

Drag Artist Interviews, 2021

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Interview with Bijou

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

Bijou: Um, the first time I heard about drag was, I think, kind of, similar to a lot of people from my generation, through RuPaul's Drag Race. Um, I always had, like, a lot of... like, a big love for everything, um, that had to do with, like, makeup and fashion and, kind of, like, styling and creating. And I always tried to find, um, a medium, in which I can combine everything. And, um, when I saw Drag Race for the first time I was like, "Duh, like, that makes sense." And I, uh, kind of, got into the idea of starting it, but I was, like, way too young back then. Like, I was, I don't know, like, 15, 16 when, like... when I saw the first season. So, like, I was way too young to, like, even think about doing it. And, like, the older I got and, like, the more I really got also professionally into, like, doing makeup and doing... um, creating, like, looks and outfits, um, I was like, "Okay, now is the time to, like, actually start doing it."

So, I started doing it in 2019, in, like, February 2019, and, um, that was, kind of, like, the start of my drag career, if you will. And, um, I just got into it by, like, trying to look for a medium, I can combine everything, then seeing that drag, like, exists, because we don't really have a lot of drag queens in Germany. At least, I didn't know a lot when I was younger. We had, like, two very, like, famous drag queens, kind of, but they did not represent a kind of art that I would want to make, because they, kind of, decided to be like the butt of a joke, in a sense, which I never would like to be because I, kind of, like, take what I do very, very seriously. Um, so when I saw that there are other performers or other artists, like, just, that, like, represent something that I would like to make... especially when I saw Violet Chachki for the first time, realizing that, kind of, the vintage aesthetic and something more classical is also combinable with doing drag, that was when I really got into the idea of actually doing it.

Heidi: So, when you got into it in 2019, was that when you started performing as a drag artist, or...?

Bijou: Yeah. So, I... beforehand, I, like, tried out stuff. I got, like, my first wig styled, I tried out a lot of different makeup looks, I tried to, like, perfect a lot of things, I got, um, a cos-- a costume made. And then, in... I'm thinking on the 2nd of February, 2019, I performed at the party of a friend. He was like, "If you really want to try out if you're good at this, do it somewhere where you're surrounded with friends and people you know, because even if you fuck up, they wi-- they will just laugh about it and it's okay." And, um, that's what I did. And, like, in that specific moment I knew, "Okay, like, I might have started something that I cannot stop anytime soon," [laughing] and, um, that's when I, like, really started performing. And then, I sent out applications for, um, performances, and, um, I got some small ones at, like, smaller parties. Then

I got my first big, um, performance. I was booked for my first big performance in front of, like, I think 600 people, uh, yeah, which was like, "Oh shit."

Heidi: [Laughs]

Bijou: And, um, at a vintage party here where I live in Cologne. And, um, that was when I, like, really knew, "Okay, like, I wanna do this, like, big time, like, in front of bigger audiences and, like, really come up with performances that people will be left with, kind of, like, a feeling of, oh, that was great."

Heidi: So, how did your family, friends, and, um, other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Bijou: I'm very lucky and I'm very privileged in the sense that I always grew up in an environment that, like, always took me exactly as I am. Um, I am very... I always was very extroverted, and I was always someone that, like, loved to create. Um, so, like, going into arts, and going into doing makeup, and going into, um... like, having a huge interest for fashion, like, that, kind of, for most of the people surrounding me was not a huge surprise. When I came out as gay, like, that was also, like, fully okay for everyone. I think there was literally no one in my closest surrounding that I also care about, um, that had an issue with it. Um, especially my parents, like, got very protective over me, being like, "We fully support you, and we want to make sure that you're always good. Like, if there's somebody who makes... like, gives you a hard time, always tell us, and we will find a way to, like, get rid of any problems." Um, that sounded very wrong [laughing], not get rid of any problems but [inaudible].

Heidi: [Laughs] No.

Bijou: Like, you know, going with me to that person and being like, "Okay, like, that's not okay." Um, I think my mom, when I told her I was doing drag, she just was very afraid of society judging me in a way that is not fair to me, um, because she knows that there's still a lot of people, especially in Germany, because there is not a real drag scene, or, like, not a huge drag scene where everybody, kind of, knows it exists, and people are used to seeing it, um, that I will be judged heavily, especially in my day job. Um, so she was kind of, like, just a little bit, "Oh, oh okay." My dad was fully fine with it. He was like, "Do whatever you want to do." Um, he was like, "If I have to drive you anywhere, tell me. If you need props that I can, like, build you or anything, like, tell me." And my mom just been like, very... in the beginning, just, kind of, like, a little bit anxious, like, how will people receive it? Um, also, she was just very interested in seeing how I do drag. So, at the beginning, she was, like, very observant of, like, what I'm doing. And after some time, when she saw what I'm doing, and when she saw, like, what my, kind of, style is, she immediately was hooked on it, and now she's like one of my biggest fans.

And same with friends, like, everybody was just like, "That makes fully sense that you do this." [Laughing] They were like, "That makes sense. Okay, I mean, yeah." And now, they're like, my best friend is my assistant. She drives with me anywhere, like, everywhere where I could need some assistance, she's with me. And, um, my first big performance that I told you about, I had at least, like, 10, I think 10 or 12 of my very close friends in the audience. They all bought a ticket

to the party. And some of them I didn't even know that they did. So, I got on stage and I... they, like, literally started like, "Whoo!", and I was, like, looking in the corner, be like, "Wh-where are you coming from?" [Laughs]

Heidi: [Laughs]

Bijou: And like, it just made me feel so at home, in a sense. I was immediately less nervous because I knew that, like... and I could also focus on them a lot.

Heidi: Yeah.

Bijou: Like, I was looking over the audience, but I could focus on their corner a little bit more, so that, like, really calmed me down. So, like, everybody is, like, receiving it very well. In my day job, I work in public administration, as a day job, which is definitely more conservative, but even there, like, some people just, like... I mean, some people find it a little bit awkward, but they would never, like, tell me. They're like, "Yeah, that's not for me, like, I don't wanna talk to you about this." I'm just like, "That's fully fine, like, you don't have to. Like, I don't care for some of your hobbies that you have as well... [Laughs]

Heidi: [Laughs]

Bijou: So, that's fine. Um, but it was also surprisingly well received, especially because I work for the administration of police. And I was like, that could become an issue,

Heidi: [Laughs]

Bijou: But, um, they've been like, "If you're ever, like, on posters, or if you're ever, like, on billboards, in Cologne, like, if you're at a party, just tell us beforehand. So, if there are any questions coming up, we just know what you're doing." Um, but they're always fully fine. Like, there... if there's something that is a little bit more... like, I once worked at a, like, you could say like fetish party, but as, like, an organization not actually as an artist. So, I told them that this is happening, and they were like, "Yeah, well, it's okay, like, just don't tell everybody here that you do this..."

Heidi: [Laughs]

Bijou: "But it's gonna be fine." So, like, also there I was surprised that it was received very well.

Heidi: That's great.

Bijou: Yeah.

Heidi: Um, so what is your drag name, and where does it come from?

Bijou: So, my drag name is Bijou, um, my actual name is Nick, and, um, when I was thinking about, like, my drag name I was, like, okay, if... I knew I don't want to have a last name, because I always loved artists who only have a first name. I think that's kind of, like... makes it even more mysterious to just know one name, and there's not like a full-on name there. Um, I also find it a little bit like witness protection program to, like, have a first and last name as an artist.

Heidi: [Laughs].

Bijou: I always loved, like, Madonna and Cher just being like, "We have one name, that's it." Um, so I was thinking about like, how do I... how would I describe the character I'm going for? I knew I wanted to be, kind of, like, a little bit androgynous in a way of, like, body shape. I don't really pad, I don't wear boobs, um, I corset from time to time if it fits to a certain look, but I, kind of, like my more androgynous, like, very slender body, than with, like, a full on, like, makeup and hair. Um, it also fits to, like, the eras that I like, the [inaudible] 20s and 30s because that was, kind of, like, the body shape that was very, like, on vogue, you could say, in that time. Um, so I knew I wanted a little bit androgynous, I wanted to be, kind of, classic, show girl, but at the same time with modern twist. So, I didn't want to be "Miss" something. I was like, "Okay, let's do something that is, like, a little bit more modern, but at the same time gives the vibe of I am someone who, like, dresses and is interested in, like, vintage and vintage showgirls.

Um, I also knew that I wanted it to be French, so, like, some kind of, like, French twist to it, because I really love, like, the 20s and 30s and Paris and the showgirls from Paris, Moulin Rouge. Um, and then I, like, wrote down, um, how would I describe my character? And I came up with, like, one sentence that, "I am the jewel of the Parisian night life." And I was, like, stuck to the jewel, and I was... because I had French in school, I was like, "Wait, the French word for jewel is bijou," and then I was like, "That's it." Then, I, like... I wrote a couple of my friends and been like, "What do you think about Bijou?" And they were like, "For what?" "My drag name." They were like, "That's dope," and I was like, "Okay, we're settled."

Heidi: [Laughs]

Bijou: I sent it to the... I attached it to the first application, and I was like, "Okay, now it's official, like, we did this." And I like it because it is, kind of, androgynous, it could be a guy, it could be a girl, it's short. Most people are... it's easy to remember. Um, so yeah, I stuck with that name up until now.

Heidi: Do you think that, um, the type of drag that you do... like, you were describing your 1920s type of style, do you think that that affects your life as a drag artist?

Bijou: It does. Um, I am more limited to, um, certain environments and certain performances I can do. I can do modern. Like, I did a couple of gigs for sure, like in these typical, like, leotards, like, the sequined leotards, kind of, numbers, which I also enjoy from time to time. I love when someone literally asks, like, "We know you do this, but could you do something more modern, something more, like, loud and energetic?" I'm like, "Sure." Um, but I always had, kind of, like, a [inaudible] for it, like, the classic, like, burlesque, and cabaret. Um, and I knew I want to mainly do this. It also fits more to, like, how I am presenting myself as a drag artist and, kind of, like, the personality I have in drag. Um, but I [inaudible] immediately, like, got to know, it's like, "Okay, you cannot apply for certain, in fet... like, parties or something like that with your style because it just does not fit into the environment.

So, I mainly work at, like, cabaret shows and burlesque, um, shows and burlesque festivals, um, which is great, and which I absolutely love. I think especially the burlesque, um, community is

one of the most, like, inviting, warm, supportive, environments or, like, communities that you can find. Um, but it's limited because we don't really have a lot of that. I think the burlesque scene in general is fairly small, and especially in Germany, for some reason. So, I have to travel a lot. Like, in Cologne, I rarely find jobs. I travel a lot to Berlin or to Hamburg, um, Germany which, um, just has more of a, like, variety of drag artists and, like, more of, um, opportunities to work in, kind of, like, the room that I work in.

So, I know it limits me to opportunities, but at the same time, I, kind of, think that's also a blessing, because I don't... if you do a lot, and if you go to a lot of, like, parties and a lot of opportunities, um, people get sick of you quicker. They'll be like, "Okay, we've seen you here and here and here, like, we need someone new." Um, but at the same time, it's also like I'm... immediately I get more, um... ah, like, now I'm looking for the English word, um, more picky you can say, more picky with where I perform, and I think that also, like, keeps up my quality. So, it's a curse and a blessing, sometimes, but, um, I love it, and I will not stop doing it. and I, kind of, like, really found my home in this style. So, I'm okay with having less opportunities. I mean, as of right now, obviously, nothing's happening. [Laughs]

Heidi: Yeah.

Bijou: We're currently in another lockdown in Germany, so, um, that's that. Um, I have... the last performance I had was in October 2020, and before that, like, it was a whole year...

Heidi: Oh wow.

Bijou: That I had nothing. I'm doing a lot of photo shoots now because that's possible to do, but, like, performances is, like, done for now. Um, but, like, that's what I'm realizing that happens, but at the same time, that's not that big of an issue for me.

Heidi: So, there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, from drag king to drag queen, and among others. Um, what label would you use to describe your drag?

Bijou: Um, I think drag queen is, kind of, like... I know it's, like, the general word for it, but I think with the term of drag queen, you immediately have a certain picture in mind how that person looks like, what kind of things this person does. Um, I see a lot of people, especially, like, for example, Violet, or, um, Sasha Velour, or the winner of Season 9 of RuPaul's Drag race, that they, kind of, um, went away from the term drag queen to drag artist, because they realized the... the picture that people have when they hear drag queen is not what I represent. Um, so I also, always, in applications or anything, I always put, "I'm a drag artist," so I'm... It's mainly because, like, with drag queens, a lot of times, um, they also create, like, a complete new persona, like, visually, they're completely different, very over the top, huge hair, crazy performances.

And for me, it's, kind of, like, I almost stick to h-- I almost stick to, kind of, like, how I look like out of drag, with, like, black hair and black, thicker eyebrows. And it's mainly like I've feminized my outer appearance to have more opportunity to work artistically. It's not to, like, completely get rid of, like, who I am in that moment. Um, so I always say, "I'm an artist who uses the art form of drag or specific, um, elements of drag to make more art happen for me." So, that's... hence why I'm always saying, "I'm a drag artist," but I also... I'm fully fine with people just

calling me a normal artist or a performer or a burlesque performer. Um, I just started modeling for an agency, and they just have "Bijou" and just "model." They don't even mention that I'm a drag artist. They, obviously, mention that I'm a guy, [inaudible] they have to. Um, but I am not very into labels. I just do what I do, and if someone wants a label, I just say, "I'm a drag artist, I'm..." or, like, "I'm an artist who uses drag to, like, make, um, their art happen."

But, um, I also, kind of, found myself going away from the term drag queen. Because I also think that they are, like, drag queens, like, who do drag the way we think of drag, that they should have their bubble. Because what they do is, like, still so different from what I'm doing and from what other artists like me do, that I want them to have their platform, that people know what they get when they book them. And people like me just kind of been like, "Okay, well, let them do their thing, let them have the term drag queen, so everybody immediately knows what they're doing. And we, kind of, like, go in the room of drag but use a more general term to describe what we are doing.

Heidi: Who or what has influenced your drag?

Bijou: Um, I think a huge influence on my drag, first of all, I think, like, other drag queens. Obviously, it's easy to find inspiration in other drag queens or in other drag artists in general. Like, some of my biggest inspirations when it comes to drag is Violet Chachki, which, um, I was very blessed to be able to meet her, kind of, right when I started drag at a meet and greet. And she, like, really took time, so you had, like, two, three minutes to, like, actually talk to her. So, I, like, asked her, like, two questions that I was always, like, very interested in. And she, kind of, like, told me, um, "I don't see, really, flaws, but if you wanna, like, have, um, any tips, you can do this and this and this," like, because we are very similar in what we're doing, um, which was very great.

I am heavily inspired by Sasha Velour, kind of, like, just her mind is, like, so out of this world. So, I like to see what she's doing and, kind of, think, like, "How can I take inspiration from this and put it into my kind of drag?" Um, but also, I think, like, actual women, Dita Von Teese is a huge inspiration, but also Lady Gaga, um, old, like, Hollywood, um, showgirls or actresses, Rita Hayworth, um, and, um, classic, like, burlesque performers from, like, the time of the 20s to, like, the 40s. Um, I think also a huge inspiration is, like, pop culture in general, and fashion. Like, I always loved fashion designers a lot. So, um, even for, like, my costumes that I make for performances, I sometimes love to go to certain designers I love, like McQueen, um, Jean Paul Gaultier, Mugler, [inaudible] and just see what they have done in their body of work and just take certain elements and put them into what I'm doing. So, I think I, kind of, get my inspiration from everywhere, um, but I have a very clear eye for what I like and what I scan. 'Cause I can watch certain things or see certain things and be like, "Yeah, that's nice, that's nice," but I always stop at a certain point when I see this is something that I'm more interested in. So, like, that's, kind of, like, where I get most of my inspiration for what I'm doing.

Heidi: Um, do you consider your drag political?

Bijou: I think drag is always political. I think there's no way of being someone who does not fit into the heteronormative, cisgendered society and not say that you're not political. Because our

poli-- like, politics and everything that's happening in governments, no matter where, is always heavily based and most influenced by heteronormative, um, like, ideas and cisgender ideas and, like, the identity of people like that. Um, so, I think, every time you step out of your house and don't fully try to fit into the norm that we have, it's always political. 'Cause you're always... even if you don't want to, kind of, work for progress. Because progress always... like, if a political progress... progress always starts in society itself.

I can see it in Germany a lot, we have a very range... like, our government is mainly based on a very conservative, um, party, um, they are fully fine. Like, we have... we're also very privileged in Germany to have a lot of, like, um, a lot of rights. We have, um, the right to marry whoever we want. We, um, are very supported and secured by law. But at the same time, you can tell that, like, there are certain things that they just don't want to change. Um, we cannot donate blood, as an example, um, still not allowed in Germany. And I think, because our society is still also very conservative, and have a special, like, older generation that is still heavily conservative, this will not change because they will still vote for this party up until the point where, like, I don't know what they have to do to, like... for people to be like, "Oh, we're not gonna vote for them anymore." Um, with COVID as an example, they're really fucking up a lot of stuff right now in Germany, unfortunately. We're in month five of lockdown again. Um, like, the vaccination is so damn slow, like, we have no vaccines, like, everything is, like, so crazy, and nothing is organized. And now is the first time that people are like "Oh, maybe we're not that great." But they still will be voted because it still fits to society.

And, by just being different and being out of the norm, you open eyes of the people in our society a lot. And by opening just a couple of eyes, they will also go to other people and be like, "Oh, I met that person. Like, that's totally cool. Look at this, look at that." And society starts changing in itself. And then politics change, because then the first time the society will be like, "Are the people in government who are currently representing us really representing the society we live in?" No, not anymore. So, they make a change. That's why certain parties, um, especially parties who are heavily involved in climate, um, change and saving our planet get more and more popular in Germany because the minds of the people change, and they're realizing it's not all about money and not all about, like, big corporations, it's also about smaller people, about people who are more, like, on the, like, room of being, like, poor and having nothing.

And, um, so, like, by being us and getting out there and doing what we do, and especially drag, because especially drag fucks with, like, society norms so much. It's... for some people, it's almost, like, not understandable how I can give up my privilege as a man to be feminine, because I know how feminine individuals are treated in our society. So, like, for them it's, like, totally crazy, and it's like... it completely shakes up their whole idea of feminine and masculine. 'Cause sometimes I had people looking at me from afar being like, "That's a woman." Then I come close, and they're like, "Oh, that's a man." They're like, "What's going on?" So, they realize that, like, gender and especially, like, the appearance of a certain gender is just a full-on social construct that has nothing to do with how it can work and what's actually possible.

So, I know that there are a lot of drag queens who say, "Oh I would never like to be political." But, like, you are. Like, there's no other choice. I would never, like, say that I am heavily in

politics. Like, I'm not in a party, I'm not, like, going to, like, huge rallies for certain parties. Um, but I know that just by being me I can make a change, in a sense, or can open some eyes. And I know that this is happening. 'Cause even at work when I see, like, people who never were in touch with it, or, like, even friends and family who never were in touch with it, and now they see what I'm doing, and they looked up into drag. And now they have a complete different mindset on it.

I know that this changes a lot of the perspective of people, and with that, over time... it will be a long process, for sure. We've come a long way, but it will at least be, like, another 30, 40, 50 years for huge change to happen because, first of all, a certain generation, even if it sounds very crazy, has to die. Like, the generation that will never ever understand, that it will never look past what they know, which, sadly, is, kind of, like, a generation of, like, my grandparents. Although they are very open to everything I do. But I know that there are a lot of people in the generation that will never look past what they... like, the status quo of, like, the 40s, 50s. Um, so, like, a certain generation has to die, and then, like, our generation, or the past... or, like, the generation of our parents have to become the older generation, like, the generation that my grandparents are now, to, kind of, like, be more open. And, like, my generation has to become the age of them, of the generation of my parents, to, like, really make things happen. Because, unfortunately, it's the generation between, like, 40 and 50 who really make change happen the most, um, because they, A, get taken more seriously in our society, but they also have just more options to, like, be out there in comparison to people my age. We're not really taken seriously, we don't have, like, the funds to do certain things, we don't have to... we don't have the voice right now to do certain things.

So, it will be a lot of progress, but I think what we're doing right now and, like, even, like, having Drag Race on TV or having, um, like, more and more people like me involved in more mainstream media, it will change something, and over time, I think it will change society and politics a lot.

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

Bijou: Mm-hmm. Um, it's... I think in my normal day-to-day life you cannot really even tell. I think even if you come into my apartment, like, I have a separate closet where everything is in. So... but, I need to... kind of, need this at the same time, because if I would be surrounded with my art the whole time, I, first, would never stop working on certain things and would overdo stuff. But also, I, kind of, like the clear division of my normal life to the more... obviously, more crazy and, like, more... sometimes even like more stressful life of an artist. Um, so, if you come to my apartment, or if you're, like, meeting me for the first time, you wouldn't, like, really know. Um, I'm also not someone who, like, is at the first sentence, like, "Oh, I'm a drag artist as well." So, it's, like, very low key in my day-to-day life.

Um, if I get in drag or if I'm, like, in the process of creating things if I'm at jobs, I'm always very, like... I would say, I am extrovert for everyone around me, but I'm more an introvert in the surrounding of other artists, 'cause I'm always very focused on what I'm doing, and, um, I'm,

unfortunately, a crazy perfectionist, so I always look at everything and be like, "Is everything fine? Is everything good?"

Um, as of, like, being in a drag family, no. Um, that's not that big of a thing in Germany. I know we have like a couple of drag houses, um, but they also don't have, like, a clear, like, mother, like, house mother and then, like, children. They just came together... they're more like a collective, in a sense. They came together because they have a similar aesthetic. But that's not a huge thing in Germany to have, like, houses or huge collectives. Um, we definitely are in touch, so, like, if we get to meet each other, we stay in touch, if we can then borrow something from someone, we use connections that another drag artists has for us, um, and vice versa, obviously. And, um, that's, kind of, like, how drag and how drag things work in Germany. We, kind of, like, share connections, share ideas, ask someone, ask like, "Do you think this is cool?"

Um, as of for me personally, because I am way more in the cabaret/burlesque community, um, that's what I would call my community and my home, in a sense. Um, we are a huge community, so we, like, stay in touch through, like, certain Facebook groups or, like, group chats. Um, so that's, kind of, like, how I am positioned, in a sense. But I work mainly alone. So, like, my performances are alone, like, how I come up with things most of the time is I'm doing it alone. Um, or I do it on my own, I think alone isn't the right word, I'm doing it on my own, and always with knowing that I can ask certain people for opinions or ideas. Um, but I'm not part of a house, we're not like, you know, like... I don't know, huge dynasties like you have in, like, America where you have, like, huge, like, houses, where you have a house mother, and then you have, like, all the children. Like, that is not really happening in Germany.

Heidi: So, I know things are different, with, um, you mentioned the lockdown and your ability to perform. But, I guess... well, you could talk about prior to and now, but how often do you perform, and where do you perform?

Bijou: Um, because I am working full time during the week, um, most of the time on the weekends, if there is... if there was something that I really wanted to do, where I was like, "I really want to take this opportunity," I took time off from my normal day job, um, which they are fine with. Like, if you are still able to do your normal work while you're here, like, we don't care if you take one or two days off to go somewhere and work in your art. They're fully fine with that.

Um, so most of my performances are on weekends, sometimes on, like... if it's on a Friday, I do a half day on Friday and then, like, drive to the performance. Um, so I think in 2019 I had... I just started, but at the same time, I think I had, like, 18-- around 20 performances. So, most of the time, I have at least one a month. Um, in the beginning of 2020, I had, from January to March, up until the point where it was forbidden to perform, I had, I think 10, and, like, two at the end of 2020. And then we got into another lockdown, so, like, I, kind of, like, had nothing for, like, um, first of November up until now. It will stay like that for a long time.

We, kind of, asked... or, like, artists asked, like, "When is the first time you could see performances happening again?" They've been, like, if the vaccination, kind of, like, works out better, and if, like, the cases stay down, they say, like, late summer. So, we probably... like, my

first performance will be the one that I am still currently booked for on the first of September. Let's see if that works. But, um, I'm not doing it full time. It's mainly when I have the time I do it, and I'm also very picky with what I want to do. So, I don't take everything that comes in. Um, but it's enough. It's fully enough for me. Because I think, if I would do it too much, I would... It would lose that feeling of something special for me. Um, so I think the things that I do are for me currently fully enough. And, um, it's at least, like, once a month there's something going on that I can then a whole month have... have a whole month to prepare for it, which is also what I love, just, like, the whole process of preparing things, creating performances. Um, so I know that there are artists who do, like, every night, and then there... in Germany, and then there are artists who, like, appear at some points and do something, and then they go back to their normal life.

Heidi: What goes into getting ready for a performance?

Bijou: Uh, seven pounds of makeup! [Laughs]. Um, most of the time for me it's, like, I hear a certain song, or I have a certain idea for a costume, or I have a certain idea for movements I want to incorporate. Then I sit down and I, um, like, just take everything I have as of right now, like together for a certain number. And most of the time it starts with, like, choreography, basic choreography. I know how the costume has to be, what kind of special, like, knickknacks the costume has to have. Um, then I know when... I know what the costume's gonna be like, what hair am I gonna wear with it, what accessories.

So, most of the time it starts with, I have an idea... somewhat idea, for a performance. I sit down, take... either I already have the song or I look for a song, then I look for a choreography, then costume, and then, like, the little fine details. And then, right before a performance, it's a lot of just practicing, um, because I would never feel comfortable going on stage and only having practiced that performance like two or three times. So, I practice it a lot. Most of the time, I film it and send it to, like, people I know always give an honest opinion about it. And, um, if I feel ready and comfortable with a certain new performance and a certain new number, then I, like... either if I'm booked for something, I take it, or, like, I apply for something with that certain number.

And then, right before the performance, I don't think about it a lot anymore. Like, if I'm in makeup, and I'm just waiting to get on stage, the last thing I think about is the performance itself. Like, sometimes I think about what am I gonna eat afterwards, or, like, what I'm gonna... so, like, to get my mind off of thinking too much about what I'm gonna do in five minutes. Um, so that works out very well for me. I'm still get, like... I still get very anxious, and I think that's a good thing if you still get very anxious before going on stage because it shows that you still care to be at your best. Um, so most of the time it's, like, a lot of preparation, a lot of finding confidence and feeling comfortable in this number, and then, when you have to do it, just do it.

Heidi: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Bijou: I think there are certain, um... I think, first of all, like, if you look at how we are viewed, um, I think in society, as I already said, it's like... it can be an issue, um, because sometimes you cannot talk openly about what you do because you know that, like, it could get you into trouble,

or, like, have a negative, um... like, a negative effect on, maybe, your day job or maybe, like, certain relationships you have. So, that's always a struggle.

Um, it's expensive, I think drag is very expensive. It's not an art that you can just do with a couple of dimes. If you really wanna do it professionally, and if you really wanna come across as a professional, it will be expensive. Most of the costumes have to be made to, like, really fit you, um, wigs are expensive, makeup is expensive. You, at least, I always say, at least throw, like, 20-30 bucks away every time you just get into drag because, um, you use certain things, and you have to throw away certain things that you wore because you cannot be able to wear them. And that's always, kind of, like, also an issue in the beginning when you don't really have money to, like, really get into it.

Um, drag is hard on your body sometimes because we don't really have an option to just get on stage, in, like, for example, flats and just something. Like, we always have to, like, make this appearance, make the, like, vision happen. We have to, most the time, wear high heels and corset and wear padding or whatever. And wigs get heavy on your head, and everything is very tight. So, that's also... can be an issue if you're in a surrounding where it's like, oh, you have this one performance at that time, and five hours later, you have the next performance. You're like, "Oh my god, how am I gonna survive that?" Whereas like other artists can just be, like, taking the shoes off, getting somewhere, whatever.

Um, I think what also makes drag very difficult is finding, um, a way to divide yourself from your drag character. Because if you get too much into your drag character, um, things can pop up in your mind of like, "Am I trans?", um, "What does it mean for my gender identity?" Like, if you're in drag too much, kinda, like, your personality as a drag queen and your own personality can, like, mix up in a way that is... can be difficult for, like, still knowing who you are and finding yourself in, like, later years.

Um, and I think also what makes drag sometimes very difficult is finding job opportunities. Because I think people have a ve-- there are drag queens out there who have done some damage on reputation, um, because there are a lot of drag queens... especially in Germany, because there are a lot of drag queens who don't perform. They just go into clubs, they get drunk, they are very bitchy and very mean to people, but these are the kind of people who do drag to finally feel confident, and then they think they have to put other people... or they have the power to put other people down. So, like, the reputation for drag artists in Germany is a little bit difficult sometimes. I think when... I hear that a lot when people meet me for the first time, they go, "I would have never actually, like, booked a drag artist, but I saw you, and I was like, yeah, why not? Let's try it out. And now I know there are other drag artists that are actually professional and nice." And I was like, it's sad that this is the picture that people go into meeting a drag artist in Germany, instead of being like, "Oh, what a cool artist" and like, "Let's see what they do," they're, like, "Oh, that can be difficult, that person can be difficult."

So, it is difficult to get job opportunities, because I actually like to call for certain applications. And like, "Oh, I just sent you mail, but I also wanted to, like, quickly say who I am on phone." So, they talk to me for the first time, and then, like, immediately have a different picture of me as

of just seeing that I'm a drag artist and being like, "Oh no, I don't want that at one of my venues" or something like that. That person will just get drunk and be messy." And, um, so it is a bit more difficult to find actual professional connections 'cause there's a certain picture that people have of us.

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

Bijou: Can you repeat the question?

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

Bijou: I wouldn't say so that much, because I think German drag is so heavily influenced by drag from other countries. So, I think that we are such a mash up of different styles of drag from all over the world. I think for a long time, drag in Germany has been extremely influenced by American drag. Um, we have a lot of these, like, very classic, almost, like, pageant girls, although there are no real pageants in Germany, but their aesthetic and the way they perform and carry themselves is very much like these, like, huge pageant drag queens from, like, um, Dallas, or something like... something around that room.

Um, and then, like, later, a lot of, like... the drag from the UK, especially London, came over, like, this more, um, punk, party girl, is, kind of, like, you know, going in and [inaudible], and then it's go-go, like go-go girls started happening which also came a lot from the UK. Um, I now see a lot of, um, inspiration in German drag from Asia. Um, so, like, the style that they have in Asia, and, um, a lot from, like, um, scenes like New York, like, this club kid scene in New York. Um, but I think there's not necessarily something extremely unique, um, because we're such a mash up of everything that we see, because we don't really have references. So that's what... so, we have to take reference and have to take inspiration from all over the world to, like, make something happen in Germany.

Um, I think a huge difference is that, um, we are so much less in our country. So, every performer gets unique, in a sense, of being, like, there are not a lot of people like that in Germany. Um, and I think what... I think one thing that is unique is we are not very connected in collectives, but we're stick up for each other a lot, and we're always trying to make sure that, um, other drag queens get a fair chance for a job. People did that for me, and I did it numerous times. I was like, "Oh, you booked me, do you, maybe, need another performer?" Because I know that that person... So, that's what we do a lot.

Where in America, you have a lot of competition, because there's so many, they have to be way more, um, competitive, way more, like, in a sense of putting themselves so much out there, um, to get jobs and, um, no one, like, blends in too much into, like, all these drag artists. And I think that in Germany where we have the privilege to get jobs, but at the same time, we don't have to fight for jobs so much, and even can get other people jobs, which is not happening that much in America. You have a lot of queens who are responsible for shows and for collectives in America, and they get people in. But just a normal working drag queen, most of the time, will not be like,

“Oh, I've got to take you and you [inaudible] is mine. And in Germany difference is we are very much, in a sense, supporting each other, although we're not that heavily connected.

Heidi: How has drag impacted or changed you?

Bijou: I think how it changed me is, like, I always was, kind of, extraverted, but at the same time, I think, this... before I did drag, um, people always told me I come off as very confident, which I was not. Like, there was a long period of... in my... especially, like, in my later teenage years from, like, 16 to almost, like, 20 where I felt very insecure about my body because I am very slender. I felt very insecure about my place in our society and my place in this world. I didn't know what to do with myself. I started working in public administration, but I got very tired of it because I had no, like, outlet for everything else that was going on inside of me.

Um, so I think drag, in a sense, gave me a certain kind of confidence to accept a lot of myself. Now that I'm doing drag, I see my body in art, or, like, I can create art with my body. I'm like, "Okay, your body is fully fine and fully great" and gave me a lot of confidence, and that made me feel way more comfortable in my body and the way I look. I always, um, looked a lot younger and a lot more feminine than other guys my age, but now it's also a huge plus for what I'm doing.

Um, and also, I realized what I can do with my face, with my appearance is great. So, I'm... it gave me a lot of confidence in the person that I am. It also changed me because I am way more balanced, and I'm way more balanced out in, like, how I live my life because I now have something that secures my existence, in a sense, like, my day job, and then I have something that, like, secures my mental stability, because I can create and I can do what I love.

Um, and it also changed my perspective of society because I always thought that I cannot change something. I think, especially as someone out of our community, we sometimes feel we cannot really change something. There's so many people who live in this norm, um, that we will never be able to actually break it. And by doing drag, I just realized that just because I appear somewhere, it changes. I was like, "Oh my god, you can make change." So, that also made me... it made me feel, like, more valid, that, like, my existence is more valid, in the sense of, like, I'm just... I'm not just, like, breathing, sitting here, but I can make change.

Um, and it also opened my eyes for... because I, unfortunately, was also someone who felt very... not weirded out, but uncomfortable around people who don't fit the norm, um, especially gender-wise. But it was mostly because I didn't know how to comprehend what I was feeling, so seeing that made me feel uncomfortable in myself, and then, kind of, made me go away from these people. And now I'm friends with so many people who are nonbinary, um, are fluid with their look, um, are trans, because I feel more comfortable around them because, first of all, I can now understand them a lot better. But I also don't have this barrier inside of me anymore, so I automatically was able to let down the barrier outside of me for people like that.

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

Bijou: Um, outside of drag, I identify as a cisgender man. Um, I don't have body dysphoria, so I don't look into the mirror thinking that this person is not... that the person I'm seeing is not the person I should look like or be. So, I do identify as cisgender. I always describe it as, I am just very androgynous. So, like, if you put certain things on me, or if I style myself a certain way, the kind of, like, lines of gender, kind of, like, get a [inaudible] where they're blurry. Um, I, kind of, see gender and gender identity, everything on a spectrum. So, if you have very male and very female, I'm kind of floating in the middle with a little bit more to male. Um, but it's, kind of, like, why I love to do drag is because I have a strong feminine side, but I am not always willing or just don't want to give it that space in my day-to-day life. So, I have now the opportunity to give that side of me a huge platform in drag. Um, so I would say I am just more androgynous. You can put me in anything, I feel comfortable in everything. Um, for sexuality, I'm gay, so I'm a gay male. Um, and yeah, I think that's about it.

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

Bijou: Um, out of drag, always depends. Like, I am... like, as drag queens, we love to say she or we call, um, ourselves or each other by our drag name, our [inaudible] name. Like, I literally don't know half of the real names of people that I know from like performances. They call me Bijou, they have me saved in their phone as Bijou. Even my seamstress calls me Bijou, although we, most of the time, see each other when I'm out of drag. Um, so, out of drag, for everyone who does not know me as a drag artist, um, I prefer he. Um, I'm not really... Like, if friends of mine [inaudible], like, I'm fine with [inaudible] better. But if, like, someone who does not know me at all asked what my pronouns are out of drag, I would say he/him, I identify as male, so I would like to be referred to as he/him. In drag, I also don't really care. Um, you can call me he, or you can say, "He's next," because underneath everything I'm still a man, so that makes sense.

But I always say, just out of respect, because, um, my art or the art of a drag artist is to make this vision happen of a feminine individual. Um, so if you say she, or if you refer to us as female, um, it just, kind of, like, is a pat on the back of being like, "You did this good" because the vision works. So, it's just, kind of, like, it just is a sign of respect and a sign of admiration for what we're doing if you say she, 'cause that's the vision we want to create for you and we would like to achieve. But at the same time, I always say, if you're in drag, if you refer to me as he/she or they, I don't care, everything's fine. Out of drag, you can say... well, I prefer he, but if people who know me say she or they, I'm also totally fine with that. I am not very stuck in a certain way I want to be referred as. Just not saying it, and then I'm good. [Laughs]

Heidi: [Laughs] Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities?

Bijou: Um, I would say I feel more at home in my male existence because I now can be... and be more masculine and have, like, my ma... like I always say, like, it is my man time. Like, that's what I like to call it. I just have my man time when I'm, like, just in a hoodie and jeans and, like, with messy hair and, like, I'm having man time, like, don't, don't bother. And, um, so I feel more comfortable and feel more at home in my male existence, male body because I now have this, like, outlet to give all my femininity and everything in this, um, regard, and just give it a room to grow and, like, present itself.

So, um, I think it just made it more clear for me because there was a time when I was... especially when I was like... I would love to dress up like this... love to wear this, but I was, like, "What does this mean?" Like, I am, maybe, not cisgendered male. And I started doing drag, I realized I loved doing this as an artform. But if you would ask me after an hour of [inaudible], "Would you like to be get out of drag?", I would be like, "I would love to. I don't want to look like this anymore..." [laughs].

Heidi: [Laughs]

Bijou: So, I now know, you are cisgendered male, and this is your identity. But you're, at the same time, more someone who feels comfortable in a feminine appearance and who can use this to create. And so, it just... it just made it more clear for me where... how I identify. Um, and it made me just, in general, feel more comfortable in my masculine being and my feminine being, which had a huge influence on a lot, had a huge influence, um, on my confidence, how I approach people. It had a huge difference... made a huge difference also in terms of, like, being in relationships or even sex, like, that makes a huge difference because you now know who you are and you know where you identi-- or how you identify, and it, like, completely changes everything, and it just takes all the doubt away. So, that's what drag did for me, in that sense.

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

Bijou: I think my younger self, I would just literally be like, do the things that you want to do sooner. Stop thinking about everything too much, just do it. 'Cause it was such a long time, even with drag, I was like... I could've started way earlier, but I was like, "Oh, I don't..." And I would just tell myself, like, just do it. If something in you tells you to do this, and you know, like, by doing it you don't hurt anybody or you don't hurt yourself, just do it. Then you don't have anything, really, to lose. And if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out, and then you know that. But if it works out, you just have more time.

Because what I know is I will not be able to do drag forever. I don't see myself being 50 and still doing it, because the way I'm doing it and the way... how I want to look like, and how I want my appearance to be like, and how... what I want to do, the time is limited. And sometimes I think it would have been nice to start it sooner because you would have, maybe, like, three or four more years of doing what you love so much.

So, I would just be like, just do it, just do whatever, and really stop thinking about what other people think. Because, like, the only people that you should care about, and the only opinions you should care about are from people who you care about. If there's someone out there on the street telling you you look like shit, why should you care? You never asked for their opinion, you don't necessarily care for that person, their opinion. So, just don't bother, and don't think about it. And I think that's also something I would tell myself is just, be more you at a younger age.

Heidi: I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or how drag has impacted your identities. So, could you share about how one or more of your social

identities, like gender, race, class, um, religion, or the interaction of those identities have impacted your experience of drag?

Bijou: Um, I would say, like, I also was very iffy and very, like... when it comes to religion, which comes from the fact that I am also, I think it's Catholic. Yeah, I think, yeah, like, the Chris-- I'm a Chris-- I was, um, a Christian, and I was Catholic, which, is, um, a very interesting religion to be in, let's just say that. I was always very iffy about it. I stepped out of it when I could, so when I knew I'm in a secure work environment, because it's also, like... if it says you left church, there can be bosses that are gonna be like, "Okay." Um, it's, unfortunately, still a thing in Germany, like, everything's very influenced by religion. Um, so, when I felt secured in my life, I was like, "Okay, I'm gonna get out of this bullshit immediately," so, I stepped out of church. Um, I don't have to be part of something that literally wants to see me in hell, why should I?

Um, so I like to make fun of religion now, that happened with drag. I have a number to Personal Jesus by Depeche Mode where I'm, like, the most sexed up, like, pope that you could ever see, [laughing], in, like, lingerie and everything but like a full pope outfit. So, I, kind of, like, like... I like to make fun of certain social constructs in drag.

Um, I think I'm just... I'm just more... or the more I got into putting my being different out there, I now can more understand and feel for people who always had to do that. Um, I have friends who are Black, I have friends who are Muslims. Being Muslim in Germany is, kind of, like, also... I think in America it's also very iffy, if you say you're Muslim, they're like, "Oh my god, terrorist," whatever, and it's the same in Germany, I think, because of the huge refugee crisis, um, especially since, like, 2015, Muslims have a very hard time in Germany being accepted just for their religion, which I think is absolute bullshit.

Um, and I can feel more for that, because when I'm in drag or when I am more feminine or I less and less fit into the norm in that moment, I get so much unnecessary... sometimes so much unnecessary hate and... or just weird looks for no reason. But I can always take it off, I can always be like... I can go back to this, and I have it way easier, and they can't. Like, as a Black person, you cannot just take the Black skin off and be like, "Yeah, now I fit into your norm," or as a Muslim, as long as you're not completely changing your religion, which I think you shouldn't because that's also part of your identity. Um, they have such a hard time being accepted.

And because I lived a more privileged life for a longer time, fitting more into the norm, I never really thought about that. I knew that racism and, and being anti-Muslim, anti-whatever, that that always existed, but I never really felt it that crazily. Um, but since I gave up a little bit of privilege, because now people know that I do it, or they see me in it, I can feel more for these people. I would never say I understand how it is, because I can't. As long as you have not walked in their shoes you will never understand how it is. But I have a better feeling of how it must feel like to really be judged heavily for something that is just part of you. And, um, obviously being gay and being openly gay, I already knew a little bit of that. But I think, in Germany, it's way more accepted to be gay than to be Muslim or to be Black, which, like, is sometimes it's crazy

because you look at other countries, and it's like the worst thing you can be. So, that's where we are very privileged in our community.

Um, so I also never thought about it, as a gay man, thought too much about how crazy it can get on a day-to-day basis. But doing drag and presenting more feminine, I now have a better feeling for when someone says, "It's so hard in our society to be different." In the past, I was, kind of, like, "Yeah," but I'm like, "Yes, you're right." So, that has changed a lot in, like, my social identity. I'm just way more I think, sens-- is that the right word? Sensible? Or, like, I'm way more, um, thinking about, kind of, my privilege and, kind of, like, how rough life can be for others sometimes.

Heidi: How do you define drag?

Bijou: I think drag is, kind of, like, an art form that is... that cannot and also should not be defined. I think it's always so iffy when people are like, "Drag has to be like this," or "That's the definition of drag," or... because I think art, in general, is never to be defined. I think like... I think as... I think drag can be defined as an artform that is tearing apart gender constructs. I think that's the only thing that I would define drag as. I think everything else should be completely open, because it's so divisive inside the drag community to define it, and then our... because I would probably fall out of the definition as well. So, um, I think drag itself should not be defined, or there should not be a real picture of what drag is, but if I were... if someone were to ask me, "What is drag?" I'm like, "Drag is an artform that tears apart gender constructs that we have in our society to influence the view on our norm society on what gender and gender identity and appearance of certain genders is really like, that it's not just A and B, but it's a whole spectrum that is so fluid. And that is what drag is really doing and what drag is about."

Heidi: You, kind of, answered this in that one, but, um, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Bijou: I think the purpose of drag is, kind of, like... first of all, I think it's just to give people like us a stage, or, like, just a platform of presenting themselves. Because before drag, there was not really a platform for artists like us to work. You had these, like, very typical male performers, they did, most of the time, some kind of music or been serious actors or whatever but... and then you have women who were like dancers or whatever, but you never really had a place for people who don't fit into classic picture of a man or a classic picture of a woman to make something, to make art, um, to make art on a broad spectrum for a lot of people.

Um, so I think it just... I think drag, or the purpose of drag, is to give people who don't fit into norms a platform to create and be taken seriously as an artist. Um, I think the purpose of drag, right, is to, like, tear apart the gender constructs, tear apart the idea of gender. Even if you look highly feminine, it still is... you could be like, "Yeah but, um, that person or, like, that man dresses up as, um, how a woman is perceived in our society or how a stereotypical woman is looking like." And I'm like, "That's true, but a man is able to do that, not just a woman, so that's also tearing apart your construct." There's a whole man underneath this, but that person looks like a woman to you, like a stereotypical woman. So, the picture you have of biological females

it not working just for biological females. So, that's also tearing apart, kind of, like, the constructs we have.

And I think, also like the purpose of drag is to... also for, for... actually for some trans individuals, to find out that they are trans. I will always say, and this is so important, to keep being trans and being a drag queen completely apart, because it's not the same thing. A drag queen is someone who does it for art purposes or for, like, just living out, kind of, like, ideas and, um, and a certain part of their identity that they have, and a trans person is completely different. And... but some trans individuals, and we seen it on Drag Race as well, we have so many, um, queens who are now trans women. I found, through drag, that they're not only feeling comfortable as a woman in drag, but they wanna feel like that all the time. So, it can also be... drag can be a way of really finding out who you are in a safe and almost playful way.

Heidi: Do you think drag is sexual?

Bijou: Can be. Obviously, we are highly fetishized, um, and there are a lot of people who have, like, a huge fetish for drag artists, um, which, I mean, you do you. [Laughs] If that's your thing, you go girl. Um, I know that there are a lot of drag queens who are into this as well, who, kind of, like, get off on that. I think it will always be a little bit sexual, um, but I think everything is, kind of, sexual. I think, like, no matter what, I think, like, even ice skating is somewhat sexual, like, you have a man in tight tights and a tight shirt with like... I mean everything can be sexualized, and everything is sexualized, unfortunately, nowadays, which... where I'm like, "Y'all need to chill for a second."

Heidi: [Laughs]

Bijou: Um, but, obviously, like, like, especially how certain drag queens are dressing and presenting themselves as these crazy high feminine personalities with huge tits, huge ass, like, dresses that are this short, it, it will be sexual, in a sense. But I would never say that drag comes from or is for just sexual purposes.

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

Bijou: I like it for, um... I like it for entertainment purposes. I watched it religiously, I still do, um, mainly to, like, get to know other drag queens, get to know, like, how drag is looking like in certain cities or from wherever you are. I think now that we have, like, Drag Race Canada and UK and America and Thailand, and it will be in Australia soon, and we have it in the Netherlands, and it will be in Spain, like, I think it will be just so interesting to get to know different kind of drags from over the world.

I think what's very important, especially from the view of a drag artist, is you cannot look at Drag Race and think that this is what drag is about, or that this is what drag is. It's a reality TV competition. We're not always just screaming at each other being like, "You look like shit! No, you look like shit!" And I think that we still don't have bioqueens, so women who do drag, um, that, open, open, like, trans personalities still have such a hard time getting on it. I think it's... it is, kind of... it is too exclusive, in a way, and RuPaul is, kind of, like, too stuck in a certain picture that he has in drag, or has for drag.

Um, I think it also kind of... it's been very great... what definitely has to be said is, like, drag was not how it was before RuPaul's Drag Race. It was an absolute, like, underdog situation. No one cared for it, it was too weird, it was not in the mainstream. It did so much for us drag artists that this show exists, and that it gave drag queens the platform to show to the world what we do is great, we are here, and we are slaying. And that happened, for sure. Um, but it can also be a little bit destructive, in the sense of, like, how drag is presented, and that drag race itself is sometimes overly sexual for no reason, which then again makes people think that we are only doing this for sexual purposes.

Um, so it think it's a curse and a blessing to have this show and, um, I still watch it because it's entertaining, but I also know that when I see certain things, okay, this is far from reality. Um, but at the same time, I'm like, "Oh my god, I just hope other people will not think that this is like how everything is." Um, I hope it continues, but I'm always someone... I said it, and I think, I hope it will happen soon, is that RuPaul is stepping down, and gives someone younger with a more diverse view on drag the opportunity to change this institution as [inaudible] it's an institution now, you can say, you know, it's like the... it's like the Harvard or Yale of drag, like everyone wants to get there to, like, get, get whatever out of it. And, um, I think just someone comes across, or comes around, and is gonna be like, "Okay, now we're gonna make it more diverse."

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

Bijou: I would say that I would love to change, um, that every drag queen, no matter what kind of style or drag artist, whatever, what kind of style they're doing, that they are accepting other styles of it as well, or as much as their own. Um, I hope, for what we are doing inside the drag community, that it just will be getting more... that we will be more, like, okay, everything is great, like, every style of drag is great, like, everything has the same value. And then, what I would love for the drag community to change on the outside perspective is that we get even taken more seriously as artists, and that people will not always question what we do, and just take it and then be like, it's just art. That's, that's it. And not think about it too much in the sense of, like, why is that person...? What is that? That it's just taken seriously as art and is put on the same level as art, in the sense of that we don't have to always explain and almost defend why we're doing it.

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

Bijou: That we're... that all... every drag queen is trans, um, that every drag queen wants to be a woman, um, that we are perverted or pedophiles or whatever, that we are, um... that we are only in drag because we hate our male existence so much or the person that we are as male. Um, there are so many misconceptions about drag, I feel like more misconceptions than, like, real, actual conceptions of what drag is. Um, I think the biggest misconception is that we're trans, and I'm saying it's the biggest because it's the most hurtful for the trans community in the sense of them not being taken seriously as an actual person with a very certain and clear gender identity. They're like, "I am female," or like a transwoman is, "I am female, and I'm female always, I have

always been female, and I'm putting on the female, and I can't take it off. I am this person." And then some people think that... like, I even, like, know that this happened because I was once part of a situation where a trans person was asked that, it was like, "Oh, um, but, like, um, but, like, in the evening you can take this off," or like... and then I was just like, "What's going on? No." I think it's just very hurtful sometimes for the trans community, like... that's why I am always making sure when I tell someone, um, that I'm doing drag, I'm like, "I am not trans, and I don't want you to put this on the same level. That is just not fair." Um, so I think that's the biggest misconception because it has a huge negative effect on a drag queen, but also on the trans communities in general.

Um, and I think the next misconception is, we're not perverted, we're not doing this just for sex, we're not doing it because we're getting off on it. There are cross dressers that have a kink for this, or that do it out of a fetish, but a drag queen, a professional working drag queen is not doing this for anything sexual, for getting off on it or whatever. We're not trying to, um, lure straight men into having sex with us because we look like women. Um, we're not dangerous, in a sense, because I think drag queens are sometimes even seen as dangerous for society or dangerous for certain people, for kids, or for straight men or whatever, which is also just a huge... I'm just a man in a wig making art, for god's sake, like, that's the only thing I am. Like, I don't have, like, a master plan in mind to take over the world or anything, I'm just doing me and doing art, and just see it as that and that's it. And I think that's, like, huge misconceptions, but there are so many, um, that are still going around, also depending on, kind of, like, where, in which country you're in and how much people got in touch with drag.

Heidi: What do you think would help change those misconceptions?

Bijou: I think if people would be more open for it, for drag. Like, for, not doing it but just being around it, seeing it, watching it, um, learning about it, um, talking to drag artists. I see it every time when I'm in drag at, um, Chris—like, at our pride parade, and I talk to people at, um... borders of the street watching the parade, and, like, they've never been in touch with it, they're seeing it sometimes even for the first time. And they're talking with you, you can see that, like, their whole perception changes of what I'm doing in, like, a two-minute conversation. And I think if people would be more open, especially people who are so much in this... our society norm, if they would be, more like, "Okay, I'm gonna get out of my norm, I'm gonna look past, kind of, like, the edge of where I feel comfortable," they can learn so much more about our society and about life and about different people that are on this planet.

And I think, um, if peo-- if other people be more open to just get to know us... you don't have to like us. You don't have to, like, be a fan and [inaudible] afterwards, but if you just listened, and, kind of, know what's going on, this will already change a lot of misconceptions, because even if you're like, "I'm not a fan of...", like, if you're in a conversation with someone, and someone talks about cert—or, like, is saying something that's part of a misconception, you can be like, "I may not be a fan of it, but I know what you're saying is bullshit," and that would help.

And, um, I'm seeing that this is happening for sure. I'm... I really am. I see it on my Instagram when someone is, like, leaving a nasty comment, like, how many people, like, step in or are like,

"Yeah, that's bullshit, like, shut up, go away." And that would have not happened a couple of years ago. People would have been like, "Yeah, that's not nice but I'm not gonna say anything." And people feel more comfortable supporting us now, and I think there's a change happening, and I think misconceptions get less, or, like, um, they're not as widespread anymore. Um, but I think if more people would be open for it and if more drag artists would be open for conversation as well... because I see a lot of people in our community that they are not really willing to get into conversations where they have to be a little bit more vulnerable. Because it will be a vulnerable conversation talking about why you do certain things, or why you don't fit the norm.

And I know that there a lot of, um, people out of the drag community or even like the LGBT community who are not... don't feel comfortable getting that vulnerable, but then they also have to accept that they cannot be part of progress. Because the only people who can really show other people who we are are ourselves. We are the only ones who can do it. So, if you don't wanna go out into the world, into the norm, and show yourself and show... represent your community, then you can't expect change to happen quicker.

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

Bijou: That it's fun, I think that it's fun. I think... at the end of the day, like, I think it's just fun to look at, it's fun to do, it's fun to be around drag queens, because most of the time in drag we're our most, like, authentic selves, and, like, so... we, most of the time, are exuding so much confidence and fun. And I think, if there's anything you take away from drag is... anything positive, if you don't wanna get into politics, or I don't know, tearing down patriarchy or whatever, if you just wanna get into something very on the surface of drag, it's fun.

And I think, I know that there are people who come to drag performances and they're like, "I don't wanna even talk about, like, what you mean for society or for politics or whatever, but I just wanna be here because you're so damn entertaining and it's so much fun to be around you." And that's it. I think if there's one thing... if there's one thing that I can, like, explain to someone on drag where they don't have to think about a lot afterwards is, it's just fun. It's highly entertaining for both sides. So, I think that's what I would love people to know is, like, no matter what you think about it, just come and watch, and you will be entertained.

Heidi: So, that was, um, the last question. Thank you so much. This has been great.

Bijou: Yeah, thank you, thank you for, for even, like, doing, um, like, this whole project. It's always great when people, like, take their time to, like, make something and really... because as I said, like, we don't sometimes have the opportunity to, like, really present ourselves and, like, explain to people. So, by people like you making these kind of projects, it's even more... it's another opportunity for more people to just get to know us and get to know what we do and get to know the people behind it. So, I can also, like, say thank you, thanks for... in the name of, like, the whole community, I can say, that, like, you are also part of progress for us.

Heidi: Well, thank you, I appreciate your time so much. And, um, enjoy the rest of your day.

Bijou: Thank you, you as well.

Heidi: Okay. Bye-bye.

Interview with Breanna Burns

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Cory: So, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Breanna: When I first heard about drag, I was in, uh, Miami, Florida, and it was with... it was when I was a professional tennis player at the time. So, I, um... we were going down Ocean Drive, and, you know, I had a friend I was going out with. And he told me, he's like, "Hey, uh, you know, I looked at... I looked down the street, and there was a lot of people, so many people, I was like, "What the hell is going on over there?" So, um, so he's like, "Oh, they're drag shows." Like, I was like, "Oh, awesome. Like, let's check it out," and we, like, pulled up to it. And there was a color... a people of color queen. Um, she was hosting the show. She was hilarious. And I was like, "Oh, this is like a whole new, different lifestyle." Like, like not lifestyle, night-- nightlife. That's what I meant to say. But, um, I was, I was like... you know, I was very straight acting at the time. So, at first, I was like, hmm, you know, I was like, "I don't know if it's my cup of tea." So, I went to Clarksville, and I, like, went to another drag show, and I loved it. And I was like, "Okay, this is... this is very much, like, something I can do." And that's how I started. Anyway, I probably went really deep into that question. [Laughs]

Cory: No, that's good. That's what we want. That was a great answer.

Breanna: Thank you.

Cory: Okay. So, next question is when did you start performing as a drag artist and why?

Breanna: Okay, when did I... okay. So, this was, kind of, the part I was getting to, and I was like, I have a feeling you'll ask that question.

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: So, um, so when did I... okay, what was it? It was when did I and why?

Cory: When did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Breanna: Okay, I started... So, about, mm, over fi-- like five-and-a-half years ago, I actually just came out as gay. And I was like, you know... and that's when I went to the, uh, to the show in Clarks-- the drag show in Clarksville. So, I was like... so, I watched it, and I was like, "Damn, I could do that." And, you know, like, 'cause I just knew it, like, I knew I could do it. So, I was like, "Let's do this."

And, you know, I had a few supportive gay friends at the time, and they walked me through, like, what to get. And you know, I actually turned to my mom. And my mom was like... she was a little bit unsure about doing drag with me. So, I was like, "Come on, let's do the show." So, I

brought her to a show with me. And I embarrassed the hell out of her. I paid one of the queens there to do a lap dance on her head. I kid you not.

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: It was great. It was great. And, uh, so, she was... she, kind of, understood where I would want to do that, and she helped me. So, I started drag about five years ago in Clarksville, Tennessee. Why did I start doing it? Um, because I knew I could do it. Like, it's, it's very... like, the dancing in it is very athletic. I myself am a very athletic person. I played Dance Dance Revolution to work out. Isn't that the craziest thing?

Cory: [Laughs] That's awesome.

Breanna: My god. Um, so yeah, and I was just like... and it just looked fun. Like, I love interacting with people, I love theater, I love all of that. So, I'm gonna do all that. [Laughs] And it's just a different way to express it. I felt like I connected to that art form very well. So, that's why I chose to do it.

Cory: Okay.

Breanna: Not like a big pageant answer, but...

Cory: [Laughs] Um, going off of your mom, um, how did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Breanna: Oooh, oh, we're getting a little deep here. Well, okay, it's kind of funny. So, you know, like, my mom.... uh, I came out to my mom as gay first. So, she was very onboard with everything. She's supported me 100% of my life, like... so, yes, she was, boom, on board. Um, so my family, [laughing] my fam-- um, not my dad's side, my dad's side, I don't really know about my dad's side, honestly, but my mom's side of the family, like, I started posting, like, "Ooh, I'm doing drag now, like, look at me," posting all that on Facebook. And, and then I was like... and, uh, so I posted all that and, you know, my mom would talk to my aunt or my uncle and they'd be like, "Um, yeah, I don't know, kind of unsure about that. It's not my thing." Um, they weren't, like, totally, like, disown-- like rude about it. So, I'm thankful for that.

Um, trying to think. But, um, I actually told my dad I did drag about two... um, no, about like, a year and a half ago, I told hi-- I actually came out and told him I did drag in the same day. So, two, two for the price of one.

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: He really got a lot of information that day. [Laughs] So, I told him about that. And he was like, "Okay, you know, as long as you're making money with it," and I was like, "Oh, yeah, about money." [Laughs] So, um, so yeah, I told him about that. And I was just like, "Okay." Yeah, he was... he was okay with it. But, um, I don't really know if my dad's side of the family knows too much about me, in general, so...

Cory: All right. Okay. Next is where does your drag name come from?

Breanna: Oh, okay. So, Breanna, Breanna Burns? Okay. Um, Breanna, I was... so, Breanna is like a twist on my boy name, like, Brian. It's almost like the girl name for Brian, if that makes sense.

Cory: Yeah.

Breanna: Um, so I was like, "Oh, Breanna," and I was like... I was like, "Let's think of a catchy last name," because I want something, when you say it, like, rolls off your tongue, something that sticks in your mind. So, um, you know, like, my current boyfriend at the time was like... um, he's like, "Oh, you should do something, like, French or something..." I'm like, "No, I don't want to sound basic. Come on now." So, [laughing] Lacroix or something, I don't know. So, I was like, so I was like, "Okay, well, um, Burns. Let's do it. Breanna Burns." And it just, like, it clicks so well to me.

Cory: It flows.

Breanna: Yes. I love that.

Cory: All right, so this one's a long one, so, bear with me.

Breanna: Oh, my gosh. Okay.

Cory: Okay, so it says, there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag from drag queen and drag king to glamor queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen, camp queen and among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? And what kind of drag do you do? And what is your style of drag?

Breanna: Okay. So, to answer that yeah, I mean, yes, I do believe there are labels in, um, the drag community, like, as drag queen, drag king, um, you know, femme queen/bioqueens, you know what I mean? Um, you know, and that's just to, kind of, tell you what kind of character we are, kind of thing. But, um, if I were to identify my drag, and this, kind of, supports my answer from before, it was like, you know, like, someone... one queen can be multiple different types of categories. Because you have like your horror queen, like you said, camp queen, comedy queen. You know, like you... that's what's the beauty about drag is you don't have to just stay in one lane. Drag is your art. So, like, one night, like, I'll do a camp queen number, the next I'll be a little bit funny, or, you know, then next number I'll, uh, dance the house down.

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: Like, yeah, that's my answer on that. Like, if I wanted to be, um... like, if one night, I wanted to go out in boy drag, say Breanna Burns kind of, like, did like a more drag king look, um, you know, I could do that too. Like, drag is that valid. Drag is-- drag goes in a big circle.

Cory: Mm-hmm.

Breanna: Anyway, did that answer...?

Cory: Yeah, that was good. That was very good.

Breanna: Thank you.

Cory: Okay, um, who or what has influenced your drag?

Breanna: Who or what has influenced my drag? Oh, you know what, um, so, um, two things, actually is... actually, three things, because I got to, you know, include my favorite celebrity in that. First, I'm going to say local queens, because local queens taught me how the actual show is ran. Local queens have, you know, like, taught me how to behave in the back-- in backstage or learn how to talk to people, like, in the audience or even go on the mic. Like, that's what local queens have taught me. RuPaul's Drag Race has... okay, number two, RuPaul's Drag Race has very much motivated, uh, motivated me as well. It's kind of what made me jump into this, um, hobby. Like, you know, I'm just like... I was watching RuPaul's Drag Race Season 5 with my ex, and, you know, I was just watching it, and I was like, "Oh, my god, that looks like so much fun. I want to do that one day." And, you know, I'm trying to do that, living my best life right now. So, we got... that's number two. And number three is Lady Gaga. Yes.

Cory: Lady Gaga.

Breanna: Yes, Lady Gaga. Like, if you ever go to one of my shows, like, my outfits very much, like, represent her. Like, um, I have been introduced once or twice as, like, the Lady Gaga of drag [laughs].

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: But, um, oh, yeah, oh, yeah, it's... have you ever been to one of my shows?

Cory: I have not. I have never been to a show in my life actually.

Breanna: Oh, you gotta come on over.

Cory: [Laughs] Well, banking off that, um, the next question is, can you talk about your life as a drag artist? And one of the points is how often do you perform, and where do you perform?

Breanna: Okay. So, I try to perform at least once or twice a month, you know? Um, what is my life as a drag artist? Is preparing for the next show, pretty much. Um, you know, you got work, obviously, but outside of that time to work, like, outside of that time of work. I have to, um... trying to think. You know, like, I listen to music, or I'm out with friends, or I hear a certain song, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, like, I think that song would vibe really well with, with an audience." And I'll ask that song, get the song. And I'll sit there, learn the words to the song. And then I will literally try to think of a whole mechanic around that song. Like, I'm very, um... when I perform, I want to make every song, like, um... I want to make every song, kind of, stick in your head. And, like, I do... I don't do my, uh... oh my gosh, how do I explain that? Sorry, it's, it's hard to explain.

Cory: No, you're good. You're good.

Breanna: [Laughs] You know, yeah, that's... it's pretty much just preparing for the next outfit, the next show, you know, just... it's very... it's piecing it together, it's like a puzzle. So, yeah, I think... I think that's pretty much what I have for that answer. [Laughs]

Cory: Okay. Uh, what are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Breanna: Oh, the different challenges? Uh, well, since we're in COVID-19 right now, you know, bars are doing, like, less shows, and so it's a little bit tougher to get booked at the moment. Um, time constraints, I'm... okay, so, I'm used to, uh... I'm used to starting the show around 10 or 11 at night, which, now since the shows or the... some of the regulations are starting to be lifted, some of the shows are going back to that time. But, um, yeah, like, right now, during the COVID, it's hard... it's hard to manage time more, because the shows do start earlier right now.

Cory: Okay.

Breanna: Um, what else do I struggle with, or what is challenging? Um, oh my gosh, learning new songs sometimes is very challenging, trying to fit stuff in your schedule between work and when you're off work. Trying to think what else. So, what is... okay, the question was what is challenging?

Cory: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Breanna: Okay, and being a drag artist, okay. Let me touch on that. Um, being a drag artist is trying to figure out stuff that hasn't been done. And I mean, you know, a lot of stuff has been done as it is. Um, but just trying to think of what your next gag is going to be as your next show. That's, that's, that's a very challeng-- that's very challenging as an artist.

Cory: Okay. Um, how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression out of drag? What pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Breanna: Okay, so I am, uh, he/him, and in drag, I actually... I prefer to be called she/her. But you know, if you know me, personally, you came up to me like, "Brian," I'd be like, "Hey, Breanna right now." [Laughs] Um, I do, um, chan-- I do definitely change genders when I am in drag. What are my views on it, you said?

Cory: Uh, yeah, you can hit on that.

Breanna: I mean, not my views, like, um, you know, anybody is free to be who they want. That's why we're in America. And you know, this world is everybody's, so it's not just... this world isn't just one political party or one democrac-- or culture, you know? You know, people can be who the hell they want to be. Like, if they...

Cory: So, would you say that drag has influenced how you view gender?

Breanna: Um, yes, I... yes, I would have to say that. Um, it's also taught me how to be more accepting about different types of people. You know, I've had a lot of people... Okay, no, just go back to gender.

Cory: You're good.

Breanna: [Laughs] But, um... okay, I'm sorry. It's hard. Um, because this is a very sensitive subject, but, uh, I'm trying to think. It's... you know, it has taught me to be more accepting of, like, others' genders, for sure. You know, at first, I've... like before I came out as gay and before, like, when I was a tennis player, you know, I wouldn't understand why someone would want to refer their pronouns as they/them. But, um, when I got in drag, you know, I learned that people,

you know... because that's the biggest one, I feel like that people have a speed bump to get over. And, you know, and it ta-- and it took me, you know, someone that went by those pronouns to teach me why they feel that wa-- you know, why they prefer to be called those pronouns. It was like, yes. Uh, you know, I understood and I definitely was a lot more accepting with that, and, yeah. [Laughs]

Cory: Okay.

Breanna: For sure.

Cory: Okay. So, um, has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag, and if so, how?

Breanna: Oh, yes. So, when you're out of drag, you know, when you're out of drag with your hair just hanging down over your shoulders... I mean, my hair's not that long, but... [Laughs]

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: Uh, you know, when it's... when you don't have the attention that you... that you get from, um, like, the audience... because when you're in drag, like, it doesn't matter, like the audience loves you because, because, you know, like, if, especially if you put a lot of hard work and dedication into your craft, the audience sees that and they love that. So, when you're not... when you're just in boy, you're just working your job, and you're just, like, wearing cargo shorts and a t-shirt, like, you know, you're not... not everyone's gonna be like, Oh my god, you know, you're not going to get that total attention that you desire. And it's, it's hard being, like, a single... it can be hard being, like, a single person, because it's like, you want that attention and you feel like that if you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, um, that, you know, that they can give all that attention to you, so... that you want. And that can make it, kind of, hard. So, yeah, I think that can struggle with your confidence a little bit.

Cory: All right. This next one might get a little deep, so...

Breanna: Ooh, okay,

Cory: Okay. So, if you could go back in time as Breanna Burns, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Breanna: Oh, I love this. It's like the baby question on drag race.

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: Um, what advice would I give to my, my baby self? Um, don't change anything. Um, I wouldn't... I wouldn't really tell her anything to change differently because, you know, I felt like... I feel like, as a drag queen, like, you're meant to go through different, different phases, I almost feel like. And it's very humbling, like, the process of becoming who I am today, you know? Um, it's taught me to... who to take advice from, you know, take advice, you know, people are gonna say that, um, they... you didn't take the advice well, but you very much well did and that perfected your... that's gonna perfect your craft, baby. That's... and that's going to make you bigger, and you're gonna find out who your real friends are. Like, you're gonna meet some

amazing people along the way, like, stick with them, you know, the older queens are the best [laughs]. The older queens give the best advice and are by far the most intellectual. Um, always be supportive to your trans woman 'cause they on an amazing journey themselves. Uh, and you're going to be there for... through a lot of people's journeys along the way, 'cause... and it's going to be... it's just going to be amazing. So, okay, that's all I had to say to that bitch.

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: [Laughs]

Cory: All right, so this is another long one.

Breanna: Okay.

Cory: All right. So, 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?

Breanna: Okay, my mind is, kind of, blown with this, um, this question., So, when you mean identity, like, who I identify at the ti-- as at the time?

Cory: So, meaning, like, the social identities that either you possess, including your gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, etc., and/or the other... like, that other people around you, how have those impacted your experience as a drag artist or has... how have those experien-- or, um, impacted your social identity?

Breanna: Okay. Oh, it is a hard question for me. I'm very sorry.

Cory: No, you're okay.

Breanna: Um, 'cause I'm just trying to figure out where to even start here. Um, when you... Okay, trying to think. 'Cause for some reason I'm thinking very much of, like, cultures right now. And I don't even know if that's, like, the right way to even answer this question.

Cory: Yeah.

Breanna: I'm gonna just, kind of, like, throw it out there. But, you know, like, I think people when they, like... yeah, I don't know, I'm just... oh, this one's a hard one for me.

Cory: Alright, we can skip. It's no big...

Breanna: Okay. I'm sorry.

Cory: Okay. No, that is perfectly fine. All right, so those beginning ones were talking about your personal story, and then these final ones are going to talk about your personal ideas about drag.

Breanna: Okay.

Cory: Okay. So, this one is how do you define drag?

Breanna: How do I define drag?

Cory: Yes.

Breanna: Um, you can, uh, be who you want to be when you want to be. That's how I define drag right there.

Cory: Okay. Okay, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Breanna: Purpose of drag is to take your regular ideal-type person and, uh, to completely change that, that person into a character.

Cory: Alright. Okay. Do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not?

Breanna: Ooh, um, I mean, if that's your character, um, that's... that, you know... like, I think it depends on your character, for sure. If you have a more sexually deviated character, then be sexual. Like... but, you know, like, I personally like to be a little bit more classy at times. You know, I can be a little bit fun, I can be a little party girl at the moment, but hey... [Laughing] I do prefer a little bit more classy.

Cory: Okay. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Breanna: Oh, um, I love RuPaul's Drag Race. I'm very happy that, um... I'm very happy that the show is giving people a chance to make this into a career. Um, you know, like, people like me, hi, um...

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: Hi RuPaul [laughing]. But, um, you know, a lot of... you know, it's giv-- it's giving people a chance to be a star, and that is what we need in this community.

Cory: Okay, um, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be?

Breanna: Ooh, the one thing I think would change? Um, oh my gosh, where do I start? [Laughs] Oh, um, the one thing that would change. Okay, I'm gonna get a little bit rude with this. But you don't have to be a bitch to be a drag queen. There. That's one thing I would change.

Cory: All right. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag?

Breanna: Um, that they're strippers. I hate that, oh, my god. And that... there's a difference between burlesque and stripping. So, um, yeah, that's... uh, that's a big, like, misconception. Like, no, we don't take our clothes off. I mean, we might take off a nice cape and call that a reveal, but that's not stripping baby. [Laughs] Um, yeah, that's a big one. Uh, I don't think people realize, like, how hard it is to get up in front of a light and still dance your heart out while taking tips and while interacting with the audience [laughing]. I don't think people understand how that... how hard that is. So, um, yeah, I just... I just don't think people realize, like, how much dedication this... goes into this.

Cory: Do you think anything could be done to help change these misconceptions?

Breanna: Um, if people will go to a damn drag show.

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: Just saying. Usually people that say this, I always... I always follow up with the question, "Have you ever been to a drag show?" "Well, no." "Okay, you need to take your ass to one and live your life a little bit, hello."

Cory: [Laughs]

Breanna: "Oh, you say you can't go out without your kids? Oh, there's kids' drag shows. Oh, you want to go out with your girls? Oh, bar's right down the street, so pretty sure they're having a drag show." Like, [laughing] it's... yeah, go ahead. Anyway. [Laughs]

Cory: Alright, our final question is if you chose one thing you want people to know about and learn about drag what would it be?

Breanna: Know about and learn about? Um, that, uh, people just have different types of drags, and, um, you shouldn't, uh... people... you shouldn't have to sit there and just support your friend when you go to a show. You should be able to expand, expand your, your small mind into other people's drags. Um, trying to think. And what should they know about? I mean, I, kind of, like, tipped off what they... uh, I'm trying to think. They should just know how much effort it takes to get from, uh, one gender to another. I mean, not just gender but character to another. And I don't think people understand the amount of makeup it takes, the amount of... okay, I cinch myself with duct tape, so, for me, the kind of duct tape I use. [Laughs] Um, yeah, it just... like, what it takes to make that full illusion.

Cory: All right. Well, I just want to say thank you for taking your time out of your day and helping me with this. You did an amazing job, and I'm so happy that you decided to help me with this.

Breanna: Oh, that's not a problem. I was like, "Ooh, an interview." I was like, "Let me step into this a little bit. Hello." [Laughing] Oh, I...

Interview with Ceduxion Carrington

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Julia: Okay, it's recording now. Alright, so we'll go ahead and get started then.

Ceduxion: All right.

Julia: When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Ceduxion: That is the most unique question I've been asked. Um, so I, I halfway came out at the age of 18, [laughing] as in I started telling my friends but not my family. And, uh, I was sneaking off to, um, gay bars in Springfield, Illinois, 'cause at that time you only had to be 18 to get in. So, my first experience at drag show was actually really, really good. Um, I met a drag queen named Crystal Knight from Springfield, and I wasn't even doing drag at the time, of course, and she thought I was her nephew, I favored her nephew. And she pulled up a picture, and yeah, I really did look like it. So, her heart dropped when she saw me because she thought maybe her nephew was closeted and decided to come to the gay bar.

Um, I didn't really have, like, an opinion of it. Like, I wasn't, um... I don't even know how to really describe it. Um, I didn't think good or bad of it, but I enjoyed it, you know? And it was me coming out, and I enjoyed the show and I didn't... at that point in time I never considered it. Um, it was just part of gay culture that I was being exposed to. So, that's bas-- that's basically it. But they were... the people that I met that night, they were all very welcoming and legendary to their area.

Julia: Excellent, that's really cool, and that's funny about the nephew thing.

Ceduxion: Oh yeah.

Julia: That's something that would happen to me. [Laughs]

Ceduxion: We were almost dead ringers, so she had every right to, like, be worried, for a split second.

Julia: Okay. And then, so, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Ceduxion: Oh, that's a good one too. So, as I said, um, I hit the bars when I was 18. And the funny thing is that's when I started performing, but not as drag. Um, in bigger areas there's more of a performance venue. So, like, if you're a male who performs as a male you're called a, uh, a bioking, as in a biological king or a mister. If you're a female who performs as a female you're called a bio-femme or a femme fatal. So, I started out performing as a guy, and I joined that family of the queen who thought I was her nephew. So, I was a Knight before I was Ceduxion Carrington. So, I did, um, three years of that.

And then, of course, the excuse is Halloween. So, one Halloween I got in drag and, uh... and that was even before the career; that was just the first time. And then, after that, my best friend, her drag name is Chanel Carrington, and, uh, I took on Ceduxion Carrington shortly after. Um, the first time that I actually did it was for a same-sex abuse benefit show. And then it just kinda... it didn't carry on, like, immediately after that. Um, another prominent figure in our community named Anita Mann, she was having a pageant, and she needed one more contestant. And I really wasn't about the drag life, to be honest. I just, kind of, did it to do it as, like... like I said, the same-sex abuse was my start for it 'cause it was a good cause.

But my Auntie Anita, as we call her, she needed a, um, contestant for her pageant or she would have had to cancel it. And there was, like, pageant promoters from all over coming down to watch this preliminary. So, she asked me to do it, and I was like, "Hell no, I don't even have drag." Like, I don't have drag I just did the same-sex benefit show, um, abuse benefit show. That was it. And everything I had that night was loaned to me. So, she was like, "I got you, I will give you all the clothes and things you need, blah, blah, blah. I just need another body because I can't have a pageant with two contestants. There has to be a winner, a second place, and, basically, a loser." At that time, if you didn't have at least three contestants, you had to, uh, cancel your pageant. It's not so much that anymore, but back then, that was kind of a rule.

So, she gave me all of the things that I needed. The categories were, uh, interview, evening gown, and talent. And I've always been a dancer or whatever, but long story short, I won the pageant. [Laughs] My first time doing a pageant, my first time really doing high in drag and all that, and I won. Well, she failed to tell me that by winning, it was a preliminary to a bigger pageant. So, um, if I wanted to step down, I had to give back the prize money, and I didn't want to do that. [Laughs] So, um, that preliminary was to a state title which was called Miss Illinois US of A. And so, I fulfilled my obligations, uh, as the local bar winner, and then we made it to the state pageant and I got third in the state. So, that's, like, under a year of drag, and I'm competing against veterans, you know, and I got third in state.

Well, from the time that I won the pageant to the time that I actually went to the state pageant, other bar owners or promoters were watching me and then they were asking me to come perform at their bar, which is known as a booking. So, I started traveling the United States. I was in different parts of Iowa every other weekend, and I was in Carbondale and I was in Springfield and I was in Missouri. And so, once that ball got rolling, I just stuck with it. I was like... and my expenses were being... not all of 'em, but some of my expenses were being taken care of. I'm seeing different places and it just... I just stuck with it, and here we are, still. 25, 26 years later.

Julia: That's amazing, I love that story.

Ceduxion: That's a long-ass story.

Julia: [Laughs]

Ceduxion: That's actually still... that's still the short version. [Laughs]

Julia: [Laughs] Um, okay, so how did your family, friends, and, like, any other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Ceduxion: Oh man. Well, my mother is hilarious, um, and I'm going to tell just a hair of a backstory. When I was coming out, I was more worried about her opinion of me, because my mother is the kind of lady that goes to church 75 times a week, and I was like, "Oh, here comes the Bible beating, here comes all the stuff." But I'm a mama's boy, so any hurtful words from my mother would definitely hurt. But she definitely was not that at all. Um, I guess it's because most coming out stories are horror stories. So, uh, my mom was like, you know, "I love you, you're my son no matter what." Uh, and then she finished that with, "If anybody has to move out of this house, it will be your dad." So, she had my back, no matter what my father may or may not think. [Laughs] She's willing to put her husband out for her boy. [Laughs] So, I've got a great mom.

Um, so I didn't tell anybody initially. But you can't hide things from your mother. I'm on the phone with my mom one day, and we're chatting, and she's like... we're just talking, and she said, "Yeah, I went to the grocery store today, and I picked up some milk and some eggs, couple loaves of bread, I know you do drag, some soda, and some chips." I said, "What did you say?" [Laughing] She said, "I picked up some milk, some eggs, a loaf of bread, I know you do drag, some soda, some chips..." [Laughing] I was rolling. I was like, "How did you find out?" She's like, "Don't worry about it." [Laughing]

And then, um, she started going to my shows, the local ones, and she go to... go to my shows at night, and go to church Sunday morning. And, uh, she told her sisters and they started to... they never came, but they wanted to. Um, and then it got out that I did it, and more and more and more my family started attending my shows. Like, so I really didn't have to tell them. They're just like, "We want to go." So, I didn't really have any obstacles.

The funniest one is my brother, is because he's, he's probably my biggest... one of my biggest supporters. But he's a thug. And so, being stereotypical, when he walks in the gay bar everybody, like, clutches their purse and their pearls and their wallets 'cause he's scary. And, uh, and then when I perform, he gets all gangster and it... and it scares... it scares the audience members. He'll go, "Yo, that's my motherfucking brother up there." [Laughs] And it scare—like, the people that who don't know him, see this dude sagging in his little beanie cap, jumping up and getting all wavy. They're like, "What's this guy doing?" But it's just my brother getting excited 'cause he enjoys the show. And it's so funny because now he knows what a good show is. Like, he will go to a show with me, um, and be like, "Yo, she needs some help, Bro. Go talk to her," like he knows what... [Laughing] It's so funny to hear him say that shit but... [Laughs] But yeah, I've got... I've got a great support system, so I didn't even have to tell them; they were already on board once I started.

Julia: That's awesome. I love that. Okay. And then, so where does your drag name come from? Like, you talked a little about the Carrington part, but where did you choose, like, your name?

Ceduxion: Hilarious. My first drag name was Kiwi. [Laughs] And, uh, there was a drink in the 90s called Fruitopia. I don't even know if it's still around. And my favorite flavor was Kiwiberry Ruckus. So, Kiwi was my... Kiwi Ruckus was my first drag name. And then I worked at a retail store called Von Maur, uh, doing security, which was funny, and, uh, I was in the women's

department, and I saw these... this, uh, label of clothing called Ceduxion and it was spelled C-E-D-U-X-I-O-N. Well, tradition in my drag mother's family is your name has to start with C because we use the, um... I can't think of the right word. Uh, like Chanel, the label, their emblem is two Cs back to back. So, we use that to represent the house of our family. So, my daughter's name is Calexus, my other daughter's name is China, Chalaya. So, as long as we can use the label for Chanel, that's the word I was looking for, the label for Chanel, the emblem. And it's not a stickler, you don't have to have the Cs, but that's just, kind of, what we do. So, I decided to change my name from Kiwi to Ceduxion 'cause I liked how it was spelled actually.

Julia: Yeah, that's really unique and interesting. Okay. So, there's a lot of different, like, terms for the types and styles of drag, and then, like, from drag queen to drag king, which you, kind of, touched on a little bit earlier, you know. And then, to glamor queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, you know, queer artist, bioqueen we talked about, camp queen, um, among, like, many others, you know? But are there particular labels that you would use to categorize your drag? And then, like, what kind of drag, like, do you do? What's your style exactly?

Ceduxion: I've learned not stay in a box. I'm all over the place. I have never done bearded drag. But that's just the school that I come from. And it's hard for older queens to accept bearded drag. Not, not me. I'm not going to lie. At first, I was like, "What is this?" But immediately I dismissed it because drag is expression, and if you want to keep your beard on and do your makeup, that is your expression. Who am I to say that you can't do that? A lot of older queens do have an issue with that. A lot of older queens have a lot of issues with the drag that's going on now. But you can't forget what drag is. It is accenting something that was normal. Like, that's the whole point of putting on fake lashes. That's the whole point of drawing your eyebrows to your hairline. Like, it's accenting something normal. So, however you want to do it is fine.

