Interview with Salem Graves

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**Heidi:** Okay. When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

**Salem:** I would say... I was not aware of drag until, I would say, my sophomore or freshman year of high school. Um, that was when I came across the show RuPaul’s Drag Race, I believe. My favorite season, at the time, was airing, I believe it was Season 6. And I still stand by that, Season 6 is my favorite season of Drag Race ever. Um, that’s when I saw queens like Adore Delano, um, Bianca Del Rio, Milk, uh... forgetting some of them, Courtney Act, just, like, really amazing... really amazing, um, individuals that all, kind of, like, had their all u—they all had their unique style.

And, um, I never really knew that there was this side of queer culture. I just kinda knew, you know, being gay doesn't really come with a handbook. You know, you kinda [unclear] as you go. And, um, you know, sophomore year, I learned through... we had, like, a queer LGBT-Straight Alliance Club that we all liked to discuss our favorite things in queer culture and just, kind of, you know, talk. And, you know, that’s when I found out about drag from some of my other gay friends, and I found this community of just really accepting and unique induvial that I found myself being so welcomed in. And, you know, that's kinda when I started, you know, falling in love with drag. And it, it really has changed my life, you know? So, I would say sophomore year of high school is when I started, you know, diving into the drag culture.

**Heidi:** Yeah. That’s great. When did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

**Salem:** I wouldn’t say I, like, outwardly started performing until 18, like, out of high school. That’s when I started, um, doing more public stuff and became more confident with myself and who I am as a human being. So, definitely, out of high school. I would say my, my first time ever performing-performing was actually prom. I went to my prom as a drag queen. Um, I got a lot of looks, but it was something that I wanted to do forever. So, uh, prom was my first time ever going out in public like that. Other than that, I stayed indoor. I was mostly a social media queen, and I posited pictures, and, you know, I was mostly just doing it for social media, but, um, yeah, prom, prom was my first time.

**Heidi:** How did your family, friends, and other loved ones perceive you becoming a drag artist?

**Salem:** My mom and sisters were cool with it. [Laughs] They thought... they, they thought I was the prettiest person in the world whenever I had makeup on. And getting that kind of attention from my mom was very, um... it was very nice. It was a very nice feeling being told you’re pretty from family members. Um, my grandmother, before she passed away, saw me, and she told me that I was gorgeous.

Um, it was all very... uh, the maternal figures of the house all were very, very accepting and loving and supportive of, obviously, whatever I was going through. But, um, my dad and my brother, I would say, definitely, were a little more of, of cold shoulder towards it. They just didn’t understand. Um, but they were always nice to the face to me about it. Um, yeah, they were just supportive to the face about it, and they, they just didn’t understand what I was going through. But all the... all the maternal figures really loved what I was going through. So, that’s how they reacted to that.

And, um, I think that my father, kind of, has a... he just... he just doesn’t understand. He’s, you know, very straight, country, shoot guns, drive trucks, very that, and he just doesn’t understand where I was coming from. So, I think that’s where, like, this, uh, gap is. So, obviously, I don’t get along with my father or my brother too well. But my mom and my sister have always... they've always been my biggest supporters.

**Heidi:** Where does your drag name come from? I guess I should ask, what is your drag name, and where does your drag name come from?

**Salem:** So, my, my real name is Logan Fisher. My drag name is Salem Graves. Um, Graves is the... is my mother’s maiden name. I think Graves is a really, really cool-ass name. I’ve always been in love with it since I was a kid. Um, Salem Graves, obviously, paying homage to the Salem witch trials, and I think that goes along with my drag aesthetic, which is, kind of, like, gothy, spooky, sexy kind of look. Um, so I just... I think Salem is... you know, it... I said it, and it just clicked with me.

**Heidi:** So, earlier you had mentioned... I know you had mentioned something about mainly being online or a social media queen. So, there are a lot of terms for types of styles of drag, from drag queen to drag king to glamor queen, among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

**Salem:** Uh...

**Heidi:** Or what, um, what is your style of drag.

**Salem:** I would definitely say modern with a mix of traditional. I like to keep, like... I like classic, um, traditions of beauty, clean skin, clean hair, clean nails. Um, the Ruby Woo lip from MAC, just, you know, old-fashioned Hollywood glamor really does it for me. Um, I would definitely say I like, you know, to keep, like, an upbeat, dance-y kind of attitude whenever I go about doing performances, I like to be high energy, kicks, flips. Um, that's just always been the kind of drag that I've gravitated towards. Um, but I can also... I, I also like the term comedy, 'cause I think comedy can cover, like, a multitude of sins. If you’re funny, you can get away with anything, and I think that's what I've gotten away with a lot of stuff in my [inaudible]. Um, so I would definitely say, you know, traditional Hollywood glamor with, like, a touch of comedy would be... would be my ish.

