depending on what show you're going to or where you're at. Because apparently I recently found out that they do that there's a thing called the naked drag show that they have at what are called play parties, where basically it's a sex party. And I'm just like, that is something I would never do, but it's fun to find out that it happens.

Interviewer: What do you think can help address and change these misconceptions about drag?

Gigi Gemini: Honestly I feel like just - I really, I honestly think it would be beneficial if we had more diversity amongst the queens that really go big mainstream to the level of like Trixie Mattel and stuff like that or RuPaul, Shangela you know that get to that level. I think we need more variety amongst who those queens are and what it is they do so that this way, there's more chances for people to encounter drag. You know, like Nina West is she's from Season 11 her drag is very much of like Disney Channel kind of variety of like it has that innocence to it and that playfulness and you know she the way she puts herself together is a look that is very much based on like looks from children's programming, just very non-threatening, very innocent, you know to the point that at DragCon, and stuff like that, the way she had her booth set up and everything a bunch of parents who had brought their kids there loved it because they were like, "This was like taking the kids to like Disney or something. It was very innocent. I didn't have I wasn't I didn't have to be worried while my kid was there that something too racy was gonna be said or anything like that," it was a very safe thing, you know, I think if we had more, more queens that were doing that, or, you know whatever, you know different capacities throughout the entertainment industry and also, throughout even politics, like Honey Mahogany in San Francisco was just elected to city council I believe in San Francisco. You know, it's like even having them get into politics and stuff like that so people can really get to see like, just because drag is our main passion and our main form of performance art or like where we get to really express ourselves, we're not one dimensional, that's not all we do. And there's more to us, I think once people start to realize that it'll help to break down those misconceptions.

Interviewer: If you could go back in time to your younger self, what advice would you give yourself?

Gigi Gemini: To stop giving so much of a shit, I'd be like, "Just calm down." I really think about it this way -if it doesn't matter in five years, it doesn't matter and say "fuck it" like move on, and stop procrastinating on so much shit.

Interviewer: I feel like you're talking to me. And then, if you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag from this, what would it be?

Gigi Gemini: To give it a try! You know, just even if it's just for Halloween or whatever, give it a try, you know, like, I don't mean like, bad Party City wig and very, very badly applied makeup and some basic little like, sexy nurse costume or whatever. No, I mean like really give it an honest to goodness try. And it's like I guarantee you no matter who you are, if you do it the minute you're in full costume, there's this sense of like power that you feel it's almost like just some of my costumes but like a lot of the body suits when I put them on as soon as it's on, I'm like "I feel like a superhero." So it's like there's - so yeah, try it, the confidence you'll get is just insane.

Interviewer: And then did you have any other experiences or anything else you'd like to share today?

Gigi Gemini: I will say that the experiences I've had doing group numbers with other queens have been some of my favorite memories of drag so far. Because the creative process behind like, coming up with like, "Alright, how are we - what song are we doing and how are we going to do it? Is it going to be-are we just - going to be like a full dance number? Are we going to be more slapstick with this or, you know what - how are we doing this?" and then everybody's input all the way from like the choreography to the makeup to the hair, costuming, everything is like - I love doing that because to me, it feels similar to like doing what I imagined it's like to be in the theater, you know, and see all these different creative forces all come together to create something really wonderful and really entertaining and something that the crowds always love because the- like I did a Hocus Pocus production numbers And I was the Sarah Jessica Parker's character. And then during December, we were doing Mariah Carey's All I Want for Christmas and I was a sexy elf in the background. But like, what I loved most about doing those was the creative practice with the other girls and the audience's reaction.

Interviewer: And then, if you didn't have anything else to share, I'll let you go. If you'd like to send like some of your favorite pictures that I can include on the upload, you could definitely email or text those to me or anything like that.

Gigi Gemini: Sure, yeah, I have some actually promo photos that I can send you. A friend of mine, she's a drag queen photographer in the Bay Area called Tragic Glamour, so I could send you that and then also, if you guys had any information that I can pass on to other queens if they wanted to contact you about doing this, would that be okay?

Interviewer: Yeah definitely! I'm doing this throughout when I graduate in May. So yeah, anybody who you think would like to do this, definitely just send them my email and have them contact me, I'd be happy to do that.

Gigi Gemini: Sure yeah, cause, I know some queens that I could probably shoot the information towards and be like hey listen - there's this going on if you would like to, you know, contribute to it or whatever, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah that would be awesome

Gigi Gemini: Alright cool

Interviewer: Thank you so much for participating.

Gigi Gemini: Of course, thank you so much for asking.

Interviewer: Okay, you have a great day and stay safe

Gigi Gemini: You too

Interviewer: Thank you, bye

Gigi Gemini: Bye

Interview with Mick Douch

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Baxter, Destiny. 2020. Interview with Mick Douch. *Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville*, February 18. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/mick-douch/>).

Audio of interview is also available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/mick-douch/>

Interviewer: And then were you able to take a look at that participation form I sent you?

Mick Douch: Yep

Interviewer: Did you have any questions or anything?

Mick Douch: No, all good there.

Interviewer: Awesome, okay so my first question is when did you hear about drag – for the first time I'm sorry-?

Mick Douch: I mean, I watched *The Birdcage* when I was a kid. So, if we go to like when I first heard about it, I suspect I heard about it then, when I was like first watching *The Birdcage* in the 90s.

Interviewer: When was like the first time you, like, witnessed or experienced drag that –

Mick Douch: Wasn't a movie?

Interviewer: Yeah –

Mick Douch: Probably, gosh, that would have been back in. I think October of like 2009. So, it was back when I lived in Utah, and it was a Halloween show at one of the LGBTQ bars out there. And it happened to be Halloween, they had drag queens performing.

Interviewer: Okay, what was your initial reaction to it?

Mick Douch: I mean, it was pretty cool because they were all doing very classic villains. I didn't really think too much in depth about it. So it was one of those things where it was just kind of fun and exciting to see I had not ever seen anything like that before in person, and that night they were actually overshadowed by like the fire performers and the aerial people they have there. So, the drag queens didn't even look that cool when you put them in that context with those other entertainers there.

Interviewer: When did you start performing as a drag artist?

Mick Douch: I didn't start until, would have been January, 2015 I tried my first time. And then I think I did another couple times in 2015. And it was December 31st, 2015, that I feel like I really started

because that's when I actually started trying with makeup versus just generic cross-dressing. And that would've been like the first show show I did.

Interviewer: And why did you start performing at that time?

Mick Douch: I started – I started going out to one of the local, like, gay bars and I really just was trying to find a group of people to spend time with and I started talking with different drag queens and they started encouraging me to try drag, and so that's really what sparked it for me was that I was just seeking a community and drag queens were encouraging me to try doing drag king stuff. So, I figured give it a shot.

Interviewer: And how was, did you want to maybe go into a little bit more detail about your first experience? Do you remember that?

Mick Douch: Um, I mean, I vaguely remember it. It happened to be an all drag king show that was set for New Year's Eve, and it was going to be before the regular queens show, as like a way to try to bring in more bodies into the bar. It was – I mean, it was a lot of fun. It was a lot of us who hadn't really done much for drag before. So, it was a bunch of very, very new entertainers. So yeah.

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

Mick Douch: At the time I was married, and my wife was pretty like, neither here nor there about that situation. My mom was pretty against it. But my mom is usually against everything at first and starts to come around a bit. My dad couldn't care less. Most of my friends were classmates at the law school that I was attending. And they were my biggest supporters especially early on. They were the folks who are coming to my shows and cheering me on as I was trying this new thing

Interviewer: And where does your specific drag name come from?

Mick Douch: I was looking for a drag name and I, I was really having a hard time coming up with it. And one of my guy friends suggested that I use Mc-Douche because a few weeks prior to that I was mad at him and in a fit of rage as an insult I called him Mc-Douche. And so, my drag name became the random insults that I've picked out for one of my friends when I was mad at him.

Interviewer: That's awesome, so there are a lot of terms for types of styles of drag, so there's you know, comedy queen, queer artists, bio queens, and so on, what kind of drag do you do? How would you characterize your drag?

Mick Douch: Yeah, side note, bio queen is now becoming an unfavored term in the drag community, because it draws a line of biology being a dictation of gender and your identity. When in a space that's so queer, bio is becoming increasingly irrelevant. You'll still see it in some places in the south, but vast majority of areas prefer hyper queen now. Mostly because it's addressing the fact that there are trans men who are drag queens, and where do they fall in this spectrum? And then the idea of like, well, if a trans woman is a drag queen, is she now a bio queen? Is she a hyper queen? Is she a drag queen? What is she? And so people have found hyper queen to be just a little bit safer cuz it doesn't go into that biology concept. And like my partner, now, who's

assigned female at birth, who's a drag queen. She just wants to be called the drag queen because she was like, "What does my vagina have to do with my drag at all?"

But for me, I consider myself a drag king, and anyone who performs on stage who has a character that's masc of center, I see as welcome to use the label of drag king. So, it's one of those where you could have been assigned male at birth, you could be assigned female at birth, you could be intersex, somewhere in between. and as long as your onstage persona is masc of center, I feel drag king is a label that's available to you.

Interviewer: Definitely. So how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression outside of drag?

Mick Douch: I was assigned female, a female at birth and I identify as non-binary, but I'm also trans masculine. So, it's kind of like a big ol' puddle of stuff.

Interviewer: So, what pronouns do you use? Outside of drag and then inside of drag?

Mick Douch: In drag I use he/him exclusively, outside of drag I'll use they/them or he/him. A lot of folks will still use she/her, but some of that is just course of habit. And then there are some spaces like my workplace is wonderful and they're trying to hold the they/them thing people are really, really working hard on it. But because I still use the female restroom at work, it leads to some like crossover for people. So, for the folks who especially aren't closer to me, or don't work with me regularly, they still default to she/her and, you know, it's just part of what happens.

Interviewer: So how does drag influenced your sex and gender identities?

Mick Douch: I definitely think that – that drag, and more so the drag community itself, gave me permission to explore who I am and to know that there are people like me out there. Without drag, I don't know when I would have met my first non-binary person to know that there are some people that are like 'Well, I'm not a guy, but I'm also not a woman.' And – and I think that's been the biggest influence has been suddenly having people who are more similar to me who are visible. It's definitely the biggest influence that drag as had

Interviewer: And then has drag influenced how you think about gender as a whole?

Mick Douch: I think in the same way that that it did with my own is a lot of it comes down to I've met more people that fall outside of this cis-normative script. And so meeting people who are like big, hairy bearded human beings, who still don't identify as men and, and it just helps kind of skew the perception a little bit that there's much more freedom and fewer boundaries than I would have ever known existed if I hadn't been meeting drag artists who, outside of drag, identify in all these wide variety of ways.

Interviewer: Has dragged impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Mick Douch: Oh definitely. I think Mick has done wonders for helping me learn to interact with people better and learn to talk with folks better. There's a lot of us who are drag performers who also are on autism spectrum. And so, figuring out social interaction can be very challenging. And so, I

think drag just put me in situations where I've more and more often had to practice like when – when a random stranger walks up and wants to talk to me like figuring out what to do. And being in spaces where you kind of discover that, you know, it's perfectly okay to just nod your head through an entire conversation, and people will go along with it. So, I think it's definitely created opportunities for development that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

Interviewer: And then, who or what has influenced your personal drag?

Mick Douch: Honestly, my personal drag has been heavily influenced by other drag kings as well as some queens. When I was starting out in drag, I didn't know that many drag kings just a few folks that I worked with, no one very established. And so folks like Mindy Bellwood, Roxy Mask were drag queens that I would see, were a big influence for me as a performer along with Muffy Rosenberg in Des Moines and Ginger Snaps out in the Quad Cities because these are all queens kind of took me under their wing and helped, helped me see how drag is done in the abstract with the exaggeration, with the over the top costumes. And so, I definitely think those queens were a major influence on my development. And then as I got more into drag and I discovered the world of the internet, I now moderate one of the biggest drag king Facebook groups out there. Actually, probably the biggest, we have over 5,000 kings from all over the world. So now I think my influence comes from so many other kings, big names like Landon Cider, you smaller names like Oedipussy Rex who's overseas and seeing the stuff that he's creating. So being, being in a group like that, where we're all sharing what we're creating, talking about ideas, talking about different issues in a space, it, it definitely has a huge influence on the choices that I make.

Interviewer: And then do you consider your drag to be political?

Mick Douch: Inherently no, it's not political, but I have some political routines and some – some ways that I use drag for activism, like I, I help host the debates here in Chicago at Berlin Nightclub for the Democratic primaries. And so while my drag itself is not always political, it gives me a platform to talk about politics in a way that people listen, because I've found that people are like, so this is this is crazy, almost tangential. But I'm an attorney by day I have all this stuff I know about. But no one wants to listen to an attorney talk about how the world works. Ironically, I slap on a pound of makeup and a few rhinestones. And suddenly people will listen to me say the exact same thing I would have said out of drag. So, I it's one of those words of Spider Man moments like drag performers have so much power to influence the world around them because we're icons of the queer community. And so, whether we want to be political or not, we are with everything that we do and calling for social justice is almost a duty that we that we have, and some people buy into it more than others.

Interviewer: Definitely. So, are you part of a drag family or drag house or collective?

Mick Douch: No, I'm not I'm I am a free agent. But I, as much as I would love to say that I'm not because I'm really not a part of an organized drag family or anything like that. But with my partner being a drag queen, it's almost like we're a drag family by default. And then something that I always tell all the young kings as they're trying to find drag parents is like, drag parents are kind of an outdated idea. It's something that played a lot bigger role in life before the age of the

internet, when you needed mentors who are local to help teach you the tricks of the trade or to let you watch them do makeup. And in today's world of YouTube and Instagram, you can pull up anyone and use them for inspiration or for ideas, or figuring out how to do X, Y and Z.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes definitely makes sense. So how often do you perform?