Um, I've dabbled and dabbled in almost all those categories you've named. So, I like to be versatile because there's always someone in the audience at some point that I've never connected with, and I like to try to connect with various people in the audience because our au-- a drag show audience is so diverse. There's no way you could blanket the type of people that go to a drag show. So, I would like to be known as that performer... I won't say successfully do other styles, but I attempt to do it, and I work on my craft, and I try to finesse it to make it enjoyable.

Julia: And then, just like the... so, how does this really impact, like, your life as a drag artist with you being versatile in your style and your drag?

Ceduxion: Um it's actually always been my life. I just put makeup on. [Laughs] Like, okay, so, I'm going to bring up, like, stereotypes. Being African-American, if I go to a certain bar, and I'm singing lyrics to a song that people probably think that I shouldn't know. But my mother raised me on country and gospel, and it took me getting older to realize, like, all these country songs I'm singing, my mother introduced me to it. And then, like, my blues, and my soul and R&B is my... and jazz, maybe not really jazz, maybe a touch of jazz, was my father. My brother introduced me to some hip hop and R&B and rap, you know? And we were the only Black... at the time, we were the only Black family in a predominantly white neighborhood, and that's

where I got my rock and roll and my metal and my... like, I have a blend of all of that. And then I did show choir, and that's probably where my Broadway and my camp came from. Like, drag... like, all I'm doing is putting on makeup and being myself, really, to tell you the truth, like, I just... I have dabbled in everything. I sang, I did choir, did all that stuff.

And I wouldn't change it for the world because if you can only do one type of thing, you're limited, and I don't feel limited. Kind of, like, some actors are typecasted, like Kevin Hart plays the same role all the time. He's limited. I'm not saying he's not good at it, but he would never be able to play, like... Uh, I don't say never, that was rude but, like, people might look at him differently if he played a war veteran or something like that. So, this has always been me, and like I said, I wouldn't change it for the world.

Julia: So, what I'm hearing is, like, in regards to what or who, rather, has influenced your drag, you would say, like, that music really had a big impact because the show choir thing, you know... and like you...- like you just said, like, it's always been a part of you, you're just putting on makeup. Um...

Ceduxion: Yeah.

Julia: So, do you have, like, another way that you want me to, like, word how drag has really influenced your life, or is that a pretty good...?

Ceduxion: Oh, music is that, but, like, I'm also a huge nerd. Um, I do cosplay, and I incorporate that into my shows. I've been Wonder Woman, I've been a female Iron Man, I've been a female Spider-Man, I... I don't know. So, I feel like this is what drag is to me, like, this is what I tell people all the time. Drag is a sum total of my life's failures. All the things that I aspired and wanted to be when I was younger, I'm able to convey that through drag. I wanted to be an artist. I draw, I make up my own superheroes. Um, that's how much of a geek I am. And I draw, I mix my music myself, um, I dance. I've choreographed numbers for myself and other drag queens. So, like, all the things that I wanted to do was... when I was little. I wanted to be an artist, I wanted to be an architect, I wanted to be an actor, I wanted to be a backup dancer. Um, I get to do all those through my craft. And, like, though I may not be on Hollywood, I still am successfully living my dream, plural dreams, 'cause there was so much I wanted to do. 'Cause, like, when you do drag, you have to sell what you're giving, so I do monologues, I do parts from movies. So, like, I get to do all those things I wanted to do.

Julia: That's really cool. Thank you. Do you consider drag to be political? And then, why or why not?

Ceduxion: As in community-wise, like, political... I mean, to a degree, like, definitely there's, like, drag politics in pageants, and I'm sure, like, in RuPaul's Drag Race, I'm sure there's some politics. Like, I get looked at funny 'cause I've never watched a single episode of RuPaul's Drag Race, and I do drag, and people are like, "Are you kidding me?" And yeah, of course, I've seen clips, I've seen the memes, um, I know tons of the girls. Like, I knew a lot... I always know who's on what season or whatever. But there's so many girls that I met before they're on there, you know, I just... I don't watch it. So, I always get in trouble for that. But I'm sure that there... it

sounds like things are political, like fan-favorites and sometimes it's... I hear from my friends that's been on a show, things... some things are already predetermined on how the outcomes are gonna be.

Julia: Oh...

Ceduxion: And you're gonna [overtalking] okay with it. Um, so, definitely that, I've seen it in pageants. So, you know, some... I've seen girls win pageants based on their name and not give it the effort that they should have, or maybe a new girl did better than a veteran girl, but they don't want to give it to the new girl. So, it's... there's definitely that kind of politics involved.

Julia: Okay. Um, and then, how often do you perform and, like, where do you perform, I guess, the most?

Ceduxion: Oh, often? Woo! Not much now. Good ole COVID. Um, we're just now getting the ball rolling. I mean, the most is my Central Illinois being... 'cause that's where I'm based, so Decatur, Springfield, Champaign, Bloomington, Peoria. The gay bar in Champaign did close after... four years ago, so not so much is there. I call us homeless drag people. We should hold signs saying, "We'll do drag for food," because Champaign had its gay bar for 35 years and, like, literally we don't... it's like we don't know what to do. It's hard. I mean, we do it at a lot of straight venues or whatever but, like, we don't have home.

So... but I still travel mostly Central Illinois. There's a point in time where I was in Indiana every weekend. Um, I was in Iowa at the begin-- a lot in the beginning of my drag career. I've been to Texas, I've been to Virginia, Missouri, Wisconsin. That's where actually... I actually won a national title, so I... nobody can take that away from me that I went... kind of, like, a Miss America Pageant, so I went national. And I am known as Gay North America International Supreme. That's a long title but that's mine.

Um, so I'm trying to think of where else I've been. I've traveled quite a few places. Not as much as I like but... but Central Illinois is my home base. Yeah, that's pretty much... pretty much it that I can think of on the fly.

Julia: And then, what all goes into, like, getting ready for a performance? I'm sure there's tons of things, but if you want to give like a brief overview of all that goes into it, then that would be great.

Ceduxion: I can do that. Um, number one in my opinion, is the venue. Um, and that breaks down into whether I'm familiar with the venue or if I've never been there before. But if I'm familiar with the venue, I'm familiar with the people so then I tend to know what to bring. And then it depends on the music selection and then the combination of the outfit, the jewelry, and, um, the hair [laughs], and then how much of the performance you want to give. And that sounds kind of bad to say but, like, if it's a restricted area, I'm not bringing a lot of stuff. Like, some... of course, I... you don't need me to tell you, some venues are bigger or smaller than the other, some dressing rooms are bigger and smaller. Um, and it also depends on how the show is ran. 'Cause sometimes you have time to do elaborate costumes or sometimes the shows move at such a high pace that you had better be able to throw something on quick and still look nice and maybe

request the assistance of someone else, but not a whole lot. But if you got, like, four entertainers between you, then you can do more elaborate costumes. Sometimes... and it depends if they take a break in the show or if it's a straight through. Yeah. So, those are the things that, uh, that I factor in when getting ready for a show.

Julia: And then what are some of the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist in general?

Ceduxion: Right now, just being 44 years old. [Laughs] Uh, I always got ideas and, uh, brainstorming, I always got that going, but executing, executing them is getting a little harder. [Laughs] I'm known as a dancer, the... my high kicks are, are now middle to low kicks. So, [laughing] it's just getting old. And it kind of sucks, but I always... I compare drag to being in a, uh, professional sport, you know, everybody's going to be on top for... people are go-- you're gonna be on top for a while, but then there's rising stars, and then you get older. So, I mean, you just got to, you know, roll with your time, and when your time sets, do it gracefully or whatever. But I'm still pushing through.

Julia: Uh, is there, like, uh, anything unique to the drag scene where, like, you live compared to the other places that you've traveled to?

Ceduxion: Oh, um, I want to start by saying this, when I travel out of town I expect higher standards, better drag than my area. And it's not putting down the queens in my area, it's just like, I'm out of town, I'm ready to be wowed by some out-of-town drag. Um, so I say that's about a 50/50. There's similarities and then there are differences. Um, the further away you go, the more you see, um, females performing as females, males performing as males. And there's even pageantry systems to, to those who perform in that manner or that style. But it's like... it's 50/50. Sometimes, I see a lot of what I see at home, and sometimes I'll be like, "Oh, they don't do that back at home," so...

Julia: And then, what has this pandemic, like, meant for your life as a drag artist?

Ceduxion: Well, when it initially hit, it was a financial slap in the face because I had so many shows lined up. I perform at all... almost all the major universities in the Central Illinois area, college shows are amazing, and they're fun, and it's great energy. Um, and I've been doing it for years, like, double-digit years. So, that hurt. Um, but it also gave me time to sit and reflect. I enjoyed the time off when we couldn't do anything. I did not do anything from my home, I know some girls did. Um, I just... I had my own opinion about that. I just wanted to sit and relax. I don't feel like that I should... I don't know, like, people missed me, but I didn't feel like I should do it from my home for the simple fact that, you know, times are hard, so I don't want to... I... this is my personal opinion, I didn't want to set up a Venmo and be like, "Tip me while I perform at home." Like, a lot of people are questioning where their next dollar comes from.

Now, what I did do with my drag granddaughters is, like, we performed once on TV... not on TV but, you know what I mean, live on cam, for people's enjoyment. Like, we didn't put Venmos up. We did it for the passion of the art to inspire people, to make people be lightened up during times like this, for people who have lost their jobs or can't work, it's like, "Here, we're here to

give you entertainment. We don't have our hands out asking for tips. We want you to enjoy what we do." Now, that's not disrespecting any queen that did put a Venmo up. That's... that was just my personal feel about it. I, I didn't feel right doing it. But I also know a lot of queens do drag for a living, and when that pandemic happened, you can't get unemployment. [Laughs] I had two jobs, so I was able to get unemployment, you know? But people who do drag as their source of income, when the pandemic hit, I understand why they were performing and putting Venmos up because there went their source of income.

Julia: Okay. And then, how do you identify in terms of, like, sex, gender identity, and gender expression outside of drag?

Ceduxion: Um, like, I have a rotted, rotted eyelash, on, but I identify as transgender. I dress every day. Like, what I do every day... my makeup that I do every day is totally different from my stage makeup. And yes, Marcus is around, just not as often. Um, not necessarily questioning, um, my id-- my identity, but taking my time to make sure. I know people who have went from male to transgen-- transsexual female and then went back to male. So, like, I don't want to be that person to transition and then undo it. I know somebody who's done that three or four times. [Laughs] Like... and I'm... that's not my place to say, "What are you going to do?" but, like, that's got to get expensive.

Julia: So, what pronouns do you use in and outside of drag then?

Ceduxion: Um, depends on who speaking to me. If it's someone who doesn't know me, um, I prefer they say she while I'm a transgender. Um, if I'm not in face, um, definitely he. But people that grew up with, I know sometimes it's hard, I don't get bent out of shape about it, you know. It just... it really just depends on who's talking to me. And I... and if I feel that they're being disrespectful, I'll let them know. But I... like I said, I know, some people who, like, I went to high school with, they're not in the culture, it may be hard for them to adapt, or they only see me as Marcus. And then if, if it gets to be too much, I'll say, "Hey..." so, I mean, I'm pretty lenient. I know some people are very tight wound about that. Everybody... just everybody's different.

Julia: Um, how did drag influence your sex and gender identity?

Ceduxion: Oh, I was very anti. I used to run and take it off soon as I started. [Laughs] Um, then this, this comfort just set in, and that's about the best way that I can describe it. I just got comfortable. And then, I like to dress... like, the way I dress, I like putting my outfits together better when I'm a female, like, everyday outfits, like my little body dress [unclear], I like all that better than just putting on jeans and a t-shirt or whatever, I don't know. I don't know, I just... it just, a comfort set in that wasn't there before, and so I rolled with it. I mean I don't... I don't think you should question it. I think if it feels good then do it, you know? That's the only way you're going to see.

Julia: And then, how did drag influence how you think about gender?

Ceduxion: Totally expression. I just had, actually... this sounds funny, but I had this conversation with my Verizon rep. 'cause he was asking about gender identity, and he... and he was talking about his son. And, you know, his son identifies as a boy, but he was like, "I don't

know what I would do if he said, 'Daddy I identify as a girl.'" I said, "Well, then, you just be there for him." I said, "You have lived your life. Times are different now from when you grew up." I said, "It's about expression. You don't know how someone feels on the inside. You just know your perception. You see what you believe to [unclear] a little boy and that's how he should identify. So, you don't know what's going on inside." So, I believe drag has allowed people to express not just what people see on the outside, but you get to see who the person is on the inside as well. And I think it has accelerated in the past couple years, and it's good that people are finally living their lives for themselves instead of, you know, conforming all the time.

Julia: And then, how did drag impact and change your life?

Ceduxion: I'm sorry, say it again? Yeah...

Julia: How has drag impacted or changed your life?

Ceduxion: Oh man. I am overwhelmed by how people receive me. Like, I may not be famous with Brad Pitt, but I'm definitely somewhat of a celebrity. And, like, people get excited and run in place and scream and hug me, and I'm like, "It's just me," like... [Laughs] But, they... like, drag definitely is a form of celebrity, most definitely. Like... so, I mean, I, kind of, was popular... I was popular in high school. Drag has taken that to a whole 'nother level.

And, like, also, drag has, like... I realize what it does for people. It's not just entertainment. Case in point, there's a girl that came up to me couple years ago and said, "I want to thank you," and I was like, "For what?" And she's like, "Well, you're one of my favorite drag queens." I said, like, "Thank you." She said, "But I come to every show that you are at." And I said, "I appreciate your support." And she goes, "No, you don't understand, your entertainment makes me so happy, and when you're on the microphone, it makes me happy, it makes me laugh." She says, "You provide my escapism."

And I don't use drugs, and she was addicted to heroin. So, there was a time in Champaign, 'cause we had shows every week, she was coming to Champaign every week to the shows, and that's how long she was clean. She looked forward to going to the shows. My performance, for whatever reason... and that was the first time I actually had interacted with her. I hadn't interacted with her previously. But for whatever reason, whatever I did on the microphone, whatever I was doing, kept her from using drugs. And you never would think as a performer that you are doing more for someone than just performing, until they say that. And I've had other people come up to me, not as deep as that, and be like, "You know, I was having a bad day, but watching you today got rid of that." So, that's why I think queens need to appreciate the art more than just for the money.

Julia: Wow, wow. Um, so did drag impact your confidence as a person, uh, and, like, did... like, even when you're outside of drag, does that still, like, impact your confidence?

Ceduxion: I probably would... I don't want to say boosted it 'cause I never was, like, not confident, but it definitely, I guess, enhanced and boosted at the same time, but I don't want to seem like that I was a shy or, um, introverted person, 'cause I never was that. Um, but I just... I say if you're in drag you can get away with more things, for sure. [Laughs] 'Cause people just...

like, you slap someone on the butt, and they be like, "Ha, ha, ha," and if I wasn't in drag, they may not. [Laughing] It might not go over so well. Um, but it definitely makes life more fun. [Phone ringing] Sorry about that.

Julia: That's good. That's good. Okay. So, if you could go back in time, like, to the beginning of your drag career, what advice would you give your younger self?

Ceduxion: Oh god. Oh, well, everything is a learning process. Um, it sounds bad to say, but some of the people I associated with... I think that's in everybody's past, whether it's drag or not. Some people you associated with, you kind of wish you hadn't. So, like, I definitely would have done... not put so much faith in certain people because there's a saying that all advice is not good advice. And some people will help you, and some people will help you fail. So, like, you have to question people's intentions, which is really bad to say, but in retrospect, I see that a lot of people, when I started drag, didn't have my... didn't have good intentions. So, I definitely would have dodged that bullet.

Julia: So, I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag, or vice versa, how drag has impacted your identities. Uh, I was wondering if you could share a little about how one or more of your social identities, such as, like, you know, your gender, race, class, age, geography even, religion, sexuality, or anything else, you know, um, and the interaction of the social identities even, have impacted your experience of drag, or how has drag impacted your experience of this social identity? So, I know we talked a little bit about gender, uh, already, but if you want to touch on any of the other identities or [unclear] I didn't mention.

Ceduxion: Um, I mean, I have... like, I get asked like, "What is it like to be..." for lack of a better word, gay?" And I say, "All the ignorances that plague heterosexual society, plague homosexual society." I was like, "Some of the stereotypes are in both societies." Like, so I identify as pansexual, um, and that blows a lot of people's minds. [Laughs] And, uh, even some other... like, and I get from straight people, and I get it from other LGB--LGB-- ah, LGBT members. And then, my drag granddaughter said something to me, uh, 'cause my drag granddaughter now has a trans man husband. And the only reason that my drag granddaughter has that is because of something I said. And it was because I was like, "Why do I have to limit my menu?" I said, "My menu is determined by my peers, and I don't like that," I said, "I like what I like, and I don't like the fact that I have to justify it to anyone."

And... 'cause he was blown away that I was still sleeping with women. And then, after I said that, I don't know how many years later, he starts dating a trans man, and he comes up to me, he says, "I would have never done this if I would have never heard you say that." And I say, you only got one chance on this earth, and I'm not even living my life to full capacity, nobody is. But I am glad that I've been able to break down the barriers and the walls that have been implemented by society and live my life for myself.

So, I get stereotyped for still being Black, and then as a Black queen, that's stereotype. Like, I get... I don't know, like, I get judged on if I decide to do Britney Spears. But I tell people, "Music is not label. You think I shouldn't do Britney Spears because, I guess, she's not Whitney Houston or whatever." I do whatever music I want to. I don't have to be in a box. And that drag

has... by me being that bold and that loud, other people have kind of... it kinda has helped other people have the smoke clear. I just went through this conversation with my... I have a lot of drag kids, but another granddaughter that was like, "I want to do Jill Scott, but I don't feel like I should because I'm a skinny white girl." I was like, "Music is for everyone. Nobody says, 'That's Black people music, that's white people music.'" "Yeah, but I don't want people to be mad at me in the audience to think that I..." I was like, "You're not being disrespectful because you like the song or you like the artist." I said, "If somebo--" I said, [unclear]. But drag is like being a DJ. You're never going to be able to please everybody in the audience; all you can do is try. There's always going to be somebody doesn't like what you do, what will you play, da-da-da. I was like, "Do Jill Scott." So, now they're going to do Jill Scott.

So, like, there's just all... all the societal pressures exist within the community, LGBT community as well, I guess people all expect because we're trying to get others to be open-minded, that there's not closed-minded people in our community, which there totally is.

Julia: So, then, how do you define drag?

Ceduxion: Oh, I always say drag is accented. And I tell people, "If you take a pen," and I've said this for years, "if you take a pen and put a dot on a piece of paper, and then you put that pen back on that dot, and then move it to the left or the right, all you did was accent that dot, and made it longer. You dragged it. You dragged from one point to another point, and that's what drag is." It... the minute you put on lashes, the minute you put on a ponytail, you're accenting something from its normal state, and that's all drag is to me. It's... and... well, that's all, but, of course, like I said, expression, but that's how I define it.

And I say, the only time, the only time how your drag matters is if you're in a competition. Other than that, express yourself. When you enter a competition there's guidelines, there's boxes [unclear] check, so then it does matter how you look, perform, convey. But if you're not doing that, it doesn't really matter what my opinion is or the next person's opinion is, express yourself, drag how you want to.

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

Ceduxion: Well, definitely, like I said, expression is number one, but it's, kind of, have changed over the years. Mentalities have changed. And now, now I feel like... if I'm being honest, I feel like drag has become a commodity. Like, now straight venues are seeing that drag is a cash flow and, um, so now it's a... it's a business venture. Um, I've said for years that drag is about entertainment not orientation, and I prob-- I think I was the first queen in my hometown to do a drag show not at a designated gay bar and continue to do so across my city. So, I was like, "You guys, Las Vegas figured this out years ago." Las Vegas had drag queens hosting shows and events a long time ago. They weren't in gay bars. They understand that it was entertainment. Now, the rest of the country is starting to catch on what Las Vegas has been doing for years. So, drag is turned into a business venture as well. Um, but like I said, expression first, most definitely.

Julia: Do you think that drag is, like, sexual, um, and if you do, like, how, or really in, like, what way do you think it's sexual, and also, like, why?

Ceduxion: In, in a perform—uh, depending on your performance, I, like... I mean, if you see a queen perform Rihanna S&M it's not going to be in a ball gown, you know? So, I mean, I think it depends on the song that you do, but I don't believe that there is sexual gratification, or that they're turned on by doing it but... I can't speak for everyone; I know that I'm not. It's just basically trying to, I mean, like, do what most of the world does and sell sex, you know? Um, but maybe someone may enjoy it more than just a performance. I... but I can't say that I've met someone who was turned on by it.

Julia: So, you mentioned that you'd never seen an episode of RuPaul's Drag Race but that you have seen clips and you know a lot of the girls. Um, but how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race? I mean, I guess, even though you haven't seen it, how do you feel about...?

Ceduxion: Oh, uh, it's catch-22. I know, I know, it's on... if it's on TV, it's about ratings. [Laughing] I already know that. Um, I'm not going to say this person's name, but one of my friends that was on it was kind of hurt because they prompted her to act a certain way, and she became unpopular on the show. And she is 0% not that person that they had her portray on TV. So, I know, I know it's about ratings. But I feel it's a... it's good that it allows drag to enter everyday people's homes, I guess. But it's bad because, if you've never been around drag, then people are going to assume that that's how all drag is, you know? So, that's... it's a catch-22. [Laughs]

Julia: If you could change one thing about, like, drag, or the drag scene, or the community, even, what would it be and why?

Ceduxion: Man, I don't know what I would change. That's a very good question. I don't think that I would change anything. I think... I think growth is key, and you have to go through experiences to grow. So, I wouldn't change 'cause you have... 'cause some of the obstacles we encounter is gonna make us stronger. Uh, but I don't think I would change anything. Um, yeah. I don't... I don't have an answer other than I probably wouldn't. Like, I appreciate what I have went through with drag. I appreciate the, the barriers that I have knocked down. I wouldn't want to be easy, because that contributes to... me breaking down those barriers has opened doors for others, you know what I mean? You have to acknowledge the struggle, most definitely.

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

Ceduxion: [Laughs] That all of us are bitches. [Laughs] And then RuPaul's Drag Race doesn't help that either. [Laughs] Um, that every drag queen wants to be a woman. And it's, kind of, popular... like, it's, kind of, popular now to date a drag queen, but when I started, like... and this is before I even dressed every day, like, if I talked to a guy and then I told him that I did drag, he didn't want to talk to me. Like, if I talked to a gay guy and say, "Hey, yeah, I do drag," they'd stop talking to me. So, it's not quite... so, the mentality has changed, so that's good. But, yeah, I think that's just a really big misconception that most people assume that you want to be a woman, or that we're going to be bitchy.

Julia: Where do you think that those come from?

Ceduxion: Oh, well, stereotypes are in place because there are people out there that fit that mold, and that's... that's what's... the stereotype is pushed more than the, the contradictory people, you know what I mean? So, like, I just think that that's always... just kind of, like, when it came to two men dating, the feminine one was automatically the bottom, and then the masculine was automatically the top. And that's, kind of, 80s-90s thinking. And then... or if two lesbians dated, and both of them were of a masculine nature, then, then definitely they shouldn't be together. And that wasn't just heterosexual society, that was the LGBT society too. But things have changed. But like I said, the world we live in will push stereotypes much, much harder than... they'll be like, "Hey, not all people are this way," you know? So, I think... I think that's why, I think that's why that's out there.

Julia: Mm-hmm. Uh, what do you think would help to change this, like, these stereotypes?

Ceduxion: Ah, oh, I always say that about any and everything is life's experience. Like, you can go on TV and say, "Not all queens are bitchy," but people are going to pay attention to the bitchy queen, 'cause the bitchy queen is going to get the most attention. You can go out there and say you know, "All country people are not racist," but then the racist country guy spouting all the slurs is going to get the most attention versus the guy that saying... that's talking peace, you know? Um, so life's experiences, and let's just hope that people don't adhere to those stereotypes and meet a queen that's not bitchy or catty like that.

Julia: Mm-hmm. So, last question, uh, if you chose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag what would it be?

Ceduxion: Please appreciate it as an art form 'cause a lot of work goes into it. From picking the songs... from picking the songs, the outfits, the costumes, to, uh... I... like, one of my... one of my biggest hindrances is when I get on stage, I fall into this box, and I, like... and when I perform, I kinda, sorta do the same moves. And then, when the show's over, and I dance around, I do these moves, and I'll be like, "Why didn't I do that during my performance?"

But when you do drag and you're performing, you have to remember to lip-sync, you have to look for tips, you have to make sure your earring didn't fall off, you have to make sure that your hair doesn't fall off. Like, so you got all these things going on while you're trying to entertain. And then, if you feel a bobby pin get loose or jewelry starting to slip, then you're like, "Oh, oh, I'm about to lose a earring." So, then you're trying to keep a calm face on stage and be aware of everything that's going on with you at the same time. It's a lot. That is multi-tasking. They say people don't multitask, but trying to make sure you lip-sync and dance at the same time, get your tips, make sure your hair stays on, and your ear... like, it's a whole lot. A whole lot. So, definitely, appreciate drag as an art.

Julia: Yes, for sure. Well, thank you so much for your time today. Again, I really, really appreciate it. I loved hearing your story and learning all about your drag and your community. Very honored to have spoken to you today.

Ceduxion: Thank you. I'm glad we finally got... I'm glad the Zoom went good. [Laughs]

Julia: Yeah, me too, me too. Well, have a great rest of your night, and thank you so much.

Ceduxion: Thank you. Let me know how it goes, and if you need anything else, just send me an email.

Julia: I will. Thank you so much.

Ceduxion: Thank you, Julia, have a good day.

Julia: Bye.

Interview with Claire Voyant

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Interviewer: Yes, I will. Okay. So, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Claire Voyant: Okay. This is, kind of... I almost have, like, two experiences with this because my first introduction to drag was very young, very, very young, and it was Divine. Um, and so, I was, like, introduced to, like, Divine through, like, John Waters' movies and things like that. And that's, like, really heavy to, like, first introduce someone to drag through Divine, because Divine has like... either they're messy and it's like... uh, it's like... there's, like, this, this quality about Divine that, like, makes you uncomfortable, but, like, that's, kind of, like, the art about it. And so, when I saw Divine and when that was my first introduction to drag, I'm like, "Oh wow, so if this is drag, I don't want anything to do with drag because this is just too weird, makes me too uncomfortable, I don't like it.:

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: And it wasn't the fact that, like, Divine was, like, dressed up as a woman. It was more so Divine's just, like, really nasty and really messy and, like, that made me uncomfortable.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: And so, that was, like, one of my first experiences being, like, introduced to drag. Um, but then, when I was, like, older and when I was in college, everyone was talking about RuPaul's Drag Race, which I'm sure is going to come up a plethora of times. Um, and I sat down with one of my friends and I watched it, and I'm like, "Wow, this is incredible. Like, people really, like, showcasing themselves and their art, and that's, like, really cool to see on national television." So, you know, like, as a kid, it was through Divine, but, like, as an older adult, it was definitely through Drag Race.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awesome. Um, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Claire Voyant: Interesting. Okay. Um, well, I studied acting at ISU, um, and so, I have, like, a lot of, like, theater training and, like, we were doing a lot of, like, gender bent roles and, like, scripts and things like that. Um, so that was, like, kind of, a point where I started like, like, like dabbling in it you could say. Um, so, like, I would do, like, certain characters for shows but, like, I also was, like, dressing up, like, as a woman to, like... to, like, go out and stuff like that. And so, like, that was, kind of, like, fun and it was a way for me to, like, get my feet wet without actually getting my feet wet.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: Um, and so then, when I moved to colle--when I moved from college to Chicago, um, that's when I started doing drag in the city. And I consider my first time performing in drag to really be, like, when I started doing drag because I started... that was almost, kind of, like, a commitment for me, in a way. Um, does that make sense?

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Yes.

Claire Voyant: Yeah? Okay. Um, so, uh, that was just, like, a really cool... it was, like... it was probably when I started, so that was, let's see... god, I'm so bad at days. Um, that had to be October of 2015, 2016, I wanna say. So, I've been doing drag for almost, like, five or six years, so it's... not... maybe not six, maybe like five years. But it's, like, been a while. Um, and the other question was got me into it or what...?

Interviewer: Yeah, why did you start?

Claire Voyant: Why did I start?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: Um, I suppose it was an amazing way for me to really express myself. I loved... I loved acting, I thought it was really cool. But, um, one of the things that really, like, kind of, appealed to me about drag was that I'm a very controlling person. I like my hands in the pot. And so, um, I wanna be in charge of my own makeup. I wanna be in charge of my costumes. I wanna be in charge of, like, the material I'm performing. I wanna be in charge... you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: And with, like, theater you can't really do that. You're, kind of, like, given a script, and you're, like, "This is your part and this is the role that you play." And so, I think with drag, that was, like, kind of, really appealing to me that I'm like, "Woah, you're telling me I get to make all of the decisions? Like, I'm responsible for myself?" I'm like, "That sounds awesome, that sounds incredible."

Um, and so, that's what I think, like, really got me started into it, and that's, kind of, when I started, like, really, um, like, exploring with, like, not only my sexual orientation but also my gender identity, and it, kind of, like, snowballed from there.

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

Claire Voyant: That's a good question. Um, I've always had an incredibly supportive, like, family, um, and a group of friends as well. And, um... which is really odd because I had a really difficult time coming out in life; it took me, like, until my third year of college. So, what's odd is that I literally came out junior year, which was probably 2014, I wanna say. Um, and then I started, like, dabbling in drag immediately after that. And so, I think what was so challenging for me to come out was, like, not only I'm gay but I'm gay, I'm a drag queen, you know what I mean? Or, like, I'm gay and this is really interesting, like. I really wanna explore, like, this

aspect of our culture, of my culture as a gay man, um, and that sort of an aspect to it. Um, and so, I think my family, they were always fine with me being gay, but they were never quite fine with the drag aspect to it. And so, that's what I think they had trouble understanding was, like... they're viewing gay as just literally being physically attracted to the same sex but, um, it was more so that there were a lot of other strings attached to that. There's the culture, and, like, they didn't un-- they don't understand the culture, they don't know the culture. And so, it's, it's challenging to, to express that to them.

And so, they were... they weren't cool with the whole drag thing. But when I started, like, doing it, and when I started, like, becoming more active on social media and on Facebook and, like, Instagram and, like, things like that, my friends were seeing it and their parents were seeing it, and they started really enjoying it and really liking it. And that's when my parents started, like, coming around to it. And they're like, "Well, you know, maybe we should be supportive blah-blah-blah-blah-blah."

Um, and my dad always had a harder time with it than my mom. Um, my mom came onto it pretty quick after that, but my dad still takes, like, a little bit of, like, a push every so often. But he's still, like, um... he knows, like, I love to make things and things like that. And so, I got, um, I got this package in the mail [laughing], it was from my dad, and he was like... bird feeder tops, like, the tops of bird feeders. And he was like... he put it in a Ziplock bag, and he wrote "tittie armor" on it.

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Claire Voyant: And I just think that's, like, a funny story because, like, it... he still has an issue, or he still... he still feels uncomfortable with the fact that I do drag, but it's, like, those moments that show that he's working on it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: And I think that's really cool.

Interviewer: Yeah. The fact that he saw that, and he was like, "Na, he needs that." That's useful. He'll use that.

Claire Voyant: Yeah, right? Yeah, so, like, that's, like, really cool. And then, you know, like, I think what he's also trying to understand too is, like, when I explain, like, the business aspect to him or, like, the scene aspect to him, he's, like, way more intrigued, because I think he views drag as, like, just a very surface level thing, like prancing around, like, and really just not doing anything or accomplishing anything. But when I explain, like, the dynamics of it, um, and what it's like to work with bars, and what it's like to make money... and then, like, he's also like really into science. And so, when I explain makeup and why makeup works the way that it does and things like that, he likes understanding the whys, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: And so, he's slowly, slowly, slowly coming on board, um, which is really cool. But my mom's been really supportive

Interviewer: That's awesome.

Claire Voyant: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yes. Um, where did your drag name come from?

Claire Voyant: Ooh. Um, I am, like, really... I'm, like, super spiritual, um, I like astrology and everything like that, um... And so, I'm a Scorpio, and Scorpios are, um, like, deemed as one of the most intuitive signs of the zodiac. Um, and so, I, like, wanted to really, like, represent that in my drag name. So, clairvoyant is, like, someone who sees the future, like, very intuitive, like... that's, kind of, like, where that dynamic comes from.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you have to, like, go through... did you have other things in mind, or was it just, like, that immediately, and you ran with it?

Claire Voyant: No. I went through... this is a horrible name.

Interviewer: [Laughs] Okay.

Claire Voyant: You better not put this in your paper.

Interviewer: Okay.

Claire Voyant: [Laughs] No. Um, I originally had the name Prisma Light [laughs] and I'm like... I, like, sat with it, I think, for literally, like, maybe a week, and I'm like, "This is trash..."

Interviewer: Yeah. [Laughing]

Claire Voyant: Like "Horrible," like, "I'm not using this."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: Um. And so, then what's odd too is that Claire, kind of, like, just popped up in my mind. It's like people ask me this question a lot, and, like, I know the intuitive side is how I got to that name. But it almost feels like the name was, kind of, like, handed to me from, like, something just a little bit bigger. I don't know I've always, like, kind of, felt that, like, it was, kind of, like, just supposed to be like meant to be thing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: Um, and then, I honestly, too, um, two years into my drag, I was actually thinking about changing it to Styx, like, S-T-Y-X, which is the name of the river in hell and the underworld.

Interviewer: Okay.

Claire Voyant: Um, I like the band. Um, I'm always, like, you know, really, like, obsessed with, like, the darker things in life and, like, the occult. And so, like, that, kind of, like... I really liked the sound of it, and it just... it felt right.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: So, I never did it, but I was... I was very close to doing it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Um, there are a lot of terms for types of styles of drag, from drag queen to drag queen, to glamor, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen and camp queen and others. Are there any particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? And what kind of drag you do and the style of it?

Claire Voyant: Wow, that's a big question. Um, well, what's interesting too is I think that drag is such a new art form, you know, when I look at... when I look at other art forms like, you know, like, dance, theater, like music, like, um, performance, right, they've originated over thousands of years, right? Drag is newer, like, considerably newer. And so, because it's so new, I feel like it's still fluctuating, and it's still, like, growing. And I think people... I think people all have a different definition of what drag is, right? Some people are like, "Well, it's, like, when you impersonate a woman." Like, that's obviously the big one.

But for me, at least, like... and then, also, people will say like, "It's when you impersonate a woman," or they'll say, "It's all based in gender," or they'll say, "It's not based in gender." Or it's, like, you go back and forth, and, it's like, everyone has their own definition of drag. So, that question is, kind of, difficult to answer. But for me, I like to think that drag is self-expression, like, bottom-line self-expression, like, it's an art. I really don't think gender is involved because, sometimes, you know, like, it's, it's more you're taking what's there, and you're, like, amplifying it. It's exaggeration, right? It's like scraping the bottom of the barrel and making it somewhat larger than life, and, like, that's drag.

So, like, I would identify, like, Kiss, the band, like, the makeup, that's drag. I would identify Cirque du Soleil, like, that's drag, like, a lot of things that are larger than life. So, it doesn't necessarily have to be based in, like, gender performance. A lot of people want it to be, and I think it can be, if that's what you wanna do, but I think it's more so, like... it's way more general than that.

Um, but going back to it, so I really don't feel like I identify with a particular titles. Sometimes I'll use drag queen because I feel, like, it's easy for people to understand. Do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: It's like, I'm not gonna sit down and have this five-minute conversation with everyone that I meet saying, "Well, I'm, like, a drag performer, but I'm not drag queen," and they're like, "Well, what do you mean?" Like, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: It feels like I say that to make things easier, to make the conversation easier. Do I really, like, fully identify it? Probably not. I probably identify with something more, like, just a drag performer, something that's like... doesn't really, like, suggest gender, but it does suggest drag, um, it suggests performance, you know what I mean? I feel like there's a lot of tags that go

on with drag queen that I don't always identify with it. But that's the term that people know the most, so I use it.

Interviewer: Gotcha. Yes. Um, who or what has influenced your drag?

Claire Voyant: Let's see, um, I've always been influenced by... like, I love fashion, I like... Like, you know, Alexander McQueen I think is, like, so cool. Iris van Herpen, like, they're just unbelievably abstract, like, creative artists that use materials. So, I think that's... like, it's like a physical, like, um, a physical thing which I really like. So, I generally like artists who use, like, physical materials.

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: But, um, I don't know what I'm trying to say there. But, um, like, in that same vein, though, I really like, uh, you know, Dahli and, like, surrealism and things like that. And so, I, kind of, feel like that, kind of, fits in that... in that, like, Alexander McQueen box, you know? Um, I really like Tim Burton. I really like darker things. Um, astrology is a huge influence to me. Tarot is a huge influence to me. Um, I love animals. Like, I'm... like, animals play a kind of a large role in my work. Um, I really like prosthetics and things like that, so I almost, like... And that's like... when you, like, put a prosthetic on, and you're like a monster, you're really taking the gender out of it, like, completely. Like, you're no longer a man or woman, you're just this, this thing, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: And so, like, I think that's why, like, animals are really interesting to me because, like, for some reason, I really don't, like, usually identify a gender with an animal, I don't say like, "Oh, that's a female dog." Like, it's a dog.

Interviewer: Yeah. A dog's a dog, yes.

Claire Voyant: So, I think, like, that's a big part of my art, um, like, textures and, like, colors and things like that. Like, things in nature I'm really inspired by. So, like, I would say things in that vein. Do you think that's a good enough answer for you?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Yeah, absolutely. Um, do you consider drag political or your drag political?

Claire Voyant: Um, I feel, like, the go-to answer for a lot of people would be yes, like, it is political. Um, I mean, you are making an incredible statement by, like, stepping out of your house and expressing who you are and, like, what you are. So, I think, like, in that sense, like, it's rad—it's rad-- drag is radical self-expression, that's the best way to put it. And so, if you're displaying that in public, you know, I would think that that would make a political statement. But do, like, I actively go out with the intention of saying, "I'm going to make a political statement"? No, I'm just going to go out and, like, really express who I am, and if that makes you comfortable, great; if it makes you uncomfortable, like, great. Like, I don't care. So, I feel like it's less for me about the political, like, expression, um, and more about, like, the internal, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, so, can we just take a minute to talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Where you perform, how many times—like, all of that kind of stuff.

Claire Voyant: Oh, okay. Um, I... well, it's odd right now because of COVID, obviously.

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: But if COVID wasn't a thing, um, I work at Berlin, um, I work at Splash, I work at Replay, and I work at Scarlet. Um, those are, like, four my major bars. Um, I've also worked at, like, Roscoe's, um, and, like, Charlie's and things like that. So, I generally work in the area of North Halsted. It used to be called Boystown, but they changed the name to North Halsted because it's more inclusive, which is really great to see.

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: But, like, that'll... maybe you might recognize the area or the neighborhood better if you heard Boystown.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: Um, so, that's, like, where I work. Um, at Berlin, I have a show called Slay. It's like a drag horror show. So, that's where I like the... like, occult and darkness comes from. And at Splash I have a show called Belladonna which is like a witchcraft theme show. Um, so those are really cool. Um, at Replay... Replay is a very, like... it's like... it's a... I would not consider it like a drag bar, but there's drag there. Um, and it's more, like, of a place for people to relax and chill and have a drink versus go out and party. So, I do host, like, an American Horror Story, like, viewing party there that a lot of people really enjoy. And then at Scarlet, um, I used to do... like, it was a Lady Gaga night because Lady Gaga is one of my favorite people.

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: But, uh, I now just submitted a show that's gonna happen called On the Rocks which is gonna be like a celebration of, like, um, classic rock and roll. So, like that'll be really cool too.

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: I'm trying to think. I have a show in Geneva which is kind of fun, um, that's more, like... we try to, like, do a choicer, kind of, like, seasonally, um, and that's called Diamonds in the Rough. And it's a really cool opportunity because... um, very similar to, like, how I... how you came to the drag workshop at ISU, I really like to take drag and, kind of, make it accessible to people who don't normally have that accessibility, you know, either whether you are not 21 yet and you can't get in the club where drag primarily takes place, or, like, maybe you maybe don't know where to go to look for drag or that sort of thing. So, I really like taking drag into places where it feels like it doesn't have a lot of representation. Um, so, like, the suburbs is where that the show is. And so, that's a really great opportunity because no one's really seen a drag performer before, and no one really has... like, understands that drag can be many different things. And so, like, that's... I like, kind of, branching out of that bubble as well.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. When COVID wasn't happening, how often were you performing?

Claire Voyant: Um, I was probably performing... I keep a... I just got my new one. You're in here as well, There's an interview section.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Claire Voyant: But, um, I was probably was performing... I perform... in October. I perform a lot, like, a lot. I think last year, I tried to take as many gigs as I could in October, and I did, um, like, 32 gigs in 31 days.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Claire Voyant: There were some days where I was, like, doubling up, and it was a lot. Um, but normally, like, on a normal month, I'll probably perform, like, six to eight times a month, which is, like, maybe, twice a week, once or twice a week.

Interviewer: How long does it usually take you to get ready for your shows?

Claire Voyant: Depends on what I'm doing. So, um, if I'm doing like a normal face, it'll take maybe two-and-a-half hours, maybe three hours. It's kind of weird because, you know, you have to, like... you get makeup, and then have to pack a bag, and then, like, you go there, and then you get dressed there. And so, it's, kind of, like... it's all these, like, little stages. You're not really, kind of, like, really doing everything at once. You're, kind of, doing it in separate pieces. But it's probably about two-and-a-half to three hours.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, what are the biggest challenges in doing drag and being a drag artist?

Claire Voyant: Hmm, that's a really good question. I don't think I've ever heard that. Um, I think some of the biggest challenges are... it's like, you remember... you know how, um, sometimes, like, people's, like, biggest love is also their biggest hate, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: So, for me, I think it's, it's, it's the scene, and by the scene I mean, like, the people that I work with. You know? Sometimes, they drive me absolutely crazy, and sometimes I absolutely love them. But one of those things I think I'm learning about drag scenes, especially the drag scene here in Chicago is that... I actually had this conversation with someone last night, so it's kind of interesting. Uh, I think as, like, gay people we really, um... we don't experience a childhood in the normal sense of, like, a heterosexual, straight person would, you know? It's, like, we come out so late in life, or we come out later in life, and all the time before that, like, we were, kind of, forced to be something that we're not. Right? So, it's almost like we're living, like, a very falsified lifestyle.

And then, we come out, what's really interesting is that I think we, kind of, experience this, like, Renaissance where it's almost like we're growing up again, but we're doing it as our authentic self. So, I find that... the reason why this relates to your question is because I find that, like, sometimes the attitudes in the drag scene can be very, like, high school-y. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: So, you know, there's, there's groups of people. You have the cheerleaders and the jocks and the nerds and, like, the alternative people, you know what I mean? Like, that's, kind of, very much the dynamic of the scene. And when you have, like, high schools like that, you know, there's drama, there is, like, chitchat, there's gossip, you know? It's like now... there's pointing fingers, and, like, doing things. And so, I think that's probably one of the biggest challenges, for me, at least, is, like, trying to keep the professionalism where it needs to be. Because, you know, sometimes, like, this is a job for some people, you know? It's partially... it's probably a part-time job for me, it's not a full-time job, it's a part-time job. And for other people, it's just a hobby, you know?

And so, people, kind of, put various levels of, um, like, dedication towards it. And so, I think that, kind of, messes with people when it comes to... when it comes to, like, how you should treat this as a career, versus how you should treat this as a hobby. And so, people, sometimes, don't take it seriously, and that's kind of... it becomes bothersome.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm sure.

Claire Voyant: Hopefully that makes sense and answers your question.

Interviewer: Yeah. I just... yeah. So, it's just really cliquy?

Claire Voyant: It can get really cliquy, you know? And especially when you go to, like, New York, like, there's cliques in New York, there's... it's generally when you go to bigger populations, like, bigger populated places, you'll experience more cliquy-ness, you know? And it's not fun, it's not fun.

Interviewer: Yeah. It's... [Laughing]

Claire Voyant: And so, I think one thing that we really try to do here in Chicago is, one of the coolest things about Chicago is we have drag of all types. Like, literally, we have a huge pageant scene, we have a huge club scene, we have, like, people that are more alternative, and that are more, like, um, beauty-based, you know? There is, like... there's a drag of all different types. And there are cliques, but I think sometimes some people try to... making an effort to, like, get outside of their clique and, like, go support other art forms and other forms of drag that you don't typically see. So, that's, kind of, the cool thing about Chicago, but the cliques are definitely evident.

Interviewer: Yeah. Is there anything other than that that you think is, um, like, unique to Chicago when it comes to the drag scene?

Claire Voyant: Sorry, can you repeat that?

Interviewer: Like, um, with what you were just saying about all the different types of drag and people, kind of, trying to come out of their cliques more, is there anything, um, like, also that you think is unique to Chicago that you wouldn't necessarily see in other places?

Claire Voyant: Yeah, I do. I think Chicago is a, um... earlier, your question was, do you think drag is politically, um... what was the question? It was like politically...?

Interviewer: If it's political, yeah.

Claire Voyant: Yeah. It was, do you think drag is political? And I would say that a lot of people... a lot of people, if you're... if they're interviewing other Chicago performers, I bet you everyone in Chicago is gonna say yes to that question. Um, but I think Chicago, especially, because there's a huge, like, social justice presence here, that is really awesome to see, like, really, really awesome. Um, where I think we don't see it and other scenes, like, in LA and New York.

And so, during, um, you know, the main core of the Black Lives Matter protests over the summer, a lot of it was being, like, run by drag queens. And, like, that's awesome to me, like, that's so cool. And so, um, I would say that drag, like, is political in that way, and I would say that's what makes Chicago very unique too, because I don't think we saw that from other drag communities around the country. So, I would say that's, that's another reason that Chicago is unique. I think we have all different types of drag, we're very diverse in that. And I think that we, like, really focus on social justice, and I think that's, like, super cool.

And we... I think one thing too, we... there was a lot... there was a of drama in the scene this summer. Um, and so, um, people... there's, there's this thing where people are holding people accountable more for, like, their actions and what they do and what they say. Um, and I think, again, in, like, other places, people just, kind of, get away with things, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: So, Chicago, I do think is a very, very special place for drag. It was, like, I've... It's, it's unique in so many ways.

Interviewer: Absolutely. Um, what has COVID-19 meant for your life as a drag artist?

Claire Voyant: Um, this is a good question. Uh, these are good questions. You did a good job on this. Um, no, this one, uh... I think... there is... there is... the drag scene, you have a lot of people coming and going, like, coming and going. Like, you'll have people that do drag for one night, you'll have people that do drag for six months, you'll have people that do drag for years, you know? It's constantly evolving, constantly shifting, constantly changing. You have people coming from out of town, you have people leaving town. And so, it's, like, always different, it's always different.

Um, but one of the big things that's, like, recognizable is that all these people are... they get, like, distracted by the flashy lights, right? They get distracted by, like, the beautiful hair and the gorgeous costumes and the makeup and the attention and the money. There's, like... there's, like, a lot of that glitzy and glamor that really draws people in, right? Um, and it's an issue because I've learned over the years that... I really was so focused on drag, so focused on my art and what I wanted to put out into the world, that I really lost, um, sight of Nick, you know, like, me. Um, because I view Claire as, kind of, an extension of myself. I don't view Claire as like a character I

play. I view Claire as like a side that I do not showcase to... that I... it's almost like the side of me that wanted to be expressed before I, like, came out, right? That's really what Claire is at the core.

Um, and so, people get distracted by this glitzy and glamor. I think they really lose sight of, like, who they are as people. Because drag will slowly, kind of, like, eat away at you over the course of, like, two, three, four years. And it's really, really, really important to make sure you are in tune with who you are at your core, not just your persona, not just drag, but who you are.

And so, COVID's been really great because for a solid year I wasn't doing anything. And I... like, I've always had issues with my body, and so, like, it was a really cool year for me because I started caring for my body more because it's done so much for me. Um, and I've really, like, gotten in tune with myself and, like, my likes and my dislikes, and I feel like I'm not a robot anymore. I feel like I was a robot for a really long time, because drag, kind of, does that to you. Um, but COVID's been really great because it's almost, like, taken me back to my roots, in a way, which I really like.

Um, and then, on top of that, you know, once I... once I, like, sat down and really, um... and really, like, came to terms with, like, who I am and what I want, and, like, started caring for myself, um, like, that's when drag actually started coming back, and, like, that's when I started noticing that there's been a shift in my drag and a shift in how I view drag. And I still want to do drag; I don't want to do drag as much, and, you know, it's like a balance. It was, for me, finding balance.

And so, when it comes to... like, more so, the question was about... less about, like, me and more about my drag, my drag has shifted over the pandemic, because I think we're moving into a very digital age, you know, the fact that we're Zoom calling, you know, the fact that, like, people are ordering things through, like, scan codes. Um, and so, I think that digital drag is going to take off, and it's really going to, um... it's gonna change how we see it.

One thing that, like... like, doing the whole, like, digital drag performances and numbers, it's a lot of fucking work, and I really don't want to invest all that time in it. Um, but I love doing, like, shoots and things like that because I think a photo is, like, worth like a thousand words. And, um, you can really, like, create a moment that, like... that, like, burns in people's memories. And so, why I think that's kind of cool is that the digital is starting to take over. So, now, you have, like, drag performers who aren't just doing, like, a photoshoot, like, you know, they're making themselves fly or, like, you know, they're making themselves appear underwater. And so, like, did they shoot that in the air? Did they shoot that under water? Probably not.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: But, um, the digital aspect to it, I think is, like, really becoming accepted and encouraged when it used to not be. You know, people are like, "Well, that's fake", like, you know, "you didn't do that for real." And I think it's... the digital is almost, like, making the fantasy even bigger, you know, which I think is neat.

Interviewer: Yeah Um, so, next are some more personal questions. Um, how do you identify in terms of sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Claire Voyant: Cool. Um, very similar to the question before, where you were like, "How do you identify? Do you identify as, like, a drag queen or, like, a drag performer? So, I identify as, um, a gay man because I think that makes the most sense to people, you know? Identify a drag queen because that makes the most sense to people. Internally, I feel like I'm probably more so, um, gender-fluid. You know, there are some days where I really embrace that masculine energy that I have, and there are some days that I really embrace that feminine energy that I have. And so, I really don't feel like I'm either one, but I'm more so, like, both. So, I would identify as gender-fluid.

Um, but I also will say I'm a gay man because I think that, just, that's generally where... on the scale, I probably, like, go more towards gay man, and I feel like, I'm not about to have a five-minute conversation, 10-minute conversation on why I feel gender fluid with someone who doesn't understand gender fluidity.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely.

Claire Voyant: You know what I mean? So, does that, kind of...? Is there more to that question?

Interviewer: Yeah, there are more. Um, so, hmm... has... um. Sorry, I'm just trying to think of what you said and eliminate some of these sub-questions, I guess, that I feel like we've already covered. Um, do you think, uh, drag has influenced your sex and gender identities at all, or was that just, kind of, separate from everything?

Claire Voyant: That's a great question. Um, I would... I would say probably yes, you know? I think one thing that, like, um, Claire has really taught me as a person is my confidence. I always had a lot... a lot of issues with self-confidence growing up. Um, and as soon as I started drag, I started understanding that I have power. Um, and so, like, as I... the longer I did it, the more confidence I started developing. And so, now, I feel, like, really comfortable again in my own body, in my own skin and how I connect to people and how I relate to people. And so, um, I feel like that's not necessarily Claire affecting my gender identity or sexuality, but I feel like confidence does play a key part in affecting your gender identity and sexuality and, kind of, coming to terms with who you are authentically.

So, I mean, before, if I... if I were not doing drag, and I were doing something completely different, I would say that I probably would not identify as gender-fluid, which makes me think that drag has impacted that. But I think it's more so, like, Claire's given me the confidence to really, like, reflect on that and express that.

Interviewer: Yeah. That's awesome. Um, so, how has drag impacted or changed you?

Claire Voyant: Well, I feel like we answered that, like...

Interviewer: Yes, I know. [Laughs]

Claire Voyant: Um, I have this book by Magnus Hastings. I don't know, like... I don't know what you're, like, physically doing this project, if you're writing a paper, if you're... just, like, interviews, but this book is really cool, if you can find. Here, it's right here. Okay. Magnus Hastings is a really big photographer in LA. So, he wrote this book called *Why Drag?* It's incredible, check it out. Um, and there is this one page where he... he essentially takes all these photos of all of these performers, and he asks them, "Why drag?" And they literally give an explanation as to why they do drag. Uh, and some of the... some of the answers are really short; some of them are really long. Um, but it's, kind of, like, a really cool... like, if you're looking for, like, more information or anything, like, it's almost like an interview with, like, a bunch of different people. So, that's, kind of, cool. I don't know if you need that for your project.

But the reason why I bring this up is because there is a page in here with these queens from Africa, and, um, he asked them why drag? And, uh, they say... I can't even find the page. See? This is... this is horrible.

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Claire Voyant: Um, they say something along the lines of, like, doing drag makes you a more rounded person, and it makes you more self-accepting of others. And I would 100% agree with that. It's like, I've learned not only so much about myself, I've learned so much about other people. And it's really, like, shaped my perspective of, like, social dynamics, political dynamics, everything like that. And I feel like I would not have that experience if I had not done drag.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Um, let's see. Um, I feel like we've covered a lot already.

Claire Voyant: Yeah, I know we have.

Interviewer: So, I don't want to just keep asking the same things over and over again, different, like, ways of saying it. Um, okay, we're just gonna skip that. Um, what do you think the purpose of drag is?

Claire Voyant: I think everyone has a different purpose in drag. For me, I think it was a lot more to do with myself and, like, coming to terms with my sexual orientation and my gender identity, um, and drag was a way for me to do that. But I think for other people, it's about, you know, activism and giving back and doing something for the world. And so, I think everyone has a different purpose when it comes to drag.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Um, do you think drag is sexual?

Claire Voyant: I think it can be sexual. I don't think all drag is sexual. Um, that's really interesting. I feel, like, um, I as Claire, like, sex is one of probably the three words that I would use to describe Claire. And I think sex is very important, it's very important because I think it's something that everyone relates to. And I am of the belief that you can have a concept, a really, really, really wild or weird concept, and if you sell it sexy, people will buy it. And that goes for literally anything. And so, like, I do believe... I suppose, yeah, in some way drag a sexual because I do feel, like, you are selling sex to sell something else. You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: I do numbers where I put a cage on my head, and I fill it with mice, right? And, like, that's weird. But if you can sell it in some sort of sexy way that people relate to, they buy it, and they want more of it, right? So, like, there's that dynamic when I think it comes to sex and drag. So, like, overtly, like, over-the-top, it is always about sex? No. But I do think it's the art of selling something.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Claire Voyant: Wow, this is a big question.

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Claire Voyant: Um, I think Drag Race has done a lot a lot. I think a lot of people would, would discredit Drag Race saying it's, it's absolutely terrible, XYZ blah-blah-blah. RuPaul's Drag Race has put drag on the map in the... over the world. If we did not have RuPaul's Drag Race, we would not have a plethora of other things that are drag-related today. And that's, kind of, it, period.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: Um, I do think that RuPaul is not a good person. I do think that he is... probably has a little bit of, like, internalized racism, um, where he does not like to put a lot of Black queens on the show, and he's gotten yelled at for that before. I think he has an issue with, um, transphobia, um, and every other season, the re-- big reason why... are you watching this season of Drag Race.

Interviewer: No.

Claire Voyant: Okay. There's a contestant name Gottmik on this season, um, and it's a very big deal because Gottmik, um, was, uh, was a woman who transitioned into a man.

Interviewer: Yes.

Claire Voyant: Um, and that's really cool because, in the past, any trans contestants we've seen are all been men who are transitioning into women, right? And so, that's, kind of, a role reversal, and that's a really big deal, to have someone like that and have that type of representation on the show. And I think... to be honest, I think, um, you know, like, how some people say, like, "You have a token Black friend," or something like that. I think Mik is, kind of, a token, like, trans man. Sorry, my computer is making noise. Um, I think Mik is, kind of, a token trans man for Drag Race. And that's not a good thing to say, you know what I mean? Um, but it's a step in the right direction because they have some sort of representation, you know? It's a stepping stone. But I almost feel like they're, kind of, like, "Well, you know, y'all did us for transphobia in the past, so we're gonna do this for you, and now you can't say that anymore," you know? That's, kind of, how it feels like to me.

Um, so, I don't think RuPaul's a good person, um, but I think Drag Race has done a lot for the world for people's careers, you know, for the perception of drag. So, it's more so, like, do I like Drag Race? I like Drag Race. Do I like RuPaul? I do not like RuPaul, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely.

Claire Voyant: That's probably answer that.

Interviewer: Yeah. [Laughs] Um, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be?

Claire Voyant: The drama. I would change the drama hands-down. It's way too much, way too much. It's constantly, like, bickering, bickering, bickering, and going back and forth, you know, pointing fingers. Like, it is way too dramatic, like... and that's funny. I'm telling drag queens not to be dramatic I feel like that's in a job description. But at the same time, I feel like drag could be so much more progressive and so much more successful if there was less drama.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Um, what do you think are misconceptions people have about drag?

Claire Voyant: I think that drag... um, people view drag as men dressing as women. I think that's the biggest misconception. It's not just that. Um, obviously, gender does play a big role in it for some people, but I don't think, like... I think that would be the biggest misconception. Um, I would also consider another misconception that, you know, I feel like people view it as an art form, but I feel like people don't view it as a viable career, but I do think it's a viable career. Um, so, that would be probably another misconception. Yeah, probably, like, those two.

Interviewer: Yeah. Um, if, uh, you choose one thing... if you could choose one thing, um, you want people to know or learn about drag, what would it be?

Claire Voyant: That's a tough one.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: Um, to know or learn about drag. I feel like, again, I've probably answered this in some facet. Um, can we come back to this one?

Interviewer: This is actually the last question, but you can take as much time as you'd like.

Claire Voyant: The last question? Okay.

Interviewer: If there's more than one, you can just explain those.

Claire Voyant: No worries. Can you... can you repeat it?

Interviewer: Yes. Um, if you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would it be

Claire Voyant: To know or learn about drag. Um, I'm, kind of, drawing a blank on this one, I feel like. Like, part of me, my gut reaction says that, like, going back to our previous conversation, I would want people to know that drag makes you more human, you know? Drag being all about, like, stuff expression, um, really allows you to feel comfortable with your own mind, your own body, your own skin. Um, and I would say that it also allows you to understand

people and relate to the human experience in a very different way that a lot of other careers can't do for you.

One of the coolest things about drag is that I get to work with some of the coolest and weirdest people I've ever met in my life.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Claire Voyant: [Unclear]. And I guarantee you that I couldn't do that in any other field. And so, having all of those different experiences and all that different diversity, I think has just made me a really well-rounded human being. I think that's what I would want other people to know, is that, like, it's... it, like, does so much for the expansion that is you.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely.

Claire Voyant: It's a very big answer. [Laughing]

Interviewer: [Laughing] No, that was perfect. Yeah, that is all the questions I have for you. Thank you so much.

Interview with Cyller

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Natalie: When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Cyller: Oh man, I first heard about drag when I was, like, 18 years old, so probably a long time ago. I hadn't been out yet, and I was just exposed, um, you know, through some friends of mine to the drag community, and that's, kind of, where I first was exposed, yeah, about 18 years old.

Natalie: Okay, awesome. So, then, when did you start performing as a drag artist?

Cyller: Um, I probably... I was performing in 2010. That's... yeah, that's when I first started performing, was in 2010.

Natalie: Okay. And what made you want to do it?

Cyller: Um. So, there was a bar called Novak's back in the day in the Grove, and every Monday night they had a drag king show. And so, once I became legal, um, and was 21, I, you know, would just go out there, and I had some friends that attended Monday night king shows, and they knew folks that were in the shows and friends with some folks in the show, so I just kinda tagged along and went and watched, and I just kinda fell in love with it and that spark just... it just kinda took off.

Natalie: That's awesome. Um, and you're not doing drag anymore?

Cyller: I am not, mm-mm.

Natalie: Okay, when did you stop?

Cyller: Oh man, well, I stopped performing probably... oh man... oh man, um, probably five or six years ago. It's been a little bit of time, but yeah, I was going real strong for a while and then, um, you know, I kinda just started focusing on my career and teaching, and the drag scene had changed quite a bit, so I kinda just, you know, decided to just take a step back and, um, you know... Again, things changed and then career, so I just kinda decided to give it up.

Natalie: Yeah. You said that the drag scene changed. Was there something about it that you didn't like so much anymore then?

Cyller: Well, um, in St. Louis, we kinda go through our waves of drag, and drag kings are a lot different than drag queens. And so, it's a lot more difficult to find venues that will allow kings to perform because, you know, they aren't seen on the same caliber and the same level as drag queens and the entertainers that they are, and, you know, all the greatness that they bring to the stage. You know, the perception of kings, you know, went... really went downhill for a while. And some of the bars closed, and there was just, um... there was no money allotted to have kings

and queens perform. So, slowly the amount of drag king venues just kinda withered away, and there was nowhere really to go perform and have that outlet anymore.

Natalie: Gotcha. That's unfortunate.

Cyller: Yeah.

Natalie: Okay, um, so when you did start doing drag, how did your family and friends and other loved ones react? What did they think of it?

Cyller: Well, um, I never officially kinda told my family because my family is very religious, so, um, you know I kinda, kinda keep some things from them and don't really divulge everything. But my family or my friends, you know, they were really supportive and really helped me out, and I relied on them to kinda help form my persona. And, you know, they would come out on drag nights or, you know, performance nights and, you know, bring some people out with them and just... it was really supportive and a huge... you know, a huge, amazing time. Um, yeah, they were just really great and happy and supportive, so, pretty cool.

Natalie: That's good to hear. Uh, so your drag name is Cyller? Uh, where did that come from?

Cyller: Uh, well, my childhood street name was Cuyler, and so I spelled it a little differently. But that's just kinda how I came up with it. I had a friend when I lived in Tennessee for a while, I went to college down there for a couple years. Um, I really... that's when I really got into the gay scene and the drag scene, and I started running with a couple of queens down there. And they were just being funny and random, and they're like, "Oh yeah, if you decided to come up with your drag name, it's your street that you grew up on, and then your animal growing up." And I was like, "How about we just... let's just go with the street name." And that's just kinda where it... where everything evolved from.

Natalie: [Laughs] Nice. Okay, so, you know in drag there's a lot of... a lot of terms, like, you know, drag queen, drag king, glamor queen, camp, all those things. Um, are there any of those, uh, any of those labels that you would use to describe your own drag, the style or the... anything like that?

Cyller: No. And, you know, I will say since I have been out of the drag scene for a good five to six years, um, at least performance-wise... I'm still involved in, like, the Pride, um, the Pride Royalty Committee and things like that every so often, but I don't perform. Um, so I think in the last five or six years that's really when, um, I noticed that the scene has changed, and a lot of those terms came into play, um, because of everybody's originality and what each individual might have brought to the table.

And so, it just, kind of... at the same time... it's kinda weird, because at the same time the king scene was leaving St. Louis, the drag scene in general was just, like, blowing up, and new performers were coming out of the woodwork, bringing to the stage their own spin on things. And I think that that, you know, is kinda where all these terms came up, um, and originated. And I... you know, like I said, I kinda left the scene before that happened, so I... yeah, I don't really put myself in any of those categories from what I did.

Natalie: Gotcha. That makes sense. So, what did you... what did you do as a drag artist then?

Cyller: Um, I really tried to play to the audience. And back in the day, kings and queens, mostly kings, made their money and their... yeah, their money from performing by tips. And so, for me, I did a lot of observing and watching what the queens did and what some of the kings, like, in different cities did, um, that were famous and that were just huge and fantastic. So, what I kinda tried to do was play to the audience. And it depended on what type of show it was. If it was a Monday night all-kings show, the song choices and the outfits I would do and come up with would kinda be geared a little differently towards my audience, versus a Saturday night at a bar, where it was mostly straight folks coming to see the drag queens. I kinda had to be more popular in the song choices that I made, and, um, I kinda had to think about, okay what's gonna make some drunk folks excited, wanna dance, and then give me their money?

Natalie: [Laughs]

Cyller: So, I had to... I had to perform and become someone that kinda catered towards that, that person. So, I was just, kind of, all over the place. And, you know I would do a variety of different songs from different genres, um... you know, if anybody requested a song, then awesome, I would totally do that. Uh, I also was married at the time, not to my current wife, um, but... she's my ex now. But my wife at the time was very creative, and she would just come up with amazing costumes and outfits, and then... so, she would have this idea and come up with an outfit, and then I would turn around and try to match that outfit with a song. And so, that's kinda how I came up with some of the song choices and outfits that I, you know, kinda, kinda put forth.

Natalie: Okay. That's fun, that sounds fun. Um, did you... I guess you already went into this a little bit. Um, did you take influence from any other drag artists?

Cyller: Yeah, there's a lot of drag artists out there, um, not only in our city but, you know, across the nation that I would follow and I would meet through pageantry. So, that's another added layer to who I was as an entertainer. Um, I started performing in bars, uh, just like on the little Monday night shows or Saturday night shows. And then I met some folks, and I was able to get into pageantry. So, um, through pageantry... I mean, the, the amount of kings that I met that were just amazing and had so much talent was, I mean, just mindblowing. So, I met a lot of great folks through, uh, pageantry, and they, kind of, you know, um, kinda helped me form who I was and kinda where I went from there.

Natalie: Mm-hmm. All right. Cool, um... sorry. [Laughs]

Cyller: Totally fine. [Laughs]

Natalie: It's okay. Um, do you consider your... well, did you consider your drag to be political?

Cyller: No, I didn't get into the political-ness. I used drag as an outlet to have fun and to, you know, bring something different to the table. Yeah, I never used it politically or to make a statement. It was all just fun. And again, back in the day, in 2010, it's been a while, but, you know, it was a different kind of perception as far as drag was concerned. So, we really didn't see

a whole lot of political drag back in the day when I first started, so, you know, I just... I definitely... I didn't touch that, no.

Natalie: Gotcha. So, it was just more of a fun thing for you, I guess?

Cyller: Yeah. Yeah.

Natalie: It does sound like fun.

Cyller: It was fantastic.

Natalie: Um, so can you tell me about what your life was like at the time, as a drag artist?

Cyller: Um, I mean it, kind of... I kinda had a separation and, you know, some folks blend their drag lives with their real lives, some folks have separate drag lives from their personal lives. And each is to be respectable. Um, you know, I tried to make a disconnect between my drag persona and my day-to-day life, because I'm a teacher, and a gay teacher at that, in East St. Louis. So, I've got all the odds stacked against me. So, I definitely didn't want that perception being brought into my career. And so, I tried to keep that as separate as possible.

Um, you know, but there were some things that kinda flowed together. I... you know, I was one that didn't like to be called by my drag name unless I was in drag. And that was something that, you know, when I went out to the bar, the more I started... you know, the more I performed, the more popular I would get, and people would recognize me. And so, if I would be out on a Saturday, out of drag, just out and about in the Grove, people would call me by my drag name, and I wouldn't... like, I wouldn't make that connection because I [unclear] hearing it, you know, other than being announced on the stage. So, it was a lit--- it was kinda weird to be called by my drag name instead of my real name, so... but, yeah, I just tried to keep my life separate because, to me, that was the point of drag at the time, was to be someone or something that you wouldn't normally do or be in your regular day-to-day life. So, I tried to have that separation.

Natalie: No, I think that makes a lot of sense, that definitely sounds like something that... you know, from what I've heard a lot of drag artists, like, to use drag for that sort of reason.

Cyller: Right.

Natalie: So, when you were doing drag, were you part of, like, a drag family or collective or anything like that?

Cyller: Um, I was for a minute, and then some drama went down, because, you know, at the end of the day some... most of us were, you know, female, so drama, drama, drama.

Natalie: [Laughs]

Cyller: Um, yeah, I did... I did become part of a family in the beginning, and then, as my journey continued and I met different folks and became friends with different drag artists in the community, my family, my drag family didn't really get along with my other drag friends. And so, I made some bad choices, I made some bad calls, and decided to abandon my drag family. But again, I'm an adult, I can, you know, take ownership of things. And so, I made amends and,

you know, would I say now I'm still part of the family? Eh, I think that perception has kinda changed throughout the years, especially with the older generation of drag people. But yeah, I've... I was for a minute, and then I just kinda... yeah, I just dropped out.

Natalie: Gotcha. So, how often would you perform?

Cyller: Ooh. Back in the day, when I first started, I could pull... Monday... probably two shows a week sometimes. So, probably within a month, I could pull anywhere between five and six shows. And again, at that time, kings only had Monday nights at Nova—well, Mondays and Saturdays at Novak's, and Saturdays were king and queen shows, so you had to be invited as one of the two king spots to perform on Saturdays. So, yeah, like, back in the day, I could pull, like, quite a few shows. And if people called out, um, then, you know, I was kinda like on standby, and if I needed to show up and throw together some numbers for a show, then, yeah, I could throw some shit together. So, um, yeah, yeah. About five or six maybe in a month, sometimes more, just kinda depended.

Natalie: Uh, what places? I know you said some of the places had, you know, closed down. Any that are still around?

Cyller: Uh, so Grey Fox used to do drag kings and queens, um, so Grey Fox was a good one. There was, um, Rehab, we did Novak's, Attitudes, Bar:PM. Some of them are still around, but some of them have switched owners, and they don't really do, you know, drag shows, and especially no king shows. Um, yeah. And then, like, there would be some, um, like, events... oh, definitely Pride, because as a former King of Pride, you have to attend certain Pride functions in drag, out of drag. So, you know, sometimes wherever Pride would hold, like, some kickoff events, you know, I would go hang out or perform over there. But yeah, that was just kinda dependent on where they were. Or like festivals... oh like, um... oh, uh, GroveFest, where it was, like, in the middle of the street, I've got to perform at GroveFest. That was freaking awesome, um, yeah that was so cool. But, yeah, definitely different, different spots, um, that I got to perform at all over the city, and I traveled a little bit to do some, you know, some pageants, so, yeah, lots of different places.

Natalie: Cool. So, tell me a little bit about what goes into getting ready for a performance.

Cyller: Oh man. Well, there's a whole lot that goes into getting ready, you know, back into, like, weeks or months, um, even down to the day, down to the minute. You know, you really gotta start thinking about song choice, and, you know, your outfits. That's kinda where everything begins, who you are as an artist and how that aligns to your song choices and your outfits and down to your props or anything you're going to use. Um, so, you know, that's kinda where you have to start and think about what you're going to perform and what you're going to wear.

And then you have to... you know, you have to buy all the binding things... and every king and every entertainer is different as far as what they buy and how they bind, and, um, you know, putting facial hair on. Like, for me, for the facial hair part of it, I would get a haircut, and I would have to keep my hair. And so, I would sit... I remember so many times, I would sit in front of the TV and just cut my hair until it was like a powder consistency. And then, um, like, the day of

you would have to buy spirit gum... or not the day of, but you would have spirit gum, and then you would put it on your face, and you would have to take the time to put your face on.

And then I would paint my face as well, so I did, like, some shadowing and, you know, some, like, base foundation and things like that. So, I did a combination of makeup and real hair. But, I mean, it, it definitely takes quite a bit. It's a lot of thinking and a lot of, you know, back planning. What am I going to do? What do I need? Um, so yeah, it could start weeks, months ahead of time down to, like, the day of.

Um, and then yeah, just like right... even, even during performing you're still kinda changing things. You're changing your outfit, sometimes you want a different facial look from song to song to song, you know. So, people will go in the dressing room and change that up. I didn't, I was like "Y'all, that's too much, that's just... if that's what you wanna do, then okay, but that's not me." So, yeah, I mean, it definitely takes a lot of preparation, and knowing who you are as an artist and connecting to your outfits and to your song choices.

Natalie: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I feel like I didn't really know so much about how that went as a king. I... we hear a lot about queens, but...

Cyller: Oh, yeah, yeah. Hoo, yeah. Being in a dressing room with drag queens is just mind...

Natalie: [Laughs]

Cyller: Eye opening. Like, you would not even believe! Oh man. It was... it was great times, though. Yeah.

Natalie: [Laughs] So, what would you say are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Cyller: Um, boobs.

Natalie: [Laughs]

Cyller: If you don't have tiny boobs, that's your biggest challenge. How in the world am I going to tape down the tits if they're this big?

Natalie: [Laughs]

Cyller: How can I tape those down and get those to look like they're not boobs? So, that, to me, was number one the most difficult thing ever. Because before, before I had two breast reductions, it was insane. I, I don't know if that's too much information but, like, my boobs are large, and they were hard, and so to try to, like, tape 'em down, I would have to take a roll of duct tape and tape my boobs, and tape 'em... like... and you have to not tape in the middle, because you've got to breathe here, so you gotta tape from your boobs all the way underneath your armpits, back around to the back. So, I would have tape all the way from one side, all the way around my back to the other side, and I would only have this spot right here left to breathe. So, I would wrap and wrap and wrap.

And then, I would have, like, um, suspender right here. So, I would also do, um, duct tape from suspenders. So, like, from my boobs across my shoulders to my back. And then I would put on a binder to hold everything in and down, because when you get to going and sweating and moving and stuff, you're gonna pop your tape, you're gonna come out, and your boobs are gonna get like, "Here's my boobs!" So, it was definitely a learning curve on how to tape big boobs. Other than that, I don't... I mean, that was really, like, the challenge for me. Oh, that was awful.

Natalie: [Laughs] Oh, that sounds like a lot.

Cyller: Yeah, yeah. So, thankfully, breast reduction worked really well, so it's just a binder these days. Whoop! If that's... if that happens, just the binder, boom, and gone.

Natalie: Mm-hmm. Uh, so is there anything unique, you think, about the drag scene in St. Louis compared to other places?

Cyller: Um, I definitely think it's more of a family orientation. Um, you know, we tend to stick together a lot. We tend to fight and argue within the drag community, but I think that that's what draws us so close and makes us a good family. I know... again, from my experience, it's been a long time, but, um, being in the... in the drag scene, I was able to connect and make, you know, bonds and relationships with drag queens, um, and female entertainers of all sorts. And I think that that was a really great way to connect.

And any time we would see every... you know, anybody out, in drag, out of drag, you just have this sense of family and love, and you would always speak to them. You know, it was almost kind of, like, sometime politically correct where there were just those certain entertainers that you had to speak to, because otherwise, it was going to be like, "No, I don't know you, I'm gonna give you a hard time."

But, I think, yeah, St. Louis is just known for its uniqueness and, you know, everybody loving each other, and knowing that drag is the art form of our community. Like, that's our art, you know? Everybody else has something that they do, but drag is our art for the gay community. And so, I feel like that brought us together in a... in a different way than the outsiders or somebody in a different state or city. But I don't know, I love the folks in St. Louis, they're just... they're amazing.

Natalie: That sounds fantastic. It sounds like a really tight-knit community.

Cyller: Yeah, yeah. We really relied on each other and, like, we could call each other for help or, you know, message each other if we needed some stones, or I needed to borrow some duct tape or... it was just that kind of community to where, if I needed something or somebody needed something, they could just reach out, and they were there for everybody.

Natalie: Mm-hmm. Alright. So, this next question isn't so much for you, because you're not performing anymore, but you said... you did say that you were still pretty involved with the community. Um, do you have anything to say about the way the COVID-19 pandemic has affected drag artists?

Cyller: Um, I think it's really sad the way that it has affected drag, but I also feel like a lot of the artists have been resilient and creative in the way that they want to bring their art form still to people during COVID. Um, you know... and again I haven't been involved a whole lot, I've only seen a few things happen on Facebook, you know? But like I said, the way that, that it affected everybody, it... it was always a happy experience when you could go to a drag show, you know, like out in the Grove or out and about and get to see folks and share that experience with people out, you know, in the community.

And so, you know, when COVID shut everything down, I think a lot of folks got stressed out and they were like, "I need this outlet, I need to be able to do this." And so, that's when I started to see, you know, the online virtual drag events and the shows being held online, which was really awesome, you know, that people can come together and be creative with, with how they still were able to get their art out there and perform for people.

Natalie: It's definitely adapted, for sure. So, how... outside of drag, uh, how do you identify in terms of your sex, identity, and gender expression?

Cyller: So, outside of drag I, you know, identify as a gay female. I don't really like the term lesbian. I'm older generation, I guess, so to speak, and it carries a... to me, it carries a negative connotation, and it's just a personal opinion, personal preference. I don't prefer that word. So, I just call myself gay or queer, you know, and I just tend to live my life as who I am and, yeah, I just... I live as a female.

Natalie: Gotcha. That makes sense. So, uh, what... so, then what pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Cyller: She/her.

Natalie: She/her out of drag?

Cyller: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Natalie: And then, he/him in drag, right?

Cyller: Yeah, pretty much. Most people would just call me by my drag name, if I was in drag. Um, sometimes, I didn't realize that, you know... he/him if I was in drag. I didn't really, you know, kind of put that together and answer when that happened, because I just wasn't used to it. But yeah, I mean... and I'm not easily offended, so if somebody called me he outside of drag, it is what it is. It's no big deal but, you know?

Natalie: Gotcha. So, has drag influenced your sex and gender identities at all, or how you think about gender?

Cyller: No, it didn't really, and it hasn't affected how I think or live, you know? Like, I think I said it before, drag was kind of an outlet for me to just have fun and be somebody that I wasn't normally in my regular day-to-day life. So, there, I... you know, I had that separation and that's just what worked well for me.

Natalie: Gotcha. So, I guess, in that case, I already know a little bit of the answer to this, but have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Cyller: Not really. You know, I just wanted to be somebody that I wasn't, and just put on and, you know, kinda dress up and entertain folks that wanted to come out and see a good show. To me, it was more about entertainment versus, you know, this is who I identify with and how I live my life as this person. Yeah, it was all straight up entertainment for me.

Natalie: Has your drag influenced your confidence as a person, when you're out of drag?

Cyller: Yeah, I would definitely say it has. Um, you know, I started doing drag in 2010 and I had been out for... when did I come out? For about 10 years. And so, you know, it really did help me kinda come out of my shell because I was, earlier in life, a shy person, and I was very, you know, keep to myself, I don't wanna go out. I wasn't outgoing. Um, and so, by doing drag and being in the community and having that network of people, you know, it was really eye opening and it really... yeah, it kinda shaped who I became and the confidence I had, um, you know, moving forward. It was... yeah, it was really, really, really great.

Natalie: That sounds like it was really good for you.

Cyller: Yeah.

Natalie: Okay, so if you could... here's a... I think this is a fun question.

Cyller: Okay.

Natalie: If you could go back in time as Cyller, what advice would Cyller give to your younger self?

Cyller: Oh, what advice would I give to my younger self? Um, be cautious of people in the community and in the scene. Sometimes, you know, people will mislead you. Also, have fun. Do what you want to do. And, um, you know, make drag an outlet for whatever you want it to be. Don't put yourself in a box, you know? If you want to make a statement and be political about it, do it, you know? Use your platform for whatever you feel it's good for and what can help people. And just the outlook, you know? So, I would just definitely say, "Have fun," you know, "Make your character what you want it to be."

Natalie: So, here's another question that I feel like we've already touched on a little bit, but we're expanding it to other things. So, um, we're talking about more of your social identities now, so, like, gender, race, age, religion, that sort of thing. Have the interaction of those social identities impacted your drag or how you've experienced drag, or vice versa?

Cyller: Yeah, um, I can... I really can talk on the religion part because I was raised, um, you know, Assemblies of God, Christian, you know, from the time I was born until I left the house and went to college, it was church... church this, church that, all church all the time. It was lots of religion. Um, and so, when I came out, I really struggled, and even to this day, I still struggle with my religious aspects and beliefs, um, so I won't even lie about that.

Um, you know, so it really... coming out was an issue, and also, going into drag, religious-wise, it... you know, I, I didn't tell my parents, um, even though my dad is super supportive about me being out and just make myself happy. Um, you know, it was just, kind of, one of those things I wanted to do for myself, and I wanted to kinda not think about religion. Um, so, yeah, religion was a huge influence on my drag, and it just kinda made me think and question things.

Um, I didn't bring religion into my, my character or my, you know, entertainment. It was something personal that was going on in my life at the time, you know? So... and I still struggle with that, like, is it right, is it not right, you know? Um, so, really, I mean, other than that, race, not really, um, didn't play a factor in my drag, except for the fact that I was one of those people that I wouldn't do a song if it had, you know, bad words or words that, you know, white people shouldn't use.

Natalie: [Laughs]

Cyller: So, I really steered clear of that, and I also tried to stay true to only performing songs of Caucasian artists, um, you know, because I also thought that it was, kind of, you know, not right. If I wasn't a person of color, why would I be doing a song, you know, of a person of color? So, you know, I might find a different version of that song, if I liked it. Um, but yeah, my age... I mean, I'm an old soul, and so, I tended to, you know, kinda do some of the popular stuff but also some of the older stuff, um, so, yeah. I'm, I'm... yeah.

Natalie: I see, okay,

Cyller: [Inaudible] religion.

Natalie: [Laughs] So, I want to hear a little but about your thoughts about what drag is to you. So, how would you define drag broadly?

Cyller: I would say it's the art form of our people. It's the art form of, um, the gay community. And I think I mentioned that last time, but I really, truly think it is. And I real-- and I owe Siren, if you know Siren, um, a former queen in our community has moved... she, she moved to, uh, New Orleans. But I love Siren, she's great. But that's... you know, that's the one thing that, um, I take from her, and I really, really truthfully believe that that's the art form of our people. And we can make it what we want to make it because it's perception, it's fun, it... you know, it's our... it's our platform to get our lives out there and to show the community, like... and people outside of the... of the LGBTQ+ community like, "This is us, this is what we do for fun, like, this is part of our people." You know?

'Cause every other, you know, subgroup of folks have their, their art and their art form and what they do and what makes them happy, and their, um, you know, their, um, traditions. So, I feel like that is for us, and that's, that's just us. It's only for us, and I feel really strongly about that. And it's how we express ourselves. We're free to... you know, I'm free to be a female every day, day-to-day, but I also am free to step in and put some hair on my face and tape my tits down and do a guy song and act like a guy on stage, if that's what I want to do because that's who I am, and that's what our community allows us and opens up for us to have, is that platform to be who we are and express ourselves as we want to express ourselves.

Natalie: I love that, I love all of that. [Laughing]

Cyller: [Laughs]

Natalie: So, what do you think is the purpose of drag? Is there a purpose?