**Heidi:** Do you think the type of drag that you do affects your life as a drag artist?

**Salem:** I think whatever type of drag you do definitely, you know, um, has an effect on your perception of the world. Obviously, we see queens like Valentina and Farrah Moan, they've all gotten very high, um, reaction values from the audience because they’re very, very appealing to look at. While some other queens, like, um, Alexis Mateo and Peppermint, who are constantly, you know... The Drag Ra—the Drag Race community are... they're sharks. They are aggressive and just very, very mean for some reason. We're supposed to be a community of, you know, support and love, and for some reason, when it comes to Drag Race, the gays get a little bit too aggressive with it.

Um, so, I definitely think the kind of drag that you are... um, that you are and that you have and work with has an effect on your... you know, your, um, your acception in that community. And I think, uh... I think mine definitely had an effect on mine, because I think it, uh... if I came out doing something, like, very, very wacky, I don’t think people would get the reference too much. I think, because I keep it lighthearted comedy, and I’m like, "Oh, I'm just a guy in a wig," kind of, I think it makes people feel more comfortable with the fact they're dealing with something that they’re not, not necessarily used to. So, I think that your drag can definitely, um, have an effect on how people view you and talk to you and interact with you.

**Heidi:** Who or what has influenced your drag?

**Salem:** [Laughs] Um, I definitely had my list of gay icons growing up that I looked towards. Um, a lot of them came from pop culture, uh, references. Like, for me, a really big gay awakening for me was Velma from the live action... Velma and Daphne from the live action Scooby Doo movie, just powerful, feminine roles in movies that, you know... we always see the macho man the... that saves the damsel in distress and, um, saves the day, and it's always the men that get all the spotlight. But whenever it was a woman for me, and they were... they were just badass and unapologetically themselves, and they got the job done just fine, I think those people were the people that I looked up to. So, like, Velma and Daphne from Scooby Doo were obviously a big deal.

I loved, uh, classic movies, like, uh, '80s... '80s retro was a really cool for me too. That was a really big movie. Uh, Halloween, horror movies, uh, the original Halloween movie with all, you know, the, the hair and the scrunchies and everything. That... the '80s was just a big movement for me and... There was another really big one. I can't remember it. Uh...

**Heidi:** That's okay. If you think of it later, we can always come back to it too.

**Salem:** Okay. I have a list somewhere. I'll, I'll... we can come back to it if we have more time.

**Heidi:** Okay, perfect. Do you consider your drag political?

**Salem:** Uh, I would say that all drag is political. It is an active form of rebellion, peaceful rebellion. So, I think, like, any, any drag performer is committing an act of just, you know, political uprising, so, um... which I think is very important. I think... I think anyone that has the ability to say something so powerful without actually, like, you know, committing to too much...like, all we're doing is dancing and makeup and wigs. So, I really do think that the, the effect that we have on the, the people that perceive us is definitely a powerful tool that we need to use to our advantage, and to make awareness of, uh, LGBTQ and, uh, inequality, uh, trans inequality... like, it was Trans Day of, uh, Visibility yesterday, and I know some drag performers, you know, used their platform to bring awareness to that. So, I think that drag definitely is inherently political and that, uh, it is something to be taken advantage of.

**Heidi:** Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? So, are you part of a drag family, house or collective?

**Salem:** I don’t have a family or a house. I have... uh, I have friends that have helped me start. Um, I had a friend named Truman, that helped me start and, you know, sat down with me and talked, uh, talked with me about, like, eyebrows and stuff, just makeup. So, I would say that he's not my drag mom but he definitely helped me get started. Um, I would have loved to have a drag mom, but something about starting drag at an early age really just doesn’t bode well for longevity. Um, you kinda have to learn how to do stuff a lot on your own, and that’s, unfortunately, what I was... I was... I was, you know, meant to do, I guess.