Mick Douch: Usually about two to three times a month is where I cap myself. I don't really have a requirement as to how much I perform. Since I'm a lawyer during the day, my career takes priority, of course, because that's your ethical obligations as an attorney, but I still try to get out there at least a few times a month

Interviewer: And then do you perform in any specific place or do you go to different places?

Mick Douch: Yeah, you can – I do go all over the place in Chicago, you can find me at most of the bars off and on here and there, usually more often at places like Berlin Nightclub or Scarlet Bar, since those are both venues that are highly committed to casting diversity. So those are two bars where you'll always see trans people, always see people of color, always see AFAB people. And so, I – I'm more frequently at those bars, The Call up in Andersonville is also another phenomenal one for casting diversely, but they're further from my house. So, I tend to go up there less. Same with Hamburger Mary's in Andersonville, it used to be very like, your traditional drag queen where it's a trans woman or a cis-het gay man. And now they're progressing into having more events that are more inclusive, more diverse. So those are usually the spots that you'll find me around town. And I love to travel for drag. So like, at the beginning of February, I was out in Los Angeles and had the opportunity to perform with a group of kings that I met through the internet and fashion. In April, I'm going to be out in Salt Lake for work, and I'm going to do some shows while I'm out there. So, it's a lot of fun.

Interviewer: That's awesome. I've always wanted to go to Salt Lake City. So pretty.

Mick Douch: I would say if you go there, though, you should go south for the pretty, the city itself – eh.

Interviewer: And then, so what goes into getting ready for a performance for you?

Mick Douch: Well, some of it depends, because some shows are going to be submission driven, in which case you have to like, look at their theme and come up with your act well in advance at least a vague idea of it to submit. Other ones, you can kind of just pick your number after you've been booked and figure out where you want to go. But usually the first thing is coming up with either a song or an idea or a character that I want to do and figuring out where to build from there. And so, there's all these things of like learning your song. Do you want to do choreography? Do you want to do a gag? Do you want to do a reveal and planning all that out. As far as creating costumes go, I don't sew for myself, on occasion, I'll get my partner to sew for me. But usually, it's me finding readymade things that I can add accents to a lot, usually a lot of rhinestoning sometimes other modifications to them. And as far as makeup goes, it's – it's usually a two hour or more process depending on what I'm doing. If I'm doing prosthetics, it could take god like four hours sometimes to do makeup, especially if it's a new prosthetic. So, there's – there's a lot more that goes into the makeup for it that people don't think about. So – because I've had people before be like, 'Oh, yeah, wow, you made that much for a three minute

song?'. And I'm like here, you don't get it though, the hours and hours going into the costume and the money going into the costume and hours going into makeup, you're making way less than minimum wage per number.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, then what would you say is the biggest challenge to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Mick Douch: Honestly, the financial is a huge barrier for many drag performers. And especially when you're new, you're expected to work for free essentially, to do open stages and to do competitions. And so particularly when you're doing competitions, you might be turning out a new look every week. And so, you're – you're losing money as you do drag. And that can be a major, major hardship on some folks, especially folks who don't have very stable day jobs and that's, that's increasingly common for like transgender people it's been something that's always been an issue but now we're talking about it more and more. And so that financial barrier is a big challenge, I think another one is figuring out how to network and who to network with. Once you figure out who show producers are, it's a lot easier. Once you figure out how Instagram works, it's a bit easier. But if you're just starting out the gate, like my first Instagram post, I didn't use any hashtags. I had no idea what to do on Instagram. And so, it's, it's a learning curve to figure out how do you use social media to connect with other people and get your name out there and figure out who's booking things who can help you get shows.

Interviewer: And then building off of that, do you think that there are some implications either for yourself or just in general regarding like, intersections of gender, class, race, things like that.

Mick Douch: Oh, what do you mean?

Interviewer: So, I'm curious if your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice versa?

Mick Douch: Oh definitely. You'll find that vast majority of drag kings hate RuPaul. Because RuPaul has made so many statements about how drag kings or AFAB drag or transwomen who do drag are not the same as traditional drag queens. And you find a lot of cisgender gay men who hold a lot of the same values as RuPaul, because they've heard what he's said about it. And so, like stuff like that does become a major issue. And it's sparked things like the hashtag #AllDragIsValid, that one of my friends Paradox Rei started and now the world is kind of starting to run with, which I find funny because I started it a couple years ago, just as a rejection of some of the stuff that drag kings and non-binary creature type drag encounters. So, there's – there's a lot of that. And people of color point this out all the time that there's so many drag shows that are all white cast, even in diverse cities. And so, there's now becoming a call, especially among minority members of the drag community, that if your show doesn't have a person of color, if your show doesn't have a trans person doesn't have an AFAB person, are you really booking an inclusive cast? Is it really a show that we want to support? So those issues are becoming more and more talked about, and there's still definitely a predisposition to cast a lot of the traditional drag queen versus the broad diversity of drag.

Interviewer: So, what do you think are some misconceptions that people have about drag?

Mick Douch: That it's about sex, being the number one. Especially when you hear about drag queen story times people all up in arms that it's pedophilia. And it's like drag is not, not sex guys. It's not sexual. It's they're – they're mixing concepts because drag is really just about entertainment, and entertainment that involves the exaggerational performance of gender. And so, I definitely think the idea that drag is sexual is a misconception. Like sure, some people do like the dirty sexual humor or like sexy routines, but you'll find that anywhere you go in any medium. Like, I think that's one of the biggest ones. One that drives me nuts is when people say that drag kings are just not as entertaining. And then my favorite game to play with these people is – “Well name three drag kings you've seen.” they usually can't name a single one. And then when I'm like, “Hmm,” they tell me it's and then they'll usually respond to “That's because drag kings are less entertaining.” They can't remember any of them. And then I'm like, “Really?” And I'm like, “Well, have you tried to look at drag kings on the internet? I'm sure you've looked at tons of drag queens,” and usually folks haven't. And so, there's these assumptions that inherently AFAB drag or drag kings will be less entertaining. Oh, and that's the other one that drives me nuts. The assumption that drag kings are only appropriate for lesbian nights is one of my pet peeves. Because you'll find that yeah, maybe half of drag kings are lesbians or once upon a time considered themselves lesbians, but there are straight drag kings and there are trans men who are drag kings and there are cisgender straight men and cisgender gay men and the whole spectrum of people. So, the – that idea is silly.

Interviewer: Where do you think that these type of misconceptions come from?

Mick Douch: I think the less entertaining thing comes from like I said, RuPaul's influence heavily. And I think good old misogyny plays a major factor in the idea that people who are not men are less funny. And people who are not cismen are less funny because you see the same thing within the comedy industry. Yes. Or *Birds of Prey* is one of my favorite examples. How like, because that's so timely right now people talk about how it was a flop. I go and look at the box office numbers and compare it to one where it was my male cast recently, they were praising a male cast that had the exact same box office numbers as being a hit. So, there's stuff like that that I think is a huge factor. And I think the idea of drag kings belonging on a lesbian night is largely driven by gay men saying that they don't want to see a woman with a beard drawn on their face, because they don't realize that being a drag king is so much more than that. So yeah, it's, it's, one of those where I think just a lot of prejudices that exists outside of drag are just so present, they don't go away.

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

Mick Douch: Fire RuPaul. But honestly, I think that's one of my biggest things is how can you put someone like Miley Cyrus in drag to judge RuPaul's Drag Race, while simultaneously saying drag kings don't belong on the show? Like there are certain things like that that need to change. I think one of the biggest things that can happen and should happen, and this is one where it actually takes the control outside of the usual drag producers, is if a university is booking a drag show for the university, they should require that they have a diverse cast. Because that's one where it's silly because you can really sway it all. So that's like Aurora Gozmic, who puts up a lot of the bookings for Scarlet, she makes sure that every Saturday night she has AFAB people,

or trans people, or people of color. She doesn't book very many guests each Saturday, so you might get one out of three or two out of three. But it's still it's a – it's a commitment to diversity that she's undertaken as a producer. Same with Abhijeet here in Chicago has taken on this commitment to diversity and will always book a diverse cast. And at the university shows it's especially important because oftentimes, those are the most high paying shows out there for drag entertainers. So making sure you're booking people of color and trans people and drag kings, the people who usually don't get high paying opportunities is super, super important to helping sway the dynamic and you're catching the most the most young drag fans largely, by swooping into the university shows.

Interviewer: So, would you say that there is no anything unique to the drag scene in Chicago compared to other places in the country or the world?

Mick Douch: Oh, yes, I think Chicago is actually a place where we're kind of on the forefront of being more accepting of all types of drag than many, many places. Chicago is a place where yeah, we have our traditional drag queens. But we also have a lot of beautiful trans people and non-binary people and AFAB people who participate and are fully welcomed on the same level as cisgender men. It's also a place where you can see people who are more like creatures inside drag like Hinkypunk is kind of a drag queen, but also kind of a creature and having it be normal. And so that's really nice. You can go to a show and see a total horror number that's gory. And then 10 seconds later, someone could be doing a routine that's clowning or acrobatics. Yeah, it's just such a diverse scene. The most part, a lot of the venues are really open to diverse casts and ideas from diverse people. And I don't know I've, I've not seen people try to, like relegate drag kings to having to be just with other drag kings or on their own nights. We have some all drag king shows, but it's not because someone forced us there, it's because we chose to create an all drag king show to try to amplify other drag kings. Which I think is very unique because in most cities, it's the other way around where a bar is like, "You're not bookable for the regular main show so here's a Wednesday night, good luck filling the bar. If you can manage to do it, eh, maybe we'll move you to the weekend sometime." Versus in Chicago, like Dan McMahon approached Hamburger Mary's and was like, I want to do a king show and right out the gate, they gave him a Friday night. So, it's just a place that's much more willing to give us the same opportunities no matter who you are.

Interviewer: Yeah that's awesome. So, if you could change one thing about the entire drag scene, drag community what would that one thing be?

Mick Douch: Stop with the shade. What drag queens and some drag kings and drag beings call shade is really just being an asshole and bullying. It's not, like, okay, haha, you might get a chuckle out of it, but you're, you're being a jerk. And if your humor comes with a price of being a jerk, why, why do it? It's one of those where I think it comes out of the misperception that women are catty. And so, drag queens are catty to each other and like, they joke about cutting someone's wig or tripping them, you know, to get ahead and I'm like, "Why? It doesn't have to be that way." So that's the one that I'd really like to get rid of, is the idea that, that everyone's in competition with each other because we can all succeed together. Doesn't have to come at a cost to somebody else.

Interviewer: Yea and then you kind of mentioned a couple times, but just a general maybe elaborate more on it. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Mick Douch: I giggle because someone the other night asked me if I'll help cohost the viewing of it. I told them only if I can remind people every day how much RuPaul sucks. And they're actually fine with me doing that when I'm hosting Drag Race. But, the thing is, is I respect that it brought drag more into the mainstream and brought forth a whole new generation of people who are interested in drag. But I do think that Ru needs to realize that the time for what Drag Race used to be, it's kind of changed – like it's god, they're on like season 14. And I'm like 14 years ago, we were a very different culture than we are today. Like they/them pronouns weren't used 14 years ago and RuPaul was saying some very, very transphobic things and had like, there used to be a part of RuPaul's Drag Race called she-male. And I'm like that, that when it came out for like, one year it was okay. And then it was no longer socially okay to have. And that's part of it is I wish RuPaul and VH1 would realize that RuPaul needs to adapt to the times or it's gonna die. And I think it's pretty damn close to dead, honestly, because there's less and less people who are interested in it and less people who are watching it or who want to be on it than there were 14 years ago just because it's, it's not getting up to the times and the fact that drag is more than just men in dresses.

Interviewer: So how would you personally define drag?

Mick Douch: I think drag is an art form that can be either visual or performance. And it's characterized by the exaggeration of gender, whether that's a lack of gender, or presenting hyper feminine or hyper masculine or anything in between. It doesn't have to be cross dressing, although oftentimes it does involve someone portraying a gender that's not their own. But it's just playing with the concept of gender in one way or another.

Interviewer: And what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Mick Douch: Well, I think that's one that really depends so heavily on the individual. I mean, for me, my drag, it used to be just about like me having fun and hanging out with other people. And now it's become much more of a platform to find opportunities to talk about issues. Like I've sat on panels and I've spoken at universities in ways that as a drag king that I would never get as an individual and so for me, it's – it's a platform, it's a chance to be hyper visible in a world where everyone is so much the same. But then there are other people who really do it purely for the joy of performing. Like my, my partner is, is, gosh, way better at performing than I am. And she really does it just because she loves performing and she loves how drag makes her feel beautiful. And then I know some people who are, some cis performers, but a lot of trans performers well that's their primary source of income. And, and for them, the purpose of drag is a job, it's a way to stay afloat. So, it's a very diverse thing as to what the purpose is.

Interviewer: And then if you could go back in time, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Mick Douch: Oh, don't perform toxic masculinity and not – and the worst part is, it's not an intentional thing, many young drag kings fall into performing toxic masculinity. Because when you think about being a man or parodying a man, you fall into some of the worst of what it means to be a

man. And so, I would honestly talk with myself about the idea that you can present masculine and present masculine concepts without running the risk of perpetuating some of the really bad behaviors that those who are men engage in.

Interviewer: Definitely, and then if you chose one thing that you want people to know about, or learn about drag from this, what would it be?