Cyller: I don't... I don't... I think, uh, I would have to say every entertainer's purpose is gonna be different. So, for me to generally say, "Here's the purpose of drag for everybody," I feel like I would be putting folks in a box, and, you know, I would have to say, "This is my purpose, as Jill, as Cyller, this is my purpose for drag." And my purpose may be different from everybody else, and that's okay because it's expression. It's our art form. So, I just... you know, I just feel really strongly about that, you know, um... because like we talked earlier, my... what I do with my drag is entertainment. There are people out there that use it for political platforms. And that's fantastic. Like, if that's your purpose, however you get your message out there, fantastic, you know? Go ahead and do it.

Natalie: I'm sorry [laughing] if you can hear the dogs barking.

Cyller: [Laughs]

Natalie: Alright, so, my next question, do you think drag is sexual in any way, and why or why not?

Cyller: It can be. Um, there were definitely... um, I will speak about kings, you know, when I was performing, that were more sexual, that were more, um, promiscuous with their drag. Um, but knowing them in and out of drag, it was that persona. They could step out of their day-to-day life and become this other person. That was one aspect that I saw. But I also saw, I know this person outside of drag, and that sexuality and that sexual-ness was still part of their being. And that's what made it so great and broad, is because you knew that Princess Machiavelli rolled up in here and was gonna perform in his swag suits, dressed to the nines, and be all up on the ladies in the crowd and, you know, try to, like, swoon them and have your swag. And you also... and then you had folks like me, who just wanted to have a good time and bring a smile to people's faces and entertain them. So, you know, I think, you know, it's also up to who... you know, who feels what, and what their platform and purpose is for entertainment. I think drag queens are a lot more sexual.

Natalie: [Laughs]

Cyller: Oh, [unclear].

Natalie: You think drag queens are more sexual than drag kings?

Cyller: Yeah. Oh yeah. That's all that they want to talk about when they, like, are hosting or whatever. And their songs tend to be more, like, risqué and more about sexuality and, uh, yeah. But it's still great. I love it because it's awesome.

Natalie: [Laughs] Okay. So, I've been waiting to ask this one.

Cyller: [Unclear]

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

Cyller: Um, oooh, that's a loaded question, because I've had that discussion with queens and kings of all different variety of, you know, experience. Um, I... it's been on for a while, and I have wa-- I watched it faithfully from Season 1 all the way until a couple seasons ago. And I love the beginning seasons. I don't really know if I am into it nowadays. Um, I think it's more dramatic, and it's more for pageants folks. And I'm a pageant king, like, I love pageants, don't get me wrong. You know, once I got started in the pageantry that was like the end all, be all, and just great. But I feel like they've catered to a certain type of person and certain type of crowd lately, um, and I don't think that they're holding true to what it used to be in the beginning.

But again, having said that, times change, people change, um, money talks. So, if you want to keep your show running, you've got to think about the money aspect of things, and if you want people to watch your show, then you've got think about, how can we keep it, you know, fresh and new and creative and still get people to watch it and have the ratings?

So, you know, I think it was a really great outlet. And my friend, um, actually, I got to be involved with him when he wanted to... he actually auditioned for RuPaul's Drag Race a few years. He didn't make it, but it was really cool to see, like, the audition side of it, and what you had to do to just submit your audition to be considered for the show. So... but yeah, I mean, it's changed so much over the years, and I don't know. I...

The best thing about it is that it does get it out there for the whole world to see and, like, showcase the fantastic entertainment and the transitions that can happen from looking like a male in real life to full painted face, you know, dressed to the nines in these fantastic costumes that you've made. I think it's a really good outlet and a really good way to showcase the drag scene and the drag community.

Natalie: Gotcha. I think I see what you're saying.

Cyller: Yeah.

Natalie: Alright, so I just have a few questions left. We're at... we're getting toward the end.

Cyller: Sure. Go for it. Alright.

Natalie: So, if you... if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Cyller: Ooh... I wish there were more outlets, especially in St. Louis, um, I just wish there were more outlets for performing. Um, I also wish, especially for the king scene, knowing and being involved in just the, like, little bar shows versus the pageantry... um, because there's a big gap in the quality of entertainment and, you know, um, costuming and things like that in pageantry versus bar shows. So, I wish that there was more, um, knowledge and more of a community of, let's help each other.

You know, I was... way back in the day, I was part of a group that we tried to host some, like, master classes for drag kings. I think we were successful a couple of times. We held them at

Novak's back in the day. But it was great to be able to say, you know, the few of us that are seasoned kings, "Come in, let us show you how to tape your tits down, how to... how to pick song choices, how to create your outfits, like, just to create your persona." And so, I think that was a really great thing that, you know, would really be, you know, fruitful these days, with the amount of variety in drag, you know, and just more of a non-catty feeling in the drag scene.

It's come a long ways, you know, from when I first started. It was very, very, very catty back in the day, but, you know... it's not so much these days. But I don't... I don't know, I just wish there... wish there were more outlets, and I wish that more people were receptive.

And, um, you know, one thing I wish is that the quote-unquote straight people would, kind of, think about that when they come to show up for, like, a bachelorette party. And back in the day, when we couldn't get married, the straight folks would come to the drag show as part of their bachelorette party. Like, that's a slap in the face because this is for us. Like, awesome, great for coming out and experiencing something new, but not, not in that aspect. Like, that throws something in our face that you're like, "Well, we can do this, and we're celebrating this, but we're in a place where you can't do the same thing." So, I don't know, that's just something I wish a perception would change, you know?

Natalie: That's... no, I see what you're saying there. Um, and that... I'm actually, uh... I want to know, uh, what do you think are some misconceptions, also, that people have about drag?

Cyller: I think, um, I think it goes into, like, straight folks versus gay folks, really. Um, and their perception is, um, you know, "Well, if you're a drag queen, you want to be a woman, and this is just how you're going to get out there, and you're just a freak." And, um, you know, the perception, I think, is, "Let's go...", from straight people, is like, "Oh, let's go watch the boys dressed as girls, and, um, you know, let's see a freak show."

And then, you know, for the kings, the straight people don't even... they don't even give two shits, because, "Oh, you know, it's a girl; they wanna be a dude, so this is just what they're doing." So, I think that that is really disheartening, you know, looking at it as a straight versus gay kinda scene. Oh, it...

Natalie: What do you think would help change that perception?

Cyller: Oh, I honestly... I don't... I don't really know. Um, I don't... I don't know. Because, again, I think it kinda all snowballs. It's all religion, it's perception, you know, it's a few of the outsiders or straight folks that maybe had some bad interactions with gay folks, and that puts a bad light on the gay community, you know? So, they're seeing it as that, um, you know? And the... and the other thing is, you know, gay people don't really go out to straight bars, you know? You see the gay pe... or you see the straight people coming to our bars all the time, you know, want to go out, have a drink or watch the show. But, most gay folks kinda steer clear of those straight bars, and, you know, why, why are you doing that to us if we're not, you know, going into your spaces? This is our safe space, so... But I don't really know what the... what the end result is or how to get for it to be more accepting, um, you know? I just... more exposure, I guess. Yeah, I just... I don't know. That's a tough one.

Natalie: It sounds like there's this disconnect between, you know, straight, cisgender people and the LGBTQ community, this misunderstanding of the other side, I guess.

Cyller: Right. And if you're religious, it's a sin to be gay, so there's, there's that thing in there too, religion, it plays a huge part in gay versus straight, you know?

Natalie: Sorry, the dogs are barking, and I'm waiting for them.

Cyller: Oh, you're fine. [Laughs]

Natalie: Alright. This is my last question for you.

Cyller: Okay.

Natalie: If you could choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Cyller: To watch it with an open mind and be receptive to being entertained. It's entertainment. Again, it's the art form of our pe-- of our people, so come enjoy, watch us, be entertained, you know? Have a good time, learn something, learn about our community through the drag scene. Yeah, that's what... yeah, that's what I would think.

Natalie: I, I really love that, and I really love the phrase you keep using, the art form of our people. I think that's great.

Cyller: That's all Siren, I... props to Siren for that, because, yeah, Siren nailed that on the head. Yeah.

Natalie: [Laughs] Well, that's all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else that you want to say, or want to share?

Cyller: No. I mean, it's been a great... you know, it's been a great couple sessions, and I've really enjoyed this, and it's brought back a lot of good memories, and, you know, it's just been... it's been really great. And I hope that, you know, this, whatever you're going to do with this really helps folks out in the community and... you know, to just be more exposed and be more open to, you know, what happens in our community and how we have fun and how we entertain.

Natalie: I'm really glad you enjoyed doing this. I had a lot of fun talking about you and hearing all that you had to say!

Cyller: That's so great. I'm so happy.

Interview with Holly Haliwell

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Holly: The drag name?

Carson: Yeah.

Holly: Hi, Holly Haliwell, drag performer, drag queen. I don't know what else you want me to say introductory wise.

Carson: I think that's good. Anything else we'll talk about in the questions.

Holly: [Unclear] works.

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

Holly: Um, I guess my first exposure to drag was when I first went out to... started going to the bars. Um, in Carbondale, you can get into certain clubs at 19. So, um, I had recently moved down to Southern Illinois area, didn't know many people, so... but I had heard of one local gay bar, quote-unquote gay bar in Carbondale, so I, I went, uh, shy little 19-year-old, to that bar and saw my first drag show there, um, with some of the local legends and, uh, fell in love. I've al-- it was not a hard jump for me because I grew up in the theatre world, in the performing world, and for a while, I had been on the production side of things. And so, I saw this new form of performance and thought it would be a great way for me to, kind of, dive back in to the onstage stuff versus the offstage side that I'd been, kind of, accustomed to previously.

Carson: How did your friends, family, or loved ones react to you becoming a drag artist?

Holly: Um, I guess friend-wise I stayed, kind of, within my circle, and so, I had bar friends and dm and, and that kinda community that I had developed and grown through a few years. Because I didn't... I started going out and being in the drag area and world, kind of, at 19 and slowly... didn't start performing until I was 21. So, I befriended people and watched and listened and was a spectator for a while to, kind of, soak it all in and learn. And so, when I finally said, "Okay, I want to try and do this," some of the queens were like, "Girl, you don't know what you're in for. You don't... you don't want to do this. Trust, trust me, you don't want to do this." And I'm like, "Okay, I want to try though, still want to try." And...

Carson: [Unclear].

Holly: Yes. And so, they were... they were supportive though, and they helped getting me into it. And then, family-wise, I didn't tell my family for a long time, um... and then, when I fin-- uh, I finally told my mom, and she was kinda confused, and wasn't really sure, like, what all went into

it and anything. But after I showed her some pictures and we, kind of, eased into it a little bit, and, kind of, explained that it wasn't... it wasn't me, like, wanting to transition or anything to... uh, gender dysphoria or any type of big extreme. It was just my... it was a version of performance for me. And so, it's me putting on... for me, anyways, drag is me putting on a character and stepping into that character for an evening or a show or a period of time. And I put on that persona, and then, at the end of the night, it all comes off. And that's not the case for everybody. Some people use it as a way to, uh, cope and get to understand more of their gender identity and then whatnot. And it's, kind of, like, a stepping stone. That's fine, and that's great for some people, but that's not what it is for me. But...

Carson: Where does your drag name come from?

Holly: Um, I am actually kind of [laughing] a TV nerd. And so, the TV show Charmed, I grew up with, and was kind of a big nerd when it came to that show. And so, my favorite character of that TV show is, uh... her name is Piper, Piper Halliwell. That's... uh, the show is about sisters named the Halliwell Sisters. And the actress' first name is Holly, Holly Marie Combs. And so, I took Holly and Halliwell and put them together. And it fit for me because I really do love that show, and it's also about, uh, paganism and witchcraft, which I am a practicing pagan. And so, I took elements of that from my own personal life to try and incorporate into my drag persona.

Carson: So, I know that there are a lot of, like, terms and types and styles of drag. Are there any particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Holly: Um, I don't like to say I fit any one specific box. I mean, you have your pageant queens and your glamor queens and your camp queens and your comedy queens and all that. And I think I take a little bit from each thing. Um, I've done pageants, I still do pageants, um, but I also... and so, I have that glamor side and... but I also have more of the, like, the Broadway stage theatre side when it comes to, like, [unclear]. And so, I can bring a little bit of comedy into my act as well. So, I don't think... it's great to have a niche, and I do... uh, Broadway and theatre will always be, kind of, like, my go to, but I don't try to limit myself to one specific box.

Carson: Makes sense. Who or what has influenced your drag, besides Charmed, of course? [Laughs].

Holly: [Laughs] Right. Um, I'd say theatre in... I mean, just theatre and the Broadway world influenced my drag a lot. Um, one of the big aspects or, or attributes that I'm personally known for is my celebrity impersonation of Liza Minnelli. Um, when I started drag, people were like, "Oh, you should try and do her." And I'll be honest, I didn't know a lot about Liza. I was bad... I was a bad theatre kid, bad, young 19-year-old theatre kid. But as I started researching more, um, I fell in love with her, and I've embraced my celebrity doppelganger, and have really dove into her style of theatre and her style of performance. And so, even when I'm not doing Liza, I'll still find myself doing a gesture or a stylistic move that maybe she would do. So, I would say... and she's helped actually... just being able to do that type of character has helped get me bookings and helped progress and, and push my drag career forward some. So, I, I do owe my... a lot of my skills to her.

But I also want to, like, give credit where credit's due, and acknowledge the, the local entertainers that I drew from and that helped me out as I got started. But just the local legends that... 'Cause I never really had a... tangent, sorry. I never really had a specific, like, drag mother or a person that... one specific person that took me under their wing. I had... I was lucky enough to have two or three, um, and that I took little bits and pieces from that helped inspire me to, uh, grow and become the entertainer that I am today.

Carson: Do you consider your drag political or, like, drag in general?

Holly: Um, maybe not mine, specific, but I think drag as a whole inherently is, is... has a touch of politic--politics to it. Um, some of the greatest, uh, historical moments, um, were pushed forward by drag queens. You look at things like Stonewall and gay rights movement and a lot of those fights for equality and, um, progress in the LGBT community were spearheaded by drag performers and drag artists, specifically Black trans drag, uh, people, drag personas. And yes, there is... there always is going to be a note of politics to it. But that shouldn't be what everybody totally focuses on, because at the end of the day, we're also here to have fun. So, it's good to push boundaries here and remember what we're fighting for. And we've made so much headway so far, and there's always room continue. But at the same time, too, it's still good to be able to laugh and still be lighthearted.

Carson: Can you talk about, like, what your life is like as a drag artist? Like, how often, where you perform, what goes into getting ready for a performance?

Holly: Yeah. Um, I... obviously, through the pandemic, we... performance has been limited, but even before that, we... personally, I wasn't able to perform as much as I probably would have liked to. And that just has to do with the area that we're in currently, um, with the one establishment, that local establishment that we had to perform at closed down. And so, we were, kind of, nomadic and jumping around from establishment to establishment, wherever we could find a place that would host a show here and there. And so, we didn't really have a home per se.

But we have been lucky enough over the past couple years to find a few, um, local, kind of, dive bar, hole in the walls, places that you wouldn't even really expect to ever see a drag show. Like, what would be considered super straight, kind of, like, country bars, that actually have been very welcoming. There's one in Hurst, Illinois that we've done, and, uh, had many shows at, and they have become really welcoming. And it's great to see some of these just odd towns, small towns, their, you know, side bars that have actually welcomed us in and then, you know, wanted to see it and explore and just, again, wanna come out and have fun. And that's what this was all about at the end of the day, it was just coming out and having a good night.

And then, um, just outside of Southern Illinois, I've been fortunate to be able to do a little bit of traveling to other towns around Cape Girardeau, Evansville, Indiana, um, couple places in Tennessee and Kentucky, few other places in Missouri, so...

Carson: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Holly: Um, honestly, it's, it's probably the preparation. Like, I'll be rea... like, I'll get booked for a show, and I'll be like, "Oh yeah, I'm so excited for this show." And then the day co-- the day of

comes, and I'll be like, "Oh god, I'm tired, I don't want to do all this." Because at the end of the day, it is... it's probably... it's a two-plus-hour process for me. And I know some people that can put on a 30-minute face and look gorgeous and whatever. And that's not me. I, I do like to take my time. And, uh, it, it does involve some preparation, um, just physically and mentally, uh, picking your numbers that you want to do, uh, rehearsing those in your head and, and making [unclear] your words and all that. And then, just physically sitting down, taking... and basically, reshaping your whole, entire face and physique to, uh, come and form the illusion of a female impersonator, so...

Carson: How do you identify in terms of your sex?

Holly: I have some really big bushy eyebrows, too, so they take... they're a good 15 to 20-minute process of making these disappear [laughs].

Carson: [Laughs] Sounds like so much fun.

Holly: Yes.

Carson: How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, or gender expression out of drag?

Holly: I identify as a male, cisgender male, um, and I... people have, um... as time's have gone on, people have reassessed the term of drag queen versus drag artist versus performer and all that. And I grew up, kind of, old school, and so, I will always be a queen. I don't put labels, I mean, I don't find it necessary to be neutral when it comes to identity and things like that. Um, at the end of the day, I am a queen, I'll be... I'll be a queen. If you want to be an artist, that's kind of... that's fine, you can go be your artist, be your whatever, but I'm royalty; I'll be a queen [laughs]. Um, but yeah, out of drag, I live my life as a cisgendered male, gay male.

Carson: Like, it's weird, and, like, I know you, but I still have to ask these [laughs].

Holly: Yeah, I understand.

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

Holly: I would say to an extent, I mean, there's... it... there's the... a sense of... um, how do I word this? Once you get all in it, there is a sense of, kind of, like, I know a lot of people have used this term before, but it's almost a sense of armor. And you have this, kind of, protective forcefield on you. And so, it is empowering to an extent, and it does help, kind of, bring out a new side of you that maybe you wouldn't normally, in your everyday life, present. And so, there is a certain level of confidence, and, and air that you put on, I guess, when, when Holly comes out.

And I can see that every now and then if, like, you're in more of a hostile situation or you, you were, kind of, in a confrontational situation in your everyday life, there's times where you can, kind of, tap into that, um, to, to relate to and to [inaudible] life. But at the same time, I, daily, normally, I... I'm an overall, kind of, quiet person. I like to classify myself as an extroverted introvert. I can be social and out there when I need to be, and when I have to be around people for work or for whatever. But at the end of the day, I would rather... like, I get peopled out, and I

need to come home and just be the introvert that I secretly am. And so, Holly does bring out the more extroverted side of me and helps, uh, that... fuel that, I'd say.

Carson: Here's the Drag Race-style question. If you could go back and...

Holly: Ah, yeah.

Carson: [Unclear] Holly, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Holly: Um, advice I'd give to my younger self. I would say just listen, listen. I see so many younger queens starting out too that... I guess, you talked about Drag Race for a second, that that's the only type of drag they've ever seen. That's the only drag they've ever been exposed to. And so, they think that by watching that television show that they know... they know how it works, and they know the ropes and everything. And Drag Race has, has helped bring drag into more of a mainstream territory and has, has exposed more people to drag. But what you see on that show isn't necessarily how it works in the day-to-day world, in the, uh, everyday drag performing world. That's a more grandiose perspective and a more over-the-top, not everyone's spending thousands of dollars on outfits and, and has a full stage and, you know, has half a... hundreds of thousands of dollars in production and lighting and all that stuff, and a whole team to put their stuff together.

So, when you're getting started, stay humble, and I would tell my younger self to stay humble and to listen to your mentors and to the people that are... that have... the seasoned queens that have done this and been around and... 'cause they know what they're talking about, and they're gonna help you if you, uh, are receptive to it and are receptive to the, the constructive criticism that they're... you're given.

Carson: How do you feel about Drag Race?

Holly: Um, I [unclear] I touched on [unclear] a second, but I can go in a little bit more. Drag Race... I started drag... Drag Race had already premiered. I think they were in prob-- I don't know what they were in, but I [inaudible] drag in... I was 21, so it was 2011. I think Season 1 of Drag Race was 2009, so they were in their third season or something. But it was still early on enough in the show's run that it hadn't, kind of, taken off. Um, and so, I started... I thought... I think... I would classify, kind of, at the end of the old school age of drag, where it was still a really much of a bar life-type thing and a bar scene and a club scene.

And I think that was a great time for me to start because I, I, I feel I benefited from that. I didn't get caught up in the whole Drag Race phenomenon. And Drag Race has been great, again, when it comes to bringing the style of drag and, and... how do I want to say this? It's been great in bringing... teaching the world and teaching more mainstream audiences about what drag is. It's been great for that. It's been gr-- that type of exposure has been great. But at the same time, it also has hindered what, what people's perceptions of drag can be [inaudible].

And now, a lot of... again, a lot of kids think, "Oh, I've seen it on Drag Race, how hard can it be? I can go and..." And you have your In-- what I call Instagram drag performers that have never stepped foot on a stage in their life, but they have watched half a dozen YouTube makeup

tutorials and can put on a clean... and fun filter on Instagram and think, "Oooh, [click] I'm amazing. I'm the [unclear]. I'm a legend." I feel like, sometimes, the word legend gets thrown around way too easily. Like, it takes a little bit more to become a legend, uh, and a star and then... and all that. So, uh, it's a double-edged sword. I say Drag Race is a double-edged sword. It is... has a lot of positivity on bringing the art form into the forefront of mainstream, but it does have its disadvantages.

Carson: What are some other misconceptions you think people have about drag?

Holly: Um, I'd say the... again, the... one of the most common that I, I encountered when I first started, like I said before, was, um, "Oh, you do drag. You wanna be a woman, right?" Oh. That just is the common assumption. "Oh, you dress up in women's clothes. That means you want to be a woman, right?" And no, I had no... when I started, I had no interest in transitioning. I was very secure in my gender identity and sexuality, and I was, uh... it was... [inaudible] from a theatre background, it was a character. And that's, that's what I saw it as.

Um, another common misconception is that drag is an inherent, like, deviant and sexual thing. Um, sure there are some, some queens that do more risqué music, but that's no different than turning on the radio and hearing Cardi B singing WAP or whatever [laughs], It's, it's really just what you make of it. There's nothing inherently sexual about drag. It's, it's what performer is performing. And, and plenty of...I've done family-friendly shows, I've, I've performed for audiences that had toddlers in it, and I've had little prince-- little girls dressed as princesses come up to me and hand me a dollar and just beaming, beaming, going... because at the end of the day, it is, it's a character, it's a fun show, and you can... it's how you perceive it. And there's nothing inherent—

But I've also... I mean, I've performed in more R-rated facilities before too, and... 'cause again, it's a balance. But drag itself I don't think should be ever seen as inherently, like, [inaudible] or, or, "Oh god, they're coming to convert you, or they're coming to, to corrupt our children," type of thing. So, the notion of Drag Queen Story Hour that was, kind of, in the news in a couple different communities a while back about, "So, we can't expose our children to, to drag performers and drag queens 'cause that... oh, the thought of it." And, and it's the same way of... I feel... I look at it as the same as teaching LGBTQ history in schools, like, that was recently passed. Um, it's an educa-- it should be approached from an educational standpoint, um, and teaching our history and the community's history is just as important as American history or African American history or anything else like that, to that nature.

Carson: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Holly: Um, I would... part of me would say the drama, but sometimes the drama is the most fun too [laughs]. So, um... But yeah, there's a co--- it is an inherent competitive nature, even if you're not even competing in a pageant, just in the community there's always an inherent dramatic and competitive nature to it. And so, that can be stressful at some times. But it's, again, a double-edged sword, when there's competitiveness but there's also family and camaraderie, and there's the idea of a chosen family.

And, and when you work with... especially a smaller community that Southern Illinois has when it comes to the drag world, these performers you're performing with the same on a semi-regular basis. So, you develop this bond with them. And I think that's really special, versus some of the bigger cities. Like, you look at Chicago or St. Louis, and you have 100 plus different queens all vying for one, on or two spots a week at a couple different nightclubs, and that competition can get intense and it can keep you on your heels of trying to scrape and scrounge for bookings and trying to get yourself known and out there. And while there's still some of that in our area, I think we're lucky enough to have that nice knit community here of us. We're, we're small but, but mighty, I'd say.

Carson: I agree. If you could choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Holly: Um, that at the end of the day, it's, it's a show, it's a performance, it's no one trying to push their agenda or anything on you, per se. Um, it's, it's fun. We're here to have, um... to entertain. It's a form of entertainment, and it shouldn't be seen as anything more than that, I, I think. It's an art form, it's an art form, it's a form of entertainment at the end of the day. And that if we can all come together and just enjoy a show the way you would a concert or going to the movies or a theatre production on Broad... or on Broadway or wherever, it's, it's... we're here for a few hours to have a good time.

Carson: Is there anything else that you want to share about your experiences?

Holly: Um, I guess, I'll... I can go back and talk again about, again, how I got started and just... but I would like to acknowledge the legends that I... that did help me out, uh, Blanche duBois and Jodie Santana, Rochelle Delight, Aida Headley, Veronica J Belle and Kara Belle, all of them... I didn't... again, I didn't have one specific drag mother or, or mentor, I had a slew of them. And they all contributed to shaping me and my persona in some way or for, and I thank them all for that, so...

Carson: Where do you live now? I need to include that in my biography.

Holly: Um, I'm currently in Herrin, Illinois, so...

Carson: Alright. Thank you for talking to me. I really did enjoy it.

Holly: Yeah, good. I hope I was of some help.

Carson: [Laughs]

Holly: Didn't just ramble on incoherently for too long.

Carson: No, it's fine. But can you send me a couple pictures of you in drag that you like, so I can add it, as like... so I can add it to my project?

Holly: Yeah, of course.

Carson: I don't wanna just [unclear] you like them

Holly: Yeah, sure, of course. Right. No, that's fine. Yeah, I'll send you a couple. That's fine.

Carson: All right. Cool. Uh, I'm gonna turn it on Friday, I think.

Holly: Yeah. I'll, I'll go through tomorrow in, in the morning when I'm at work.

Carson: It was nice talking to you.

Holly: Yeah, it's good to see you.

Carson: Hopefully [unclear] soon.

Holly: Okay. Have a good night.

Interview with Ivy Tabou

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Claudia: Okay, so the first question I have is, what did you... or when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Ivy: So, I... it's going to sound really lame, but, like, I just saw an ad for RuPaul's Drag Race, and I was like, "Oh, like, that looks, kind of, cool." Like, I don't know, I've never really been, like, the person to, like, be judgmental about anything like that. So, I just kinda was like, "Oh, that's cool." Then I, like, kind of, got into it more and, like, started doing research on it and yeah.

Claudia: Cool. And then, what was your initial reaction to it?

Ivy: Um, probably just, like, amazed because there was a lot more to it than people think.

Claudia: Yeah. Yeah, we lear... like, in this class I've, like, learned so much about it. I was like, "Wow, I did not know it was that intense."

Ivy: Yeah, it's a whole, like, project.

Claudia: Yeah, definitely. And then, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you get into it?

Ivy: So, I've only been performing since January because of quarantine. There hasn't been really any, like, amateur nights available. Um, I've been practicing, like, drag makeup, that's what I picked up during quarantine, like, whenever it first started. So, I just was, kind of, building up my makeup, getting all of that down, getting some things before I started. Um, yeah. I forgot the other part of your question, I'm sorry. [Laughs]

Claudia: And why did you start performing?

Ivy: Um, I started performing because I like... I've always liked performing. Um, I used to be in, like, choir and, like, theatre and drama, and I just, kind of, was like, "I need..." Like, I missed performing; I missed the outlet that it gives me, and yeah.

Claudia: Awesome. And then, how did your family, friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Ivy: So, my mom is very supportive, like, her side of the family is very supportive of it. My mom comes to a lot of my shows. She tries to come as many as she can. Um, my dad is from a very conservative town, so it, kind of, took him a little bit to, kind of, like, educate him and get him around to the idea.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: But he's definitely gotten a little more receptive to it, he's a little better with it.

Claudia: That's good.

Ivy: Um, my friends, on the other hand, they just, kind of, were like, "Okay," like, "when's your show? I'm coming."

Claudia: Yeah. [Laughs]

Ivy: Like, "You can't stop me."

Claudia: That's good that you have a good support system for it, though.

Ivy: Yes, definitely. I feel very lucky to have a support system.

Claudia: Um, and then... so, you told me your drag name is Ivy Tabou, which I love, but where did your drag name come from? Like, how did you come up with it?

Ivy: I'm gonna be honest, I looked up on Google, like, a drag queen name generator...

Claudia: Really? [Laughs]

Ivy: Which I didn't even know existed, but it popped up. And first, I was going to be Phoenix Monroe, but I didn't really like that. So, one of the other names was Ivy Taboo, but I just had to change the name around because of social media because it wouldn't let me keep Taboo the same word, for some reason...

Claudia: Oh.

Ivy: Because they said it's not a real person, so...

Claudia: That's weird. That's cool that you did that, though, 'cause I know a lot of, like, bands say like, "Oh, I just went on random band name generator," or something, and like rappers do that too. So, that's, kind of, cool.

Ivy: Yeah.

Claudia: Um, and then, there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag from, like, drag queen and drag king to glamor queen and, like, male impersonator, comedy queen, like, all those. Are there, like, particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Ivy: Um, I definitely identify with just drag queen. I don't really like to use, like, AFAB or bioqueen because to me, personally, it's, kind of, not as inclusive as I thought it was whenever I first was starting out. So, I try to be as inclusive as I can. I... I'm still trying to find, like, my persona, so I don't really, like, use campy queen or, like, glamor or anything like that, I'm just, kind of, figuring out who Ivy really is and, like, building on it.

Claudia: Yeah. Since you're so... yeah, since you said you started in January, so I'm sure you're like... still trying to, like, figure what kind of drag you want to do, 'cause my next question was, what kind of drag do you do, or, like, what style? But are you, like, still trying to find that?

Ivy: Um, I do know that, like, Ivy's a little bit alternative and really likes musicals, that's about as far as I've gotten.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: But I definitely try to keep people, like, on their toes, like, not perform the same number more than, like, three or four times unless it goes over really well.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: Yeah.

Claudia: Yeah. So, do you have, like, a favorite, like, kind of songs that you do? Like, what are some of, like... is it usually, like, the same genre? You said you like musicals, so you, like, stick with musicals?

Ivy: Um, I typically try to do musicals every now and then because audience perception is such a huge thing with drag, and a lot of audience members don't know musicals that well.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: So, I try to do, like, top 40 or, like, throwback songs, like Avril Lavigne I've tried doing.

Claudia: Oh, okay.

Ivy: Um, I've tried doing some, like, Ashnikko recently...

Claudia: Okay.

Ivy: And it's, it's gone okay.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: But, yeah. [Laughs]

Claudia: [Laughs] So, do you, like, usually, um, base the next song you're gonna do off of the crowd's reaction to it?

Ivy: Yes, in a sense. Um, I... luckily, like, I performed... or before I started performing, I was able to go to, like, a few of the bars I've performed at. So, that way, I can see what songs go over well, like, what kind of music. So, I, kind of, just pick and choose like, "Okay, like, this goes over really well at this bar, whereas at this bar it doesn't go over very well at all."

Claudia: Mm-hmm. Okay, that's interesting. And then, my next question was going to be, does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist, and if so, how?

Ivy: Um, I definitely don't think it does, I felt pretty welcomed coming in. The only thing is, some... like, some people will try to tell me to, like, really overaccentuate every aspect, which I'm not personally a huge fan of. Like, that's just not for me. But I'm definitely, like, overaccentuating what I can and what I can do. So, it's just, kind of, like, you pick and choose what, what advice is given to you.

Claudia: Yeah. And going off of that, I was gonna ask you... 'cause I know you're a woman dressing in drag as a woman. So, have you ever received, like, backlash for that? 'Cause I know that is, like... sometimes happens in the drag community since, like, some people see it as an advantage, although I don't personally think that way, but do you think...?

Ivy: I have... I have definitely, like, been lucky. I haven't gotten really that much, like, backlash towards it. The only thing I have been asked, really, is if I was transgender, which I'm not, but I just, kind of, said, "No, I identify as a cisgender woman, like, this is just what I do."

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: Um, I've had somebody try to reference my kind of drag as, like, stripper. Like, I told them I did drag, and they said "Oh, so kind of like a stripper because you collect tips." And I was like, "No, it's not like stripping at all."

Claudia: Mm-hmm. So, you, kind of, get, like, labeled? Do you think you get labeled more for it as becoming... as being a cis woman going into drag?

Ivy: I can definitely see it that way, yes. But I try to not use any labels, but I will just kind of be upfront, and I'll be like, "I'm a cisgender woman. Like, this is just what I do as a hobby." Like, yeah.

Claudia: Mm-hmm. Okay. And then, do you have any, like, influences for your drag? Like, any one, like, person or thing that influences your kind of drag style?

Ivy: Um, definitely. There's this one queen in St. Louis, her name is Roxie Valentine. I really like her because she's, like, alternative, and she's kind of the first person I ever talked to, like, about drag and, like, to get advice. So, it definitely, like... she's definitely a big part of it. I try and do anything in pop culture and just, kind of, make it a little bigger and, like, add my own taste to it. So, that way at least, like, the audience will somewhat know what it is.

Claudia: Mm-hmm. Okay. Um, so, like, going off of what you said, like, Roxie Valentine, is she more like... has she, like, guided you through the process, like, of all of your drag performances then?

Ivy: So, um, we talked during quarantine, and then she started getting booking for shows, like, a lot. So, it, kind of, like, fizzled out, which there isn't any drama, nothing happened, just both of us got busy, so...

Claudia: Mm-hmm,

Ivy: But I've definitely talked to her and, um, a few other queens I've talked to, and they've really, like, guided me through, like, "Hey don't do this," and, "Hey, maybe do this, like try it."

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: So, it's definitely been very helpful to get, like, a more experienced queen's advice...

Claudia: Yeah.

Ivy: Especially, like, since I'm so new still.

Claudia: Mm-hmm. Well, that's good that you have like a good support system behind you.

Ivy: Yeah.

Claudia: Um, and then, do you consider your drag, like, political at all?

Ivy: I do not. I try to not do anything too political right now. I'm hoping to do a little bit more political in the future, but as of right now, no.

Claudia: Okay. And then, um, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?

Ivy: I can. [Laughs]

Claudia: [Laughs]

Ivy: So, typically, I... Like, are you just wanting, like, the process of just getting ready?

Claudia: Um, I guess more like, like where... are you a part of more like a specific, like, drag family and more, like, how often do you perform, how do you get ready? So, yeah, I mean, you can go through, like, the entire process if you'd like.

Ivy: So, I, um, I'm not a part of a drag family as of right now. I used to be a drag child to a drag queen named Breanna Burns. But we, kind of, realized that we're a little too similar, so she's now one of my best friends, and we just... we give each other advice, not as, like, drag mother and daughter, and it is a lot better that way.

Um, typically I will do... I have, kind of, cut back because of school, and I'm trying to get good grades. So, I only try to do, like, three to five shows a month. But, if I get booked more, I get booked more, and I just work around it.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: Uh, how I get ready, I typically do my makeup, like, at my house, and then I pack all my stuff in a suitcase and get everything in my car, and then drive to the venue, and then get ready, like, in the dressing room from there. Not very exciting. [Laughs]

Claudia: [Laughs] How often... or how long does it usually take you to, like, get ready for each show?

Ivy: Typically, the makeup is about an hour, hour and a half.

Claudia: Oh wow.

Ivy: And then... like, actually doing, like, hip pads and tights and putting on the outfit, things like that takes about 30, 45 minutes.

Claudia: Okay. And so, when you go out and perform, are you usually just performing, like, one song usually per night?

Ivy: It depends on the show. Some of them book you to do three. Like, I know I'm booked at a show at the end of April. and they are wanting me to do four different numbers.

Claudia: Oh wow.

Ivy: So, it is really just what the show director is wanting.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: Um, any [unclear] that I've done now has been two, which isn't really that bad, so...

Claudia: Okay. That's cool. And then, I was gonna ask how COVID, like, affected your drag, but I know you started in COVID, so you don't...

Ivy: Yeah.

Claudia: So, you've never been in the scene, like, when it's been normal. So, that, kind of, interesting.

Ivy: Yeah:

Claudia: Has anybody told you, like, how it's been before then compared to now?

Ivy: Um, a lot of queens are like, "Yeah, I, kind of, miss not performing with, like, the face shield or the clear face masks that we have to wear." I mean, I'm used to it 'cause that is all I've ever done...

Claudia: Yeah.

Ivy: Is just perform with a clear, like, face shield or clear face mask, whatever the case is, so...

Claudia: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I noticed that in your selfie that you sent me, it was this, like, clear mask, which is honestly good 'cause I feel, like, that would be so annoying to have to wear one that covers your face when you just did all of your makeup.

Ivy: Yeah. Um, it's really not that bad. The only issue I have as of right now is, like, the face shield, I cannot see hardly at all with it on. So, I'm very lucky that I got that face mask because I can at least somewhat see where I am going [laughs], not look so blind.

Claudia: Yeah. [Laughs] Um, and then I was going to ask... you said earlier that you identify as, like, a cisgendered woman, correct?

Ivy: I do.

Claudia: Okay. And then, when you're in drag, you also identify as a woman?

Ivy: Yes.

Claudia: So, has drag influenced, um, how you think about your gender at all?

Ivy: Um, not really. Um, it's just made me a little bit more open to pronouns, per se. Like, I do identify as cisgender, but I'm... it's gonna sound really weird, but, like, I'm fine with any pronoun. Like, any pronoun is good with me, but I prefer, like, woman.

Claudia: Yeah.

Ivy: Like, I prefer to be a cisgender woman.

Claudia: Yeah. But, like, if someone... so, you don't mind if someone were to, like, identify you in a different way?

Ivy: No.

Claudia: Okay. That's interesting. Um, and then, how has drag impacted or changed you?

Ivy: It's definitely educated me on, like, transgender rights and just the transgender community in general. Because coming into it, and at least just, like, going to shows before COVID, I was not very educated on the whole, like... the whole scene, and I wasn't trans... I wasn't educated on transgender rights. And that's really, kind of, like, opened my eyes to it and the discrimination against it.

Claudia: Okay. And then, has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Ivy: Um, it's definitely made me a little bit more confident in some of the things I do. Like, I'm a little bit more confident to, like, stand up for what I believe in and not really back down quite as much.

Claudia: Mm-hmm. Yeah, so, do you find drag to be, like, a more empowering, um, form of art for you?

Ivy: Oh, absolutely.

Claudia: Okay. And then, hmm... Let me see what I want to ask here. Okay. And then, I want to ask how do you personally define drag?

Ivy: I personally define drag as an art form and however the person wants to display their art form is valid, it's expressive, it's a way to get anything... like, any frustration out. Like, I know if I'm frustrated with, like, school or anything like that, I can go and perform a ballad or perform a song, and then, I just feel better.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: So, I take it as more as, like I said, an artform or like a therapeutic approach.

Claudia: Yeah.

Ivy: Some people define it as, like, a job which it, kind of, is but, yeah. I prefer to think of it as an artform.

Claudia: Okay, cool. And then, what do you think is the purpose of drag? Or if there is one, like, specific purpose?

Ivy: I think the purpose is to entertain people but as well as, like... as well as entertaining, just to, kind of, like, get people's attention and really, like, have them forget any issues that are going on in their life, like, just for a little bit. Like, they'll have a show to at least be at.

Claudia: Yeah. Okay. And then, do you think drag is... I know, like, you said, coming in as a woman, people, like, assumed like, "Oh, so it's like stripping." So, do you see, like, drag as a sexual thing?

Ivy: Um, not all the time, no. It's just... it depends on... like I said, it depends on the person. Like, some queens like to be sexy and like do burlesque and things like that, but that's totally just up to them.

Claudia: Mm-hmm. So, it just depends on the drag queen?

Ivy: Yeah.

Claudia: Okay. And then, I know you said, like, when you got into drag, it was more like... you saw, like, RuPaul's Drag Race. So, how do you feel about that whole show?

Ivy: Um, I, I think it's a good way to, at least, show off drag queens. I would like if they would include... like, they have gotten a little better because of this season. They have Gottmik, which is a transgender male who is a drag queen. But I personally would like if they had, like, an AFAB queen, if that is how you identify, or just like, like me, a woman that just does drag. I would prefer if they had that and wasn't as solely set on like, "Okay, you're just a drag... like, a drag queen." Like, I'd love to see drag kings on there but not my show, so...

Claudia: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I was curious to see what you would say about that because I know... 'cause their representation on the show is sometimes, like, limited to the amount of drag. And for me, going into this drag class, like, that's really what I saw it as, is just what I, kind of, saw on RuPaul's Drag Race, just, like, men usually dressing up in drag as women. So, do you think it... like, the show is, like, a little closed off in that way of representing the drag community?

Ivy: I do think it is a little bit closed off, but like I said, they are getting a little bit better with it, but it's, kind of, baby steps. I will say, though, there is a show on Netflix called, uh, The Boulet Brothers' Dragula, and they, um, they are awesome with being inclusive.

Claudia: Oh.

Ivy: They, um, they've had drag queens, they've had nonbinary performers, they've had all kinds of different drag artists on the show, and I just think it is really awesome that they, kind of, see drag as more of an artform. Whereas I think RuPaul's Drag Race sees it more as a competition and, like, the set rules are in place.

Claudia: Mm-hmm Huh, I didn't know...- I have never heard of that show. I need to watch that then 'cause that seems interesting.

Ivy: Yeah, it's really good, very good. It is a little like... it's gory, I will say that.

Claudia: Oh really? [Laughs]

Ivy: Yeah.

Claudia: Um, and then, if you could change one thing about drag, or, like, the drag scene, or the drag community as a whole, what would it be, if anything?

Ivy: Um, I would change probably just, like, people's perception of it. Like, a lot of people are accepting towards it, but I would like if a lot more people weren't as, like, rude---not rude, but, like, homophobic about it, and only appreciate it during Pride month, things like that.

Claudia: Okay.

Ivy: I know that, like, wasn't your question, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. [Laughs]

Claudia: No, no. Literally answer it however you want. [Laughs] I like to hear your opinions on everything, so that's good. And then, so going off of that, do you think--what do you think are, like, misconceptions people have about drag? 'Cause I know, like, RuPaul's like... I feel like even for me, even going into this class, I had a misconception of, like... I really just thought it was usually... I knew, like, women going into drag, I have seen them do, like drag kings, like, dressing as guys and, like... just women dressing as men. So, do you think that's-- what do you think is, like, a common misconception for people?

Ivy: Um, I think a common misconception is, like, people just think it's a man dressing up as a woman or a woman dressing as a man. Whereas, there's... it's really not, in my opinion.

Claudia: Yeah, there's... going into this class I was like, "Wow, there is a lot more to this than I, like, really thought. And the rep-- do you think the representation, like, that is in the media, has had a negative impact on those, um, like common misconceptions?

Ivy: Um, not really. Um, I think, sometimes it can be a little negative, but typically, it's not negative. It's just, kind of, like, not educated, per se. So, I guess, yes. [Laughs]

Claudia: [Laughs] Okay. And then, I think I have one last question. Um, if you chose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Ivy: That drag is very, like, inclusive, and it is not some underground scene like it was back in like... back... way back in the day. Like, it's not. Like, we're, we're not scary. [Laughs]. We're not scary people. You can come up to us and say hi or tell us that we're pretty; things like that. Like, we won't... we won't bite you.

Claudia: [Laughs] Okay. Well, thank you so much for answering all those.

Ivy: Yeah, not a problem.

Claudia: So, I guess I have one... a little more questions. So, you said that you usually, like, perform in St. Louis?

Ivy: I do

Claudia: So, is there... do you usually perform at the same clubs? Or you perform at, like, different clubs or what?

Ivy: Um, I perform at a few different bars, I am just now starting to get booked at different places, which is very exciting.

Claudia: Mm-hmm.

Ivy: So... but, um, I have traveled to Columbia, Missouri a couple times to perform.

Claudia: Oh wow. That's awesome. So, do you think, like, as your drag career goes on, you'll probably wanna travel more places?

Ivy: Oh, definitely. I love to travel, so any reason just to travel in general, I would love, especially if I can, like, travel and do drag, that would be amazing.

Claudia: Yeah. Yeah, that would be so cool, I'm sure. Oh. Well, when's your next drag show?

Ivy: My next drag show is tomorrow.

Claudia: Oh really?

Ivy: Yeah. I'm traveling to Columbia, Missouri.

Claudia: Oh, okay, wow. Well, good luck.

Ivy: Thank you.

Claudia: [Laughs] Is that your first time going to Columbia, then, to do drag?

Ivy: Uh, it's my second.

Claudia: Okay. Oh. Well, awesome. Well, thank you so much. That was super interesting.

Ivy: Yeah, not a problem.

Claudia: [Laughs] Well, I hope you have a good rest of your day. I'll let you know how this whole project goes. [Laughs]

Ivy: Okay.

Claudia: Okay, have a good day.

Ivy: You too. Bye.

Claudia: Bye.

Interview with Jade Sinclair

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Terranisha: Okay, cool. All right, so I'm about to give you, basically, a research participation notification just saying that, like, I'm... I have permission about interviewing you, you know, , just making sure everything's okay...

Jade Sinclair: Okay.

Terranisha: And safely... You can read that over, if you like. Just, just wanted to make sure everything's okay.

Jade Sinclair: Sure.

Terranisha: Yeah, [unclear].

Jade Sinclair: Okay. I'm good with this.

Terranisha: Awesome. Okay. Well, you say you're great at talking. Me, personally, I am a nervous wreck.

Jade Sinclair: Oh no.

Terranisha: Oh, so, this is something that's seriously out of my comfort zone, but we will get through it. [Laughs] But again, uh...

Jade Sinclair: It used to be one that was out of mine too, until you, you go on the stage on a... on a regular basis...

Terranisha: Yeah. That's...

Jade Sinclair: And you learn...

Terranisha: Like I said, I really command people that, that do because it's so much... it is very brave [unclear]. And, like, oh my god, do you do your own makeup?

Jade Sinclair: I do.

Terranisha: Oh, okay.

Jade Sinclair: I'll send you some pictures [unclear] in case you need them. But I'll send you some promotional pictures also.

Terranisha: Oh, that's so funny because I went on your Facebook already and got a screenshot. I'm sorry. [Laughs]

Jade Sinclair: No, that's fine, go right ahead. Yeah.

Terranisha: But, um, basically, I was going to start off saying, thank you so much for sitting down with me, especially at short notice. You're awesome for that. I really appreciate your time and your effort. Basically, we're just going to go straight into the questions.

Jade Sinclair: Okay, certainly.

Terranisha: It's like 18 questions.

Jade Sinclair: Okay.

Terranisha: So, hopefully, it's okay.

Jade Sinclair: Oh yeah.

Terranisha: Where did you first hear about drag, and what was the... um, int-- your interaction with it, your reaction with it?

Jade Sinclair: So, as I said before, my experience was probably a little bit different than someone who's in college today. I've been, um... I'm 49 years old...

Terranisha: Looking good.

Jade Sinclair: And I've been an out gay male... Thank you. I've been an out gay male since about 1995. So, when I first started to go out to what would have been, you know, we called them the gay bars back then, but really, they would be LGBTQIA establishments today. I would go out, and I encountered for the very first time what was drag at one of the dance clubs in Springfield, Illinois.

Terranisha: Okay.

Jade Sinclair: And the bar was called, um, New Dimensions, back in the time. And there was some entertainers that I saw in '95 that are still performing today, some amazing individuals. But I can honestly say that at that time being a very young gay male, I did not understand drag very much at all.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: And I... and I had a very cliché response to it, and that was, "Oh my god, if I want to be with woman, I'd be with a woman." But that's because I didn't really understand the art form of, of female impersonation. And then, I think over time, I, I began to appreciate it more. I realized that it's not about sexuality.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: It is more about a performance art. And so. Then, I began to get more interested in it as I saw it more and more and as it was woven into the LGBT community. And in 1997, I think it was, when I was living in Wilmington, Delaware, after, after grad school, I was the president of the pride festival there. And we used... and the entertainers to raise money, to help pay for the pride festival. And they thought it would be really fun to have the pride board members, who were not drag queens, by the way, to, to do a number in the show. And so, I did,

and I, kind of, like... I guess you can say it was [unclear] like the proverbial bug had bit, and I really did enjoy it. And I think I enjoyed it so much because I've always had a love of theater. And I didn't realize that as a... as a drag entertainer or as a female impersonator, that it really does fulfill that, that desire to be on stage and be a character on stage.

Terranisha: Wow. That's very interesting. And you know, you hit a lot of great points. And I... you know, before I started taking this class, I kinda was not educated at all. So, hearing your story in person and, you know, learning about, it's like, "Dang, this is real." Like, like, yeah, the journey is real. So, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Jade Sinclair: So, it would have been probably around the middle of the year of 1997. And it initially, as I said... as I said before, it was just to... uh, as a fundraiser. But I had a lot of fun being on stage, being in front of a packed audience.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And then, just having them all, like, you know, applaud and cheer and throw money at you. [Laughs] [Unclear].

Terranisha: Oh. [Laughs]

Jade Sinclair: That money was for charity, so I think...

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: They're always inclined to throw a little bit extra when it was for charity. Oh, so... Um, but, you know, that was... that was where I initially got my interest. And at that time, it seemed pretty easy because...

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: You know, I sat down in a chair while an established individual did my makeup for me. And then, I went and bought clothes, and I just put the clothes on. So, it was all different because after I had had that initial interest, I wanted to pursue the... it more.... uh, at a more full-time basis, and that meant I had to actually learn how to be a little more self-sufficient. So, I had to learn the, you know, makeup, and I had to learn, like, not only how to go out and buy a wig, but then how to make it look presentable on your hair... I mean, on your head because it's...

Terranisha: Sure.

Jade Sinclair: That's, you know... they, they don't come necessarily styled. [Laughs]

Terranisha: They don't. They really don't.

Jade Sinclair: Yeah. And so, then, you had to find clothes that better suit your body. And then, then it also moved into buying street clothes, which are fine. But when you're trying to be a seasoned entertainer on stage, you want to have more show pieces. So, then, even finding them back in the day was very hard because you have to remember that I did this in 1997, this is pretty much before there was really ever an internet.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: So, a lot of what I bought was going to be from stores or if I'm [unclear], so it was really hard. Like, even learning makeup was like, you couldn't go to YouTube tutorials because it didn't exist yet.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: So, you had to, like play at home or go watch somebody who was already doing it. And then, you know, it's, it's kind of, um, awkward to say, "Hey man, can I watch you do your makeup?"

Terranisha: Right, exactly. Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: [Laughs] So, it took a... it took lot of... a lot of trial and error, and it was very hard. But through the guidance of one of my mentors, I did learn quite a bit about how to sew for myself, not a... not very well. I don't do my own clothes today, but it got by. And then, I learned, like, you know, how to, like, you know... to put some style in a wig. And then, I learned a lot about my makeup.

And then when I moved to... and Delaware had a very small drag community. It was a very small state, you know, so... But then, when I moved to St. Louis in 2001... I'm from Missouri originally, that's where I think my knowledge and my career really took off because it was a much bigger...

Terranisha: Right. Bigger population, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: Community here and had a lot more opportunities to learn from a much bigger audience and a lot more established entertainers.

Terranisha: Gosh [unclear]. Oh, that's awesome. That's really good. Yeah. Um, like, so, with this one it was... I'm really wanting to know this, how did your family, friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Jade Sinclair: In all honesty, for the first several years of my entertainment career, I didn't really tell them about that, that side of my... of my, uh, my life or my lifestyle.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: I... 'cause I don't think... I come from a very rural environment...

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: In rural Missouri. And I wasn't so sure how accepting they would be. I was lucky enough that... you know, my parents were farmers and they were pretty open about, um, about me being gay, to begin with. And it was, I think, a small bit of an awkwardness, but then they accepted me pretty, pretty readily. So, I was very blessed in that regard.

I don't remember exactly how I told them I did drag, but I did tell them, eventually, that I did perform on stage and drag. And there's a local bar about a half hour from my parents' house, and

me and some of my... what we call my sisters, when we were in Delaware, we drove out in a... we rented a van and drove, out and we all performed at that bar about a half hour from my family's house. And, and my mother, father, and all my sisters were there for the show. So, it was a really, really fun, rewarding experience. And we got a picture together, and it just happened it was also pretty close to their 35th wedding anniversary. So, it was real nice.

Terranisha: Oh, really? Oh my gosh. Were you nervous?

Jade Sinclair: Uh, I was a little bit, but, I mean, really... I mean, I think having my, my close friends there perform with me, it...

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: And I think I'd been doing it for probably, oh, four years by then. So, I... some of my stage nerves had worn off a little bit.

Terranisha: Okay.

Jade Sinclair: So, that, kind of, like, auto... that automatic side of the... of the show business, kind of, took over. So, it wasn't too bad.

Terranisha: Okay. That's really great. Oh my gosh. Where does your drag name come from?

Jade Sinclair: So, this is not a very glamorous story, but when I first knew I was going to perform, I, I wanted to have a name that I thought was, kind of, unique and began with, like, a unique letter. And I really liked, for some reason, names that were [unclear] gemstones. And in the area, there was already a diamond, which is, you know, the best gemstone.

Terranisha: Right, exactly.

Jade Sinclair: And I thought that, oh my god, like, Emerald, I thought, and Ruby and Sapphire kind of sounded a little bit old. [Laughs] So, then I... so, then I went with, with Jade, 'cause it was kind of a... of a [unclear] a fresher name, and it had... started with a J, which is a unique letter, so...

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: At it was just... at that time, it was just one name. I thought I could be like Madonna and Cher, I didn't need to have a full name. I just needed to have one name. So, it was Jade for a while. And then, when I did my first pageant for female impersonators...

Terranisha: Oh, wow, you did a pageant?

Jade Sinclair: Yeah. It was probably around 1999 or so, that, like, okay... so, that's before my full name, I'm like, "Oh, I guess I better get a last name." So, I went with Sinclair, I thought that it sounded a little elegant.

Terranisha: Wow. When does it...? This is just a random question, but when does it get, like, busy? What's the best days to come here?

Jade Sinclair: The busiest days, I think, are, are probably Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. But we do have shows here Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. We only have one night open, that's Wednesday. So, it works well that you have come tonight. But we have pretty good shows. I mean, we get a lot of birthdays and bachelorettes on Fridays and Saturdays. And then, we have... we have a very strong, um... Sundays there's always been for... you know, a very strong night for our African-American population. So, there... it's really busy, and we have a predominantly Black, uh, Black cast that night. And so, we get a lot of their followers come in for that.

Terranisha: Oh. Well, I ain't going to come Monday, now that I know so much. The next question is, there are a lot of terms for types of styles of drag from drag queens, drag kings, to glamorous queen, male impersonating, comedy queens, queer queens, bioqueens... and I know it's a lot. I'm so sorry.

Jade Sinclair: Yeah, that's fine.

Terranisha: And camp queens, amongst others. Are there particular labels you would use to categorize your drag?

Jade Sinclair: I think, in general, I would probably say that my look is a very traditional drag queen. Well, very traditional drag queen or female impersonator look. I tend to, like, try and come from trying to copy what... you know, an ele—an elevated, elegant version of what you would see in a strong female persona. So, you know, I have, like... I guess it's just pretty traditional drag. You know what I mean? I have... on occasion, I can do more than that. I have... I have created some looks that are very campy, I've done some things that are very comedy, but in general I would say that I am a very traditional pageant drag queen or female impersonator.

Terranisha: Okay. And then that... it was, like, points. What kind of drag do you do, and what are your styles? But you already, kind of, answered that one.

Jade Sinclair: Yeah. I think it's pretty traditional. I mean, I perform a lot of... I have a pretty wide repertoire of music, but myself, my favorite musical genre would be like eighties or nineties. But I do a lot of things, even, you know, contemporary stuff as well. I try to do things that I think that the audience can, can have a good time with. I try to keep a very party atmosphere at my show. So, I want it to be kinda upbeat and fun, and I want people to be able to go be clapping and singing along and having a good time.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: It's supposed to be here... I think we're here in our shows to not only break down barriers and say that you can really be whatever you want to be. That's, kind of, the point of why I do drag, aside from getting my little scratch of my theatrical love. But I find it interesting to walk out... and I am a padded queen, which means I wear... I wear breast foams, and I wear, like, hip pads, and I pad my butt as well. So, when I walk out, I have a very feminine silhouette, and I, you know, I have, I think... hopefully people think too, very, you know, very natural-looking hair. So, I present female onstage, and I've learned to soften my voice a little bit when I'm on the microphone. I know it still sounds male. I know it does. But I try to... you know, try to give the

character. But I love to, like, walk out and have this image. And then sometimes I break character, I'm like, "Hey, how are you?"

Terranisha: Oh. [Laughs]

Jade Sinclair: [Laughs] Because, I mean, we get a lot of... we get a lot of people that have never been here [unclear] to see drag for the first time. And I think it just puts that duality of it and says that they... they see this female, then they realize, oh, this person is a man.

Terranisha: Right. Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: You know, I mean, we live in a world, and you have a... you have a degree... my degree is in psychology, by the way.

Terranisha: Oh.

Jade Sinclair: You're studying psychology and sociology. We are... we are taught from a very young age, whether or not [unclear] we know what... how to behave.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: There are so many non-verbal lessons that we're taught all throughout our youth. And, and, so, it's interesting to be able to break those and help others realize that we don't have to live up to what society says we should be. We can find ways to be our own selves, our own authentic selves.

Terranisha: Exactly. Yeah. Totally agree with that. Next question. Does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist? If so, how?

Jade Sinclair: No, I don't think it... oh, I can say one thing. I mean, it doesn't affect my life, but I do live pretty much a separate lifestyle. Like, I have a day job also, and I worked for a large regional bank. And I work in a professional role, and I work with a lot of senior leaders who... I mean, they're focused on the performance of the bank, not about necessarily what we're doing, our personal lifestyles, but we don't talk a lot about it. And I don't... I just don't share that side of my life with them.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: But my family and my friends, are all... are all well aware of it and they often... I meet a lot of my friends here because they'll, they'll still come to shows and be like, "Oh, I love watching the show." So, they may end up talking to me and become friends outside of it as well.

Terranisha: Exactly. Exactly. Who or what has influenced your drag?

Jade Sinclair: In a professional environment, like, artists, musical artists have influenced me. I mean, Madonna was a huge influence on me in the late nineties when I was first starting, because she was still a very predominant figure. I'm not sure how familiar you are with Madonna from that timeframe, but she also broke a lot of barriers. She stood up for a lot of minorities, if it was... if it was the LGBT community, if it was the... if it was the people of color, she was very... she was always vocal for the people that are being suppressed by mainstream society. And so, that

spoke a lot to me and a lot of the queer community at that day and age. So, she was always a strong influence on the character that I tried to be, you know, a strong, feminine role model.

Aside from that, my drag mother, which is the person that helped me a lot when I first began with makeup and stuff, her name is Karyn Thomas, and [unclear] probably not known her. she's from Delaware. She was also a very strong influence on my professional side, like, how to be professional. Because drag is a business and I'm creating a product that I'm trying to market and get sold to bus--- to bars. So, she taught me a lot about how to behave in a professional stage way.

Terranisha: Wow. That's very true. That's very true. Actually, I had a quick question. You had said that... um, do you read people? I was learning about that. I know you said, I do know [overtalking].

Jade Sinclair: To be honest, I don't do that a lot.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: But I do on occasion, though, but usually it is in a very fun way.

Terranisha: I've seen a couple of... and I was like, "Wow, they go i."

Jade Sinclair: No, I see... And what... I've been commented before that my MC style is, is a lot more laid back, and I make people feel really welcome. And I know that reading people is absolutely an art, and you know what I mean, they can really go in, and pe—and people can laugh with them, and it's okay. My way is usually, um... to be honest, I often tend to target straight white males. [Laughs]

Terranisha: Why?

Jade Sinclair: I think just because they, they are obviously the most uncomfortable in a show all the time. Because they're the ones that feel like, like their masculinity...

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: Is being challenged by being here in a bar that's a gay bar, where there're men performing on stage that they, honestly, are probably attracted to. It really... it really confuses them quite a bit. And I... so, I, I do pick on them a little bit, but not, not that... not that bad.

Terranisha: Not that bad?

Jade Sinclair: And mostly I get them to laugh a little bit, and I get them to realize that I'm not going to hurt them.

Terranisha: You're just playing, yeah. We're all just... it's all jokes. That's really funny.

Jade Sinclair: And because those are also the people in society that, that, in reality, don't have to face that kind... type of situation. So, I put them in that role.

Terranisha: Exactly. No, seriously. Especially being Caucasian and straight and coming from, you know, privilege.

Jade Sinclair: Exactly.

Terranisha: So, they don't see any type of...

Jade Sinclair: And I, I hope... I hope that when they leave... sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Terranisha: No, no you're fine.

Jade Sinclair: But when they leave, they hopefully have a little bit more insight about how other people feel...

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And maybe to be a little bit more tolerant and accepting of other... of other people.

Terranisha: Yeah. I think, um, just off topic, but I really think that, like, this... taking this course was seriously, not only, like, you know... not only, like, you know, "Oh yeah, we have sympathy," but I feel more connected because we're all in the same route of trying to basically survive. So many, like, you know, barriers we have to keep knocking down. So, many people that's trying to, basically, tell us we're out of lane or we're out of pocket or, like, um...

Like, I'm all for... like, you know, I'm, I'm pro Black. I love my Black, like, the Black Lives Matter movement, and when I was protesting last year, and I saw how many LGBTQ coming out and helping and burning stuff. Like, they was... they, they... you know, "We're tired". And I'm like, "Oh man, this is... this is outrageous." But not only that, but it was really the bomb, and that's when I was like, "Yeah, well, I think I want to take a class or something like that."

Jade Sinclair: Good.

Terranisha: Just because I've seen just their passion, you know? And I really also just liked the fact that they were just well put together, but that's not neither here or there.

Jade Sinclair: We've, we've had... That community has had their own... and continue to have a lot of the struggles.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: I mean, much like the Black community. I mean, we... You know, you think that it's 2021, I mean, Jesus Christ, how... It's just crazy to me to think about how much oppression we st-- that anyone today still faces in, in an advanced.

Terranisha: Yeah. I was just like... especially in New York, I was... my teacher, like, learning about just crazy things about the community, like, that you guys face is just...

Jade Sinclair: Stonewall? Is that the one you learned about?

Terranisha: Was it?

Jade Sinclair: Stonewall was the bar in 1969 where...

Terranisha: I think it probably was.

Jade Sinclair: That was where we...

Terranisha: That was in the 1980s.

Jade Sinclair: Oh...

Terranisha: It was a... oh dang, it was a video we was... we was watching. I forgot, but it was a lot of great information I was receiving. And it was just mind blowing, just seeing that, like, you know, how the... at the time, the AIDS rate was really high.

Jade Sinclair: Oh yeah.

Terranisha: And seeing, like, you know, people would just be walking down a block and, like, you know, just getting beat and not having a place to stay because their parents were so relentless, not accepting it. So, they had to, like, you know, find a drag mother, like...

Jade Sinclair: There was a... there was [unclear] time where... and I was... I came out much after this, but I'm all aware of it because my... you know... but there was a time when... and people still would say that being, being gay is an absolute... is a choice. And, and when I was in college, one of the things that I... that before I was even out, that resounded in my head was my, my psych professor said to me, when she was talking about, you know, sexuality, and she said, "I don't ever recall a time where I decided to be heterosexual. So, why would I think that someone who's homosexual would have... why is it a choice for them?"

Terranisha: Right. Exactly.

Jade Sinclair: But parents did not understand that. And a lot of religions said that this is terrible...

Terranisha: Exactly.

Jade Sinclair: You're going to go to hell. And so, yes, people were kicked out of their homes.

Terranisha: Right. And that's just my...

Jade Sinclair: At a very young age.

Terranisha: Yeah, that's what I was saying, some people saying like 13, like, that's crazy.

Jade Sinclair: I just can't... I can't even believe that.

Terranisha: Yeah, like, what? Like, you know...

Jade Sinclair: How can... how can somebody be equipped enough to deal with, you know, supporting themselves with no tools at that age?

Terranisha: Right. Exactly, exactly. And that's why I'm just happy that drag mothers took them in, and then, you know, some... they found some type of stability.

Jade Sinclair: Have you ever seen the show Pose? Did you ever watch that?

Terranisha: Oh, yeah, I love Pose.

Jade Sinclair: That's... It's, it's, kind of, about the same time frame.

Terranisha: Yeah, it's... I think that's what it was basing off of. But, yeah, I love Pose. I forget her name, the super tall mother who's over all of them, but she'd read people funny, too.

Jade Sinclair: She's, she's a sick bitch. [Laughs]

Terranisha: Yeah, yeah, she is, she is. I was like, "Oh wow, she's feisty." Okay, but can you talk about what's your life is, like... I mean, you, kind of, did this, but it basically said, um, are your parents... wait. Are you part of a drag family, house or any type of organization?

Jade Sinclair: Yeah. So, I am a part of a... of, like, a drag family. It was a pretty tight-knit family at the time. You know, it was for my drag mother, Karyn Thomas. I don't have her name by any means, but none of us ever did. But then I moved here, and I still have, like, some drag children that I helped when I... when I moved here.

Terranisha: Oh, okay.

Jade Sinclair: And, um... But I think... and I see children today... when I say children, I don't mean... these are obviously, you know, 21, 25-year-olds; they're not really children. But I see newer entertainers who were trying to, like, find that drag family. And I, I sometimes feel like the environment today is just changed so much from... like, from the nineties and the eighties...

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: That I don't personally think that having that strong drag family is really as important as finding yourself on your own. Because I think there's so many tools that are available today. Like, I had to learn from somebody to do make up.

Terranisha: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: Now, you can learn on the internet, and it's so much easier to learn. And now, you have access to buying things on the internet. You could buy anything you... almost anything you need on the internet. So, I don't think that...

Terranisha: The connection.

Jade Sinclair: Exactly. You know, you don't have to... it's not as... it's still a trade.

Terranisha: It's not as tense.

Jade Sinclair: It doesn't have to be as one-on-one, learning from somebody.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: I think you can learn from the internet. You can learn from all... We have so many shows going on in the city, it's crazy.

Terranisha: So, the relationship is not as close, like, the bomb, you can't build...

Jade Sinclair: I don't... Yeah, I don't think it has to be.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: I think... I think you could have a more successful career by just... by building your friendships, right?

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: You know, by learning... from learning from multiple sources.

Terranisha: Right. No, yeah, that's actually... that's a great point. I didn't even think of that. How often do you perform, and where do you perform? I know that this is the place.

Jade Sinclair: I perform quite a bit. I perform about five nights a week, and I also work five days a week.

Terranisha: Ooh.

Jade Sinclair: So, I have a pretty busy schedule. So, I work here on Thursday, Friday and Saturday...

Terranisha: Oh wow.

Jade Sinclair: And then, I work at another bar on Sunday in South City, then I work at a bar in Soulard on Monday. So, five nights a week.

Terranisha: Wow. This one is really a good question because I, kind of, want to know this too. What has the COVID, uh, COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

Jade Sinclair: For me, because I have a day job, and I have been able to work from home, it hasn't impacted my financial situation. It did impact, in the beginning, my social situations 'cause I'm used to being out so much because of my shows. And we were shut down, as you may know, for quite a bit, like, you know, for two months last year. So, I sat at home.

We, here in this bar, initially, when we opened around June, I think we were... I have to go back now, we were either at 25% or 50% capacity, which is, like, about... we used to have about 100 people in this room. So now, like, we can only have 25 to 50. So, we pulled up some tables, which we still have some of them pulled up. [Unclear] it didn't impact me a whole lot outside of missing my shows, but I do know... I have many friends that do drag, and some of them that only do drag, and that was a really hard time for them because they lost their source of income.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: And... this is for college, so probably it isn't a big deal, and we're also not listing any names. You know, we rely quite a bit on tips...

Terranisha: No, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And a lot of that tips is unreported income.

Terranisha: No, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: So, you can't go to the... and say, "Oh, like..." You don't get unemployment from being a drag queen.

Terranisha: Mm-hmm.

Jade Sinclair: So, it... so, it was really hard on them. So, a lot of them, we did learn some new tips and new techniques. And a lot of my friends did, like, online shows and accepted electronic tips.

Terranisha: Oh, okay.

Jade Sinclair: So, they learned how to, like, you know, how to set up...

Terranisha: Wow, [unclear].

Jade Sinclair: How to set up a camcorder, how to get a backdrop. I shouldn't say camcorder, that's so old, a video camera. [Laughs] You know, how to get a backdrop. So, we went out, we bought things I, myself, I wanted to do a couple of things too, just because I was bored at home. So, I went... you know, doing Amazon, and I got, like, you know, a whole camera kit with, like, bright lights and a whole backdrop and...

Terranisha: A whole set up.

Jade Sinclair: Yeah. So, we... and we put that in one of my rooms. And we also did, like, some, um... we also, like, would record some videos, and we would edit them, and, um, you know, we would post them online and accept some online tips as well.

Terranisha: Wow.

Jade Sinclair: It was... it was a...

Terranisha: That's very creative.

Jade Sinclair: It was. It was a fun time for some of us, even though it was very challenging for a lot of us.

Terranisha: No, yeah. Oh, next question. Is there anything unique to drag scenes where you live compared to other places in the country or rural?

Jade Sinclair: So, I have been, um... I began on the East Coast in Delaware, which is a really small state. So, drag here compared to Delaware is a lot bigger. It's a lot more refined, and there's a lot more national attention on the... on the entertainers here. So, like, in Delaware, we didn't have nearly the pageant community that we have here. So, you know, we have some Miss Americas, Miss Gay Americas, that are... that live in the city. We have some Miss Continentals that live in the city. So, we have a lot of national entertainers that live in the city. So, it's

different in that regard. But overall, I can tell you that drag is... it was, in my younger years, a very regional thing. So, the Midwest was always known for having very pretty queens on stage.

Terranisha: Really?

Jade Sinclair: And I think a lot of it has to do with... if you think about, like, New York, for example, compared to St. Louis, we have a lot more room here. In New York, they have a lot less room, and they have a lot, um... They're, um... It's a more expensive footprint to have. So, here, we can have a dressing room that can be big, where we can all, like, hang clothes and change clothes. And there, they're like, "Oh my god, [inaudible 00:26:05] is too expensive, we can't have big..." So, you don't have that. So, people in New York will, like, come to their show already in drag, and they'd probably not change their clothes at all. So, it's [unclear] gonna be about the quality of their entertainment, not necessarily about their wardrobe over everything else. And a lot of people on the coasts, East Coast and West Coast, sing live, and a lot of us in the Midwest lip-sync.

Terranisha: Gotcha. That's like RuPaul.

Jade Sinclair: But also, I mean, you know, if you think about that, a lot of the people from New York are also, uh... the huge theater community.

Terranisha: The population, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: So, there's a lot of pop-- people that are in theater that, you know, that while they're not working, they're gonna be doing some drag.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: So, I think that's why you get a lot more singing artists out on the coasts, because they're a lot more... a larger theater community than you have in St. Louis.

Terranisha: Gotcha. What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and becoming a drag artist? Did I say that?

Jade Sinclair: Yeah, I think that, first of all, the largest one is trying to learn how to... speaking for myself as a drag queen or a female impersonator, however you want to call that, my obstacle would have been trying to unlearn the, the masculine mannerisms that, that I was taught as a child. So, it's how I hold my hands. It's how I... it's just how I do things that make things look softer and more feminine, which is taboo. I mean, as a gay man, especially, I was taught... I shied away from anything that I thought was feminine because I didn't want to be beaten up. So, I would try to make it rah, rah. So, I had to... I had to learn a new way to carry myself that fit my personality on stage. But aside from that, I think that there was a lot of things that our community has to overcome. I think there's still a stigma around, you know... the media outlets tell you what's beautiful.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: And for a man, it's masculine, it's chiseled this, it's chiseled that. So, a lot of the drag queens, I think, feel inferior to that image. And I think, also, a lot of people who are trying

to find a man to date, see a drag queen as not in that image. They're like, "Oh, that's..." you know, they... like, oh, the whole masc for masc, masculine for masculine, you know, so, there's a lot of... I think we face a lot of... a lot of, um... I don't want to say criticisms, but, um, what is the word I'm trying to find? It's... Uh, I'm sorry.

Terranisha: No, you're fine.

Jade Sinclair: I know it. [Laughs] We... and I think that drag queens in general face a lot of discrimination from the gay men when they're trying to find partners. I, myself, don't have that problem because I'm a striking young man. No, I'm just kidding, no. I've had the same partner for, like, 16 years, so I'm good to go. But I know that a lot of my friends complain that it's really hard for them to find people to date.

Terranisha: Yeah. Why do you think that is?

Jade Sinclair: I think it really is because there's that stigma around... just like there was a stigma in the eighties and nineties around HIV, there's still a stigma around, "Oh, you're a drag queen." And I think part of it is because people think that we're full of drama. Part of it is because people think we want to be women. Part of it is because they think we're all feminine. So... And that was back, I think... it's rooted in when we were... when we're children where... and this just crazy, like, think about this. It's unacceptable for a man to dress like a female, but it's totally fine for a female to dress like a male. And what I mean is, like...

Terranisha: No, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: For a woman to wear pants is totally fine. No one... no one bats an eye about that. But if a man were to walk down the street wearing a skirt, it would catch everyone's attention. It's because our emphasis on society, and we... and they do, society evaluates males over females.

Terranisha: That's true. That's very, very true. This one is really cool. What goes into getting ready for a performance?

Jade Sinclair: A lot of fun, actually.

Terranisha: [Laughs]

Jade Sinclair: Um, you know, when I first started, and I say that because, you know, I just have expanded my wardrobe so much over the course of 25 years and also my musical background. But generally speaking, when I first started, it was a process where I had to find out, okay, so what song am I feeling now? Okay, I like this song.

Terranisha: Oh.

Jade Sinclair: So, then, as soon as you had the song, you know, what am I going to wear? What's my hair going to be? What's my makeup going to be? What's my cosmetics going to be? What's my costume going to be? Then find the right shoes, and the right jewelry. It was assembling all of this stuff. And then, I literally have a bedroom that's just full of, like...

Terranisha: I can only imagine.

Jade Sinclair: It's... My bedroom is a closet, and it's stacked full, full, full. So, I don't have to go through all that anymore. But honestly, getting ready as one of the fun things about drag. I like to be able to come to this bar or wherever I'm going to be working, sit in the dressing room with... around my peers. And if we have, like, five of us in the show, we all sit in the same room. We all do our makeup, we kiki, we have a good time. It's just... it's a lot of fun. But it's... I love putting on the makeup. I love watching the transformation in the mirror in front of me.

Terranisha: Right. How long do you think it takes? Like, how long does it take?

Jade Sinclair: Usually I think, in general, a new person, it takes a lot longer than it does a seasoned or a long-term individual. I recall, when I first started with my drag family, we would do a show, and the show would be at 10 o'clock, and it would be at a bar downtown in Delaware. And so, we would... we would arrive at my drag mother's house. We'd get there at 5 o'clock. This is five hours before the show. It's, kind of, ridiculous. We would just, like, sit there, and we would all smoke cigarettes [unclear] smoke, we kiki, and then we'd be getting our makeup on, getting all of our stuff. And we'd to leave there, leave her house around 8:30 or 9 o'clock. So, like, four hours for trying to get ready.

Terranisha: Oh wow.

Jade Sinclair: But a lot of that was, you know, was, like, having a good time and... But, um...

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: And that was also me doing a show once or twice a month. Now, I'm doing five times a week. So, it's just a lot different. Now, I get here, like, it's 6 o'clock for an 8:30 show. And I can do my makeup in probably, like, 35 to 40 minutes.

Terranisha: Oh really? That's impressive. I listened to RuPaul. He said, like... he said five hours for him.

Jade Sinclair: I think that's usually people who are just not as... you know, I mean, if you think about... as a female, you probably have a beauty regime. And when you first... and when you first developed that, that's putting on your lashes, [unclear] whatever you're doing, it took time. And even, like, putting in contacts, it'd be, like, a struggle when you first do it. But then, over time, it's like, oh, pop them right in.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: So, it all picks up in time.

Terranisha: Exactly.

Jade Sinclair: So, you know, I can probably be ready... I can be ready from head to toe, which means, like, my hair and my makeup and everything, in about an hour and 10 minutes.

Terranisha: Oh that's impressive/

Jade Sinclair: If I... if I focused on getting it done.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: But normally, I usually allow about two hours. It also allows me time to go downstairs and get a drink too from the bar. [Laughs]

Terranisha: That's still not that bad, though, actually. It's actually really good. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, any gender expression out of drag?

Jade Sinclair: Yeah, I'm pretty... I'm pretty traditional. Like, um, from when I... when I grew up in the gay community, in, like, the late nineties, I mean, we always referred to everybody as she. So, like, I mean, we called ourselves she, not necessarily to be, um... we never thought that we were women by any means at all. It was just... I think we just identified a lot more with, with the women of the world. They were a lot more nurturing, a lot more caring, a lot more supportive than heterosexual men. So, we always... I think that's why we always used the word she to refer to ourselves. So, I... people still... some of my older friends still call me she, even though I'm a boy. If someone were to ask me, "What are your pronouns?", I'm saying I'm probably he, him.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: When I'm on stage, I probably go by she, her, because that's what I'm presenting.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: So, I go by what I present. But I have a lot of friends that... I have friends that are... that are nonbinary or that are trans. So, I support all, everyone for who they are.

Terranisha: Right. I didn't know who... my... personally, I'm like, okay, well, in articles it says she, so that's what I've just been like, okay she. I didn't know myself. But what pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Jade Sinclair: Yeah, so out of drag it's usually, like... I mean, for... like, if I were with my family or at work, it's usually going to be he, him.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: But then, a lot of my gay friends will always refer to me as she or as her, which is what I do present as drag.

Terranisha: Right. You just said. Yeah. Has drag influenced your sex and gender identity and how?

Jade Sinclair: It hasn't, but it can be intoxicating. Because I think everybody likes to have some level of attention from, from people that they find attractive. So, for me, I am attracted to the male... to men. And so... and a lot of it's on social... because of social media, I get bombarded by, like, men that I don't know with sexual advances. And sometimes they're very subtle and sometimes they're very blunt. And I usually try to tell them pretty, pretty bluntly, "Look, you know, I'm a man." I know my profile says that... looks like a woman, but it says a man. So, I... And I think men can just be pigs to begin with, but...

Terranisha: Okay.

Jade Sinclair: Um, [unclear] I forgot what the question was now. What was the question, again? I'm sorry.

Terranisha: No, you're fine.

Jade Sinclair: Oh, how has it affected my sex life?

Terranisha: Yes.

Jade Sinclair: Okay. So, I said it can be very intoxicating because you... I'm... you get a lot of attention...

Terranisha: Attention, right.

Jade Sinclair: When I'm dressed in this female role, but people have to understand that it's... that it's only an image.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: Like, so... and I used to joke with people, I say, "Hey, if I go home with you, if I take off my pantyhose, my pads fall out. That's not very attractive." [Laughs] You know? So, I am... I am a man, so... But people... you know, men are still, like, always in my inbox, and I'm always like, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Terranisha: Oh my god. Do girls hit on you as well?

Jade Sinclair: No. Not really.

Terranisha: No? You never get hit on by a girl?

Jade Sinclair: Uh, I've had some... I may have had some women that are lesbians that said I'm really attractive, but they're usually never as sexually forward as men are.

Terranisha: Wow. Mens are, mmm...

Jade Sinclair: Yeah.,

Terranisha: They're pi—like how you said, they're pigs, even the ones that try to act like they're not.

Jade Sinclair: Yeah.

Terranisha: Yeah. I don't like dudes. Um, has drag influenced your sex...? Well, I think, no I read that. Has drag influenced how you think about gender?

Jade Sinclair: It has. I think, first of all, being... for me, being gay always made me a lot more, um, considerate of women because I, I knew I was always removed from that category of the cis, white male or the cis male. So, I can see how they would behave, I would see how they would treat me and how they would treat women. So, that always made me sympathize a whole lot more with, with women of our world, which probably was why I was so attracted to drag and

that strong, feminine role model. But I think, just in general, I try to have an appreciation for anyone's experience. And it isn't even about if they're gay or if they're straight or if there are female or if they're male. I mean, even people of color, I try... I try to treat people the way that I want to be treated.

Terranisha: That they should... yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And I know that we don't have... we will not always agree on a lot of things...

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: But I will respect you as a person. Even if I think you're an ass, I'm going to respect you as a person.

Terranisha: Right. Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: I can keep you out of my circle of friendship, I can... I can rem-- I can... My decision is, um, I control who I hang out with and who I'm friends with, and that's how I choose to deal with people that I don't want to be around. I can just choose to walk away.

Terranisha: Right. Well, yeah, that's actually very true. How has drag impact or changed you?

Jade Sinclair: It's made me a lot more confident. So, you talked about how, you know, talking wasn't one of your strongest points or whatever.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: So, I, I was... I think because I knew I was different growing up, and then I, I later realized... you know, I thought, at one time, that maybe, you know, my thoughts about boys as a young child might've been a phase.

Terranisha: How old were you when you, like, started to realize you were attracted to guys?

Jade Sinclair: Well, I think... I think... I had, like, an interest and wanting to be around them is how... because it wasn't really about sex at a younger age.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: But it was like, I wanted to be around them more than I did the girls. And that was probably back in around fourth or fifth grade, I'm gonna guess.

Terranisha: Okay.

Jade Sinclair: But it wasn't like... it really wasn't sexual then. But I knew I was a little different, and I kinda thought I would, like, outgrow this. And I... you know, I didn't date women, and then I... you know, was even engaged to be married at one time.

Terranisha: Oh wow.

Jade Sinclair: Um... I know. Um, but I think... what's the question again? I'm getting off track.

Terranisha: No, no, you're fine. I'm getting off tr-- No, I actually asked you a question, like, um, about how did you felt... like, you know, when did you fe—when did you realize, basically, that you were gay?

Jade Sinclair: So, I knew that I was a little different back then, and I thought I would grow out of it. Um, but I guess... there was a question that I was trying to answer. I'm sorry. I don't...

Terranisha: No, you're fine. [Laughs] No, you're fine. Like, what was that? Um, how did... how has drag impacted or changed you?

Jade Sinclair: [Unclear] that one.

Terranisha: [Unclear] that one. And how has drag impact your confidence?

Jade Sinclair: Oh, my confidence [unclear]. That's right. I was... Yeah, so anyhow, I think because I... that's where I was going, I'm sorry.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: Because I think I knew I was gr-- I grew up different from a lot of people, and I... in a very rural environment where I had no positive gay role models because there wasn't early on. There was no drag race. There was no Will and Grace. It was a lot of things I didn't have exposure to it at that age. So, I always felt very different. And I think, as a result, I was a very insecure individual.

Terranisha: Oh, really?