But, uh, if I had a drag mother, I would absolutely, you know, love that opportunity. But life as a drag queen, it is definitely a painful life. I would say any life as a gay, gay, LGBT person is, you know, not necessarily preferred in the comfortability level. I, I constantly get stared at. I constantly, you know, get asked, so, you know... all those uncomfortable questions like, “Are you gay?” like, “What do you do?” It's, it's just not ideal, and it definitely comes with some drawbacks... [laughs] some drawbacks that, um, I don’t think are good for, like, your mental health.

Being constantly looked at my entire life is, you know, just, kind of... I’m at the point in my life where I really just don’t care anymore if people stare at me. But you get used to it, and it’s just... it's painful and it's lonely, but it is also one of the best things that I’ve ever done. I have complete individual freedom, um, artistic expression. And I get to be unapologetically me, and, you know, no one really... no one really can say anything about that anymore. I used to let people... what they say affect me so much that it got to my... it, it got to my head, And then, I started to realize that, I’m only out here doing this for me. This is to fu-- fulfil some dream or fantasy that I have in my head. So, I’m gonna stick doing with what I do, and everyone else can just, kind of, you know, leave me alone. So, that's how I feel about that

**Heidi:** How often do you perform, and where do you perform?

**Salem:** Uh, so, I don’t have a club setting, obviously, with COVID and everything. That has, kind of, put a damper on the drag career. So, I haven’t really been performing in the last year. Um, but I... like I said, I performed at college, I performed at my high-school prom. Those were all very, um, interesting settings to me, because it’s not like a drag queen going to a drag show, right? Drag... people that go there, they know what they’re signing up for. They’re gonna see a man in a wig dancing around, they're and are gonna have a great time 'cause that’s what they’re expecting.

When you go to a prom as a drag queen, when you go to high school wearing makeup the way I did, when you go to college wearing the, uh, makeup that I did, looking for that attention, you... the people there, they aren’t expecting to see someone like that. But whenever they do, you know, obviously, it's it’s in their face, and they can't, um... they can't run away from that conversation. And I think that, kind of, draws out a lot of the negative people. I think, um, you know, it sheds light on how people truly feel about, uh, certain situations. I think it puts them in an awkward position that I think everyone needs to be put in. Because we can't be... we can't be comfortable as a human race until everyone has been made uncomfortable at some point. So, I definitely think that being a drag queen in these types of scenarios, these type of, um, situations, definitely has, you know, taught me to steer clear of some people, but also, what people are good to talk with, if that makes any sense.

**Heidi:** Yeah, it does. You, you addressed some of this in that answer, but what are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

**Salem:** Uh, biggest challenges I would say, being misunderstood a lot. Um, people don’t understand the kind of gratification that I get from achieving, like, a look, or, um, something that I was set out to do. People don’t really understand how this really just drives me. This, this is just something that a lot of, you know, artists understand. It's, um, it's fulfilment, it is... it's passion, it’s, it's something that you set yourself out to do, and whenever you do achieve it, it’s, it's a feeling of overwhelming, just, joy.

So, whenever people don’t understand that this is something that you do, literally, just out of pure passion, they are very confused. They are... they're just like, “Why is this something that you want to do? Like, you’re a man putting on makeup.” And I have to have that talk with them, that, you know, makeup shouldn’t be something that's inherently for girls. Like, it’s, it's just cosmetics that anyone can apply on their skin. And it, it brings to me some sort of joy that is... I can’t find anywhere else. Like, when I put on my wig, and I put on my makeup, and I dance around to Ariana Grande, I... it’s, it's a... it's a jolt of energy that just runs through your body that I’m completely addicted to. So, definitely, there is a miscommu-- miscommunication between me and everyone else perceiving me. Um, that's a huge problem.

Another one, I would say, is location. My geogra-- um, my geographical proximity to other gay people, I would say, is damn-near nonexistent. The Midwest is just not it for the LGBT community, and, uh, that has definitely... it's troubling not being around people that understand what you’re going through. My high school had approximately, like, maybe three, four gay people. Like I said, in that gay-straight alliance, there, there was really just me, Truman, two other people, and the rest were straight girls that wanted a gay best friend.