Mick Douch: I don't know, I gotta think. I would probably say, if you are going to be at a drag show, at least cheer – cheering is free. And if you can afford to, tip people because the tips are how most people make money to like pay the cost of their costumes, and even if you can't tip, cheer. Oh and then drag is non consent, do not touch me unless we talk about it.

Interviewer: And then, did you have any additional experiences or comments or anything you'd like to share?

Mick Douch: Not that I can think of.

Interviewer: Okay well thank you so much, Mick.

Mick Douch: Awesome

Interviewer: And I will email you and if you'd like – or send me pictures you'd like to include some for the posting that'd be awesome as well.

Mick Douch: Yeah, I can do that. Do you have a preference like size or headshot versus like body or whatever that you prefer –

Interviewer: Anything that you're most comfortable with or you know, your favorite pictures. Anything like that would be, would be perfect.

Mick Douch: Okay, cool. Yeah. I'll dig through those and send you some later today.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you so much. It was great talking with you.

Mick Douch: Yeah, thank you.

Interviewer: You have a great night, bye.

Interview with Tomahawk Martini

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Baxter, Destiny. 2020. Interview with Tomahawk Martini. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 16.

Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/tomahawk-martini/>).

Audio of interview is also available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/tomahawk-martini/>

Interviewer: Hello

Tomahawk Martini: Hello

Interviewer: Hi, sorry, um, how are you doing today?

Tomahawk Martini: I'm good

Interviewer: Did you get a chance to look over that participation form I sent you?

Tomahawk Martini: I looked it over, was there anything in particular you needed from that?

Interviewer: Oh of course not, I just wanted to make sure that you didn't have any questions and that everything seemed okay with you.

Tomahawk Martini: Yes .

Interviewer: Okay. So, I'll start with my first question, which is, When was the first time that you heard about drag?

Tomahawk Martini: The first time I heard about drag, I would say was 2008. Yeah, I think 2008 was the first time I heard about drag.

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

Tomahawk Martini: My initial reaction was like, because it was RuPaul's Drag Race, it was on Logo TV at the time and it was something that like I just randomly came across, like, just skimming through the channels on TV and I was like watching it and I was like "Wow there's actually like a TV like a TV show of men dressing up as women." So I was just like "I'm so like intrigued and I'm so like confused like is this actually a thing?" And I just kept watching it - well I would only watch it like when I thought I was allowed to because to me it seemed, as a kid, like I'm doing

something bad like watching something bad, so anytime like there was like shuffle in the house or like my family was out and about like if they would come into the living room I would like change it back to like cartoons, just because to me it just felt like something in the same sense like you know you're caught like watching something dirty, and that's when like that's, that's - that was just my initial thought when I first saw Drag Race was like, this is amazing, this is so cool, but I also felt really, like, dirty watching at the same time.

Interviewer: Yeah, when did you start performing as a drag artist personally?

Tomahawk Martini: In 2011, when I was moved out to Albuquerque, New Mexico, which is where I reside now, which is about three hours from the reservation on where I grew up. So that was the first time. When I finally turned 21 was able to go to like a gay club, a gay bar, and they had a drag show that first time I went there, and that's was my second like introduction into like, actual drag besides watching it on a television show. But experiencing it firsthand was the first time I turned 21 and went to a gay bar.

Interviewer: Do you remember that experience at all? Does it stand out to you that first -

Tomahawk Martini: It stands out to me for a lot of reasons, but the first was just seeing it firsthand and seeing how like, in command these entertainers were just how big and extra and like large, they were just like these big personalities. And I was just like, that's when I decided I was like, I really, really, really need to do this. Like this is something, it was just something, like hidden deep inside me that was like this is what you should be doing and this is what you should have been exposed to a longer or sooner because it's exactly what I thought I was supposed to be doing. And it felt right in that moment.

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

Tomahawk Martini: So, I think I went about drag in a very different way because I was never out to my family, I never, like, spoke of it. I was just like, let me finish high school and move away from the reservation and then I'll be able to, you know, like explore who I am and what I'm interested in. So, drag came out in the process along with coming out. I didn't tell anyone I was coming out. I didn't tell anyone I was a drag queen. I just kind of did it through social media, where I wouldn't like really post pictures, I would just go out and drag and if people that knew me saw me, then that was like their way of being introduced, like, oh, this is who you are. And I eventually started posting pictures on Instagram slowly, just like posting one picture here, waiting a couple months, then finally posting another one here. And it was just like, slowly introducing people into who I was. And that I knew would eventually make its way back to my family, because I knew other people would see what I'm doing and they would go back and be

like, do you know Thomas's - at first, cause they're not exposed to like drag, they're just like, "You know, Thomas's like a transsexual. Like he wants to be a woman." And that was kind of the misconception because I didn't want to be a woman. I just was doing drag. But of course, a lot of people aren't exposed to drag queens or know the difference between so I just kind of came out with drag. Eventually I was fully out in drag, I was promoting my shows I was doing shows I was, you know, doing videos and eventually I went home one day and I just my family like already knew at that point. So, it was just like that, like elephant in the room that needed to be addressed. So, I sat there with my auntie who raised me after my grandmother passed away, and was just like, "Son," she was like "Sonny, we need to talk" and I was like, "Okay," and she was like, "I heard and seen pictures." Like, "what's going on with you? I just need to know. Are you gay? Do you want to be a woman?" And I was like, "Yeah, like I'm gay, like I like men. And I was like, but as far as the drag like, I like being a boy dressing up. I like being fabulous, I like being extra I, like being you know, androgynous or like weird at the same time." But I was like, "No, I don't want to be like a woman. So, like, don't get that confused." And from then on, my family's been totally accepting ever since I came out and they have been at most of my drag shows. I've done drag shows back on the rez and every time my family's there just cheering me on just having a good time.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great.

Tomahawk Martini: Which is the way I didn't think it was gonna go, I thought they were going to disown me, but it ended up turning out like they were okay with it.

Interviewer: So, you spoke a little bit about growing up on a reservation. Did you want to speak more about how maybe like your geography, class, race, anything like that has impacted your experience of drag?

Tomahawk Martini: Oh totally, speaking from a Native American, you know, indigenous person, drag to me isn't- like drag, I guess - in a way it was a part of our culture, but it wasn't the way it's seen in like mainstream drag as far as you know, the - the third gender or the Two Spirit whatever tribe you're from and however you associate that next entity of who you are as a person has always been part of native culture. You've had men who would help women out, you know, cook and clean even though people think it was like a woman's job, there were men who helped women. And - and in that general sense of like, that's always been there. But when it came to like, drag, it, it takes on a whole different mindset from our families and like traditions. Because I - it's hard to explain without experiencing it firsthand, because when men do women duties and are more involved with women in the community, no one ever sees it as anything but just them helping. But then when you put on a wig and high heels all of a sudden your family's like, "Wait, what's going on? What are you doing?" So that, that gender has always been there, it's never been an issue. And I learned more about it growing up through drag, and then finally coming out in drag

and going back home and a lot of these like elders telling me, these were the stories of, you know, the two spirited people that would help out and like do things. I think I veered off track on what I was saying.

Interviewer: Oh no, you're fine.

Tomahawk Martini: But your question was, again...

Interviewer: Just how like, you know, geography in terms of you're growing up on a reservation, your race, your class, have impacted your drag experience.

Tomahawk Martini: So, a lot of people here in Albuquerque don't really take Native American drag seriously. Most of them, I would say, most of them aren't the most polished drag entertainers and most of them are transsexuals, which has been a huge influence in my drag career with Native transwomen just you know, offering me a hand, giving me advice, helping me here and there, taking tidbits of their experiences and trying to apply it to mine, and trying to make myself a better female impersonator. But growing up Native American a lot of people doubt you, a lot of people don't believe in you. You kind of have the - you're kind of the underdog because you weren't exposed to gay culture sooner than other gender- or other races were, like white people have just been like, "Oh, since like, I have my grandpa's or my uncle was gay and I was like, listening to like Diana Ross and Donna Summer" and like, they have like a huge cultural like upbringing of gay culture. But on the rez like you're never exposed to that because one, like growing up for me I didn't-I my family barely got running water like four, four years ago. We didn't have like TV, we didn't have phones. We didn't have paved roads like we weren't - we weren't exposed to like the world outside of the reservation. Which is what was my disadvantage coming out to the city, because I had to, like learn who Cher was. What were Madonna's accolades? Or like, what is Stonewall? Like all these things I had to like learn because I wasn't exposed to it at a young age and it wasn't until I was 21 that I moved out here and I started learning "Oh there's like there's an actual like gay culture" like "There's things you need to learn or things you need to like, associate yourself with." So, being Native, growing up on the rez, it was kind of a disadvantage, but it just, it just comes and goes. And with that said, My drag is more a take on my indigenous background and being more proud of just me being Native American, just really owning it because today's society just, especially in the gay community, people being selective, they just make you feel like because you're Native American, you're dirty, you're not good enough, you're not their type. And they don't mind putting you down for it. So, I always just like to take the bigger road and just be like, "This is who I am. You don't like it? I don't care." So that's me growing up from the rez, like just being more proud of who I am, which this drag and this gay community has made me, because at first I was just like, maybe being Native isn't a good thing. But I was like, you know what, this is who I am. You guys are

going to accept it or not. We should all celebrate each other. And so, I feel more empowered being Native American and being a drag queen than ever before.

Interviewer: That's great and then, so there's a lot of different styles of drag so you know, glamour queens, comedy queens, how would you characterize your drag and your style of your drag?

Tomahawk Martini: Everyone always called me a diva, I like the old school drag because I just love the fantasy. I love the masculine side of older drag queens whereas like in today's - today's society there's a lot more like more feminine men that can pass off as like real women easier whereas like if you see a broad 200 pound man that just has like jacked up arms and is like doing a Diana Ross number, like, to me that's exciting. Like, to me, that's what I like about drag. So, I like to dip my toes into everything. I think I'm an ever-changing drag queen. I do anywhere from like, club kid looks to avant-garde to - I can easily do pageant drag, and I have, and I think it's one of the coolest things, but it's not the most exciting thing. I like more doing more of like conceptual art club kids is one of my favorites. I like being like a walking piece of art where people just like stare at you and they're like, can I take a picture of that. And that's what I like, just being that like piece of art in a nightclub just walking around and rotating throughout the club and socializing with people. But, my main priority, like, drag when I go out, it's just you know, a casual drag queen, like, I like when I do drag I like to socialize so majority of my drag just comes from like a cutoff jean short, to a see through mesh top, some hoops and a leather jacket. Like that's the majority of what I wear, because I only go out to socialize in drag more than I do to like perform.

Interviewer: Okay and then where does your drag name come from?

Tomahawk Martini: So when I first started drag, again, I was a social queen, I didn't do stage performances, I didn't get ready to be like, I'm going to be on stage, I'm gonna lip sync to Britney Spears. I was just more, like, I just want to go out and hang out with people. So, my first drag name was Anita Shot and it was a play on words because when people would ask my name, I would be like, "Anita Shot". And then of course, you know, everyone always like, has to make sure repeat your name back to you to like, make sure they heard it, right. So, they'll be like, "I need a shot?" and I was like, "Yes, I would love one" and majority of time at worked so people always ended up buying me alcohol without me ever asking for it. And so, I did that for several years and then finally I was like, "You know what, I'm bored with the socializing. It's kind of getting boring like I want to be on stage. I want to do like concepts and stuff," so I did drag for the first time I think three years, 2014, was my first time on stage like as a drag performer and I was like no that name like I need to take myself more seriously Anita Shot is not what I want. I don't want to be known as like a party girl or, you know a very cheesy name I wanted to, like, actually represent who I was. So, I kept thinking of names, I kept going through names, and I was like, "None of these sound right, none of these hit me the right way." And then eventually, I was like, oh, Tomahawk, and I was like, I love that name. And I was like, Martini, and I was

like, “Perfect.” and these names I’ve always had growing up. In high school, my last name is Martinez, and so my high school cross country team would just call me Martini, like short for Martinez. And like, I didn't know what a martini was at the time it just sounds really cool, I was like oh Martini, so they just would always call me Martini in practice. And that name just kind of was there I never like used it or like trademarked it or like put it on my books or wrote it down I was just like - it was always in the back of my mind. Then Tomahawk I got when I went to college for running and my cross-country team named me Tomahawk because I had a mohawk all through middle school in high school. And so, they put Tom which is Thomas and Mohawk together so they just called me Tomahawk, and I was like, oh, that's pretty cool you know, it's like an indigenous weapon. It's actually pretty cool. Like, I like that. So, they would just call me Tomahawk and then I stopped running I, you know, left college, moved out to Albuquerque. And then eventually, I was like, wait, I have these two names, it's Tomahawk Martini and I was like, that sounds perfect because one I don't do just like full female illusions, I do androgynous, like I'm a boy that likes to wear makeup or, you know, I'm a drag queen that has no hips and no boobs and no like hair because I was bald after I cut my mohawk off, I went bald and I was just like this is - it's like an entity and whatever it is, whatever you want it to be Tomahawk can be conveyed in many different ways. So, I ended up just sticking with Tomahawk Martini. And once I like named myself that I was like, this is like, again, this was like a revelation, but this is who I'm supposed to be. And so that's how Tomahawk Martini came about and it's been that ever since.

Interviewer: And then who or what has influenced your drag?