Jade Sinclair: And, um, I was also a very... I think I was always a very creative child. And my mom would often say that I was... that I never had... I would always entertain myself. But anyhow, and so I always very quiet and shy. And it wasn't until drag, when I had to get on stage, and when I had to find a way to, like, command the audience, and when I had to, like, build up my stage presence, that's when I began to be a lot more confident as myself on stage. And then that, I think, has carried over into myself as a person. So, I'm a lot more confident now speaking to somebody, even though I'm not in drag.

Terranisha: Gotcha. Good, good answer. If you could go back in time as blank, as [unclear] blank, what advice would... oh, if you can go...

Jade Sinclair: As Jade.

Terranisha: Huh?

Jade Sinclair: Yeah, go ahead.

Terranisha: No. If you could go back in time as, like, you know, a person, what advice would you use as a drag name or give to your younger self?

Jade Sinclair: I think... you know, it's always a fun question to think about, you know, the whole what if? Because if you really chan-- I think, you know, if you change your past, then you change who you are today. So, I really am happy with who I am. However, I do think that our

youth, and even my younger self, needs to be taught that it's totally okay to be different. And you shouldn't let... you shouldn't worry as much about what other people think of you, but worry about just the person that you want to be and living up to your own expectations.

Terranisha: That's really good. I like that a lot.

Jade Sinclair: Thank you.

Terranisha: That's really sweet. I'm concerned if and how your social identity have impact your experience of drag or vice versa. How drag has impact your identity. Can you share about how or... how one or more of your social identities such as drag, race, class, age, geography, religion, sex, sexual, disability, etc. and/or the interaction of the social identity have impacted your experience of drag and/or has drag impact your experience of social identity?

Jade Sinclair: Ooh.

Terranisha: So, it's kinda like same thing.

Jade Sinclair: That's a long question. I don't know if I can answer...

Terranisha: It really is

Jade Sinclair: Maybe if you...

Terranisha: Uh...

Jade Sinclair: Okay. Which one was it?

Terranisha: Question number 11. [Laughs]

Jade Sinclair: Number 11? I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. So, I don't know that, um... I don't think that it's really impacted my identity. I think it has the potential to do so, because for some people... but I am co- - I'm confident in myself as a cis male, so it doesn't change who I am or how I identify. It does... it does open up my understanding to what other people go through, who may be from a different background than my own.

So, that's a positive aspect of it on me. I think that... I know of several individuals who, who would today identify as trans, that wouldn't have earlier, and perhaps drag and the experiences of wearing female clothes in what is considered an appropriate way, meaning, like, drag... and I think it's... mainstream environment, drag is considered pretty acceptable now, you know? So, like, RuPaul's Drag Race does indeed help expand that knowledge of drag across the world. Um, but trans is still a very taboo topic in a lot of communities.

Terranisha: It is. It is.

Jade Sinclair: And so, I think that drag has helped some of them identify their own trans with inside them. So... And I think... and I don't know how to help make that more acceptable. I... you know? Um, meaning, like, RuPaul's Drag Race doesn't do that. There's no one on there today that is a male to female trans individual.

Terranisha: Right. Why do you think that is?

Jade Sinclair: I, I don't know. Um, I know it's a very... it's a very controversial topic.

Terranisha: It is.

Jade Sinclair: And a lot of people have can-- um, have tried to cancel RuPaul because of that, because they believe she's being very discriminatory by not doing that. Not being someone who can connect with her on a personal basis to find out, or with World of Wonder Productions, I can imagine that watching this show... this is just by me...

Terranisha: Oh, yes.

Jade Sinclair: Grasping at straws. I can imagine that her... you know, you watch that show, and quite often they're, like, backstage and they're like... you know, their shirts are off, and they're doing their makeup. I, I don't know if that's a factor because, obviously, if you're a person that has breasts, that would be an issue for a... for a television production.

Terranisha: And how... yeah.

Jade Sinclair: I don't think that's really it, I think that's just me trying to be...

Terranisha: Or probably because, like, the... like, you know, probably having the advantage. Like, you know, they have the adva-- like, it looks like, you know, they don't have to put as much work in, so...

Jade Sinclair: That, that is honestly, um... there are people in the community that, that do have that feeling, that, that thought behind it. I think that they... there are some that are... that are very, um... advocates that drag should be a man dressed as a woman, um...

Terranisha: Which I don't agree. Women should... can be drags too.

Jade Sinclair: Well, but I mean... I mean, there are some that, that have a hard time accepting the trans individuals as drags, I think, so...

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: But that's not my position. I know... I hear it from a... I hear it from a lot of... from a lot of different people. I mean, I hear it from all levels. But I mean, we here in this bar, specifically, we try to be pretty tolerant of a lot...

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: So, we have, like, what's called our Discovery Night on Thursdays where we say, you know, it's any new talent. It can be whatever you want it to be. It can be... it can be, you know, bioqueen, hyper queen, drag king. It can be whatever you want it to be.

Terranisha: Exactly.

Jade Sinclair: You know, we have... we don't limit ourselves to one defined art of drag. On Monday nights, we have a... we have a predominantly drag king cast on Monday.

Terranisha: Right.

Jade Sinclair: So, we try to be very all inclusive here.

Terranisha: That's really good. All right. We're getting down to the nitty gritty. How do you define drag?

Jade Sinclair: I think, to me, drag would just have to... would have to mean, um... and the general rule that applies to the different, different types of drag, drag is something that is over the top of what you would see from a character or a personality walking down the street. So, if, for me, it's going to be I'm going to have longer nails, bigger hair, longer lashes, and, you know, and a lot of makeup on. And then, it could be... it gets different for a king. It can be, you know, hyper [unclear] but I think it's whatever, it's just an elevated level of that... of that personality.

Terranisha: No. Yeah. I agree. What do you think is the purpose of drag? I guess it's like the same?

Jade Sinclair: No, it's a good question. Because I think I... my... I think that my opinion of that might have changed quite a bit over the years. I think, in general, a drag persona is somebody who does get on stage and entertain. All right? So, that's... so, people appreciate that side of it. But I think, aside from that, you know, they do have some social responsibility to help push the envelope a little bit and be that Madonna or that Lady Gaga or that somebody else to try and help push our community forward to a more inclusive stance.

Terranisha: I see. Do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not? And if so, how? In what way?

Jade Sinclair: I think often I feel sexual. [Laughs] I mean, you know, you have to admit when you get all dolled up, and you look in the mirror, and you're like, "Damn, I look good."

Terranisha: Look good. Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And so, in that regard, it's like, "Oh yeah." But, um... And I know that I re-- that I do receive sexual advances from individuals. But for me personally, even though I may feel sexy, this is, like, not a comfortable sexual environment for me, because if you consider the fact that I am a man and I am wearing foam padding on my hips and four pair of dance tights...

Terranisha: Is it heavy?

Jade Sinclair: The padding isn't heavy, no.

Terranisha: Nothing's heavy on you? Okay.

Jade Sinclair: No. It's just... But I am, like... I do wear corsets, you know, I cinch up. I do a lot of things to my body that... to make it look good onstage, but that in itself is uncomfortable. So, the idea of trying to be sexual with somebody while I'm up in all that is not at all appealing to me.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: Plus, I have certain parts of my anatomy tucked. [Laughs]

Terranisha: Yeah, I know. Yeah, yeah. How does your husband, like, feel about... like, did he meet you here or meet you at a bar?

Jade Sinclair: Um, we actually met playing softball.

Terranisha: Okay, cool.

Jade Sinclair: So, he knows me from my athletic side as a male as well. He used to come to almost all my shows and, um... for, for several years, and would travel with me when I was... when I had traveling gigs also. But he has probably not been to one of my shows in well over 10 years. [Laughs]

Terranisha: Oh, wow.

Jade Sinclair: I think because he... he liked drag in the beginning, and he had a lot of respect for some of the artists. And then, once, I think, you get really involved with somebody...

Terranisha: I know.

Jade Sinclair: Or in the community, then you begin to see some of the dark sides of it, you get to see some of the shady aspects of things. And, you know, when... much as you would expect, if someone's doing well and succeeding, there's people there... that are there to try and tear them down. And so, he witnessed a lot of that, where people were attacking me...

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: Not physically, but, like, verbally...

Terranisha: Oh yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And mostly behind my back, and he was very upset by that.

Terranisha: It was... it was... Yeah. That is a lot to take on and...

Jade Sinclair: And he couldn't separate himself from that situation, so he chose to just remove himself from going to shows.

Terranisha: I completely understand that, like, seriously. You know, he loves you, so, like to... like, what can you do? But you love it. So, it's like...

Jade Sinclair: And he knows that this is like... you know, this is a part-time job for me. It's the job that I really like to do and I have [overtalking] so...

Terranisha: Do, yeah. It was like a good hobby. And then...

Jade Sinclair: Yeah.

Terranisha: I can only imagine that. Yeah. I was... Hmm, that's interesting. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race? Like, I guess we, kind of, like, discussed that, but...

Jade Sinclair: I think, overall, it... you know, it is a positive engine in the fact that... I mean, I think that it does make drag mainstream. I think it doesn't make what I do mainstream, because

there's a diff—there's a difference between the drag you see on that TV show and what you see here on the weekend. I don't know if you watch that show that much? Do you watch it?

Terranisha: We do. We... the whole class, I mean... Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: Right. That to me, um... I have some friends that have been on that show.

Terranisha: Oh, really?

Jade Sinclair: And so, I, I watch it, and I can, kind of, like, read between the lines a little bit, but then I also have talked to some of them about things, you know, like, when they're portrayed... when you see them saying a certain thing, I'm like, "God, how...? Did you really say that?" And they're like, "Well, yeah." So, that show is, um... it's entertainment.

Terranisha: Wow.

Jade Sinclair: It's not... it's not reality TV, it's entertainment TV. So, you know, they record everything that you do, and then they can then edit it however they want to create storylines however they see fit. So, um... but I think it is good because it does... it does help advance the art form. But again, it's also a lot of acting challenges.

Terranisha: It is.

Jade Sinclair: And a lot of like singing and stuff, and that's not really what I do. I mean, I might sing Happy Birthday to You, that's going to be about it. You know, I'm more of a performance artist, and so, I'm more of, like, you know... The show's an hour lo-- hour and a half long, and, like, three minutes of it's Lip Sync For Your Life. That's what I do. I lip sync for my life.
[Laughs]

Terranisha: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. [Laughs]

Jade Sinclair: So, I mean, it does help push the art, and it does present some different versions of drag, you know? You have people that are... like, [unclear] Queen is a... is a little bit kooky, little bit different. Who [unclear] on this season? That's, you know... I don't know if you've watched her other seasons. Like, there was this person from Springfield, Missouri that was a little bit artistic, and she had... what was her name? Crystal Methyd. She had some exaggerated makeup. So, it does show you other types of draggers aside from just, like, the beauty queens. So, it is good in that regard. It's just not, you know... it's more like watching Instagram versus watching YouTube.

Terranisha: Mm, that's a good comparison, actually. A very good one. If you could change one thing about drag, the scene or the community, what would it be and why?

Jade Sinclair: If I could change one thing about the scene, it would really... it would be to try and get people to stop trying to tear other people down. And it's really not even that visible aspect of it, but it is there. And I think it gives us a bad name. And I think there's room for everyone to shine, and if we spend our efforts and our time on our own craft and not trying to tear someone down, then we will also find our way to success.

Terranisha: Just off topic, like, how... what keeps you humble? Like, you know, so loving? Because it is everybody that's like, you know...? Because even in a girl commu-- not in girl, but... well, you probably experience it as well, like, we have hate towards each other, like, we jealous, like, we get jealous. How do you...?

Jade Sinclair: You do.

Terranisha: So, I know that you guys are experiencing the same thing. How do you remain, like, good-hearted and not, like, face any type of, like, you know...?

Jade Sinclair: By never forgetting where I first started, and by hearing those... hearing those terrible critiques that people would say about me behind my back about, "Oh gosh, she's a deer in headlights," or, "She has no stage presence. Oh, she's a stuttering drag queen."

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: Just those things that they said about me when I first started. And I was like, "Oh my god," you know. And so...

Terranisha: Did that hurt your feelings when...?

Jade Sinclair: It did, but I never... I never vocalized it. I internalized that, and I used that as a motivator to push me to do better.

Terranisha: Wow. Well, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And I... and I would... I don't want to make anybody else feel that way.

Terranisha: Exactly, exactly. That's probably like the root of it. But there's... you know, I guess there's mean people and nice people everywhere, I guess. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag, and where does it come from? What do you think will help to change it?

Jade Sinclair: I think one of the misconceptions is, is that a person that performs in drag in general, is a person that... I think there's confusion. Maybe less today because of RuPaul's Drag Race, I'm not sure, but I think there's confusion between, between drag and being transgender.

Terranisha: Mm, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And I think a lot of people think that because I dress as a woman, that I want to be a woman, which is not the case at all. And also, I think sometimes, because we dress more provocatively and... or more sexually... I shouldn't say sexually, but, you know, we want to be sexy on stage. So, I think then there is sometimes a confusion about us trying to, um... trying to be sexual. Does that make sense?

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: You know, I'm not... I'm not here to seduce somebody. I'm not here to... I'm here to have a good time. And even if I do...

Terranisha: Have fun. Right.

Jade Sinclair: So, I mean... but sometimes I think people can misconstrue that, because there... you know, there's times when I [unclear] touched a little bit inappropriately. And nothing that I've done or wear shouldn't really give them that opinion, but that I'm sure that women have the same problem.

Terranisha: Exactly. Oh yeah.

Jade Sinclair: I'm positive that they do, so, I think... And I guess, um, what we can do about that, how I can change that? I think, again, that might go back to the reason why I may just, like, sometimes drop my voice and be able to [unclear] some guy in the audience. And, and the person might not even have been doing anything, but it just... it just keeps that, that realization that, "Hey, I might look one way, but I'm really this."

Terranisha: Okay. Right. Wow. That's a lot. That's hard.

Jade Sinclair: [Laughs]

Terranisha: I'm sorry. You have to go through that.

Jade Sinclair: Oh no, it's okay. I mean, I know... I'm a man. I know how men can be, and men...

Terranisha: Because I'd be one to...

Jade Sinclair: Men objectify people.

Terranisha: I did learn to do, like, you know do, uh... like, the 1920s, like, being on stage, like... I forgot the...

Jade Sinclair: The flappers?

Terranisha: Yes. Type of women. But I thought about just all those people that... you know, you already getting this on the regular, do you really want that as well? Like, it's too much pressure, so I commend you. Because it's... because this is, like, you're going for work, and everybody's just lusting and just trying to, like...

Jade Sinclair: Not everybody, but there are people that do that, though.

Terranisha: Yeah.

Jade Sinclair: And honestly, they... if you look at my inbox, I mean, not my inbox, [overtalking] but if you look at, like, this whole, like... I never answer these things, but the whole message requests is, like, just full of people that are... you know, that are probably hitting...

Terranisha: DM, yeah.

Jade Sinclair: That are hitting on me.

Terranisha: Wow. Well, last one. If you choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Jade Sinclair: I think, in general, it's the... it's the transference of the fact that we can all stop focusing upon what society tells us we should look like, should act like, or should be, and just be our true selves and enjoy that. And instead of worrying about what people think about you, just worry about who you are and if you're living your best self. Sorry.

Terranisha: No, that's [unclear]. [Laughs]

Jade Sinclair: And if you are achieving your full potential as your... as your authentic self.

Terranisha: Well, I'm going to say thank you so much for sitting with me. You've been amazing.

Jade Sinclair: Yeah.

Terranisha: I'm so sorry for, like, you know, asking you so many questions.

Jade Sinclair: Oh, no.

Terranisha: I didn't mean to pressure.

Jade Sinclair: No, it's no pressure at all. It's all good.

Terranisha: But that concludes, I guess you could call it podcast [laughs] or interview with Jade Sinclair?

Jade Sinclair: Yes, very good.

Terranisha: Awesome. Well, you guys can follow her on Facebook as well. [Laughs]

Jade Sinclair: I am on... I'm on Facebook...

Terranisha: [Unclear] follow on Facebook, Instagram.

Jade Sinclair: And I'm also on Instagram. I am, yeah.

Terranisha: [Laughs] Well, you could... you could tell them if you want... I had to upload this on the website.

Jade Sinclair: My Facebook is Jade Sinclair, my Instagram, though...

Terranisha: You guys got to come out, support her and get her some... a lot of tips.

Jade Sinclair: Oh, I would love that. And then, my Instagram, I have to find that. I'm so sorry. I should know that, but I don't know it off the top of my head. It's Miss Jade Sinclair on Instagram.

Terranisha: Awesome. Well, thank you so much, again, and I will be coming out to one of your performances.

Jade Sinclair: All right. Awesome. Thank you so much.

Terranisha: So, you will see me... so, you'll see me again.

Jade Sinclair: Thank you very much.

Terranisha: Thank you.

Interview with Jakki Love

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Baylee: Create a transcript.

Jakki: Yes.

Baylee: So, should be recording now.

Jakki: Yes. I see that in the upper left corner.

Baylee: Okay, cool. I've never had to do that. I've been in the Zooms where other people recorded, but I've never had to record. So, that was... yeah. Um, what's your major?

Jakki: Yeah, so, I am a mass communications major with a focus in media management, promotions and sales. And then, I did my time at theater. So, I do have a theater minor.

Baylee: I love that. Is theater like... did you do theater in high school?

Jakki: Mm-hmm.

Baylee: Like, were you in drama and then, like, now in college, is it big... is it like a big difference?

Jakki: Yes. Which I will continue my answer. I actually have to switch over to this router. I have two routers in my apartment. It's...

Baylee: Okay.

Jakki: I just want to make sure we won't have a loss of connection. So, give me one second...

Baylee: No problem.

Jakki: Alright. I should be back now.

Baylee: Yep, I can see you.

Jakki: Cool, cool, cool. But yeah, so, um, what was your question? I'm sorry.

Baylee: Um, Is it like... is the theater...

Jakki: Theater, yes.

Baylee: From high school different than college?

Jakki: So... Oh definitely. I think that, like, theater as a career was definitely not for me. And I mean, probably as your interview questions go on, I'll probably answer that anyways about, um... just I thought that I needed, like, a performance outlet and a creative outlet through theater. Like, I was like, "Oh my god, I love doing this, and this is going to be my career forever." And then I said, "No, I hate this." [Laughs] And then I left. Um, yeah, and then I ended up leaving, so now I love it so much better.

Baylee: Mass comm is just like... it's always an amazing degree to have because there's so many... like, so many things you can do. And I think that's the best kind of degree, is one that you are not limited.

Jakki: Yeah. So, what's your major in?

Baylee: Um, mine's Psychology. And then, I have a minor in Sociology, which is why we are here today, because I am in The Art of Drag, which is a Sociology course at SIUE. This is like the second year he's taught it. Um, but...

Jakki: It's a [unclear].

Baylee: It's really good. We watch Drag Race on Fridays, and we're watching Season 9.

Jakki: That's so interesting. Like what other stuff do you watch, other than just, like, Drag Race?

Baylee: We watched Paris is Burning. He shows different music videos from different drag queens, like, queens that were on Drag Race and, like, different... like, different videos and...

Jakki: Have you seen Party Monster yet?

Baylee: Yes, I think so.

Jakki: That is Michael Alig and St. James... uh, James St. James talking about the club kids scene back when RuPaul... before RuPaul was famous.

Baylee: It sounds familiar. We did, like... that was, like, in the beginning of the semester. We did a lot of, like, Paris is Burning, and, like, looking at RuPaul before and after. And like, it was funny because he referred to him as Charles for the first few classes. And at first, I was like, "Who are we talking about?"

Jakki: Yeah. [Laughs].

Baylee: [Laughs] 'Cause, like, just... 'cause, like, no one ever calls him Charles.

Jakki: Right. RuPaul/Charles. Yeah. I know, it's so interesting 'cause I feel like Ru is definitely, um, one of the queens that, kind of, use their own name for their drag name, which is, like, who you refer to them as in and out of their character. Is it a character? Is it an extension of them? All the fun questions to [unclear].

Baylee: Don't you do the same? Like isn't your...?

Jakki: No.

Baylee: So, what is your real name?

Jakki: So, my government name...

Baylee: Yes.

Jakki: Um, is Jeremy.

Baylee: Jeremy. Okay. So, then your drag name is Jakki Love, right?

Jakki: Mm-hmm.

Baylee: Is that how you pronounce it? Okay. I just love the spelling. I thought it was so cute.

Jakki: Yeah, so, um, I don't know, do you... is there a certain way that you want to start? Or how would you...?

Baylee: Oh.

Jakki: Sorry. I was like... I feel like the answer, or some of the answers that I'll have right now, I want to make sure that you are able to... if you have, like, a formula. I don't want to mess that up.

Baylee: For sure. Okay. So, we could start with the first question. When did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it? Do you remember the first time?

Jakki: Yeah. So, I'm a younger person. I'm 22, even though I've heard...

Baylee: Me too.

Jakki: [Unclear] think I'm old. I am younger. I should... I have to tell myself, I'm a younger person. So, I learned about drag, actually, in... okay, side note, how explicit can I talk? 'Cause I wanna make sure that I'm, like... also want to be...

Baylee: Honestly, I think you could be as real as you want to be, because the bottom line is that's how life is, you know? Like, I don't think that there's... I don't think my professor would be happy if I told you to sugar coat things, if that makes sense.

Jakki: Cool.

Baylee: So, if you want to do you, that's okay. When I make the transcript, I can always, like, you know, put, not spell out the whole word or something, you know, whatever. So, yeah, it's just...

Jakki: So, I learned what drag was as probably not the right age to be looking at this. But I was on YouTube, and I was probably around... oh, I'm so bad with times, probably, like, 10, maybe a little bit younger, maybe a little bit older. I was around that, like, pre-tween/tween age. And Willam, Detox, and Vicky Vox had a song on YouTube called This Boy is a Bottom. And it's essentially a parody on, um... oh, what song? Alicia Keys. It's a parody of Alicia Keys, This Girl on Fire, and just, like, talking about, like... so, if you're not familiar, a bottom is a sex position, for the most part, and it's just like someone who is submissive, and it's usually someone who... not... I'm sorry. That is not correct. That is not correct. A bottom is just a sex position with you primarily being on the bottom, usually receiving anal.

And in the gay world, bottoms are used as... and this is why I corrected myself, bottoms are used... the word... if you're, like, coded as a bottom, I feel like it's more of a like a derogatory term, but like a derogatory term in gay terms. So, it's like, oh, you're submissive, like, you're the girl, you're the femme, you're the weak one in the relationship, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And that's just, like, a gay stigma that you need to get over.

Anyways, not that... point of the question. But I was watching This Boy is a Bottom, and so I was just like... I was like... I saw these people, and I was like, "Wat is this?" like, "Are these

women?" Like I didn't understand it. And then, I saw another clip, um, I believe it was on Tumblr at the time. [Overtalking].

Baylee: Oh, good old Tumblr. [Laughs]

Jakki: I know. Um, it was on Tumblr, and it was the clip from Drag-U, and it was Raven and Jujubee, and it was that whole clip of, Is that My Ring? So, it was like a little clip of like, uh, Jujubee and Raven going back and forth about how Jujubee stole Raven's... or Raven stole Jujubee's ring, but it wasn't actually Juju's ring; it was Raven's ring, but Jujubee wanted the ring, so she pretended that Raven stole it. Funny video. Um, but that is from Drag-U. So, that is how I discovered it as the first part. And I was like, "Oh, okay, I've seen... okay, like, this is new, I'm seeing this for the first time."

And then, when I was older, about my sophomore year, I think it was about my sophomore year of high school, Season 7 of Drag Race was happening, and it was the final three between Violet...spoiler, I guess, uh, Violet, Ginger and Pearl, and, like...

Baylee: I've seen that one

Jakki: Yeah.

Baylee: You're fine, you're fine. [Laughs]

Jakki: [Laughs] Um, my friend, Abby was watching it. And she was like, "Oh, be team..." And I was like, "Okay, I don't know what this means, but sure, we're going to be Team Pearl." And so, I, kind of, watched the... I don't think I watched the finale, but I saw the outcome of who won. And then, what ended up happening is I went back and started watching new seasons. And then, I watched Season 8 live, as it was happening. Um, so that was, kind of, my start with drag as I guess, like, a younger white gay of just like, "Hey, Drag Race, this is fun." Um, so that was, kind of, my introduction to drag

Baylee: That music video that you're talking about, we actually watched in class, and we've watched Drag-U too. Because I remember that music video, and as soon as you said that, I was like, "I've seen that. I have." [Laughs] It's a great one. It is.

Jakki: Yeah. [Laughs] I mean, as, like, a... yeah. Yes, it's good... it's a good one. [Laughs] I'll just keep it at that.

Baylee: Also, you don't have to worry, 'cause my professor's talked about tops and bottoms in class too. Plus, like, I mean, like, I know anyways 'cause I'm a lesbian, so, shocker. Um...

Jakki: I was just like, I also...

Baylee: No, I wanted to hear your, your description, no matter what.

Jakki: Right.

Baylee: Like, I wanted to know, because I think it's always interesting to know what other gays think. Like, I think it's...

Jakki: Right.

Baylee: Because everybody knows the same terminology, but everyone has a slight variation, if that makes sense

Jakki: Right. And I also am just, like... I guess I also am thinking of, like, my editorial side, that I'm like, I like to explain the terms as I'm speaking, 'cause I know, if this is getting published to something, like, obviously, this is code language that we all know, but if someone is reading your work or reading or listening to your work as you're interviewing me, I just want to just, like... I'm involved in so many damn student organizations that I'm always like, "I have to be this and show this presentation and blah, blah, blah." So, if I am doing too much, please let me know because I...

Baylee: No, I love it. I love that you're doing too much. [Laughs] I don't even think you are. You're doing fine.

Jakki: Good.

Baylee: Okay. So, the next ques--

Jakki: Yeah. I can also... Yeah, I can also be more personable. Thank you for giving me that pass.

Baylee: [Laughs] Uh, the next question is, when did you start performing as a drag artist and why did you start performing?

Jakki: Yeah, so, I started in March of... wow, I guess it would be three years now. So, three... about three years ago, my gay little ass was performing at a show called Gender Galleries. And what Gender Galleries primarily is, at the time... now it's a little bit different this semester because we're online, but it showcases under 21 performers because, as you know, the art of drag is a very fun art, but it is limited on who can be a part of it, for the most part, I feel like. So, obviously, online and out of the bar, anyone has accessibility to do drag. But if you want to start getting... I feel like if you want to be famous, and if you want to start getting your name out there, you need to perform in a bar. Well, the time of the internet's really tricky.

Um, but before TikTok, it was definitely more... it was harder to get recognition and do drag and to understand what drag is unless you went inside a bar. And drag does not allow for under 21, for whatever reason, for the most part, because drag is a bar scene, and if you're not 21, you can't go into a bar.

So, the Gender Galleries gave the opportunity to give under 21, all performers, there's a priority towards 21 under, but it wasn't just for them. And it was just like a space for people to do drag. So, I had my first opportunity at Gender Galleries, and I... what... your second question was, why do you continue?

Baylee: No. The second question was, why did you start?

Jakki: Why did I start? Yeah. So, I started at Gender Galleries, and I... the reason I started is because I had, like, a fascination of drag, like, throughout high school, as I was talking about before. And I was actually a part of Instagram Lip-Sync Races, which was really cringy. Um, it was essentially, like, drag without the theatrics. Like, I don't know, it was... it was fun to do. But

looking back at it, I was like, "I don't think I'd ever do that." I'd do that... I would do that at the age I was at. So, like, 16 and older, but I would not do that as a 21... like, 19 plus, no.

But, so, I was doing Instagram Lip-Sync Races. So, it was essentially, someone gave you a song, and you record yourself lip-syncing to it. So, I was, like, performing that way. And then, I ended up, like, just watching Drag Race, being, like, a Drag Race super fan, and I was like, "Oh, I don't know if I ever want to do it, but it's, like, fun. Like, I, I, kind of, want to try it." And when I was at my home at the time, I didn't necessarily have the space to, like, explore drag 'cause my family... uh, I wasn't, like, fully out, nor, like... I was, like, kinda, no... yeah, I wasn't out when I was living at home, and, you know, I can't do drag if I'm not even like... they don't even know that I'm [unclear], how are they gonna know that I, like, want to dress up as another gender, or all that fun stuff.

So, I ended up just going to ISU, continuing with Drag Race. I... my drag mother, uh, Holy Marina, I ended up following her on Instagram and saw that she went to ISU as well. And I said, "Oh my goodness, I'm going there in the fall. I hope to meet you sometime." So, I be-- actually became a fan of someone and then became their friend. And they, kind of, got me into drag and got me booked at Gender Galleries. And ever since then, I just continued going strong.

Baylee: Well, that's nice.

Jakki: Yeah.

Baylee: I think that...

Jakki: [Overtalking] great reminiscing, ah...

Baylee: The families are a big part, a big part of everything. Um, okay, so, the next question is, how did your family, friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Jakki: Yeah. So, as I said before... so, I actually came out as gay... No. I came out as bisexual because at the time I generally...

Baylee: Don't we all?

Jakki: I was going to say, at the time I generally was attracted to women, and it wasn't like a thing of like, I... you know, kind of, like, the gay scare, where it's just like, I'm bi now, gay later. Like, I know that is, like, a big stigma that a lot of people have. But I believe that at that time, like, in high school, I wasn't lying to myself that I did find, like, women attractive. Now, I just don't.

And I think, aside from the question that you didn't even ask me, but sexuality in general, I think it's just like a whole spectrum that needs reevaluation, that, like, you don't have to just stick to, like, being gay. Like, I think a lot of people are, like, pansexual for the most part, but it's a societal thing to, like, put labels on to each other and, like, enforce stereotype, blah blah blah. That's a whole 'nother discussion.

Baylee: I totally... no, I totally agree with you. Like, I personally don't really like to put labels on myself for my own sexual identity because I feel like it makes people look at you differently based on it. And that's not... who I'm with is not who I am, if that makes sense.

Jakki: Right. Well, it's also just like, it's conforming to a... I don't know, low key, I think it's a... conforming to a patriarchal ideal that, like, you are certain types and you act a certain way, so, therefore, your sexuality needs to be this. And it's like, no, it doesn't. Like, I believe that when people are married to someone for so long and they end up being... end up being gay, it's like, were they lying to themselves for so many years? Sure. Maybe. Were they not? I don't know. Sexuality, it can develop, like, it's a trait that people develop over time. Like, why does that... why is it only certain things that are, like, black and white, but everything else can be fair game? Like, whatever.

Anyways, um, so when I came out as gay, like, I came out to my dad on the phone on National Coming Out Day, and I was like, "I need to tell you some..." I wasn't crying, but I was like, "I need to tell you something, I'm gay. No, I'm bi." He was like, "Oh okay, I kind of knew that." And I said, "Okay, cool."

Baylee: Kind of knew that.

Jakki: I was like, "As long as you have that," I was like, "then it's fair." I'd rather him say, "I...", which, personally, I'm, kind of, like, I don't really care if people assume, I know it is dangerous to assume, like to say like, "Oh, we already knew," 'cause it's like, okay, that's kind of a slap in the face. But, like, I was really happy when my dad said that, 'cause I was like, I'd rather him respond than that... than be like, "Don't ever come home."

Um, when I came out... so, I actually came out to my Aunt Leslie first, and she was... she, like, changed the subject, but it wasn't, like, in a demanding, spiteful way. It was like a, "Okay, it doesn't change the way I'm going to treat you. Like, let's just continue talking. It's not a big deal to me." Um, so, like, part of me was, like, really happy to get that. But then part of me was like, "No, I want to talk about this," like, "No, I want to... let's talk," like, not just change the subject. I mean, she didn't fully change the subject, but that's how that happened, and that was in high school.

And then I just kinda came out to, like, my family here and there. And then, other than that, like, I think my friends kinda knew at a point. I never received any backlash from anyone that was like, "Oh, you're gay, you're, um, this, that and the other." But I will say, when I did come out... come out as a drag queen. When I started doing drag and being more open about it, I did receive a lot of backlash, um, not in a, "You're getting separated from the family; we're not talking to you" type of way, but definitely as in like a, "Oh, you want to do that? You sure you want to do that?" Like, "Okay..."

Baylee: Like a side-eye?

Jakki: [Overtalking]. Yeah. So, um, is one of your questions, how I got my drag name?

Baylee: That's the next question. Where does your drag name come from?

Jakki: So, these two will tie into each other. So, I got my drag name, um Jakki Love... I got my drag name from my mother. My mom passed away when I was seven years old, and it was two days right before my birthday. So, I was seven about to turn eight. And her name was Jacque-- I can't even say her name, Jacqueline, uh, Kim Wilson. Hello, full government, let me give you

her Social Security while I'm at it, too. Um, but, yeah, so her name was Jacqueline, and she always had different spellings of the name Jackie. And when... before she passed, she spelled her name J-A-K-K-I. And so, for me, I've always, kind of, had, like, my mother's spirit around, 'cause she was someone who I idolize and still to this day idolize on what she was given to the world and what she gave and who she was. So, for me, I was thinking, like, because drag is, like, the female impersonation of it, I wanted to incorporate her as in, like, another thing to have her next to me.

Now, I'm not, like, a cis male. Like, I identify as a man, but I'm also nonbinary. So, I do identify as they/them. My preferred pronouns are he/they. But I really... I think I'm more on the they side. And so, for me, that's why I was, like, embracing the femininity 'cause I wasn't able to fully do that when I was younger. And so, when my dad and my two brothers heard that, they got really mad at me that I decided to choose the name Jakki, 'cause they thought that I was, like, tarnishing her name or turning it into something else and, kind of, having that selfish viewpoint. And I was like, "You know, I hear what you're saying, but I'm going to have to be the one to say, it's not about you in this moment. Like, it's about me and how I choose to live my life and how I choose to embrace a memory of my pa-- of my past mother. So, although you all are very sensitive about the subject, this is how I reclaim the death. This is how I push strong to keep her by my side. Like, I'm sorry that you have your own idea and your own viewpoint of our mom, but this is mine and this is what I want to continue," you know?

So, on that side, it was, like, really negative. Um, they--- my brother, Nick, actually ended up coming to my first drag show. So, it's definitely not, like, a thing of, they don't want to see it. It's a thing that... well, my dad is also very like... about it. Like, he's been like... he really would be like, "Ooh". But I've never had, like, the experience of, like, being beaten or told I'm fucking disgusting and this stuff like that. Like, something I do really appreciate and love about my dad is, like, although he doesn't get it at first, and he's very vocal about not getting it at first, he does always come around to understand it.

So, I think it's still, like, a thing to see me in drag. He doesn't necessarily want to see me dressed up as, like, a quote-unquote woman, but I, I know that over time he's going to become more comfortable with it, 'cause he's already been very comfortable in it... with it. So, at the start, like, it was very like, "Why are you doing this? This is like... this is gross, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And then, I ended up winning a pageant, um, last year. And I was going to co-compete in Texas. And it was really big of him to, like, make a Facebook post saying how proud he is of me, like, as a drag artist. And I was like, "What? That is so, like, full circle."

Baylee: That's so sweet

Jakki: And something that is also really crazy is, like, I'm gra-- you know how we're graduating soon. So, my... we're having a walking ceremony, and I was... I had the opportunity and the privilege to be fully vaccinated. So, I was like, "I'm [unclear] vaccinated and keeping safe. I might as well go and walk, 'cause they're having a walking ceremony." So, I'm actually gonna walk in full drag. And that is also, like, a big step because I was like... I know I'm doing it for myself in, like, a selfish way, but, like, I had to let my dad know that is going to happen, and I want him to be there, but, like, you know, I'm going to be in drag, so be prepared for that. And

he was like, "I mean, I'm not going to stop you," like, "This is your thing," like, "Okay." So, I think, coming full circle from that is definitely really special, and I hold to my heart.

Um, as far as, like, my Aunt Leslie, like, she was really supportive and loving. So, my mom has 11 siblings, [laughs] and I was, like, pretty close to, um...

Baylee: Whoa!

Jakki: So, my Aunt Leslie is my... technically my godmother, and I'm not religious, but I always treated her as, like, a second mother. And so, she lives over in Champaign right now. And, um, so, I've always kept her close, and she's always been supportive of me and loved me and blah, blah, blah. So, like, when I started doing it, like, she was, of course, like, uh, one of the number one fans. And, um, she's just older. So, she... she would, like, come out to the bars, but it wasn't, like, her favorite thing 'cause it's very loud to her and, like, she's very, like, sound sensitive and very, uh... she's just older. [Laughs] So, like, she'll come out and, you know, hang out, come, show her face for, like, an hour, half hour and then head out. And I think that's more than enough for me quite honestly 'cause it's like... I mean, as long as you're there and showing up and... she would also rather, like, take me out to dinner after or, like, take me out to dinner before or, like, take care of me before, just 'cause the events, like, they just get overstimulating. And I, you know, I respect that. But she's always been there for me and been a supporter.

And, like whenever my, uh, cousin Ray, is giving away stuff, my Aunt Leslie is just like, "You're not there. So, we have some fun stuff you could probably use for your drag." Or, you know, she's always, like, trying to re-gift things 'cause she has her own, like, philosophy of just, like, reusing, reducing, uh, if someone else can use it, give it off, you know, that kind of idea. So, I was always given stuff that they were getting rid of, but now, it's always just like, "Oh, I found this, this might be useful for your drag, blah, blah, blah." And she gave me a sewing machine, which I use now and that's just, you know, sew a bunch of outfits and everything.

And, um, yeah, so overall, like, uh, other than, like, the little hesitation from my dad, like, I haven't had a problem. I, I think my grandparents who are really, really older, like, I was really surprised that they're not, like, up in arms about it. But they're also actually, like, a little bit on the, um... keep it... not, like, keep it behind closed doors, but it's, like, "We're not just going to address the problems in here, but we're... we love you, no matter what" type of thing. So, it's like, even if they disagree with it, they might make some comments here and there, but I've never had a problem with, like, my grandparents saying anything like, "What you do is disgusting. What you, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Now, if they said something behind my back, that's a different story. Do I think that they have? No. Well, maybe shady comments, but not, like, anything detrimental.

But for the most part, all friends and family that I've had, like, very supportive. I never had any friends that weren't like, "What... why, why would you do this? This is weird. This is this, that and the other," 'cause if they did, I wouldn't be their friend. Um, I've always had supportive friends. And although I always do too much, um, I know, like, they do a lot for me as well. So, um, yeah, no... nothing really bad has happening. And then, that was, kind of, the origin story of my drag name.

Oh, so, I got my drag name, so I can [unclear]. If you're... if you're typing this up, it's going to be for the second question. So, I got my drag name from my mom. I also didn't want something stupid like Wacky Jakki 'cause then like... drag names need something to roll off the tongue. And I was like, "Oh god, I don't want to just be Jakki. I want something to, like, incorporate something. And I ended up choosing Jakki Love because it not only represents my love towards her, it's just like loving what she did, but I think love also is an extension of, like, what I want to give to the world and my love of drag and my love of entertainment and my love of just what I do in my passion. So, when you step out to the... when I step out to the stage and showcase Jakki Love, like, I'm here to just show the love and enthusiasm that I have, but also, literally, sharing the love with the room. And that's something that I lo-- love, you know? Yeah. I just didn't want something stupid like Wacky Jakki. Here comes Wacky Jakki on the stage, like, okay...

Baylee: Your name is everything. And you could end up getting a name like Alaska, and you don't even say the other half of your name, because...

Jakki: Thunderfuck, yeah.

Baylee: Yeah. Like, half the time, Alaska doesn't even say her full name, so... but, I mean, you know she got that from actually a weed strain..

Jakki: Yeah.

Baylee: For her name? Yeah. When I heard that I was like, "That's so funny." Okay, the next question's very long, so if I need to repeat it, just let me know.

Jakki: Sounds good.

Baylee: There's a lot of terms and types of styles for drags, from drag queens to drag kings to glamor queens and others... or, no, male impersonators, comedy queens, bearded queens, queer artists, bioqueens and camp queens, among others. Are there particular labels you would like to use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do, and what is your style of drag?

Jakki: Yeah. So, I always love to critique. So, I'll say for myself, and then I'll say for those other labels as well. So, for me, like, I think drag is drag and anyone can have accessibility to it. I identify as a drag queen because I feel like I am more of, like, a female, um... female impersonator, like quote-unquote female impersonator, because, you know, what exactly is a female? Um, so for me, I definitely feel, like, queen, very feminine, very embracing that. So, my style, I always call myself a drag queen. Now, if there is a space for other people who are not drag queens, so, like, male impersonators and stuff like that, I would just call myself a drag artist.

Now, overall, I believe that the labels are good, but also, kind of, bad at the same time. I think there's some outdated ones. I know you said bioqueen, like, I don't think that is a term that should be used as much because it's saying that you're biologically a female, which leaves out, like, trans people. And it's like, what exactly is, like, a bioqueen? And so, uh, newer terms that we've started is AFAB or AMAB, so, assigned male at birth, assigned female at birth, just so it gives more of a, um, opportunity just in that, like, you're biologically a female. Like, what does that even mean? Like... because if it's a standard of what science says, science says a lot of it is

nonbinary. Like, there are nonbinary people, there are intersex people. Like, these types of labels exist, but a lot of the time we choose to ignore them.

And so, a lot of the... I think, overall, we're all drag artists because the art of drag is just the exaggeration of gender expression. So, I don't believe you need to be a man, born a man, and you have to do a female impersonation in order to be a drag performer. And you also don't need to be a man to be a drag queen. Like, there are successful drag queens out there, Creme Fatale, Fay Ludes, um, two of the names that I... come to mind. Um, they're just, like, AFAB performers or AFAB people who are drag queens.

And then, you have just drag kings who are, like, completely underrepresented. Like, I don't hear about any of them. Like, and that's, that's a problem. Um, I mean, thank goodness, Tenderoni, who is a famous drag king in Chicago, just won Drag Queen of the Year at Alaska's pageant and really helped with the representation of drag artists all over. And you have Landon Cider who just won Dragula Season 3. And I just think it's, like, important to understand where these labels come from and understanding how they can develop. Because as time goes on, we realize that everything is evolving, and gender doesn't need to be just tied to... or drag performance and gender expression should not be tied to sex and your sex organs and stuff like that.

And I feel like that is a lot of the narrative still [unclear] like, "Drag queen, so how does it feel to tuck?" It's like, "What do you...? you don't need to tuck to be considered a drag queen." And even with, like, trans, uh, performers like Aurora Sexton, like, she's fully a drag queen. She happens to be trans, but she's also a drag queen. Like, she... they don't need to be, like, labeled, and they don't need to be excluded from this, that and the other. Like, it is what it is. But that's my own low philosophy talk about that. I'm a drag artist, drag queen, very femme, hello, royalty, you know, all that selfishness.

Baylee: So, you would say that your style is just drag?

Jakki: Style, sorry. I always get stuck in tangents. Okay, so my style for me, um, that's something I'm still discovering. I just know that when I'm in drag, I love to be very pretty and, like, my definition of pretty is not... definitely not what other people's definition of pretty is. Um, but I think I was, kind of, stunted growing up, not being able to explore my queerness because I just don't know fashion, so I just don't know what looks right. Um, but I try to be very... I like the campy comedy side to things. Um, I consider my kind of comedy as, like, a dad pun, like, dad joke humor, and I, kind of, like to explore that in my drag. Um, but if you go on my Instagram, it's mostly just, like, for the most part, cookie-cutter drag of like, I am feeling pretty in this, and I want to look glamorous. So, I think my style in the future, and if I were to develop with like a skill and unlimited funds, I would love to be just the high glamorous person there is, without, like, the standards of, like, you need a pad, you need to have boobs, you need this, that or the other. And like, I just want to look pretty doing what I want to do.

Baylee: Does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist? So, that's, sort of, piggybacking off the last question.

Jakki: Yeah, um...

Baylee: Do you think it limits you to any extent?

Jakki: Like... Yeah, I mean, I definitely don't think so because I'm very open as well. Like, if we're talking about styles of drag, like, I don't mind doing something that's, like, quote-unquote alternative or spooky, or something that is, like, quote-unquote, which I hate this term, critical fish. Like, I don't like to limit myself in what I can do. Um, if I want to paint myself green or, like, paint myself a certain way, like, I have no problem doing that. Um, it's just not my specialty, and it's not something that I would just necessarily do all the time.

I would say, like, personally, I don't like sticky stuff on my face. So, doing, like, SFX of, like, blood dripping mouth, like, you know, pipe coming out. Like, I could do that for a look. It's probably not going to be my first choice, just because I hate texture. Um, but I like to keep very open. So, if there is an opportunity for me to have, like, a certain category that they're looking for of like, we want you to look like a beast, we want you to look like this. Like, I was like, "Okay, let's see what references I have, and let's make a look out of that." Um, yeah, I just try to be open. I don't ever limit myself.

Baylee: And I think that that's the best way to, sort of, look at it, is to try new things. Because if you get really stuck in one sort of idea, then you're not really... you're going to be able to, like, not be able to express yourself the way that you're able to...

Jakki: Exactly.

Baylee: Just so many different ways. Um, so, who or what has influenced your drag? I would assume your drag mother, obviously, influenced your drag a lot.

Jakki: Yeah. So, I have two drag mothers, actually. Um, so Holy Marina definitely helped a lot with my makeup style and, kind of, understanding, like, that glamor side. Um, I would also say, like, my other drag mother, Kitty Banks, has also helped influence a lot of, like, my dance performances and stage presence and understanding, like, how you obtain stage presence. But aside from those two, um, I really love Bob the Drag Queen and Monét X Change.

Baylee: The Drag Queen.

Jakki: Those two are really... I do keep close to my heart, because when I was still understanding performance styles and understanding my drag, those were the two that I would idolize. Now I was watching Monét before she was in Drag Race, and when I heard that she got on Season 10, it was so iconic. But I definitely do look up to them a lot and have a understanding of how their performance have that [unclear].

And as far as, like, look wise, my boyfriend is also a drag artist. Their name is Tory Chiffon, and I really do idolize what they do with their drag, because they always have a vision. And I feel like, quite honestly, if it was not for my boyfriend, I would not be in the part of my drag career now. Um, they have styled wigs upon wigs for me. They have helped me understand how to sew. They have understand me... like, they just helped teach me how to do drag as they're learning themselves. And I do pay, like, a lot of homage to them because I, I can say strongly, like, I would not... I would not be where I am at without them.

And, um, they always help keep me in line. Like, "Does this look good? Does this help my style? No? Okay, cool." Um, so, they are definitely, kind of, someone who helps push to the looks to

keep it a little more elevated. But as far as, like, my own personal point of reference, like, I love like... I don't really show to my drag, but I love, like, the plants and, like, the bright colors. And, you know, I have watched different, like, animated movies and different anime and just, kind of, having, like, obscure things about it.

Um, I'm a huge gamer, so it's, like, understanding what types of video games... okay, if this is a green look, this reminds me of computers and stuff, like, binary code, green bina-- Oh, let's do, like, a cool computer look, having wires and stuff. So, I try to just, kind of, make sure my own point of reference is a little more obscure, but that also goes back into the dad joke thing.

Because if I can make a pun out of it and think of it differently... of a category differently than someone else can, like, that's something that I want to do. Like, how Jan Sport came out in her tool look in tulle with power tools. Like, that's, kind of, the way that I think of just, like, what is a different way that no one else is going to think of it? And then, when they say it, they're go—they're either gonna go, "That was smart", or I love the reaction, "Oh, that's so stupid," you know? Like, kind of, just, like, son of a bitch, like, uh, okay, we're doing this.

Baylee: I think it's, it's always very beautiful when you can grow with somebody else and you grow together with your passion, and so, I, I really am jealous for that. [Laughs]

Jakki: I know, I definitely... uh, I love what I have and I, I try to not take advantage of it. 'Cause I know a lot of people don't have it, and it can... I mean, not as quickly, but I mean, realistically, it probably can go at any time.

Baylee: I think it's always... you have to live in the moment, and you have to make sure that you are thankful for everything you have with every day that comes, because you don't know what tomorrow brings.

Jakki: Right.

Baylee: And you don't know how much time you have with somebody. And I think a lot of people look at, like, relationships nega-- negatively after they end. But the bottom line is you shared something very personal and very beautiful with that person for a while. And so, it's not... there's no reason to look at it negatively. So, the next question is, do you consider your drag political?

Jakki: Oh, of course. I feel, like, no matter what people say, drag is political. And although I wish it wasn't, it is. And I think every time you get into drag, you have the power to say something. And if that's speaking up for something that's right, which people should, um, you have the power and the privilege, I wouldn't... um, not everyone, but I would say, you have the power and the privilege when you're in drag to say something and speak up because, realistically, you're in drag, like, eyes are set on you, whether you want them to be or not. And it's just sad that we have to live in a world that, just because I want to put on some makeup and, and some hair, like, I automatically become a political statement. But I believe that's what it is. So, for me, that's, like, why in this interview, I become so, like, teachy to you. And I... like, I apologize if I'm trying to come...

Baylee: No, no, no.

Jakki: [Overtalking] or anything, but this is realistically, like, why I talk the way I do, is because drag has so much power and potential to make something of it. And I feel, like, some people aren't utilizing it as much as they should be. Like, I don't know, a lot of gay people don't like drag queens, but a lot of people idolize them. So, like, we have the power to help make change. Like, I don't know, I, I really do believe that drag is political, and I do try my best. So, every time someone is gonna listen to me, I'm gonna talk about issues that need to be addressed. I also am, like, gonna have a good time. So, not every time I'm gonna be speaking, I'm gonna say like, you know, "We need another stimulus bill." But, like, also, if I have the opportunity and the space to do it, like, I'm gonna speak up.

Baylee: I think a lot of it has to go back to what you were saying earlier with gender, because gender is just so political. So, anything destroying the norms surrounded by gender is going to inevitably turn more political in nature.

Jakki: Right. And I think, also like, because gen—or because drag is the freedom of expression, of gender expression, like, okay, so then, what is gender expression, and how do we evolve that? And I think that's what comes with the political side of it. It's, it's you're... giving you the opportunity and the space to speak up about stuff that needs to be talked about.

Baylee: Um, the next question is sort of a big one. There's, there's parts to it. The... So, I'll read it a few times. The initial question is, sort of, like, can you talk about your life as a drag artist? But then, there's subsections, like, are you part of a drag family, which you've told me about. How often do you perform? Where do you perform? Um, what goes into getting ready to perform? What are the biggest challenges in doing drag and being a drag artist? And is there any way or anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world? Um, also, this one's a new one, what is the COVID-19 pandemic mean for your life as a drag artist, which you've, sort of, talked a little bit about.

Jakki: Can you ask the first question of that?

Baylee: Yes. So, the first question is, are you a part of a drag family, house, or collective?

Jakki: Yeah. So, I'm a part of what we call the halfway house, and it consists of myself, Kitty Banks, Holy Marina, and then, Jessie Jones, and then, um, some people who are not in drag or drag artists, um, my friend, Aaron and my friend, Guido. Now, they do have drag personas. Erina Lee Underwood, Teener, Tina Slut. Um, and then, my friend Guido had one. They had to... they couldn't do drag due to family reasons, Uh, it's a [unclear] situation. Anyways. Um, but yeah, so they... that's, kind of, our family, just, kind of, be, what, six of us.

And I know that there... I don't know, I mean, there's not, like, a reason that we don't expand, but I would love to expand the family. And that's, kind of, just, like, our, kind of, start. We started here in Bloomington-Normal, and the idea behind, like, the halfway house was it wasn't like a... we're a household that all look alike. We have, like, our own different styles and different things that we do with our drag. So, it's not, like, you come to a show, it's gonna be, "Oh, we're all, like, high performance, high kickflips" and stuff like that. Like, it's like you're gonna get a variety of different genres and whatever. And what was the second question?

Baylee: How often do you perform, and where do you perform?

Jakki: Yeah. So, pre-pandemic, I was performing, probably, like, once or twice a month, depending on it. 'Cause I was a full-time student, so, it wasn't, like, I could just drop whatever. It was like a weekend thing. And I also worked, too, so it wasn't, like, so easy. Um, but I performed a couple times here at the bistro, as well as Chicago. I love Chicago a lot more to perform than down here, um, just because, like, the drag is more diverse. The drag is also a lot more competitive in Chicago, so you have to work harder in order to get a booking. Um, but I think, overall, once or twice a month, Chicago or the bistro down here in, uh, Bloomington.

Baylee: Okay. The next part is, what goes into getting ready for your performances?

Jakki: Yeah. So, is that, like, how it takes to get into drag, or I'm already in drag about to go on stage?

Baylee: I think they mean, like, getting into drag, like, makeup, and, um, costumes and things like that. And then, also, I mean, like, getting ready to get on stage, like, what do you have to tell yourself? Like, do you... is there, like, something you go through, like a ritual maybe?

Jakki: So, I can ans—yeah, I can answer that. Cool. So, getting in drag, just showered, just shaved my face, putting on my moisturizer and I'm getting ready to do the mug. Mug can take an hour and a half to two hours. I have, like, started becoming a little more speedy in it. Um, I know some people... like, Trixie Mattel, she can do her makeup in an hour, Kim Chi can do her makeup...

Baylee: I love Trixie. That's my idol right there. All of Trixie's videos I watch, um, just... Okay, keep going. Sorry. [Laughs]

Jakki: You're fine. Um, so, like, for me, I would say, like, an hour or two hours doing my makeup. Um, I have done my makeup in an hour and 15 minutes. So, like, it really just depends on, like, how much time I wanna give and, um, how quickly... so, if I have to get ready quick, like, we gotta do... we gotta do things a little quicker. Um, but yeah. So, that's when I just do my makeup. And then, getting into costumes and stuff takes about 45 minutes to an hour, probably less. I think it takes more time just to make sure my glue is secure or like what is secured... or, my wig is secured, um, because I, kind of, have, like, my own process of just, like, spring got to be putting something on there, letting it sit, letting it soak into the skin, making sure it's not coming off, bobby pinning it.

Um, I actually have, um, my pads in, like, Spanx shorts. So, I literally just put those on like a pair of shorts, and then you just put on your tights. So, like, that can take, like, 10 minutes. It really doesn't take too long. So, if my tights are all laid out, I can just put them on and get going.

Um, so I'll put on my padding, tights, and then, depending on the piece, uh... actually I'll say it doesn't take me an hour; it probably takes me around 30 to 45 minutes to get into costume. And it also just depends on what I'm wearing. If it's something like a dress, you just zip it in... slip it in, zip it on, then we're fine. I don't have a problem putting on heels. And then, I would say, the wig can always take a little bit longer. I would say the wig does take about 20 to 30 minutes because you have to let that glue sit and make sure it's not going anywhere.

Um, so, if I... I have been in shows that, like you need to perform and then immediately go change your outfit. So, like, I have had times where I've had to change my outfit in under 20 minutes, full head to toe, not makeup, but full head to toe, everything, in less than, like, 10, 20 minutes. Like, it happens, and you just gotta do it. '

Um, so, I do have, like, that experience. But I'd say overall in drag, I like to give myself about three hours, or... if I have it. You know, it depends on how, how quick I need to get ready. Um, if I know I have a drag show, I like to give myself, honestly, like, five hours, and it's just, like, if I'm done, then I just get to chill out and just drink water, get to eat, get to do that. If it's something that I have to get ready quick, um, that's what I gotta do.

Baylee: Okay. So, the next question is, what are the biggest challenges when doing drag and being a drag artist?

Jakki: Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot to ask your second question. So, before stage, I just, kind of, hype myself up. I'm like, "I'm going to have fun. This is going to be fun. Like, everybody's going to laugh. Everybody is going to love you. Like, you got this." I also miss in-person drag so much because I'm... I love my friends and I love watching... like, I have such a love for drag and watching it and watching performances and doing that. So, like, for me, I'm just like, I love to be a hype man and, like, a hype person, if you will, and just like, "You got this, you're gonna do amazing. Stop fucking doubting yourself. You're that bitch." Like, "Get the fuck up there, and you're gonna fucking kill it." And then, they go and kill it. And then, I tell them, "See, told you, bitch."

Um, so I just, like, I think, more importantly for me, although drag has a very selfish and vain self, um, I think it's also, more importantly, about supporting your queer friends and, you know, if you're not queer, maybe there's straight people out there doing it. Like, just support those who are doing it, um, if they deserve the support. I mean, if they're nasty, rotted, like, don't give them the time of day. But I genuinely am, like, give the support to those who need it. You know? There's a lot of doubt on, like, what... and it's a very selfish game out there. Like, people are gonna have doubts of they're not gonna be good enough or they're not gonna be this, that and the other. And it's like, "Build up your friends, make friends, make this like a fun space. Don't make this a negative competition. Like, I'm better than you, look at this, this, that and the other." Like, what are we? We're drag, drag performers. We're literally putting on costumes to get dollars from people. Like, it's not that serious.

Baylee: Yeah. Like, we're all here to have fun, good time and express ourselves, like, not to topple over each other for no real...

Jakki: Right.

Baylee: Benefit, I guess, besides, like... you know?

Jakki: Yeah. I just say, for the most part, we're queer people. Like, we've already dealt with so much shit in our life. Let's not add to it.

Baylee: Honestly. Like, there's so much hate from the outside, why create hate on the inside?

Jakki: Exactly. And I think also, like, 'cause you were saying that, um... which, I guess is my question is, what is your preferred pronouns?

Baylee: Um, she, she/her, I would say.

Jakki: She/her? So, you... uh, so, my understanding is you identify as a woman, and you're a lesbian.

Baylee: Mm-hmm.

Jakk: Now, I can...

Baylee: [Unclear] I... so, I guess... I guess my preferred...

Jakki: Or queer, let's say queer.

Baylee: Yeah. I mean, I go by, like, fluid. Just... I don't really like to... 'cause, I mean, I don't really like to label it, 'cause I feel like if you say you're bisexual, then there's, like, the stigma. And if you say you're...

Jakki: Stigma. And that's where I was about to go with that, is like...

Baylee: Yeah. And that's like, where I'm, sort of, at, because, like, I've, I've, sort of, experienced what you've experienced. Let's just... let's just get into this. Um, I've experienced what you've experienced, where my sexuality has changed, you know? Like, there was a time in, in my life where I specifically only liked women. Like, I couldn't feel anything for guys. It wasn't something, like, I did. And then, as I've gotten older, it's, sort of, evolved more and, like, I've been back and forth, but not necessarily in a negative way. And I feel like there's a lot of negativity with that. And even, like, not from the hetero side, but from...

Jakki: Yeah, the queer side. That's like...

Baylee: From, like, all of the lesbians I was with, who were like, "Oh, you're not a gold star." And I'm like, "Thanks, that makes me feel great." Like, so, that's why I, sort of, just say fluid.

Jakki: I honestly identify as queer. And, I mean, as... I guess I can say it like as a gay man, because I don't really find attraction to women, but, like, I just... I think, like, I just always say queer, 'cause it's like... I mean, I know some people think of it as, like, a negative. I, kind of, think we're in the process of reclaiming it. But I just say queer, so just, like, overall encapsulating. But what I was about to say is just about, like, this is how misogynistic the drag world is and how, like, transphobic the drag world is and how, like, exclusive it can be and how... you know, it's just, like, we're, we're all, like, creating a space that we can all feel safe and express who we are. Like, don't make it into a space no one wants to be a part of or a very exclusive space. What's the point?

Like, we made... I mean, like, as a... as drag, um, artists, like... sorry, I was about to sneeze. I feel like, like as drag artists, like, we already are making a space for us to feel safe and, like, separated from, like, a straight world or stuff like that. Like, why, why create a space and then make another separate space for, like, whatever, the white passing, white dominant, cis gay men. It's stupid. I, I just... that's something that I'm like, "Create the space for everyone."

Baylee: And I think there needs to be more people like that, for real. That makes... it's like, you... we've, we've all experienced being left out of a group, and then to be left out of a group that, you know, that you're supposed to be a part of, like, it just... it, it hurts in an all different... all different way.

Jakki: Right.

Baylee: Um, so the next one is, what is the biggest challenges in doing drag and being a drag artist for you?

Jakki: Oh, money. Oh, I would say two things. Either getting booked, because sometimes it is just about connection, and it's just really about, like, who you know and who wants to book you at the time. But I think, more importantly, it is money. People underestimate how expensive drag is. Now, there was... they say it on Drag Race, you don't need money to do drag. I call bullshit on that because you will not be respected unless you look a certain way. Like, sure, you can make stuff out of materials, but that also takes skills. How do you develop that skills? With money. Like, you have to, like, purchase supplies, you have to purchase this, you have to...like, it's not cheap, and I, I think that that frustrates me so much is, like, how, how ignored and how classist drag is and how we don't acknowledge that.

And it's like, I don't know. I'm part of the problem. Like, I can't... I'm not going to say that... I'm not going to sit here and say that, "I'm giving up my drag and lending it to everyone." Like, no, like, I am selfish and stuff like that, but also at the same time, like be mindful of, like, how expensive living is and then how expensive drag is. I think you could do it at any, you know, any money bracket, but the more money you have, the easier it's going to be.

Baylee: Yeah. And I mean, even like... so, within our course, there's been... he gave a lecture about, like, showing how much drag artists actually make, and then, like, how much money they have to spend for their look alone. It's, like, over \$300 sometimes. And then, like, even with Trixie, there's been videos that I've seen where she's like, "I have to step up my own game within drag now that I am more famous. And, like, there's even more pressure on me because they know I have more money." And I think that that's... like, that's very, you know... okay, what were you going to say?

Jakki: No, finish your statement. I keep cutting you off. I apologize.

Baylee: No, you're fine. I, I feel like I do that a lot, and I always get yelled at by people for it. But, like, I feel like there's a lot of things that you can do to, sort of, like... like, Trixie has videos where she does, like, a whole look in, like, um, dollar store makeup and stuff like that. And it's... there's a lot of different ways, but it is, it's very hard. And even if you do know how to make things, what about your sewing machine? What about your materials? What about how you learned how to make those things? It's not just money, it's time and commitment that you also need.

Jakki: Well, [overtalking]. I... adding on to that, like, I think something that I always forget about that my boyfriend has to always remind me, your time is money...

Baylee: Yes.

Jakki: Whether you like to admit that or not. Like, I can spend 30 hours on a piece. I can also spend 30 hours behind the register at Ta-- I also work at Target. I can also spend 30 hours at Target. Like, where am I spending my time and money? And that is something that is, like... time is money. And it's just utilizing yourself the best way possible.

But more importantly, something that people often forget about is drag is never ending. So, a streamer, let's say, because this is something that I've wanted to get involved in. Really, I... it's like a one-time payment. Like, of course, I [unclear] can always get the new aesthetically pleasing, but it's like, I need a computer. I need a controller. I need a monitor. I need this. That's it. If I want a newer monitor, I can buy it. I don't need it. But I feel like, for drag, because of the social demand of, like, "Oh you already worn that before. You sure you want to wear it again?" Like you have to continuously invest in...

Baylee: Okay.

Jakki: And it's not something that it's like... but even for yourself, like, you want your wardrobe to expand, you are constantly buying stuff. Makeup expires, you have to purchase makeup. Um, uh, my boyfriend makes a good point. Every time you do your makeup, it is probably worth \$100 of makeup. So, say, I want to just practice my makeup, that's probably, like, \$100 I'm putting on my face right there. Because I have to put on a little bit of the eyebrow primer. And, you know, I have... I have decently priced products. I, I like the higher quality stuff. So, when I'm swiping on a Stila eyeshadow, guess what? That costs me \$38 to purchase alone. And that's just a little bit of glitter on my eyelid. [Overtalking].

Baylee: I love those eye shadows. So pretty. I've been wearing them since high school. My teacher in high school showed me them. [Laughs]

Jakki: [Unclear] lips and glitters in this little box.

Baylee: Oh, yes.

Jakki: [Unclear] though. Like, this is just lipsticks and liquid eyeshadows. This is nothing. This is, like, just added. I don't ne--

Baylee: That's more makeup than I have, in general. Like, I don't wear makeup. Like, I wear mascara, and that's, that's... I mean, maybe I'll wear, like, a Kylie lip, maybe once, if I'm feeling classy. That's...

Jakki: Okay.

Baylee: But that... I think that's more just me and, like, you know how, like, you were talking about didn't like sticky things on your face. Like, I can't... I don't like makeup on my face. And it's just like...

Jakki: Girl, tell me about it. I'm a drag queen.

Baylee: I don't know how you do it. Like, I don't, I really don't, 'cause, like, I watch videos, and, like, I'm like, "I don't know how people..." Like, I watch even, like, Bailey Sarian. I don't know if you know who that is. But, like, her videos, she... She's true crime. Um, and she does makeup while she does true crime videos and she, like, tells the thing.

Jakki: Yeah, she [overtalking].

Baylee: So, like, even her makeup is like... I just think... I just feel itchy thinking about having all of that makeup on.

Jakki: I will tell you, sometimes I don't want to do... Like, I just don't want to put on makeup. Like, I wish I could just go out there and just, like, naturally look like that. Um, 'cause it's, like... I mean, think of it like this, James Charles made a good point. Although I don't want to support that groomer. Um, he made a good point of, like, "I wish that I can just do a YouTube video. I don't wish that I can... I have to get ready to do a mu—a YouTube video. Like, other people can just go out and blog and talk about their life, but I have to take two hours to get pretty in order for me to start something.

And so, I think, also, like, as a creative, like, that takes money. Like, if you're not earning money from a video or something that took you two hours, it's like, you wasted that two hours of time. I wouldn't say wasted, but, like, you know, that that's your time that you spent on getting ready. And then, if something isn't success-- you know, it's like all that stuff. So, I think, overall, kind of, that idea of just, like, drag is a never-ending cost, and I don't think it's something that people realize that it costs money and it's a continuous money thing.

Baylee: Very much continuous. And I think that that's a good point that you're bringing up, because a lot of people don't think about that. Like, even on Drag Race, like, they, they talk about sharing different dresses and, you know, like, "This dress has been passed around to every queen in New York." And, like, they say things like that. But even then. it's like, "Okay, but where did that dress start at? How much was that original dress? And what do you have to do...? 'Cause I know people aren't just handing things out. Like, you have to do favors for them too, like, you, you gave them something in return, because no one's ever, you know... nothing's for free, at least that's what I was always raised.

Jakki: All right. And, uh, yeah, it's... it always stems from somewhere, and it's all about, like, I don't know, sharing the wealth. And I think that also has to do with, like, booking people and being more diverse in your... in your bookings. 'Cause it's like, "Don't give the same opportunity to the same person all the time." Like, "There are other people who want to, like, [unclear] their bread and just need, like, that one booking to help them do it. You know what I think? And that's another thing it's just like, how do you even earn your money? Like, luckily for me I have a day job, who I can support myself, but some... a lot of people are out there, especially during the pandemic right now, like... and this is something I can talk to that... is that the next question?

Baylee: Um, no, that's the question after that.

Jakki: Okay. Then I can wait on that. Um, but it's just like a thing of, like, there are literally starving artists out there, and use your privilege for the best. Don't use it against, like... I think it's just sharing, it's sharing the space, sharing the piece of the pie, you know? And I, I genuinely try to live my best to that because I've been given so many opportunities as a white person. Like, I have this privilege that I was given in my life just because I'm white. Like, I should use the opportunity to give those who, you know, don't have that same equal opportunity, or that often

get looked over for the way they looked, or often are ignored for the way they look, like you see me, so, okay, then I'm going to make some noise.

Baylee: No, I think that's beautiful. It really is. Is there anything unique about the drag scene where you, um...

Jakki: Oh.

Baylee: I'm not talking to you, computer. Gosh.

Jakki: Um...

Baylee: Is there anything unique about the drag scene where you live compared to others... places in the country or world? Sorry, my computer thought I was talking to her.

Jakki: Chicago drag scene is on, like, a whole different level that I don't think is comparable to anywhere in the United States.

Baylee: Okay. So, this is the question that you had some, some things to say about, uh, what has COVID... What has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

Jakki: Yeah. So, it sucks. Like, I was... before the pandemic, like, I just turned 21, and I was waiting, like, I was itching. All my friends turned 21 before me. It was, like, finally becoming my moment. I was gonna... like, I felt like I was gonna shine. And then, it all crumbled. So, uh, before the pandemic started, I won two pageant... or I won a pageant, and then I got second place for a pageant for a state level, and I was supposed to go to Texas and Maine. Um, that did not happen, and I'm here, now, just, here [unclear].

Baylee: One side note. Um, before I forget, 'cause you've mentioned this before, is there any way you can email me all of the titles you have won, so I can put it in your bio?

Jakki: Hones-- I can just tell it to you. It's only two titles.

Baylee: Okay, okay. Let me write them down.

Jakki: Yeah, I was like, I only... I only did two pageants. Um, so, I'm Miss Gay Bloomington 2020.

Baylee: Okay. Beautiful title.

Jakki: And Miss Gay... what is this title? I'm going to butcher it. It's like Miss Gay USofA Illinois First Alternative. I don't care about... like, I have titles, but, like, I use it in such a joking way. 'Cause I did the pageant, and the only reason why I say it, like, in a joking way, um, is because, like... and this is like an extension of, like, why I didn't really want to talk about that.

Baylee: Um, so, the next question is number nine, which we, sort of, talked a little bit about. Um it, it goes into sex, gender identity and gender expression. So, how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression out of drag? Now, there's four sub parts. Um, we already talked about your pronouns, which is he, he/they, right?

Jakki: Mm-hmm.

Baylee: And drag influence, uh, has drag influenced your sex and gender identities?

Jakki: So, I don't... I think yes, 'cause it has like a liberation side to me, but it's not like a thing of like, "Oh, I did this because of drag." I think that drag gave me the opportunity to grow, and it's an extension of myself. So, I don't ever... like, I don't put it into myself that, like, I'm a different character in and out of drag. 'Cause, like, ye-- technically yes, but, for the most part, like, I like to be who I am in and out of drag. And I feel like drag is just an extension of me to feel glamorous or next level or pretty. And that's, like, why I, like, told my dad, I was like, "I want to graduate in drag." 'Cause it's like, I don't want to graduate looking like this, like suit and tie, like... no, I don't like that. Like, I'd rather look pretty and how... my idea of, like, show stopping is gonna be, 'cause it's my moment. Um, so I think that [overtalking].

Baylee: Exactly.

Jakki: An extension of who I am, but it's... yeah, drag is an extension of who I am, not a separation of who I am.

Baylee: That's greatly... a great [unclear]. Um, has drag influenced how you think about gender? I feel like you had very distinct views on gender before drag, and drag has just very, um... sort of, like, elaborated more on your gender, like, [unclear].

Jakki: Yeah. I mean, I think, for myself, like, I'll be blunt, I was transphobic before. Like, I didn't understand it, and I didn't understand, like, gender identity in general. So, drag has given me the opportunity to understand that, like, you don't... like, not... just because you're a drag queen doesn't mean you're trans. And that trans... like, a trans identity and being a drag queen are two completely different things that people often overlook. And I think, just even on, like, a nonbinary side of stuff like that, like, drag is an art form and is an express-- it is an art form. So, it's, like, what it... what people make it out to be.

But aside from that, it's also understanding and detaching people who utilize the art, but also who are just this identity their whole lives. Like, this is not like a performance to them. This is not this, that, and the other. As, like, for me, like, okay, I'm going to put on a wig 'cause I want people to look at me, and I want to lip sync a song. But, like, other people want to put on a wig because that is just, like, how... what embraces them. That is how they want to present themselves. This is what they believe is them. So, like, yeah, I definitely think it has helped me make an understanding of, like, detaching from the toxicity that patriarchal society has on us.

Baylee: I mean, even in my short time in the Art of Drag course, like, I feel like my ideas of gender have very much changed. And I've taken a lot of gender studies. And I think that that's one thing that college really provides you with is more outlets to explore yourself in other ways that people can't. Like, for example, you talked about intersex. You know how many people don't know what that is?

Jakki: Do you know how many people I have to, like, argue with them to let them know... that stupid argument "Well, it's science." Well, science says there's literally nonbinary more, so [overtalking]/

Baylee: Yeah. There is an in between. So, like, I, I totally...

Jakki: [Overtalking] I'm going to get heated [unclear]. I, fucking, hate when people are like, "Yeah, like, I can see, like, a fish change sex throughout their lives, but people can't do that." Like what, what in nature do you think cuts off people between, like... if it's expressed in the world, what do you... what makes you think that people can't have that? Like, fully cats and dogs and have human mental illness, and you think that, like... and human diseases, you don't think that humans can...? [Overtalking].

Baylee: It goes back to what you said earlier about categorization, putting people in boxes. And that's what it is, because in our brains, we need to have it cut and dry. And if it's not cut and dry, then we make it out to be what it's not.

Jakki: Right.

Baylee: And that's, that's all it is, is people wanting it to be straightforward, and being... and to the... to an extent, that is detrimental to our society in general.

Jakki: I also love the more that we're talking, my hair is drying. So, I took a shower. As you can see my hair is [overtalking].

Baylee: I love it; it's gotten bigger and bigger. No, my hair is exactly like that. Like, my hair is very curly. If my hair was short, it would look spitting image like that. But my hair is actually...

Jakki: Yeah, I get my [overtalking] when I dance thickness.

Baylee: Yeah, tha—honestly, like, your hair looks exactly like my dad's hair. It's, like, super curly, super thick. And if he gets it, like, cut really short, he has, like, a full-on fro. Like, his is a little bit more curlier than yours, but mine's, like, all the way down my back. So, my curls are more, like, not as tight as they used to be, but, like, if I cut it short, they're ringlets.

Jakki: Yeah, my mom had really tight curls, but my dad, um, my dad just, kind of, had like the... you know, kind of, like, Grease... I mean, not like slick back, but, like, the big poofy hair in, like, Grease musical, you know, that time, like, era. Kind of... he, kind of, has, like, that kind of hair.

Baylee: [Laughs] Okay. So, the next one is, have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag? And then that would be the end of the gender identity part of the questions.

Jakki: Sorry, I just realized, we're...

Baylee: We are actually... um, yeah, we are only halfway through.

Jakki: Yeah. So, okay, let's, let's bullet through these ones. So, um, it says that... uh, I think so, like, I, I feel like in drag, like, I'm able to be more comfortable with myself. So, I'm able to express myself and, like, more of a free way. So, like, I can be, like, more sexual if I wanted to. Like, I want to perform Red Light Special by TLC so bad, and it's a very intimate song. Like, I feel like because I idolize, like, these female, um... I shouldn't say female. Because I idolize these women in my life, and I'm like, "Oh, I want to do that for myself too." Like, love Doja Cat at the moment, even though she's an anti-masker and she's [unclear], but, like, um, still want to do, like, choreography...

Baylee: That's my best friend.

Jakki: And I don't want to, like, be in the club doing her Grammy performances, 'cause that's just what I love. And I think that being queer and being more open with myself allows me to implement that into my art.

Baylee: Have you ever seen anybody do Rico Nasty in drag, like a Rico Nasty song, Smack a Bitch?

Jakki: So, my, my drag mother, Kitty Banks, you can see on their Instagram, they actually performed F-- uh, FMU. It's not... I mean, it's a Brooke Candy song featuring Rico Nasty, but, um, it's a really good song, and she fucking kills it. Um, no, I haven't really seen anyone do Rico Nasty.

Baylee: I feel like that would just be such a powerful song to, like, do on stage.

Jakki: Right. I just, like, I would want to, but I'm white, so I don't want to like...

Baylee: Yes. And I feel like that's also a big... yeah, I, I get that as well.

Jakki: Plus, also, I don't know where you live, but Central Illinois, it's nothing but white people. So, that's also like... I'm like, okay.

Baylee: I live... Okay. So, I live in St. Louis, like, the city. So, I live... like, I grew up going to school with people of all different kinds. Like, my school was... I guess most of the time it's primarily white, no matter what, but, like I went to school with, like, Black kids and a lot of Bosnian... Do you know any Bosnians? Yeah. I have a lot of friends that are Bosnian because...

Jakki: I... I was gonna say I grew up... where I grew up is, uh, 75% Hispanic. So, I, I actually grew up where I was in the minority.

Baylee: I think that... I don't think I'm in a minority, I would say... Like, maybe where I live, I'm in a minority.

Jakki: Right. No, I...

Baylee: But in St. Louis as a whole, I don't think so. Which honestly, I, sort of, wish I was because I... I don't know how to explain. I'm very... I don't like my race, if that makes sense.

Jakki: I know exactly what you mean. I...

Baylee: It's very hard to be... No, no one's talking to you, computer. It's very hard to, sort of, be comfortable within your own race, when you know what people have done in the past, and you're, sort of, representing that just by being here.

Jakki: Yeah. I definitely understand that. I think that's, like, also why I'm so... I advocate a lot for using my privilege and being very open in speech, because being white has such a power, and you need to utilize it in the best way possible.

Baylee: Yeah. I mean. Like... and there's, like... there's so many things that happen that just further solidify that ideal, and within, like, within our lives, as we go about, like, just different experiences. Okay. So, the question 10... So, I guess we have eight questions left.

Jakki: Okay.

Baylee: So, 10 and 11 are just about your personal story. And then, when we get to 12, it's going to be your ideas about drag. So, more of, like, what do you think drag is and things like that. Um, so 10 is, how has drag impacted or changed you? Subparts are, has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag? If so, how? And another subpart is, if you could go back to the time, as in blank before, like, before you were Jakki Love, what advice would you give yourself?

Jakki: So, I think the first question is I... I mean, it kinda goes into the subcategory. Like, it gave me a sense of confidence, it gave me a sense of self, and it gave me a sense to belong on this earth because I finally felt comfortable in my own skin. And like I said, I was an actor, so I failed at that and I don't... I wanted to continue to entertain people, but I realized that I could do it in a non-classist, patriarchal, homophobic. You know what I'm saying? Like, although the acting world likes to pretend to be very open; it's not. And I'm very happy that I'm able to share that continually with my drag.

And if I can go back and tell myself something, I would definitely say, "Fix your mug, but more importantly, um, just learn to love yourself right away and build your confidence as soon as you can, because you are beautiful, and you are going to do amazing things, and you're going to have fun along the way. And don't take it so seriously. Don't get so mad at people. Like, just have fun."

Baylee: Also, one comment...

Jakki: "Worry about yourself, not others." I think that's what I should say, "Worry about yourself. Not others."

Baylee: That's what I always say. Um, one other comment that I have to say is, just because you realized that acting isn't for you does not mean you failed.

Jakki: Oh, I mean, I... the only reason why I say that I failed is because I got kicked out of the... of the acting program. Now...

Baylee: I got kicked out of the speech pathology program at SIUE, and I say that I left on my own volition. It's what you say. It's what you say.

Jakki: Oh, [overtalking]. It was drama-filled. [Unclear]. I know how to sell, but I just say, like, I failed, like, as a [unclear] as an acting major, like, I think I failed. As an actor, I know I can go out and act.

Baylee: Yeah, I think...

Jakki: That's the thing is, 'cause I know I don't need a degree to go out in the theater. So, I said, "Fuck you," if I want to pick up a script again, I know I can. [Overtalking].

Baylee: Yeah. And I think that that's... that's what it is. It's the beauty of acting, is being able to... it's just so versatile, and your position and parts, and there's just so many options.

Jakki: [Unclear] at the time in drag, like, this is literally what I'm doing.

Baylee: I mean, yeah, honestly.

Jakki: Girl, is this really Doja Cat singing to you right now? No, it's Jakki Love doing Say So.

Baylee: [Laughs] Okay. So, the last one is, um... I think it's funny that he wrote... because he wrote it like I'm saying this, but I'm not. Okay it says, I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience in 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... what's size mean? Like, body size?

Jakki: Yeah.

Baylee: Sexuality, disability, etc. and/or the interaction of these social identities have impact your experience within drag and how your drag impacted your experience in these social identities? I specifically want you to talk about your school identity and, like, your educational identity and how that has impacted your drag. Because I feel like that's a very, um, beneficial sort of way to look at it, especially since, you know, we're both 22 and in college, which is more...

Jakki: Yeah, I think something that's really annoying with drag is it's high intensity. So, I feel like it's really, really difficult to be a student and a drag performer, because you're either spending your time and money on school or your time and money on drag. And I really think that you, kind of, have to choose one or the other. If you want to be a successful drag queen, you have to choose drag over school, which sucks. Or you take a break, and you go to school and then you come back to drag. Is it doable to do both? Sure. Is it hard? Immensely. Um, that's why I'm so happy to graduate. 'Cause I'm just like, all of these responsibilities are going to be condensed into a job. And now I can just do my job in school... or sorry, my job in drag.

So, as a student, like, it is... it fucking sucks, like, it fucking sucks. Like, I wanted to do much more, but I can't 'cause, like, I have class or I have to, like, be up the next day, or I have to do this, that and the other. So, I think just as a identity, as a student, like, you have to know the balance, and you have to know when too much is too much. And just because you need to focus in on your school, does not mean that you're not taking your drag seriously.

I will also say I feel like my weight and my... I would say my weight and race have definitely helped me be looked at a lot more because, like, being a skinnier person, it's just like... the realistically of, like, skinny privilege is people are gonna think that I look prettier in an outfit than someone else is gonna wear rather... like, the outfit's ugly, let's be honest. Like, is it... is it...? Do I look good because I'm skinny and white, or do I look good because it's a really great garment with beautiful hair, beautiful makeup? Like, that is what the reality is.

And I think that that is why, like, I just try to be so open with, like, my voice and including people and including problems that are going on because it's like, stop thinking that I can just get a free pass because I'm white. Like, I should not have that. And do I exploit that at times? Honestly, yes. Like, sometimes I don't use my privilege to the best ability. But I think, overall, it's just, like, acknowledging it, and then using it to your best power, because I have power. Like, that's not... that's not like an unknown, that's not like a secretive thing. Like, I have power, and I need to utilize it in the best ways possible.

Baylee: So, now we're going to move on to, like, the drag artist's ideas about drag. So, how do you define drag yourself?

Jakki: I define drag as the art form of gender expression. Now, my standards of drag is definitely not what other standards of drag are. Um, I sometimes feel like, like, yeah, you could put on a wig and a little bit of eyeliner, call yourself a drag queen and go out and perform. Like, will I get upset that you're getting a lot of attention, or you're getting more attention than me? Probably yes, because I put in more work than you. But also, in the other sense, it's like some people take drag as, like, a full-time career, and some people take drag as a hobby. And that's something that I think is often lost, that some people don't take drag as seriously as other people do, and they just want to do it for fun. And that is fine. And I think that drag is just... should be accessible to every... everyone, every shape, size, every color, every race, every, every identity. Like, it should be accessible. Except to Republicans, like, I don't need you in my space. Um, but... [Laughs]

Baylee: Thank you, yes. Amen.