Um, but, you know, being around a bunch of people all day, the Midwest, just, um... it really puts a damper on your spirit. Um, I’ve gone 21 years living in the Midwest with relatively no one that understands what I’m going through. And, you know, my dream is that, whenever I graduate from high school, I can move either to California or New York, where I can just experience something totally different and, I don't know, maybe, you know, find some people that actually understand, like, my friend group, maybe, like, a drag family that could even understand what I'm going through.

I think that would definitely help, 'cause there's... you know, you hear the stories all the time about the gay kids that grow up in the closet from... because they live in an area where they're just not accepted, and it really... it weighs heavy on their heart. So, I think living in the Midwest, surrounded by people that don't understand you is a very huge problem for a lot of LGBTQ community members.

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

**Salem:** St. Louis is interesting. St. Louis and Chicago is interesting because they're... I never consider them Midwest. They're just... I, I consider them like mini-New Yorks or something. They’re just... once you cross those city lines, like, everything about... everything changes. So, um, living in St. Louis, we obviously have some unique characteris... uh, and, you know, when I went to pride last year, it was... it was very interesting to see all the different types of drag that, um, St. Louis has to offer, as well as Chicago.

I've been up to Chicago a couple of times and, um... I don't think there's really anything inherently different between St. Loius... like, the Midwest area, uh, from New York or LA or something. I just think that there is more population to it. I think there’s more people doing more of what everyone else is doing. So, there’s more, um... there's more feedback, there’s more content to it. There's, there’s just more of it. So, I think that St. Louis... St. Louis is cool. I just think, uh, like, New York, they just... they do it more, and I think they do it, um... they do more dramatics, theatrics, 'cause I think that’s what New York is, kind of, known for.

**Heidi:** What goes into getting ready for a performance?

**Salem:** Um, god, it's been so long. I can’t remember, like, the last time I got, like... from sit-down to stand-up ready, it took me about two to three hours each time, which is something I really love about drag. Drag, there’s a whole... there's like a whole routine to it that everyone, kind of, has gotten aware of because of... let's just say Drag Race. There is the makeup, the, the outfit, the wig, the actual performance, what is your personality like? There’s just so much customization that can go into it, that really, like, can differ from people to people.

And I think that’s why so many people are in love with Drag Race because it's a... it is a, um... it is a talent show for bunch of really unique individuals that all have their own styles, and they get to show it off on stage. And I think that’s what made me fall in love with all these people. I got to see, you know, people put on their makeup and their outfits, and I was like, “That is exactly what I wanna do, and I wanna go out and give a performance to people.”

So, putting on the makeup, my makeup is very, um... I like to make it apparent that I'm a man wearing makeup. I like the, the dramatics. My hair is always big, and I like to, you know, um, show off. I like jewelry, I like having a cinched waist and looking, um, like the classic feminine figure, hourglass bottle. Um, that's just what kinda does it for me. Uh, my outfits are always very sparkly and shiny. I like to have something that kinda glows under light a lot of the times. And I also like to add a little bit of an artistic flair to it. I, I make sculptures in my free time, and I paint paintings, and I do all this, um, clay work. So, I like to have some sort of, um, artistic element to it that, kind of, separates me from all the other queens and makes me, you know, unique to me. So, I, I definitely like to have, um, some sort of flair that tells people that this is who Salem Graves is.

**Heidi:** What has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

**Salem:** I think what I’m going through and a lot of other drag artists are going through, I definitely think this has put a damper on our careers. Um, obviously. as drag queens, we are... we are visual... we are meant to be visual elements and, you know, looked at, gazed upon, and, you know, taken pictures with. We're just something that's better viewed in person than, I think, on television. 'Cause I... there's so many misconstrued elements of television that can lead people left to an impression, like, you know, the lighting... the lighting could be wrong, and person get the bad impression that you're just, you know, ugly or something. [Laughs] So, I think... I'm sorry, what was the question?

**Heidi:** Just how has the... or what has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

**Salem:** Sorry, I completely forgot where I was going.

**Heidi:** No, no. You're okay.

**Salem:** Okay. Uh, yeah, COVID, I think, has... It... I can’t remember what life was like before COVID, if that answers it quick. It, it has definitely changed, I think, our lives forever. I don’t really see this going anywhere soon, especially with people not really taking it seriously now. Um, and that is a big problem for a lot of drag queens because it limits, you know... due to regulations, it limits the amount of people that we can let into, uh, typical drag settings like club bars, um, stages. And I think that, you know, obviously, that's lost revenue. It's lost profit, and most importantly, I think it's, like lost... it's, it's lost people that we’ve touched. It's lost people that we've, um, have re—we've tried to reach out to. You know, people that wanna know what drag is like, they can’t do it now because they're stuck inside the house 'cause people don't wanna wear a mask.