Tomahawk Martini: Hmm, good question. My first and foremost inspiration, motivation or inspiration toward my drag would have to be my drag troupe that I created. They're called Blackout and I've been in the drag scene for a minute before I met these girls so I was you know, that person that always was there always turning out looks, always giving performance and people loved it. And then eventually I was like, I've always been the outside drag queen and I've always had to fight against what everyone else thought I should be what everyone else thought drag should be, I was always the oddball and I met these girls that were like getting, you know, scrutinized for like, not padding, not wearing enough hair, or, you know, wearing pedestrian like off the rack clothes and I was like, no, like, people should give these young entertainers a chance like they're young, they don't know any better, like grow instead of just scrutinizing them and like putting them down like, become their friend encourage them because I wish I had me growing up in drag. Like I wish I was my own role model because I didn't know anything, I did trial and error. I was the most awful drag queen ever, but I just kept trying, I kept trying myself, I kept trying to prove people wrong. Like “No, I know what I'm doing” and it was all - my drag is all self-taught so no one ever like sat there and like walked me through what I should do. I just kind of did my own thing and learned as I went. But, these queens I picked them all up, I brought them to my living room one night, made them all dinner and I said, okay, and they're the younger than me, they're

like five years younger than me, which is, I think, a huge difference in the gay world, because you learn a lot in five years, and you grow a lot in five years, and you experience a lot in five years. So, I put them all down in my living room, I made them dinner, I cooked for them, we ate, you know, watched Drag Race, watched an episode of it and then at the end, I was like, okay, the reason why I brought you all here is because I want to propose a show idea. I am, you know, and I worked at the bar that I perform at, because I'm a bartender. I was like, I - the owners given me a show once a month, on a Saturday and I want it to be like a resident show. And I was like, I looked at all of you guys, I've seen you around, I've you know, chatted with you for a minute and you guys are all different and you guys are all so young that I want you guys to, like, grow together and I- eventually I was doing it because I wanted to help them grow. I wanted them to be like you guys can work together, you guys can help each other, you guys can just, you know, grow faster and just be better. And so, they worked it out, it was a hit. It's just been working out so much and then we've gone on to our second year now and then I sat back, and I was like, well, these girls have actually taught me more about myself than I have taught them about themselves. That's as far as just like being accountable, you know, being a role model, being someone that they can go to advice for something like if they need help with drag, I'm there for them. So, they just kind of taught me a lot about myself and I think they are my biggest inspiration because I keep trying more now every day to be better because I have all these young ones looking up at me. So, I would say that my drag troupe that I created is my biggest inspiration, without even knowing it.

Interviewer: Yeah, and then are you part of a drag family, house, or collective?

Tomahawk Martini: I don't. I, like again, I'm all self-taught, I'm self-made, I created the House of Martini just on my own. I now have two drag children. So, I'm just more of like, self-made, just stand on my own trial and error.

Interviewer: Would you consider your drag to be political?

Tomahawk Martini: I would say I don't take the political aspect as far as drag because there are other people who I think do it well in our community, and I usually just leave it up to them and - I'm more of like a shoulder, or a hand held outward, I'm more just like uplifting people or helping people up more than, like, the political side of it all. You know, I'm there because, when people at the clubs just like, "I had a bad day" and I'll sit there and I'll just talk to them like, I just, I'm relatable to people and I don't mind sitting there listening to your story because that's what helps get people throughout the day, you know, they were disowned by their mom or you know, things happened in their lives that they just, they don't know how to handle it. And I'm that person that's just there to like, listen.

Interviewer: And then I know there's limitations right now because of COVID-19 but how often would you say that you perform normally?

Tomahawk Martini: I haven't - I only performed once there was an online digital show, but I was asked to be a part of it was, you know, a simple paid gig and I filmed it in my drag room. I do drag, I do make up like I go on live, I just do makeup, but I don't really perform because I know a lot of drag queens in COVID now, you know, they rely on drag as their main source of income and I do - I'm a bartender like my, all my shows are - my drag shows are closed, my bartending gigs are closed, there's really nothing I can do. But, I don't like doing drag shows because one, I don't like asking people to like tip me when I already know everyone else is struggling and \$10 for me is a lot or even just \$5 is a lot for me. So, I'm not going to like go online and do drag shows and tell people like, make sure you tip me here make sure you tip me there because I just think it's not right and a lot of people are struggling. So, I don't do a lot of drag shows during quarantine.

Interviewer: What about outside of quarantine?

Tomahawk Martini: Outside of quarantine I have, you know, I have gigs left and right every weekend and I'm booked for something. I have my own like, like, again, Blackout which is my show I produced it, we make a lot of money off it. So, outside of COVID-19 I'm constantly doing drag, where now I'm just sitting at home just like resting just chilling.

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

Tomahawk Martini: I think the hardest thing for me to be a drag queen is making people realize that we're not there for their entertainment. As far as like we are not your clown, we are not put on stage for you to like mock, to touch, to make fun of, to degrade, to be just, like, overbearing like we - I feel as drag entertainers we are only presenting our art and all you do is appreciate it. Where I feel like in this day and age, because you are a drag queen, people are doing it for the wrong reasons, they're doing it for money, they're doing it for attention which in return makes the audience think like, you should do this because I'm here giving you \$1 and I'm like, I don't need your dollar, I can still go home and be fine if I didn't get one single dollar from anybody. I'm doing this for myself. So, I think the hardest part is just like trying to make people realize that like, I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing this for myself and if you don't like it, it doesn't bother me. If you don't tip me, it doesn't bother me. You don't like me? There's plenty of other drag queens that you can go and hang out with. So I think that's just the hardest part is getting it through to people because then you come off as like, mind my words, like a bitch, or entitled that I'm like, no, I'm not entitled, again I can just go home and just hang out and do whatever - my drag is validated by what I believe it is and what the art it is not by how much dollars I can make at a club, or how many people like me or how many Instagram followers I have, that doesn't

validate my drag. So, again that's just the hardest part, is just making people realize like, this is our art and all you should do is just sit back and just enjoy it for what it is, it may not be your taste, it may not be up to your standards, that's not up to you. All you can do is just sit there and like it. Just watch it. Realize, realize that this person is giving you a look into their lives, into their mind, into their emotional state, whatever song you're performing, whatever look they're conceptualizing. That's their ideas and everything inside their head, so you are actually - they're exposing themselves to you, and all you're going to do is sit there and be like, I didn't like that, I don't expect that, this is not what I want. Like that's not for you to decide. So, I just wish people were just more appreciative and just more understanding and like just sat back and thought about things for a minute before they even spoke or tried to put someone down.

Interviewer: Very true. Would you say that there's anything unique to the drag scene in Albuquerque where you live compared to other places in the United States or even the world?

Tomahawk Martini: What was the question again?

Interviewer: Would you say that there is, like, uniqueness to the drag scene in Albuquerque compared to the rest of the country or world?

Tomahawk Martini: I honestly think Albuquerque is by far one of the most underrated cities for drag queens. I'm not saying that because I'm biased, I'm just saying that because firsthand I experience- Albuquerque has the most diversity I've ever seen in a city, because when you go to other cities, you see a certain type of look, you see a certain type of style, you see - I don't know how to say it, people like oh, that's LA drag, or oh, that's Chicago drag or oh, that's New York drag. But in Albuquerque, you can go to all the bars here and be like, what is this, like, everyone's different, like you have a pageant girl sitting on one side hanging out with you know, like an androgynous performer and they're all laughing, drinking hanging out. So like, that whole performance aspect, like I just think Albuquerque has one of the best drag scenes because no matter where you go, you're going to get alternative drag, you're going to get pageant drag, you're going to get, like fashion model drag, like it's just so diverse. So that's how I see Albuquerque differ from the rest of the drag community in the world or in any city. And I encourage people to come research and like look into Albuquerque drag.

Interviewer: And then, how do you identify in terms of your gender identity inside and outside of drag?

Tomahawk Martini: That's a good question. I don't know how I identify. It's not - it's not saying that I'm like fluid, but that's kind of what it is. It's like one day I'll wake up and I'll be, you know, masculine feeling where I'm like, you know what, I'm gonna wear my Converse and jeans and a band tee and a backwards cap and you know, my posture just is a little bit different. Then there's

some days where like, oh, I'm gonna go pick up my purse and you know, put on some foundation and a little eyeshadow and go, and go about my day.

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

Tomahawk Martini: As far as pronouns, I am a person that I don't care what you call me, I'm not offended on how you address me. But how you address me is where I understand where that person is coming from. For example, like if a guy walks into me, he's like, "Hey, what's up, bro?" Or "What's up, dude?" I know he's straight. So how - if I'm, if I'm in drag or not in drag, if that's how he addresses me, it just, it's more of an understanding of I know where he's coming from, rather than I need to make him understand where - who I am. So like, if they, if a gay person walks up to me and it's like, "Hey girl," I'm like, okay, we like sissy girls like we gonna, you know laugh about something or again, it's just like how people address me, how I, like, understand where they're coming from and I don't care. It doesn't bother me I already know who I am, so I don't really care about pronouns or how I'm addressed.

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

Tomahawk Martini: No, it's more - it's hard for me to go over into drag and tell people like it's drag, shouldn't be a gender rather than drag is a gender. Whereas, like, if you like drag should only be men dressed up as women it's like no, drag can be all types of - I think I'm answering your question.

Interviewer: Yeah, you are.

Tomahawk Martini: Drag is just kind of whatever you want it to be there's no gender with drag. Drag is its own like just its own thing. So like, for example, like if drag queens- there's no gender in it because if you want to be a drag queen, and you want to wear like, no hips, no pads, you just want your boy body but you want to wear makeup, I don't really specifically think they're trying to convey a gender, they're just saying, this is who I am. Whereas other people, like, if you want to be a woman, you need to have boobs, you need to have big hair. You need to have hips, which is more sexist than anything but, I'm like that doesn't make you a woman, that just shows me that that's what you think you should look like as a woman. Rather than, say, tell someone like you're not a woman because you're not doing this, you're not doing that.

Interviewer: Would you say that drag has impacted your confidence as a person when you're outside of drag?

Tomahawk Martini: No, I feel like I've always just known who I am. However I exude my confidence depends on the environment that I'm in, because I am very well aware, you know, growing up on

the rez, there's just environments where you know, you're comfortable and there's other places where you're like, you got to watch out for yourself. So, I don't think drag outside of drag has made me any like different or like more confident. It's just who I am, and I've always been that.

Interviewer: And then how do you personally define drag?

Tomahawk Martini: That's a really good question, I've never thought about these things

Interviewer: Sorry, tricky questions.

Tomahawk Martini: And what was the question again?

Interviewer: How would you define drag?

Tomahawk Martini: I would define drag as just like a personality, like, whoever, whoever that person is. I know some people need to be able to distinguish the difference between drag, like they're like, oh, one day I'm John the next day, you know, I'm Betty, but I'm never the same person, they're different people. So, I guess it's just more of like a personality because I honestly think I'm Tomahawk Martini all the time, in or out of drag. I still who I am, I don't change, I don't crossover. So again, I think it's just more like drag is just like your personality like who either you want to be or just generally just who you are all around. You can be in, you can be self-conscious and very, like, timid, but the minute you're in drag that personality, that whatever, that whoever makes you confident, I think that's drag, because that's their personality they're exuding.

Interviewer: I agree. What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Tomahawk Martini: I think the purpose of drag is generally just to make people happy and that's how I look -at it-. I don't know if that's really what people believe, but honestly, I just think drag queens are there just to make people feel good. Whether that's laughing, whether that's being a muse to, like, fashion or like makeup, or, you know, lip synching to your favorite song, it's just it no matter what a drag queen does, either way, it's going to make somebody happy. And I think that's what matters the most is just making people happy, and at least that's why I do it, and that's why I've been doing it. I haven't done it for any other reason except just to make people happy.

Interviewer: Do you think that drag is sexual?

Tomahawk Martini: I'm biased on that because my drag is very sexual. It's very, like, provocative but to like a certain extent, to not where it's like - don't grope me without me knowing, don't just like come behind me and like start touching me all over like, excuse me. Like, whereas like if I'm

hanging out with people, and they're just like, "Oh my god," like they have a conversation and they're just like, "Wow, you're like so pretty and like, like your boobs looks so good, like, are they real?" and I'll be like, "No," and they're like, "Well can I touch them?" And I'm like, "Sure," like, if you're just curious to like, touch a drag queens boob like, sure. But don't ever, like just run behind me or like, grab me or like run by and like, smack my ass because I just kind of feel like if you're really intrigued, then come ask, don't be doing all this unnecessary stuff.

Interviewer: Right.

Tomahawk Martini: So, I guess I'm sexual, but only to the point to where both of us understand.

Interviewer: And then how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Tomahawk Martini: At first, I really, really, loved RuPaul's Drag Race, I thought it was the most amazing platform ever. I thought it exposed and, you know, brought a lot of people exposure to Drag Race. But the more and more I watch it, the more and more I realize I'm not a fan - I'm a fan of it, but I'm no longer dreaming of getting on that show. It's no longer like a dream of mine. It'd be a nice goal, but it's not like I'm working toward it every day to be on it anymore. I'm just kind of like, it's there.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about the drag scene or drag in general, or the community, what would that be?

Tomahawk Martini: The one thing I would change about drag, in the community would just be acceptance - no I would say self-confidence, because I had this conversation with someone a couple months ago, or yeah almost like a year ago, is I just wish the community was more confident in themselves and who they were, because there wouldn't be such a hostile environment going into this, there's always like cliques or like "You can't be a part of this, or I don't like that, you can't say with us," and drag queens always like ripping down and dragging other drag queens like, "You're not doing this and that, that's not good. This is not that, I don't like that, your hair looks awful." Like, be confident in just who you are as a person. If your drag is what you think it should be, then you should easily go about the bar and just be nice to people and just say "Hi, how are you?" or "Hi, nice to see you out. Thanks for being here," rather than sit there and look at someone and be like, "Oh, you decided to wear that today?" where I feel like when people are being shady or like cunty towards other people. It's kind of from inside that they tend to make themselves feel better. So, I just that drag queens were more confident and were like yeah, this is what I present and that's fine, and don't worry about whoever else was casted in your show, don't think because "Oh you're booked with this queen that now all of the sudden your drag means less," like no it doesn't. Tearing down people doesn't make you any better, did it make your life you know, better to pull this young drag queen down and tell her that her hair is

awful, did it make you feel better? Did you get more money in your pocket? You didn't, so like don't do that. And that's the queen I've always been, I'm just like leave people alone, let them represent themselves, it's their art, they bought it, they can do whatever they want with it. And I think that all just comes down from people being self-conscious with people, like, worrying too much about how they look, or who they're associated with.