Jakki: So, you know, just nasty people. But for the most part, like, I just believe that drag is gender of... uh, expression of gender and an extension of gender expression and a love for performance. I mean, how fun was, like, Lip Sync Battles, like, to see Tom Holland doing Umbrella. Like, we all lived for that. Was that drag? I would say so. Like, girl, that was camp. That was camp. That was high-performing blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Like, I, I think that people think that drag, you need to have, like, your eyebrow glued down, a weight down in here, weight there... and you know, and that's just, like, what limits the drag expression. And it's, it's not just that. And I think that we need to change that. So, my idea of it is, go out and perform, have fun. Like, drag can be whatever you want it to be. My drag standards are going to be separate from yours, but if you believe that it's drag, I mean, go ahead.

Baylee: The next question is, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Jakki: I believe that... I just think there's so many different things. So, like, obviously, freedom... it's freedom, like it's freedom of understanding who you are, freedom of space, freedom of just having fun. More importantly, I think it's political. And I think it's a way to use your voice to create change. People will listen to you if you look different. People will treat you differently if you look different. Whether or not it's positive or negative, like, that's what's gonna happen. So, I just believe that there are just different ideas of it. And yeah, I, I don't know. There's not, like, one, one way for me to put it.

Baylee: Do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not? If so, how and in what way?

Jakki: I feel like it can be, just like any performance. Like, I, I believe that drag is... like, it's an extension of, like, what it is. I believe what Doja Cat is doing is low key drag. Like, she is out there performing, wearing different hair, costumes, makeup. Like, that's not much different than me. No one calls her... Uh, I believe her real name is Amala?

Baylee: I have no idea.

Jakki: Yeah, I think her real name is Amala. She had an album, about it. It's, like, the... No Car, No Police, that album. The uh... yeah. Amala. Um, she... that's the album that has Go To Town. Cookie Jar, has, uh, Candy. Has Body Language [unclear].

Baylee: Okay.

Jakki: It's her old... it's before she... Anyways, so...

Baylee: Before she was mainstream. [Laughs]

Jakki: Right. Like, no one calls her Amala. No one's out there saying, "Oh my god, that's Onika." Like, no, that's Nicki Minaj. Like that is a... that is an extension of what it is. And that's what I'm doing. I'm just not in the Grammys. I'm not performing multimillion... you know what I'm saying? Like, it's an exaggeration of what I'm doing. And so, um, yeah. What was the question? I'm so sorry.

Baylee: [Laughs] Um, do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not?

Jakki: So, because of that, because of the exaggeration, I believe that it ca-- it can become sexual. So, like, as I was saying before, I can go out into a club and perform TLC and, like, do, like, a burlesque number. Like, it... drag is whatever you want it to be. And, um, if you want to make it sexual, that's your drag, you can do that. Do I think drag is inherently sexual? No. Um, I think that bodies come in all shapes and sizes. So, like, to accentuate, like, hips and have big boobs and blah, blah, like, the fact that we think of that as sexual right away tells you about what we think about the woman body if you wanna think of drag queens. Like, it's not inherently sexual; people just, kind of, look like that. Some people don't look like that. Like, it, it just is an exaggeration of what we believe bodies look like.

Um, like, if I was to... if I wanted to go have drag queen story hour, and I want to read to kids, am I going to be, like, skinless and blah, blah, blah? I mean, I could, but I don't think that... it doesn't need to be, like, sexualized, and I don't need to be like... jokes that... I don't make these jokes, but, like, other jokes that people make in the bar of, like, squeeze my tit, wa-wa-wa. Like, that can be, like, the sexual side. But, no, I don't think inherently drag is sexual, but I believe that it has a stigma that it is, um, because it is an exaggeration on gender expression and what is gender expression. Like, my boobs look like this. What does a female look like? How do I...? Excuse me. How does a woman look like? How do I make that extra? How do I... you know what I'm saying? Like, that just has to do... you know, girl, fuck the patriarchy. That's what [unclear] is an extension of.

Baylee: And yeah, I think it's a lot to do with just gender in general. Like, people assume, like, gender, and then they just link sexuality and all of it together, so much so that they just... they're like, yeah, it is all sexual, everything's sexual. And I think also, like, saying it's sexual is an easier way for people to be more dismissive of the culture. Um, so...

Jakki: What's taboo? Like, I mean, we live in a society that, like, sex is can... anything is... everything is hypo-se-- hypersexualized, but no one can talk about what sex is.

Baylee: Mm-hmm. Yeah, like...

Jakki: Look at an Axe body spray. Like, no one teaches you...

Baylee: Yeah.

Jakki: Like, they're gonna tell you how to get women. And it's how, like, a six-year-old... "Oh he's a... he's a ladies' man. He's gonna get all the women [unclear]." He doesn't know what he's doing. And on top of that, you can have, like, talk about how you're a womanizer, you're gonna get men, you're attractive, blah, blah. You can't even, like... they literally call a sex talk, the birds and the bees. What does that say about us? Like, come on now.

Baylee: [Overtalking]. I think...

Jakki: No one can show a nipple. Women, women can't even go, like, shirtless on a beach without like...

Baylee: There needs to be more... less stigma about bodies and just bodies in general. Like, for example, like, with women, you know how many women don't know what goes into childbirth? They don't know what's gonna happen until they get there and that baby is on the way out. Like, there's so many women that are like, "I didn't know that this was gonna happen" and stuff because we don't think it's okay to talk about things like that in our society.

Jakki: [Overtalking] it's objectify-- uh, objectifying a vagina, like, a vagina is only supposed to be used for sex. You didn't know that? And so, if it's not, what does a child...? Like, okay, cool. Bring my child, anyways. Can I go and [inaudible] it again? You know, it's, like, it's disgusting that people genuinely believe stuff like that. Or, like, how women can't even breastfeed in public without being like, "Oh, put your tits away. I, I can't look at that." Like, [overtalking] were you?

Baylee: Like, you were a baby, like, you were a baby. It's like... it's like, you can't look at it now, but you, you want to look at it later in Snapchat, you know what I mean?

Jakki: Right.

Baylee: It's, like, completely... like, we don't want to look at you in this light, but we want... it's sort of like the stigma of, like, guys want a girl who's experienced, but don't want to have a girl who has high body count, if that makes sense. It's sort of like that stigma.

Jakki: Exactly.

Baylee: Which I... I've heard that, like, literally all the time, and I hate that so much. Um, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race? Which, obviously, I would assume that you like it, but I feel like you might have a little tea to spill.

Jakki: I love the show. I am a big fan of drag, and anything showcased at the highest level I am going to watch and enjoy. Do I love the politics involved with the show? Absolutely not. The fans make it toxic. They make the show seem... I mean, the show... I don't know. Um, I think that a lot of the fans ruin the magic that goes into Drag Race because of how toxic it is. I mean, they are treating Kandy Muse right now like complete shit on Twitter for no reason. She didn't do anything. Just loud, proud, Black, doing her thing, big, bigger body size. She's getting hate for what? For being herself?

Baylee: How dare her. How dare her be herself.

Jakki: But then another white queen can go around yelling and being like, I'm confident, blah, blah, blah, and she gets love and attention. Like, that is disgusting. Like, that... that's the part that annoys me. And something about it is also like reality TV in general, and this show is just an extension of reality TV. But, like, reality TV in general just makes, like... they just make things more toxic than it needs to. And they're fabricating stuff and they... like, Loki can ruin people's lives without... I think it's intentional at times, but they can just, like, ruin people's lives, and that's what I find really disappointing and really sad. But it also can make or break your career, because if you get on Drag Race, guess what, you have the potential to be in another tax bracket.

Baylee: And I think, like, when you were exp—like, talking about that drag artist and, like, how they're getting so much hate because of their size and because of their thing, like, even if you look back, like, currently, I'm watching Season 9 with class, Eureka came onstage in Season 9, and she did, like, a white trash thing. And, like, she didn't get a whole bunch of backlash for that. You know what I mean? And, like, things like that, are more okay for, for people that are white to do, than people that are of a color.

Jakki: The whole thing, as you'll see that... I don't know what episode you're on, you'll see how much Eureka uses her whiteness to weaponize other people.

Baylee: Oh, yeah.

Jakki: The Vixen is literally... and this is something that annoys me, people hate The Vixen. For what? She's a proud Black person. And so, she's just trying to showcase and use her side of the space, and she is loud because she has to demand the space. But Eureka can just come in and go, "Wow, I'm big, and I can do this, and I'm country, so you're gonna to love me." It's like, girl, no, like, you're problematic, and people let you get away with it because you have white tears and white fragility. Like, no.

Baylee: And I totally... I did not... like, at the beginning, I liked Eureka. And then, the more I started to, like, understand who Eureka is and, like, how they weaponize their, their color, obviously... like, I, I could even pick up on that in the first few episodes. It's, it's amazing. But we're at the very end, almost, there's like five queens left, I think.

Jakki: Right. I mean, you can even... a great example is, like, when, uh... which was so funny, but, uh, when, Aquaria started to... crying in Untucked, and they called her out for her white tears, and she said, "Well, right now, you're painting a narrative that I'm a mean Black person who made a white girl cry, and now I'm going to get hate." And she did. And she called it out on, on, on camera, and they... the fans and then treated her like shit. And it's like, that's, that's what I mean. Like, it is to the pa-- the highest degree, like, on Drag Race showing it. But the reality is that reflection happens in local scenes all the time, and sometimes even worse.

Baylee: Yeah, even more so, because it's less checked. There's less... there's less flack for you to tear somebody and destroy them, you know, like...

Jakki: Or you [overtalking] if you get punched, I mean, there's a crew that stop you and save you. Like, you can't have that... like, what happens if you get hate crime in a club? Like, [unclear]. And you can't go to the police; the police don't care about you.

Baylee: Yeah. I mean, it's, it's disgusting. It really is. Um, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or drag community, what would it be and why?

Jakki: I think there needs to be more openness. There needs to be more time to understand of, like, sharing the pie, building people up. But more importantly, there needs to be a lot more room for critique-ness, because the confidence that people have is annoying because you look like...

Baylee: Needs to be checked.

Jakki: I am sorry, but, like, you look like shit, stop pretending that you are... like, just because you have money, and you have power to book people, does not give you the power... Like, does not make you a good drag artist. And I think that's something that's really important. Because it's like... I mean, you can... like Loki's scene in Drag Race, like, just because you're a bigger name in your scene, doesn't mean that you're good at competitions, or you're good at this. And I think that is something that people need to have is, like, I guess a reality check of just being like, because the scenes and everything is so vain, that it's not just about yourself; it's about the people who make you and the people who build you up. Because drag should be more of a team effort, although you can do everything yourself. Um, it's also depending on who you market towards. People have to like you, people have to do this, that and the other. And I think that more people need to have more patience and more love for each other rather than a, a hostile, comp-- competitive thing all the time.

Baylee: Um, so this is the second to last question. Sorry that there's so many.

Jakki: You're okay.

Baylee: Um, I didn't think... [laughs] it's funny because in his interview... like, in the interview instructions and everything, it's like, yeah, your interview needs to be at least 20 minutes. And I'm like, yeah. [Laughs]. Um, what do you think the... are mi—are misconceptions about having... okay, sorry. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag? Where does it come from? What do you think would help change that?

Jakki: Yeah. So, I think this whole interview thing, I think that patriarchy, as fun... as fun as, like, people make jokes about it, like, it is a serious thing. Like, it is, and no matter where we are, it's going to always be a man-dominated space. And a lot of that just stems from, like, oversexualization, objectification, um, misogyny, this, that, and the other. Like, all of these problems stem from men and cis men. And when you have, like, gay... specifically gay white men in power in these spaces, then they have the influence to im-- uh, the influence to continue that narrative and just be like, "You're, you're a woman. No, you can't do... you're not a drag queen, honey. You're a woman, stay in a woman's place." Like, what? This is a... supposed to be a queer space, a space to involve everyone. Like, you have obviously been shunned. And so, now, what are you going to do? Shun another person because of us...? You know what I'm saying?

So, I think that a lot of the misconceptions just stem from in-- inherited societal things. And it's just, like, a way to change that is to acknowledge it and change who's in power, realistically. It's just share, share the po-- share the cake, you know? Like, I think that's something that I love that is gonna happen in Chicago, is just, like, a lot of the white people are not gonna be in power.

Like, they have a Chicago Black, uh, Council that is just, like, designed to support, uplift Black people and... But more importantly, just, like, create the space in a better way.

And honestly, it just, kind of, starts from taking away the power from those who have it now and, um, distribute it in a, a more of an equal way. It doesn't need to be a hier-- hierarchical thing, whatever, like a business thing. So, it doesn't need to... like, queen at the top, and then you control these bars, and you get to book these people, you get to... you know? It's just like... like, I understand businesses need to thrive and make money, but also, at the same time, like at no-- it doesn't need to be at our expense. Like, just make the space good, make the space happy, make it include people. People don't wanna see it, people don't come to the show. Like, I understand that hurts your business, but in an ideal world, oh wow, like, these people should still be showcased. We shouldn't be just, um... we shouldn't be showcasing or doing it for a straight world because that's what makes the money, like, no.

Baylee: Yeah. Because... yeah. And I feel like our society, in general, has taken several steps back just in the past four years, that we have to very much overcompensate for now. And we need to get back on track because of that. Um, okay. So, the last one, if you choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would it be?

Jakki: The magic of it. It's such a fun thing. And I really do wish that people would understand that drag comes from struggles of other people, and to pay homage to the people who have struggled so we have the freedom to do what we can do. Um...

Baylee: Yeah.

Jakki: Let me tell you, I know I keep saying it, wasn't a white man that created gay pride. Marsha P. Johnson. I know, like, she... that's the trans identity, but, you know, like, it was people like her that helped pave the way to help create change. Um, although I think RuPaul is a little whitewash and more of like a businessman, capitalism, but, you know, like, as much as I hate giving him credit, like, he helped pave a way to give us the freedom and space to do it.

Baylee: Yeah.

Jakki: And I think that... I wish people could understand the magic that it's not just like a oversexualized thing. Oh, you want to be a wom—like, oh, you can't do that. Like, go, go on a pole. Like, no, that's not what I want. I don't want to be a pole dancer. Like, I just want to lip sync and have fun. Like, I'm... I have, like... I just wanna be famous, and I wanna entertain. Like, that's where the magic comes from. It comes from a creative outlet. And I wish people would understand that more.

Baylee: I think it... in life it's all about doing what makes you happy, as long as it's not at the expense of others. And that's really... that's what drag is, is it's being able to express yourself and making yourself happy within your expressions, and trying to make other people happy, like you said. Like, you wanna spread love, and that's, that's the whole point of your name, is just to, sort of, venture out and express yourself.

Jakki: Right.

Baylee: Well, um, those are all of the questions I have, but it's been amazing talking to you.

Jakki: Yeah. You as well.

Interview with Johnny Ford

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Rachael: So, the first one is, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Johnny: When I first saw or heard about drag, I was a little apprehensive just because I didn't fully understand, like, why people wanted to do it or, you know, what the value was. And so, I thought it was a little over the top, a little too crazy for me. But as I got closer to it, and I really started to understand the art form, um, I started to really appreciate it and get more into it, so then [unclear] eventually, obviously, tried it myself.

Rachael: Love it. Okay, for the next one, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Johnny: I started performing about two years ago, um, in the gay scene in Chicago. And so, one of my first opportunities was actually a charity event, where folks were raising money for some local nonprofit, and they had folks, like, do drag to raise money.

Rachael: Oh, that's cool. For the third one, how did your...

Johnny: Sorry.

Rachael: No, you're good. How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Johnny: Yeah, I had a lot of support from my friends and my family as it relates to drag. There weren't a whole lot of questions, I think it was like a very slow evolution. People were, like, starting to see me play around with makeup and, like, do this charity event, and then, you know, picking up from there. So, it was pretty natural, and I've gotten, like, a ton of support from my friend group, who, like, would actively go out to my shows or share my posts and stuff like that.

Rachael: That's awesome. For the next one, there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag from drag queen and drag king to glamor queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen and camp queen, among with others. Are there any particular labels you would use to characterize your drag?

Johnny: Yeah.

Rachael: Go ahead.

Johnny: I, I just try not to label myself as it relates to my drag because I just really appreciate the flexibility to be creative. But if I had to describe my current drag aesthetic, it's definitely more of, like, a look queen. So, I really am drawn to the aesthetics and putting an outfit together

and the cohesion with the makeup. And so, I guess that's where I consider myself as an artist, as a... just more of a, like, a looks...

Rachael: Yeah, I gotcha.

Johnny: Or a fashion girl.

Rachael: Okay. For six-- for the sixth one, who or what had influenced your drag?

Johnny: I'm sorry, what was that?

Rachael: Who or what has influenced your drag?

Johnny: Who has influenced my drag? Um, lots of other drag queens. [Laughter] Um, so... and lots of, like, female artists. So, I'm really inspired by artists like Brooke Candy, Rico Nasty, um, like Pablo Vittar, really empowered by these artists that are out there, kind of, sharing a new vision or being bold and doing something different, I absolutely love that.

Rachael: That's awesome. Do you consider your drag political? Why or why not?

Johnny: Drag is 100% always political. So, there's no... I don't think there's a way that you can do drag without it being political. It is a statement in itself...

Rachael: Right.

Johnny: Um, when you decide to put it on. But I think there's an ad—there's advantage to that, in being able to command a presence and then share a position or a platform, um, to try and do good with it.

Rachael: Gotcha. Yeah. Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Like, are you a part of a drag family or house or collective? Like, how often do you perform? What goes on getting ready for performance? And, like, what are your challenges and whatnot?

Johnny: Sure. The drag community is, like, so energizing and incredibly diverse, which I appreciate so much. I'm not in a drag family, but I have met so many really incredible artists through drag that inspired me to do more. And I love to collaborate with other artists. So, in general, you know, I am not part of a, a family or a collective necessarily. But I still consider myself pretty fresh in the scene, and so, I'm sure, you know, as I grow and make more connections, you know, who knows? Like, the sky is the limit.

Rachael: Right. How often do you perform, and where do you perform?

Johnny: Oh [laughs], I performed a hell of a lot more now than before COVID.

Rachael: Oh yeah.

Johnny: But, you know, and then, before then, it was a lot of performing at the bars. So, in Chicago, we're very lucky to have several queer spaces that include drag and, and pay for it. So, I've performed at several clubs in Chicago like Splash, Berlin, Scarlet. So, I'm very lucky to have done that. In general, um, performing, I would do, like, [unclear] a couple times a month.

Um, and then, you know, if I were to enter into a competition, like I did a couple years ago, I was performing every week.

Rachael: Oh, that's cool. What goes into getting ready for performance?

Johnny: What goes into getting ready? Oh my gosh.

Rachael: [Laughs]

Johnny: Uh, so much. Physically, obviously, you have to sit down and put yourself together.

Rachael: Right.

Johnny: It's a lot of listening to music and putting on your face and, you know, putting your outfit together, always running late to the bar for the function.

Rachael: [Laughs]

Johnny: And then, mentally, you know, it's a lot of, uh, you, kind of, just hyping yourself up to get you into that state of mind where you can step in front of the crowd and feel confident and be able to, you know, really put on a show. So, it's a lot of that kind of hyping yourself up for a few hours to be your own [unclear].

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

Johnny: Biggest challenges. Um, one of the biggest challenges I think is [unclear]. You know, it takes a lot of guts to stand up in front of a crowd of people, gays especially, because we're notoriously judgmental. [Laughs]

Rachael: [Laughs] Yeah.

Johnny: We know... you know, in this day and age of Drag Race, I feel like there is and ex-- like, an expectation of drag to be like high quality. And so, you, kind of, have to deal with that in your head, what are people thinking of me? What is the perception of the crowd? Are they enjoying this? Am I not living up to their expectations? And then there's a whole other side of that in your personal life of, you know, how am I being considered by my friends as a drag artist, you know?

Rachael: Right.

Johnny: Am I...? You know, romantically, does that hinder or help that you... when you reveal to somebody that you're interested in that you do drag, you know what I mean?

Rachael: Yeah.

Johnny: There are layers to it, not only in drag but it, kind of, touches other aspects of your life.

Rachael: Yeah, I gotcha. Okay. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity and gender expression out of drag?

Johnny: Um, I'd say [unclear] I'm a pretty flexible person. I think I said this earlier, but I don't really feel the need to label myself a lot.

Rachael: Right.

Johnny: But in ju-- in the most basic terms, I still consider myself a cisgendered, homosexual male. That being said, you know, I love to, you know, wear my drag clothes as boy clothes and, kind of, just play with gender and expression as much as I want to [unclear].

Rachael: I gotcha, yeah. How has drag impacted or changed you?

Johnny: Drag has made me a thousand times happier. And, I don't know, it just, like, feels like you unlock something when you do drag. I always encouraged people to try it at least once. I feel like you learn a little bit more about who you are when you step into it. And the bravado that it gives you, I just... I think it opens up your world and your view and your understanding of more... of the, like, the like queer community when you do it.

Rachael: Right.

Johnny: I feel like it has just made me a more mindful, more celebratory, more queer person which I absolutely love.

Rachael: Yeah. Would you say that it's, like, impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Johnny: 100%.

Rachael: Yeah?

Johnny: 100%, I think it has impacted my confidence out of drag.

Rachael: That's awesome.

Johnny: Like, being able to, like, command a presence or... like, to people I don't know, and... you know, I've, I've never really been a shy person, but I definitely think that drag has had an impact in my overall [unclear] and, like, confidence [unclear].

Rachael: Yeah, I gotcha. Almost done. How do you define drag, like, your own definition?

Johnny: My own definition of drag?

Rachael: Mm-hmm.

Johnny: My definition of drag is pretty wide.

Rachael: [Laughs]

Johnny: Drag can honestly be anything that pushes you out of your normal comfort zone. So, it doesn't necessarily have to be makeup. It's like, you could throw on, like, a piece of clothing and that could be drag for you. It [unclear] changes how you see yourself and how you present

yourself to the world. So, drag, for me, is just shifting their expression outwardly, and pushing yourself into a new element.

Rachael: I love that. Okay, next, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Johnny: Oh my gosh. [Laughter] So, for me, the purpose of drag is... it changes for each person, right? Some people may want to do drag as an escape from their current situation.

Rachael: Right.

Johnny: They may want to step into a new personality or try something new. There may be more people that choose, like, to do drag because they love to entertain and be onstage. There might be people who do drag because they love fashion and creativity. And so, for me, it's, it's completely based on the person, because there are so many different reasons that you could do drag. And what I love as well, is beca-- like, drag is ever-evolving. You might get into drag because you love to do clothes, or you love doing hair and makeup. And then you learn something new, and drag becomes something even more fulfilling in the future.

Rachael: Okay. So, do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not? If so, how? In what way?

Johnny: Is drag sexual? Is that the question?

Rachael: Yes.

Johnny: Yes, absolutely. I think drag is sexual. I think there's power in being able to, kind of, fit the narrative around sexuality and express, like, something new and something different. So, I think, you know, there is this kind of expectation too that drag has to... you have to be a sexy drag queen, you have to be beautiful.

Rachael: Right.

Johnny: And I don't think that's necessarily true.

Rachael: Right.

Johnny: And I think there's always kind of an innate sexual nature to drag instead of, like, just shifting gender expression. And gender and sex are so, you know, infinitely linked. And so, I think there's absolutely, kind of, an underlying tone of sexuality in whatever kind of drag you do.

Rachael: Yes, for sure. Okay. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Johnny: [Laughs] Uh, very mixed emotions.

Rachael: [Laughs] Yeah, I feel that.

Johnny: Drag Race has been really fantastic in just elevating drag into an art form that people recognize across the world. And so, I'm very appreciative of Drag Race for being able to take what was, I guess, considered cringe and maybe considered weird in the queer community, and really taking it to this level that people are so invested in. And it really feels like a competition or

a sport and an art form, and gives this platform to all of these artists who are doing incredible work and deserve to be recognized.

Obviously, the other side of that is that Drag Race is not perfect. And so, there are tons of really incredible, diverse performers who don't fit into the mold that Drag Race has created, and are not given the same attention and platform. And of course, there's this level of polish that people tend to expect from drag because of Drag Race. And so, we have to, kind of, deal with that too, as, like, maybe the local artists and the artists that don't have those resources or that attention are, kind of, looked over, because people are looking for Drag Race quality drag. So, that's kind of the double-edged sword, I think, of Drag Race.

Rachael: Okay. We have three more. So, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Johnny: If I could change one thing about the drag scene, I would try to get rid of as many barriers as possible for the drag artists that are overlooked, like the bioqueens and more, like, gender nonconforming [unclear] performers, and, of course, drag kings and queens of color. I feel like there are a lot of barriers that still exist for those performers. They obviously don't get the same kind of attention, they're not casted on shows like Drag Race as often. And I think that's changing. And that's something that I would... if I could snap my fingers, that's what I would do, is make... put those same performers in the same spotlight and in the same positions with the same resources as the kings that you're seeing being cast on Drag Race.

Rachael: Yeah, totally. Okay. What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag? And where do you think it comes from?

Johnny: Yeah, I think, there are definitely several. People have the general misconception about drag in that I think a lot of people think that to be a drag queen you must want to be a woman, or you may be, like, overly feminine, or there's something going on in your psyche that you're not like... you know, whatever your general gender expression is, that you want to be something different. And for me, that's not the case [unclear]. But in general, I think people have a misconception as to why you want to do drag. And I think people are starting to more recognize now and see it as, like, a sport and an art form that is separate from, you know, the struggle that someone may have related to their gender identity.

Rachael: Yeah. Okay. Last one. If you choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Johnny: What I want people to learn about drag? That it's accessible and that everyone should do it. That it's for everybody. Absolutely.

Rachael: Love that.

Johnny: It's something that, like, everyone should touch, everyone should see, everyone should do. Because you can... no matter who you are, you can learn something about yourself from it.

Rachael: Right, yeah. Well, thank you. That was all of them.

Interview with Liam Laughin

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Interviewer: So, I have a few questions. It'll be about 20 minutes total.

Liam Laughin: Okay.

Interviewer: So, I'm ready to start when you are.

Liam Laughin: All right, I am ready.

Interviewer: Okay. So, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Liam Laughin: So, my very first experience with drag, I was maybe five, and I saw RuPaul on VH1. And I asked my mom, "Who was that?" And she said, "That's RuPaul; she's a drag queen." And I said, "What's a drag queen?" And she said, "Well it is a man that dresses up as a lady." And I said, "Oh, okay." And so, that was [laughs], like, the end of the conversation. And I was like, "Cool, cool." And I've been in theatre for my entire life, so drag has just been in my life a very natural thing. The art of it is beautiful. And so, I've, I've always known about it since consciousness.

Interviewer: Okay. When did you start performing as a drag artist? And why did you start performing?

Liam Laughin: I started performing as a drag artist March of last year. The reason why I started performing... my origin is in cosplay, and dressing up as characters was something that I enjoyed doing. But with the sparseness of cons and everything, it just wasn't enough to really express myself. You work on a look, you become somebody else for a day, and then six months later, you do it again with somebody else. And that's cool. Drag is a little bit more. You can do it in your bedroom, you can do it in public, you can do it wherever you want to, anytime you want to. And so, that's the reason why I started drag, was I enjoy putting on a character and sharing that character with other people.

Interviewer: Awesome. Where does your drag name...? Oh, I'm sorry, wrong question. How did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Liam Laughin: For my friends, my chosen family, they were very excited, and they said, "Well, obviously, because you're male cos--" Male-presenting cosplay characters always hit better than your female presenting cosplay characters." So, they were like, "Obviously, this is going to be a lateral move for you. Awesome. We're excited."

My parents were a little bit concerned at first. They were a little bit worried for me. And I think it's just because of where I live is a very conservative town with very closed-minded people.

They were worried, especially since I just became a drag artist at the age of 32, and I'm a small business owner, that it would be frowned upon in the community. And, you know, it is what it is. But I said, "I'm going to do this because this is what I feel is good for me. And, you know, be damned if my business goes down in flames, I don't want to work with those people anyway. I don't."

So, now, now that I've been doing it for a year, my parents are supportive. They're loving it, they're sharing my stuff, they're my biggest fans. And actually, we were wrong about how the community would receive what I do. And the community has actually banded around me, and they're also incredibly supportive. So, it's kind of an exercise in humanity and, and seeing people be so lovely and accepting even in a conservative town. It's, it's beautiful.

Interviewer: That's great. So, where does your drag name come from?

Liam Laughin: My drag name is a pun because I love a good pun, Liam Laughin. When I started... Liam is a side of me 'cause me, Morgan, in every day, I don't... like, I was taught certain things that you don't do. You don't make jokes, you're very strait-laced. You are yourself, but what... you want everybody to perceive you as being normal. And so, Liam is my cut-up character. He's funny, he has no problem talking to people, he'll crack a bad joke. And so, that's the reason why I call him Liam Laughin is, it's a pun of leave them laughing. And so, he... that's, that's where Liam came from. And yeah [laughter]. I might change my name in the future, but so far so good.

Interviewer: Do you have any ideas of names in the future, if that becomes a [inaudible]?

Liam Laughin: Uh, I don't, but every now and then, just to pass time, my husband and I will come up with funny drag names. And I've seen a lot of really good drag names out there. I think I have a running list. But no, I don't have something nailed down just yet [laughs].

Interviewer: Okay. So, there are a lot of terms and styles of drag from drag queen to drag king, to glamor queens, male impersonation, comedy queens, bearded queens, the list goes on and on. Are these particular labels, uh... are these particular labels something you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do, and what's your style of drag?

Liam Laughin: Okay. So, we'll just break this down a little bit, so I don't go off on a rambling tangent. Okay. So, I am okay with the term drag king, but I'm now starting to go towards drag artist or drag performer. Because when you section yourself off like that, not only does it set you off from the drag community as a whole because you are separating yourself from the queens, which I don't like to do. I love the queens. The AFAB, the queens or AMAB kings, I think they're just as valid. And I think when we start to section ourselves off like that, it becomes a ranking system. But that's not to invalidate anybody who likes to call themselves that. So, I prefer drag performer or drag artist. It just... it works for me. Because sometimes I don't want to put Liam's face on. Sometimes I want to be a monster; sometimes I want to be an alien. And that's, kind of, where I am there. Okay, so, what was the second part of that question?

Interviewer: The second part of question is, what type of drag do you do in...?

Liam Laughin: Okay. I do a very heavy storytelling drag. And I have not performed live a lot. If you do the math, I started doing drag right when, when shutdown happened. So, a lot of my content has been virtual, digital content. But with a lot of that, I started realizing that what I enjoy to do most is story tell through either acting or lip syncing and putting together a video that way. So, that's... that's Liam's shtick, is he loves a good storytelling. Okay So, what was the third part? [Laughs]

Interviewer: The third part is a little bit similar to the second part. It's, what is your style of drag?

Liam Laughin: Okay. And my style of drag is very concept heavy, driving, storytelling drag. And sometimes I don't even have to have makeup on for it, don't even have to have a costume. And some of the best drag that I have seen has been the artist being themselves out of drag, and it's beautiful. So, I go for... more for concepts and actually delivering a message or a story than just throwing a face on and doing a song.

Interviewer: Okay. Who or what has influenced your drag?

Liam Laughin: Uh, mainly the king. Of course, have to pay homage to the reigning king himself, Landon Cider. He's phenomenal. That's how I found out that AFAB performers could actually perform in the drag space in the first place. Him winning really opened it up for a lot of us. And I mean, there's... it opened up this world that I didn't even know existed. But the classics Mo B. Dick. He's phenomenal, OG, has been doing this since the '90s, holding it down, still looking good.

Other influences, um, my dear friend, Kreme Inakuchi, [laughs] who is from Canada. They are a drag performer that has a male-presenting character and a female-presenting character, and sometimes they will mesh that together, and it's beautiful. So, Kreme Inakuchi is a big influence for me. And pretty much every single drag performer that I have come into contact with inspires me in some way. They all give me something.

And that's the cool thing is that, the basic public perception of drag is we're in competition with each other all the time. But really, even in a competition setting, at least in my experience, it's been a community, it's been supportive, it's been loving, and a place where you can be yourself. So, everyone inspires me. Anybody that I've met inspires me. And I will go on ahead and say my drag mother as well, Onya Nerves, inspires me. She's helped me a lot break out of my shell, and she towers above me, probably about two feet, two feet above me in heels, and looks down, and she goes, "It'll be okay." [Laughs].

Interviewer: That's great that there's a lot of influences that go into it. That's... because it helps build and build and build. So, do you consider your drag political?

Liam Laughin: Uh. I'm trying to think. And I don't think my drag is political so much as it is a critique on the human condition. I struggle a lot in my day-to-day with depression and anxiety. So, I use my drag to show others that it's okay to feel these feelings that you do. And here's how you can tell a story with that and touch others that way. So, I haven't really done anything

political with my drag. If something calls me to do that, then I might in the future, but for now, no.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?

Liam Laughin: It is a mess.

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Liam Laughin: It is a mess. In fact... I don't know... I know you're gonna just... you're recording it for just, um, I'm guessing note taking, but I'll just... I'll give you a little tour. There is a wig head on my kitchen counter surrounded by masks and art supplies. My drag room is a green screen with a black sheet over it, because I'm too lazy to take the green screen down.

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Liam Laughin: And I got lighting equipment, I got wigs on the wall, I have my makeup desk that I have not cleaned. It's awful. This is my closet. That is all Liam's clothes. And yes, Liam has more clothes than Morgan does. It's chaos. [Laughs] It's organized chaos. I know where everything is. I got... I got a mannequin on the floor from a short that I did, and she's still been there a month later. I don't want to pick her up. So, [laughs] that's my life, is this an organized mess [laughs]. And I love it.

Interviewer: That's, that's great that you're, you're having a ball while doing it, even though there's a lot of moving parts to it, as you've shown me.

Liam Laughin: Mm-hmm. Very...

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

Liam Laughin: Yes. And now, we don't all live together. But my drag mother, Anya, she has several children, and I have my grandma, Eileen Don Dover [laughing]. I love these puns. So, there's Eileen, there's Anya, there's me and my brother, Will, and I also have a drag son, Ernie. And, um yeah, so we are part of a collective. We just, kind of, adopted each other, and it works well.

Interviewer: Okay. How often, um, do you do you per—do you perform? I know you said that, you know, we are in the COVID era, so it's very difficult to physically go somewhere. But how often do you do, like, online, online gigs, I guess?

Liam Laughin: I would say I try to do a live show at least once a week with my work. Kreme Inakuchi is up in Canada. They have a drag house called House of Tequila Mockingbirds. And we... I've been doing their weekly Tuesday night show for the past year, every couple of weeks or so. So, I try to do drag at least once a week to keep my skills sharp. But also, that way when I do perform again, I'm not deer in the headlights. And I think that's pretty healthy. I feel like if I did this all the time, it becomes... it takes over your life. It becomes an obsession, and that's not healthy. It becomes a coping mechanism as opposed to therapy. So, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you verbally describe what goes into getting ready for a performance exactly?

Liam Laughin: I have to... [laughs] I have to bind my chest, if I am doing... and it just makes me feel a little bit more euphoric when I do bind my chest 'cause I like to commit... or at least Liam's a bit more euphoric. It just doesn't feel like I'm completely in drag unless I do that. And there are performers out there that, you know, they identify as a drag king, but they will perform with their boobs out. And it's cool. And I... you know, that's, that's great for them. It's not something for me.

So I bind. I put on my makeup in that process. If it's a quick makeup, it will be about 30 minutes. If it's a big makeup for a competition, three to four hours. I do my hair, and that... I can either just do my hair the way it is, or I can put on a wig. I prefer my natural hair. And so, that process, from start to finish, can take anywhere from an hour to five to six hours. [Laughs] It's a very intricate process. And of course, then I have to get my lighting equipment set up and get the music ready and all that. Yes.

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

Liam Laughin: The biggest challenges to doing drag, for me, has been letting go of Morgan while I'm in drag, 'Cause Morgan has the fear, Morgan has the, "Well, maybe you shouldn't do that because you're gonna look stupid." Where... so, that's been the biggest challenge for me, is separating who I am day to day from who Liam is, and who he can be. So, I'm still working on that part. It's a bit of an adjustment, but it's getting better. Uh... and what was the second part of that question? I'm not sure I...

Interviewer: Just, uh, what's the challenges that come with being a drag artist?

Liam Laughin: Oh, yeah. And being, being assigned female at birth, there's still a lot of misogyny in the drag community, and there's not enough representation for AFAB artists and there needs to be. And it's... I'm starting to see it, my last gig that I did live, and it was actually in a room full of people, is that, at the end of it all the crowd goes to the queens. And then me, as the AFAB performer, I'm kind of stuck in the corner; nobody really wants to talk to me. I'll branch out, and they're kind of like, "Yeah, yeah." And then that's it.

It's just... I don't know why, and maybe there needs to be a study done on it, but that, that is the biggest challenge, is because I was assigned female at birth, the general population is still trying to catch up to that idea of there are other drag performers out there than just what you see on RuPaul. So, that's, that's a challenge, but we're breaking down the walls a little bit. Landon Cider won Dragula, Tenderoni won Drag Queen of the Year. Adam All is killing it, Hugo Grrrl is killing it. There's all these great AFAB performers out there that are, are getting after it. So, we're getting there. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Yeah. Little, little baby steps.

Liam Laughin: Yes.

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

Liam Laughin: Um. I'm not quite 100% sure. I just know that there's very limited venues here. They're very exclusive. And, again, a lot of the producers are still not... they have their favorites, and they book them. And that's cool. I understand. If you know where the money is, then you know where the money is. But not being more inclusive of the Black, Indigenous people of color; not being more inclusive of AFAB performers is just very cookie cutter, and it's... and I, I see other communities where they are starting to incorporate that, and they're holding each other accountable. And so, hopefully, the scene here... and my mother is doing a very good job of that, is making sure that performers that would not normally get that limelight are getting the limelight. And I'm seeing a lot more drag performers, the producers starting to pick up on that. But it's, it's a little bit slower here from what I've seen.

Interviewer: Yeah. It's, it's growing though, as, as you said, it's starting to get a little bit better.

Liam Laughin: Yes.

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

Liam Laughin: Outside of drag, I am cis female.

Interviewer: Okay.

Liam Laughin: And I own it, and I'm good with it. Um, I heard a gender studies... oh, it's... her name is Matisse... or sorry, their name is Matisse DuPont. And they said, "If you are going to be cis, actively be cis; don't passively be cis." And I love that. It's like, you know, own it. Just do it. And so, yes, I am a cis female.

Interviewer: Okay. So, what pronouns do you use in and outside of drag, if they are different?

Liam Laughin: In drag, he/they, in drag, she, she/they.

Interviewer: Okay.

Liam Laughin: Yes. So... and I mean, my main thing is, if, you know... if, if I'm in drag, and someone calls me she, I'm not gonna get upset about it. And same thing, if I'm out and about, and I'm not in drag, and someone calls me Liam, still going to go, "Yeah?" So, [laughs] it's, it's all good.

Interviewer: Okay. Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities at all?

Liam Laughin: I think it's just strengthened that, and it... and it really did, um... it made me think about it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Liam Laughin: It was... it made me actively think about it, and yeah.

Interviewer: So, has it influenced how you think about gender? Drag, that is.

Liam Laughin: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: It has? How so?

Liam Laughin: Well, now that I am actively participating in the drag community and in the queer community, um, I mean actively participating. I've always been a part of the queer community 'cause theater. But listening to my... you know, my friends' friends, my nonbinary friends... and every single part of how you identify gender-wise, there's a beautiful spectrum. And, and gender identity is something that's incredibly personal, and it's also, I feel, a right. So, I, I... my, my thoughts on my own gender identity, and also, my thoughts on everyone else's gender identity, has only grown since becoming a drag performer.

Interviewer: Okay. Have your sex and gender identities influenced your own drag, and in what way?

Liam Laughin: That is a very good question, because being a masculine-presenting drag performer, it's almost like you have... there was like... when I first started, there was this set of rules, you know, you need to do this, you need to act more, you know, macho, and you need to have that, you know, rah, rah, rah. But also, as I was going through things, I was like "That's not exactly Liam, though." Like, Liam's own gender identity is on a spectrum. I haven't quite figured out his gender identity yet. But he's a little bit more fluid and does what he likes to do. He doesn't really like labels on his gender, I am learning that part. So, if he wants to, you know, talk with his hands like this or, you know, be... wear pink and do the soft curves, or, you know, do his hair extra pretty, or his makeup, you know, super glam with glitter, that's what he's going to do, 'cause his gender identity is super fluid. So, I would actually say that, that Liam's probably nonbinary.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, how has drag impacted or it's changed you?

Liam Laughin: Um, it has been the most wonderful experience. I... the running joke for me is that I will fall into hobbies, and I'll fall out of love with them really fast. I'll go full in and then burn out on it in a couple of months, maybe a year tops. With, with drag, it's so much different. Um, j\Just the community itself, the people that I've met, this gorgeous world of different people with different stories, different talents, it's, it's made my life so much better.

Interviewer: That's [overtalking].

Liam Laughin: And in some ways, it's destroyed my life, because, again, my house is a mess [Laughs].

Interviewer: It's a... it's a good destruction, from the way you're talking about it. It's, it's a good destruction.

Liam Laughin: Yes, very good.

Interviewer: So, with that, how has drag impacted your confidence outside of drag?

Liam Laughin: I think it has boosted my confidence. Especially since finally coming out and saying, “I’m a drag performer,” and not being scared of someone, you know, coming up to me, pointing in my face, and telling me I’m going to hell, which I’ve been told that before. But that was before I was even a drag performer. So, [laughs] I... it’s like... it’s just taught me to be myself more than anything else and forget what anybody else says, because I’ll always have my drag family, I’ll have my chosen family. My family loves me; that’s all that matters.

Interviewer: That’s great. It’s really, really good to hear. Um, so I know you said that you were a little bit newer to dressing in drag or performing as drag, I’m sorry.

Liam Laughin: No, you’re good.

Interviewer: Um, if you could go back in time as Liam and, you know, talk to... talk to them, uh, what advice would you give Liam, um, to your younger self?

Liam Laughin: Oh goodness. ‘Cause there are so many queens and kings and drag performers out there that are just babies. They’re like 16, 14 years old, and they already know who they are. Uh, if Liam could go back, 33-year-old Liam could go back and tell even 18-year-old Morgan to go on ahead and start and be okay with who you are, then that would have changed a lot. Don’t be afraid; just do it. You’ll be happier for it, I promise. I know it’s scary, but do it. So, someone’s cutting onions up in this piece.

Interviewer: [Laughs] Well, its, its... I mean, its, its impact is... as you’ve expressed to me, it’s impacted you a lot. So, it’s, it’s good to be emotional. It’s good to have that emotion with it.

Liam Laughin: Yeah.

Interviewer: But I’m, I’m curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. Like, how has drag impacted your identities overall? Such as, can you share more about one or more of your social identities, like, gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, etc., and have... how have they impacted your experience of drag, and how has drag impacted your experience of those as well? It’s kind of a lot, I’m sorry.

Liam Laughin: Yeah, it is a lot. Long and the short, drag has impacted all my identities by calling forth and listening to ideas that I held about the world before I started. Um, there’s a lot of preconceived notions that I had in my head that are really, again, deep, ingrained, based on where I was brought up, how I was brought up. And it’s made me realize that a lot of what I was taught was wrong. A lot. And so, unlearning those thoughts, unlearning the self-hatred that I have, it’s, it’s a call to action to be active every single day. Point seeing bad things in the world that, you know, wouldn’t normally be a priority, but seeing that and knowing that it’s wrong, and asking those who are being oppressed, “What can I do to help?” is what I’m, I’m learning from being in the drag community.

And I’m...this isn’t a self-improvement project. This is a, “Just shut up and listen; stop being a white girl. Let’s be real here. Stop being a basic bitch. You’re self-centered...” Like, [laughs] there’s ‘s... like, there’s a lot of that that goes on in my head. You’re self-centered, you’re a white,

white girl, you're, like, five steps away from being a Karen, just shut up and listen. [Laughs] And I'm thankful for that. So, if anything, it's just a call to action to learn and listen.

Interviewer: That's, that's great. So, we're gonna kinda shift gears a little bit about your overall ideas about drag. So, how would you define drag, exactly?

Liam Laughin: Drag, actually... I don't think there's a standard definition. I think it's incredibly... an, an incredibly personal definition of what you define as drag. And everyone's going to have a different definition of that. Um, my definition is just me being the most authentic version of myself that I'm not allowed to show because society won't let me.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Liam Laughin: I... hmmm. The purpose of drag is to question. There.

Interviewer: Okay. That's an interesting definition.

Liam Laughin: [Laughs]

Interviewer: What do you... what do you mean by, like, to question, exactly, though? Like, what, what exactly are you questioning?

Liam Laughin: Questioning gender, questioning social class, questioning race, questioning religion, questioning politics, uh, questioning, you know, does this... is this look more valid than another, which always the answer is no; all drag is valid. Um, there's just... it's just calling out a question, and then the drag gives an answer. And every... and the people that see that drag are going to have, I think, a different answer. So, the artist asks the question and then the audience answers.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. I've... honestly, I've never heard that answer. That really opens... really opens the door for... of, of thought there. So, that's a really, really interesting answer. Um, so, do you think drag is sexual, and why or why not?

Liam Laughin: Mm, I don't believe so.

Interviewer: Okay.

Liam Laughin: I don't believe so. Um, I know there's a lot of... and by sexual, are you meaning, like, sexy time?

Interviewer: Um, sexual as in, like, provocative or, like, it's focused on sex appeal, what, like...

Liam Laughin: Oh no, no. Unless the drag performer chooses it to be, but there's a lot of drag performers out there, uh, I've seen like my friend, Marty McGuy. He... I'm sure he could slap on, you know, a daddy costume and do the whole thing with, you know... and make us all sweat bullets, but he hosts a drag story time for children, and that's-that's his thing. There's nothing to it that's sexual. It brings him joy. It brings the kids joy. He's kept a lot of families entertained during the pandemic. Um, he's, he's a source of light. So, no, I don't necessarily think that drag has to be sexual or provocative.

Interviewer: Okay. So, how do you feel about RuPaul's drag race?

Liam Laughin: Fuck that show.

Interviewer: [Laughs].

Liam Laughin: Now, I'm not saying anything about the queens, 'cause the queens on that show, it is a very traumatic experience for them. I can't imagine, I cannot imagine. Um, but it, it kills me that Ru won't acknowledge anybody, you know, outside of the cis male. And yes, he has brought in Gottmik, which is great, transmasc, trans man. Um, that's cool, but Ru will not acknowledge anybody else outside of that mold. And I think it's very problematic. It's creating cookie-cutter performers. Um, I don't like it.

Um, the, the fanbase is toxic. It's really... it tears... I think it tears apart the, the community. Um, I just... when you're putting yourself out there as a drag performer, and there's people sending death threats or using racial slurs or coming for somebody because their, their favorite contestant didn't win, that's, that not... it's not okay. So... and I don't know if Ru has actually come out and said anything about how her girls... her girls are being bullied and how her girls are being attacked. Nothing, as far as I can tell. It's been radio silence. It's not right. Um, the, the people that are being attacked shouldn't have to be the ones calling attention to it. It should be her. So, that's my thoughts.

Interviewer: Okay. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the entirety of the drag community, um, what would it be?

Liam Laughin: There's not enough glitter in the drag space; there must be more glitter. [Laughs] No, I'm kidding. Um, I, I look forward to a future where it doesn't matter who you are, where you came from, and that there's, there's venues booked out with drag performers of all kinds.

Interviewer: Okay. Why, why would you change that for [unclear]?

Liam Laughin: Because there's just not enough in-- inclusivity in the current climate. It's getting better. But just because you book one, one Black queen as your quote-unquote "token", which is sickening, it doesn't make you woke, doesn't make you okay. You gotta do better, you gotta do more. Because there's performers... are nine times out of 10 better. You gotta... you gotta try. You gotta try. You gotta break free of that white, cis male mold.

Interviewer: Okay. What do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag overall?

Liam Laughin: What have I seen? Well, most people don't even know what a drag king is, which is hysterical. You even say, "Well, you know what drag queens are, right?" And they go, "Well, of course, I love RuPaul yes, yes, yes." And you say, "I'm a drag king." They're like, "I don't understand. I don't get it." [Laughs] So, yeah, that. That, that, that.

Interviewer: What do you think would, would help change that exactly?

Liam Laughin: I think it's just gonna be starting in the local scenes, being more inclusive of all types of performers, and then it bleeding out and getting to the mainstream either via social

media, reality television, news reports, whatever needs to be done, whatever needs to be done. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, well similar to, um, to that, if you could choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about in drag, what would it be?

Liam Laughin: [Laughs] This is my joke response, but how to do a cut crease properly. [Laughs] Um, what would I want people to learn about in drag? I think it's just... I think that's the other thing, too, is that there's... again, being in the South, there's people out there that will clutch their pearls and demonize us, um, which is the most wrong thing ever. So, just more of... I, I... one of my very first things that I did before I started drag was I put guys who had never been in drag before, into drag for a little drag race that we had in town, pairing up the professional queens with just these everyday dudes. And the confidence, the sass, the, "This is awesome," not being ashamed of it, it was... it was really cool to see. Um, a couple of guys, of course, did not like the eyeliner going on; their eyes watered up by it. [Laughs] The overall, "I am here. This is me. I feel powerful. This is my armor, almost. Nobody can get me," I feel like if everyone tried drag just one time that they, they would hopefully feel that.

Interviewer: Okay. That's great, Well, that is all the questions I have for you.

Liam Laughin: Ooh.

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Liam Laughin: [Laughs]

Interviewer: I, I really appreciate...

Liam Laughin: [Overtalking] [Laughs]

Interviewer: I really appreciate you accepting to do the interview again.

Liam Laughin: Yeah.

Interviewer: I thank you a lot for it.

Liam Laughin: Thank you.

Interviewer: So, yeah, this is all to be presented in my class. I'll give a quick presentation about the experience. There is one more thing I can ask for you.

Liam Laughin: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: I would like to include pictures of you.

Liam Laughin: Sure.

Interviewer: Are you able to send me pictures, or can I just use them from your Instagram account that I messaged you on?

Liam Laughin: I'll send you, um... yeah, 'cause you sent me the email. So, I'll send you those, 'cause if I start sending through Instagram and all that, they get grainy, it's just not good, the quality's meh.

Interviewer: Okay.

Liam Laughin: So, yeah, I'll send you what I have. Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay. That's, that's great. That's all I need from you. That's all the time I have. And again, thank you so very much.

Liam Laughin: Thank you. This has been a joy. [Laughs]

Interviewer: I'm glad.

Interview with Liz Anya

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Ian Hafley: Okay. So, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your, like, first reaction to it?

Liz Anya: I, kind of, first heard about drag, I feel like... I don't know, I can't really remember honestly. My sister, her gay best friend, she doesn't say that, but I like to say it just because it's funny, she... her, her friend was roommates with my, like, eventual drag mom. And so, I would go to, like, their house parties a lot. And, like, my drag mom, Veronika, she had, like, just started. Um, she... excuse me. She would just, like, get drunk, like, blackout drunk, and then, all of a sudden, would show... like, just be in her room for, like, 10 or 15 minutes, then come out in just, like, a wig... oh my god, excuse me. Just, like, a wig and heels and a dress, and that was it. And so, then I found out that she had just started doing drag.

And then, I think that's when about... that's about the time when, like, a lot of those seasons of Drag Race were on Hulu. So, that's, um... so, I think I had just watched Season 6, and that's the first season that I really liked. And then by, like, Season 7 or 8, I was like, oh, like... oh my god, excuse me. Ooh. So, by, like, 7 or 8 I was, like... and I had gone to, like, a few shows by then of Veronika's. And so, I was like, "Oh, I could definitely do this." Oh, sorry, excuse me. Oh my god. I am so sorry. Oh my god.

Ian Hafley: [Unclear].

Liz Anya: Um, and so, by, like, Season 8 I was like, "Oh, I could like definitely do this." Like, I feel like I'm, like, fairly, kinda funny, Like, I'm... I can't sing, but, like, I can pretend to sing. Like, I can dance out in the club. So, like, I'll just like put on a pair of heels and a wig and see what I can do.

And so, that was, sort of, was my first, like, exposure to it. Um, and I was... my kind of reaction was like, oh like, this... obviously it's, like, difficult, but I was like, "This seems like doable for me. Like, I think I could probably do this." [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: That's cool. I've never heard anyone describe it as like, "I could do that." Like, just [inaudible] interesting.

Liz Anya: [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Um, when did you start performing, and why did you start performing?

Liz Anya: Um, my first performance was I think in, like, August of... what would it be? Like, 2018, I think? No. [Unclear] 2017. Yeah, 2017. Um, no. Yes. I'm so sorry. Um, yeah, it was probably in August 2017. And I started performing just because, like I said, like, I enjoy, like dancing. I've ne—I never did theater, but I think I would be a theater gay if I had the exposure.

Um, and so, yeah, I just, like, thought it looked like a lot of fun. And I lo-- and I, um... And yeah, I mean, I just... it seemed like what I was, sort of, meant to do. So, I was like, "Oh, let me... let me just do this real quick." So... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: That's interesting. Um, sorry, I got lost in thoughts for a second.

Liz Anya: You're fine. You're fine.

Ian Hafley: Um, how did, like, your family and your friends and, like, other loved ones react to you becoming a drag artist?

Liz Anya: Um, most of my friends were, like, really okay with it. Um, my family is super cool with it. Like, they've been... come to my shows. Um, like, my mom and dad have. I think... um, just 'cause my parents are, like, 60 and 70 years old, um, I think, in their mind, I'm like a... like a crossdresser. So, I think it's, like, a little weird to them. So, I don't think they're, like, telling the world that I'm a drag queen by any means.

But they are super okay with it. Like I said, they've come to my shows when they can. I usually have, like, Thursday night shows, and they are, like, real adults. They have real jobs. So, they can't really come on weeknights. But if I ever have, like, a Friday or a Saturday night show, they'll try to come. Um, but, yeah, that's... it was like a pretty, like... they were like, "Oh, okay." Especially, like, whenever I came out, and then whenever I started doing drag, they were like, "Oh, that makes sense." [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah, my parents were, like, the same way when I came out, too. They were like... they were like, "Okay," like, "that makes..."

Liz Anya: Yeah, they were like... my pa-- my mom [unclear] said, "I've known since you were three. Love you." I was, like, "Okay, cool," like, I figured. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: I asked my mom that one time. I was like, "Did you always know?" And she was like, "Yeah." And I was like, "Okay, that's..."

Liz Anya: Okay, cool, perfect. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Um, so, there are a lot of, like, different types and styles of drag from, like, being a queen to, like, a drag king, and then from being just a male impersonator to, like, a comedy queen and all those different types. Like, is there a particular label that you categorize your drag with? And what kind of drag do you do, like, what is your style?

Liz Anya: Um, I would say that... I would argue that I'm like a campy queen, just because I, like, know I don't look like a real woman, like, I'm very aware. I'm not trying. I don't think I'll ever look that convincing. So, in that... so, sort of, like, to react to that, I, sort of, just, like, am... I, I just... I love to, like, walk around the crowd and, kinda, like, get in your face in, like, a funny way. Like, I love to, sort of, like, mess with people. And so, I'm definitely, like, a high-energy performer, um, like, a comedy queen. I've, like, hosted a couple of my own shows, and I kinda treat it like stand up, open mic nite... uh, open mic night.

And yeah, like, I've recently... not really recently, but one of my first shows, I found this, like, vintage, um, like, cow print skirt at, like, a thrift store in town, in Columbia. And I wore it, and I was like, "Well, what else do you do in a cow print skirt besides the Dixie Chicks?" So, I did a Dixie Chicks number for my... one of my first shows, and everyone called me, like, a country bumpkin. They all made fun of me 'cause I'm from a small town.

And that was, like, a couple years ago when, like, the yee-haw renaissance really was kinda coming back in, like, pop culture and stuff. And so, I just, sort of, like, leaned into it. Because I do enjoy country music. So, I was like, "Oh yeah. So, I'm like... I'm, like, the country queen." Um, I think my Instagram bio says like, "Country queen... country queen meets pop diva," 'cause, I mean, Beyonce and Lady Gaga are my number ones, always will be. But yeah, a lot of people have come to always expect, like, some Shania or Dixie Chicks or something at one of my shows. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: I, I love a good female country song. I can always get down...

Liz Anya: Truly. 100%. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Does your type of drag that you do affect your life as an artist in any way?

Liz Anya: Um, not really. I don't really, like... Um, I would say that since doing drag, I've become a lot gayer since starting. And so... and I've just become a lot more comfortable with... like, 'cause whenever I'm in drag as Liz, I'm like, "Oh, I am so out of control," blah blah blah like, "I'm a good time." Like, I, I kinda this think to myself; I'm not, like, trying to boast, obviously.

So, whenever I, like, am out of drag, and I'm, like, going to work... right now I work at Andy's Frozen Custard. So, whenever I go to work, I am like, "Oh, I'm still Liz. I'm just not, like, in a wig." So, it's like, um, I'm... and I... and I'm not gonna, like, be up in anybody's face about it, but I'm, like, still pretty flamboyant, like, I'm pretty... I'm still super gay. My customer service voice sounds like a woman, so [laughs] unfortunately, it outs me every time.

But yeah, but... like, I don't... since I only do drag, like, maybe once or twice... um, like, maybe three times a month now, like, I, I feel like... what did I say the other day? I said something about like, um, "I'm Liz, like, one or two nights a month, but I'm Anthony the rest of the time. But, like, there is not really a big of a divide between the two." So, yeah, like... so, I'm still, like, pretty out of control as a boy but... [laughs].

Ian Hafley: I get that. I... My customer service voice is so peppy and like...

Liz Anya: It's so embarrassing. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: So, embarrassing. Every time, like, somebody else at work hears me, they're like, "What?" And I'm just like, "What?"

Liz Anya: Yeah. I feel like if I didn't have, like, facial hair with, like... 'cause I usually have, like, my hair in, like, a bun and stuff, I'll probably... people probably, like, think I'm, like, a

woman or something. Like, they have to think I'm a girl or, like, not all the way there. You know what I mean? [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah. I completely get that. Um, how... do you have, like, any influences, like, of your... from your drag, like, any people or things in particular?

Liz Anya: Yeah, kind of. So there... like, um, like the old-school drag, that's, like... they're, like, pageant based. And so, that's, sort of, where a lot of the, like, um... like, fringe costumes and rhinestones, blah blah blah. So, like, if it's, like, um, old-school drag, it's like big hair out to here, like a fringe leotard with... that's like rhinestoned to shit, and it's like, um... so, I really do... And, like, my drag mom, she's heavily involved in pageantry, so I... so, that's like a... kind of a really big influence on me, just, like, 'cause it's always there.

But I always like to... I try to, like, kind of, take inspiration from other things. So, I always... I like to recreate a lot of... like, if I can, um, like looks that, like, popstars have done on tours. So, I've recreated a couple of, like, Lady Gaga looks. Um, Orville Peck, he had a music video. In the background, this one girl is wearing, like, cow print chaps and, like, a orange silky-looking leotard with, like, a cape. So, I made that real... so, I made that. And I was really looking forward to that look.

But yeah, and then, like... so, my drag mom started doing Trixie-inspired makeup, like, Trixie Mattel. And so, she had her eyebrows up to here, blue, blue eyeshadow all the way up to here. And she then she, kind of, refined that, and that's what she looks like now. And so, whenever she was teaching me how to do makeup, she was still, sort of, like, in the middle, like, the middle ground. Um, so I pretty much do what she does, I, like... but she, she doesn't really use color anymore. So, I, just, like, I almost always do, like, colored eyeshadow. Like, I love to wear blue eyeshadow, I don't know why. And I usually do, like, pink. Um, or if I'm, like, spooky I do like green. So... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: So, you mentioned you drag mother. Are you a part, like, of a big family? Or is it just, like, you and your mother? Like, how does it work for you?

Liz Anya: I would say we're, like, a pretty big family, especially for Columbia, Missouri. We... so... luckily, I don't have a daughter. I don't think I'm ever gonna have one. I don't know who would wanna look like this, but... um, so, I have a drag mom, and then, um... okay, so it's, kind of confusing because there's a lot of weird layers but, okay, so, I have a... so, there's me, my drag mom, Veronika, then her drag mom, Jennica. She lives in Jefferson City which is, like, 30 minutes away from Columbia. And she is, like, the dancing diva of, like, Columbia drag. She is one of the... I think, honestly, one of the best, like, performers that I've ever seen.

And so, her drag mom, she lives in Moberly, I think, which is another small town near here. And then her drag mom is, like... lives in Kansas... lives in St. Louis. I've only met her once. I, like, didn't know she existed. She came to a Legends of Missouri Drag show in Columbia once. And so, yeah, like, if... and you could... I could keep going if I knew anyone really past there. But, like, allegedly, you can trace my family lineage back to, like, the Andrews family that Roxxxx Andrews is a member of. I don't really believe that, but it's fine.

Ian Hafley: [Laughs]

Liz Anya: Because back in the day there were... like, before social media, in, like, the '80s and '90s, there was, um... like, drag was still like pretty underground. So, like, that's just, sort of, how you kinda, like, got into it. It was just you joined a drag family. And so, in Cape Girardeau and, like, Carbondale, Illinois, there's some, like, old-school drag that goes on there. And, like, that's where a lot of, like, big names come from. Like Alexis Mateo, her drag mom I think is from either Carbondale or Cape Girardeau.

Anyway, that wasn't really your question. Sorry, I, I go on a tangent. But... so, my drag family, they're pretty big in Columbia. So, Veronika, and then Lisa de la Rentá, they're like sisters, 'cause they have the same drag mom. But I live with Lisa; we're roommates. And then Veronika's other drag daughter, Lorilie, we're, like, really good friends because we started about the same time.

And then my other... my drag mom also, like, adopted someone else recently. Her name's Bennifer Lopez. So, like, we pretty much hang out almost all the time, 'cause me and Lisa live together, and Veronika and Lorilie live together. So, we always go to each other's houses. And we... there's probably, like, three or four main drag families in Columbia, but there's, like, a lot more drag people. But... so, we're, like, I would argue, one of the more prominent ones, just because you can, kind of, like, tell we really love what we do. And yeah... so yeah, it's pretty big, but it's no, like, Iman dynasty by any means, so... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: I... like, I grew up in Columbia. I was, like, born and raised there. And I, like, I moved away before I learned about drag and all that stuff. And it's just interesting to hear about it now, like, hearing that there is a whole drag thing happening there, just because, like, I never thought it was the town for that [overtalking].

Liz Anya: No, really.

Ian Hafley: But it actually is, and I realize that now that I'm older.

Liz Anya: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I went... I just went to Sephora to get, like, some more makeup, and I basically just was like, "Yeah, I'm a drag queen, so it doesn't have to look good. It just has to, like, be dark." And all the girls there were like, "Oh my god, you're drag... you're a drag queen. Oh my god, blah blah blah." I think they had all just moved from, like, Kansas City or St. Louis. So, they were like, "I figured Columbia was so small, it didn't have a drag scene, blah blah blah." And I was like, "Oh no, I am the drag scene" So... [laughs] I'm just kidding. But yeah, no one ever really expects it.

Ian Hafley: Yeah, that's... it's surprising, but, like, good.

Liz Anya: Yeah, right, exactly. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah. What goes into, into getting ready for a performance for you?

Liz Anya: Um, usually, I have to work the same day. So, it's like, I usually I get off work around five. And then I usually, like, shave, and then I, like, take a shower, and then I hope to be done

with that by, like, 6:30 or seven. 'Cause I like to, you know, kind of, be [unclear] around and, like, take my time.

And so... and then if I, like, sit down, I try to give myself about an hour and a half to two hours to do my makeup. And then after that, it's... and I'm usually, like, listening to music the whole time. And then I'm usually in the same show as Lisa. So, we, sort of, like, play music on the TV or something just to, like, fill the whole house with music and stuff. And then I'll, like, get in body, I'll put my pads and stuff like that on. And then, we're usually done by then. I'll, like, put on my finishing touches, like, lashes and a wig and stuff like that. Then I'm usually good to go. Like, I'll drive in my, my big wig and heels, so I mean... [laughs]

Ian Hafley: Good. What's, like, the biggest challenge of doing drag and being a drag artist?

Liz Anya: I would say right now it's definitely COVID. It's just been... like, 'cause we were supposed to have this big drag bar open last year after Yin Yang closed. And then, just because of COVID it kept getting slowed down. And now it's been... it's been like a year since Yin Yang closed, but now it's probably gonna be ano... like, one year since Yin Yang closed, now it's probably gonna be a year of... like, when the new bar was supposed to open. So, it's probably gonna open in late summer, like, this year, and it was supposed to open late summer last year. So, that definitely been an issue.

And then, also, just because of COVID we haven't had... been able to have very big crowds which is, like, obviously, fine. So, it's just been difficult to, sort of... 'cause, like, one of our last shows, it got sold out in, like, 10 minutes because of, like, the lower capacity. And I think my drag mom said she had to turn away like 40 people. So, like, to me, I'm such a nice person, like, oh, I feel bad they couldn't come, like, oh my god. And so, like, in my mind, I'm like, "Oh well, not everyone gets to see what we have to offer right now." So, that's a little annoying.

And then, also, just everyone expects you to, like, want to be on Drag Race, and that's a little frustrating. Like, I'm down to go on Drag Race. I think I'd be pretty okay at it. But they see all these, like, drag queens on TV who have, like, a buttload of money, and they see me in, like, my little stretch velvet dress, and I'm like... that I made myself the day of and, um... Like, they get that I'm not there yet, but it's just frustrating that... you can tell that they, sort of, expect more, which is a little frustrating. I say that's, honestly, about it, so... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah. Because of, like, Drag Race they've expected, like, bigger budgets.

Liz Anya: Oh 100%, yeah. And I get paid, like, maybe... I used to get paid, like, \$25 a show. So, I was like, "Oh yeah, I'll definitely be able to go buy that \$400 wig you want me to wear." Like... [laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah. Like, they don't... they didn't... like, there's the disconnect between, like, the, the famous drag queen and then, like, the local drag queen [overtalking].

Liz Anya: For sure. For sure.

Ian Hafley: Yeah. Is there anything unique about doing drag in Columbia from other places?

Liz Anya: Um, I don't know. I think just 'cause we're a college town it's, sort of, um... like, we'll always have a new crowd every, like, four years. And, I mean, yeah, just because we don't have, like, huge... like, nobody is ever really [unclear] become like a full-time drag queen in Columbia just 'cause we, we don't have... Like, even when Yin Yang was open or SoCo was open before that, which was, like, pretty successful, there's no way you can.

So, I mean, like, nobody is ever gonna be able to, sort of, be built up to that level, which kind of sucks. But, I mean, that just means we, sort of, like, appreciate what we have, and we, sort of, like, hustle extra hard just to make sure that we can compete with, like, other pe-- like big city queens, like St. Louis or Kansas City. Um, yeah, I mean... I wouldn't say that that's like a challenge, but it's definitely, like, since we are so close-knit, like we are... like, there's a lot of fighting going on right now, sort of, in the... in the drag community in Columbia. But we will always, like, have each other's backs. So, that's always good 'cause... since we are, like, so, kind of, tight-knit.

Ian Hafley: So, like, is most of your crowd that comes out, like, college students?

Liz Anya: Oh, for sure. Yeah, especially now that we've been able to perform downtown again. It's been a lot more... like, it'll be like the regulars who used to come to Yin Yang and stuff. So, they'll be, like, a few of our friends that we know, but it's mostly, like, straight girls, honestly, so... [laugh].

Ian Hafley: When you are in and out of drag, what pronouns do you use? Do you change it, or do they stay the same?

Liz Anya: Yeah, I change it. So, out of drag, I'm he/him, and then in drag, I'm she/her. But I really don't care if people call me either one in drag. Like, a lot of my... like, my drag family, they... if I joke, if I'm like, "You're just a man," like, they get offended if we're, like, hanging out on a couch on, like, a Tuesday. Like, they're like, "I'm a woman." But, they're not really. Like, they're completely, like, a boy outside of drag. But yeah, so, like, if someone calls me a man in drag, I'll be like, "Yeah, you're right." And if someone calls me she/her out of drag, I'm like, "Yeah your right, girl, Let's do it." So, it's like... it really doesn't bother me at all.

Ian Hafley: Yeah. That's a good way to see it, too, just, like, whatever

Liz Anya: Yeah. Like, I'm a boy, and then sometimes I'm a boy in a wig. So, like, whatever you wanna call me, like, I'm... [laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah. Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities at all?

Liz Anya: Probably. Yeah, just because I am more comfortable, like... like, I, I really don't think I'll ever, like, want to transition or anything like that. Like, I don't think I'll ever be in that position. But yeah, I mean, yeah, like I said, I don't care if someone calls me a girl. I'm like, "Oh yeah, cool." [Laughs] And then... I mean, yeah, like, I'll still... I will always be, like, a man, but I'll definitely... like, I'm definitely more comfortable with everything now. Like, I... um, like, the Kinsey scale or whatever, like, I'm definitely okay with leaning more towards the female side now. And yeah noth—like, it really doesn't bother me at all, so... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Has drag influenced how you think about gender overall?

Liz Anya: Definitely. Because I know a lot of people who have started drag, and then they'll, sort of, realize that maybe they are nonbi-- nonbinary, maybe they do want to, like, transition and stuff. So, I mean, it's definitely opened my eyes to... and, like, I've even experienced that as well I'm like, "Oh, what is a boy, and what is a girl?" So, it's, like, who really... literally, like, who cares? And yeah, so I know plenty of people who are nonbi-- nonbinary and, like, still perform as like a girl in drag. And yeah, so, I mean, yeah, it's definitely, like, changed my outlook on it for sure.

Ian Hafley: Interesting. Have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag in any way?

Liz Anya: Not really. Like I... Liz is definitely, like, female-presenting. I mean, I'll do, like, a boy song and stuff like that. And some people don't like that 'cause it... like, a lot of people don't... not a lot, but some people don't like when female drag queens... female drag queens do, like, boy songs. Like, I did a Journey song a couple weeks ago, and I did a Bon Jovi song. 'Cause it's, like, what... like, like I... like I've said, it's, like, what's the point? Like, I mean, I'm still a boy dressed as a girl, so it doesn't really matter. But, yeah, I wouldn't say it's necessarily a... I wouldn't say I've, like, influenced it, but Liz has influenced me, so I mean... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Interesting. Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Liz Anya: Oh, definitely. Like, I mean, I've always been a fairly confident person. Like, I really don't get embarrassed easily. So, I think that's, sort of, why I can do drag. It's... 'cause I'm like... I'll go on stage and, like, "Oh, somebody, somewhere is gonna like it." So, it affects... um, and... affected my confidence, just because whenever I, sort of, walk anywhere, like, all my drag family, they're... like, I always hang out with Lisa, Loralie, and Veronika. They're just like, "Oh well, Liz just walks with her chest everywhere. Like, she just struts everywhere. Blah blah blah!" And I'm like, "Okay, so, like, why don't you?" Like, I mean, like...

'Cause we're all... like, everyone else is.. they're all super confident in drag, but out of drag, they're not. I would argue that they're not the most confident. But I'm, kind of, the opposite. I'm like... I'm definitely... I feel like... I always feel a little less confident in drag just because I feel like I still have a lot to learn, so I don't... I can't really... I'm not really offering everything that I know yet. You know what I mean? But out of drag, I'm like, "What are you gonna do about it? Like, oh my god." Like, what's gonna...? If someone's gonna hit me, like, because I'm like... 'cause I'm... like, I'm not scared of getting gay-bashed. It's like, "Okay, well, I'll try to beat them up back. Like, nothings gonna happen."

But, like, if you walk in with a purpose, no one's gonna mess with you. So, like, that's just what I do, I walk... I walk... I, like, strut in the grocery store, so nobody, like, like steps to me. Like, I, I don't think it will ever happen, but, like, you... if you just go around not very confident, like, kind of, like, scared of the world, like something might happen to you then that's like... I don't know. I don't really know where I'm going with that one, but oh well. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: I mean, I, I understand where you were going. That made sense to me.

Liz Anya: Okay. Cool, cool, cool. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Okay. Now, the next question is the classic final three question from Drag Race. If you could go back in time as Liz, what advice would Liz give to your younger self?

Liz Anya: I don't know. I mean, prob-- like the... probably, like, the basic, like, "It's gonna get better. Everyone already knows." Like honestly, like, I probably wish I would have come out in high school. So, like, I probably would've told younger Anthony to, like, just come out already 'cause, honestly, everybody already knows. And then, I mean, yeah, I wish I was like a better dancer, so maybe I would tell myself to, like, enroll... literally, like, enroll in a dance class, even though there weren't any good dance classes in Booneville. But I would just tell... encourage myself to, like, come out more and, sort of, embrace my... or, like, more artistic side, for sure, just because I feel like that could really help my drag now.

Ian Hafley: Interesting. Take a dance class, that's funny.

Liz Anya: Right. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: I always tell myself that too. I, I said, "You could have been better."

Liz Anya: Literally. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Not [unclear] every time I dance, but whatever. [Laughs] Have any of your social identities impacted your experience of drag in any way? Like, any social identities that you have, like, gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, disability, geography, location, any of that stuff. Has that impacted your drag at all?

Liz Anya: I would argue that... like I said being from a small town, so I do, like, love country music. Um, I don't love but I like it. 'Cause I... like, my mom listened to it a lot growing up, and obviously, it was always all around me. So, like, definitely being from a small town has affected my drag. And I'm very okay with, like, you know, doing country numbers and, like, looking up, sort of, country stuff and, like, just... and I can see and appreciate where they are coming from, you know what I mean?

And I would... and I always told, like, my sister, whenever I first started, I was like, "Yeah, and being like a mediocre white gay, like, I had a good amount of friends. So, like, people would come to see my shows at first. So, that, honestly, always helps. And I'm aware of it, I'm aware of my privilege. It's fine.

And, let's see, any of those other [unclear]. Yeah, I mean, like I said, being a cisgendered white gay person has definitely helped. And then, being from a small town has definitely shaped my... honestly, like, my entire drag aesthetic. So, I'm always thankful for that. I think that's probably it, honestly. I'm trying to remember all the words you said. So... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Oh, a lot of them, like, they were probably... were just like extra fillers.

Liz Anya: Right, yeah, yeah, yeah. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: It's fine. That was a... that was a good answer.

Liz Anya: Oh, thank god. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: There's only, like, six more questions, so we're almost done!

Liz Anya: Yeah, you're good. No, you're fine.

Ian Hafley: How do you define drag, like, personally?

Liz Anya: Um, I don't know, personally, like, for Liz... Liz's personal drag is definitely, like, female-presenting, always, like, pretty cooky. Um, but, like, overall drag is whatever you want it to be. Like, I really do think that. Like, my little sister, Bennifer, she does... like, or... and my drag grandma, she did, like, bearded drag and she... like, she started out not doing bearded drag, but then... but she loves to, like, be different. So, she's like, "What gonna make me different? Okay." So, she, like, grew a big old beard, and, like, started doing bearded drag all the time.

And so, then, my, like... like I said, my little sister, she definitely does, like, they/them drag, like, boy out of drag, but, like, they/them in drag sort of thing. She definitely wears... like, she keeps her beard on, she doesn't really wear pads or anything. Like, she'll have, like, her hairy boy legs out and, like, a pair of fishnets. And definitely, like, um... definitely, sort of, like, nonbinary, um, and... or androgyny, that's the more appropriate word, I guess. Androgyny, androgynously ex--inspired? I don't know if that's a real word, but oh well. So, like, literally, do whatever you wanna do. Like, whatever you wanna... If it... just make sure it's good, honestly, like... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: What do you think the purpose of drag is?

Liz Anya: Um, I... Like, I think... I think... maybe Peppermint said it on her season, she called drag queens, like... sort of, like the gatekeepers and like the forerunners and like the storytellers of, like, the gay community. So, I... And, like, pride is really important to me, so I always, sort of, think that we are, sort of, like, the pioneers and, like, the first line of the LGBT community. Like, I always... I'm very passionate about pride and, like, inclusivity and, like, stuff like that, and making sure that everyone's voices are heard. And in order to, sort of, make sure everyone's voices are heard, I have to yell the loudest. You know what I mean? If... Does that make sense?

Ian Hafley: Yeah.

Liz Anya: So, I always try to make sure that I will speak up for someone else 'cause I have the loudest voice in the room, and people will listen to me first before they might listen to someone else.

Ian Hafley: So, ba—like, that was a really good statement. So, basically, what you mean by that is because you have this privilege as a white, cisgendered man, you wanna speak louder for minorities who can't... who won't be as heard as loudly by others who, like...?

Liz Anya: Exactly. Yeah.

Ian Hafley: I like that. That was really good.

Liz Anya: Thank you.

Ian Hafley: Do you think drag is sexual at all? Why or why not?

Liz Anya: I don't think my drag is. I think drag can be, but I... but I don't think that I'm, like, a very sexy person in or out of drag. So, I'm, like, not... like, it's... I always... Like, that's kinda why I do get self-conscious in drag sometimes, is because I know I'm not very pretty. So, I think, like, me wearing, like, a bunch of... like, pairs of tights, I'm, like, trying to pull over at my waist, 'cause I'm just kinda squishy sometimes. So, I don't think I'm sexy in drag at all, but if you want to do it, you can. Like, I don't think... like, everyone always, sort of, assumes that I'm, like, down to clown, but I am, in fact, not. So, I don't... I think the ge-- people generally think that it is, but I don't really think it is inherently sexual.

Ian Hafley: Interesting. I could... I could... I can see that, 'cause some people, they make it very much like their aesthetic to be, like, pretty woman, like, I'm [unclear] a stripper woman. And then some people just... it's just interesting to see different styles and how, like, that all plays out. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race as a show?

Liz Anya: I think it's great television. I think it's so fun. And, like, I do get inspired a lot by them as well. I do see, like, the pros and cons, obviously. Like, RuPaul is semi-problematic sometimes. Some of the queens he casts are problematic sometimes, definitely. But, I mean, at the end of the... but it really is just a great way to, sort of, showcase drag as an art form, 'cause I think a lot of people don't really see it as that way until they honestly do see, like... until they do watch Drag Race. So, I think they do think it's a bunch of, like, cross-dressers who are—like, cross-dressing sex workers who are just out on the prowl, blah blah blah. But I don't think a lot of people do see it as, like, a real... like, a real, formidable sort of art form and, like, possible career. But, yeah, the drama is great, you know what I mean? So, it's always a good time. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah, it's so... it's so entertaining that there's...

Liz Anya: [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: There's so many things that... it's like little one-liners or, like, something like that... something like that.

Liz Anya: Literally. [Overtalking] I got my... I got my mom, like, obsessed with it, I think during All Stars... like, the last one, so what was that, 5? My mom... like, I watched it in front of my mom once, and she... like, the next week she texted me, she said, "Oh my god, Anthony, I'm obsessed with Drag Race. I'm watching it again." And then I think she started watching Season 13 too. And I was like "Oh." Like, she just randomly texted me while... like, we were... while it was on. She said, "I can't understand a word Kandy Muse is saying." I was like, "Oh my god." [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag community, or the drag scene, what would it be and why?

Liz Anya: Hmm... I don't know, this is sort of... hmm. I don't know. I mean, like, I obviously... like, it can be pretty competitive and, kind of, see you next Tuesday-ish. So, I don't know if I'm allowed to say that word on a school project. But I think if everyone would just, like, be a little nicer, like... and I'm sure if you ask someone, I'm not the nicest. I try to be, I always try to be

super nice to everyone. But since there is, like, a big, sort of, drag feud in Columbia right now, people might not agree with that statement, but oh well.

But definitely, if we just, sort of, tried to be nicer to everyone and, like, definitely try to uplift everyone, I think that would definitely be a better situation for everyone. Because, in the beginning, you, sort of, do get, um... like, you're not gonna look good in the first... your first time in drag. It's a God-given fact, everyone is gonna look awful. And there's... but there's a better way to tell a baby queen that they don't look good than just being like, "Wow F off, you look terrible." You know what I mean? Like, there's like... I think if we gave more constructive criticism than just tearing other... like, tearing new queens down... 'cause that's, like, why a lot of people don't, kind of, make it because they like... like, people are just so mean to them in the beginning that they just don't wanna do it anymore. [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah. That's why I've never, like, tried to do drag before because gay men terrify me.

Liz Anya: [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: What do you think are some misconc-- goodness, oh goodness. What do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag, and where do they come from?

Liz Anya: I don't know, definitely like... like I said, people always think that I'm like a cross-dressing sex worker, which is, like, not the case at all. And I think just because so many trans women do need to, like, turn to sex work just to make a living, I think that's, sort of, where that stems from. And, like, I wish that wasn't the case, obviously, but, like, yeah, people... like, there is this guy in town who always trying to, like, make moves at me, and I'm always very uncomfortable. Just because, like, I am not gonna look good once I take all this off. So, you know what I mean? So, like, I am gonna be a sweaty, greasy mess, and my hair is gonna be, like, glued down, like, you don't wanna see that.

But definitely, like, people think that it's... I think people do think it is inherently sexual, and I think that's an issue. Just because... I mean, that is like... that is a potentially, like, dangerous situation for, like, another drag queen to be in. Because, like, if [unclear] me, like, a cisman, all of a sudden, someone is trying to, like, get with me, that's a scary situation for anyone involved.

Other sort of misconceptions... I think... Like, I... Like I said, I'm a very nice person in and out of drag. I think another misconception is that we're all so rude and like... I mean, my drag mom she paints in, sort of, a, um... a sort of, like, standoffish way. And so, I think people think that she is just a raging bitch, which is, like, not always the case. So, like, [laughs] I think people just need to, sort of, realize that, like, we are nice people. Like, we are still nice people underneath all that makeup. So, you know what I mean? [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: They said the same thing about Pearl on Season 7.

Liz Anya: Right.

Ian Hafley: They said she [unclear] a bitch face. [Laughs] If you chose one thing you want, like, every-- everyone to know about drag, or learn about drag, what would it be?

Liz Anya: Um, hmm... That, like, it's not as easy as it looks. Like, I like to think I'm making it look effortless but, like, it's hard. It really is. I think... I think Miz Cracker said one time that, like, a standing drag... like, just a resting position, like, standing drag queen is actively doing more than someone walking down the street, like sprinting, like going on a run or something. Like, I am actively doing more than you are. You know what I...? So, it's, like, really hard to, like... it's like really hard.

And just support local drag. Like, it's easy to sit down on your couch and watch it on TV or, like, on YouTube or blah blah blah. But like, obviously, this is pandemic, so don't go out that much, but pre/post-pandemic, like, go out and watch it in person. Like, it's so much fun, it really is just so much fun.

Ian Hafley: It is. I've only been to one drag show my entire life. I know, it is really sad, I know. And I wanted to start going to more, but then the world ended. [Laughter]

Liz Anya: It happens.

Ian Hafley: Now I don't do anything.