And I think... I think it’s so sad that, you know, the way that drag careers and livings have been built off, by going to clubs and doing this every night for, like, years and working towards that goal of being one day, like, a legend, like, a superstar in your community. I think a lot of that was taken away from people because we can no longer leave our house. So, I think... I think it’s definitely a bad thing that COVID has done to a lot of drag queens' careers.

**Heidi:** So, now we're gonna shift gears and questions a little bit.

**Salem:** Alrighty.

**Heidi:** How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

**Salem:** Out of drag or in drag? 'Cause I’m two different people.

**Heidi:** We'll start with out of drag.

**Salem:** Okay. Out of drag, I would definitely say, um... as I’ve matured a lot, I would say that I’ve also, like, calmed down in my level of flamboyance, if that makes any sense. I used to be very flamboyant whenever I was in high school. Um, I dyed my hair, I painted my nails, I liked to wear makeup, and even in boy form. Like, it was... it was just something for me to do. And I guess in high school, that's kinda just what I wanted to do. But as I grew up, I, I, kind of, became a more laidback personality type, where, um, I really wasn’t looking for all that attention anymore. I'm kinda just chilled out now.

So, I would definitely say that... people have told me that in boy form most people can't tell that I’m gay, which is a huge compliment to me. 'Cause whenever I was in high school and people told me I looked gay, I always took it as an insult, as a very large insult, and it would mostly ruin my day every single time people asked that.

Um, bit I think I’ve... I think I've crossed a lot of those bridges growing up, and I’ve... and I have focused more on me mentally, just, like, self-help and, you know, like, handling some scenarios that I was going through in high school. And now I would say that, um, a majority of the time, I like to walk around as a guy, and, you know, people... I get away with it and people don’t know, you know, a single thing.

But, um, whenever... well, I... here, I'll, I'll say for drag later, but, yeah, I like to walk around as a guy, I like to be perceived as a guy. And then, um, my sexuality, um, you know, I’m gay in and out of drag. So, that really doesn’t change. Uh, and then, do you want me to talk about when I’m in drag, 'cause...?

**Heidi:** Yeah, you can go ahead.

**Salem:** Okay. 'Cause they, kind of, contrast. Yeah, I like to be, uh, a guy whenever I'm a guy, and whenever, you know, I’m Salem, I like being girly, flirty, flirtatious. Um, it’s kind... it's, kind of, about the element, for me, of being a guy whenever I'm a guy, and then, doing that drastic 360 flip of turning into a gorgeous woman that can, you know... that no one would know was actually Logan in a wig. That is always a big, big [unclear] for me, 'cause it's like... kind of, like... it's, kind of, like a surprise factor of, you know... you get that shock value of just, you know, people had no clue that you were into something like this, and, you know, whenever people do find out, they have, like an... like an entirely different outlook on who you are as a person. And I think that’s a very, very powerful tool to have in your arsenal.

**Heidi:** What pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

**Salem:** Um, I go... I’m very gender fluid. I go by he/she, um, them, and, uh, I, I didn’t start adapting these pronouns until last year... yeah, last year, uh, I took a, a gender class. So, I think her name was Corey Stevens, and she... she helped me realize a lot of the stuff that I was going through, and, um, I realized the terms gender nonbinary, gender fluid, and I found one that kinda resonated with me that I had no idea even existed. Um, so, I definitely would say that my pronouns are he/she/they.

**Heidi:** Do you use those same pronouns in drag?

**Salem:** When I’m in drag, I would say I turn to she a lot more. That’s just the dominant personality that comes out at the time, you know, like I said it, like, to be flirtatious and have fun, have a fun time. Um, so, I would say she, she, definitely, when in drag, Salem.

**Heidi:** Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities?

**Salem:** It has made me come to terms a lot with my sexuality. Um, I would say that it has helped me come across a lot of internal biases I might have had. It has... you know, like anything, you can... you can learn from any experience that you have, and I think drag definitely helped me a lot with coming to terms who I am as a person, who... and, um, who I'm looking for as a partner, I would say, definitely, has helped too. So, I would say... I would say drag has had an effect on my sexuality as well.