Interviewer: What do you think are some misconceptions that you think people have about drag?

Tomahawk Martini: That you want to be a woman, first and foremost. So yeah, I'd just say like they think drag queens want to be women, it's not true.

Interviewer: Where do you think like that kind of misconception comes from?

Tomahawk Martini: I think just more from the lingo and the personality from generations before, where it was like "You cannot clock the mug, my hair is real," like the drag back then was like you had to be a fully realized woman, and people would think "Oh that's really what you want to be" because drag queens would just think that that's what they wanted to be, and from the people I have known, it's like they started out as drag and then eventually transitioned over into being women, which was majority of the things that like happened, was you were a man, dressed up as a woman and then you eventually just became a woman. So, it's kind of like a segue into your next chapter and I think that's what a lot of people think drag queens are doing - like that's the early stages to convincing themselves or admitting to themselves that they want to be a woman. But in today's society, a lot of people just dress up to dress up, they don't really dress up for- to fulfill the fantasy or to be the fantasy or whatever.

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

Tomahawk Martini: I think what's changing now, it's already happening, it's people being like just going out with a hairy chest and like, no shaved arms like, they're not trying to be a woman, they're just wearing makeup and putting on a wig and I know it frustrates a lot of people in the community, especially the older community because they're like, "That's not what we were raised, you guys are ruining this, you're tarnishing it, you're changing it," and they don't like change because, I feel like it's a hard pill to swallow because this day in age, you're so open and you're so free to be who you are but them growing up, it's kind of resentment, because they're like, well we weren't able to do that. So, it's changing, there's really nothing else anyone can do except just be

themselves and do their own representation of drag, which is happening, so it's just going to take time for it to finally just eventually like, just be the new normal.

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

Tomahawk Martini: To learn about drag, is that, that everyone's different, not everyone's the same. Because I would say like, it's hard, but that's like the easy way - like drag is really hard financially hard, physically it's hard, just getting ready in general like all the padding, all the tights, the cinching, the corsets, like that's really hard, but I think that's just what everyone in general is going to say, is that it's physically demanding on the body. You have glue nails, um, glue to your hair, you have wigs like 10 pounds just sitting on your head, you have a headache, so it's like a whole production, and you go about this for several hours in a crowded, hot bar with people who are drinking, personalities that are heightened because of outside influences like alcohol or whatever. So yeah, maybe yeah that is my answer, cause it hit me and it felt right - just physically demanding, it's hard.

Interviewer: Definitely, and then did you have any other experiences or thoughts that you'd like to share?

Tomahawk Martini: I don't think so, I think I pretty much expressed most of everything in my interview. Just drag is amazing, I'm so glad I found it, I wish I found it sooner, that's the only thing that I can bring attention to is I wish I knew this was who I was a long time ago, because I would be far off more than what I am now, not saying that where I'm at now is bad or anything, but I only have so much time in this world, and there's so much more that I want to do that I haven't done yet, so.

Interviewer: Well thank you so much for participating, I really enjoyed talking with you.

Tomahawk Martini: Awesome, well thank you for reaching out to me, I appreciate it. If- or when you finish the article, if you have a link or anything, I'd like to follow up and like read up on it, and share it as well, I think that's be cool.

Interviewer: Definitely. I'll make sure to send you a link once I get everything transcribed and uploaded.

Tomahawk Martini: Okay, and then just quick like because I read it but like what is your like goals or like, what's the project you're working on as far as like interviewing drag queens and all that?

Interviewer: So you'll see once I send you a link, and I could even send it to you now so you can see what it's going to look like, but we're just creating profiles of drag artists with the transcriptions, and like links to their social media, and different things like that so that people who are interested and want to know more about drag are able to listen, read, and see first-hand kind of the experiences that drag artists have.

Tomahawk Martini: Okay

Interviewer: Yeah so, I can make sure to send you that link, and if you'd like I can always - you can email me, you know, some people have like professional photos taken, anything like that that I -

Tomahawk Martini: I mean I could submit some photos that you might need that I have professionally done and retouched.

Interviewer: Yeah definitely just email them to me.

Tomahawk Martini: And then I can send you all my social platforms just in case you were like wanting to reach out or actually see the work or art that happens cause all social media is different.

Interviewer: Definitely, yeah, I will make sure to upload those photos and then include the links and I'll send you the link once I'm finished with everything.

Tomahawk Martini: Awesome, well I appreciate that and I, thank you for talking and thank you for reaching out, I appreciate it.

Interviewer: Thank you, I hope you have a great day -

Tomahawk Martini: I haven't talked to a lot of people so talking to you was like amazing.

Interviewer: Thank you, I'm glad, Stay, safe for sure too, with everything going on.

Tomahawk Martini: Yes, you too.

Interviewer: Have a great day.

Tomahawk Martini: Alright thank you, bye!

Interviewer: Bye!

Interview with Twinkie LaRue

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Baxter, Destiny. 2020. Interview with Twinkie LaRue. *Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville*, February 23. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/twinkie-larue/>).

Audio of interview is also available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/twinkie-larue/>

Interviewer: Hello?

Twinkie LaRue: Hi, is this Destiny?

Interviewer: Yes it is, hi.

Twinkie LaRue: Happy to finally talk to you.

Interviewer: Sorry about that.

Twinkie LaRue: Oh, it's okay no worries.

Interviewer: How are you doing?

Twinkie LaRue: I'm doing all right, how are you?

Interviewer: I'm good, thank you. Did you get a chance to look over that participation form? Did you have any questions or anything?

Twinkie LaRue: I looked over it, everything seems alright.

Interviewer: Awesome. So, my very first question is When did you first hear about drag?

Twinkie LaRue: When did I first hear about it? I would say a couple of years ago when I started watching RuPaul's Drag Race.

Interviewer: Okay, and then what was your initial reaction to it?

Twinkie LaRue: I thought it was really cool. I didn't really know much about women doing drag, to be honest, because it wasn't represented on the show. And I didn't know it was a thing until I had searched it. And then I realized, "Oh, wow, there are a lot of cisgender women that are doing this" and I thought that it was - it was validating for me it was like, okay, well then it's an option for me. So, then I decided I wanted to check it out, like see some local shows and possibly get into it.

Interviewer: So, when did you first start performing as a drag artist?

Twinkie LaRue: Um, I think it was October 2018 – yep, so I was almost 20.

Interviewer: Do you remember like your first experience in drag, would you like to share anything about that?

Twinkie LaRue: My first experiences in drag. I don't know, I thought it was like a really cool art form. And I think I felt more confident in drag and just, it was like a really liberating experience.

Interviewer: How have your like families and friends and other loved ones received you becoming a drag artist?

Twinkie LaRue: It hasn't been easy. For sure. I think it's been a process. I thought, I believed that everyone would be cool with it. And I don't think it was- it was definitely hard to understand especially from my family. They are definitely working on it for sure. And I think they are more accepting than a lot of my peer's parents. They come from a generation where I think it just wasn't talked about. And even if it was talked about, there wasn't really that representation of cisgender women being drag queens or really anything else. So, it was definitely, it took a lot of, you know, conversations and like, it's definitely been a process to put it in short.

Interviewer: And then where does your drag name come from?

Twinkie LaRue: Well, Twinkie it's because I've always been very short. I come from a big family and everyone's very tall, and I'm 5'3". So, it's kind of like the- the slang term in the gay community twink, but also my paternal grandmother's, they used to call her Twiggy because I guess she resembled the model and kind of like a mix of those two things.

Interviewer: Okay, and then so there are a lot of different types of drag. So, you've got you know, glamour queens, impersonators, comedy queens, how would you characterize your drag?

Twinkie LaRue: That's an interesting question because I, I think I'm more so a performance queen. I am still, you know, learning. I don't have the- like I'm a student, I don't have the most money to go out and like, invest in real expensive outfits and things like that, so I think I focus more so with performance. Aesthetic wise - ideally, glamour, I would like to kind of explore that a little bit more like the fashion aspect as well. But that's the kind of aesthetic that I gravitate towards, with a bit of influence and like the alternative punk kind of scene as well. Sometimes I go for that kind of look, because I was always drawn to that in like middle school and high school, so I guess I can't shake that influence.

Interviewer: Yeah, so then who or what else has influenced your personal drag?

Twinkie LaRue: Outside of my scene, I would say a lot of the music I listened to. I listened to a lot of, well, I guess being a 90s and 2000s baby, a lot of pop music and the pop stars of the generation like Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, and I think people like that. I used to listen to a lot of like Marilyn Manson and like Nirvana and kind of alternative music as well. So that's kind of an

influence of mine. Also like, Drag Race scenes and people from- that you see on television as well, I think that they're, we're living in a really cool time now where you see drag artists on TV and you can take influence from that even if you aren't a drag queen, you can- if you're a visual artist, or a musician or whoever, you can see these people and take influence. In my scene, there is a drag - there's a few drag queens that have been very open about accepting people that aren't cisgender men into queer spaces and allowing them to do their art. Courtney Conquers is one of them. She's been a very big influence of mine, Scarlet Bobo who is a local performer who has always been very open in booking cisgender women and other people that don't identify as cisgender men, as well as creating her own competition and just being very outwardly, like outspoken about injustice in the performance world.

Interviewer: And then do you consider your drag to be political?

Twinkie LaRue: I would say so I think, although I don't, I have never really done a political performance. But I think the mere act of me existing at times can be political. Because I see from other cisgender women that go to the village, which is like where we have our drag shows is kind of the LGBTQ club in Toronto. A lot of ciswomen and other people, I can't speak on the trans experiences because I don't identify as such. They have had difficult experiences in the village. A lot of the cisgender women I've talked to, like there's a group of young girls that go to the local drag, they have experienced discrimination, and I feel like me just being in that community and just making myself visible in queer spaces and performing there, I would say it changes minds it kind of, you know, it really is it's a silent act of being politicized.

Interviewer: Definitely and then so are you part of a drag family or a drag house or collective?

Twinkie LaRue: I am not. I was at the start of my drag career. And I decided to leave. Because just some disagreements and things like that. It's not for everyone. I think that some people really like that. Some people, they're not too keen on that idea. But I will say that, really any community that you're in, you kind of find like a type of kin relationship. Like I have lots of friends that I would consider, like family members that aren't a part of like a traditional drag family so.

Interviewer: Yeah, and then how often would you say you perform?

Twinkie LaRue: Well, because I'm a student and fairly new and I would also be remiss if I didn't say, possibly because I'm a cisgender woman, I perform at a- like a regular booking, maybe once a month. I think like I do- we have several opportunities in Toronto for open stages. So, that is a way to kind of like shake off the cobwebs and also, you know, talk to other performers, possibly get a booking. But yeah, it is, I would say it's difficult, and in a city like Toronto, it's a small drag community, but it's the biggest in Canada. So, we're, there's a, we have a lot of bars that do drag shows, but even then, they have so many queens and kings and other performers that it's very competitive. But yeah, about once a month.

Interviewer: Would you say that there's anything unique to the drag scene in Toronto where you live compared to other places in the country or world?

Twinkie LaRue: I say what I've seen from other drag performers in Canada, I've never visited another city's drag scene. What I see in Toronto, the fact that it is a bigger drag scene it's kind of similar to what I've seen in New York. I've never seen it firsthand but like for TV and things like that, it's a very, you have an alternative theme, which is around the Queen West area. And we have in our village, which is more of a traditional, if you can call it that traditional drag scene, where it's very much like glam, top 40 performance style and unlike other cities, we have marathon drag. So, a performer will do about 15 minute sets, and then another performer might come on stage and do 15 minutes sets. For about, like a two-hour show. In other cities, it's usually each performer does about one or two performances throughout the span of a two or three hour show, and that is how they do it there, in Toronto was definitely a different layout. I would say it's similar to other types of performance styles where you don't it's not just one number you do you do like several. Yeah, several different numbers.

Interviewer: And then what goes into getting ready for a performance for you?

Twinkie LaRue: What goes into it? I say ideally, I like to practice some sort of self-care beforehand, like, take a shower, try and rely music on. I think that that is something I like to do but that isn't always ideal. I say, putting on makeup, listening to the music that I'm planning on performing that night. Finding a costume or an outfit that I can wear, putting on the wig. It's a process that definitely, there's this I guess, misconception that cisgender women don't have to put as much effort into - into drag, I think. It's definitely a long and strenuous process, but it's definitely very worth it, I enjoy it. For sure.

Interviewer: And then what do you think are some other misconceptions that people have about drag?

Twinkie LaRue: Um, I think that there's a misconception that a lot of these drag queen, drag king, and performers are, I mean, that like a lot of these bars and the people inside the bars are very seedy individuals. I think that that was a concern, especially for my family when I started. Although working in the nightlife industry is definitely not the best, but really nothing is. I think that you realize that drag performers are regular people, a lot of them are students, they have day jobs. You know, it's at the end of the day, they are still people. And I think another misconception that I had watching, starting out watching RuPaul's Drag Race is that it's really just cisgender men that are doing this. And then you go to an actual drag show, and you might see a cisgender woman or a trans person and not a non-binary person. It's a big, there's lots of different types of people that do drag. It's not just the traditional men dressing as women or women dressing as men. So that's definitely a big misconception.