Liz Anya: Yeah. Very fair. If I'm not doing drag, I literally don't do anything either, so it's like... [Laughs]

Ian Hafley: Yeah. Okay, that was all the questions I had, so the interview is over. So, thank you so much for that. That was really good.

Liz Anya: Oh, of course, yeah.

Ian Hafley: Yeah, I don't think I need anything else from you. If I do, I'll just, like, text you or something about it.

Liz Anya: Cool, perfect. Yeah, go for it.

Ian Hafley: Okay, we're done. Thank you so much.

Liz Anya: Okay, cool. You're welcome. Bye.

Ian Hafley: [Unclear].

Interview with Lorilie

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Interviewer: Okay. So, I'll start off with when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Lorilie: When did I first hear about it?

Interviewer: Yep.

Lorilie: I first heard about it when I was, like... I don't know, maybe like, we'll say 16

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: I saw RuPaul's Drag Race for the first time on, like, TV. And I didn't really know, like, what it was at first. I just, like, heard of RuPaul here and there before, and I didn't really know what it was. I just, like, watched the show, and I found out what it was through it. And it was... it just seemed like a lot of fun, and it seemed really exciting.

Interviewer: Okay. When did you start performing as a drag artist? And what do you think made you start performing?

Lorilie: I first started performing two-ish years ago. Actually, no, it'd be three by now, yeah, three years ago by now. And what was the second part of the question?

Interviewer: Why did you start performing?

Lorilie: Oh, okay. I did drag... like, I just practiced it a year before I even started performing just because I wanted to, like, try it out and see how I was... how I was at it. And then, like, a year... around a year later, I got the opportunity to perform. And I just wanted to, like, perform because I just felt like it was like the next step.

Interviewer: Right.

Lorilie: There's like a lot... there's like a lot of drag queens who just, like... they're just, like, online entities, but there is also, like... I feel like a majority of drag queens, like, are performers as well.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: So, I just wanted to make that next step and become a performer.

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

Lorilie: My family actually doesn't know that I do drag. Coming out to them was, like, really, really difficult because they were, like... they're really conservative and religious.

Interviewer: Right.

Lorilie: So, I haven't really told them. And I feel like I, I would at some point in my life, but I don't know, I feel like it would have to, like... I don't know. It'd have to... like, the circumstances would have to just be, like, perfect. And I don't know whenever that would happen, so...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: Um, friends have mostly... like, my... I have always had, like, a small circle of close friends, and they've always been really supportive, so...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: And at least, like, through drag, like, I've been able to build a new support system because I've... it's really helped, like, filtering out the people that I can, like, trust or can't trust.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Um, okay, so where does your drag name come from?

Lorilie: Lori-- so, when I first started drag, I wanted a name, 'cause I wanted... I... the aesthetic I was going for... sorry, I'm like... I'll probably jump back and forth. Okay?

Interviewer: No, it's totally perfect. Like, whatever you want to talk about is perfectly fine.

Lorilie: Okay. The aesthetic I wanted to go for was, kind of, like, a little dark and, like, spooky but also, like... I wanted, like, an old, vintage, kind of, sounding name, like, a name that's not really used much anymore.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: And plus, there was, like, a... there was like... I'm a Pokémon nerd, so there was a Pokémon character I really liked with that name.

Interviewer: Oh, I love that.

Lorilie: But I could never spell it right or correctly...

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Um, so I spelled it the way I do. And it gets pronounced as, like, "Loralee" a lot which is not... like, at this point, I don't care, like, I, kind of, um, brought that on myself, so [unclear].

Interviewer: [Laughs] Okay. Um, this one is, sort of, a long one. There are lots of terms for types and styles of drag from drag queen to glamor queen to comedy queen to queer artist and camp queen, among others. Are there any particular labels you would use to categorize your drag? And what kind of drag do you do/what's your style?

Lorilie: Not really. Like, I just describe myself as, like, a drag queen. Like, I pride myself on being able to do, like, various different types of drag. Like, I can be campy, I can be glamorous or pretty or, like, um, you know, like spooky, whatever, like...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: I can...I can do, like, various different things. I know there's a lot of drag queens who describe themselves as, like, female impersonators as opposed to, like, drag queens.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: I think people like that might take drag more seriously.

Interviewer: Right.

Lorilie: Even though, like, I take my drag seriously, it's, uh... I don't really consider myself a female impersonator; I just consider myself, like, a drag queen. Like, I'm a performer, and I'll use, I want to say, like, with... like, these days there's so many different types of people who do so many different types of drag. I honestly refer to people as, like, performers or drag artists as opposed to, like...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: Drag kings or drag queens or whatever because there's just so much diversity with drag these days.

Interviewer: Yeah. It is so broad.

Lorilie: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: The next question was, does the type of that drag you do affect your life as a drag artist? But you, kind of, said you're pretty versatile. So, you can still answer that, if there is an an—like, answer.

Lorilie: Yeah. Like, when I... I, I have definitely gone through, like, an evolution of drag style. Like, when I first started, I said I wanted to be strictly, like, dark and spooky, but also very glamorous.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Lorilie: And I have since, like, evolved past that, like, I don't like putting myself in a box. I think it is important as a drag artist, at least if you want to become, like, a well-renowned drag artist, which I am still working on, obviously, I think it's important that you have a certain brand for yourself and have a certain style core to you.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: But I... but I do believe that everyone should try to be more diverse and versatile, so try to do more things and just be like [unclear] I want to do various different things.

Interviewer: Okay. Who or what has influenced your drag?

Lorilie: A lot of different... a lot of people I know, like, get inspired by different fashion designers or actresses or singers. I've really only ever been inspired by, like, other drag performers because I look at them and see what I want to see in myself.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah.

Lorilie: Like, when I first started, I was inspired by Pearl, who was on Season 7 of Drag Race.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: I was also inspired by Vander Von Odd, who has not been on Drag Race, but they won the first season of, like, the Boulet Brothers' Dragula, which is like the... if you don't know, is like a more alternative show...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: For like... like, spookier, like, alternative styles of drag.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: I really, like, gravitated towards her at first because like, like I said, she did a lot of spookier stuff, but she was also very glamorous. Um, but I'm inspired by so many different people, like Naomi Smalls inspires me a lot, Laila McQueen, like, all these people have been on Drag Race. And there's people who haven't been on Drag Race that inspire me as well, but... And, like, a lot of local drag queens throughout Missouri that I have seen or met...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: They inspire me as well. So, I just take a lot of inspiration from different drag artists.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lorilie: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you consider your drag political, and why or why not?

Lorilie: I do not consider my drag political. I, I was never really very into politics...

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Until I could... I was able to vote.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: And the first time I was able to vote was when, like, Trump and Hilary were both going for president.

Interviewer: Mm.

Lorilie: After Trump won, I became a lot more political because I wasn't a fan of the political climate that he created. My drag does not translate over to that. I purely keep my drag for my

purposes only, which is just to, like, express my art and express myself through, like, makeup and performance and costuming and all that, so...

Interviewer: Right, okay. So, are you a part of a drag family/house/collective?

Lorilie: I am. When I first started, I was probably by myself for, like, a year without a drag family, and I was perfectly fine...

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Not being a part of that. But I will say, like, I was... after I was, and after, like, I've... after I got to know them and everything, I will say, like, it is a lot more fun to be a part of a drag house or a family...

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Just because like you are around more, like... and I don't think all drag families are, like, as close as we are. Like, we are all very close. I live with, like, my drag mother...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: Who is like... she's not like a mother figure to me, like, she is literally just like one of my best friends.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: And then I have two other drag family members who live together. So, like, we are all super close. We all like... we hang out all the time, like, we, we have a good time together. But it is just like a great support system to be around, like, queer like-minded people, who share the same interests as you.

Interviewer: Yeah, I bet. Okay, so how often do you perform, and where do you usually perform?

Lorilie: I used to perform... back, like, before COVID, I performed for... at Yin Yang Nightclub mostly in Columbia. It is since... it shut down about a year ago. So, since then, it's been harder or more hard to be able to perform. I don't really perform as much. I probably performed like a few times a month back before COVID, but now I maybe do... like, maybe perform maybe, like, once a month...

Interviewer: Okay.

Lorilie: Sometimes. So, drag has definitely, like, been put on the backburner for me this past year. Like, we do perform... like, me and my drag family, we, we do shows a couple times a month at Eastside Tavern here in Columbia.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: It's just, like, a little... it's, like, a pop-up show that we do just to be able to still get out and perform. I try to take bookings, like, wherever. I have performed in St. Louis a couple of

times within the past few months. I've performed in Kansas City, uh, just Friday. That was my first time performing there. That was a lot of fun.

Interviewer: Oh, that's really cool. [Laughs]

Lorilie: Yeah. I used to perform in Springfield a lot.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Lorilie: Not so much anymore just because, like, it is so far away.

Interviewer: Right.

Lorilie: But, yeah, just, just here and there.

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

Lorilie: For me... I think everyone is different.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: I am very anal about my performances. I love, like... I'm very, like... I'm a very physical performer, like, I love to dance and use various dance moves and all of that.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: But I will literally, like... and it's a great way to exercise, like, I'll literally, like, clear out my living room and just practice, like, routines for stuff and just [unclear].

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: And it's a great way to, like... to get exercise, but it also just helps me, like, figure out what I want to do at each part of a song. And I also, just, like... I'm really anal about that stuff. Like, I just... I'll plan out, like, everything about what I'll be wearing, or what my makeup will look like, or what kind of wig I'll be wearing. Just, I plan out all of it to a detail or to a T.

Interviewer: Okay. What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Lorilie: The biggest challenges, um... I think one of the biggest things I struggle with is, like, drag today, like, with Drag Race and all of these drag queens, who even aren't on Drag Race, like, they become famous through Instagram, is, like, there's a constant feel for, like, you have to be... being a drag queen is a way to get famous now. I think that's, like, a big problem with it.

Interviewer: Mm.

Lorilie: Um, like, when I first started doing drag, I won't lie, like, when I... I wanted to be on Drag Race, but, like, since then, I've gotten to where I just love doing drag, and I don't... I mean, getting on Drag Race eventually would be really cool, but if I don't get on, like, I will be okay with that. But there is always that feeling of, like, people might be seen as better than you because they have more followers than you do or they get more likes than you do.

Interviewer: Oh.

Lorilie: And I think... yeah. And I think my problem is, just, like, I need to focus on myself and pushing myself, as opposed to just, like, focusing on other people.

Interviewer: Right. Yeah, that is tough. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world?

Lorilie: I don't think there's anything relatively unique about drag in Columbia. I know drag in Columbia has been going on for a very long time, and there is a lot of history that, like, I don't know about. But I think there is one thing that, like, is kind of cool is like, we're, kind of, in the middle of Missouri, so we have a lot of different styles of drag.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: There's not a lot of... I will say there is not a lot of good drag in Columbia...

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Lorilie: But we have, like, a lot of different styles. Like, Kansas City is more, like, performance based, St. Louis was... [unclear] the younger generation, it's more about the looks. And then St. Louis... did I say St. Louis already?

Interviewer: Um, I'm not sure. [Laughs]

Lorilie: Okay. I meant Springfield is about looks. Kansas City is about performance. St. Louis is a lot of, like... there's a lot of, like, pageants, drag pageants that happen there, that they are more focused on, like, establishment and polish and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lorilie: Whereas Columbia has, like, a nice melting pot of various different styles. So, I think that's kind of cool.

Interviewer: Okay. What has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

Lorilie: Just kind of, like, what I've said before. Like, our, our bar got shut down. It was really hard for us as a community.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: And it's made it really hard to perform. Like, I used to, like... I used to be, like... drag was like the main thing I did. Like, it was my hobby. It was my, like, therapy almost. So, I've gotten to where, like, it's really difficult to, uh... It was my hobby. It was like my main... like, not my main source of income, like, I have a, a job that I do full time. But it was just like an extra way of, like, getting money.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: [Unclear] honestly, pretty much it. Like, just the bar was shut down; it became really difficult to, like, perform.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: Yeah, that's pretty much it, honestly. Sorry, that was, like, such a scattered answer.

Interviewer: [Laughs] No, that's okay. Okay, so next is, kind of, like, the sex and gender identity and gender expression category. So, how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Lorilie: I identify myself, like, pretty much as a cisgendered male, like, as a gay man. I will say that I do think that gender is becoming... at least when you do drag and, like, the gender lines are more blurred, I think that gender is becoming more of, like, a construct, kind of thing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: So, every now and then, like, I'll... I do, kind of, identify myself along, like... in the gender fluid spectrum.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: But, I mean, that's really it. I mean, I am honestly, like... I don't care what pronouns I'm used with, like, I don't care about, like, what gender I'm used with. I, I really don't care. Like, I'm honestly really, like, loosey goosey with it, honestly.

Interviewer: Okay. The next question was actually, what pronouns do you use in drag and out of drag?

Lorilie: In drag, I prefer the she/her pronouns because I'm, like, female-presenting than, like... I'm not, like, you know, presenting as a woman or qualify myself as a woman, but I'm presenting effeminately.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: So, I prefer those pronouns. Out of drag, I honestly don't care. I present myself as a male, so I get he/him. I will get they/them. Um, and then, like, my drag family, like, we all refer to each other as she/he, or she her. And then we all, like, honestly use our drag names out of drag a lot.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: So, I get called all different kinds of pronouns, and I honestly don't mind.

Interviewer: Okay. Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities and how?

Lorilie: My... how it's influenced what?

Interviewer: Oh, your gender identity.

Lorilie: Oh yeah, that's just, kind of, like, along the lines I said about, like, the...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: Gender fluid thing. Me and a couple... a couple of, like, my drag friends and my folks, like, I think, we, kind of, are on the same page of, like, when the gender lines become blurred

from drag, our, um... we might consider ourselves, like, more gender fluid. I [unclear] consider myself, like, a man, but I also, like, consider myself gender fluid to an extent. So, I mean yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Has... how has drag impacted or changed you?

Lorilie: Drag has, honestly, like, been really beneficial for my self-esteem. I grew up, like, heavier and got... I was from a really small town, so I got bullied a lot, only had, like, a couple friends. So, I was, honestly, like, really, really shy throughout most of my life. So, drag, honestly, has really helped me, like, coming out of my shell. Like, um, it's helped me become, like, a lot more confident. Like, it keeps me in this mindset of, I need to focus on... now I focus on, like, Lorilie, but I need to take time to focus on Logan, that's, like, my biological name. So, like, I always make sure I take time out of my day to, like, schedule self-care, whether it's, like, going on a jog or, like, ordering a pizza for instance. Like, I just always want to make sure that, like, both Lorilie and Logan are taken care of.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. So, has drag impacted your confidence as Logan?

Lorilie: Yeah, it's made me. um... Lorilie has really helped me to, like, become more confident, um, as Logan. Like, I, I, honestly, like... it's hard to think of myself, like, how I used to act, like, being so shy and being so soft spoken and, kind of, getting, like, walked over. Like, I've... it's, honestly, really helped me, like, stand up for myself a lot more, which is very nice.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. If you could go back in time as Lorilie, what advice would Lorilie give to younger Logan?

Lorilie: I would probably just tell myself to, like... you're gonna, like... you're gonna face, like, a lot of hardships, but in the end, like, just stay strong. You're gonna get through it. Um, and I would also tell him to, like, take the time to take care of yourself and focus on yourself and not focus on other people, because it's gonna be more beneficial to you in the end.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Um, okay, this says, 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 the social identities have impacted your experience of drag and/or how drag has impacted your experience of this identity? Sorry, that was a long question.

Lorilie: Um, okay, so, [laughs] I was, I think [overtalking] worry about.

Interviewer: So, basically, any of your other... any of your, like, other social identities such as, like, religion or class or age or size or sexuality, has that interacted with your drag and has either impacted each other?

Lorilie: Not really. Like, I will say drag is like a really expensive hobby.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: So, like, if, if you're not well off or you're not, like... you don't have a nice job or whatever, like, whatever the situation might be, it's probably not the hobby for you. Um, I am

fortunate enough that I have a, a decent paying job. I work for a bank, so I have... I have it pretty nice financially. I don't... I try to be responsible with my money, though, and budget out, like, money here and there for drag. But, um, uh, that's really it. Like, I mean, I, honestly, like, I'm not really... I'm not religious.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Um, and it really doesn't affect me, like, much how outside... you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: Like, in those co-- correlating things.

Interviewer: Okay. So, these last questions, there's about, like, six of them, and they all center around your ideas about drag. So, the first one is, how do you define drag?

Lorilie: Ooh, that's a tough one. Um, for me, I can't define it, like, as a, a general definition.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Um, I can only define it for, like, how I see it. Drag, for me...

Interviewer: Right.

Lorilie: Is just... it is my hobby, it is my passion, it's a way for me to produce art and stay busy, but also, like, I do that to find happiness. Like, I feel like there's a better way for me to describe that, but that's just a rough definition. Um, but yeah...

Interviewer: Okay. What do you think is the purpose of drag? You can answer this, like you said, if you want to just answer it for yourself purpose-- or for yourself, that's fine too.

Lorilie: Yeah. Um, for me, my purpose of doing drag is to, like... kind of, like, what I said before. For me, like, I love to perform. I've always, like... I did, like... when I was in college I did, like, acting and stuff. I've always loved to, like, perform and be on a stage. Um, uh, even though, like, I'm a... I'm fairly shy still, like, I do... like, getting into drag and performing, it's such a great way for me to, like, express that part of me. Um, and it's also just a way for... like, it really helps my self-esteem, it, like, helps me stay busy, helps me express my art. Like, there are so many different reasons that I do drag and different, like, purposes for me to do drag. So, just, like, all of those... all of those things.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think drag is sexual, and why or why not? And if so, how and in what way?

Lorilie: I do not think drag is sexual. Um, I think there are people who might sexualize their drag, and that is their own thing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Um, I do not think that those people do that in order to promote having sex in drag. I think that there are various different drag artists who like the idea of having a sexual drag

persona, just be-- just like, uh, pe-- okay, so, like, let's say, uh, men or women, for instance, they might dress more provocatively, but that does... that does not mean that they're asking for someone to have sex with them. You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Right.

Lorilie: Like, I think it's... I think drag is like the same way. I do think that there are people... there... I know there are people who will have sex in drag, but I don't consider, really, that to be drag. I consider that to be more along, like, the cross-dressing aspect, um, which is like a different kind of... fetish kind of thing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Um, but I do not believe drag to be sexual.

Interviewer: Okay, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Lorilie: I guess it's my favorite show. I watch it all the time. Um, I mean, I don't watch it all the time but, like, I'll keep... uh, watch a few episodes, like, whenever I can.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: Um. I think it's really helped make drag a more modern, like, mainstream kind of thing, which I think is great. Um, I do think it has, like, kind of, pushed drag to be more about, like, followers and social media and likes and all that, as opposed to, like, the art form of drag itself. But I also think it's made it to where drag is like, you should really push your drag and push the limits of it and, like, make it more exceptional. So, I think that's a... it's, sort of, like the... a good and a bad thing to that.

Interviewer: Okay. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the community what would it be and why?

Lorilie: I think just, kind of, what I just said. Like, I wish drag would be less about, like, followers and likes and all that, and just more about, like, pushing yourself and talent. Like, I think that a lot of people, at least where I live, who, kind of, get, like, um... oh, what is it? They get, like, uplifted for, kind of, doing, like, the bare minimum, when I feel like they're really not doing as much as they could be doing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Um, I'm always trying to, like, push myself and make myself better than I was before through drag. Um, so do I wish there was more of that within my drag community.

Interviewer: Okay. What do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag and where do you think they come from?

Lorilie: Um, well, like I said, like... you mentioned, like, the, the sexualizing...

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Which I think that is one thing that is often mis-- um, misunderstood. Um, I think, also, there is, like... at least, uh, when I first started doing drag, or at least when I came out... when I first came out as gay, my parents accused me of being trans because they just didn't understand the idea of being gay. They assumed it also meant, like, I was trying to transition to be a woman, which I am not.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: I, I think people assume the same thing with drag, like, if you do drag, you want to be... you want to transition to be a woman, which is not true for everyone. Like, there are trans women who do drag and present themselves as, um, drag queens. And then there are trans men who do the same thing as drag kings. But I think all of it just comes from, like, ignorance and not knowing and not trying to learn more about it. Like, the people who try to learn more about the different kinds of drag and what... the various people that do drag, I think that they'll understand eventually that, like, there is so much more that goes into drag than just putting on clothes of the opposite gender.

Interviewer: Yeah. Is there anything that you think would help change, like, those misconceptions people have?

Lorilie: Um, I don't know. I think, I... like I said, Drag Race, RuPaul's Drag Race has become, like, a really big thing and I... people, obviously, like, see all the time that there is, like, men who get on the show, and they are drag queens. There have been a couple contestants who later came out as trans women. Um, and then, this current season, there is, like, a trans man who does drag as a drag queen on the show.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lorilie: I think if there was more diversity shown through, like, these, um... through, like, these mainstream platforms, I think that would help a lot to broaden people's eyes to the various different types of drag.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. And then, lastly, if you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag what would it be?

Lorilie: Um, not quite for sure... I know... let me think.

Interviewer: Or even if you want to answer it as, like, choose one thing you would want people to know or learn about your drag, what would it be? That would be fine too.

Lorilie: Um, hmm. I'm not quite for sure. I know, like, um, everyone perceives drag differently. I don't...Um, with my drag, I mean, like... I'll just... I'll just answer like this. I know, like... okay, when I first started drag, like I said, I wanted to be spooky. I still get called a spooky drag queen here and there.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: I don't really consider myself to be, like, a spooky drag queen now. And I don't mind being called that either, I really don't. But, I do want people to know that, like, I can do... and I

think people do... like, a lot of people see that and realize that too. Um, but I do so much more different types of things than what I originally did, or what I... like, I mean, 'cause I'll still... like, I love to wear black, and I love to do, like, darker makeup. But I... I'll still do, like, other things here and there because I'm willing and ready to grow with any opportunity that I can. Um, and I think... I really hope more drag performers can learn that or realize that. I guess my, my thing is more like... is more to other drag performers than it is to the regular people.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Lorilie: Um, because I don't really relate to them as much as I used to anymore. But I think that's, like, a part of thing with the job, like, once you're in a certain thing, you might relate to more people who are in that job that you are. So, I, I hope that people who do drag are more willing to become more diverse and, and, um, just willing to grow and improve and change. And I guess people, like, in the same way too, could do that as well. Because, like, the world is ever changing, like, there's so many different things changing and going on. And some people just can't keep up. So, I do hope that, like, there... the people that can keep up will work hard to help others keep up. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: No, yeah. Yeah.

Lorilie: Okay. I, kind of, gave, like, multiple different answers for that, but...

Interviewer: No, it's perfectly fine. Is there anything else you wanted to add to it?

Lorilie: No, I'm gonna... I'm gonna just end it with that 'cause I, I talked about quite a few things for that question.

Interviewer: Okay. [Laughs] Okay. Well, that's it, unless there's anything else you'd like to share.

Lorilie: Not really, no.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you so much.

Interview with Luna Steelheart

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Connor McDonald: Alright, is it recording for you?

Luna Steelheart: Um, wait. Meeting is being recorded, continue. Alright, yes, yeah, it shows it is recording.

Connor McDonald: Alright. Well, hi. How are you today?

Luna Steelheart: I'm doing great. How are you?

Connor McDonald: I'm doing fantastic. So, would you like to say your drag name, your age, and where you are a performer at?

Luna Steelheart: Um, so, my name is Luna Steelheart. Um, that is Luna as in the Spanish word for moon, steel as in the metal and heart as the organ. I'm 22 years old, and I don't really have a particular place that I am tied to performing. I mostly perform in Kansas City and in Columbia, Missouri.

Connor McDonald: Perfect. Why did you choose your name for drag?

Luna Steelheart: So, actually that's a funny story, and I'm glad you asked. Because for me, I've always been drawn to the name Luna. Luna has always been a name of mystery, a name of the night, and I've never felt so connected to the night as I have with the name Luna. It represents the moon, and all things under the stars. They were... it's about partying and having fun and all of the fun things that are tied to the moon.

As Steelheart, it was actually a name that was given to me by a friend of mine back in high school. And originally, my name was going to be Luna Lovegood. So, my lack of knowledge, I didn't know that Luna Lovegood was already a character created in Harry Potter. So, from there, it became like, okay, well now I need to find a new last name. And somebody goes, "Well, why don't you choose Steelheart?" And I was like, "Steelheart, like, what do you mean?" And she goes, "Oh well, you know, steal their hearts away or your heart can be as cold as steel." And I was I was like, "Dual meaning, I love it." So, we just, kind of, took on that name, and it's been, kind of, an adventure with it as well along the, uh, the four years that I've been doing that.

Connor McDonald: Oh, I love that. So, you are originally from the St. Louis area, is that correct?

Luna Steelheart: That is correct. I got my start... uh, my very first performance was at none other than St. Charles Community College. And then my second performance, but my first performance at a bar, was actually at Attitudes Nightclub back in 2017. And that's where I got

my start. I had been doing drag there for about a year and a half to almost two years, until I moved to Kansas City and, kind of, moved around a little bit there further.

Connor McDonald: So, why did you move out to Kansas City? Was it for a job? Was it for drag?

Luna Steelheart: A little bit of everything. I, honestly, moved out to Kansas City for a fresh start. I knew the drag scene was a lot bigger. I knew I'd be able to make a better name for myself, and all of those dreams have come true. Kansas City was a place where I had some family and some friends and decided to move... move out there to better my life. But ultimately, it's been the betterment of my drag as well.

Connor McDonald: Do you think that the drag scene is different out in Kansas City than it is in St. Louis?

Luna Steelheart: For sure. There's definitely a different style of everything, especially when it comes to geolocation. I'd have to say in St. Louis there's a lot more freedom of artistic ability. As far as in St. Louis, there's a lot of different types of drag that I haven't seen out in Kansas City yet, whether it be that I haven't gotten to discover that part or actually be part of that... part of the drag community, is up in the air as to if I have gotten to work with these types of people. But in St. Louis, there is definitely a more artistic scene when it comes to, um... there's, like, a lot more cosplayers, there's a lot more, um, like, ghoulish, um, like, creepier style drag that might be on *Dragula*. And here out in Kansas City, there's a lot more pageant, there's a lot more club, there's a lot more artistry in the sense of seeing drag as a purest art form. But there isn't as many drag kings out in Kansas City as there are in St. Louis.

Connor McDonald: I have seen a few drag kings in St. Louis. So, how were your first...?

Luna Steelheart: Yeah, there... there's a lot more drag... oh, sorry.

Connor McDonald: You go first.

Luna Steelheart: I was going to say, there's a lot more drag kings in St. Louis than there are in Kansas City, for sure.

Connor McDonald: Interesting. How were you first exposed to drag?

Luna Steelheart: Honestly, the way it started for me might have been a lot different than a lot of other people. So, for me, it actually started at a very young age, I used to... me and my sister used to be roughly around the same body size and shape. And so, I used to go around in her dresses and play dress up with her. And I put on... you know, masculinity and femininity are nothing more than social constructs.

And so, from there, I, kind of, explored it a little bit further. And it wasn't until high school that a friend of mine had shown me none other than RuPaul's Drag Race contestant from Season 5, Alyssa Edwards. And I kind of found a little bit more connectivity in that. I started to research a lot more, started learning the backgrounds and truly discovering that that's who I was. Because for a while, I started to contemplate the idea if I were trans or if I were genderfluid, nonbinary, or

if I was just a drag queen who very much enjoys expressing, expressing artwork through gender identity.

Connor McDonald: So, drag has become a form of self-expression in a way?

Luna Steelheart: For sure. I always, uh... there was a quote from Dragula that I truly resonated with, and I, I have said it time and time again since I've seen it. But it's, "Drag is art, art is subjective, and nobody... it's nobody else's place to judge." It is truly the artist's form of expression that allows you to resonate with the art form itself.

Connor McDonald: I like that. How would you describe your... [overtalking]. How would you describe your drag right now?

Luna Steelheart: I would consider it to be more on the side of witchy glamor. I like to describe it that way because I find beauty in dark things, whether it be, oh, you know, the tale of a witch or a poltergeist story or, you know, some type of monster, there's always a beauty behind it. Like the story of Medusa, it's, uh... but it's portrayed as a [unclear] the feebleness of men. Uh, it's that there's not really a monster in everybody, and that's the beauty behind it all. It's that we are all in some form a monster, and there's a beauty to it.

Connor McDonald: That's very beautiful. So, would you define witches and monsters to be influencing your drag? Or are there other people or other aspects that influenced your drag?

Luna Steelheart: Um, see, for myself, I find artists through my music that would allow me to feel inspired. But as far as, like, my look and everything else, I don't really draw inspiration from another person, just because my own look comes from my own interpretation of who has inspired me. So, for instance, if I were to do a Lady Gaga number, which, she's my... I'd say more main influence. If I were to do a Lady Gaga number, I would do something that I feel I [inaudible] translate Gaga as my own artistic [inaudible] somebody else and go, "Okay, they did [inaudible], kind of, where it's evolved from."

Connor McDonald: I like that. So, do you remember your first time in drag?

Luna Steelheart: I don't think I could ever forget it. It was a, a very hot day on June 17, 2017, and the reason I remember that date is because that is Luna's birthday. I was actually out of pride for St. Charles, and I was wearing nothing more than a, a dress that was covered in glitter and a slit up the leg. And I was wearing a wig that I had gotten off of from Wish, and I had no more makeup than, you know, an everyday cisgendered woman, um, because we... I didn't know what drag was. And so, I didn't really have my eyebrows all the way glued down. My wi—my wig would, kind of, slide around. My, my body didn't quite have the shape that it would today. But, of course, I would agree that, you know, everywhere has got its own start and, you know, it's moments like that that we look back at where we began, and just see how far we've come.

Connor McDonald: That's very inspiring. So, how did your friends and family feel about drag? Or did you care what they think?

Luna Steelheart: Say that last part again?

Connor McDonald: Did your friends and family feel okay about you doing drag or did you even care about them or care about their opinions?

Luna Steelheart: Um, at the... in the beginning, there was a lot of... uh, what's the word I'm looking for? Apprehension.

Connor McDonald: Okay.

Luna Steelheart: A lot of people, kind of, looked at me a little different as in like, "Why would you want to do this? Is this your way of wanting to become a woman? Is this you telling us something that... through another style of speaking? Like is this a way to lighten the punch?" And a lot of friends were starting to think that I was a little obsessive with my drag, because at first [inaudible] it demands all of your attention, and at the time they were expressing who I... and, and in its truth and in its entirety, I was expressing myself in ways that they haven't quite understood yet because that's all they'd known is just the press version of me. And, you know, I completely opened up.

And at first, with my family, like, there's only a few family members that know, still, to this day. But for my immediate family that does [inaudible] and data first, they were like, "All right now, we support you during this. You're an adult now. Just as long as, if you do make up in the house, that you keep it down in your room. You don't come up in full face. You don't... if you're getting ready for a show, you know, don't get ready here, get ready at a friend's house, and then don't come home with makeup on." Because it would attract the neighbors, and they didn't want to have to answer questions for neighbors that they weren't ready to fully answer, which I understand and respect fully.

Connor McDonald: So, it seems more that your family was more worried about their image than your image.

Luna Steelheart: In some aspects, yes. And they were also afraid that me walking the streets looking the way I did was, kind of, a call out to the people who might be a bully and try to mug me or beat me or, ultimately, kill me. And that was their biggest fear, because my mom's already lost one child. She did not have any intentions to lose another.

Connor McDonald: Oh, I'm so sorry.

Luna Steelheart: That's all right, I actually embrace my sister, and I actually wear her as part of my body for the rest of my life. I have a tattoo on my right wrist that allows her to be with me every single day.

Connor McDonald: That's beautiful.

Luna Steelheart: For sure.

Connor McDonald: So, how has COVID-19 affected your drag?

Luna Steelheart: For some, it hindered their ability to perform more. Mine, it gave me the ultimate green light to flourish and grow and prosper within it. Um, because if you're not keeping up with it, you're saying behind the scenes. So, that's the way I've always looked at it,

is, um, I had... towards the beginning of drag, um, right before it hit, I had one performance in Kansas City on my 21st birthday. And then all the nightclubs went down, and I wasn't able to perform for a couple weeks. And then an old friend of mine. Anthony Plogger, actually hit me up and messaged me and was like, "Hey, um, how would you feel about doing online shows? You know, you have a place to stay. And if there's any information, we can give you, it's yours." And I was like, "Of course. I'm in."

And so, I've been performing there ever since, and they've accepted me as part of the family. And, you know, they don't even... an they don't even call me an out-of-towner... or an out-of-towner or out-of-town performer anymore. They call me a hometown performer because of how often I had got to perform there. And they've really seen my drag grow and change and evolve into what it is today. And I couldn't be more grateful than how I currently feel.

Connor McDonald: That's good. Do you get any reactions from people who see you do drag or see you doing drag during COVID?

Luna Steelheart: Do you mean as far as fans or...?

Connor McDonald: As far as fans or people saying that it might be a bad idea because of the pandemic?

Luna Steelheart: Um, I've had a lot of people that are not super familiar with the art form tell me, "Oh, you should be careful, you know, at least always wear your mask," you know, just give me all the precautions that I already knew. [Coughs] Sorry, I had a dry throat. Um, they had given me a lot of precautions to live by, that some people urged me not to. But I was, like, "Keeping me away from performing is like taking a fish out of water and telling it to breathe." So, I mean... and a lot of my fans that were coming to the shows, I created a larger fanbase, you know? A lot of people love that I do it; they're thankful that they actually have an outlet to be able to be entertained and feel connected with in a time where connectivity and entertainment are, kind of, hard to come by due to the effects of COVID-19.

Connor McDonald: That's understandable. I'm glad that you are still able to do shows, and that you have been precautionous.

Luna Steelheart: Always. [Laughs]

Connor McDonald: So, do you have a drag family? Because I know that in many aspects of the world, a good drag queen usually partakes in having a families, a drag mother.

Luna Steelheart: Yeah, of course. Um, towards my start, I did have a drag mother. I no longer have a drag mother, and I would like to keep that a little private, just because we, we did have a falling out but, um, you know, the future is always bright. Um, but, no, I have actually taken on my own drag daughter. Her name is Regina Steelheart. She's my pride and joy. She makes me happy; she makes me smile. And she always keeps me motivated very much as a mother and as a best friend in, um, you know, just every sense of the word.

And Regina's actually got a new bouncing baby da... or baby sister on the way. Uh, her name's Zelena Steeheart. And we're growing it from there and gonna see how it works and, you know,

what works for us, and so on and so forth. So, so, yeah, I'm very excited. I've got lots of sisters, a couple brothers, uh, you know, they, they all just keep me active and motivated.

Connor McDonald: So, you have a big family then?

Luna Steelheart: Oh, for sure.

Connor McDonald: That's glad because drag communities are often very helpful, and I'm glad to see that pertaining to your family as well.

Luna Steelheart: For sure. For sure.

Connor McDonald: So, how would you identify yourself in and out of drag, if you are, are okay with it, maybe specific pronouns?

Luna Steelheart: Oh okay. Yeah, in drag, I'm strictly she/her/hers. The way I look at it is, is I put a lot of work in to look like a... or to represent the females of the group. So, you know, I like to be referred to as such. But out of drag, I am open to any term, um, whether it be she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, he/him/his, as long as it's not hyper masculine such as dude, sir, bro, man, and buddy. Like, those are just ones that, kind of, I just don't feel like I relate to those terms. I don't feel like they represent me very well, however it wants to be worded, but I, I just don't relate to those words and... but those are my pronouns.

Connor McDonald: That makes sense.

Luna Steelheart: Hmm?

Connor McDonald: I said that makes sense.

Luna Steelheart: No, I said, "Uh-huh."

Connor McDonald: Oh, okay. [Laughs]

Luna Steelheart: [Laughs] My bad, I'm sorry.

Connor McDonald: Oh no, you're totally fine. And obviously, not to have any terms that would be disrespectful to you as well.

Luna Steelheart: Oh, of course, yeah.

Connor McDonald: So, how has drag impacted your life?

Luna Steelheart: Honestly, it has been like a hope into the darker parts of my life. Uh, you know I [inaudible] from depression and anxiety. And whenever I struggle, I start to think of the light that drag has inspired me to be and, uh, has been able to show my life a lot more meaning and has been able to allow me to connect with other people in ways that I could never dream of. It allows me to just see that everything does have an art form, and all art is beautiful. I do find a lot of connectivity between myself and my drag persona. And whenever I'm feeling down or scared, Luna is typically my, my torch and my, my strength and my, my armor to continue to be strong and, uh, you know, hold my ground and be who I am.

Connor McDonald: So, you would say that drag has changed you personally, as, as well as behaviorally?

Luna Steelheart: Absolutely.

Connor McDonald: So, how would you describe drag in general?

Luna Steelheart: Um, well, I'd like to, kind of, answer as somebody else and say the way that RuPaul says it is. Uh, we're all born naked, and the rest is drag.

Connor McDonald: [Laughs]

Luna Steelheart: Anything that you do to modify your persona to be something other than what you are on an everyday basis, is exactly what drag is. It's to escape... it's a form of escapism. It's a, a form of personality that you can get to only discover whenever you do change from what you are currently... what, what you currently know as your normal. And, you know, it's, it's art. It's... that's truly is what it is. I mean, if you dress up for Halloween, I suppose that is a form of drag, and, you know, all forms of drag are to be admired and loved and seen as an artistic feat. And, you know, just keep on the bright side of everything and, you know, it's, it's exactly anything and everything you could ever hope to... or hope or dream it is.

Connor McDonald: That's great. So, you would believe that the purpose of drag is for an art form?

Luna Steelheart: Absolutely. I don't... if it was anything other than an art form, I don't think drag would be as big as it is today, at least, or if at all.

Connor McDonald: Understandable. So, how would you like to further your drag in the future?

Luna Steelheart: Um, for me, this is me shooting for the stars, but, you know, if you shoot across... shoot for the stars and miss, uh, and you land on the moon, then, you know, you, you still accomplished something phenomenal. But, for me, I would love to take this as far as going for a singing career, to be able to travel the country and the world, eventually, and be able to connect my art form and connect my positive vibes and communication, and responsibly help those who are also struggling with their self-identification and their, their inner selves.

And I want people to know that to love yourself is the most important thing, and to continue to be a light for others is how we make this world a better place. And that's really what I want to do. I want to make the world a better place, and the best way I know how to is to connect to as many people as possible. And the best way that I know how to do that is by elevating my fan base to be a thousand times larger than what it is now. Because through that, I can communicate with a lot more people with a lot less effort. Not that I would give any less effort, but more so that I can connect to a lot of people in a shorter amount of time.

Connor McDonald: Makes sense. So, are you very focused right now on trying to raise your following on social media?

Luna Steelheart: As of right now, given the many facets and focuses of drag, it is a little difficult to keep up with social, social media pages as I don't fully understand them as... as a

whole. I do try to gain more followers. I do try to, you know, promote myself to the best of my ability. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but hey, it's trial and error thing, and, you know, we just gotta keep, keep it monitored, keep it updated, you know, just keep looking forward to that next show.

Connor McDonald: Totally makes sense. Now with the future of your drag, does that also include being on a future season of Drag Race?

Luna Steelheart: Oh, absolutely. That is one of my biggest dreams, uh, on how to get, you know, to where my dreams would come to fruition, would be to be on RuPaul's Drag Race. And you know, even if I don't make it onto RuPaul's Drag race, I definitely would like to go on to Dragula or, you know, maybe American Idol, just to be able to... be able to connect with some form of audience, to be able to elevate myself to the... to the limit that I exceed.

Connor McDonald: I think that is a great goal to have.

Luna Steelheart: For sure.

Connor McDonald: So, with Drag Race, how do you feel about Drag Race?

Luna Steelheart: As the whole of the show, or how do I feel that I would be on Drag Race as a contestant myself?

Connor McDonald: Either/or.

Luna Steelheart: Um, I feel like Drag Race as a whole is a very great T.V. show to be able to give fellow performers around the country a bigger name for themselves and be able to have it go mainstream and have a lot of audiences that perceived you multiple different people in multiple different ways. Like, if you're a [unclear] fan, you're typically... you know, your humor is gauged towards that facet. And if you're a fan of Alaska, you know, your humor is gauged a different way. If you're, you know, more toward Violet, then you like the... a, a lot of the dancing that she does. Or Kameron Michaels, same thing is her dancing and...

So, it goes to show that there's so many different types of drag and there's a lot of different ways to connect with it. And, you know, seeing myself on the show, I could see how my brand would be able to be translated for the audiences of not only the United States, but around the world, to have some pe-- or have some people around the world connect with me, and therefore, being able to give RuPaul's Drag Race more fruits for its labor as well.

Connor McDonald: I like that. Do you think that there are any misconceptions that people have about drag?

Luna Steelheart: Um, I think the biggest mis-- misconception that a lot of people have about drag performers is that a lot of people think that drag and trans are the same thing, or that if somebody is doing drag, that they are basically saying that they are trans without them actually saying so. And I'd like throw th-- like, throw those assumptions aside and just say that drag is drag. Trans is trans. They are separate, but they are both beautiful in their own ways. And my

love of the trans community and my love for the drag community is unequivocal because they are so... just beautiful in their own ways. And I find a lot of connection with both of them.

And you know, for... there are trans drag performers, and there are drag queens who... or drag performers who do identify as trans, and, you know, uh, but those are still separate things. Just drag is an expression whereas trans is a... is you living to be your true self. And, you know, it, it truly does boil down to something as simple as that, as drag is, like I said, art; and trans is who you are.

Connor McDonald: Excellent. I enjoyed that, and I fully love, love that answer.

Luna Steelheart: Well, thank you.

Connor McDonald: Alright, well, that is all I have for you today. Thank you so much for doing this with me, and thank you for joining me for this project.

Luna Steelheart: Of course. I... Of course. And I wish you the best on your fruits of your labor as well.

Connor McDonald: Thank you so much. You have a great rest your night.

Luna Steelheart: You as well. Bye, bye.

Connor McDonald: Bye.

Interview with Mercury M. Poisoning

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Madison Lammert: I think we're good.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah.

Madison Lammert: I'm going to record on my phone, too. Okay. So, we're going to go ahead and get started with a few questions that are more specific to your personal story with drag. So, I want to know first, how did you first hear about drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, well, I was first introduced to drag when I was 18 when I came to college. I went to Lindenwood University for my undergrad, and some of my friends wanted to go to The Grove in St. Louis and that was back when Attitudes was open, and they were 18 and up at the time. So, we were able to get in because we were 18. And so, we went there, like, "We're going to a drag show." And I was like, "Okay," and I was terrified, because, like, I came from a small country town, I'd never seen drag before. And, um. it was... I mean, it was scary at first to me [laughs], because it was way out of my comfort zone. But then I, like, kind of, enjoyed it, so I kept going more and more. And then I... you know, finally was just like, "Well, this is wonderful. I love this." And then I was like, "You know, maybe I should do this sometime." But I... that was kind of a joke at the time, so...

Madison Lammert: Yeah. So, how did you end up getting to the point where you were wanting to perform drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. So, I actually started a drag show at Lindenwood. I was, kind of, in charge of our GSA, and somebody was like, "Hey, all these other schools do a drag show. Like, you should definitely do a drag show, like, that'd be amazing." and I was like, "No, no, like, I don't think anybody here would want to see that. Like, we're in St. Charles. It's very conservative, like, I don't think the school would let us." And then they did. And so, I was like, "Well, I'm not gonna do this show and not perform." So, I decided to perform, and loved every minute of it. And I was like, "You know, maybe I'll just do this for Lindenwood shows. Like, I'm not gonna do it any other time. Like, I'll just do drag for this." And then we had another show, did it, and then Pride St. Charles was getting started up around the same time. And they were like, "Hey, we're doing this show. We're looking for performers. Would anybody from the show be interested?" And I was like, "Well, I mean, I would," and nobody else was. And so, then I just, kind of, started doing it there and just kept going, and six years later, here we are.

Madison Lammert: Awesome. That's so cool. So, you did answer the next question, when did you start performing as a drag artist? But can you elaborate... [phone ringing] sorry... a little bit more on why you started performing?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. I mean, like I said, kind of, at the time, it was more of a joke. And so, I was like, "Yes, I, I just want to do it because, you know, we're doing it for the school, I wanna... like, we're..." we, kind of... we started turning into a fundraiser, so I'm like, "Anything I can do to help raise money for, you know, a different organization and... that's in need or, or whatnot." So, it was, kind of, as a joke, but, kind of, as a fundraiser side of things.

But then I just started enjoying it, like, I really liked the feeling. So, after that first performance, like, I felt so powerful on stage, because I was a whole different person. And like, granted, you know, all of my friends were there, so everybody knew who I was. But it was like, I could be a whole different person, and I could be like, "Oh, well, that's Mercury, so, like, she's different from Ethan," you know, like, things like that.

So, it's funny, but, like... I don't know. It was a good feeling. And so, I just wanted to keep that feeling up and be like, "Yeah, I have the, the ability to transform, if you will, into a completely different person, that she can get away with doing more things, she can be more confident." And, you know, it's okay, because she's a drag queen. It's not, "Oh, Ethan to be more confident. He's just a terrible person," you know? It was something like that. So... I would say, kind of, those are the, the big reasons.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. How did your loved ones perceive you coming into doing drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. So, um, my parents... like, I told my mom, I was just like, "Hey, just in case you see pictures, like, this is happening," at least, you know, for the first time. And she was like, "Okay." And then, I... you know, I slowly did it, so it was, kind of, like, easing her into it. And her and Dad, like, don't fully understand it, necessarily. I've tried to explain it more in terms of that... even, even though this is not a very good representation of it at all, it, it's not... but for them to understand, this is what worked. So, what I told them was, "It's like theater, essentially. It's me playing a character where I lip sync to other people's songs and, you know, people tip me for it."

And so, that was how it was... that's how it was, or that's how I was able to explain it to them. It's a little bit easier to explain it that way rather than, "Oh, you know, I feel more confident. I feel like it's not just drag, it's about expression. Like, drag's not theater, per se." You can use drag in theater, but it... you know, it's not theater. My brothers... one of my brothers think it's... thinks it's completely weird.

My oldest brother has come to shows and supported me, him and his wife. My, um... the brother closest to me in age, we live together, so he's used to it. But he also comes to a lot of the shows and... well, before COVID came to a lot of the shows and everything. So, they were all good with it. But, like, my parents are still... like, they won't come to a show, but they did come to, like, the Pride Parade that we did for Pride St. Charles, because I helped host that. So they have met Mercury, they've just never seen her perform.

Madison Lammert: That's cool.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. And then what about your friends? What did they think?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh, all of my friends love it. Like, when people find out, even, like, new friends, when they find out I'm a drag queen, they lose their minds and get so excited. And they're like, "Come do my makeup. Come..." [laughs] you know, "do whatever else." And I'm like, "Okay, like, if you want to look terrible, I'll do your makeup." Like, I can do my makeup, but doing makeup on other people is very challenging.

Madison Lammert: Yeah.

Mercury M. Poisoning: So... But it's, it's fun. They're supportive.

Madison Lammert: That's awesome. Yeah. And where does the name Mercury Poisoning come from?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. So, the name was a bit of a journey. [Laughs] When I started, which you probably saw in my email, when I started, I was Mercury Jones.

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: And so, that's why my email is the way it is because I created it back then, and I don't think you can change it without just creating a brand, new email. Which, that's fine. I, I don't care. But I started out as Mercury Jones. And so, Mercury came from Sailor Moon, the...

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Which is, you know, like anime manga. So, it was a show, though, back in the 90s. And I was born in the 90s, but I, I grew up watching reruns when I was a kid. Since I loved Sailor Moon, like, loved the show, and I ended up liking... like, Sailor Mercury was one of the Sailor Scouts. [Laughs] This sounds so nerdy, but she was one of the Sailor Scouts, and she was always one of my favorites. And so, when I would pretend... like, when I... when you're a kid, you know, you play pretend. So, I would always pretend, and she was one of the ones I was always, like, I was that scout, so I had her powers whatnot. So, I loved that. So, Mercury. And then, Jones, I don't really know where that came from at first. I don't know if I saw it somewhere, or if I'm just like, "Well, this has a nice ring to it," whatever.

And then about four years ago, I guess, I think, I'm not sure how long ago it was, but I ended up getting adopted. After I started performing in the city a lot more, I ended up getting adopted by Scarlett Syanide, who is also a drag queen. She's retired now, but she... her last name was Syanide. And so, we were like, "How can we know...? Like, how can we do something that, like, people know I'm in her family but not changing my last name to Syanide?", which is a very popular thing to do, like, when you get adopted into a drag family, you change your last name to match theirs.

She, she and I agreed that it would be better for, kind of, like, my own individuality to either change my name, but not to Syanide. And so, then we kind of stuck on Mercury Poisoning because it tied with Syanide, which, you know, it's poison, but... so it tied to that, but it wasn't

using the exact same last name. So, it's like, "Okay, we're part of the same family. We just, you know, have our own individual styles," because Syanide just didn't fit me, so...

Madison Lammert: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So, can you describe for me a little bit how you characterize your drag? For example, do you use particular labels? And, like, do you have a particular style?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I know I specifically, in drag... like, my pronouns, I use she/her pronouns, but I'll answer to any so it really doesn't matter to me. I'm flexible in that sense. As far as different labels, I [unclear]. I don't know if I have any other labels. Like I, I guess, kind of, on to, like, your second point, I classify myself as a hot mess. [Laughs] But, but, no, aside from that, I always, when people ask me, like, how I would categorize... that's hard to say... my drag, I, I don't know. I would almost say that I'm more of a, um... I, kind of, say, like, a pop princess. I do a lot of pop music.

But I'm pretty versatile as far as, like, genres because I co-produce a show in St. Charles with my drag mom, Roxxy Malone. And she, um, she and I tried to have a lot of different themes and everything for those shows. So, like, we've done country; we've done rock and roll; we've done 80s; we've done 90s; we've done Broadway, you know, whatever it may be, like, whatever you can think of, we've probably done it. So, I can do a little bit of everything.

So, I'm definitely versatile, in that sense. But I, I probably stick at home more with like pop music and things. So, I would consider myself a pop princess. But I'm definitely... um, like, as far as if you go into, like... you know, you have people in the drag world, you consider them looks queens. So, like, their makeup is what they're best at. I'm not – like, I'm good at makeup, but I'm not like up-there amazing. I'm definitely not a full comedy queen, but I'm, kind of, funny. So, like, that's mixed in there. Um, but I would say where I shine at is my lip sync specifically with ballads. So, I would almost call myself a ballad queen. I don't know, I'm just really good at it, so... [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Cool.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah.

Madison Lammert: Um, you said, "hot mess," can you tell me a little bit more about what that means?

Mercury M. Poisoning: [Laughs] Yeah, I just say that to myself, probably because I'm a very, like, self-deprecating person, you know, just to, kind of, make a joke. That's what I... that's how my humor goes. But I always say, "hot mess" because, like, I'm not super great at styling hair. So, like, I can make my hair look presentable, but it may not look the best. So, it's, kind of, like, one of those situations where I'm like, "Eh, it's good." But it is something that I'm actively working on to try to get better at, so then I won't say I'm a hot mess anymore.

But there's just little things that, like, I'm super nitpicky, 'cause I'm a perfectionist when it comes to certain things. And so, in drag, I've had to really, like, be like, "I can't fix some of these things" or you know, whatever. So then it just, kind of, falls under the hot mess category.

Madison Lammert: Mm-hmm. Okay. So, who or what has influenced your drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, oh, um, that's, uh, that's a good question. Let's see. Also, sorry, I just changed my name on my... I realized it was still my name from a previous trivia night I was a part of. So, anyway, so I changed that. But, um, who has influenced? Um, I don't know. I mean, I feel like a lot of my influences come from things I see on Drag Race. Because even though, like, you know, there's a lot of things that have happened with RuPaul, you know, and comments that she's made towards different communities, or, you know, different populations. So, like, not... maybe not the best, but I watch it for the fashion and for the queens that are using their platforms to change and make a difference and things.

But, like, I really, really enjoyed, um, like, Raven when she was on her season, who has gone on to do so much in drag, and, like, Bob the Drag Queen, who's a comedy queen, but does so much, like, activism and things like that. But it's like, as far as performance styles, I would say I probably lean more towards, like, kind of, how Bob the Drag Queen does it or even, maybe... I don't know. I'm not even sure who else.

But I, I mean, as far as, like, celebrities go, I always... I, I mean, I enjoy... like I do a lot of Dua Lipa, so I feel like her music, specifically, and probably her, you know, because it's her music, has influenced me a lot, um, 'cause I love performing her music. Or I just look at some of the old, like... I don't know, like, maybe some of the artists from the 90s, maybe, because I don't do a lot of 90s but, like, I like that style, so... But I, I don't know, that's always a hard question for me to answer, so I'm sorry it's not a super great answer. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: What about Bob the Drag Queen? You said her performance style? Can you describe that a little bit to me?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes, she's always like, um... she's a comedy queen, so it's, kind of, like, there's like a funny aspect to it where she's, like, just very, um... she makes a lot of expression with her face and with her mouth, because she... like, she does really well with her lip sync. So, I feel like I do similar things. She can dance and things, but she doesn't always do that. Like, sometimes she just does a little bit of, you know, movement or expression with her hands.

And I definitely do that because I am not a dancer, by any stretch of the imagination. And, and I'm, I'm aware of that, and it's okay. I, I try but, like, it's, it's, uh, it's not some of those, like, you see people that are, like, kicking and twirling and whatnot. I just can't do it. It just looks awkward when I try to do it. The best I can do as a cartwheel. But, but Bob the Drag Queen does that expression and, like, really knows her lip sync, so I... that's why I like to think that I'm a little bit like her in that regard. But, definitely, very, just like, overexpression is, kind of, the main point of hers.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Okay. Um, do you consider your drag to be political?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I would like to say no, because I hate politics. I keep up with it enough to be... like, to be knowledgeable, so I know what's happening and can make my own informed decisions. But drag in itself is kind of a political move, I would say, because it is something that's challenging the binary as far as, you know, trans rights go and, and nonbinary rights and things

like that. It is challenging that binary of, "Oh, it's just male and female," which is not the case. You know, it, it's showing that people can be fluid, or, you know, they can be solid, and their identity, whatever that identity may be, but they can still be fluid enough that they can express their gender in different ways, if they want to.

Because, you know, for drag, like, for a lot of people, drag is just expressing a different gender, but for other people, it is a full exploration of their identity. Because some people get into dr-- into drag and then, you know, later on, realize, um, you know, "This feels right in drag, like, this, this feels like who I should really be." And a lot... you know, a lot of trans people go through that journey. Not, not all of them, by any means, but I've known several trans people that have gone through that journey of starting out they're like, "Oh yeah, I'm just doing drag because it's something I'm interested in." And then, you know, that interest came from the fact that they're... they are trans and maybe didn't know it yet and, you know, kind of, go on that journey and figure that out. So, so yes, probably, it is, whether I want it to be or not. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Yeah. That's something we've been talking a lot about in class. So, I mean, these questions are all given from the professor because it's, like, a research study, you know? Um, but I was particularly excited to see your response to that one.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. So, um, so, um, you had mentioned being part of a drag family and, um, how...? Can you tell me a little bit more about how that works?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. So, I've been a part of two different drag families. You know, my first one was Scarlett Cyanide, and we were part of what we called the House of Defiance because none of us say... or none of us have the last name, but normally, you know, everybody will have the last... same last name or, um... so, like, I don't know if you watch Drag Race at all, but, like, this most recent season that's still happening, there was, um... I can't think of her first name, but her last name was Iman. So, there was the House of Iman, so all of her children, their last name is Iman, or Iman is in their name somewhere. And that's how you know they're all together. And that happens a lot too with, you know, other families. So, it might be, like, I don't know the... right? Or in St. Louis, like, the House of Control, they were... there are a ton of Controls. They all change their last name. But we didn't do that. So, we all kept our own last names or... if we had one, and just named the house a different name.

And then I left that family. Scarlett, I still consider to be my drag mom, but I have another drag mom, who's Roxxy Malone, who... she is very... you know, she's very well known in St. Louis and everything. And so, I added, like, to my name... just, like, side note, I added an M into my name. So, I'm Mercury M Poisoning.

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: So, that way it, kind of, has the Malone feel. So, I'm tied in there. But didn't change my last name to Malone or anything. So, um, didn't, didn't want to change my name again. And she was fine with that as well. And so, in that house, like, we call ourselves the Dynasties, so we're the, um... well we're the Dynasty.

But basically, kind of, how it works is when... a lot of times when... in a situation when you have a drag mom, it's because they saw something in you, they see promise, they see, you know, something, and want to either help you reach your goals, or they want to give you advice. Or, it may just start out where they're just giving you advice, and then it slowly comes, and then you make it official, or you may never make it official. But, you know, a lot of times it comes from a place of mentorship. So, a drag mom or a drag dad or whatever it may be, would mentor you, give you tips, give you advice, help you out.

You know, we're lucky because Roxxy has... uh, her fiancé also sews and does a very well j—like, does very well at it. So, we're able to, you know, work with him to get new costuming and things like that, and have a little bit better access to it that, you know, other people aren't always able to. So, we don't have to order it from somewhere; we can have a completely custom piece made, you know, as long as he's willing to do it, which that's fine, because it's his... you know, it's [laughs] his right to say yes or no, but... um, because I have some crazy ideas sometimes and they're, they're all out there every now and again.

But, when you're in a drag family, like, I have drag siblings, and so, you know, we... I have... Roxie Valentine is my drag sister, Lucy Couture is my drag sister. Then I was adopted. So, I'm the third. And then Brother Daniel was adopted. And so, he is a drag king, and I consider, um... I just call him my drag sibling, because out of drag, he uses they/them pronouns, in drag, he's fine with they or he pronouns. And so, I always just call him my drag sibling, and we're considered the twins, him and I are.

So, [laughs], so, it, it's very much like a real family dynamic, because, like, we all hang out, we have a group chat, we all help each other. But Roxxy's our mother, you know, the main reason, kind of, the part that ties us all together. And then we each have our own relationships with each other and, and still help each other and give advice, whether we want it or not, to each other. It's a very... like, a regular family dynamic. We even hang out. Like, we do Christmas every year and do, like, a little gift exchange and, uh, we try to get together every now and again as a family and, and things like that, so...

Madison Lammert: That's so cool. Is it...? So, you said that you, uh, switch families? Is that something that, like, most drag artists will do? No?

Mercury M. Poisoning: No [laughs]. It was very, um... it's a weird situation, really. But it, it's not something that's super common. It may happen. And it may happen more than I'm aware of, but I don't think it's something that is super common. Just, it was... when I did it, just... you know, like, I, I don't mind talking about it. Um, so, like, when I did it, it was very much... I just didn't feel like I fit in anymore. In that family, it was all kings, and then...

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Me and Scarlett, who were queens. And not that that... there's anything wrong with that. Because I can learn a ton from kings, but they also don't know female drag, necessarily, because that's not what they're doing. Like, you know, they're presenting as male or a more androgynous look, just depending on which performer it was. And it was... like, I didn't

feel like I was growing, and I didn't feel like I was being pushed. And so, then I just decided I didn't... I... and Scarlett agreed, and I was like, "I'm gonna leave the family," and you know, talked about it. And they all took it very personally and thought it was something they did, which it wasn't. Like, it was all very much... it was something I needed to do, and I'm glad I did it, you know, to this day I'm still glad I did it. I love being part of Roxxy's family. I love still having Scarlett as an influence and a... you know, a, a mother in my life, but it was definitely a better choice for me, and it's, it's worked out for me.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. So, where do you and your family perform?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. So, the show that I coproduce with Roxxy is at Leo's Pub & Grill in St. Charles.

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: It's... uh, we, we're actually celebrating our three-year anniversary in April. So, we have a big... a big to-do gonna happen for that, you know, brand new costumes and we're... I'll let you in on a little secret, we're doing a little photoshoot soon to change our... kind of, our branding for it. So, that's, that's gonna be exciting.

And then Roxxy has a weekly show at the Grey Fo-- uh, the Grey Fox in St. Louis called "See You Next Tuesday." So, it's every Tuesday. So, I'm, I'm sometimes there, you know, the family is sometimes there. Some of us perform at Rehab every now and again. Roxxy also coproduces a show on Fridays and Saturdays at Bar:PM in St. Louis. So, we are all there every now and again as, as well. You know, if they need people, we get cycled through. Because, you know, there's a ton of people in St. Louis that do drag, so it's... you got to cycle through who is doing that. Not everybody's performing right now because of COVID, either. So, like, you see a lot of the same people right now, but once COVID is hopefully over, fingers crossed, we will... you know, that'll, that'll spread out to where we have more performers coming through.

But they also... like it's just other random, like, one-off ones. You know, there's other days at Grey Fox that we'll perform. Brother Daniel hosts the Monday Night Show, which is drag karaoke. So, a lot of Grey Fox performances, a lot of Bar:PM, a lot of Leo's performances. I think there's a place in Soulard, oh, Bastille, on... which is on Monday nights that they occasionally perform there as well. I haven't performed there yet, but maybe one day. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: So, like, St. Charles, St. Louis areas is where you guys are?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, that would be the main place. And then, every now and again, there's different gigs. Like, I've been booked to work at, uh, Illinois College, I think it was. I've been booked to work there before, so, like, you know, maybe different, like, school shows that are in different areas. But... and then, like, I do... I'm lucky enough that I, I got to do, um... that I've been hired to do some different, like, bingo nights and trivia nights. So, like, I'll get all dolled up in the drag, and then I'll host a bingo night for different schools and, um... or trivia nights for different schools. So, that's a lot of fun, too.

Madison Lammert: Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's really awesome. So, can you tell me a little bit about what goes into getting all dolled up in drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: [Laughs] Yeah, there's a lot. Um, so, you know, kind of, my routine, I, I always like to shower before I get ready, because I have to shave my face and everything. And so, I shave as close to possible, because I am one of the unlucky queens where I have a lot of... or I have, like, thicker facial hair that grows pretty quickly. So, I always have to shave, like, as close to possible as, like... as I'm getting ready. And then I also actually shave off my eyebrows, which you can, kind of, tell, but there's light from a window happening right now, but... so, I shave my eyebrows off completely. I used to not, and I just found that it saved me at least 30 minutes, if not more time, getting ready if I just shave them off. Because otherwise, you have to glue them down with, like, glue sticks and everything, and it just takes a lot to do that and make sure they're covered and don't look chunky. And I was tired of that, so I was like, "Yeah, you're gone." [Laughs]

And then, after that, of course, it's just getting ready. So, for me, I can do it in about an hour, hour and a half if I don't have time. If I do have time, I like to take a little bit longer, and usually it'll take me two or two and a half hours. But yeah, like, brief... like, how I do is, you know, I shave everything, and then I have to color correct my beard so it doesn't show through, and then foundation. And then, from there, I do my eyes. So, I powder everything... or no, actually, I powder everything, and then I do my contour, so I powder contour to make my lines on my cheek, my forehead darker, like, under my chin.

And then I go through my eyes. And so, it's... my eye shape is usually the same. My drag sister, Roxie Valentine, recommended, like, with my eyes shape, I should try a different style. So, I've been trying something new lately, where I cover my entire eyelid in eyeliner, and then my, like, crease of my eye is a little bit higher, kind of, on, like, my brow bone almost.

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: And so, that's how I do that. So, I do all my eyes. And then once my eyes are done, really, the only thing left I have is blush and then my lips. And so, I, I do all of that. And my, my eyes, of course, are what takes the longest, because that's what you see the most probably, and they're the most detailed part of the... of the drag. [Laughs] So, I, I do that, and like I said, I can do it in about an hour. If I'm new, it definitely takes longer because I don't want to mess up, and I want it to look pretty. And then I usually end up messing up and panic a little bit, but we get it sorted out in the end.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. I feel like that's like, every time I do my makeup, I feel like there's one thing.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Exactly.

Madison Lammert: No, I feel like that's just like, everybody goes through it. What would you say are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. I guess I didn't finish, like, one thought about the other one: After I do drag, like, I do my face at home and then I go to the bar. And then I, actually, wear five pairs of tights. So, I have pads, so think like a couch cushion, on either side of my hips to give me bigger... like, to give me bigger hips and a, a bigger butt. And then I have four pairs of tights, over top of that, I have a corset. And then I have a pair of tights that are, like, netted, that are like fish nets, but they're nude, so they match, like, make it look more like by skin tone, rather than shiny. Like, ballet tights make your legs shiny. So, it, kind of, cuts down on that shine. And then, I have a bra, and then I stuff my bra with, like, Beanie Babies, basically, like, it's the stuff from inside Beanie Babies.

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: I mean, so that's what gives me the volume there. And then I put a shaper on over that. And then it's my costume. So, there's a lot that's happening underneath the costume to, kind of, give you that, like... for me, I, I'm all about... like, I want that, like, hourglass figure. Not everybody does, but I do. And so, that's why there's so much [unclear]. But anyway, back to your next question, which was... hold on, repeat the question again. I lost all train of thought.

Madison Lammert: The biggest challenges?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes. Okay. So, the biggest challenges, of course, are staying... I want to say, are staying current. So, a lot of queens... and I mean, I'm still bad at this too, but a... and not even just queens, but a lot of performers, once they find something they're good at, they tend to stick with that. So, like, once I started doing cartwheels, I was like, "Oh, I can do this." So, I would do it every single show. So, like, my drag mom is like, "Hey, do you realize that you're doing this all the time?" And I was like, "No, I didn't at first, but now I definitely do." So, like, trying to find other things I can do, so, where I'm not... so, like, maybe once every three or four shows, I'll do a cartwheel, instead of doing it every single show. Like, yes, everybody loves it, but, like, it gets boring after a while, like, "Oh, she's gonna do a cartwheel." Like, you know, you don't want to be predictable.

And then it's also, like, staying current with songs. So, like, everybody, you know, a ton of people do, like, old songs, like, they'll do classic songs; there's songs that are specifically, like, you know this is a drag song. You know, and a lot of people do those. But also trying to stay current where you're doing new music, but not overdoing it and, like, you're keeping up, like, building up your library of performances.

Like, I have... I use Apple Music, and so I have an entire playlist of all songs that I've done before. And then, you know, if it is someplace new, I may bring out one of those instead of learning a new song. But I'll bring out one of those and be like, "Oh yeah, I've done this before," and, you know, usually still have the costume or whatever. And so, I can cycle through all of that. So, I'm still showing either new things or old looks, but I haven't worn them for a few, maybe, months or a few weeks or however long. That way you keep up the variety, and it doesn't get boring. You know, you never want to bore your audience. So, uh, it's... that's, I want to say, the biggest challenge.

Of course, you always also deal with a lot of people that are stupid, in my opinion, of, like... you have people that don't know drag that are just, like, very judgmental of the fact that you do drag. Or you have people that, like... like, my personal big... like, the thing that I always struggle with is, like, I'm single which, whatever. But I find a lot of people that, when they find out I'm a drag queen, don't wanna date me after that point. And so, that's a bigger struggle for me as well, that not everybody faces, but it's definitely something that I face and, like, have to work through all the time.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Why do you think that is?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I, I don't know. I've never figured it out. Like, the thing I always hear is, like, people are like, "Oh, well, I wanna date a man that's a man," which is like, that's super toxic [laughs] [unclear].

Madison Lammert: Yeah.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Because I'm like, you know, I still identify as a man, I'm a cis, uh, you know, cis gay guy. So, I, you know, identify with the, the gender and the sex I was assigned at birth, and I do identify with that. I just enjoy getting dolled up and looking pretty and having people tell me I'm beautiful. And, you know, I enjoy that. But that doesn't mean I'm trans. It doesn't mean I identify, you know, any other way. Because I'm not trans; I don't identify as trans. And like, usually, that's what it comes to. They're just like, "Oh well, you're too feminine for me," is, like, how it usually comes to.

Madison Lammert: Yeah.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Like, I don't see that... like, yeah, I'm a feminine person, but, like, I embrace it or I try to at this point, just because otherwise I'll go crazy, so...

Madison Lammert: Yeah, yeah. We read something about that, too. So, I, I guess, like, if you thought you're the only one, you're not. Like, that's like a phenomenon or something.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah.

Madison Lammert: And we were all trying to figure it out in class. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I mean, I would say St. Louis is very different in the fact that we have a lot of drag kings...

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: As well. So, I, I would say I can't speak on, you know, behalf of other populations. Maybe they do have more kings, and I'm just not aware of it. But St. Louis has a lot of kings that do really well. But, but they are also very underappreciated, I would say, because, for whatever reason... which I, I also think this is stupid, is that people don't appreciate drag kings the way they appreciate drag queens. And I'm like, I don't know why, because, you know, they still have to have makeup skills to, you know, make their... make themselves look more masculine. And I don't know if it's just because they don't typically wear the big hair, or maybe

they don't wear, you know, like, the big costumes. They, you know, they wear more, like, suits and, um... or, you know, vests and things like that. But, like, they're still doing every... you know, they're still doing all the work, and not getting the same payout, which I, I don't think it's fair.

So, I know we always try to... like, with the shows I do, we always try to, um, you know, incorporate drag kings, so that way we can have that representation and that variety, because it's not fair. But I would say we're lucky, though, in that sense, that we do have a lot of, of kings represented, that other places don't necessarily have that.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Okay. Um, and I think you touched on it a little bit, but can you explain a little bit more about how COVID-19 has impacted your life as a drag artist?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. I mean, a year ago is when kinda, you know, the shutdown happened. And at that time, all shows were canceled everywhere. And so, we didn't start back until, I want to say, sometime in June. And so, St. Louis opened up enough that they started having shows, but they were at earlier times. So, we bumped up our show times. And so, we're done a lot sooner, which is nice, because we get to go home sooner. But it starts sooner, so it's harder for people that work... that may work like a day job. Not everybody has a day job, or they have different ones where they're able to get off sooner. But, like, I work until 6:00. So, an earlier start time means I don't have as much time to get ready, which is fine, we, we make do with it.

But, so, that's been an impact. But you know, to try and still do drag, we would try to do virtual performances, which were good, but I don't know how well they went, 'cause people found it awkward to, like, tip you, like, "Oh, I'm gonna just tip you \$3," which is... you know, a lot of people just tip \$1 for... per performance, and then you do three performances at a show, normally. So, you would make, like, \$3 a person, essentially. And so, it's really awkward to just be like, "Oh, I'm just gonna send you a dollar." Or people didn't have excess money because COVID, and, like, didn't have jobs or whatnot. So, that made it difficult.

But then, I mean, as soon as we started up, like, other things that made it difficult is, like, in St. Charles, there are no mask mandates. You know, everybody's encouraged to wear their masks. The businesses can have a mass mandate if they want to, but it's not required, like it is in St. Louis. And so, like in St. Louis in the bars, you have to wear a mask, you have to be, you know, six feet apart, you have limited capacity. St. Charles just did limited capacity, but not necessarily anything else.

And so, you know, like, the bar I have, they... she doesn't have to regulate it the same way they do in St. Louis. And so, like, we don't have to wear a mask if we don't want to. We encourage all of our patrons to wear a mask, but it's not enforced because the city doesn't have anything saying they have to. And so, we get a lot of issues with that, because people think they know better, and I'm like, "I understand we're in a pandemic, and we're doing our best, but like, we also have to have a show because somehow-- sometimes this is the only way some people are surviving." Like, you know, this always supplements the rest of my income to make sure I have enough for my bills. And so, like we deal with that of people thinking they know more about our show than

we do and making comments that they think they know better, but really, they're just irrelevant, and they're bitter about that fact. And so, they're just trying to make it problematic for everyone else.

But, like, we always tell our performers they can wear their shields if they want to, and we encourage them to wear their shields, but if they choose not to, you know, they don't have to, because they're... we're not in a place that it's required. And so, we're just following our own rules and regulations, but we are giving that option. I mean, of course, now that people are starting to get vaccinated, less people are wanting to wear them anyways, so I mean, there's only so much we can do. But, it's definitely different. Performing with a face shield is hard because it gets fogged up, or you get makeup on it, or [laughs] you can't see, depending on the type of one you have. And so, it's just made it more challenging, but we're still able to do it, and, you know, still have a good time. So, one day maybe we won't have to wear them again, which I hope, because they rub my makeup off all the time, but other than that, like, they're manageable.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. I feel like that would be really interesting, but... so, you guys won't be in... like, you won't be performing in, like, an actual mask, right, that covers your...? Like, how...? Is that even possible to do that?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I would say, no, that's probably not possible, because you wouldn't be able to see our face. So, we have face shields. So, they have some that are like a headband that cover your face. It's just like, you know, a thing of plastic. I have one right now that, like, do you know Hannibal Lecter, like, the little mask thing he had over his mouth? Do you know what you're... do you know what I'm talking about?

Madison Lammert: Sorry, I muted myself because my sister is playing music, even though I asked her not to.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Um, so if it bothers you could just tell me to mute...

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh, no, you're good.

Madison Lammert: Um, but, like, are you talking about the ones where he couldn't, like, bite people?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes.

Madison Lammert: You have one of those?

Mercury M. Poisoning: So, it's kind of, like, that but it's clear, essentially.

Madison Lammert: Oh! Interesting.

Mercury M. Poisoning: So, like, it hooks over your ear, and then it just sits over your nose and your mouth, but it's clear, so you can see everything. But we always joke and call it, like, the Hannibal Lecter mask because that's, kind of, what it looks like, is that one so he won't bite people. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: That is so int...! You can make a costume out of that.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Honestly. I mean, and I'm sure somebody has. I probably should do that. That'd be fun. But yeah, then other ones they have are, like, little goggles, so, like, you... or not goggles, but they're glasses. So, you put glasses on, but it's still the plastic. Those ones are really hard to see out of because the lights glare off of it. So, some people have started cutting out, like, the eye portion, so you can see out without any problem, but you still have the rest of the mask covering, or the shield covering your nose and your mouth. So, I don't know if it helps, but, you know, we definitely wear them to make sure that we're not, like, spitting on anybody.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, that is interesting.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah.

Madison Lammert: Okay. So, switching gears now into more of your personal identities. So, what pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, so in drag I use she/her pronouns; out of drag, I will use he/him pronouns. But I really will answer to pretty much anything. So, I mean, if somebody wants to use different pronouns for me, like, I'll answer to them. Because, like, out of drag, even when we're with our drag family, we still refer to each other as our drag names. So, like, you know, I may not be in drag but, like, I'm gonna go hang out with Roxxy, and then later I'll still call her Roxxy, she'll still call me Mercury, and we still use like, the pronouns we use for them in drag, we still use those pronouns.

So, they, when they refer to me, they use she/her pronouns. Like, I don't care, like, it doesn't bother me any. 'Cause, you know, I, I'm solid enough in my own identity that, like, I'm flexible and I don't mind that. But, you know, there are some people that it, it is particular, like... and maybe not particular, like, I don't want to seem like it's a bad thing because it's not. Because, like, Brother Daniel uses they/them out of drag, but in drag, is okay with he/him. But they don't necessarily like it out of drag, per se, because they are going for... or not going for, but they, you know, they identify more with the they/them pronouns. So, it's, kind of, knowing, knowing your person and asking what's comfortable. So, like, it's different for everybody. But, like I said, mine are... mine, I'm flexible, I don't care, whatever, [laughs] whatever you want to call me.

Madison Lammert: Perfect. Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities in any way?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, not for me, I would say. I mean, the only way... it's kind of, like, what I touched on as far as, like, relationships, but not my own personal identity. I mean, if anything, I've come out of my shell a little bit more, but other than that, I would say no, it didn't really change anything.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Okay. Um, has it influenced the way you think about gender?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Definitely. Because, I mean, I... like I said, I grew up in a very small town, that it was very male and female, people aren't different, predominantly white, like, zero diversity. Like, the most diversity we had, we did have some Latinx families, and we did have some other families of color, but we didn't necessarily have... it was mostly white people that are

farmers. And we had some Amish as well, like, we had a big Amish community. But still, again, the Amish are predominantly white. It was just a different, like, religion, essentially, if that.

So, I wasn't exposed to a lot. So, I was very much stuck in that, like, yeah, it's male and female; there's nothing else. And so, it's really helped open my eyes and meet a lot of different people that are exploring their genders and their sexualities and stuff in different ways for me, but I am able to ask, or, at least if I hear about it, be like, "Okay, I don't want to be offensive, necessarily, and ask them, because they probably get asked questions like this a lot. Like, I'll go educate myself and if I need clarification, I know I have people that I can ask clarification questions on, you know, for something. So, I would say yes, it really has opened me up to a lot more that I wasn't aware of, and I'm glad that I, I'm... have that knowledge now.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. And on the... like, kind of, flipping it around, have your personal and sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh, I mean, I don't think so. I don't think so. I mean... I don't know, I always... you know, when I'm on the mic, hosting, since, you know, I coproduce, I host that show as well with Roxxy; we both host it. I mean, it definitely comes out at that point... because, like, you know, I always make jokes about... even though I'm dolled up and, you know, presenting more feminine, I always, you know, still make jokes as, like, a gay guy would. But, you know, I... so, I guess a little bit, but I don't think it does, like, to a great extent I would say.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Okay. So, these are more fun questions, in my opinion. How has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, so I would say it still hasn't. I would still say it has influenced me but not, like completely. But my confidence is definitely a lot higher. Once I started doing drag, I came out of my shell a little bit more, I do speak up a little bit more for myself. I can still be very timid and shy and afraid to do things, but, like, as Mercury I feel like I can do anything. And I don't know what the difference is. I don't know if it's just 'cause I'm in makeup, so I do look a little bit different, so not everybody always knows who I am. Which is nice, but, yeah, I would say I'm definitely... I'm more confident than I was previously, so I have seen a difference, but...

Madison Lammert: Yeah, awesome. And if you could go back in time as Mercury, what advice would you give her?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I would say to Mercury... I would tell her to start doing her, her own makeup sooner. I didn't start doing my own makeup until, like, two, two years in or so. Start performing sooner in the city, start doing your own makeup sooner, and learn how to sew [unclear]. Like, this would be back in, like, high school, like, go back to high school, learn how to sew starting in high school, and start getting there, so when you get to college, you can just do it for fun. And because now I'm in that mode... like, I mean, I'm 27, so, like, now I'm in the... kind of, that place where I'm like, "I don't want to learn a new skill." So, yeah, I would say learn how to sew, start doing your makeup sooner, and don't care what anybody says, like, Mercury is going to be amazing, and people are going to love her, so just keep letting her grow.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Awesome. Um, is there...? Are there any other ways that you would say it has impacted you or changed you?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I mean, I would say, it's just given me a really amazing chosen family that... you know, I'm very [inaudible] my, my blood family. And so, it's very... like, I'm lucky, in that sense. I do have... even though, you know, my parents don't come to shows. Like, my mom still asks how my shows are like. Like, she'll still look at pictures, watch videos. They just don't wanna see it in person, necessarily, which I can... you know, I can handle that, like, at least she's been supportive and asking. It's not like she's being negative about it. So, I would say like, like, I have a great blood family and support system there, but I have, like... I've come to the realization that I can have a really great chosen family that, like, I love and I care for, that is supportive, and we act just like my blood family would act with each other.

And so, I, I've, you know, been very lucky in that. And so, I do have this amazing support system, like, throughout my entire life, that I have so many people that I can go to, when I have issues or I have questions, and, you know, and, and if they're able, they'll drop everything in that moment, and come help me out with what I need, or give me advice in that moment. Even if it was just a quick FaceTime, like, Roxxy gave all of us keys to her place, to her and Ryan's place, and so if we ever needed to just get away, all we have to do is call or text and say, "Hey, can I...? I'm on my way." And they're like, "Yeah, you let yourself in, like, you're good." And so, like, we have that place to go, um, which is amazing.

Madison Lammert: That's awesome. [Background conversation.] Yeah, I don't know what's going on with my phone today. Um, I don't know why we still have a home phone, but apparently, something got charged. It's probably a scam.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh yeah, you're fine. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: I'm, like, sitting here and what this is twice in this meeting. Like, this never happened. Um, so yes. So, you were talking about the chosen family. Okay, perfect. Okay. Um, this is a long question. Okay. I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa, or 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 the social identities have impacted your experience of drag, and/or how drag has impacted your experience of social identity?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. I think... I think I'll... I think I'm answering it the way it needs to be answered. But, uh...

Madison Lammert: Yeah, it's such a mouthful.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, no, that's okay. Um, I... basically, where I'm at is, I think like, when I started drag, and even before I started drag, like I told you, I had a very... um, I had a very uneducated, narrow mind, because it was based off of the area I lived in, and I didn't realize there were other... like, there were other options, there were other people out there that were much different from me. I mean, I knew I did, but I didn't have as I didn't have quite as an understanding as I thought I did.

And so, you know, like doing drag has definitely opened my mind to various other identities and learning about different identities and different cultures, because there's so many different places that do drag, and it looks different in different areas of the world as well.

And so, there, there's... I would say, I have a greater understanding, and that it has shaped me to be, I want to say... I want to think a better person that is more knowledgeable of different cultures, different backgrounds from myself that I can... and then, that I... I understand that I have privilege, you know, based off of the fact that I'm white, and I'm a drag queen. So, in the drag community, that's top of the food chain. Unfortunately, because that's why people, like... I don't know, I don't even know why. But I'm under-- I understand that I have that privilege and that having a show of my own, you know, with Roxxy, that we're able to give, you know, opportunities to other people that don't always get the opportunities to perform because of either the color of their skin or because they're a king, which are, you know, for whatever reason looked down upon. And so, we're able to, kind of, combat that and, and give opportunities to people that didn't necessarily get them at first.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Okay, perfect.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Hope that answered that [unclear].

Madison Lammert: Yeah, I think it answered it perfectly. Um, so now, I have a few more questions that are more about your ideas of drag in general. So, if someone were to ask you to define drag, how would you define it?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I would define drag as expressing gender in a way that may be different from what you... how you express it normally, and doing it in an exaggerated way to make everything bigger, better, brighter, more fun, and exciting, plus 10 pounds of makeup. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Yes, of course. What do you think is drag's purpose?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I think that varies depending on the performer. So, you know, for some people, it's a source of income, and it is the way they make their living. For people like me, it's, uh, it's a fun way to be a different person for a few hours, while also be entertaining and you know, stroke your ego just a little bit by having people tell you, "You're great," and "You're pretty," and that they love you, when you don't necessarily always hear that. But then it's also, like I said, supplementing my income. So, it's... um, while it's not something regular, I don't do it, like, super regularly, I mean, I have my... you know, the show every other week at Leo's, but, you know, it is a... it is, kind of, a nice, little, like, supplemental income to help cover the rest of my bills that my day job may not cover, so... but yeah, so I would say it varies for people.