**Heidi:** Has drag influenced how you think about gender?

**Salem:** It has made me definitely conscious of when I perform gender acts. Um, you know, I try to... I always try to keep things androgenous and, um... I don’t really like to put too much, uh, influence onto gender, but, um, you know, it, it’s something we all grew up being told, "This is how boys act; this is how girls act. Girls are for pink, uh, boys do blue." I think that, you know, since we all grew up with that kind of mindset, it’s... you know, it's, it's internal with us now that we... you know, we know it, but I think it’s our duty to make it known when we do it, so that we can acknowledge it and fix it. So, I would say that drag has helped me realize when I do it unconsciously, and, um, it has helped me fine tune a lot of those, uh, like I said, biases that happen a lot of the time. So, um, yeah, it has definitely helped, yeah.

**Heidi:** Have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

**Salem:** I would say a little bit of it gets carried over whenever I transform into Salem, um, not too much. Like I said, I think I definitely become a little bit of a different person. Um, but all those... all those qualities that make Salem Graves, you know, the sexuality and the gender that she has, I think that comes from, you know, the knowledge and experiences that I’ve experienced as a boy, and I think it just carries over. So, I would say... I would say, yeah.

**Heidi:** How has drag impacted or changed you?

**Salem:** It has changed me so much for the better, because I think that having the artistic freedom and individuality of just completely being your own independent person... you're your own boss, you're, you know, your own crit-- your bi-- your biggest critique.

And, like, I would say that it helps you come to terms with a lot of your internal conflicts, you know? Um, you spend a lot of time in your head, and I think that... I think that it... as weird as it may sound, I think that putting on makeup and wearing the wig, and, you know, transforming into this person, helps you realize a lot of the stuff that you aren’t. I think it helps you, kind of, fine tune the things that you, you like to look at and you want to be. I think it helps you come to terms with that a lot. Um, yeah, I... just like I said, I just like that it helps you come to terms with a lot of things that you aren't, which is ironic because you're literally putting on a wig to be a different person. But I think that... as weird as it may sound, I just think that it, it helps so much that... in a way that people could never understand, unless you actually do it.

**Heidi:** Yeah, for sure. Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you’re out of drag?

**Salem:** Absolutely, it has. Um, I would say that it's just something about getting in the mindset of feeling like you are the only one in the world, and no one can talk to you. It, it boosts your confidence levels astronomically. Which is, I think, one of the things I fell in love with. I may have looked butt ugly in high school whenever I was wearing makeup and the wig and everything, but no one could tell me that I was not beautiful, because I felt beautiful. And I think that’s... you know, I think that's the way that everyone needs to feel 100% of the time. Because having that confidence transforms you into a completely different person. So, I would say that, uh, yes, drag has, absolutely, um, changed my mindset in and out of drag. That confidence has carried over into me permanently where I can now look people in the eyes and have a full-on conversation about, yes, I am a drag queen. This is what I like to do, and I do it well. So, um, it has boo-- boosted my confidence levels.

**Heidi:** If you could go back in time as Salem Graves, what advice would Salem Graves give to your younger self?

**Salem:** I, I would say not to take everything so seriously. Uh, kind of just take everything very lightheartedly, have fun with things. Um, it’s never going to be as bad as you think it’s going to be. You... you know, you put your worst fears into the front of your head whenever you think you’re about to go in and perform, and it’s never going to be as bad as you picture it in your head being. So, um, I would tell myself that.

Um, I would tell myself that I’m never going to be 100% ready for anything, but I think we should do it anyway. That has, kind of, been the motto I've been living by, you know, for a majority of my life. You're never going to be fully 100% ready to do anything, but you need to do it anyway, because that's what makes... those are those make-or-break moments. Um, so, whenever you’re having self-doubt, just, just know that doing it, actually following through the process is going to be 10 times less painless than you thought it was going to be, and everything's gonna work out fine.

**Heidi:** So, I’m curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice versa, how drag ha-- drag has impacted your identities. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities like gender, race, class, age, religion, size, geography, or the interaction of these social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or how drag impacted your experience of those social identities?