Interviewer: And where do you think that those types of misconceptions come from?

Twinkie LaRue: I would say - I would say that the media for sure is definitely a reason why there are these misconceptions, because if we don't represent different groups of people on TV or in the media, we won't know it exists. And I've had people come up to me and say, 'I didn't even know that cisgender women could do that.' And like they, they just were astonished that like, people like me even existed. And I always find that kind of funny. Sometimes it comes off as a little bit rude, when people say it, but it's a learning experience for them, and I get to be a part of that experience with them.

Interviewer: And then what different things do you think we could do to help change these misconceptions?

Twinkie LaRue: I think for people that produce shows to try and make them more diverse. I think changing the language that we use when it comes to talking about drag performers, saying performers instead of queens or kings, or because there's so many different intersections in between. I guess being aware of our pronouns. Yeah, just the language that we use, like, the term fishy is kind of sexist. There's a bunch of different terms that I think other than fishy, none of them come to mind. I think being aware of our language and who, like the end, you know, somebody says, "Oh, I'm offended by that," genuinely take it to heart and, you know, make sure that, you know, you're, I guess checking yourself. Also, I would say, not assuming the gender or sexuality of anyone that is in a queer space. I've seen a lot of queens, say to friends of mine, or people, even to me, like just an assumption at "Oh, any cisgender woman that is queer space is straight." And that's an assumption that people are making and it really isn't, you know, it isn't a fair assumption to make for anyone

Interviewer: And then how do you personally identify in terms of your gender identity outside of drag?

Twinkie LaRue: My gender identity outside of drag I identify as a cisgender woman. Sexuality, I don't use labels. That's so - just fluid or label-less I guess or queer, I guess.

Interviewer: Do you use those same pronouns inside of drag, the she/her?

Twinkie LaRue: She/her inside and outside of drag.

Interviewer: Has drag influenced your gender identities at all or anything like that?

Twinkie LaRue: Um, I would say that it's more so an expression of my gender identity. Has it influenced it? I would say it has caused me to analyze gender roles and how I might identify and I think I still identify as a cisgender woman but I think it is - it has given me the opportunity to explore gender a bit more.

Interviewer: Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are outside of drag?

Twinkie LaRue: Um, I would say, before I started drag, I wasn't the most confident. I think giving me that outlet has helped my confidence. But I do think sometimes I find it has me looking at myself a little bit more critically. Because you're altering your body when you become a drag queen or a drag king. There's a lot of like corseting or people with padding or things like that. And we don't usually wear that in our day to day lives. So you have to I have to kind of remind myself, like, yeah my waist doesn't look like that when I'm going to work or going to school, or most women don't have hips like that or you know going about their day to day lives or, or whatever. So it does, I would say, I have to remind myself a lot more than before I started.

Interviewer: So, what are the other challenges to you doing and being a drag artist?

Twinkie LaRue: The challenges? I would say there still is even just being accepted and seen as valid. I think that there's still challenges when it comes to that. I mean, on the internet, it seems like people are mostly understanding. But in the drag scene, I find, I've learned to associate with people that accept me and see my art as valid. And it has been a process to kind of like find those people. I'd say that's one of the biggest challenges because there are still competitions in my city that only allow cisgender men to perform. And I don't know how they get away with advertising like that because I see that as discrimination. And also, like people don't really - people that enter don't really care all that much about it, so I think that is a big challenge because, clearly in 2020, anyone who identifies as a cisgender man doing drag is still getting discriminated against and are not offered the same opportunity.

Interviewer: And then can you think of any additional ways in which drag has impacted or changed you?

Twinkie LaRue: I, it has changed me when it comes to -I mean, I was always that person who would go from school to home. I would really never, I never really went out and then like I was always more of an introverted person. And then I started drag, and I felt like I actually enjoyed going out and seeing people and I didn't, it was just a nice opportunity. I never had that in middle school or high school where I went into a room and people were excited to see me. Or, you know, I knew people there and you know, like, it seems like you have like a big group of friends. And I kind of, I found that really helpful. And I think it also has made me appreciate my own gender identity as well. I think that I mean, I grew up in a feminist household, my mom and grandma are both self-identified feminists, and I think I always had that influence. But until I started going out and pursuing drag, I think I kind of appreciate that background a lot more, and I'm practicing it more.

Interviewer: You've mentioned different things about how gender has kind of impacted drag. Can you share any other examples of how maybe, race, class, age, religion, those kinds of other social identities has impacted your experience of drag?

Twinkie LaRue: I think I am lucky when it comes to privilege for sure. I've noticed through my friends that they've had negative experiences, people making racist comments. And I see that as like as a friend, it gets me angry that people are in a community that's supposed to be accepting and you know, in a safe space, people are still discriminating against others. I do also see trans people being discriminated against and in certain queer spaces. I will say because Toronto, Toronto considers itself a mosaic when it comes to the different cultural groups that we have here. And Toronto, unlike a lot of the cities in North America, the majority of the people that are booked in the Toronto drag scene are people of color, specifically black queens. And that is something I would say that we pride ourselves on that, even then I don't think many Asian queens or indigenous queens. Or, like, I think that there's definitely a lack of that in the representation. And I think that I would like to see it change. And if I ever have a show in the future like a local, weekly or monthly show, I would love to diversify Toronto's drag scene for sure.

Interviewer: Definitely, and then how do you personally define drag?

Twinkie LaRue: With my own drag career, I guess I see it as a celebration of femininity. But with other people, like I think drag as a whole is a, either a celebration, a critique, an expression of gender,

whether that be your own gender or practicing, not practicing, like trying out, on a different gender for the sake of art, and I think it's ultimately inherently political.

Interviewer: And then what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Twinkie LaRue: I think the purpose of it - I think it's a form of self-expression. I think it helps a lot of people get out of their shells. It helps a lot of people discover who they are. And I also think that it is a good vessel for talking about gender, and helping us analyze what exactly gender is and how the roles that you know we take on in this world are sometimes are ridiculous. And I think that is a good way to do that in an often funny and lighthearted and fun way.

Interviewer: Do you think that drag is sexual?

Twinkie LaRue: Do I think its sexual? I think it can be. I know there's a big debate on whether or not kids should be around drag queens, like in drag queen story time or even kids that pursue drag. I do think because oftentimes drag is in bars and nightclubs, I do think it can be sexual. I don't necessarily - I don't do that in my performance style. But there is a lot of sexual references. It doesn't have to be sexual though. I do you think that there are people that can do a drag show and be very benign and appropriate. I think it just depends on the time and place.

Interviewer: Do you think that things like Drag Queen Story Hour and those kinds of things are good events?

Twinkie LaRue: I think that parents, I do have various nieces and nephews and I think will bring their top ----- [audio cut out]

Interviewer: Hello, sorry I didn't hear the last 10 seconds I'm so sorry it cut out completely

Twinkie LaRue: We were talking about the Drag Queen Story Hour- So I think that it depends on the person, if they're comfortable talking about gender identity and gender roles and sexuality with their kids, I think that it is a good starting point to, let's say go to a Drag Queen Story Hour, but not every parent is comfortable with that, and that's totally okay. I do think it's, again, it's the time and place. I don't- I've never [audio cut out]. I don't think that there are these, I would hope that there weren't any inappropriate references and things like that around kids, but from what I understand it's a very, you know, fun and age appropriate environment.

Interviewer: And then how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Twinkie LaRue: I enjoy the show. I definitely get excited every few months or whenever the show comes around and there's a new season. I'm excited that Canada is getting their version from - I'm very excited for that. I do think, however, that it definitely needs to be more diverse. And I think that that is something that I would love to see in the future. I don't know if it's going to happen, because RuPaul has said some, I don't remember exactly what he said, but that wouldn't have cisgender women or transgender women that are already transitioning on the show. which I don't think is - I think that is missing out on a big opportunity when it comes to - like there are so many cisgender and transgender performers that are incredibly talented and they can do - I would

love to see them on the show and I know lots of other people feel that way as well. And you never know, I think that like, there could be a little girl out there like me who was [inaudible] and been like, oh, wow, she's doing it. Maybe I can do it, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. So aside from diversification if you could change one other thing about drag, the drag scene or the community, what would that be?

Twinkie LaRue: I would love to just in the arts oftentimes performers don't get paid their proper wage. I think something like a union for drag queens and performers would be amazing because we don't get benefits, we don't - our hours aren't good you know, know, like it's very much under the table work. So, there have been many times where people have not been paid for certain things or other people have been paid more. In the arts, people don't necessarily often respect artists work, you know, you get paid in exposure or things like that. So, I think that would be something I would change. I think that it's super important to be paying artists for their, like, either their time or you know, the effort of actually getting into drag is unpaid work. So. yeah.

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

Twinkie LaRue: One thing I would say that anyone can do drag, regardless of how you identify, or you know, or who you are the gender that you were assigned at first, or the gender identity you have you, you can do it. It's something that I think a lot of people a lot of people don't know that it's an option for them. And I think that is something that more people should try out. Even if it's just for a night to go out in a nice outfit and have makeup on, you know, it's fun.

Interviewer: And then did you have any other experiences or anything else you'd like to share?

Twinkie LaRue: Any other experiences? I think that every performer, especially if you're working in nightclub environments, they've had good and bad experiences. I mean, I think that for me, I realized that I guess being open about certain topics like saying a competition shouldn't discriminate against cisgender women and trans people like the local competition we have, I realized how many people were against even me saying that, and other people saying that and there have been, I think that is we don't necessarily listen to the people when they say things that we don't like, I was kind of calling for people who, I didn't say the name of the competition. But I think for people who are local to maybe think about a boycott, because if people don't enter this competition, then they [inaudible], and an old friend of mine wrote a whole post about me saying that I shouldn't get booked again, because I was, you know, talking badly about people that were entering this competition. And it was interesting to see that people that identify as feminists and open minded and all of that were not okay with me speaking my mind. So, I do think that there is a problem with sexism and transphobia and racism in this industry, but in every industry, there are those problems. It's just interesting to see how even me speaking my mind on things, you know, or other people speaking their mind on things can show you other people's true colors and intentions.

Interviewer: Definitely that is interesting. I think that people would be much more open.

Twinkie LaRue: You'd assume for sure, but I think in other cities I've heard it's more open minded. I think it depends on the place. Every drag scene is different because there are different every city is different. So, I think it's, I would love to travel and to see what other cities what their scene is like, how their performance style is, things like that. I don't see that in the cards right now because you know, I'm in school currently. So hopefully in the future, that would be something I would love to check out.

Interviewer: I, just from personal research, at least in the United States, of course, I don't know much about Canada, the coasts, it seems to be very liberal. So, New York and then the other coast. You know, California has a really good drag -

Twinkie LaRue: Yeah, I know Chicago has a very big drag scene and it's supposedly very welcoming. And it's a really cool place to be, as well.

Interviewer: I hope to be able to travel to those places too soon, as soon as I'm out of school as well. Did you have anything else that you'd like to share, anything?

Twinkie LaRue: I think we covered everything. Is there any other questions that you'd like to ask?

Interviewer: No questions on my part. However, if you'd like to send like a few photos that I could include in like a little biography, when I upload this to the website and everything that would be great.

Twinkie LaRue: Cool. Yeah, absolutely

Interviewer: Okay, well thank you so much for participating. And you have a great rest of your night!

Twinkie LaRue: You too. Thank you

Interviewer: Bye-bye.

Interview with Wendy Warhol

To cite this particular interview, please use the following:

Baxter, Destiny. 2020. Interview with Wendy Warhol. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*, April 28. Available URL (<http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/wendy-warhol/>).

Audio of interview is also available at <http://www.ezratemko.com/drag/wendy-warhol/>

Interviewer: Hello. How are you doing today?

Wendy Warhol: I'm good and you?

Interviewer: I'm good, thank you. Before I begin -

Wendy Warhol: I don't understand what's going on, I'm supposed to be able to receive calls [inaudible] provider. I feel bad, but I think I can talk to you now.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm sorry about that, that actually happened with somebody else too. So, I'm not sure if it's something on my end or the other person's end. Before I begin, did you get that participation form that I sent you?

Wendy Warhol: Yeah, I did.

Interviewer: Did you have any questions or anything before I begin?

Wendy Warhol: No

Interviewer: Okay so my first question is, when did you first hear about drag?

Wendy Warhol: Oh well, the first time I heard about drag was, like, when I was really young, because here in Montreal we have - we have one famous drag queen who has been around for over 30 years. So, when I was still a child, I used to know what drag was because of her. She, obviously when I was younger, I couldn't go to bars, but she would turn up in the newspapers, and I would read that, and it'd just be funny because it was containing all the stories behind the drag scene. So yeah, I was about- I would say I was about 10 or 12 years old at that time.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, and what was your initial reaction to it? Do you remember?

Wendy Warhol: I thought she was funny. I could guess because she's the kind of drag that is like a clown, so, yeah, the funny, the stories that she was like writing were really funny so I just thought it was funny and entertaining.

Interviewer: And then when did you start performing as a drag artist?

Wendy Warhol: I started doing drag even before starting to perform, I was more like a Club Kid at my beginning. It started when I was, I think it was about four or five years ago. I used to have a blog. And my blog was all about Montreal, like what to do in Montreal, and there is a festival we have each year called the Fringe Festival. And every year they launch their festival with what they called Fringe For All and it's a big evening where all the artists are invited. So, show the audience one minute of their act, or they have one minute to sell the idea of doing their show. And I saw a drag house called the House of Laureen I thought they were kind of entertaining and different from what the other drag - what the other drag was about in Montreal. Sorry I haven't talked in English for a few weeks, kind of hard to right now.