Madison Lammert: Yes. Do you think that drag is sexual?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, yeah. [Laughs] We have, in the community, what we call chasers. And they are, um... and I don't want to be stereotypical, but a lot of times they are, like, slightly creepy men that either think you're a real woman... because it happens a lot to drag queens. I don't know, I can't speak for kings, I'm not sure, I'm assuming it happens to them as well. But it does happen a lot to queens where they'll just be like, "Oh my gosh, you're so gorgeous," and

they're in, like... you know, they're in your DMS, whether it's on Instagram or with, I don't know, Facebook, if you have a Facebook page. And then, of course, they started sending you inappropriate pictures, because they're just, like... yeah, it's not fun. So, that happens a lot. So, I would say, in that sense, yes, it is sexual to that point, 'cause to that person it's very sexual. But, like, with performances and everything, I... you know, a lot of queens, a lot of kings play up that, like, sex aspect of trying to make things a little bit more fluid, sexual movements, you know, messing with people. So, I would say, yes, it's very... I would say, yeah, it's sexual. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Yeah, perfect. Um, and you, kind of, touched on it a little bit, but how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Mercury M. Poisoning: So, I mean, I still like RuPaul's Drag Race. I may have different feelings about RuPaul. Like, she's gorgeous, and she does give a lot of opportunities to people that may not have had, and has really brought drag to the forefront. But, you know, some of her own views about trans individuals and, you know, different... other different performers hasn't always been the best.

And so, I'm hoping that she's slowly trying... or, you know, that she's trying to learn and do better. You know, I don't know if she is, but I hope she is, but I still... I really enjoy watching it for the fashion because these queens have so many ideas based off of these different runways challen-- runway challenges, that, like, they take it to places that I didn't think drag could go. And it's just getting those ideas and seeing, like... being like, "Oh, that's a really good idea. How can I take this idea and make that my own, so I'm not just ripping off what they did? But I'm able to, you know, also express myself in a similar way because that matches my aesthetic," or whatever. So, I still like RuPaul's Drag Race. I watch all the different variations. So, like, right now, UK is on and the US. And so, I'm watching both of those. But it is nice. I would... I would say I like it. There, there could be better shows, but I still like it. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Yeah. Do you watch, like, the Untucked episodes [overtalking]?

Mercury M. Poisoning: No, not Untucked. I should, but I don't. I just watch the regular episodes, and then I don't watch Untucked. I'm lazy. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Okay. No, that's... I mean, we, for our class, um, we get to watch Season 9.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Okay.

Madison Lammert: So, it's kind of funny 'cause I have homework that's to, like, go and watch the Untucked that pairs with it, you know?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes. I love that.

Madison Lammert: And I'm like, this is my favorite homework. Like, this is the best homework I've ever...

Mercury M. Poisoning: No, that is amazing. I love that.

Madison Lammert: Yes. So, I mean, that's why I've been watching Untucked because I didn't even know it existed before, you know?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes. No, I support...

Madison Lammert: Mm-hmm?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I support that. I love that. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Yeah, it is so fun. It's... yeah. Um, I never imagined that we would have, like, college classes about some of the stuff we do now, and it's so amazing. You were talking about some of RuPaul's own views being kind of problematic. You mentioned her views on trans individuals?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes.

Madison Lammert: Can you explain that a little more to me?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, um, basically, kind of, what's happened... or not necessarily what's happened, but she just said, and it was a couple of years ago, um, but there was... there were questions about like, "Why haven't you had trans women or trans men or anything on Drag Race? Why don't you have drag kings?" And she basically said some things along the lines of that, you know, if you are a trans woman, and you're doing female drag, you're not a real drag queen because you've most likely... and this isn't always the case, but you've most likely had work done or something to, kind of, give you more of that feminine feature, because, you know, you have... if you have fully transitioned, you know, you might... that might be the case. And so, she thinks that's, kind of, giving a leg up to the, you know, the game, um, rather than being like a cis guy who does drag like I do, where you have to put on the pads and the... and the boobs and everything. So, she just said some things like that about how she wouldn't ever really let trans individuals on there. And she has had some trans individuals in the past, but they weren't out on the show. They came out after the show.

And so, like, one season, she did have Gia Gunn back for... and after... and so, after her original season, season, she came out, and then they had her back. So, then, I think Ru thought that was fixing everything, but it wasn't. And then, this season, the most recent season, they have Gottmik who is a trans man, and he does female drag. So...

Madison Lammert: That's interesting.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah. And so, he does that. And so, that... I think they also thought that was helping, which it is, like, I mean, it's giving more... you know, it's, it's progress. It's just not necessarily the progress we want to see. And like, why don't you have kings on there? Like, you know, people love kings, and they can compete with the best of them, so why not? But right now, they just don't. That's kind of where all that stemmed from.

Madison Lammert: Okay, perfect. Um, if you could change one thing about drag, whether it be in the drag scene, or the community, what would it be?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, let's see. One thing I would change... Um, I would change all the... I don't know, I feel like there's just a lot of pettiness that comes from people, that if someone's successful, like, why we can't just be happy for them? Why do we always feel like we have to

tear everyone else down if they are successful? Because that happens a lot. If you... um, you know, if you see other people being successful, instead of being like, "Oh my gosh, that's amazing. Congrats," half the community is, like, against you for some reason. The other half may be supportive, but for some reason, like, we like to turn on each other or turn each other against each other. And I just wish that didn't happen.

Madison Lammert: Yeah, that is very sad, especially since drag is such, like, an expressive art form, you know? Yeah.

Mercury M. Poisoning: I agree. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Um, what do you think are some misconceptions that people have about drag?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Hmm, misconceptions... Um, I think people think it... uh, you know, people that don't know a lot about drag, do think that people that do drag are trans. Um, and like we've said before, not all people are, you know, some people are doing it just for the expression, or maybe it is the ability to have a little bit more of a performance, whatever it may be. So, I don't know. It's... the big thing is, is that, is, like, just assuming that because you dress a certain way, that that means you identify that way as well. Um, and that's not always the case.

The other, I guess, misconception is that, like, if you do drag, that means you're hyper feminine, or... you know, specifically on the queen side of things, that means you're hyper feminine and that you either want to be a woman or that, like, out of drag, that also means you're super feminine. Like, don't get me wrong, out of drag I'm pretty feminine as well, but, like, I definitely try to play it out more when I'm in drag. And so, that's kind of where I'm at.

Madison Lammert: Where do you think that these ideas come from?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I think they are just, um, preconceived notions that are based off of either where somebody grew up, or, um, they... you know, people that just haven't been exposed to the drag community very much, and haven't had the chance to learn or haven't done the research themselves or talked to somebody about it. Um, I think that's, kind of, where that comes from, it's just preconceived notions.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. And what do you think would help fix it?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, mean, I definitely think more education on drag, like, making it not... like, yes, making it mainstream can be scary, but also, like, understanding... like, I don't know, giving people the opportunity to ask these questions or, like, making it okay to correct people, if they come up, and they're just like... like, I will say, you know, I made a joke about it earlier, but the biggest thing is when you're in drag, and you go up to somebody, they're just like, "Oh my gosh, I want you to do my makeup." Well, we're not all makeup artists, like, [inaudible]. I, I paint other people. It doesn't look terrible, but it is definitely not my best. And so, it's just assuming that because I can do my own makeup that we can paint everybody else, and we want to do that too. And we don't. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: Yeah.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Like, I [unclear]. If somebody wants me to paint them, I'm happy to go on that journey with them, especially if they're gonna pay me to do it, because a lot of times I have had offers to do that. Um, but I, you know, always tell them, I'm like, "It's not gonna look the same, like, 'cause your face is different from my face. So, I have to learn how to do your face."

Madison Lammert: Yeah. That's so interesting. Yeah. And if there's one thing that you want people to know about or learn about, drag, what is it?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I would say that it's just a good time. Like, go out and support your local performances. Because a lot of people that love drag might have found out about it because of Drag Race. And so, don't just go out and support those queens, because they're making a lot more money doing it. Not saying you shouldn't go support them at all, because, like, you should. Like, if you want to see your favorite queen, go see her... um, from Drag Race, you know, go see her. But you don't always... like, you should still... like, if you love drag that much, you should also be knowing... learning and knowing about your own drag culture, like, in the area you live in, and go and support those performers because they're... you know, for a lot of them, they're just trying to make a living and have a good time. Um, so, go support them and, and, you know, go on that journey with them.

Madison Lammert: Yeah. That's, that's a great way to end this, like, a cute little thing. Um, yeah. So, those are all the questions that I have. Is there anything else that you think I need to know?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Um, I don't think so. I think we've covered pretty much anything I could think of.

Madison Lammert: Okay, perfect. And, um, so, as part of this project, we will also be collecting, like, media of you. So, like, if you have any favorite pictures, like, or videos of performances, or flyers, like, anything you're super proud of, I'd be happy to go ahead and put those in there.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Okay.

Madison Lammert: Do you have a drag Facebook?

Mercury M. Poisoning: I do, um, it's...

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yeah, it's just Mercury Poisoning.

Madison Lammert: Okay. And may I pull from that too?

Mercury M. Poisoning: Oh, yeah, fully. Yeah. I try to post pictures on there. Um, you can also... the page that I... or that you messaged me on, the Ethan Todd Miller one, you are most welcome to friend me, if you want. And then, I post a lot of my pictures there too.

Madison Lammert: Okay.

Mercury M. Poisoning: But yeah, you can pull anything you need.

Madison Lammert: All right, perfect. Well, thank you so much. It was so nice meeting you and talking to you.

Mercury M. Poisoning: It was nice meeting you too.

Madison Lammert: And maybe, you know, after the pandemic clears, you'll see me in the audience or something, I'll wave to you or something.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Yes, yes, come visit. [Laughs]

Madison Lammert: I will for sure. I'm so excited.

Mercury M. Poisoning: Perfect [unclear].

Madison Lammert: Have a wonderful day.

Mercury M. Poisoning: You too. Bye.

Madison Lammert: Bye-bye.

Interview with Nadia Bizness

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Camryn: Alright. So, do you wanna just start out with introducing yourself?

Nadia Bizness: Yeah. So, my name is Brandon Nichols AKA Nadia Bizness. I've been doing drag for about four or five years, so yeah.

Camryn: Yeah. Awesome, awesome. Alright. So, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Nadia Bizness: Hmm... So, my first... here I'm going to turn my... my first experience with drag was through a cousin of mine. We... I call him Uncle Tony, but his drag name was Latanya Page. He exposed me to a whole new world.

Camryn: Okay, that's great. Alright. So, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Nadia Bizness: So, I started performing in... what? 2014, 2015? Uh, a friend of mine showed me his heels, the wig, the makeup, the glamor, and I was just like, "Oh my gosh, you... I can't believe you do this for a living. Like, I have to try it." And it was just a great experience. The first time I did it, my face was completely, like, just ugly and hideous, but I felt so powerful, and so... you know what I'm saying? So, I loved it.

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

Nadia Bizness: Okay. So, I was actually fortunate enough to not have to deal with, um, the pressures of that. My family was always very encouraging. My mom even helped me get my makeup together, choose the right colors, choose the right shades, all of that. So, very supportive foundation.

Camryn: Awesome. That's great, that's great. Alright. Where does your drag name come from?

Nadia Bizness: Okay. So, this is a funny story. So, my original name was Nadia Fierce. It came from the Vampire Diaries. I love that character, Katherine and Nadia, that combination. So, my friends were talking one day, and they were, kind of, making fun of me. They were like "Oh, your name's Nadia Fierce, blah blah blah. That's so basic, blah blah blah." And then, one day, I was like... they were like, "What's your name again, girl?" And I was like, "None of your business" like, "I don't want to talk about it." And that's when it clicked. They were like, "Oh my god, Nadia Bizness." And then, from there it just stuck.

Camryn: Alright. So, what is your personal... like, how would you label your drag? Are there any particular labels you use to characterize it? What's your style?

Nadia Bizness: Okay. So, I like to meet edginess with... edgy, classy mixed with ratchet. That's how I like to describe my drag. So, I love the whole leather look. I love the whole black. I love, um, pastels over, you know, my chest. I love all that stuff. Um, open exposure, thigh-high boots, high ponytail, that's like my signature look. Uh, I like to look edgy, but polished.

Camryn: Alright. Is there anybody that influenced your drag, and who is that person, or what was the influence?

Nadia Bizness: A couple people. So, my mom influenced me. I love her style. I love her makeup choices. My friend Vaughn, he's always been edgy and different, and I just love his confidence in anything he does. So, that inspired me as well. And then you know, people... celebrities like Beyoncé, Kim Kardashian, people who are fierce in their lives and just don't care about, like, you know, what other people think about them. They just go out and perform and give a good show.

Camryn: Awesome. Alright. Do you consider your drag political? Why or why not?

Nadia Bizness: That's a really good question. So, in a way, yes, because my drag is more body positivity. I am a... like, I would say I'm not, like, huge, but I am a bigger guy. And I believe in, you know, a bigger guy can wear, like, a two piece, he can wear a corset, he can expose his chest, he can have chest hair, like, you know, he can do bearded drag, he can have armpit hair and still look stunning and beautiful. So, my drag is more body positive more than anything.

Camryn: Yeah. Alright. Can you talk about your life as... what your life is like as a drag artist?

Nadia Bizness: Yeah, so, it's actually really weird. So, being a wedding planner is my normal profession, and getting all of the details and work that I have to do, the clientele I work with is exhausting in itself. And, um, these people require so much out of you. But it switches gears when I'm in drag because, you know, all of a sudden, "Oh my gosh you're a celebrity, you're so beautiful. Oh my gosh, let me take this photo with you. Oh my gosh, like, wow, you're so stunning." So, it's a different kind of world. Like, my normal self, you know, it's, it's weird, but when I turn on Nadia, it's like huge celebrity, huge attention factor, like, all that type of stuff, so... I hope that makes sense.

Camryn: Yeah. No, it makes sense. Are you a part of any drag family, house or collective?

Nadia Bizness: I was. I was part of the house, Legend. It's a house that my best friend, he started. But I, kind of, walked away from it just because it... when you... when you join a house, um, you follow their rules, you follow their brand. They want you to look a certain way. They want you to act a certain way. And I just... Nadia Bizness is not... she, she does not... I'm trying to think of the right word.

Camryn: She beats to the... or she dances to the beat of her own drum?

Nadia Bizness: Exactly.

Camryn: Yeah. Alright. How often do you perform, and where do you perform?

Nadia Bizness: Okay. So, I did perform recently back at, um, Hamburger Mary's Kansas City. I was in a drag competition with Widow Von'Du called Drag Survivor. I don't perform as often as much just because I moved to a new city, and the work here is just overwhelming. But it was a 12-week competition, um, and we performed every Thursday for 12 weeks. It was very intense, very challenging.

Camryn: Alright. Awesome. So, what goes into getting ready for a performance?

Nadia Bizness: So, as far as, like, this [unclear], the, the theme, the makeup choices, the outfit choices, the music choice, everything, it's, it's... takes a couple days, sometimes weeks of preparation because you know you wanna tie everything together. So, it could... it could take a couple weeks to execute a plan appropriately.

Camryn: Yeah.

Nadia Bizness: Sometimes everything doesn't even go as well. Sometimes it doesn't go as planned. Like, you know, sometimes people don't get what you are trying to put out, a lot of [unclear].

Camryn: Yeah. Alright. So, what are the biggest challenges that you face doing drag and being a drag artist?

Nadia Bizness: I say the, the confidence factor is huge. You never know what your crowd is gonna react to. And someone like me who battles, like, anxiety and depression... uh, sometimes I wake up, and I'm like, you know, I'm just not feeling it today, like, you know, and I have a performance tonight, and I'm just not feeling it today. Yesterday, I could have been... for example, I could have, like, wanted to do this powerful song, Girls Who Run the World by, like, Beyoncé and just be a powerful movement. And when I woke up that morning, like, "Oh my gosh, I don't... I don't... I don't feel as confident or as useful", like, you know? "So, maybe I should do, like, a sad ballad or something like that just to express how I'm feeling." So, I'd say the confidence factor is huge.

Camryn: Yeah. So, you've done drag in a few different places now. Do you notice anything unique about each place that you've done drag compared to other places?

Nadia Bizness: Yes. So, there is a sense of, I guess, fastness is the word. So, St. Louis drag is totally different than Kansas City drag. Kansas City drag is totally different than Colorado Springs drag, like, you know, so.... To categorize those, I'd say St. Louis drag is more pageant, more tiara and crown, stuff like that, whereas Kansas City drag is more edgy, individualized drag, like that. And then Colorado Springs is more revolutionary, things like that, so...

Camryn: Alright. So, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you as a drag artist?

Nadia Bizness: So, things change with tips. Like, normally, we can walk around and make as much ruckus and get as much money as we need to. With this, we have to stay, like, on stage. We have to wear certain masks. We can't move around. There are certain rules, things like that. So, that's been a giant headache as well.

Camryn: Alright. And do you mind letting me know what your pronouns you use in and out of drag are?

Nadia Bizness: Yeah. So, in drag, it doesn't matter to me, I use him, her, he, she, all of it. And then, out of drag, I use him and he.

Camryn: Awesome, awesome. Alright. And has drag influenced your sex and gender identities, and if so, how?

Nadia Bizness: Hmm... I would say, yes, and to a degree. When I'm in drag, I definitely feel more confident, more sexualized, more attractive, just because I have just so much going on. And then, when I take all of that off, I'm just a blank canvas, you know? So, I struggle back and forth with that.

Camryn: Yeah. Alright. Has drag influenced how you think about gender in general?

Nadia Bizness: Mm... drag, to me... like I said, it's a blank canvas. So, with gender, there are no boundaries. You can feminize it, you can masculinize it, you can do all this crazy stuff to just express who you are. So, to a degree, yes.

Camryn: I love that.

Nadia Bizness: But there's so much. There's, there's, there's bioqueens, there's drag kings, there's all kinds of categories of drag. So, I don't necessarily think that you have to put gender on it. Just go out there and do you and you perform.

Camryn: Yeah. Alright. And opposite of the other question I asked, have your sex and gender identities influenced your, your drag persona at all?

Nadia Bizness: No. Mm-mm.

Camryn: No?

Nadia Bizness: Mm-mm.

Camryn: Alright. So, we've talked a little bit about this already, but has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of... whenever you are out of drag?

Nadia Bizness: I have to do a switch. Like, it's weird because, like... like I said, once I put on the hair, once you put on the makeup, once I, you know, put on all the, um, the façade of being a drag queen, my confidence just goes through the roof. And then, once I take it all off, I have to remember, oh my gosh, I'm not this, you know, fantasized person. I'm an actual human being. I have to go out there and still be able to put out this confidence that I do in makeup and a pair of heels, you know?

Camryn: Mm. Alright. And if you could go back in time as Nadia Bizness, what advice would you give her?

Nadia Bizness: Don't be afraid of what other people say about you. Continue the craft, perfect your craft, and keep going, for sure.

Camryn: Awesome. Alright. So, I'm curious about how your social identities have impacted your experiences of drag or vice versa. How has drag impacted your identities? And can you share more about how one of your social identities such as gender, race, class, age, geography, etc. and/or the interactions of these social identities have impacted your experiences of drag?

Nadia Bizness: Hmm, okay. So, I think the question that you're trying to get at is... from what I take on it, uh... there is a sense of racism in drag and judgmental, like, all that type of stuff. Um, being a Black queen, you're expected to act a certain way, you're expected to be a certain way, you're expected to perform a certain way. I feel like there's a... there's double standard within that. So, I guess, with the social identity part, it's the same for me being, um, you know, Black male, Black queen, it's the same thing. I go through the same stuff every single day.

Camryn: Alright. So, now, I'm going to ask you a few questions about how you feel about drag specifically. So, how would you go about defining drag?

Nadia Bizness: How would I...? Say that question again?

Camryn: How would you go about defining drag? Sorry, it's kind of hard to...

Nadia Bizness: No, it's okay. Drag, simple... and I'll... and I'll give it to you simple. Expression. That's what it is, it's, it's expression. Who you are, how you feel, art, culture, movement.

Camryn: Love that. Alright. So, what do you think is the purpose of drag?

Nadia Bizness: I think it gives people a chance to express themselves in a fantasised... fantasized society where they feel like they can't be their normal selves.

Camryn: Do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not? And if so, how?

Nadia Bizness: Oh. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Um, sex work, kudos to you, kudos to the people who do it. Like, you know? It's not for me, but, you know, I've been asked to do a couple sexual numbers, and I'm like, "You know, I don't feel comfortable doing that. I don't want people even thinking about... fantasizing me over that way. But, you know, kudos to the people who do it, just not me.

Camryn: Alright. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Nadia Bizness: Well, I love RuPaul. He is a huge, um, influencer of mine. I love him to death. As far as Drag Race, drag has definitely become mainstream, in my opinion. It's... what is it on? It's on VH1. So, you know, the whole world gets to see it. RuPaul is on a number of [unclear] mainstream commercials. And I think it's... I think it's in a great place. People get to see the work that we do and really get to know who we are as a culture.

Camryn: Yeah. Alright. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Nadia Bizness: I would say the community, since as a whole, in drag, it's very competitive, very judgmental. In the gay community, we try to, you know, preach to be together instead of being divided. That's not the case in the drag scene. It's very competitive, very judgmental. Sisters,

that's what we call each other, sisters they can be very mean at times, harsh. And then, I just feel like they just need to take a second to look at what we're doing to each other and to perfect that and fix that.

Camryn: Alright. And what do you think are misconceptions people have about drag? And where do you think these came from? And what do you think we can do to help change them?

Nadia Bizness: Where do I think what? I'm sorry.

Camryn: What misconceptions have you noticed that people have about drag? Where do they come from? And what do you think we can do to help change them?

Nadia Bizness: I think that people think that it's not work. Like, you know, it takes work to be drag queen. It takes money to be in drag. Learning how to sculpt your face, learning what works for you, learning, learning just so much about who you are and expressing that individuality. Um, I think the biggest conce-- misconception is, people can hire, which people do, whatever, people can hire makeup artists and image consultants and stuff like that and just have them go out there and do their thing. But you've gotta have, like... to me, at least, you've gotta have some sort of, like, star quality. Like, you know, you can't just... anybody could go out there in some makeup and heels and a wig and do whatever they need to do. But to me, you have to have some type of star quality, some type of performance aspect, to do what you need to do.

Camryn: Yeah. Alright. So, last question. If you chose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would it be?

Nadia Bizness: [Pause] To just go out and have fun, be who you are, be yourself. I tell people that all the time. You just gotta be confident in who you are.

Camryn: Yeah. Alright. Is there anything else that you wanna add to the conversation here, or...?

Nadia Bizness: No. If you have any more questions, don't hesitate to contact me and let me know and I could provide all that stuff for you.

Camryn: Yeah, awesome. Thank you for helping me out with this.

Nadia Bizness: No problem.

Camryn: Alright. Let me just get that...

Interview with Odette Dynasty O'Hara

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Sabrina: So, what do you prefer to go by? Do you... your name or you like your stage name?

Michael: So, depending on where I am and how I'm presenting myself in the moment, that is typically who I like to be referred to as.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: So, like, as of right now, out of face, as just regular old God-given me, I'm Michael Kenneth Wooten.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: And when I'm performing or stage or at events, I'm Odette Dynasty O'Hara.

Sabrina: Okay. So, one of my first question is, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Michael: Well, considering the first time I actually saw drag performers was via the movie *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything!* [Laughs] Gotta love it.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Uh, I was about 10, 11, and my mom said I literally watched it on repeat. I didn't understand what I was watching at the time...

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: These fabulous men in gowns, but those were drag queens, and I was enthralled. But my first time meeting a performer in person was in college. It was my, uh, junior year. I was graduating from a private Christian university.

Sabrina: Oh my.

Michael: In South Carolina, and it... like, drag was not even talked about at all, gay was nothing.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Right.

Michael: And, um, I was just a person who didn't belong in the world that I was trying to fit. And ended up... uh, went to a nightclub and saw a performer on stage and was mesmerized. I couldn't take my eyes off of her, and ended up after...

Sabrina: You're fine.

Michael: Okay. So, after that, uh, I ended up meeting entertainers, hanging out with them. And I was just... I saw an opportunity for there to be... um, for there to be newness in the midst of whatever was going on in my life. So, yeah, did I answer the question?

Sabrina: Yes.

Michael: Okay. Thank you. You're amazing.

Sabrina: [Laughs] That's awesome. I, I can't remember my first time, like, experiencing drag. I think it was, like, my mom when we watched Rocky Horror Picture Show.

Michael: Really?

Sabrina: Yes. And that was just, like, the coolest movie ever, like, Tim Curry dressed up like he was, like, oh my gosh, like...

Michael: [Unclear].

Sabrina: He, he rocked that. [Laughs]

Michael: He did, he did.

Sabrina: Alright. So, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Michael: Well, this is fun. So, I graduated college in 2009... or 2008, December of that year. And it was during the, the end of that year that I ended up coming out, and I was authentic with who I was. And the church no longer needed me. And I, I don't like them; they have their rules. Um, and ended up... I ended up homeless for a period of time. And it was a group of nine drag queens who took me into a one-bedroom apartment, like, the smell of man musk and Victoria's Secret Love Spell was everywhere.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Yum.

Michael: It was delicious and disgusting at the same time; a double D. [Laughs]

Sabrina: [Laughs] Love it.

Michael: So, ended up, um, they dressed me up and put me in a talent show, and I won. And...

Sabrina: That's awesome.

Michael: Thank you. And that was December of 2008, and I have never... up until 2015, I was up on a stage every weekend. Um, and I... yeah, that's, that's what began it. What kept it going was the aspect... I am very much a community server. I love getting my hands in the dirt, I love being a part of growing things in an area and watching a community thrive, not just individuals. And for me, I noticed that people were attracted to the entertainer more than they were just the person.

Sabrina: Of course.

Michael: So, I had a stronger voice and more of a pull to get things done as an entertainer. So, the drive to create more, to create new, to allow my community feel better, that's what... that's what get me going.

Sabrina: That's awesome.

Michael: Thank you.

Sabrina: Okay. Alright. [Inaudible] it is still going... I think it's still going. We'll see. Alright. How did your family, friends and other loved ones recently... or, sorry, receive you becoming a drag artist?

Michael: Um, well, uh, [laughs] well, let's see. Since I started out... basically, I had, like, a clean slate of everything. Um, my family, there... there's a portion of them that I just don't talk to.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: 'Cause you learn as you grow up that there's no... that desire to make sure everyone is satisfied with who you are...

Sabrina: It kind of dissipates.

Michael: It does.

Sabrina: It goes.

Michael: 'Cause you realize they're not there to help you pay your bills. [Laughs] Their opinion really doesn't matter.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Yeah.

Michael: And at the same time, if they're... they can't celebrate who you are, like you would celebrate for them, and that just means they're not ready for the new. And I don't have to be upset by that, I don't have to be hurt by that. And so, family-wise, my mom, my sisters were all socially independent of one another. But my mom, uh, she was, kind of, like, the base supporter for a while. I would receive packages in the mail for Odette and never for me. I'm like, "I could use a pair of pants for work, lady. Stop sending me wigs." Just like...

Sabrina: [Laughs] Thanks, Mom, but uh...

Michael: Can't wear this to work, thanks. [Laughs] But, um, friends-wise, I... true friends love who you are. They don't care about what is on the outside; they don't care about what's going on. True friends want to see the best for you.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And those are the ones that I only listened to. And by the grace of God, they're the reason I'm still here today. And so, yeah. Did that answer the question?

Sabrina: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Michael: Okay, good. Thank you.

Sabrina: Of course, thank you. Yeah, like, my sister came out a few years ago now to me, and, like, she was really, really nervous about it. And, like, she... I had her stay the night with me at my apartment, and she's just like... the one time, uh, I was talking to her about how me and my mom were discussing how everybody was like, "I'm super straight, my brother's extremely straight," like, Sydney was just like, "Eh, we don't... we don't know what she is. She, kind of, just, like, is coasting. Like, this other one, she straight. She's like, "And like the baby, we don't really know much either."

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: And I was telling her about this. She's like, "Oh, well, you know, actually, like, I'm not" I'm like, "Oh, okay," like, "cool."

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: She's like, "You don't care?" "No." I was like, "You... as long as you only bring home pretty girls, like you brought home cute boys, I don't care."

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: Like, just don't bring home any ugly girls. Like, if you're happy I... like, I don't care, dude, you know? You do you, and I'm here to follow and support.

Michael: I love that, love that.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Okay. Where does your drag name come from?

Michael: Oh! This is one of my favorite questions.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: So, my drag name, Odette. the original name, comes from The Swan Princess, um...

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: Which Disney really should have really taken that by the balls and made it their own, but copyright infringement, you know?

Sabrina: Okay, whatever.

Michael: 'Cause The Swan Princess, out of all of the princesses that girls are introduced to or society is introduced to, she's the only one that did not allow people to accept her for only her beauty.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Like, when Prince Derek said, "I love you," she... after they grew up together, you know, she asked him why. And he said, "Well, because you're beautiful." And she goes, "That's it? Well, I'm out. Peace."

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Thus the curse started and all that shit. Like, good job lady for having a voice. You got a curse. But it... she was willing to give up what would be easy... an easy road because who she is is much more important than what she looks like.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And that, that's the message that I want, more than anything, for my character to represent, is an idea that who we are means much more than what we wear or how we look. It's what do you bring into this world, and how are you going to make a difference [unclear]?

Sabrina: I love that. Oh my gosh.

Michael: Thank you.

Sabrina: Of course. And it's great 'cause, like, we did... um, for dance, we did Swan Princess quite a few times.

Michael: Really?

Sabrina: Like, when I was little. Yeah.

Michael: I love it.

Sabrina: So, like, I know that movie. [Laughs] That's so cool.

Michael: [Laughs] Thanks.

Sabrina: [Laughs] There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag, drag queen, drag king, to glamor queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen, camp queen, among others. So, many. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do, and what is your style?

Michael: Well, I am very first lady. I'm very, like, president's wife...

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Like, you can take me out to dinner, and I won't embarrass your ass. Like, that's me. But I, I understand that our, our society is drenched in labels, like, it is one where you have to have the right label or address someone by the right way, or they'll get offended.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Um, to me, I never get offended unless someone intentionally goes to say something. Like, people just don't know, right?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: But for me, personally, I, I competed in the Miss Gay America network and circuit. Thus, I am the current reigning Miss Gay Illinois.

Sabrina: Ooh, congrats.

Michael: Yeah, thanks. I get a lot of them.

Sabrina: She's real pretty.

Michael: Little bracelets everywhere, you know?

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: But, um, in that system, they refer to entertainers as female impersonators.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: Because I'm not trying to be a woman by any means.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: So, therefore, any, any label that gives strong indication of pers-- um, uh, identity, I, I pull away from.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: Um, drag performer is used, for me, a little loosely within our community, just because it, it... everyone gets lumped up in drag.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: So, for me, as a female impersonator, I prefer... like, I love who Michael Kenneth is, like, I love me, um, and I love who Odette is, and we have to have the separation.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And so, I, I, I attuned to that title.

Sabrina: Okay. I like it.

Michael: Does that help... did that help with the question part?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Okay, cool.

Sabrina: Okay. Does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist? It's like you, kind of, answered that already but... 'cause you had... put how you guys had to be...

Michael: Yeah.

Sabrina: It has to be separate.

Michael: Oh, the one part is, what... like, what style do I perform? So, like...

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: In the style, like, I am definitely... some would say I'm a dancing queen. I don't... even though I teach dance, [unclear]...

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Um, I don't... I don't attune to that too much.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Um, what I do is, uh, I'm very much a crowd reader, and I move off of the crowd. Um, and so, I'm very classy, very chandelier and all.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Uh, I'm very, uh... I'm... yeah. Like first lady librarian, like, you're gonna get a lot of glamor, but I'll even walk out in, like, a Chick-fil-A outfit and, like, call it a day, like, I'm good.

Sabrina: Yeah. [Laughs]

Michael: You're going to be entertained regardless.

Sabrina: Right. Like, no matter what. Okay.

Michael: Exactly. I'm not drama, let's just say that

Sabrina: [Laughs] Thank God.

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: Who or what has influenced your drag?

Michael: My grandmother.

Sabrina: Oh.

Michael: She's right up there. She's so beautiful.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: And predominantly because she... out of everyone in my entire family, my grandmother has been there since day one, and has, has... not silently, but she's definitely, uh... when she speaks, it is a force, and she's always encouraged me to be who I am, to love who I am, and to pursue the best of myself. And Odette definitely carries that aspect for herself and the community.

Sabrina: That's great. Yeah, I think every once in a while, like, with my, my grandma you know, it's like, okay, well, what would she think about what I'm doing today? Would she be proud of me, you know? Like, so, sometimes that kinda gets you in check. [Laughs]

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: Do you consider your drag political?

Michael: No, not at all, not at all.

Sabrina: Just from looking, umh, no.

Michael: No.

Sabrina: She's just pretty. [Laughs]

Michael: Yeah, she is. She gorgeous. She gorgeous. She know it.

Sabrina: Okay, this has a few things to it. So, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? Are you part of a drag family, house, or a collective?

Michael: I am. So, I am... my drag family is one of my favorites, naturally, it's my family.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: But we are very independent. So, my drag mother is...

Sabrina: Alright.

Michael: [Unclear].

Sabrina: Good.

Michael: My drag mother is Eureka O'Hara from RuPaul's Drag Race Season 10, 11 or 11, 12.

Sabrina: Okay, side note.

Michael: Yeah?

Sabrina: We are watching that season.

Michael: Are you?

Sabrina: [Unclear] we were watching Season 11 in class.

Michael: That's my mother.

Sabrina: That's so cool. [Laughs]

Michael: That's my mommy. [Unclear] Eureka, used to be in Johnson City, Tennessee, used to drive her ass everywhere.

Sabrina: You're making me jealous now, so, you're...

Michael: You're welcome.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: I'll send you a picture of me with her.

Sabrina: Yes.

Michael: Um, so...

Sabrina: "Why are you being a bitch?", she says.

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: That's, that's super cool.

Michael: Uh, is it recording?

Sabrina: Yes.

Michael: Okay. [Unclear].

Sabrina: It stopped. [Laughs]

Michael: Uh, so, like, she's my drag mother, but we are all... we're all independent, meaning, we, we do our own thing. We, we follow our own drummer, basically. Um, it's inspired me because the O'Hara family is one that... there's a certain level of expectation when it comes to us as entertainers. Like you... it's not that you do or... you do anything a certain way or wear something is certain way. It's literally about how do you make people feel when you walk in the room? That is... that's what we aspire to more than anything. It's transitioning the feel of the space. We are very much... our family, that it is not... has shit to do with you; it has nothing to do with the entertainer, period. It has everything to do with the person standing in front of you. And if you're... if you're not making sure that person is feeling better about their life, then what you're doing is, like, irrelevant to the culture. And so, that's, that's what inspires me from my family.

Sabrina: That's awesome.

Michael: Thanks.

Sabrina: I think she was actually on both right?

Michael: She was. She had [overtalking].

Sabrina: 'Cause she got taken off... yeah. So, that's the one we are watching.

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: Ten, I guess, if...

Michael: Yeah I think it's 10.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: I, I think. I don't know.

Sabrina: It is the one that had Trinity and stuff on it, her, you know, best, best friend.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well...

Sabrina: So... that's so, so funny. That's... [Laughs] How often do you perf-- how often do you perform, and where do you perform?

Michael: Um, well, I'm still new to St. Louis...

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: And so, new to this region.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: I moved up here in 2017 that... right after Christmas that year. And I slowly started reintroducing myself into the drag community. Because I was on a quest to find myself when I first moved up here.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Um, and in that process, I started... after a year of being here, started performing. And again, very slow. So, started at, uh, Bubby and Sissy's in Alton, Illinois. Um, Taylor de Mornay, uh, was my roommate for a period of time, amazing human. And ended up... from there, started performing at Hamburger Mary's on house cast every Sunday or every other Sunday, in spot shows here and there around town. But since COVID, I, I have yet to take in... the stage since. Um, which there's several things enveloped in that, but mostly it's just safety concerns.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: But I, I'm not sure when my character would come back on the stage. I was supposed to do a show on the 25th for a brunch. But now, life has changed that. So, we'll see, we'll see what happens.

Sabrina: Hopefully sooner than later.

Michael: That would be amazing.

Sabrina: [Laughs] I'd have to know; I can come see you.

Michael: Yeah, come.

Sabrina: That's a fun one, what goes into getting ready for performance?

Michael: What doesn't go into getting ready, yeah? [Laughs]

Sabrina: [Laughs] Yeah.

Michael: You know, everything from breathing, to, to paint, to shoes and pain.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Uh, well... okay, so, there are different stages to getting ready. Uh, for me there's several things. Like, a lot of people are like, "You just put too much into it, Odette," And like, no I really don't. This is... this is important.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Like, one of the biggest things for me is... of course, we pick our music.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: But I pick my music based upon the crowd I'm going to be in. 'Cause it's super important that I have a sign... I always take backups with me, just in case I get in the room and I'm like, "Oh no, this crowd is totally not going to love Beyonce. Let's give 'em Gladys Knight," like, you know, like, something like that. Um, R&B and R&B... [laughs]

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Bad reference, Odette.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: But, uh, I, I ha—drag, for me, is my form of meditation. Um, so, for me, I have to calm myself, and I have to get out of myself. So, the whole time of preparing, like, while I'm doing my face, is literally meditation. Soft music, like, listen... feeling how it's going, and feeling the person that I'm going to be that night. But then, of course, there's the hair, there's the shoes, there's... and I'm different. Like, I definitely have learned I don't have to work as hard to be beautiful as some queens do.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And I think it's just from the inside, I really...

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Everything on the outside, it's just there.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Like, it's paint by numbers and, like, a little bit of spatula, like, who knows?

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: But, like, I don't... I could... I literally wear a burlap sack sometimes, and people are like, "Oh my god, that's such a nice outfit. How'd you get it together?" I'm like, literally pulling it out of the trash, [unclear].

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Like... but thanks.

Sabrina: Yeah. [Laughs]

Michael: It, it's a Walmart bag. [Laughs]

Sabrina: Yes. I can't even imagine 'cause, like, for dancing, like, I know how long it took us to get ready. And, like, we don't have to do nearly [laughs] half of the stuff that you guys do. So, like...

Michael: Well, hiding Kibbles 'N Bits and stuff.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Yeah, those are fine.

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: Our hair is usually attached to our head...

Michael: Yes [unclear].

Sabrina: Usually, but...

Michael: There's that one little curlicue just flying out.

Sabrina: It's a lot harder... I feel like it's a lot... it's real hard to change 'em 'cause, you know, you got the five billion things of hairspray and you gotta...

Michael: And the wires all in it. [Laughs] I get it.

Sabrina: Oh my gosh. Especially when we were in a hurry, you know, like, it'd be... for a point, it would be slicked back in a bun, then you had to have it, like, halfway down for your next thing and, like, wow...

Michael: Oh yeah.

Sabrina: Like, combing through the hairspray. Like, oh god, please stop.

Michael: I love...

Sabrina: [Laughs] What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Michael: Oh, that question is so individual. Like, it's... meaning, it's, it's different for every person. Um, for me... uh, excuse me, water's biting back, for some reason. For me, as a performer, being in recovery, it is... it's hard... it's hard for me to truly allow myself to feel as free as I once used to feel. Um, because I get to a space where I am mentally invincible. Like, I can do anything, I can... I can take on the world, and for an addict, that can be very frightening.

Sabrina: Understandable.

Michael: And so... 'cause you feel like you can... you can slip up, and you can use one time and everything will be okay.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And that's just not the case. So, I have to monitor myself mentally. And I have... for the first time in my life, I have a support team that they assist me with keeping me in check and keeping me humble, but at the same time, going back and forth into, into the dressing room, because you never know. You never know what you're going to get. That's always a frightening space for someone like me.

Sabrina: Yeah. Understandable. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world?

Michael: Uh, you know, I've lived all over this fair country of ours, [laughs] 'cause I'm a runner. Uh, and I would honestly say this region is very, very interesting, because when it... [clinking

sound] [laughs] I love it. When it comes to the entertainers in this area, there is... there is a sense of family. But because Saint Louis has such a thriving history of pageantry, um, there is quite a bit of competition too in the mindsets of entertainers. And that's, that's not my shtick. Like, I've already had my national crowns. Like, I'm, I'm good. I don't want your job, boo.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: I just wanna show up and help you make your show great.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Right.

Michael: Like, what can I do to help you? But when you're someone who is genuinely that, that person who wants to give, I've found that even that itself seems threatening because people aren't used to it.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And so, it makes you question your motives too. Um, and so, everywhere else I've lived, there's been a general understanding that we're just all in this together. We're all just bumbling men in gowns trying to make our best.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Here it... there's been a little bit of a different experience. I wouldn't say it's negative. Every-- everywhere has their perks. Um, for me, personally, I know I have to stay, stay as far back as I can from, from that energy.

Sabrina: Yeah. Sounds kind of negative.

Michael: I know, it does, doesn't it? I don't want it to. St. Louis is wonderful, but--

Sabrina: [Laughs] No, not like you sound negative. just like the whole aspect of that.

Michael: Yeah. They're great. They're doing their best.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Alright. And then, what has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

Michael: Oh, my life as a drag artist pretty much stopped when COVID happened. Um, and that's just... that's just out of fear and concern for not only myself, but my business and my life revolves around people of the older community, um, and I don't want to risk their lives too.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Um, but again everything is about perspective. So, COVID has done amazing things for the art culture as a whole because people who are serious, get... had the opportunity to really refine their craft in the privacy of their own home without the influence of others, which is super big. Like, entertainers get too mixed up with what other people think about them. But when you're stuck at home, having to create your own art, like, from trash, like, what do you do?

Sabrina: [Laughs] Right.

Michael: Well, then, you begin to learn you.

Sabrina: Right. Yeah, you can just work on yourself and who you are as...

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: That's awesome.

Michael: That's been cool to watch.

Sabrina: It's like, kind of, almost like a blessing in disguise in that sense.

Michael: Oh, definitely. Everything is, isn't it?

Sabrina: [Laughs] I hope so. Hope... I'm still trying to figure some of that out but... [Laughs]

Michael: Oh girl, don't make me cry. [Laughs]

Sabrina: How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag? What pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Michael: Yeah. So, out of drag, I take whatever; just don't be derogatory. Like, do—like, I'm not about, uh... I'm not about negativity all.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And so, when someone projects that on me, then, then, I, I get very flustered. But I... like, he/she, whate-- I don't... I'm not a carer. Like, whatever, girl you say what you need.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Um, when it comes to... I think this was the best thing I've ever learned, when it comes to my sexuality, it's what happens between the sheets.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: No, my orientation is what happens between the sheets. My identity is what happens on the streets. And so, I am... in all actuality, I may be a beautiful gay man, but, like, sex happens like once or twice. Last week it was three times a week, but, like, that's nothing.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: But, like... but if you identify me as just those three moments, then you're negating, like, hours and abundant life that no longer has a label, if that makes sense.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: So, I would much rather just be a human...

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Instead of being labeled by my sexuality or being labeled by my, my orientation, whatever.

Sabrina: Right, as, like, a gay man that dresses up in drag and does whatever. You're just here, you do what you want, and you're...

Michael: Yeah.

Sabrina: Here to live.

Michael: Hello.

Sabrina: YOLO.

Michael: YOLO.

Sabrina: I hate that but yeah. [Laughs]

Michael: Oh, my YOLO days are coming to an end.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: You tried... you said that the eighth time. [Laughs] Been there.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Has drag influenced your sex and gender identities and how?

Michael: Um, I mean, there've been times. You know, you see that one straight man...

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: You're like, "I got legs for you, babe." [Laughs] That's happened. Um, I would say, for the most part, no. I, I keep... I keep Odette kinda on a, a shelf in the aspect of who she is. She is too busy to be bothered with frivolous things as sex or... if that makes sense.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: So, um... and at the same time, my body is still owned by Michael. And so, if someone is to feel compelled to feel a certain way, I have to be present. Does that make sense?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: So, it, it has to give respect to the, the vessel owner.

Sabrina: You want somebody to love you, want you, as you, not just as Odette.

Michael: Exactly, exactly.

Sabrina: I like that. Has drag influenced how you think about gender?

Michael: Oh, most definitely. Definitely. Especially when it comes to my brothers and sisters in the trans community. Like, it, it took me the longest time to understand fully. Like... and I still don't. Like, so I can never...

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Put myself in any of... any of their shoes, but I definitely respect them. There is this energy that comes from an individual who is trans that is just powerful because they have owned who they are so much to the level of risking everything.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Like, what do I risk but a few glances and, like, some scoffs? They risk the vulnerability of, like, being seen and being heard and fighting for that to a level I will never understand it.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And I love them for it. Like, I love their ten--tenacity, their, their ability to look past and just push for what they want. If we all had that strength, like...

Sabrina: Right, if only.

Michael: Yeah, seriously.

Sabrina: I... there's a few girls that I went to school with that are transitioning. I mean, like, they both look amazing just from, like, the pictures. We don't... we're not, like, super friends, you know?

Michael: Right, right.

Sabrina: But, like, of course, they post pictures of everything and, like, they both got these, you know, nice beards and stuff.

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: It was like, "Yes, you work it."

Michael: Get it.

Sabrina: It's like, you look so good. Like, good for you to be you, man.

Michael: [Laughs] Love it.

Sabrina: [Laughs] It was just funny 'cause the one girl actually liked the guy I was dating at the time...

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: And she got real upset because, like, she wanted to go to the dance with him, and [unclear] like... now, I'm like, oh, [unclear] [laughs]

Michael: I love it.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Now you're... now you're a dude. Cool.

Michael: Sorry for ya.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag? I feel, like, we've, kind of, answered all of those and, like, together.

Michael: I feel like there's a lot about sex, Jesus. [Laughs]

Sabrina: [Laughs] Only you know.

Michael: Well. Um, eh, meh, not really. Yeah, like, just because of the separatism that [unclear] over the two characters.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: No, in my... off the record, in my trashy days, who knew what I would bring home. We don't talk about that no more.

Sabrina: [Laughs] We're all gonna have that hoe stage, it's okay.

Michael: Girl, no more, no more, clear mind, please, please.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: I was young once. [Laughs]

Sabrina: [Laughs] How has drag impacted or changed you? Has drag impacted your confidence as a person when you are out o—um, out of drag?

Michael: Definitely. Definitely. Um, drag has changed everything for me. When I first started performing, it was a means of getting Dollar Menu food that turned into a voice for my community that allowed me to know that we as individuals hold the choice to be who we want to be. And it's that choice that dictates our daily actions and our daily goals. And so, for me, drag has taught me a lot can happen quickly, and the evolution of a human is very slow. It is being willing to go to each stage of it. And so, it's allowed me to see people for where they are in their journey, and not judge, not, not feel any kind of way, 'cause it has nothing to do with me.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Um, one of the greatest things that I, I focused on and, like, learned in drag is, like, I refuse to never have an emotional reaction to anything that doesn't immediately affect my health or my wallet. So, if I'm not bleeding, and they're not stealing from me, what the hell do I have to worry about? Like, I'm like, okay.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Tell me more about how you feel, baby. And I... if it wasn't for drag, I would not have had that understanding at all, period.

Sabrina: Do you ever have, like, a conflict with yourself of like, like being Odette? Like, people think you look great or beautiful this way. Do you ever think, like, you is Michael are not as an attractive person or vice versa?

Michael: Uh, yeah. All of the time.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Very good question. So, I... when... I only go out as Odette. I do not go out as me. Predominantly because of that feeling itself. I feel like a fish out of water if I'm in the club, I feel... like, if Michael's there, I'm like, "Who, who brought this librarian in?" And, like, "Who is the weird guy?" you know, sitting in the corner?" [Laughs] Uh, because, like, that's her world and that, like, the commu— people... sometimes you just want people to see you, and your character sometimes stands in the way of that.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And so, that's definitely been a point. But also, at the same time, I'm, I'm mixed race. So, I'm Black and white, and growing up in South Carolina you're just not supposed to exist.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And so, I've also grown... Like I, was cultivated in that society of separating myself from myself. And it's, it's. it's easier that way, but at the same time, it can be very difficult.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And then, you create something as beautiful as the studio, and you realize that both can live as one and change you lives together.

Sabrina: Yeah, that's, that's one thing I love alike bout dance and performing, it's like you can be you, but then, at the same time, you can dress up and put all this makeup on and have all these costumes and glitter, sequins, you know...

Michael: Definitely.

Sabrina: And, like, be dazzling and out and crazy.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: And, you know, just feel loud. [Laughs]

Michael: Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina: If you could go back in time as Odette, what advice would you give to your younger self? So, like, if... both as Odette, so...

Michael: That's gonna make me cry.

Sabrina: We can skip it if you want, I don't want you to cry.

Michael: No. It has to come out eventually, I'm sure. Um, oh, one thing I would say... there are two actually. One is, make sure that you don't put your shows before family. Go to that fucking party. And the other is, you don't have to try everything to be accepted.

Sabrina: Yeah. That's the problem, is, people think, like, so many kids and everything out there, and it's like, oh, you know, you have to do this to be cool to be accepted, and it's not.

Michael: It's not the truth.

Sabrina: Rather be the loser. [Laughs]

Michael: Yeah.

Sabrina: I, I was luckily very lucky with all that. And, um, I've always had to try really hard at school, so, like, I could have been a massive pothead, you know? I could have done this, I could have done that. But I was like, no, like, I'm focusing on school. I already have a hard enough time trying to do this. Okay?

Michael: Right, yes. [Laughs]

Sabrina: Like, I don't need help. Like I'm, I'm a square; I didn't, like, start drinking till I was 21, like, I only smoked pot a few times, only 'cause it's been brought to me, and I was already drunk, so I'm like, "Fuck it, whatever, girl." [Laughs]

Michael: Well, YOLO. [Laughs]

Sabrina: But I, I, I don't know, I'm very, very, very lucky in that sense of... and now, I just live through my guy.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: He's, he's had his fun and tried his stuff. So, you know, it's, it's, kind of, nice having that, 'cause then you can hear about it. So, like, it's like, I'm okay, like, that one I'm good with. Thanks. [Laughs]

Michael: Right. I get that. Oof.

Sabrina: Alright. This is a long one. 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, science, 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?

Michael: Yes, that's a long question.

Sabrina: Uh-huh. Well, do, do we need to go over it again, 'cause I might need to? [Laughs]

Michael: That's, that's a long... So, the, the one I'm going to start with is my identity based in race, because... being mixed race. Like, and it's... a lot of people today, "Why is that such a thing?" It's very much a thing, um, because you never... you never feel like you have a side...

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: In an argument, or with a group of people. Like where's the other? Like, can we bring out an other parade? Like, where's that one? Give me the other parade.

Sabrina: Yeah. 'Cause it's like, who do you...? Like, especially with things now, like, who do you stand with? Do you stand with, like, Black Lives Matter? Do you stand with, you know, white privilege? Like, you know...?

Michael: Right. All of it. All of it. Like, I am a product of love. Period.

Sabrina: And that should... that's what should be important.

Michael: That is what is imp-- all of us are products of love. Some... Lord willing, all of us are products of love. And in that... like, that in itself gives us all merit to show up. That gives us the opportunity to, to stand and have a voice. And so, for me, like, my drag is entrenched in 100% acceptance and love, and how can I best serve someone else? But again, I, I'm a person that, outside of everything, I do my best not to... not to attune to labels. Like, I have to... and I, I love the fact that there are... there are classes that now go over this. Um, because it is. It's important to some people.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: But at the end of the day, why is it important? Isn't it more important that we just come together, and we create change? Why do we have to know what our origin is to do it?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: 'Cause maybe our origin isn't meant to be our future. Like, and that is... like, for me, that's one of the biggest... the biggest, um, areas of conflict when I'm having to go to that space mentally, is I can't... I don't wanna look at how we're different.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: I want to look at how we're the same, and let's move forward with that.

Sabrina: Right. When I was little, like, in grade school and stuff, like, everybody used to give me a hard time 'cause, like, until my, my siblings' father left on my 15th birthday, I... he was my dad.

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: He's who I always thought was my father. Then after, 'cause my mom went to get child support from him, they had her do [unclear] for me, and I found out he was not, like, my father.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: You know, go figure, my mom was 16; she was a baby. But, like, growing up, kids always gave me a hard time. It's like, oh, you know, "Are you Mexican?" I'm like, "No, I'm, I'm white." Like, I don't understand why it matters anyway.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: But, um, but he... I don't know what his father was, but he was redhead. [Laughs].

Michael: Right. [Laughs]

Sabrina: But his mother is Mexican and Native American.

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: So, I do have that little bit, you know? But, like, when I was little, I, I didn't know.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: So, I was like, "Why are you asking me that?" Like, "Of course not," blah, blah, blah, you know? Like... and, you know, you always have that thing it's like, oh Hispanic, non-Hispanic. I'm like, "Hmm, do I wanna put that on there? Maybe get," you know?

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: "This or that?" But I just always, like, identify just as white 'cause that's mostly what I am. That's... I don't know. But at the same sense in that... as, like, I am part... you know, all of these, these other, um, races. [Unclear] I was like, what is the word?

Michael: What is that [unclear]?

Sabrina: What is that word? [Laughs]

Michael: What is that...? [Laughs]

Sabrina: So, it's like, I can identify. Like, especially in the summertime...

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: She, she bronzes beautiful. [Laughs]

Michael: I love it.

Sabrina: But, you know, I don't know. It's like I'm... I can make some good Mexican food.

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: I don't like refried beans. I don't like spicy. You know, like... [Laughs]

Michael: Love it.

Sabrina: I, I mean, I've never had it, like, quite as difficult, and, like, I can't understand the whole, um, quite mixed race, you know?

Michael: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Sabrina: So, I'm just like... I don't know. I'm that same thing, like, you are who you are. It doesn't... it doesn't matter.

Michael: Exactly. Exactly.

Sabrina: Like...

Michael: You [unclear]]

Sabrina: I don't care what you are. If you're a trashy person, you're a terri—you're a trashy person. If you're a good person, you're a good person. That's just how it should be.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: No questions. [Laughs]

Michael: Some of us are just good people who've done bad things.

Sabrina: [Laughs] That's fine too, that fine.

Michael: Okay, good. That made me happy. Tell me I'm okay!

Sabrina: As long as... as long as you're not killing puppies, like...

Michael: No, no, not at all.

Sabrina: Everything else we can, kind of, eh, fine... [Laughs]

Michael: [Unclear], yeah. That one kitten. I'm kidding. [Laughs]

Sabrina: It's like if it was a cat, maybe. I'm dog girl, so...

Michael: [Laughs] Same. Same.

Sabrina: I can show you my puppies then.

Michael: Yes.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Alright. That long-ass question, we're good.

Michael: Good.

Sabrina: So, how do you define drag?

Michael: I think Ru said it best, like, when she said, "We were born naked, and the rest is drag." Drag is what we put on as our shield to step out in the day, whether it is a police uniform, whether it is doctor scrubs, nurses' scrubs, bartenders badge, whatever. Like, drag is what we put on to bring about our best life and how we feel we're bringing about our best life. For me, I am a chameleon of that art. I can... I can wear whatever to make whoever feel a certain way. 'Cause at the end of the day it all revolves around how you make someone else feel. So, hopefully, all drag uplifts another human. We both know that's not always the case. But the goal is that one finds their own strength and serenity inside their art.

Sabrina: Yeah. Yeah. I see how, like, there's so many different ways you can come about it, like.. 'cause we've... talk about that in class quite a lot.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: It's like, I don't know, I describe it as, like, love. Like, you get to be who you are with no if ands or buts. Like, it's just you being able to... yeah, you, you are who you are. You get these families and, like, those are... those are families. You are family. [Laughs]

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: You know? It's love, it's being able to express yourself, just be you.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: What do you think is the purpose of drag? Kind of hit that too with the definition but...

Michael: Yeah. It's, uh... I would... yeah, I would say they're pretty much one in the same, like, those answers are pretty much the same thing. The purpose... the purpose of anything is solely based upon with that individual makes it. Like, I could say the purpose of my new floors... so, it looks beautiful in here, while someone else says... the purpose, so I feel good. Like, what was the purpose?

Sabrina: [Laughs] Yeah.

Michael: Like, it's all... it's all the same, it's all dependent upon what that individual sees as the purpose. So, I can't... I can't answer that for everyone. But for me, I think the overall purpose is to find myself.

Sabrina: Yeah. Oh, another sexual question.

Michael: Uh-huh, sex is everywhere.

Sabrina: What do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not? If so, how? In what way?

Michael: Do I think drag is sexual?

Sabrina: Do you...? It's worded weird. Do you think drag is se-- do you think drag is sexual?

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: Okay. I might have just said it a little messed up.

Michael: No, no, no, you're good. You're good.

Sabrina: [Laughs] I was like, "Wait, what?" I was... I was confused too afterwards, I'm like, "Ah...".

Michael: Like, ah, the wording.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Wording's hard, okay?

Michael: Oh yes, alright, yeah. I'm dyslexic. I understand. Um, uh, it can be. It can be very sexual. Again, it depends on what that person brings in.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Um, I... there was, was a time where I was looking for that type... kind of attention via drag. And it... no more. Period. But it's... like, it can be, let me just say that. Like, being a teacher can be sexual, right?

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: Being a donut maker can be sexual, like, "Better glaze that again," like...

Sabrina: I mean, there's holes in the donut.

Michael: Oh! [Laughs]

Sabrina: They don't make costumes as teachers for nothing.

Michael: Oh, librarian, you. Like, it's all... anything can be. That, that question's so interesting. Is dog grooming sexual? It can be.

Sabrina: Like, "Oh, I like the way you caress that dog."

Michael: That mane. [Laughs]

Sabrina: [Laughs] That just makes me think of, like, for the season of RuPaul, like, Nina?

Michael: Uh-huh. Nina Flowers, I love her.

Sabrina: No, not her. But I do... I love, love, love her. Um, Season 10 with Nina Bo'nina?

Michael: Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sabrina: 'Cause she comes out, she got these big ole hips, big ole tush, these big ole breastesses. You know, it's like, every single look she does is very sexual. Like, you, you got this girl but... [Laughs]

Michael: [Laughs] All of it.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Um, I mean, I feel like we should know the answer, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Michael: I... Well, I do have mixed feelings about it.

Sabrina: Okay.

Michael: So, first feeling is I do love how Ru has worked diligently to make us a household name and household product. Like, we, as, as an art form... you can't go into a house in America and not have fall... someone not know what drag is.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Like, it's, it's a thing now. Um, and so, it's done amazing for the community as a whole of giving us a spotlight.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: Um, I think it's also done a detriment to our community, as in what's expected of entertainers.

Sabrina: I can see that.

Michael: Um, one of the hugest shifts and one of the, the biggest internal conflicts I have is the fact I cannot go into a space and truly be able to serve and feel comfortable and welcoming predominantly because people have attuned themselves... and especially new entertainers, attuned themselves to make it about them. When again, it has zero to do with me and has everything to do with who I'm serving. And I think that's one of the biggest frustrations I have, is we are expected now, as entertainers, to be catty, to be backstabbing, to be all of that. And that's...

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: I refuse to be that. I have no time for that.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And so, that... it's, it's a double-edged sword. Like, I'll... I'm glad I can have these conversations in open now with kids who are going to school to study it, like... I was buying heels in the back of a Goodwill, like, in... sneaking out the back door with them.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Right. Like, "Don't see me."

Michael: Like, oh... out of fear persecution. And now, it's... we can talk about it. So, I love that. I just wish there was more diversity in what's expected of us.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: And so, yeah.

Sabrina: Yeah, it's very competition-based, very...

Michael: Yeah. There's no... there's no competition besides for you to you. Period.

Sabrina: Yeah. 'Cause at the end of the day, you are doing it for you and....

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: Yeah. If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community what would it be and why?

Michael: It was just that.

Sabrina: Yup.

Michael: That exactly.

Sabrina: Two in one.

Michael: Yay! Mazel tov. [Laughs]

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

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: Where does it come from? What do you think would help change that?

Michael: Um, well you can't change anything without changing an entire species of man. Um...

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: It... I think one of the biggest things is that I do not want to be a woman. Like, that... that's, that's one of the biggest things when I talk to or meet people who've never met a queen or entertainer for the first time, and they're meeting me, and they're like, "So, do you like being a woman?" Like, oh God, no. This is expensive, and this is... like, this is time-consuming.

Sabrina: [Laughs] Right.

Michael: I'd much rather be on my couch with a bag of chips right now, like, curled up, watching some scary movie with my dog. Like, that's, that's me. And so, um...

Sabrina: Right. I don't like being a woman either, if it helps.

Michael: You're welcome.

Sabrina: [Laughs]

Michael: I'm happy to be able to wash it off for you. So, it's, it's one of those things, like, I, I wish people, when they... when they look at an entertainer, they see the, the person. I, I wish that people would see the entertainer...

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And not, not, like, superimpose what they feel that entertainer is or wants to be.

Sabrina: Yeah. I think that's one of the biggest issues with, like, any... you know, anybody that's different, you know? Being gay, being trans, doing drag, like, it's like, "Oh well, this is what I think, so that's definitely what you have to think and feel, right?"

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: No. That's not how it works.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: Like, for Ha--Halloween. Um, do you watch, like, American Horror Story?

Michael: Oh yeah, Love it.

Sabrina: Okay. So, they did the hotel one. So, my family, kind of, did that for Halloween. My stepdad dressed up as... what's the guy's name? The man who was dressed in drag.

Michael: Okay.

Sabrina: So, my, my stepdad did that. My stepdad's real straight. [Laughs]

Michael: I love it.

Sabrina: You know?

Michael: Love it.

Sabrina: Like, he did it for fun, you know?

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: He... my stepdad's also a very interesting character. [Laughs] He, he, he was feeling himself, he had his makeup on, you know, like. He... [Laughs] He... I don't know, he... you know, it's like, "It's for you. You have fun with it."

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: Just don't impose anything, like, no, he... really, he's a very straight man.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: He's... You... with my mom, you know, whatever, but...

Michael: [Laughs]

Sabrina: [Laughs] But I don't know, I just... I'm also very. very open.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: So, I was like, just don't push yourself on other people. It's not right; it's not wrong.

Michael: I get it.

Sabrina: Let people be people.

Michael: Right.

Sabrina: Da-da-da... people... that's what we just said. Um, if you choose one thing you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Michael: Ah. That it's not concrete. That there... no, no two humans can answer these questions the same way.

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: And it is... drag is something that must be experienced, and it must be... to fully understand it, it must be done. Um, because there is... there is a shift that happens within the individual that they feel the sense of power that they've never felt before. No matter how ridiculous they think they may be...

Sabrina: Right.

Michael:- When they wash it off, they miss it. Hands down. Like, I've yet to meet someone that's like, "I would never do that again." Like, when you wash it off, and you go back to you, it's that feeling that you're like, "Oh, I see."

Sabrina: Right.

Michael: Does that make sense? Like...

Sabrina: Yeah.

Michael: There is... there is a... there is an energy shift that's just unremarkable.

Sabrina: Yeah. Like, I, I can slightly relate to that because of my dance experience, you know? It's like, it takes so much work, and it's so hard, but, like, at the end of the day, it's so much fun, and you can't wait to go do it again.

Michael: Exactly.

Sabrina: You know, it's like all the praise you get, all the attention you get, like, it's nice.
[Laughs]

Michael: Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina: So...

Michael: So, the studio name, Effervescent Studios, uh, it comes from a friend of mine who... well, he would always come to the shows, regular attender, uh, he would say, "You're just so effervescent." He was like, "Every time you take the stage, it was literally, like, refreshing." He's like, "Just like bubbles in champagne." And so, the studio, kind of, inhabits that, that essence of that, that feeling you get when you're in drag. It's the effervescent freshness. Like, it's... no matter... again, no matter how ridiculous you may feel, once you take it off, the effervescence, you feel it's, it's dwindling after that. It's... that's, that's what I want. That's what I want to encompass in it.

Sabrina: That's great 'cause, as you said, I looked at your sign, and I see the bubbles.

Michael: Yeah. I was like, "That's what they are."

Sabrina: Like, it's champagne! [Laughs]

Michael: You welcome! That's where they come from.

Sabrina: That's awesome.

Michael: Thank you.

Sabrina: Of course.

Sabrina: Well, thank you so much. I appreciate your time and everything and...

Michael: It's my pleasure.

Sabrina: Answering all my fun, silly questions.

Michael: Thank you, thank you.

Sabrina: Of course.

Michael: Yay!

Interview with Paris Starz

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Kealie: So, the first question I have for you is, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Paris Starz: Um, well, I used to have a friend, um, who was doing drag, and he was just, honestly, super-obnoxious with it. And me and my friends, we always said, uh, we would never do that. 'Cause I have, like, a group of friends that [inaudible] with since the beginning. And, um, I ca-- I can remember, like, we would go to, um, the gay youth group that was here at the time in Evansville, and, um, sometimes we would dress up, but we never really called it drag. And then, uh, down at the river front, we used to always listen to music and just, kind of, dance and lip sync, but we never called it drag, but we always still thought it was repulsive.

Kealie: Okay, alright. So, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Paris Starz: Um, I was... I was 20 years old, and I had went to Indianapolis one time 'cause someone I went to beauty school with introduced me to people up there. And, um, I told my friend at the time, who was a... um, who was a drag queen, and she actually became my drag mother, but I was like, "Oh yeah, I know how to do my makeup." 'Cause we were gonna go out in the town dressed as girls. And I did my makeup the way I did it, and she was like, "Oh no, honey, that's not how you do makeup." So, she did my makeup, and, um, we, like, went around, like, downtown Indianapolis just dressed up, like, kind of, like, making, like, music videos, in downtown Indianapolis. And that was... that was the first time. But my first time ever actually performing on stage, um, I actually bought someone's ID, and, um, I snuck into a show and did, basically, my performance underage with someone else's fake ID.

Kealie: Okay, [laughs] alright. So, how did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you when you started doing drag?

Paris Starz: Well, at first, like, my, my distant family weren't, like, really cool with it. Like, they would kinda, like, make fun of... make fun of it. They would call my... they would call my actual parents and just be like, "Did you see what Billy is doing?" just all this stuff. And, um, so they weren't really supportive. But my mom has never been, uh, not supportive, and she's always come to my shows, every once and a while. But my dad, he's never... we've never talked about it.

Kealie: Okay. Um, so were your friends supportive whenever you started doing drag?

Paris Starz: Oh yes, of course.

Kealie: Alright. Where does your drag name come from?

Paris Starz: Um, well, at first, my drag name was Briana LaQueer, and, um, there was already a Briana at the time in the town, in Evansville. So, my best friend was like, "You need to come up with something else." And my senior prom theme was a starry night in Paris. So, that's kinda where I came up with Paris Starz.

Kealie: Okay. Alright. So, there are a lot of terms for drag and styles of drag, from drag queen and drag king, to glamor queen, male impersonator comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artist, bioqueen, camp queen, and among others. Are there particular labels that you would categorize yourself underneath?

Paris Starz: Well, technically, now, I'm a bearded queen, because with my job it's easier. Um, I feel like guys take me more serious when I do, like, their beard [inaudible] and stuff, if I have a beard. So, um... and plus, it's like... it's like contour for men. So, um, I, I do, like, bearded queen now, but I, honestly, go by any of those. Like, I don't... I don't really... like, labels are just labels to me.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: So...

Kealie: Does the type of drag you do affect your life as a drag artist?

Paris Starz: Um, yeah. People definitely turn their nose up to it. Like, the old school girls are just like, "You know you were way prettier before," and all kinds of stuff like that. But I know I'm still that girl, so they can't... I can't be bothered.

Kealie: Alright. Who or what influenced your drag?

Paris Starz: Um, I don't really know. Like, um, when I first started, there was always, like, the dancing queens. Like, um, there's some girls out there like Annastacia DeMoore. Um, there were just different, different names. Like, people who were, like, always into, like, bucking, which we call dancing, or stuff like that. But really, there's, like, no mainstream people that really influenced me. I would say, now, someone who's, kind of, mainstream, like Roxxy Andrews, I definitely pay attention to her, like, just really big glamor...

Kealie: Okay.

Paris Starz: And things like that.

Kealie: Alright. So, do you consider drag to be political?

Paris Starz: Uh, I think it could be political.

Kealie: Okay. What...?

Paris Starz: Um, I, I, I definitely think that drag queens are, like, um, almost like the lighthouse for the community. We... like, we can help people, um, and also we, like... we do benefits or different things to, like, raise money for different issues. And I feel like that could somehow be political.

Kealie: Okay. Alright. So, I'm gonna ask you a few questions about your life as a drag artist. And I know you mentioned it before that you had a drag mother. Um, can you tell me more about, like, your drag family?

Paris Starz: Sure. Um, I, I have two different drag moms. I have one drag mom, who I told you about earlier, that put me in drag for the first time. That's technically your drag mom, the first person who, like, did your makeup and stuff. But she was very new when I first started, so we actually met, like, another drag family, and her name was Anastacia DeMoore. And she actually, um... she was more like into, like, the stuff that I liked, like dancing, very dramatic contour, um, and makeup. So, I honestly... I got mixed in with them. But I... I don't even know if that family even claims me. But, basically, a drag family is just, like, your extended family and your chosen family that you choose, and, like, you just kinda, like, lean on each other. And even, even though we aren't always around each other, like, when we talk to each other, we never skip a beat.

Kealie: Okay. Um, how often do you perform?

Paris Starz: Um, since COVID, uh... well, from 2012 until COVID hit, I performed every single weekend, pretty much. I mean, there were... of course there were weekends off. But now, we only perform once a month here in Evansville. But also, there's places around, if you wanted to perform, you would just have to, like, do an open stage or something like that. But it's so, um, cutthroat 'cause there's so many girls out there. Um, girls as in entertainers. There's so many entertainers out there, it's just hard to [unclear] places. But in Evansville, I, for sure, perform once a month.

Kealie: Okay. How often did you perform, like, before COVID?

Paris Starz: Um, I performed every weekend.

Kealie: Every weekend, okay. And then, where do you normally perform at in Evansville?

Paris Starz: Um, before COVID, I performed at Someplace Else Nightclub, and that was where I performed most of my... most of my career. Um, I used to perform at, like, Alter Ego's in Owensboro, um, Equals in Owensboro. But now, it's just, um, here in Evansville, at most in Boka Lounge. Like, we are called, like, the dolls of the district, and it's just like four girls and, basically, we're a cast, and we perform at both venues 'cause they're, like, super supportive of each other.

Kealie: Alright. So, what goes into getting ready for a performance?

Paris Starz: A whole lot. [Laughs] Um, well, for the night of, it's mainly just, like, doing your makeup. And then, um, some girls don't have to, but I personally have to wear hip pads, and that's just to make my body look more womanly. So, I literally use couch cushions that I once found. I cleaned them, of course. And, um, you just cut out the shape of, like, your hip and what you want your butt to look like. And you trim it down, and put pantyhose over it so it smooths out like your real legs. And that is the hardest part. Like, yesterday when I per-- when I performed, I literally was like... my mom was here, and she saw me getting ready, and I was like,

“Uh, this is the worst part. You're so lucky that you don't have to put hip pads on.” But, um... so, honestly, like, preparing up to that, we just have to, like, listen music and lip sync. And honestly, I'm sitting in my room or in my bedroom, usually I have two big mirrors in here. And I'll just, like, kind of, perform or just dance in the mirror, just see what I look like. So, [overtalking].

Kealie: Okay. I've never heard about the, like, using the couch cushions as hip pads. That's definitely really interesting and neat.

Paris Starz: Oh yeah. It's like... and some people, um, nowadays, like, they actually manufacture hip pads into pantyhose. They're more so dance tights, and all you do is just pull them up. But they're literally, like, \$100, and I just... even though I've done drag for so long, I've never invested in those.

Kealie: Yeah. [Laughs] Okay. What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Paris Starz: Um, I honestly... it, it is challenging, but, but really, it's, it's not challenging at the same time. Like, I would say, like, mentally it's challenging 'cause thinking, like, people wouldn't like the songs you choose or just not fitting the stigma. But other than that, um, I feel like it's not really a challenge. Maybe, maybe it could seem challenging not being able to find a venue to work at and stuff like that. But for me, I've been very fortunate. But I know, like, people who are coming into the scene, you really have to work up to get into the scene. It was never easy at first, it took me a long time.

Kealie: Yeah. How long did it take you to get to, like, where you are now?

Paris Starz: Um, I was 20 when I started, and it literally took me, probably... I would say two years to get, like, the solid foundation. Just because... like, when the older queens, when you first come in, they, they never want a new girl, and you always have to earn your spot. So, it just... it just took a lot of time of, like, doing free shows, um, taking a lot of backtalk, like, people talking bad about you, and just doing things like that. But I rose up.

Kealie: [Laughs] Alright. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or world?

Paris Starz: Um, without a doubt. Like, we are like a little, like, hole in Evansville where we don't really... some of the girls just don't really advance. Like, if you were to go to Louisville and then come back to Evansville, our drag scene is completely different. Like, we're very old school. Um, I wouldn't say, like, all of us are old school, but some of them just, like, they never progressed with their makeup and different things like that. So, like, it's just very, like, stuck in the '80s or '90s.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: So, I mean, we're a little bit... we're a little bit unique here for that. But honestly, everyone is pretty much... like music-wise and, like, performance value kind of the same.

Kealie: Okay. So, if you were giving someone advice, who is specifically in the Evansville scene, what would you tell them to do to progress further in their drag career?

Paris Starz: Um, to definitely watch all the... all the videos of all their favorite queens, um, and watch YouTube videos of people they don't even like too, because they're gonna learn from them. But, um, go to different shows and, and, honestly, travel and do open stages. 'Cause I've done open stages, like, even over in Ohio just for, like, experiences. So, like, as much as you can perform to practice, practice, practice. And then, um, find a drag mother.

Kealie: Okay. So, um, where did you say your drag mother was located?

Paris Starz: Um, she lives in Indianapolis.

Kealie: Indianapolis, okay. And do you have, like, any drag siblings that are supportive and, like, there to help you and helped you progress?

Paris Starz: Um, honestly, no, no drag siblings. Most of my progression came from, like, friends and just, um, always watching them and, like, just learning from them and asking them, "Oh girl, what did you use to, to do that?" and different things like that.

Kealie: Okay. So, what has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

Paris Starz: Um, it definitely taught us how to perform on a camera.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: Because we had to adapt to doing most things online or virtually. And now, I would say, it's definitely... it's more acceptable just to do, like, a quick online show than it ever was before.

Kealie: Okay. And then, so now we are gonna talk, kind of, about, like, sex, gender identity and gender expression, which we, kind of, touched on before. So, you talked about your pronouns in and out of drag. You go by he or she or whatever just feels right?

Paris Starz: Yes.

Kealie: Okay. Has drag influenced your sex or gender identities, and if so, how?

Paris Starz: Um, I would say, like, honestly, drag opened my eyes to everything. Um, this is like a... this is gonna be like way over the question, but I have to tell a quick background story.

Kealie: No, good.

Paris Starz: Um, but I met... I honestly came from, like, the smallest of small towns, and I didn't even know, like, what a drag queen was. I remember finding Someplace Else on Facebook when I was younger, and, um, I saw the drag queens on there but I, I honestly thought they looked scary just because, like, I wasn't used to that kind of a look. And then, when I moved here, I met my friend who's transgender and I honestly... I didn't know she was transgender at first. I didn't even know what that meant. But we came... like, we slowly became best friends, like... and then when I found out, it, like, opened a whole new world. Um, but I would say, like,

just drag in general has, like, taught me so much and made everything okay. Like, it's made me comfortable with anything. Like, when people tell me their crazy stories about the different things that they do, I'm just like, "Oh, girl, that's nothing."

Kealie: Okay. Have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Paris Starz: Um, I don't think so. I mean, of course, like... uh, no, no, I wouldn't say. I was going to tell you, like... I mean, now, sometimes, um, like... sometimes there are... we call them tranny chasers. But that, that's, like, a really insensitive way of saying it, like, but, basically, just people who, like, want to be with a transgender or a drag queen. Like, there are people out there who, like, want you to do things, like, with them in drag. That's kind of weird.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: But, um, that's been a whole new ballpark. Like, I was not... definitely not used to that, but that has happened.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: But I've never done that. We don't do that.

Kealie: [Laughs]

Paris Starz: That's too much work. I always tell them, "Um, sweetie, I'm not a real girl. I have hip pads. There is no way it'll work."

Kealie: [Laughs] Alright. Um, how has drag impacted or changed you as a person?

Paris Starz: Um, I think that it's definitely made me, like, more of who I am. Like, I am more comfortable... I was, like, so hidden in my shell before. And now, like, that I'm a drag queen, I... I mean, everyone knows me, I have definitely, um... I've done so much more for, like, the community in more ways than I ever could have done it before. So, I would think it's definitely made me a better person and more well-rounded and educated.

Kealie: Yeah. Um, has drag impacted your confidence as a person as... comparison to when you are out of drag?

Paris Starz: Um, for sure. Like, as a drag queen, of course, I'm, like, super confident. Like, I was just thinking about my... 'cause I just had a show in Louisville. Like, I could... I could never dance or perform or do the things that I do without my facial makeup on. Uh, it's... I mean, it definitely has, like, influenced me, for sure.

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: And just made it easier to be me.

Kealie: Okay. So, if you could go back in time as Paris Starz, what advice would Paris Starz give to your younger self?

Paris Starz: Um, as in before, like, adulthood? Are you saying, like, when... before I was, like, old enough to like go out and [unclear]?

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: Okay. Oh yeah, for sure., Paris would tell Billy to stop being such a pushover and, um, with all respect, beat their asses 'cause there was a lot of people who were haters. Um, like, people used to push me into lockers, knock my books out of my hands, call me fag, all the different things. So, I think if I had Paris, then, she'd be more confident, and honestly, I would have a heel to shove up their ass.

Kealie: [Laughs] Okay. So, I'm curious if... how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. Can you share about how one or more of your social identities, such as gender, race, class, age, geography, religion, size, sexuality, disability, or the interaction of these social identities have impacted your experience as a drag artist?

Paris Starz: Um, okay, girl...

Kealie: I know it was a lot, it was a lot.

Paris Starz: One more time.

Kealie: Yeah. So, basically, let me try to, like, word it better, 'cause it's a wordy question. So, how has your, like, your own identities, such as, like, your race, size, religion, sexuality, where you live, how does that affect you as a drag artist, in comparison to other artists, who don't, maybe, share the same identities as you?

Paris Starz: Um, I don't really know. Like, I would say my size, of course I'm a big girl, so, um, I don't know. It's, um... like, skinny girls, they have it so much easier than us, 'cause they can just go buy something off the shelf and put it on. But there's not much plus size things out there. I don't know if I'm going the right way with this question.

Kealie: No, you, you definitely got it.

Paris Starz: Um, as far as, like, my music choice and stuff, I came from a small town, so, um, I'm not so much into, like, more urban music. I'm... I gear my performances more to, like, pop-y, kind of, sometimes country music.

Kealie: Mm-hmm.

Paris Starz: And so, I mean, I would say, like, the way I was brought up and the area I was brought up in has definitely influenced that. But other than that, and the skinny girls being everything... did I answer the question?

Kealie: Yes, you did, for sure. It was a... it was a wordy question. [Laughs] Okay. So, now we're gonna kinda get into, like, your views about drag overall. So, how do you define drag?

Paris Starz: Um, I would just definitely say it's like... it's like an art of expression. Like, if I'm having a bad day, or if I'm not feeling like... feeling it, and then I know I have a show coming

up, like, afterwards it's such a relief, um, like, you just feel so much more liberated. It's, it's just always been, like, a way for me to just let it all go.

Kealie: Okay. What do you think the purpose of drag is?

Paris Starz: Um, I honestly... I mean, the purpose, I really... I really don't know if there is a definite purpose out there, but all I know is, when I was younger, I used to dress up, like, in my mom's clothes when she wasn't there, and I would put a t-shirt on my head as my hair, and I... and I used to parade around as a five-year-old me pretending to be a woman. So, I think, like, drag is just, honestly, a natural thing that, um, drag queens just never pushed away.

Kealie: Mm-hmm.

Paris Starz: 'Cause I know there's lots of stories, about even straight men, who've dressed up and played with girl stuff, but here they are, living their lives. And I don't know if maybe they pushed it away or if it just wasn't their interest. But for me, it just, kind of, stuck.

Kealie: Yeah. Do you think that drag is sexual?

Paris Starz: Oh, for sure!

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: Um, I mean, I wouldn't say, like, me, personally... like, I mean, some of my songs are definitely sexual, like, you just gotta make it that way sometimes. So, it's part of the expression.

Kealie: Yeah. So, why do you think drag is sexual?

Paris Starz: Um, just because, like, society is so... like, they just love to come up and touch your breasts, like that... I don't know, like, if in real life, if men walk up to girls and just grab their boobs, but men and women come up to us, they grab our fake boobs, and it's definitely a sexual thing. Like, we-- I mean, we, we don't just have, like, an orgy fest; it's not nothing yucky or anything like that, but... not saying that's yucky, I'm not trying to offend anyone.

Kealie: No, you're okay.

Paris Starz: Um, like, just when we perform, like... I mean, of course, if it's... I'm trying to think of a song, but if it's a certain song, of course, we're going to be sexual with it.

Kealie: Yeah. So, you just, kind of, go with the vibe?

Paris Starz: Yeah, just roll with the punches.

Kealie: Okay. So, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Paris Starz: I personally... some drag queens hate it, just because it's not real drag, but I personally love RuPaul, and I love Drag Race just because, um... I can remember actually when I picked my drag name watching the Season 1 of RuPaul's Drag Race, and it wasn't even as acceptable as it is now, and honestly, a lot of people didn't know about drag. But thankfully,

RuPaul's Drag Race has definitely brought such a light to our world. Um, and even if it is a, like, superficial version of what drag is, it definitely has some of the key points and some of the things that we actually do. And I feel like it's definitely opened a lot of people's eyes to our world and our community. And, um, without RuPaul, we might still be a few steps back, honestly.

Kealie: Mm-hmm. Okay.

Paris Starz: So, I personally love RuPaul and Drag Race.

Kealie: Yeah. Okay. So, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Paris Starz: Um, if I could change one thing, it would, for sure, be the drama and, like, the cattiness within, the... within people. But all I... I know that that's just human nature. But, um, a lot of times the drama is what, like, turns people off to drag, because everyone's always so competitive, and they always want to... they always think or want to be the best. And so, you have to have thick skin and confidence to get through all that, because people, like, literally will, like, murder your mentality, but you just have to keep it moving. And that's the worst part, is just having to deal with all the extra drama.

Kealie: Mm-hmm. Okay. So, what do you think are some misconceptions people have about drag?