**Salem:** Uh, I would say that... social identities, I would say that, um, in high school the social identity that I had was gay high schooler that every girl wanted to be friends with. Um, that's a whole 'nother thing, but we can, you know, talk about that later. Uh, it, obviously, shed light on, you know, I have all this power, and all these people really like me for this one reason. Um, which, obviously, had a huge-on effect on who I was as a... as a person. Being in high school, and being surrounded by all these girls, let's say that, you know, gave people a phenomenal, um, I just want you to be my best friend. But whenever it's, like, guys, and they want nothing to do with you. It is a very weird situation to be in the middle of. You're like, well, all the boys hate me, but all the girls love me. And that was, kind of, like, my social identity, and I think that, kind of, um, had an influence on who I was as a performer. All I wanted to do was be a pretty girl that, you know, liked to party and bounce around and be bubbly that everyone liked. That was... that all that I wanted in high school. I just wanted to be accepted and looked at as one of the cool kids.

Um, and that played a huge part in whenever I got home, and all I wanted to do from... after school was to put on makeup and transform into that person that I knew I could be. Um, it, it played a huge role in who I... in who I became, you know? 'Cause I was... I was looking for a certain image that I wanted to fit, and I saw all these other girls that, you know, I want to be like her. I just... you know, she's, yeah, everything that I wanted to be because she was popular, and she was friends with the boys, she got into, into parties. And I was like, "Well, maybe if I was this person with the wig and the makeup, and I had the confidence that I did with the wig and the makeup, maybe then people would like me. So, I would say scenarios and situations like that definitely played a big part into, um, my drag persona.

**Heidi:** How do you define drag?

**Salem:** I would define drag as just complete artistic expression. I would say that... like, I said, I stand by what I said, um, that all drag is inherently political. I would say, even if you're not going into it with the mindset that you're doing a political act, it, it still is, um, because of the way it’s perceived by people. Uh, drag, to me. is taking on the role of, um, a gendered individual and performing, maybe showing, um... shedding some light on what it means to do gender, to do sexual identity, to do, um... to just do a whole bunch of stuff. And I don’t think people give drag enough credit for a lot of the conversations that it has striked up. Um, but I definitely think drag is... it is a movement. I think it is politically... gender, sexuality, I just think it is a movement for a lot of people, and I think it's a tool for a lot of people to come to an understanding with, um, some things that they, you know, may not have been taught in school. So, I think it just helps a lot of people understand themselves and each other better.

**Heidi:** What do you think is the purpose of drag?

**Salem:** Uh, I think the purpose of drag has, kind of, changed over the years. I think that when it first started out, you know, obviously, with the Stonewall movements and, um, LGBTQ individuals not having a lot of the equality that they do today, I think that it was definitely more of a last-resort effort to show people that this is what we're about, um, to be unapologetically present in the moment, and to tell people that this is what I do, I do it well, and, you know, no one can tell me anything. I think that it was very that attitude starting out.

Um, it has, kind of, shifted gears into being more about a gender artistic expression. Um, nowadays, it's performance-based. It's about putting on a show that people can enjoy, laugh, cry, um, a whole multitude of emotions. So, I wou—I would definitely say that it has morphed into something beautiful now that... obviously, you know, there was pain in the past that we've worked through, we're still working through, obviously, but I think it, kind of, shifted from that to just being more artistic-based and, um, to, kind of, show people that, you know, this is... this is something that the LGBTQ community has been doing for a very long time. It is something we're going to continue doing. So, I would say... I would say that, yeah.

**Heidi:** Do you think drag is sexual?

**Salem:** It can be; I don't think it has to be. I think that, um... yeah, I think... I, I think it definitely can be, if you wanted it to be. It doesn't have to be, if you don't want it to be. It depends on the person.

**Heidi:** How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

**Salem:** Un, obviously, I am very grateful for the show. I know that the show has... that being said, I know that the show has a lot of its own problems, um, the fan base being one of them. Uh, I think the show has done a lot more good than bad. It has definitely opened up the careers for so many... so many queer individuals that it has given a lot of people, um... a lot of people hope for their future. Because, you know, 50, 60 years ago, I don't think drag queens would be making a living off of, you know, being a TV personality. But it has opened the door for so many... so many queens and so many more queens to come. And it has transformed our, um, our society into such a more accepting and loving place.