Interviewer: You're totally fine.

Wendy Warhol: Thank you, so I wrote an article on my blog about, not just about them but like more "The Five Shows You Must See at the Fringe Festival" and when they saw my article, they were like, "Oh, we would like to invite you for a premiere and if you would like, we would love to transform you into a drag queen." And back then I didn't know that woman could do - could be drag queens. So, I was kind of excited about that. "Like, oh my god, I could be a drag queen that sounds cool" because at that time I used to hang out in the Village, the gay district of Montreal when I was like quite young about like 18 or 19 or 20 years old, but I'm older now, I'm 42. So, I was like 38 at that time, and there was a gap of my life that I didn't go to the Village at all. So, I didn't realize - House of Laureen is more, is for more outside of the village, but it taught - kind of taught me that drag can be different than what, what, mainstream drag is. I'm not saying that it is always these mainstream drag, but there are more careers, that can be a little bit more mainstream. And so since I didn't know I could be a drag queen and then they transformed me and I was like, oh my god, this is fantastic, this is cool. From there, I used to go to their shows every month because they have a monthly show - well they had this festival thing where they had a show like about every day for two weeks but then after that we had a monthly show so I would go to their show and dressed up as drag. But because I didn't know any other females I think even though they would say it was correct and drag is, all drag is valid and all of that, personally, I still felt like an imposter because I didn't - I didn't know any other female drag queens. So, I started feeling like kind of maybe, maybe I shouldn't do that, but I met a drag king at the same time so I figured well maybe I could try that. So, I started doing like, morphing my drag into drag king and you know, I was exploring. Do you want me to continue or is it too long of a story? Hello?

Interviewer: Hello I'm still listening .

Wendy Warhol: Huh?

Interviewer: Hello? I'm still listening - what was that?

Wendy Warhol: I'm saying like, do you want me to continue with that story? Or do you want me to stop?

Interviewer: Yeah, you can feel free to - yeah, continue with that story. Yes.

Wendy Warhol: Okay. So I started my drag king and then kept going with my club thing, club kid thing and it was maybe a few months later that one member of the House of Laureen told me there was a huge contest, a drag contest being held at Cabaret Mado in Montreal and it was open to every drag, even if you're not performing in the Village there was actively all kinds of drag. Uma Gahd who was the drag queen who was telling me about that contest told me like they aren't looking for drag kings because there are so many in Montreal. I was like, "Well I'm not ready for that, I'm not ready to go to a contest. I mean, I don't feel comfortable going to a contest," and then she pushed me for it, and it was like, "You know, she was like, you know, you have nothing to lose. Just go for fun at the, at the most, you know." So that's what I did, and I really thought it would be my first and last performance at Cabaret Mado. Cabaret Mado if you don't know what that is, it's like the most famous drag club in the whole province, and I was like "Okay I'll go in and I'll perform there and it will be like a one life experience thing" and back when I did my, you know, I first debated in the contest and then I went straight to the finale with my number, which stopped me by surprise because I was kind of a newbie and I didn't expect that at all. And from there, well I didn't win the contest obviously, but I started having lots of bookings from there. And I kept going for about a year as a drag king, but it didn't take me long to realize that this is not what I wanted to do. At first it was more like you know, I wanted to be a drag queen but I felt like an imposter but then time flew and I met other female drag queens and finding out it can be a thing and I don't have to feel like an imposter if I want to do that. So I talked to a few of my drag friends about you know, I'm like, I was like, "I don't really feel comfortable doing that, I see all the possibilities that I can do as a queen that I can't as a king," and I don't, personally I am, I feel like your, your art has to represent you in a certain way. And in the gender spectrum and all of that you'll have that at all. It's like, I didn't - I didn't feel I was, you know, expressing a part of myself as a king. And it really taught me because I started having some kind of big success here in Montreal as a king and I felt kind of trapped doing something that I wasn't enjoying and I was really debating because I was like "I'm having success but then if I change, will people still love me? Will they still accept me and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." So I talked to some of my friends and my friends were like, "if it doesn't make you happy, then don't do it anymore. Just do

whatever makes you happy blah, blah, blah.” So, this is then when I changed to the Wendy we know today. Yeah, well, I was saying I - it's been two years and a half now that I'm performing as Wendy.

Interviewer: Where does your Wendy Warhol name come from?

Wendy Warhol: When I was a king, I was searching like a way to do my drag and I was in constant like exploration. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. But when I decided that I wanted to switch to be a queen that was like, pretty much really clear because I was like, I want to represent something very colorful but not bubbly but happy. But at the same time I want to be able to have this spectrum of opportunities for like expressing myself because I like to play with dark things as well so I was like, I was like, kind of wanting to represent what the pop culture is because the pop culture can be as bubbly as Ariana Grande and as dark as Meredith [inaudible] , and I'm a huge fan of Andy Warhol, so I just stayed with his name and I will also say that I am his daughter, it's my story I say that well my dad, Andy Warhol met a drag queen at some point in time and this is how I was born.

Interviewer: Yeah, I like that. How did your family, your friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Wendy Warhol: Oh, well, it was mostly positive I would say. Well, yeah, it was positive but more like, at the beginning when I was a king, my father's girlfriend thought I was trans. I was like no, this is just like me being a clown. But she didn't really understand because she didn't really know about that - that art form. It was like what are you looking for why do you put yourself into men's clothes and blah, blah, blah. And then when I would do, become queen her and others didn't really understand and then it was even more confusing because they were like “I thought only men could be a drag queen.” Then after a while, now that they understand, they fully support me I would say yeah - yeah my friends and family support me, they come to my show sometimes and now everything is virtual because of the COVID-19 all bars are closed. So, I do a weekly show and they watch my shows. I feel like it's fun for me because I mean, I know it's not the case for everybody. Some people have to do it behind closed doors, which is bad. As far as I'm concerned. all of my friends and family are okay with that. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's awesome. Do you consider your drag to be political?

Wendy Warhol: Not really, except for the fact that I am a woman and a queen, I still have to fight and work twice harder to get twice as less the results. I would say like, I'm a big advocate for that, that all art is valid, you don't have to like all kind of drag but all drag is valid it's like I don't like every - everything that is done in the drag scene, you know? And that's okay, I mean, we all have tastes, you know, tastes are different, you know, it's just like everything else in life. But

saying that I don't belong because I own a vagina. I mean, you know, drag is not just a man in a dress it's an art form that expresses, it plays with gender but why can't I play with my own gender? I mean, in my normal life, I'm really like, the basic bitch. You know, t-shirt things like I never wear makeup I'm just like I'm a tomboy in a sense but I'm not tomboy but you know what I mean? Like I'm not really girly but my drag is super girly. My - I pad, I cinch, I use like lots of makeup obviously huge wigs and I actually work more, I work harder on my drag than a male to female drag queen. So it's really insulting, like I even wear a breastplate, I mean I have breasts but to me there are too small so I wear a breastplate when I perform I wear a fake, fake butt and I cinch my waist. I transform my body to a very, very, what the society says that is feminine. So I play with that what is really insulting for me is that to this day, even though I have a huge following and I do have a lot of local fans that I have opportunities that are not given to me because I am a woman. Obviously, most of the times they won't say that it's the reason but when you talk to other female drag queens, and we all live the same situations and one plus one is two, right? And yeah, so I'm not really political. I mean, but when it comes down to this, this like, you know all the things about RuPaul saying that being a woman and doing drag is like cheating blah blah like that, yeah, I will - I express myself a lot regarding this issue. But besides that, not really no.

Interviewer: How do you personally feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Wendy Warhol: I don't watch it anymore. It's not just because of that, it's because she does the same thing over and over again, just like, it's not original anymore. You know, I keep an eye on it because I mean, I'm in the industry and lots of my friends, even drag friends are still watching it. But I used to like it for the first, I would say, eight seasons maybe. And then I just started to notice that it was just a big cash machine, it was like just okay. We've seen it before. It's not original. And I'm more like a fan of local queens than what you see on TV because anyway what you see on TV are local queens that have just been put on T.V., right? But I don't know them. And I love to support people I don't actually know. So yeah, and we have other options now for drag, I mean there are other shows like Dragula, which is more inclusive and different. Like it shows, yeah, of course it's dark and stuff, but I mean, the challenges every season - what there are only three seasons, but it's different, you know, it's the RuPaul's just like the same over and over again. And that got me bored. Like, blah, blah, blah. We've seen it before. And also, all the comments, like RuPaul saying "We are born naked and the rest is drag," but it's been like what twelve, thirteen seasons, I don't even know anymore and yeah, And yeah, there are no drag kings. There are no female drag queens, and just a big lie so I feel like it's sad because yes, RuPaul has helped the local queens in a sense, because I mean it has put the - the art form like in a mainstream way. So, people who didn't know about drag now they do. But in a sense, it really doesn't help anything that's outside cisgendered men, cismale drag queens being fishy queens for most of the time. There are lots of other drag forms and people who started getting to know about drag with RuPaul think - they think that RuPaul is kind of the Holy Bible of drag. So, if

you do something that is outside of that, then you are being invalidated. Which is bad, not just, what the, what people used to say, like it was more for like, the older audience they used to, when they were around a lot of other drag forms it was like, more like what we see now, but it's not true actually, when I go to bars, I see a lot of older people in the public being like really intrigued and they actually like that they are acting as other kinds of other drag forms. And then sometimes you meet like young people in their 20s saying like "Oh girl, you can't be a drag queen you're a woman, there's no woman in RuPaul's Drag Race and RuPaul knows everything. RuPaul doesn't know everything - well he knows actually, he knows. But yeah, I mean, I wouldn't mind if he was like okay, "This is my show and what I want in my show are cis male drag queens." But this is not what he said. He said that transwomen, truly fully full-up women, and biological women doing drag as queens are cheating just like you would cheat- you wouldn't cheat at the Olympics, so- and saying that RuPaul is the Olympics so yeah, I think it's pretty insulting, so yeah. That's my opinion on RuPaul.

Interviewer: I agree. And then what pronouns do you use inside and outside of drag?

Wendy Warhol: Oh, she. She.

Interviewer: Okay, has drag influenced how you think about gender at all?

Wendy Warhol: Not much. To me it's an art form. I mean, I know that it does help trans people sometimes when they are trying, you know, exploring their gender and their sexuality. So, it helps them to explore. And then at some point, they feel comfortable and confident enough to pursue that in their personal life. But, outside of that, well to me it doesn't change anything because I'm not a trans person and I don't, I don't have issues with my sexuality or gender. But to me, it's more like an art form like any other art form. I mean, basically what I say all the time is that we are clowns for adults.

Interviewer: I like that, how has drag impacted or changed you?

Wendy Warhol: Oh, a lot. I've always been an artist. Like, when I was young, I used to draw and paint a lot and then like, I took piano lessons, I took dance lessons, you know and blah, blah, blah. And when I discovered drag, what I like about drag is that it's a lot of different art things that you can put into one. I mean, I dance, I lip sync, I create looks, I take pictures, I even take videos. So, it's very, very complete drag form. So, I really feel more complete as an artist doing drag than when I was just drawing or just playing the piano, because it's more like, it's more like a very spectrum. And it's really, I can really express myself the sides of, when I was drawing, it wasn't - I didn't feel as complete as I am now doing drag. Also, I started doing drag I was in a really dark moment of my life. So, my confidence, I was lacking confidence a lot, I didn't feel really, I was feeling pretty low. So, it helped me going through this. And it helped me also building my self-

confidence because you don't have the choice to have self-confidence when you're a drag artist. When you put yourself on a stage in front of an audience, you have to push it, you know, it's not the time to, to feel, like, frightened or anything. So, and also, all the, how can I say, all the, the hate that I got as an artist, like it's a very competitive - well, it's just like everything else in life, but I feel like it may be a little bit worse in the drag world. It's very competitive, so when you're trying to have success or anything, people will try to drag you down. So, I'm still fighting with them. And I guess, you know, I talked to other drag artists that I respect a lot who have, like, much more experience than I do saying to me like, "Well you build it - you better built yourself a shield because, because it will happen, you know, your entire career. as long as you..." because I deal with that, well that, what I think but that's what other people tell me is because I'm different and I don't, I don't. I don't fear expressing myself on certain issues. And that I started having success pretty early in my career, when I was a drag king I didn't have that you know, I didn't have that hate. But when I changed to be a queen, I feel like I was a threat, maybe? I don't know I didn't feel like that because I was just supportive, I'm not a bitchy kind of person. I used to - now I do it less and less, because obvious on me, why would I support people who don't support I don't have energy for that. I don't have time for that. But at the beginning, I was supporting fully supporting everybody, and was really friendly and stuff, but it taught me at some point that you know, people don't care even if you support them. If they don't like you, they don't like you. No matter the reason. I've been, I've been through a lot of shit because of that, even this week, I mean, last week Thursday, I was doing a live on Facebook and someone reporting for sexual content and nudity. But I was fully dressed. I was just performing some songs. And I've been In Facebook Jail for 24 hours. And besides that, I talked with another queen, she did another live, I think it was like a few hours later. I don't know who she was talking about, but she said there was some drama in our drag scene here in Montreal because actually, once we have the quarantine we have a weekly show, including like lots of drag artists and they raise up to help the drag queens, like the drag artists to help, to be able to keep going with their lives, because I mean, all the bars are closed and a lot of people have lost their job. So, they raise money every week for that, but that but then other queens or other artists - drag artists, like myself, have started to do their own thing. I have my weekly show every Thursday at 8pm. And I do it mostly to entertain myself and to entertain whoever wants to watch. And it's the way for me to keep going, you know, to keep doing drag, because I don't know how long this will last. And I want to keep that fire I don't want to be like, "Oh, I won't do anything for a month, and then start again," I will - no, this isn't what I want. I want to keep going. And I'm like we have - we are lucky enough to have these technologies that we can use. So as soon as the quarantine was done and all the bars closed, right that week, week one from week one, I started doing it's been a month now that are every week I do my show. And I do it on Facebook and then I pin a comment with my PayPal and email address in case if someone wants to tip me. And what is wrong with that? There is nothing wrong with that. My show - my shows are free. You are more than welcome to watch my show for free you don't have to give anything but then if you want to, why not? So, people and not just me, I mean I'm talking about myself it's not just me, other drag artists have