Um, I mean, no matter what anyone says about Drag Race, RuPaul, as an individual, I don't think there's... I don't think anyone can take what the show has done for our community away. So, I am very grateful for RuPaul's Drag Race for doing that. But, you know, that being said, the show does inherently have its own problems that we don't necessarily have to get into right now. [Laughs]

**Heidi:** [Laughs] If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

**Salem:** I just want people to be nice to each other. [Laughs] That's, that's all I really want. Um, I think that things are just so much more enjoyable when everyone gets along with everyone. But that being said, I don't think that's an achievable dream. Everyone's going to have problems with someone eventually. Um, I think it's funny how drag culture has, kind of, built itself upon being shady and reading for fun. I think there's ways that you can poke fun or critique someone and still make it comedy without making it, like, mean. I think people just take it to a mean place, and I don't really think that's cute or, uh, you know, [unclear] at all. So, I would... I would definitely say, if I could change one thing in the drag community, I would say, I just want everyone to stop being mean to each other. [Laughs]

**Heidi:** [Laughs] What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag?

**Salem:** That I want to be a woman all the time. People, I think, take drag queen as, oh, you want to be transgender. People don't realize that those are two entirely different things, personas, personalities, entirely. Like, I'm here for the factor of being a man one minute and then turning into the most drop-dead gorgeous female the next minute. And, um, I'm really into that, that transformation and transformation and that shock factor. But whenever I was starting out, people took it as I didn't want to be a man anymore. They saw that whenever I was a female, they... I... and saw that, you know, I was so much more happy and friendly with people and flirty and this entirely different personality from when I didn't have makeup on. They, obviously, were shocked, um, and they took it as, "Oh, he's happiest whenever he's a woman."

And to an extent, that is true. That's still true. Um, I'm a completely different way whenever I have the wig and makeup on. But it doesn't necessarily mean that I want to do this permanently, all the time. Um, that's a lot of pain, and I'm not trying to go through that. But I would definitely say that, that people didn't understand that I wanted to do two separate things just at different times.

**Heidi:** What do you think would help change that misconception?

**Salem:** Uh, I, I try my best to educate. I think education and knowledge is the best bet, um, especially with something like this. I mean, I can't necessarily force people to understand because it's... you know, you either get it or you don't. Um, but I definitely think sitting down and talking with the people that didn't understand what I was going through, could help them potentially understand, you know, more going forward. Um, so, I would say, yeah, just, like, sitting down and talking with people is, like, the best... one-on-one conversation is, like, the best way to settle any, any kind of dispute, argument, yeah.

**Heidi:** If you chose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

**Salem:** Um, there are obviously some important things I could say here. I would like people to know that drag is political. Um, it has political influence and meaning to it and that, mm... yeah, let's go with the political thing. I think, uh, I think that people should know that drag, being inherently political, means that even if we're not conscious of doing it, there are some things that, you know, not everyone's going to understand. Like, obviously, we're a... we are community of LGBT community individuals, and we all want to fight for equality for each other, because we've all been a... in a position where in a position where we've been looked down upon, treated unfairly. And I think that drag has helped me fight back a lot of those conversations. It has given me confidence to stand up for myself and what I believe in. Um, yeah, I would say that before I get too carried away. [Laughs]

**Heidi:** Okay. You can share whatever you want to share. That was... uh, or whatever you feel comfortable sharing. That's all the questions I have on my end. So, if there was anything that you wanted to revisit, or if there is anything else you wanted to share...?

**Salem:** The list of inspirations that I had for, uh, my drag, I would definitely say, just real quick, my drag inspirations definitely come from, um, old-time Hollywood, uh, actors and popular female actors. Um, Meryl Streep for The Devil Wears Prada was huge for me as a kid. Um, Sandra Bullock, and, um... she was in a really... I can't remember what it is, just really powerful feminine figures had a tremendous, uh, influence on who I was as a person. And I believe I said horror movies already, but horror movies, Scream, Halloween, Fi-- uh, Freddy Krueger, just scary, spooky movies definitely had the biggest impact on me. I like to be creepy. Um, but other than that, I would say that I am pretty much all set. Were there... was there anything else that you wanted to ask? Um, if not, I have a couple of questions about the actual, actual project.

**Heidi:** Oh, yeah, sure. Um, let me...

**Salem:** Uh, just real quick, how do I get... how... I, I have to transcribe the...