started doing like their thing here and there. And that friend who had done the live, she was like “Why is why this drama is going on? I mean, people are free to do whatever they want, if Wendy wants to put her link to her PayPal Me account, why is that a problem?” So I thought is that people were talking behind my back because of what I’m doing. And when I saw, like when I was performing last Thursday is that my Live caught and then a popup thing appeared on my phone saying broadcast failed, reported for sexual content and nudity. In your inquiry In Facebook Jail for 24 hours. And if it happens again, you’ll be in Facebook jail for three days. And I was like, you know, I was like, okay, this - this is not like, this is someone who wants to ruin my thing, and I just think it’s sad, because why do- doesn’t change anything? I mean it doesn’t change anything. If you are jealous, why, well, just start your own thing. It doesn’t take anything away from, because they were like, [inaudible]. I don’t know, I don’t I tried to ask her where the drama was, and she was like, uh, it would have been worse. like knowing who was talking about that blah, blah, blah, she didn’t want to put wood into the fire by telling names and so, but I believe her because I’ve been through that kind of stuff in the last few years, so and I don’t know what I wanted to say. But anyway yeah, yeah they were saying like we have enough of the Tuesday show where all the cash that you are getting are disputed equality between the queens so if someone like Wendy does her stuff and asks for money then it takes away money from the Tuesday night show. I’m like no it doesn’t, because if people tip me, they tip me, I’m not in every Tuesday night show I’ve been in one of these so far. So if people want to tip me they tip me they’re not tipping an entire show. I mean, so to me it’s just jealousy because I’m a I’m a fighter in life and um, I try things, I push myself pretty hard. And I work hard while other people are waiting for someone to come to go to them, while I create my own opportunities. I just think it’s sad because I mean, everybody can do whatever they want, and the thing is, this is the moment, actually to create your own thing because you don’t have any limit. When you perform at a bar, you are at the mercy of the people who give you the opportunity to perform, or you have to produce big shows or produce your own show that cost lots of money, but if you do your thing in your living room with your cellphone and using your music, I mean, it doesn’t cost a lot - doesn’t cost anything and so yeah, I don’t get it. Whatever, you just - I’m getting like, how can I say, it doesn’t affect me much as it used to, but sometimes it does. Like Thursday I had a bad - a bad day after because it was like, well, someone can ruin everything I’ve worked for with a click just like report, that’s it, and I just thought it sucked really. We’ll see this Thursday if it happens again.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, are you part of a drag family or a house or collective?

Wendy Warhol: Yes, actually, I do have a drag mom, a drag family, funny thing is my drag mom, and I have a drag sister, who- actually I do have another drag sister but she’s not doing drag anymore but she - I have two drag sisters one’s not doing drag anymore and the other one does. And my both my mom and my other sister are located in Vancouver. I’m not from there at all. Because, I was when I’m here in Montreal and I met these people from Vancouver actually this couple, one

of them is from Montreal, so they come often here, so I met them in a bar, I guess. But I met the guy from Montreal first because he was coming here along to see some stuff. And then introduced me to now my drag mom through Instagram, and we started to talk and blah, blah, blah, and that was about a year - last January, not this year, but the last one the one before, January 2019. I was in Vancouver for the first time to be with them for a week and to perform there. And this is where Mina Mercury adopted me. Even if she's really far, I mean, she's really supportive. Like, I think drag families from here, like people will say "Hey look this is my drag daughter," but they don't interact at all. We just have the title, you know, they don't share anything. they don't do anything together. They're not - practically not even friends, just acquaintances. But my drag mom is really far, but she's really supportive. Just like today there is this big drag- virtual drag show like the, you know, the one I told you about every Tuesday here in Montreal. Mina, my drag mom was the one who started the whole thing here in Montreal, if she could do it with the West Coast edition. So, she's doing it tonight and she showed me her number like the intro number of the show. And she's wearing my merch in it. I just thought it was cute.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live in Montreal compared to other places in the world or the country?

Wendy Warhol: Well, I, I've seen how it's worked only in other few places like Vancouver, in New York, and Quebec, like other cities here in the province of Quebec. I would say that we are pretty lucky here in Montreal. For us, for the venue that we have, like we have big back - and I'm going to sound stupid but it's really fun for us. We have big backstage space, where I seen that in other places, sometimes they don't even have a backstage they already come fully dressed and like painted and everything and to perform like several songs in the same costume, the same outfit. Like here, we change it for every song and we can get prepared at the bars and the venues, because they have space for that and the stage itself, like I went to New York City in January and it was the first time that I saw drag shows like in person in New York. And I was like, Well, where's the stage? They don't have a stage. Like, that's what they call the stage? Oh my god, this is so tiny. I was like okay, I'm never gonna say anything about our stage here in Montreal ever again. And yeah, and I would say to me that, because I know when, I know that Vancouver is quite open with what they call their hyperqueens it's our female drag queens I don't like that, I don't like when they call us differently I don't like the term bioqueen, hyperqueen, whatever I don't like that I mean I am a drag queen and that's it. You don't have to identify me by what I have between my legs. I do the same thing. I am a person doing the drag art in the female form for drag and queen and that's it. But they are - they're really, really, into that type of queen term. But they are more accepted there, I would say, than other places in the world, even here when I started I, would see what was going on there and it looked like it was more accepted, but is it really, I mean, when you are a visitor these things come in from an outside perspective you

know, so now I don't, I don't see anything else. I guess it's different from place to place I don't know.

Interviewer: So, when there's not a global pandemic going on, how often would you say that you perform drag?

Wendy Warhol: Oh, a lot, well, at least once a week, sometimes it went as far as five times a week depends - it depends all the time but I would say over, over, 100 nights in a year.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you perform at the same place or do you perform at different places every week?

Wendy Warhol: Obviously, in Montreal, we have like two main bars who are like drag bars. They have, but there are other bars that have like weekly drag shows. So, in the village I would play there are 1, 2, 3, 4- 4 places where we can perform drag and I perform in all four of them. But sometimes I go outside of Montreal. Like I said, I even performed in Vancouver. I performed in other cities here in the province of Quebec where there are drag shows, actually before all that [inaudible] thing, I was supposed to go to Puerto Vallarta to perform there but then my trip got cancelled. Yes, I perform everywhere. I mean, corporate gigs as well, special events like pride, but pride got canceled this year here. Yeah, so, every I mean, every place that want me.

Interviewer: How would you personally define drag?

Wendy Warhol: Like I said, I think we are clowns for adults, we are there mostly to entertain and to make people have a good time but also live different emotions. You can be indifferent I mean you can be political it can be - it's hard to try to answer because it's really personal. I would say, but in one sentence I would say drag is--

Interviewer: Would you repeat that, I didn't hear that?

Wendy Warhol: In one sentence I would say that drag is clowns for adults.

Interviewer: Oh yes - and then do you think that's

Wendy Warhol: But I will say that it's very personal. For people who take this way too seriously I keep, even when I take things too seriously, because it does happen I mean, it's my art form. I always try to keep reminding me this, "We are just clowns for adults out there." So yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think that drag is sexual?

Wendy Warhol: Um, can be, I mean, not in a kinky way, like, real thing. I mean, I have so many, like, mostly gay dudes or closet people who think that I'm a man behind my drag and then they send me like dick pics and naughty messages

Interviewer: Oh no

Wendy Warhol: Oh yeah, yeah - a lot. So, in that sense, no. I mean, I am not a sexual fantasy. Once again, I am a clown. I think it's kind of strange to have people sexually attracted to drag artists. To the point of sending dick pics and stuff. You know, I'm not on Grindr, save your dick pics for Grindr. I mean I'm on Facebook sometimes in the morning I wake up and have my - and I see a message on messenger and it's probably a dick I mean come on, I didn't ask for this? I didn't ask for this, what the fuck is that?

Interviewer: Right

Wendy Warhol: It's disgusting. There's no consent. I mean, you didn't ask me if I want to see it. Just pow. Right in my face in the morning. So not sexual but it can be a way to express sexuality. I mean, I do numbers sometimes, like half naked on stage. And I express my sexuality that way, on a, on a sexual song. But then again, just a way to express my art. It doesn't mean that because I do that, that I want sexual relationships while being in drag. That's just an expression, so if I want to express, just like anything else you can express whatever you want. I mean, I've been doing numbers with straitjacket because I wanted to express problems with mental issues when you're being in the like, if you have mental issues, then you know I have mental issues. I wanted to express that, so I did a number with a straight jacket. it's the same and if I want to show something that talks about wealth, then I'll be dressed like as a rich bitch. If I want to express like my sexuality and just me being flirty and stuff, because I'm not like that in my life but I give myself permission to express myself all the way I want. But yeah, but some, I guess some people are into it. I mean, I don't know. I never really asked my other drag friends 'Have you ever had sex while being in drag?' but I would say most would say no, I'm pretty sure. So, but to each their own, you know, I mean, I'm not here to judge, to me it's not a, to me it's just, you know, it's just a character.

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

Wendy Warhol: That would be that for once, can we please accept that all drag is valid? And yeah, it would be that.

Interviewer: You mentioned a couple but what are some other like misconceptions that you think people have about drag?

Wendy Warhol: Well, of course, that only men can be queens. That it's easy, like just putting a dress in a wig and you lip sync on a stage it's easy, no it is not easy. It's like every other art form it needs to be you need to work hard for it. Also, that every drag artists are really bitchy because of what they show on RuPaul which is not true. We're not fighting all the time backstage, you know? Pretty rare actually. Um, I don't know.

Interviewer: For the, the ones that you have mentioned, what do you think are some things that can be done to help change those misconceptions

Wendy Warhol: Well, I fight hard for my pay, and some people, some local queens here do - have said to me that I contributed into changing the local drag scene by the way I fight for it. So I would say that, yeah, I try to fight as much as I can for what concerns me, obviously, because, I mean, I'm not going to fight for something that I don't know. I can be supportive, you know, and I can be, I can help, but, I mean, I'm not going to talk in the name of other people. Let's say like, I know that people of color have - sorry, my throat. I know that people of color and trans people, have, like they have their own, too. I cannot talk necessarily, but I can support them with their, with their fight, you know. You know what I am saying?

Interviewer: Yes

Wendy Warhol: I'm not sure if I express myself very well here, but um, it's not that I don't want to, I just don't want to talk in the name of people who I'm not living their reality, like. So, I live my reality as a female as a woman doing drag. And this is what I can really talk about and fight for it. Not saying that I cannot fight for anything else, but I won't do it on my own. Like, if I have a trans friend who said I need your help with something, then I will totally help them, you know. But yeah, so I mostly concentrate on things that I feel I have the right to say something as a female drag artist, then I'm - yeah, I can, I can do that.

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

Wendy Warhol: Well, that all drag is valid. You don't have to like everything, but you have to respect it. Just like music, like if you're a big pop music fan and you don't like country music, well, that's okay. But country music still has, it has the right to exist and some people do like country music. You don't have to like it, but you have to acknowledge that it exists and the people who are doing it are working hard. That's it. Like the same with drag. I mean, some people may not like bearded queens, that's fine. But they work hard for their art. And they have the right to perform it and to exist. So yeah, that's what I would say.

Interviewer: I agree, and then do you have any other experiences or thoughts or anything you'd like to share?

Wendy Warhol: Not really, I think I've said it all.

Interviewer: Okay, well thank you so much for participating and I really appreciate getting to talk to you.

Wendy Warhol: My pleasure. So, if you have any other questions you want to ask or anything, don't hesitate to email me.

Interviewer: Okay thank you so much.

Wendy Warhol: My pleasure, have a great day.

Interviewer: You too, stay safe - bye.

Wendy Warhol: Bye.

Appendix: Interview Questions

Drag artist's personal story with drag

1. When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?
2. When did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?
3. How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?
4. Where does your drag name come from?
5. There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, from drag queen and drag king to glamour queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen, and camp queen, among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do? What's your style of drag?
 - a. Does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist? (If so, how?)
6. Who or what has influenced your drag?
7. Do you consider your drag political? (Why or why not?)
8. Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?
 - a. Are you part of a drag family, house or collective? (If so, tell me about it)
 - b. How often do you perform? Where do you perform?
 - c. What goes into getting ready for a performance?
 - d. What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?
 - e. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world?
9. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?
 - a. What pronouns do you use in and out of drag?
 - b. Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities? (How?)
 - c. Has drag influenced how you think about gender? (How?)
 - d. Have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag? (How?)
10. How has drag impacted or changed you?
 - a. Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag? (if so, how?)

- b. If you could go back in time as _____ [use drag name], what advice would _____ [use drag name] give to your younger self?
11. I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice-versa, how drag has impacted your identities. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities, such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc., and/or the interaction of these social identities, have impacted your experience of drag, and/or how drag has impacted your experience of this social identity?

Drag artist's ideas about drag

12. How do you define drag?
13. What do you think is the purpose of drag?
14. Do you think drag is sexual? (Why/why not?) (If so, how / in what way?)
15. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?
16. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be? Why?
17. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag? (Where does it come from? What do you think would help change that?)
18. If you chose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?