Paris Starz: Uh, well, people think that we're all, like... like, we're freaks or we're, um, I don't know, like, like we don't use... Like, last night, for example, I went to a truck stop on my way back from Louisville, and I was so terrified to use the bathroom, but I had to use the bathroom. So, um, I went into the men's bathroom, and I still had a full face of makeup on. And the guy said, "Um, the ladies' restroom is on the other side." And I said, "Well, I'm fearful for my life, and I'm really a man, so I'm gonna use this bathroom."

Kealie: Oh!

Paris Starz: So, um, I don't know if that was answering the question, but, um...

Kealie: Yeah.

Paris Starz: I just... I just feel like, um, people are so afraid. Um, but really, it's just so different for me and my world because I see a man wearing makeup as like, "Yes, come on, bitch! Like you look, sick queen!" Like, I'm so like comfortable with, like, the gender fluidity of it. But, um, some people aren't, and that's the one thing that I just... I fear for the most. But I'm a big person, so if someone is gonna try to take me down, they got a fight on, on their hands, for sure.

Kealie: So, um, where do you think some of this comes from, like people having these misconceptions about, like, gender identity and stuff with drag?

Paris Starz: Without a doubt, uneducated, um, just because they've just never been around it. Like, even me, for an example, when I was young, I came from a small town like Hamilton, Indiana. I actually even came from an even smaller town, but no one even knows where that is. So, um... but, like, just not knowing, like, that it's out there and that... I mean, I'm sure they know

that it's out there, but just, just knowing that they're real people, and... I don't know. It's, it's just different, just not being educated, for sure.

Kealie: Yeah. What do you think could help, like, change that, like, help people become educated on it better?

Paris Starz: Um, I think it's already happening with just things like RuPaul's Drag Race, more things in mainstream media like, getting us out there more. Of course, like, everyone's always like, "Stop shoving your life down our throats," like, "It's all your own agenda." But, really, like, just, just making us part of everything else.

Kealie: Mm-hmm. So, if you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would it be?

Paris Starz: Um, oh God!

Kealie: I know, it's a heavy one.

Paris Starz: I have to think about it for a quick second.

Kealie: Yeah, of course, take your time.

Paris Starz: Literally... we have drag pageants, and this is like on-stage question times 20 questions. So, I'm like, this is good practice for me.

Kealie: [Laughs] Good, I'm glad.

Paris Starz: So, so, one thing I could... what was it again?

Kealie: If you could choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would it be?

Paris Starz: Um, I would probably say that we're just... we're all the... we're all the same, at the end of the day, Like, we take it all off, and we're... we still live normal lives, and it's a normal life, anyways.

Kealie: Mm-hmm.

Paris Starz: So, I mean, I guess that would be it. Like, we're still... like, we're still humans, and we still bleed red, at the end of the day.

Kealie: Alright. So, I think that's all the questions I have for you.

Paris Starz: Okay.

Interview with Peach of the Midwest

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Chelsey: Alright, So, you are doing good today?

Peach of the Midwest: I'm doing pretty good. How about yourself?

Chelsey: I'm good. I just can't hear very well. [Laughs]

Peach of the Midwest: How is the... how is the COVID going?

Chelsey: It's going, it's going. I feel fine. I just know that a... I just know I have an ear infection. I got to get over this before I fly.

Peach of the Midwest: Oh good. So, it's working out pretty good? You're not having any...?

Chelsey: No..

Peach of the Midwest: You didn't have any horrible symptoms or anything?

Chelsey: No. I mean, I was just wiped out for about a week and, um, I just... I just... the secondary thing right now is what's getting me. Let me close this.

Peach of the Midwest: Oh okay. Yeah, I had... when I had it, I had somewhat of a cough, and then, like, my cough has lingered, like, on and on, so I've been taking Robitussin, so...

Chelsey: Yeah, I've been doing the Mucinex. That's been working for me.

Peach of the Midwest: Oh okay. Yeah, 'cause it's good to do that, and some tea, because I noticed, um, that mucus will sit there.

Chelsey: Oh yeah. Well, I mean, since we are on the subject of COVID, that's one of the interview questions. What has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for you, for your life as a drag artist?

Peach of the Midwest: Oh my goodness! [laughter] Honestly, it has... COVID has stopped everything for a drag queen, I'm telling you. We're even having... we're having to get creative. Um, so a lot of queens are doing, um, like, virtual shows, a lot of queens are doing, um, like, you know, they'll have, like, a big show within their basement with just the queens only. As for me, I stopped doing... my last show would have been Halloween, actually.

Chelsey: Oh wow!

Peach of the Midwest: And, um, I was actually quarantined then from being exposed to COVID, so I couldn't make that show.

Chelsey: Oh!

Peach of the Midwest: So, I haven't performed since before then actually.

Chelsey: Okay. So, it's changed everything for you?

Peach of the Midwest: Oh yeah, definitely.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah, definitely.

Chelsey: Alright, um, so I just want to know a little more about your, your personal story with drag. When did you hear... when did you first hear about drag? And what was your initial reaction to it?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, well, I started doing drag... when I first heard about drag, it was at Chester Street Bar in Champaign, Illinois. A few of my friends were actually drag queens at the time; they were doing some talent nights or whatever. And I started off from a dare. I was dared by a friend to do it, and ever since I got in drag, I never stopped. I've been doing drag since 2008.

Chelsey: Okay, okay. And you said a tala night. What is that?

Peach of the Midwest: A talent night is where it's just like a talent show; you, kind of, showcase your talent and...

Chelsey: Oh talent.

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah. So, they call it a talent night.

Chelsey: Okay, okay. Um, so you started performing as a drag artist in 2018, and you did it on a dare?

Peach of the Midwest: 2008.

Chelsey: 2008. Excuse me.

Peach of the Midwest: Mm-hmm, yeah. Quite some time ago.

Chelsey: So, 2000... and you did it on a dare, huh?

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah. I did it on a dare, and I, um, haven't stopped since. I started... I started at Chester Street Bar, actually. I became a show director over there. And then I went over to Emerald City. That was another, um, bar that they had. Um, I became a show director over there. And I've, I've been a show director for quite some time everywhere I go. So, uh, yeah I've, I've... it's been pretty successful for me, actually.

Chelsey: That's cool, that's cool. Um, like, show directing, like, say, is it like, um, like, a drag family or a house that you're in?

Peach of the Midwest: So, I'm in the house of Carrington. I started off from being a Dupree...

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: Um, and then, after... I think after, probably, six months, six or seven months, I became a Carrington, and I've been a Carrington ever since.

Chelsey: Nice. Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah.

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

Peach of the Midwest: They packed the shows. [Laughs]

Chelsey: Yeah?

Peach of the Midwest: They packed the shows. Oh yeah, definitely.

Chelsey: That's great. That's great.

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah, they packed the shows, so it worked out great for me.

Chelsey: Okay. That's really cool that you got so much support. Where does your... where does your drag name come from?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, so I started off as... my first drag name was Peaches, um, and then my, uh, current drag name is Peach of the Midwest Carrington. Um, honestly, the Carringtons are known for their backsides. So, that's where we, kind of, get the peach name from. And I've, I've... I used to travel a lot, and I've also, uh, traveled to, like, different bars within the Midwest. So, that's where we got the Peach of the Midwest from, so...

Chelsey: Okay, alright. So, there's, there's a lot of terms for, for types of drag and styles of drag, from, like, drag queen, drag king, glamor queen, comedy, bio queen, camp queen. Are you... are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? What kind of drag do you do?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, I would say I do, uh... I have performed glamorous drag, and I'm also a dancer. So, I'm a drag... I'm a... I'm a dancing girl, what they call it. Um, so, sometimes, you'll see me, like, in a dance costume with a lot of fringe and, you know, big hair, big dance hair, or sometimes you'll see fully glamorous in a full, uh, stone gown, or, you know, sequined gown or...

Chelsey: Oh, fun. That's fun. Do you make the gowns yourself?

Peach of the Midwest: No.

Chelsey: No?

Peach of the Midwest: No. So, I have a lot of seamstresses that I work with. Um, Mona Montclair, a retired drag queen, her name was Amaya St. James. Um, I have a team of seamstress who does alterations and things like that for me. They are a part of the U of I. They used to do the U of I ballet team.

Chelsey: Oh, nice.

Peach of the Midwest: So, they do my alterations.

Chelsey: Okay. So, you would characterize yourself more of a glamor queen, dancing, dancing queen?

Peach of the Midwest: Yes, uh, huh.

Chelsey: Does the type... does being a glamor queen or, you know, dancing queen, does that affect your life as a drag artist? Like, how does that affect your success or your being a drag artist?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, I think it actually helped out a lot, actually. So, I am the owner of Miss Chambana Pride. Um, I came up with that pageant last... I think two years ago. And I was a manageress for that, so that was a success. Also, I was a part of the In Her Closet at Spurlock Museum at U of I, on the U of I campus. They had an exhibit for drag queens, and I was showcased on the runway as one of the girls on there.

Chelsey: Wow!

Peach of the Midwest: I've done several big shows with, like, the RuPaul Drag Race girls. Uh...

Chelsey: Oh, that's the...

Peach of the Midwest: I've done the sold-out... I've done the sold-out shows at the U of I, Illini Union. So, yeah, it's been pretty good.

Chelsey: Well, that's good.

Peach of the Midwest: And I also... um, this past... two years ago, 'cause we didn't have it this year, but the year before that, I brought back the shows at Parkland College.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: They hadn't had shows in over, I think, five to eight years, so...

Chelsey: That's awesome. Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: It was a great success. So, yeah.

Chelsey: Who or what has influenced your drag, like...?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, the list is long. So, I have... so, I have a queen who I started out with. Her name was Kelasia Karmikal. Um, she started me out, started me... teaching me makeup and different things like that. And then, once I became a Carrington, my drag mother is, um, Stimulation Carrington. And then I have my grandmother, which is Ceduxion Carrington. I have Mona Montclair, I have Amaya St. James, um, Alexis Carrington. So, it was like... kinda like... the Carringtons are kinda like a village. Like, a lot of people say a village... it takes a village to raise a child; it takes a village to raise a drag queen too... [Laughs]

Chelsey: Okay. Alright. I was reading... um, I was reading a reading from class the other day, and it said... one of the... one of the things it said in the reading was, um, drag is for... drag is like kindergarten. It's like kindergarten for drag queens, like, starting off.

Peach of the Midwest: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Chelsey: Do you agree with that, kind of? Once you start off, you kinda... growing?

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah, yeah, I agree. Yeah, definitely.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah, 'cause you have to learn the ropes of it all. Because the makeup and.... See, a lot of the times... a lot of times when you have... when you are in drag houses, their main thing is they want you to be as independent as possible.

Chelsey: Mm-hmm.

Peach of the Midwest: So, what they do is they kinda mold you into being as independent as possible. So, they'll start off with... a lot of times, they start off with make-up. Make-up is like one of the hardest things for you to, uh... to do, 'cause you're going from, of course, a male to a female, you have to learn the structure of your face and all that. So, I think that was like the first thing for me to learn.

And then, after that, we went on to costumes, because a lot of times, when you're a new drag queen, if you don't have the family structure of someone who already was in drag or someone who's willing to allow you to borrow their costumes and garments and all that, you're gonna wear street clothes. So, that was one of the things. We kinda got a creative in the beginning with the street clothes and all that. And, um, as I [inaudible] on and learned make-up and, you know, got more serious and was willing to spend more money and invest in myself, I became, um... I became interested in costumes and, you know, garments, and I was able to meet different seamstresses and work with a lot of people to where I was able to, uh, start my closet of having my own items. So, yeah.

Chelsey: Mm-hmm, nice. Okay. How often do you perform in drag, and where do you perform the most?

Peach of the Midwest: So, bef-- before COVID, um, I used to perform at a bar called Noah's Rock Bar. Um, we would perform every month. We would have every month shows. And that had started prior to COVID, and it actually... the last show there was Halloween. Prior to that, I was going from different bars and hosting shows. I was over at Clark Bar before. Um, like I said, C Street before it closed, I was there. Sometimes we were there Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, it just depends, you know, what kind of events they had. Um, normally, Sundays were drag shows, but sometimes we would have, you know, like, a talent night for... on a weekday or something like that.

Chelsey: Okay. So, like, four or five times a week you would, before COVID, perform?

Peach of the Midwest: Uh, it just... it just depends, 'cause, see, C Street has been closed for quite some time. So, once C Street closed, things kinda decreased a lot. We kinda weren't doing drag for a while. And then I kinda did some networking to where we could get it back going. So, I would say, before COVID I was probably doing, probably like two shows a month, if that.

Chelsey: Two shows a month?

Peach of the Midwest: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: 'Cause sometimes I would travel to Peoria; sometimes I would travel to Decatur, Illinois, so... sometimes Springfield. So, yeah. Yeah.

Chelsey: Okay. So, what goes into getting ready for a performance?

Peach of the Midwest: [Laughs]

Chelsey: Short version. No, [laughs] just kidding.

Peach of the Midwest: Oh my goodness. So, first of all... first of all, picking out the garments is, is, you know... it's, it's a big deal, um, 'cause a lot of times you want your garments to go with your music. So, picking out the music is one of the most stressful things for me, because you kinda wanna... you kinda wanna, uh, look... I don't know, I'm the type... I'm the type of performer that likes to look at the audience. So, if I'm going to a bar setting, a lot of people at a bar setting don't really like the glamorous gown girl. You know? A lotta... a lotta gowns I normally pull out at, like, children's events, I normally pull out at, like, brunch events, um, so that I can keep the energy up.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: So, first things first is your music. Second thing would be your garments that you're gonna wear. Third thing would be your makeup, which takes sometimes from 30 minutes to probably two hours, just depending on, you know, how long you want to stretch it out or how long... how creative you wanna get with it. Um, and then it's getting to the bar, going ahead and setting up your station and, you know, getting to it. So, yeah.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: It's a... it's a lot of work, but that's...

Chelsey: So, a lot of work.

Peach of the Midwest: It's a lot of work, but that's just the short time... that's just the short version of it. [Laughs]

Chelsey: [Laughs] Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: Doing it is... doing it is a lot longer than talking about it, so [overtalking].

Chelsey: Yes, I... from what I've read, you guys... you guys, uh, put a lot of work... a lot of work into it.

Peach of the Midwest: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Definitely.

Chelsey: Alright. So, um, what are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, I think the biggest challenges are... well, I think the biggest challenge for now, like, in our area, we don't have a gay bar. So, we have to utilize straight bars and, you know, LGBTQ+ friendly bars to be able to showcase our talent. So, I think that's one of our biggest challenges currently.

Chelsey: So, but you said that you perform for universities or, or put on pageants? Is that what you s--?

Peach of the Midwest: So, so we... okay, so we do... we work with the university because we are... we're a part of the In Her Closet with Spurlock Museum. So, that went on for about a year. They extended it due to COVID because they said a lot of people didn't have a chance to come in and all that. So, um, the exhibit is currently down, but they're looking into bringing back some more exhibits over the course of the year or whatever. Um, so, we do do work with them. We um... we do the U of I's Illini Union show, but they cancelled it due to COVID this year.

Chelsey: Gotcha.

Peach of the Midwest: So, it'll probably be retired. So, a lot of things that we normally would do were cancelled due to COVID. So...

Chelsey: Okay. Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah. But as far as the pageant, that was cancelled as well. [Laughs]

Chelsey: Yeah. I'm so sorry

Peach of the Midwest: So, [overtalking] before... I was actually supposed to crown the first queen, um, because I was the emeritus, so I was crowing the actual first queen this year for pride, but they cancelled it.

Chelsey: Okay. Um, next question. Let's see. Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or in the world? What's unique about...?

Peach of the Midwest: I think... I think the biggest thing that we would need would be a gay club.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: I think the biggest thing we would need is a gay club because it gives us our own space. It gives us our own safe haven, you know, and it allows us to have that voice on what... you know, what our community likes and enjoys versus going into somebody else's bar and having to get comfortable with what everybody like, you know? We can actually do what we enjoy within our community in our own space.

Chelsey: Mm-hmm. And can you clarify for... where you live that, that you don't have the...?

Peach of the Midwest: I currently live in Champaign. I live in Champaign, Illinois.

Chelsey: Champaign? Okay, yeah, so I see what you're saying. Okay. So, um, the...

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah.

Chelsey: So, what is.. what is... there is nothing really nothing unique about the Champaign drag scene to you?

Peach of the Midwest: I mean, honestly, like, the Carringtons have taken over. [Laughs]

Chelsey: Okay, okay.

Peach of the Midwest: So, that's, that's the unique thing. I'm in one of the hottest houses in the Midwest, um, which is the Carringtons. I mean, we go all over. We have queens all over. Um, and I mean, when I say all over, literally, all over. There's Carringtons everywhere. But that's, that's the most-known house in the Midwest. So, that's, that's the unique thing. I'm in one of the... I'm one of the It girls. [Laughs]

Chelsey: Gotcha! That's gotta be nice.

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah.

Chelsey: Gotta always feel like you belong somewhere, you know?

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah (inaudible) I'm telling you, I, I get asked if I'm a Ca—a Carrington everywhere.

Chelsey: Really? [Laughs]

Peach of the Midwest: When I say everywhere, everywhere. Yes.

Chelsey: Okay. Well, I got a couple personal questions for you, so, um, just feel free to just pass or if you don't... if you don't feel comfortable answering, um, that's totally fine.

Peach of the Midwest: Okay.

Chelsey: Okay? Um, so, how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, so, I go by pronouns he/him. Um, actually, I'm a drag queen, and I actually have a baby that will be born July 21st.

Chelsey: Oh, well, congratulations!

Peach of the Midwest: So, I'll be a dad soon. Thank you. Yeah, so, I'll be a dad soon. Um, so yeah, I ide-- I identify as he/him in a dress. [Laughs]

Chelsey: Okay. Okay. So, how, how has drag influenced your, your sex and, and gender identities?

Peach of the Midwest: Uh, I don't... I don't know...

Chelsey: Don't know?

Peach of the Midwest: Actually... okay. So, I'll say, so I am engaged to a trans man.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: So, I'm engaged to a trans man, I'm a drag queen. I identify as he/him. He identifies as he/him Um, so I think it's actually been fun. [Laughs] I think it's been fun and very interesting for us.

Chelsey: Oh, lost him.

[Blank from 00:20:22 to 00:26:04]

Chelsey: His phone died. Shit!

[Blank from 00:26:07 to 00:27:31]

Chelsea: We'll continue at 3:00 p.m. tomorrow.

Peach of the Midwest: [Inaudible]. How about now?

Chelsea: That's better, yeah. Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: Okay. So, yeah, so, like I was saying with pageantry, you have to network a lot more, so, honestly, I always keep my personal life in drag kinda separate. Um, so, I, I don't know. I don't really know how to answer that.

Chelsey: Okay, you're good. Alright. So, um, this, this next section... there's just a few more questions. I just wanna know, how do you define drag?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, I define drag as dance like no one's watching. Um, be yourself, uh, do what makes you comfortable and be entertained.

Chelsey: So, that's how... that's how you define... that's how you define drag, as just your... freedom...

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah, definitely.

Chelsey: Freedom just to do whatever you want?

Peach of the Midwest: Oh yeah, yeah, freedom to... yeah, freedom to do whatever you want. 'Cause nowadays, drag is... nowadays, drag is a lot more open. Drag used to be, you're a drag queen or a drag king. Now, you have bioqueens, now you have, um... you know, you have androgenous, you have so many... there's so many classifications when it comes to drag now.

Chelsey: So, bioqueen...

Peach of the Midwest: So, I think just being yourself... I'm sorry?

Chelsey: So, bioqueen, can you...? Can you ju—can you... what is...? I've, I've read about bioqueens. What is... what is your, uh, definition of a bioqueen?

Peach of the Midwest: I, honestly, don't even have a [laughs] definition of bioqueen because I'm still learning, like, as far as the definitions and all that. I don't even know what to consider myself. [Laughs]

Chelsey: [Laughs] Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: My.... you know, 'cause I don't know what classification it goes under, um, because it's so many definitions that I'm, I'm not even sure what my classification would be as far as my drag persona.

Chelsey: I see.

Peach of the Midwest: Um, because as I said, I'm very versatile, you know, so I don't really know if it has the certain criteria it goes under or what. So, as far as a bioqueen, I know I've had some in shows before. Um, and they were a lot different than, you know, regular drag queens, like, as far as the attire, makeup and all that. But I don't really know if I could put together a definition for them, though.

Chelsey: Okay, okay. Um, what do you think... what do you think is the purpose of drag is?

Peach of the Midwest: I think the purpose of drag is an outlet for everybody. It allows you to be yourself. And not only just that, it, um, allows you to showcase your talent. I know a lot of, uh, talented individuals, they struggle with depression, they struggle with mental illnesses, and this is like their escape for them, so yeah.

Chelsey: Mm-hmm. Good, good. Okay. So, do you think drag is sexual at all?

Peach of the Midwest: Uh, no, I don't think so.

Chelsey: No?

Peach of the Midwest: Now, sometimes in a performance, you can get a little cheek or a little tit, but I don't think so, no. [Laughs]

Chelsey: Why, why don't you think its sexual?

Peach of the Midwest: Uh, I don't know. I think... I, I don't know.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: I think... well, I mean... I don't know 'cause sometimes... honestly, some times... I mean, with the House of Carrington, you just never know what to expect. So, I think in certain cases, it could be, because sometimes it just depends on the crowd, because sometimes the crowd likes more of a striptease versus a drag queen performance, if that makes sense.

Chelsey: Yeah, that makes sense.

Peach of the Midwest: So, I think it, honestly... I think it, honestly, just depends on the venue and the occasion.

Chelsey: Okay, so the sexua—so, it's sexual just depending on the night and the crowd and, and what's going on?

Peach of the Midwest: Right. Definitely, yeah. The energy in the room, 'cause sometimes you can get a bunch of older guys, and they want that extra, you know...

Chelsey: Yeah.

Peach of the Midwest: That extra dance. Yeah, so...

Chelsey: Like, the eroticism of it?

Peach of the Midwest: Yep. They want you to pull out all the tricks, and they pull out all the money so, they... [laughs]

Chelsey: There you go. Aright. So, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Peach of the Midwest: Oh, I like RuPaul's Drag Race, don't get me wrong. Um, I feel that some of their critiques and some of the pickings of the contestants are unfair at times, and some of the eliminations are unfair at times. But I believe it gives the world the opportunity to see the lifestyle, and it gives the world the opportunity to get educated on the art form.

Chelsey: How, how... in what ways do you think it's unfair?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, I just think a lot of times, like, when you're watching it, I think, certain people that I would say [inaudible].

Chelsey: Oh, I can't hear you again. I'm so sorry. You said it's, uh...?

Peach of the Midwest: Can you hear me now?

Chelsey: There we go. Yeah. [Laughs] Sorry about that.

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah, I just... I just think that, um... I just think that at some points, it's just not fair, like, as far as eliminations and some of the challenges of people that I feel should win. Yeah, they don't get to win, so...

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: And then, also, a lot of the contestants have been... a lot of the contestants have been, uh, former contestants like daughters, former contestants like fam-- you know? So, I just think the picking sometimes is not...

[Blank from 00:05:32 to 00:06:17]

Chelsey: And disconnected again.

[Blank from 00:06:20 to 00:12:38]

Speaker: [Unclear].

Peach of the Midwest: I'm back.

Chelsey: Hi. [Laughs]

Peach of the Midwest: This time I'm telling you it's ridiculous. I was trying not to get back into the car 'cause my nephew is on YouTube watching videos.

Chelsey: Aw, that's alright. Um, alright, I just...

Peach of the Midwest: I'm on the charger now, and I'm ready. [Laughs]

Chelsey: Okay. [Laughs] Alright, so, I've only got a couple more questions for you. So, you were talking about Drag Race, and you said that it was unfair, um, that...

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah, I just... I think that some of their selections and some of their, um, pickings are unfair at times. Um, a lot of times, when watching, um, as a spectator, you think that if some pers-- some people should win, and you think that the person that won shouldn't have won.

Chelsey: Oh, I'm -- I can't hear-- I can't hear you again. I'm so-- It's just coming through... coming through a little bit, the, the background. Um, okay. So, you said the contestants...

Peach of the Midwest: Can you hear me?

Chelsey: Yeah. So, how they're... how they're, um... how are picked and how people win, um, you disapprove?

Peach of the Midwest: Yeah. How they pick a lot of the contest winners and all that. I just think a lot of times the people who are winning should not win, and some of the people who don't get to win that, um, challenge, I think that they should win that challenge because they are a lot stronger within that challenge or whatever. I just... I don't know. Sometimes, I just feel like, a lot of the times, their pickings are more so for television versus it is for the best of... you know, the best of the best of the, the, um, contestants.

Chelsey: Yeah. Okay. I noticed on Drag Race that, um... and I read also that, uh, there hasn't been any Latino women or Latino drag queens that have won. And I noticed, like, a lot of the challenges, kind of, personify more of a, uh, white icons instead of, of, you know, different ethnicities. Um, do you think that, that drag pers-- a lot of drag performances personify whiteness more than any other ethnicity?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, as far as television, I would say yes.

Chelsey: Mm-hmm.

Peach of the Midwest: And RuPaul. [Laughs]

Chelsey: Yeah. [Laughs]

Peach of the Midwest: Um, but, um, I can say the benefit of RuPaul, honestly. He's made way for a lot of... a lot of individuals of all generations and all races, I will say. Um, even, even for local entertainers because drag... you know, with having Drag Race on television, it's allowed people to be more educated and be able to accept, you know, a drag queen better than they would if they hadn't seen it, you know? 'Cause there's never really been a show about a drag queen before RuPaul's Drag Race. So, I think it has helped us in a way. Um, but I think also it's, um, hindered a lot of us because they think that that's what... that's what they should expect from the local girls and all that and they don't-- you know? That's television. So, television is a lot more skunked up at times. And, you know...

Chelsey: Okay.

Peach of the Midwest: They have a lot of designers that can do different creative garments and all that, so...

Chelsey: Okay, great! Okay. Well, um, I noticed also that RuPaul doesn't allow fully trans, uh, individuals or fully transitioned individuals on the show. What do you think about that?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, I think that it's unfair, but I also think it's best to keep it separate so that they are judged fairly.

Chelsey: Mm-hmm. Okay. Do you think, uh, that they should allow drag kings on the show?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, I think that they should have their own show, actually. I think if RuPaul did their own show, I think... I think that that would be good.

Chelsey: Okay. I only got one or two... Only got one more question for you. Um, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be?

Peach of the Midwest: I'm sorry, I can't even hear you? [Background conversation]. Oh, you're still on. I'm sorry, what did you say?

Chelsey: You're fine. [Laughs] I really appreciate you taking the time to do this. Um, I said, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Peach of the Midwest: I think it would be getting a club. I think that would be the main thing that's our focus currently in the Midwest. I think that's one of our hindrance and one thing that will make the community and also the drag community a lot stronger.

Chelsey: Okay. Well, what do you think about... what do you think are a lot of misconceptions people have about drag?

Peach of the Midwest: You said about drag?

Chelsey: Yeah. What are... what do you think are common misconceptions people have about drag? Where, where do you think it comes from?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, I'm not exactly sure how to han-- how to answer that, honestly.

Chelsey: Okay. Uh, so if... last question, if you choose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would it be?

Peach of the Midwest: Um, uh, probably that drag is like an escape and a way for us to showcase our talent for everybody... um, to everybody. Um, and that it's... you know, for a lot of times, for a lot of people it's a fun thing versus a career. And also, a lot of people within it have made it a career, 'cause there's a lot of times, drag queens, that's their full-time job.

Chelsey: Mm-hmm. Okay. Well, thank you so much. That was my last question for you. I really, uh... I wish you the best. I know COVID has affected this a lot for you, and I, uh, I really, uh, I wish you the best, and I hope that things pick up for you and in doing shows and everything.

Peach of the Midwest: Same to you. Thank you so much. And I hope that COVID gets better for you, and I hope that it leaves you very (inaudible).

Chelsey: Thank you. And, uh, take care of that new baby when it comes.

Peach of the Midwest: Thank you!

Chelsey: You're welcome. You have a good day. Thank you.

Peach of the Midwest: You too.

Chelsey: Bye-bye.

Peach of the Midwest: Bye-bye

Interview with Roxie M Valentine

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Maggie: Hello, my name is Maggie.

Roxie: And I am Roxie Valentine!

Maggie: Thank you so much for being here, Roxie. Um, I guess...

Roxie: Absolutely, baby.

Maggie: My question is, where does your drag name come from?

Roxie: So, like most, uh, queer homosexuals, I started doing drag because I was a theater baby. And I was actually about to go to school for theater. And let's be real, with a theater degree, you ain't getting anything from it, except an expensive piece of paper that means nothing to people. Sorry, not sorry.

Maggie: [Laughs]

Roxie: So, literally, the day I was going to go to college I decided to drop, and I just started crossdressing for a living, and I basically had to do what I was gonna pay a school to tell me to do.

Maggie: Okay.

Roxie: So then, I got my drag name from the movie Chicago, obviously. So, it's Roxie... you know how she's Roxie Hart? I changed the Hart to Valentine and changed the spelling. But then it also plays on my favorite horror movie Bride of Chucky, the main character is Tiffany Valentine. So, it plays with my love of horror movies and everything horror and my love of theater.

Maggie: Oh, awesome! I love that. That, kind of, makes me wonder, like, how would you describe your drag? I know you talked about, like, horror and, obviously, Broadway and theater!

Roxie: Right. So, my drag is very... like, I would consider myself a very versatile queen. Yes, ladies and gentleman, she's vers.

Maggie: [Laughs]

Roxie: Um, because I don't like to be stuck in one box because that gets very stale and very boring real quick. I have things that I excel in. Like, I excel in doing conceptualized, creepy-style horror drag very... like, doing that very well. But I can also be a pretty glamorous woman at the same time. So, I just like to do everything. Because, this is the thing, if you're not versatile,

you're not gonna work. You have to be able to work for the audience that is at a specific venue. Like, Attitudes, the people coming to Attitudes, they were all punky, emo, rock style, versus Grey Fox, they're the older type of, like, crowd. So, they like hearing that good throwback '70s, '80s, '90s music. So, you gotta be able to do everything.

Maggie: Okay. Wow. Yeah, thank you for sharing that. I didn't know, like, different clubs had different, kind of, vibes, different crowds, I guess you would say.

Roxie: And see, that's the thing too, is it's our job as drag entertainers to push the boundaries of what is the norm at these places, but also making sure you're entertaining them with what they want as well.

Maggie: Yeah. I know you, kind of, said you don't really like labels, but one of my questions is that are there labels that you do use to characterize your drag? Or are you just, kind of, you're like, "I'm versatile. I can give you what you want." [Laughs]

Roxie: So, I, I always say I'm, like, they... glamorous, spooky, punk bitch. Like, my, my friends always call me, um, Elphaba's little bitch niece cousin.

Maggie: [Laughs] I love that.

Roxie: Because she's spooky, but she's, like... also has a heart of gold.

Maggie: That's brilliant! That probably makes you a great performer. [Laughs]

Roxie: Exactly. I'm not afraid to cut you with a, a knife from the back of my leg, but also, I'll be nice to you.

Maggie: [Laughs] Oh gosh, um, let's see. I lost... I was having so much fun, I forgot what question I was on. [Laughs]

Roxie: You're like, "Oh my god, I'm gonna have to cut out so much of this interview."

Maggie: No, no, keepin' it in. Keepin' it in. You gotta give the kids what they want. [Laughs]

Roxie: [Laughs] Oh lord.

Maggie: Um, oh gosh, let's see. So, how often do you perform, and where do you perform? Where can the kids find you? [Laughs]

Roxie: So, I'm normally always either... so, since Attitudes closed, sadly... that was... that was my home bar. And so, for a while, it was hard to get into being a part of a specific, like, group, because everyone... every bar has their own, like, main cast. So, I, for a while, was very much just floating around Grey Fox, Bar:PM, Rehab. But, like, most recently, I've been working with Jade Sinclair. She's, like, basically adopted me as part of her little drag family at this point. She claims me as her drag, uh, grandchild at this point, because she's stunning and sweet. Um, so, yeah. But literally, just, I'm all over the city, all the gay bars.

Maggie: [Laughs]

Roxie: If you can suck a dick in the bathroom, I am probably there.

Maggie: Great to know, so, you're there?

Roxie: So, I could easily make \$200 or \$300 in a night, and that is literally the cost of two wigs right there. On top of the fact that you don't have... what's that called? You don't have, like, credible income because everything's under the table. So, trying to be like, "Hey, give me this lease for this apartment" is a challenge. Because it's basically like, they either think you're a stripper or a drug dealer. And then, you just go, "No, I'm a drag queen, sorry."

Maggie: Oh my gosh. Wow. Yeah. And you guys don't have health insurance either, right?

Roxie: No. If you hurt yourself, you hurt yourself.

Maggie: Oof!

Roxie: You, you keep going and hope, um, you don't fuck your shit up more.

Maggie: [Laughs] Do you perform...? I know you said you perform in person. Do you...? I think I saw on your Facebook, do you perform, like, digitally, like, over stream?

Roxie: So, at the beginning of the pandemic... Yeah. At the beginning of the pandemic, when everything was closed down, I did a lot more social, like, media shows. But currently, I am doing an online drag competition called Supreme Drag Race on Instagram. It's streamed every other Sunday on Twitch. Um, and that's what I'm doing now, because with corona, obviously, pageants and stuff aren't as prominent. And a bitch is competitive and likes to win things.

Maggie: Yeah. No, I think it's beautiful that there's still these competitions going. I mean... I mean, how has COVID, other than, like, moving online, how has it affected your drag life and your mental health?

Roxie: So, the bi-- the biggest... the biggest effect that COVID had on just performing, like, live in drag, going back after shutdown, is these face shields and these masks that you have to wear while performing, are terrible. You already... I, I'm a big... I'm a big girl. I already, uh, breathe heavy lookin' at the refrigerator. So, whenever I'm over there, twirling around, death droppin' and, like, kickin', you get winded. And when you have these, like, face shields that are made of solid plastic, 'cause you still wanna be able to see your mouth, it's not great. I... As soon as I get off stage, I'm like, [heaving], "Help me, Jesus."

Maggie: [Laughs] Yeah, I mean, do those, like... Are they the kind that kinda stick out a little bit? Or are they pretty close to your face?

Roxie: So, there's like... We, we have the one, that is, like, the face shield, like, just the clear piece of plastic. And then, there's the one we call the Hannibal Lector, that, like, goes over your ears and your mouth. And you literally look like Hannibal Lector. And that's just like a solid piece of plastic over your face.

Maggie: That's drag, baby, [Laughs] giving you Hannibal Lector realness.

Roxie: Exactly! Every time.

Maggie: [Laughs] Oh! So, when was, like, the first time you performed in person again since COVID? Like, do you remember?

Roxie: So, I don't... Whoa! I know the first time I performed, I think it was when Attitudes, like, reopened. Huh, RIP now. [Laughs] They're gone. But, yeah, it was... I think it was that. I don't know. I really can't remember. Here's the thing, ever since COVID, like, stopped... it didn't stop, but, like, ever since we were able to reopen bars and everything, I've been running nonstop making this dream a reality, like...

Maggie: Yeah.

Roxie: Performing [inaudible] any time I can.

Maggie: Yeah. I mean, you, kind of, have to keep going as a drag artist, don't you?

Roxie: That's the thing. If you... I don't want to say to the people that, like, took their break and aren't returning to drag because they don't feel safe... I don't want it... this to come off as rude or a re-- a reed, but you are so easily forgotten once you leave that stage if you don't keep going. There are new drag artists coming in the scene every week trying to take your spot. And if you're not promoting yourself, not performing, not at least putting out digital content, you're gonna be forgotten about. Someone else is gonna take your place.

Maggie: Yeah. That's... I would say, does that seem like a new challenge? Like, is that... is that part of the challenge now, you think, of being a drag queen or a drag artist, versus, like, in the... in the heyday?

Roxie: I think it's always been that way because there's always... I, I know when I started, the girls, like, the older generation were scared of me because I was coming into the scene. 'Cause that's the thing, babies are coming in, and, eventually, they're not gonna be babies anymore, and they're gonna be the ones taking the jobs of the older generation who are starting to fizzle out. And that's threatening.

Maggie: Yeah. Wow. Huh. Um, hmm. That brings up, like, a lot of questions.

Roxie:[Laughs] [Unclear], yeah.

Maggie: It kinda makes me wanna ask, like, do you remember when you first heard about drag or when you learned about it? Is that something you can remember?

Roxie: So, I first learned about drag from watching The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Like, I feel like that's a bunch of people's, like, introduction to queer culture, like, seeing Rocky Horror Picture Show or, like, even just seeing Hairspray and the character of Edna being played by a drag queen. That's like their first introduction to seeing, like, "Oh, what's this? This is kind of cool." And then, you just blossom out into finding other things.

Maggie: Yeah. It's so beautiful to see people find themselves through different pieces of queer culture. And that's... it's so funny, I feel like I've heard a lot of people that they found drag through Rocky Horror Picture Show. So, I love that. [Laughs]

Roxie: Exactly. It, it just... it gets ya. If you watch Rocky Horror Picture Show, you will be a drag queen.

Maggie: Yes. [Laughs] Um, when you first became a drag queen, is there anyone who you, like, came out to as a drag queen that you can, like, remember their reaction, like, so much in, in your head, uh, whether good or bad?

Roxie: Not really. This is the thing. Like, I was always dressing up in my mom's, like, clothes and heels and shit, and, like, putting on crappy dollar store wigs and just feeling my fantasy. I remember, in high school, for Halloween one year, I went to school just in drag, boogered on boots. But, like, [laughs] it's there. I wore a t-shirt under a dress. It was a choice. And a synthetic-ass wig.

Maggie: [Laughs]

Roxie: But that's the thing. I think because I've been such, like, a... oh, a weirdo my entire life, it wasn't a shock to anyone. If anything, it was more of a... like a... getting the acceptance for my family to be like, "Okay, this isn't a hobby. This is what you wanna do as your career," one of those things.

Maggie: Yeah, Yeah. So, do you feel like, um, people take drag as a career seriously? Or most people or some people?

Roxie: Yes and no. It really depends, like, who you're talking to. Because if you don't... if you are not educated about the art of drag and how this, like... the industry works... 'cause it's just show business. It's showbusiness for the queer culture. That's all it is. It's the same thing. It's just... people don't take it seriously because they don't know what it is, because it's not a part of mainstream straight culture.

Maggie: Yeah. So, are you...? I guess what I, I think I'm hearing is it's, kind of, delegitimized because it's part of queer culture, because it's not the straight, heteronormative, kind of, showbusiness.

Roxie: Exactly.

Maggie: Okay.

Roxie: Exactly.

Maggie: Yeah.

Roxie: Like, you'll never look at a Broadway actor and be like, "Oh, they're not ha-- they don't have a real job." But you'll look at a drag queen and be like, "Why aren't they working at a bank during the daytime?"

Maggie: Yeah, exactly. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race? Thoughts, opinions, tea, all of it. [Laughs]

Roxie: Okay, so... you're trying to get me in trouble, girl.

Maggie: [Laughs]

Roxie: Do I think RuPaul's Drag Race has helped branch drag into mainstream society? Yes. Do I think it shows what drag actually is all the time? I do not. Because you're seeing this dramatized version. Like, yes, there are fights and everything that happen. But at the end of the day, if I went out and cussed someone out like that, how they do on the show, that's not being a professional. And in this jo-- like, in this industry, you have to have professionalism at all times. Because just like in theater, you cuss one person out, or you do something bad to one person, you blackball yourself. And RuPaul needs to have a trans woman on the damn show, 'cause I'm sick and tired of not seeing any trans woman, when trans women were the ones who pioneered the art of drag for queer culture. That's just my opinion.

Maggie: [Laughs] Yes ma'am. [Laughs] Yeah, do you...?

Roxie: And you can put that in, like, in bold. [Laughs]

Maggie: [Laughs] I will. Note to myself, put that in bold. [Laughs] Yeah, um, so you said it's dramatized, and we know that, 'cause we... I think everyone loves drama, but...

Roxie: Exactly.

Maggie: But I also think, and I, maybe, wonder if you, um... if you would watch it differently than someone who is straight?

Roxie: I, I would... I would say I would because I feel like, as a straight person, you're watching it as a reality TV show. As a drag entertainer who does something at least similar, maybe not at the same level or caliber, because it's literally the Olympics of drag, you're watching it and judging it based on like, "Oh, well, I would do that better," or, "I could do this," or, "Ooh, they did that so well." So, it's, like, that level of difference of, like, some fucking straight dude's gonna see a pretty man in a wig and go, "I think they're hot, uhh."

Maggie: [Laughs] Yeah. I, I don't know how much... so, are you, like, a casual watcher? Are you a fan? How would you, like, classify yourself a part of the show?

Roxie: So, I, I at least think that, like, since we... since I am, like, an entertainer that works very often, it's good to know what's happening. Because we see Drag Race pioneer frickin' memes, like, catchphrases that just start to come into, like, mainstream society. So, I at least like to know what's happening. So, I do make sure to, like, catch up on it every week. But I wouldn't call myself a superfan.

Maggie: Okay.

Roxie: Because after you watch the show... I... Like, when I started, obviously, I was like, "Oh my god, Drag Race!" And then, you get to start working with these girls, and you realize they're not much different than you; they just got their big break.

Maggie: So, do you feel like there's a hierarchy of drag queens? Does that... is that a kinda question that I...?

Roxie: What do you mean by... what do you mean by that?

Maggie: Um, like, girls who are on RuPaul's Drag Race are seen as better than, like, um, local performing queens who haven't been on Drag Race?

Roxie: Oh, exac-- uh, yes, 100%. Just because most people that are watching on, on the TV, watching those queens, then only come out to that night that that, like, performer is there. And that is normally their first introduction to the local drag that is around them. So, they tip and, like, cheer for the Drag Race queen because they don't know anything, they don't know any better. But that is your job as a local entertainer to show them what they are missing, to bring them out to the bars when you don't have a Drag Race girl there.

Maggie: Yeah. That was very well said. Yeah. What are...? Hmm... do you ever travel for drag? Or have you travelled for drag before?

Roxie: I have. So, that's, that's one of my favorite things about drag, is that you, very much... if you have your chances to travel, take them, because you're very much getting paid to experience different parts of, like, the country and the world. Recently, I was lucky enough to go visit a sister out in Terre Haute, Indiana to perform out there with her, and it was amazing. I've done Chicago, I've done Wisconsin, I've done the Austin International Drag Festival before. Like, if you have the chance as a... like a local girl to travel, do it.

Maggie: She's a travelling girl. [Laughs]

Roxie: Yeah. I will say that if I could get, like, so fast [unclear], so I need to... ooh, ooh, did it...? Okay. I had a low power mode come on, I was like, "Shit! I didn't bring the power [unclear]."

Maggie: Oh no! [Laughs] You're good. It will probably be a few more minutes, and then we can probably finish.

Roxie: Okay.

Maggie: So, I have a really fun question, and I'm excited to hear what your answer would be. If you could go back in time as Roxie M Valentine, what advice would you give-- would Roxie give to your younger self?

Roxie: I would tell myself that you are not the shit, starting out, because you think you are as soon as you step out. Because when you... when you start drag, you automatically have this confidence that you don't have as your normal, like, everyday self. But that can come off very arrogant and rude. So, I would tell myself to be a nicer woman 'cause, uh, I was a bitch when I started. But I've learned to be a nice... a nice girl.

Maggie: [Laughs] Yeah, because you said, in your industry, professionalism is key, right? You have to know how to work with people.

Roxie: Exactly. And so, starting off, if you think you're better than everyone, you're not. You need to be able to learn from people. 'Cause they're the ones that are em-- basically, your employer. The girls that are there booking the shows and the show directors are basically your boss. So, if you are acting too good to them, they're not gonna wanna work with you.

Maggie: Yeah. [Laughter] Um, if you could change one thing about the drag scene or the community, do you know what it would be?

Roxie: That's a good question. The first thing that comes to my mind would be to make sure we save these queer spaces because we are losing queer spaces at a rapid rate. Like, COVID hit queer industry harder than it hit any other industry, let's just be real. Without these queer spaces, queer children do not have their first opening to being 100% purely, like, themselves. I know, when... as soon as I turned 18, I was at the bars, meeting people. If it was not for these bars, I would not have my... like, my chosen family. I don't know where I would be right now.

Maggie: Yeah, I wonder what we can do? Do you have any advice for, you know, people like me and you to keep queer spaces around or to do more for the queer community? Like, what are... what's some advice?

Roxie: The best... like, the most we can do is support these businesses. These businesses need your support. Whether it's going there and getting a, a drink, a soda, a piece of pizza, whatever they sell. If you don't wanna drink, you don't have to drink. But do something to support these businesses. Go tip the girls for a round. Bring your friends, show them. 'Cause I guarantee, at least... Are you... how do you identify?

Maggie: Um, bisexual, just cis woman.

Roxie: Okay, okay. So, like, you take your girlfriends out for a night on the town for fun. I guarantee the queer space gay bar is going to be more fun than the hetero straight bar, period.

Maggie: Period.

Roxie: It's gonna feel safer and more fun. And once we lose that, it's gone.

Maggie: Yeah. Yeah, that's great. I think... I think people forget, and they feel, kind of, small, um, and they feel like they can't contribute, but really, every little... it sounds like what you're saying is every little thing counts!

Roxie: Exactly. That's the thing. You might not think your \$4 drink counts, but 10 of your friends getting that \$4 drink is paying somebody's bills that night.

Maggie: It all adds up.

Roxie: Exactly.

Maggie: Okay. Last question here.

Roxie: Yes.

Maggie: If you could choose one thing you want people to know about drag, what would it be?

Roxie: You got me in a standstill here. I'm like, "Dang!" I feel like I've touched on most of the things that, like, I want people to know. So, I'm, like, not trying to repeat myself.

Maggie: It's totally okay. Take your time.

Roxie: Um, I feel... I, I want people to know that drag is an art form. It's not a sexuality. Even... like, there is a difference between drag and transgender, and drag is the art form of gender expression. So, it does not have to be done in one way. Every single way you do drag is valid. Not all drag is good, but all drag is valid. [Laughs] There is a difference.

Maggie: Put that on a shirt. [Laughs]

Roxie: [Laughs] #Merch

Maggie: [Laughs] Everyone go check out the link in the bio. [Laughs]

Roxie: You think I'm joking? I got merch. I'll sell it.

Maggie: Yes. I'll link your merch for sure. [Laughs]

Roxie: Period.

Maggie: [Laughs] Alright. Well, thank you so much for talking to me, I really appreciate it.

Roxie: Absolutely. Thank you!

Maggie: Um, I will send you the link of the blog post if you want to check it out and read it when it's done.

Roxie: Okay.

Maggie: Alright. Thank you so much. Have a great night.

Roxie: You too. Have fun.

Maggie: Bye.

Interview with Salem Graves

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Masching, Heidi. 2021. Interview with Salem. *Sociology of Drag, SIUE*. April 1. Available URL (<https://ezratemko.com/drag/salem-graves>).

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 individual 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 fulfill 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, but 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 struck 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 would—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...

Interview with Sheffield Belmont

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Heidi: Hello. Can you hear me?

Sheffield: Yes, I can. Yeah. How are you?

Heidi: I'm doing pretty well. How are you?

Sheffield: Good. Whoops.

Interview: Thank you so much for joining me today. I appreciate it.

Sheffield: No problem, no problem. Um, I'm... I can do my video... oh, my hair's a mess [Laughs]

Heidi: You're fine. [Laughs] Mine is too. Um, let me see. Did you get a chance to look at the, um, participant notification form?

Sheffield: Yes, I did. Yeah, yeah. That's fine.

Heidi: Okay.

Sheffield: That's gonna be fine, yeah.

Heidi: Perfect. Let me pull up my questions, and we'll get started.

Sheffield: Okay. And you're, you're, uh, working on a bachelor's or a master's or...?

Heidi: Um, I'm currently working on my master's.

Sheffield: Cool.

Heidi: In Sociology. So, um, I'm a research assistant for Ezra, and he, um, started the, um, the Sociology of Drag class. So, that's where these interviews originally started.

Sheffield: Nice, okay.

Heidi: So, let's see, I'll pull them up. Um, when did you first hear about drag and what was your initial reaction to it?

Sheffield: Oh my goodness. That was a long, long time ago. Um, let's see. I'm, I'm 62 years old. I went to art school in the late '70s. So, I think, probably... that's probably when I first heard about it when I was in art school, and, uh, I was intrigued. I, I thought it sounded really interesting. I don't remember the first time I ever saw drag but, um, but I was... I was intrigued.

Heidi: So, when, when you, um... I'm sorry. I skipped a question. When did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Sheffield: Sure. That I can remember a little bit better. Um, I had been working in burlesque. I took my first burlesque class in 2014. Uh, started doing solos in 2017, and my very first solo that I worked up completely by myself was a drag act. Um, the character was like a wealthy fat cat kind of guy, you know, like...

Heidi: Okay.

Sheffield: [Inaudible]. Um, and that's, that's why I did it in, in drag. It was about, you know, power and money and, um, it was a... what is it? It was... it was an act we called a gender reveal. Uh, the character started out as a, like, s fat cat in a top hat, and then, the lay-- layers came off. And then the initial version of this act, I turned into, like, a female, uh, Robin Hood. So.... and I gave play money back to the audience. So, that's why I did that in drag; is, is to make a statement about power.

Heidi: Okay. So, you said that was called a gender reveal. So, there's lots of terms for styles of drag, from drag queen to drag king, among others. Um, are there any particular labels that you would use to characterize your drag?

Sheffield: No. I do a lot of different kinds of things. I don't just do drag. Um, some of my drag characters are characters I've made up myself, and some of them are, are cosplay or nerdlesque, which is a couple other terms, which is characters that, um, exist in popular culture. Like, I've done an act dressed as Wolverine, um, my... I think my best character out of all my characters is a drag character... I don't know if you're familiar with the movie Office Space?

Heidi: Yes.

Sheffield: I do... I do Milton Waddams, and...

Heidi: Okay. [Laughing]

Sheffield: [Laughing] and he's... I, I love Milton, and [laughing] here I have a little... I've got a li-- little Milton, Milton doll on my desk.

Heidi: [Laughing] That's great.

Sheffield: Um, and he's, he's my, my favorite character. Um, so within, within drag, I think I do Milton the most frequently. Um, and he's kind of an anti-male, uh, character. He's, like, weak and downtrodden, um, which is one of the reasons I love him so much. So, so doing drag, you can play with gender assumptions and, you know, how gender is viewed by culture. And you can play with it, you can play against it, or you can turn it upside-down.

Heidi: So, how has... since you're... since we're talking about gender, um, how has drag influenced your sex and gender identities? Or has it?

Sheffield: It, oddly enough, it really hasn't. I'm, I'm... my pronouns are she/her/hers. I'm, I'm pretty comfortable with, with the female identity. Um, the one thing that, that drag does for me

is, like, after I do drag, especially if I do Wolverine, like, a few times I've done Wolverine, I've actually glued whiskers onto my face. And then, after I take it off, I feel very cute and feminine [laughs].

Heidi: Yeah. [Laughs]

Sheffield: So, um... but it's, it's not critical to my own personal gender identity.

Heidi: So, do you think that your sex and gender identities have influenced your drag in any way? So, just, kind of, like, the opposite?

Sheffield: Um, there's definitely an interplay. I'm very much aware of my gender identity. And I actually studied gender, um, golly... like, actually when I was working on my master's degree, like, 20 years ago, I studied, uh, gender so. So, so, yeah, my own awareness of what my own gender is and, and more so... more so my studies of gender have, have impacted, you know, what I do with drag.

Heidi: So, when you, um, started performing, or, um, I guess performing as a drag artist, how did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you doing that?

Sheffield: Uh, my, my father's deceased; my mother wasn't aware of it, and... she turns 92 today [overtalking].

Heidi: Oh, happy birthday!

Sheffield: She's, she's a little too old to retain that information. Fortunately, I have a sister who knows about my burlesque work and my drag work, and who, who supports it. And a lot of my friends are actually in the burlesque community, and they, they support it. And I've even shared it occasionally with, with colleagues or classmates, if I feel comfortable doing it. So, fortunately, the people that. that matter to me know about it, and they're, they're fine, and they actually encourage it.

Heidi: That's great. Um, where does your drag name come from?

Sheffield: Mm, that's actually my umbrella performer name. I use that name for female characters, male characters, that's, that's everybody. Um, there is... I, I live here outside of Chicago. There is an intersection in Chicago, the intersection of Sheffield and Belmont that was critical to my, my personal, um, history. I was trying to come up with, actually, a burlesque name, and I was thinking the... like, the old game of, uh, "What would be your... your stripper name be?" Well, the name of your [unclear] pet and the street you grew up on. And I started looking at streets and stuff, and Sheffield Belmont sounded good. It sounded like a real name. Also, there's a nightclub there, uh, Berlin Nightclub. And I was there in, like, the late '80s, and I heard some music there that night that I knew came from Chicago and made me decide to move to Chicago. So, it's, it's like a few different things. Um, that, you know, that intersection is very meaningful to me, and itm, sort of, sounds like a real name, too.

Heidi: Yes.

Sheffield: So, so, that's the... it's, it's after that intersection.

Heidi: So, earlier, we talked about the type of drag that you do. Do you think that the type of drag that you do affects your life as a drag artist?

Sheffield: Um, I'm not sure. Um, since I don't just do drag, I do other kinds of performance, it might be easier to wrap my head around it if I think in terms of does drag affect my life as... just as a performer overall.

Heidi: Yeah.

Sheffield: And, it, it's not a negative impact. It's, it's just another... I have a lot of different pieces to what I do, and it's just... it's just another component.

Heidi: Who or what has influenced your drag?

Sheffield: Uh, lately, I have been thinking a lot about Andy Kaufman. Um, I don't know if you're familiar with him. He did a bit many, many years ago on Saturday Night Live, where he, he came out... and, and his character was called Foreign Man which is... that's, kind of, iffy, but he came out and played a record. It was the theme song to the Mighty Mouse cartoon, and he just stood there. And, and then, later, he would just lip sync to Here I Come to Save the Day. I've been thinking about that a lot lately. Not so much in terms of drag, although, actually, now, I'm, I'm gonna start thinking about it in, in terms of drag. 'Cause I don't know if a lot of women would be comfortable doing that. But that's something I, kind of, like, to play with. I like that with Milton, is that he's so uncomfortable, and I can get the audience uncomfortable, um, and just play-- playing within that discomfort.

And now that I think about it, I'm doing it as a male character, um, that would be a little harder for a woman or a female character to do, and I'm not quite sure why. I need to think about it. But, but that's one, one big influence. Um, another inf-- obviously., Stephen Root, you know, the way he does Milton himself really influenced what I... what I do with Milton. But I've, I've taken it a lot further than that. And another performer that's influenced me is Bob Newhart, is that he has... his, his comedy and his speaking approach is very natural, and he, he stammers a lot. It's not really polished. So, so that has, kind of... that's influenced me too.

Heidi: Do you consider your drag political?

Sheffield: Um, my very first act was extremely political. Yes, the, the, um... the, the fat cat who, who came out and was, was grabbing money, that act was extremely political. He, he came out, and he pulled a bag of money out of his pants and was very, very rude and, and obnoxious. And then, you know, reverted to a female character and ended up throwing money away. So, that, that act was extremely political. Um, since then, no, not really. Um, I don't think any of my other acts have been political. Um, but actually, there's a... I've done another act with the same costume pieces as that character but as a female character. That's a little political because, again, it talks about power. But, uh, except for that first act, that's, that's the only act I've done that was, like, really, really political.

Heidi: Can you talk more about, um, the power involved in that act?

Sheffield: Absolutely. Well, I'll walk you through it. Um, the song is Boys Keep Swinging by David Bowie, which is about, again, all the, you know, assumed power that, that men have. And, you know, he comes out, he's got a top hat, he's got a cane, he's got a jacket with dollar signs stitched on the lapels. And he's like, just "Oh, this is disgusting." And he's brushing of his, his jacket. Um, and then, you know, um, then reaches in and pulls out the big bag money. It's like, "Oh, I love money. Money is great," and sets it aside and then, then starts to strip. Um, the first version of the act was, like, a female Robin Hood, which was a little harder to figure out. So, the second version of the act. I had a, a bra, uh, with rhinestones on it, and, and the bra said, "Resist." And then, then I had, uh, panties to go with it, and, and the, the butt of the panties said, "Eat the rich." So, it was, like, very not subtle.

Heidi: [Laughs] Yes.

Sheffield: So, so the character who was pretending to be a fat cat was actually a Robin Hood that was gonna give the money back. So, so it was... it was, like, very not subtle. So... [laughing]

Heidi: [Laughing] Yeah.

Sheffield: So, that was [inaudible] [laughing].

Heidi: Okay. Um, can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist? So, um, how often do you perform? Or where do you perform?

Sheffield: It's changed a lot with COVID. Um, I haven't... I've only done, like, one live performance since COVID took place. What I'm doing a lot is, is some films and actually taking photos and posting them online. And I have a Patreon page that I post those to, and I consider that my performance right now. So, I'm doing a lot of still photography, which is... that's part of my background. Um, so, I'm doing a lot of, of performing and, and posing in drag and also as female characters, um, for my Patreon page. So, so, that's what I'm doing now.

And now that I think about it, um, the drag characters... usually it's Milton that I pose as. I've done another character I really wanna work with some more. I don't know if you watch Bob's Burgers, um, [overtalking] I've done Teddy. I, I have a, uh... I did some make up with Teddy, and it... and it's, it looks pretty good, if I say so myself. I want to do a little more with Teddy. Um, so, I'm doing those characters.

Like, for Christmas, I'm, I'm a mem—I'm a member of a troupe in Chicago, The Screwbelles, and we did a little photo set about Home Alone, and I was... I think he's Uncle Frank. I did one of the characters in, in Home Alone. So... and I... now that I think about it, now this is interesting. I realize that the other piece of what I do with my photos are very, very, very feminine, uh, pin-uppy type photos. So, yeah, so, that's wha-- what I'm doing is, I'm doing, like, like the drag characters, like, usually Milton on the one hand, and then on the other hand, these hyper-feminine characters. So, that's what I'm doing, is, is, like, working within still photographs.

Heidi: So, what goes into getting ready for those performances or photographs?

Sheffield: Um, putting on makeup [laughing]. Everybo-- you know, put on makeup for everybody. Even if I have the time, I can do Milton really quickly. If I... I'll just draw on a mustache and eyebrows. If I have a little bit more time, I'll do, like, a full face. But it, it'll be, for Milton it'll be very... a light and natural-looking makeup, but I will do eyeshadow and a little bit of blush, a little contouring, and, you know, put on the wig, put on, on the clothes.

Um, for Wolverine it was more intense. It was more, like, lines on the face and, and gluing the whiskers on the face. It depends on the character. But absolutely, the... for me, the makeup takes the most amount of time. And I think as drag artists go and as burlesque artists go, I go kinda light on makeup. There... I've seen a lot of performers that their makeup is much more elaborate than what I do. And even for me, it might take me about an hour to put on my makeup, so I... I'm gonna assume for a lot of performers it will take more time than that.

Heidi: What are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Sheffield: Mm. I think some arenas, if you look exclusively at drag, are not as willing to book drag kings as they are willing to look... book drag queens. Um, I don't have an issue with that, again, 'cause I work more in burlesque, and sometimes I'll... once and a while, I'll do a drag show, if I think it fits. But I think for, for drag kings it can be much harder for them to get booked than it can be for, for drag queens. Um, again that, that's not an issue for me because it's just a part of what I do.

Heidi: Mm-hmm.

Sheffield: But, but, yeah, yeah drag... sometimes drag kings have a hard time getting recognition. There are... and there are some amazing drag kings out there that really should get the recognition that, that they deserve.

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

Sheffield: Sa-- say that again, I'm sorry.

Heidi: Is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places?

Sheffield: I'm not sure. I think this has happened in other places, but I know in Chicago, in the wave of the Black Lives Matter movement, there was... I'm trying to think of a good was to put it. There was much, much attention drawn to racism in the gay community and the drag community in Chicago. There were meetings held.

There was one, uh, drag queen, uh, Tranni-- Trannika Rex. I haven't even thought about her in a while. Um, yeah, Tran-- Trannika Rex, I think that was her stage name, who was hosting a very popular show every week oddly enough, at Berlin, at that one club that I went to many years ago. And, and they were absolutely called on the carpet for racism and mistreating, uh, performers. And unfortunately, Berlin has been closed since then, but, but she's absolutely--I'm not sure what pronouns to use. They, they've lost their platform. They, basically, were banished from the Chicago scene. I've seen them post, like, a few Instagram stories. But a lot of Chicago

performers came together to address racism in Chicago and specifically address what, what Trannika was doing.

That may have happened in other cities too; I don't know. But I, I can say in. in Chicago... and I'm white, you know, I'm not a person of color, but I can, I can definitely see that the, the performers of color here in, in Chicago absolutely stood up for themselves. Um, so I don't know if that sort of thing happened in other cities, and it may... it may well have, but I know it happened here.

Heidi: Okay, great. So, you mentioned your race being white. Um, so I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. So, uh, could you, maybe, share how one or more of your social identities, like gender, race, class, age, size, um, or the interaction of those identities have impacted your experience of drag?

Sheffield: Um, I know I bring... I bring my size to Milton, 'cause Milton is a big guy too. And, and the awkwardness... 'cause sometimes I feel very awkward myself. Um, as far as race, I'm, I'm not really sure that's, like, on the front of my mind when I'm working on acts. So, that I don't... I don't know if that's really a huge piece of what I bring to, to the work. I know it's, it's there, 'cause that's who I am, but that's not something I really think about. Um, but definitely my identity as a larger person, um, I think of that when I think of Milton too, you know. 'Cause he's, he's down trodden, he's middle-aged, he's not a kid. Um, and just, you know? And he's a white male, but he doesn't really get the full deck of privilege that white males get because he's, he's, so... he's so timid.

Um, so, I think I bring a little bit, bit of that to it. But I'm definitely... I'm also very much aware, you know, of I'm a person of size, um... and that's one of the things... Actually, I play with that, not so much with my drag but in my really feminine pictures. It's like, "Hey, I'm, I'm gonna wear a wig and pose in my bra, and I'm this age, and I'm this size and too bad!" So, um, does that make sense?

Heidi: Yeah, that does. Thank you.

Sheffield: Good, good.

Heidi: Earlier, you talked about being a part... I think you said a troupe? Um, are you part of a drag family, house, or collective?

Sheffield: Ahh, I am not. I'm--I know-- I know what a drag house is. I think it's really neat. Um, I'm a member of The Screwbelles. We are a slapstick-comedy, burlesque, uh, troupe. We're not... we're not a family, we're not a house. So, um... but, uh, but I... no, I'm not a member of a house, but I'm a member of a troupe.

Heidi: Could you talk, um, a little more about that troupe?

Sheffield: Yeah, yeah. It's... I love it. We're... it's wonderful. I think we have about, I don't know, maybe, like, eight or nine active members. Um, I think we got started maybe in 2000... yeah, like, 2018 or so. It was founded by Shirley Blazen, who is a comedic-clown-burlesque performer. She's absolutely amazing and she was, uh, teaching burlesque and working with

other... working with students and other people who just wanted to perform more often. And, you know, she formed a troupe, and it's, it's absol-- it's like my second home. Um, you know; we're encouraged to experiment, we're encouraged to do stuff that's different; we're encouraged to do stuff that's not necessarily polished. Because sometimes in burlesque they want polish, which I think translates to, you know, hundreds of dollars of rhinestones and feathers and stuff. And we do... we do more, more comedy type stuff, um, But it, it's... what is it that we're... I think, I think we're, like, fiercely artistic or something. I'm sorry, I forget our, our catchphrase. But, uh, we're, we're pretty unique. We're, we're certainly unique in Chicago. Nobody is doing anything quite like what we're doing. Anywhere else... I don't know if there's any other comedy burlesque troupes, you know, they... in all likelihood they are. But uh, yeah, we have a, a unique place in Chicago, and I... and I love being one of them.

Heidi: So, through that you mentioned, um, experimenting with things, or maybe doing things that aren't as polished, um, has that, or drag in general, impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Sheffield: Mm, actually, I think doing drag and doing burlesque has actually in-- increased my confidence, even though I'm not-- I'm not a super-polished performer, you know? My, my costumes are, are fine. Um, I'm not much of a dancer, um, but I can still get up on stage and, and, and wow a crowd. So, so, outside of burlesque and outside of drag, that has actually increased my confidence.

Heidi: Alright. Let's see. So, we are getting to the end of the questions here.

Sheffield: Okay.

Heidi: Um, if you could go back in time, what advice would you give to your younger self as a drag artist?

Sheffield: Oh, oh, do it, just do it. Whatever ideas you've got, don't hesitate; just jump on in and do it. It'll be fine. You know, I'm here in Chicago, people will be... will be receptive to it. So, just do it.

Heidi: How do you define drag?

Sheffield: Ooh, that's a good question. Um, I think for me, drag would be dressing in and performing in... for, for me personally, um... it's--it would be dressing and performing as, as male, as, you know, somebody that would be identified as, as male. Um, that's a pretty... it leaves out a lot. So, but that's what I, I think of. It's like, "Okay I'm doing a male character. It's drag." And that's as, as far as I go. I know that there's a lot more to it than that.

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

Sheffield: Mm, that's a good question. I think a lot of it is play, you know, play with something, It's, it's similar to performing or acting. It's, it's play, it's like playing as a different character. It's playing as, um, trying out what it's like to be somebody other than what you are everyday.

Heidi: Do you think that drag is sexual?

Sheffield: Um, I think it absolutely can be. Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. Actually, now that I think about it, you know, yeah, it is. 'Cause I know when I did Wolverine, that was a very sexual act. Um, I have an act that I do with Milton, that's oddly enough is very sexual. So, um, it can be... it... and I think it doesn't have to be, but it certainly can be.

Heidi: Are you familiar with, um, RuPaul's Drag, Drag Race? How do you feel about it?

Sheffield: Um, I wish I could get Season 13 streaming [laughing]. I have... I have a limited... I have Hulu, but I don't have this, I don't have that. I don't have full cable. Um, I think it's enjoyable. Um, I know some people have had issues with, with RuPaul being transphobic. I don't really know the details about that. I'm pretty sure this season, one of the contestants is a tran-- is a trans man who is also a drag queen. So, it seems like there's, there's been progress made towards that, um...

And, and I know there's more kinds of drag than what you see on Drag Race. I do, do know that there's more than that. I also know... it's, it's interesting that they have gone beyond... a million years ago they called it female impersonation, um, you know, and they've gone way beyond that at least, and that's good. So, um, I enjoy it. I, I think... I think there are drag queens that are gonna have a more detailed opinion about Drag Race than what I have 'cause it's gonna, gonna be closer to what they do.

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

Sheffield: Ooh. Oh wow! Um, I can't really think of anything, again, 'cause I work... I work more within the burlesque community. There are things I'd like to see changed in the burlesque community. I'd like them to... I'd like to see older performers and, and larger performers booked more often. Um, the drag scene, I, I don't really know, 'cause that's not... that's not, like, my, my core identity. Uh, there, there probably... there may be similar, um, things that, um, other drag performers may, may wanna see change. So, um, as far as drag goes, I don't know. As far as burlesque goes, I'd, I'd like to see, again, you know, larger performers and older performers booked more often.

Heidi: What do you think are misconceptions people have about drag?

Sheffield: Mm. I think a long, long time ago there, there may be people who... and I know there may be people who still think this, that... like, say, for instance, if someone's a drag queen, they really wanna be female. Um, you know, that's definitely not, not the case. Um, som-- I do know some people do work with drag to help work on gender issues. Um, that's, that's not been the case for me. Um, but I think... I think that was one of them, that, that the drag queen really wanted to be female. And I think there are some drag queens that are working on, on transitioning to be trans women, um, but that's certainly not the case for all drag queens.

Heidi: What do you think would help change those misconceptions?

Sheffield: Um, I think just continued exposure. I know if you watch Drag Race you see... oh, this is very helpful. You see the contestants in drag and out of drag. I think that's very, very helpful, just to cont-- continue that sort of exposure.

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

Sheffield: Mm. I think that drag can be universal, in a way. Like, you can have a beard and be a drag queen, um, that you can, you know, be a, a trans man and be a drag queen, you know? You could... you could be a drag king if, if that identity suits you that... In a way, there's this sort of universalness to it. Um, I think... I think that's what, what I would... that, that yeah, there's, there's a universalness to it, and that... and there are a million different forms of drag.

Heidi: Well, this was great. That, that was my last question. Um, I appreciated this so much. Thank you.

Sheffield: No problem. No problem. If you have any other questions, let me know, I'm happy to help. So, yeah, good luck in your studies. Thank you.

Heidi: Thank you so much. Have a good day.

Sheffield: You too. Take care. Bye-bye.

Heidi: You too. Bye-bye.

Interview with Sofonda Cox

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Joshua: Hello

Sofonda: Hello. How are you?

Joshua: I am good. How are you doing?

Sofonda: I'm doing great, you know? It's a regular Tuesday.

Joshua: Okay, I'm trying to set up my audio real quick

Sofonda: Okay.

Joshua: Okay. Can you hear me?

Sofonda: Yeah. I can hear you fine.

Joshua: Okay. Alright, great.

Sofonda: And I'm, like, [overtalking]

Joshua: Okay, hi, I'm Josh.

Sofonda: Hi, nice to meet you. I'm Sofonda Cox.

Joshua: Nice to meet you too. Love the... love it, love the name. Alright. So, hi guys, I am here with Sofonda Cox, and we are gonna to do a drag interview for the Art of Drag. Okay? So, I think we are gonna get started with the questions!

Sofonda: Perfect.

Joshua: Alright. First one, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Sofonda: Um, I think I was a sophomore in high school, um, when one of my friends came up to me and was like, "Have you ever heard of RuPaul's Drag Race? I think you'd love it." [Laughs] And so, I think it was Season 5 when I first started watching. And oh my god, I just loved it right away. You know, I was like I stan Jinkx Monsoon and felt like very... I could identify with her. Um, so, that's, kind of, how it started. And then, I went to college, and I'm here in Springfield, Missouri. And so, I saw, like... there's like a ton of Springfield drag. I saw Crystal Methyd perform, I, like, got into the whole gig that way.

Joshua: Oh!

Sofonda: Yeah.

Joshua: That's awesome!

Sofonda: Um, yeah, so that's, kind of, how I got started off, just through, through the show, and then, like, local drag here. And then, once I started doing drag, I ended up, like, figuring out ways that I could incorporate my love of music, and the fact that I was a dance major, I could, kind of, put all of that together in my performances. And so, that's, kind of, why it really stuck with me as more than just a hobby. It was like, oh, I love this. I can put all of my interests together.

Joshua: Right. Okay so I'm gonna piggyback off that a little bit. So, you're a dance major, so I'm going to assume maybe some musical theatre background?

Sofonda: Yeah. So, I actually auditioned for the musical theatre program at Missouri State. And they were like, "Um, that's maybe not the right place for you, but we will put you in the dance program, and you can always, like, re-audition later, whatever, if you want to." So, I was like, uh, fine, I guess I'll take dance classes or whatever. But it ended up being pretty much exactly what I wanted to do.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: Like, I ended up falling in love with it. I was working more on, like... 'cause I have a, a music minor too, so I was writing songs and trying to do the whole, like, music video, choreography route.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: And, yeah, it ended up working out perfect.

Joshua: Yeah. So, I did see on your Instagram that you are a ballerina of sorts. You're... you do ballet. Is that like, like a dance style that you like to showcase in your drag a lot?

Sofonda: Um, not really, honestly.

Joshua: Yeah?

Sofonda: It's kind of hard. So, the only ways that I've really been able to do drag have been, like, at the club, you know, on stage, in front of everyone...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: Or digitally. I did, like, a YouTube show. We, kind of, filmed our own stuff and submitted it and had, like, a compilation there.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: Um, but I guess, in both of those cases, I haven't really done the whole ballet thing. But I definitely would if I could. I did make... so, in order to graduate with my dance degree, I made music videos as, like, my final project. And, um, so I did some ballet in there as Joe, but then I also incorporated Sofonda into, into separate scenes. So, she hasn't done it herself, but I would in the future.

Joshua: Yeah. She will one day, that's all that matters.

Sofonda: Yes, in the future, for sure.

Joshua: Awesome. Okay, next question. When did you start performing as a drag artist and why?

Sofonda: Um, I started three years ago, and it's pretty much just because I had friends who were already involved in it. So, um, uh, my freshman year I lived in the dorms in Scholars House, which was, like, for the honors' kids. Yeah. But there was another person there who was a musical theater major, and, um, like, we quickly became good friends. And then, that was, like, I went to my first drag performance with her, and watched her in drag, and, like, kind of, saw her flourish. And so, I was like "Oh, I wanna do this." And eventually, made more friends in the scene, kind of, worked my foot in. And so, then, when one of them asked me to perform, I was like, "Okay, sure, I'll make my debut, I'll get on stage." And it's, kind of, been history from there.

Joshua: Awesome. Okay. How did your family, friends and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Sofonda: [Laughs] Um, good question. My family is... so, a little background, I guess, on them. They're like... um, we, we all grew up in Saint Louis together, did the whole, like, private, catholic school growing up. I went to an all-boys' Jesuit high school. So, that was, like, very, um, my path. And so, then, when I came to college, I, kind of, found some distance from that and was able to explore drag more on my own, you know? And so, I think because of that, it was a bit of a point of contention between my family and I, just for... at the beginning, 'cause I don't think they really quite understood what I was doing or if it was, like...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: Gender expression, or if it was just art, kind of, hobby situation. Um, because they just, like, aren't very exposed to drag, and stuff like that.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: But, um, so we've, kind of, just, like, worked through it and talked about it, and we're just very open and communicating about it now. But, um, yeah, kind of, the reason that they were first exposed to it is because of that senior project. Like, I wanted to let them in on all the work that I've been doing her. Like, I choreographed these and wrote these songs, um, but then, there was Sofonda. [Laughs]

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: And so, after they watched it, a lot of them were like, "Oh, the songs were great, and the dancing was great," but, kind of, like, not addressing the drag part. But it at least, kind of, started the conversations for us.

Joshua: Right. So, where does your drag name come from?

Sofonda: Um, well, I first... my first drag name was gonna be Galaxxi Gale, Galaxxi with two X's in it and an I at the end.

Joshua: Cool, love that.

Sofonda: [Laughs] And the reason for that was because, um, my friends and I would go to Starbucks and, like, try to have them write down the most ridiculous name, you know? Like...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: Um, one of them is like, "My name is Glitter," and she got the cup that said Glitter on it and saved it. And so, then, when I went up, I said, "My name's Galaxxi with two X's and an I at the end." And, I mean, we were, like, teenagers; we thought it was so hilarious. But then, when I started doing drag, I was like, "Galaxxi, that's perfect." Um, so, it was that for a second. But the, the more I started doing drag and, like, performing and coming up with this character and personality for her, I was like, "Sofonda Cox, is perfect." Like, it's hilarious; it lets people know that I'm... don't take myself too seriously. It's, kind of, got that drag queen humor, pun situation.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: And, um, yeah, I just thought it fit.

Joshua: Yeah. Alright. So, there are a lot of terms for types and styles of drag. Are there any particular labels that you would choose to characterize your drag?

Sofonda: Um, not really. I feel like, um, drag race, kind of, gives people the idea of, like, the comedy queen versus the pageant queen. And, um, in my experience, I haven't even really even seen that, that dichotomy there. 'Cause the girls at the club, you know, when you show up there with the other girls, and we are getting ready in the dressing room before we go on stage, it's like... everyone's, kind of, just doing their own thing, you know? Some girls are singing live because that's what they're interested in. Some girls are lip-syncing, but they are more focused on the dancing, you know? So, I, kind of, feel like, um, the labels don't really apply these days. Or, or at least, to me, it, it doesn't... it doesn't feel like it applies that much, because anyone can do whatever they want in drag.

Joshua: Mm-hmm. Do you feel like those labels are so prevalent only because of RuPaul's Drag Race?

Sofonda: I do think that that does play a part, yeah. Or at least, um, the idea of, like, being a fishy queen versus a campy queen. There's still, like, that kind of, um, divide there.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: And I do think that Drag Race has something to do with that. Because in the real world, it's like... I've seen girls show up to the club, um, in, like, the biggest paint ever one night, and then, the next night, they show up looking really natural and subdued. And I'm like, you can just explore all ends of the spectrum, and not have to, like, label it.

Joshua: Yeah. Okay. Do you consider your drag political? Why or why not?

Sofonda: Yeah, good question. I think, I wouldn't necessarily, um, go out of my way to make a political statement. Like, usually, the numbers that I make are just, you know, dancing or singing or performing and making people happy, trying to be fun, you know? But, um, I think it is RuPaul who said, "Drag itself is a political statement," and, like, just the act of making queer art makes it, like, a part of our history and representation as, like, a culture, as a community.

Joshua: Right. Mm-hmm.

Sofonda: So, I feel like, yeah, all drag is political, and at the same time, it's not, because, like, we're all just hanging out, have a good... having a good time at the club, you know?

Joshua: Right. Okay. So, are you a part of any drag family or any drag collective right now at the moment?

Sofonda: No. I taught myself, or watched YouTube tutorials, or just played around with the sewing machine, and, kind of, just figured it out on my own, But I feel like, nowadays, you don't have to have full a drag family or, like, be taught by someone, as long as you find, you know, friends or other drag artists that you can, kind of, fit into a group with.

Joshua: Mm-hmm. Do you feel like, uh, like, nowadays, that that is, like, like, kind of, a new way that... you know, like, the old ways of drag was you... like, you, kind of, need a family to start, 'cause you don't know what you are gonna be doing.

Sofonda: Uh-huh.

Joshua: But now, it's, oh, you can find a YouTube video. Do you think that's the case?

Sofonda: Well, yeah, definitely. And especially with quarantine, like...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: I feel like there's a whole new genre of drag queens who are, like, the quarantine queens. You know, they just were sitting around with free time. They started experimenting with makeup.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: And, like, you can Amazon a dress to your house in two days. So it's like... with technology, I feel like anyone can do drag.

Joshua: Yeah. Very much an open art form now.

Sofonda: Uh-huh

Joshua: Okay, How often do you perform and where?

Sofonda: Um, I perform live, like, very sporadically. I think 'cause I'm more of a perfectionist, and by starting out doing drag with that senior project and, like, making music videos, I, kind of,

got more into the idea of doing drag for films. So, like, being very detail-oriented, taking months working on a costume...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: And, like, putting it all together for a very, like, professional-looking video. And so, now I'm just, kind of, sort of, starting to do live performances again. Um, but it's still been pretty sporadic, like, once a month, maybe. And, um, so, yeah, that's pretty much it. But I do my makeup or, like, get into costume probably once a week just to film TikToks, honestly. [Laughs]

Joshua: Ah, yeah, that's very valid. Like, you...

Sofonda: Right, yeah.

Joshua: On the topic of TikTok, we can bring it up, because, like, do you think that's like...? Like, 'cause I see a lot of queens I've never seen before in my entire life on there. Like, I think it's like... like, what's your opinion on doing drag through TikTok?

Sofonda: Well, for the longest time, I hated TikTok. Like, my sister tried to get me to get a TikTok forever, and I was like, "No that's dumb. I don't care about that." And then, when I finally downloaded it, I was, like, obsessed within a couple of days, you know? So, for me, it's been great because it's, kind of, been forcing me to get in drag, and forcing me to...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: Create content without being really nitpicky and making sure I have a full costume or whatever. And, like, I can just play around and put this out on TikTok, and it doesn't really matter.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: But, um, I do think that the platform is amazing because so many people can just get their content out there. And even if they're not followed by a lot of people, it can still work its way onto people's For You page, or just, like, the way of, um, getting exposure is so different to... like, compared to any other app, I feel like.

Joshua: Right. Mm-hmm. Okay. Oh, so, we, kind of, touched on it a little, like, speaking of quarantine, how has that, like, affected performing, like, COVID-19? Like, when you perform live, how has that affected, like, the situation?

Sofonda: Yeah. Um, it is, kind of, different in every venue, I feel like, you know? Or in every city, they have different restrictions, or in every, um... like, even different parts of the cities. So, um, performing live is just, kind of, weird in general. For me, I'm like... I feel pretty safe; I perform with a clear mask on. Um, the place that I perform in Springfield, they have, like, buckets out for tips, instead of, like, mingling with the audience, you know?

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: So, it definitely feels like people have been adapting and figuring out a new way of dealing with the situation. Um, but I think the... yeah, the, the best thing, or, like, maybe the most

notable change to come out of quarantine is just, like, the online presence. With TikTok and with YouTube videos, like, everyone is able to have some outlet of drag, whether it's digitally or just doing their makeup or whatever, it's like... it's become a lot more adaptable, I think.

Joshua: Right. Okay. Um, so we're, kind of, gonna get a little more sociological here.

Sofonda: Okay.

Joshua: So, how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Sofonda: Gotcha. Yeah, I think, um, for me, it's always been a little fluid, or just, kind of, ballpark areas. Like, I've never really pinpointed anything down, just because, to me, I'm more of, like, an open person, I guess. I don't think, um, that that really matters as much. But, anyway, I would say that I'm genderfluid or gender nonconforming. But I do identify as male, and I use masculine pronouns most of the time. So, just, kind of, a preference there. And then, sexual orientation, I'm gay, if that matters [laughs], but yeah.

Joshua: Well, it is part of the question, so... [Laughs]

Sofonda: Yeah, perfect. But again, those are, kind of, like, just, um, ballpark areas, like, labels that, I guess, help us identify things. But just like drag, everything's, kind of on a spectrum. That's very how I feel.

Joshua: Yeah. Has drag, like, influenced your sex and gender identities at all, like since you started to like... or, like, versus before you started?

Sofonda: Yeah. Um, I don't know if drag has really influenced my, um, like, expression. But I think they've definitely been tied. Like, when I first came out, I feel like I had so much of this energy inside that I just, kind of, like, blew up. You know, freshman year of college...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: I got away from Springfield, and the private schools, and I, like, you know, was very gay, very flamboyant, very... and, like, I still am, of course. But I felt...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: I, kind of, more felt the need to make that, um, my main personality trait, I guess, if that makes sense.

Joshua: Yeah.

Sofonda: Um, and then, kind of, as I grew older, maybe it's because I started doing drag, but I, kind of more separated my feminine and masculine energies, I guess, if that makes sense.

Joshua: Yeah.

Sofonda: I think having drag as an outlet for, kind of the, the feminine energies that I was suppressing for so long. That was more of a channel than just my normal daily life, if that makes sense.

Joshua: Mm-hmm. No. Yeah that, makes a lot of sense.

Sofonda: [Laughs] Yeah.

Joshua: I feel like a lot of people share that, like [overtalking] as well.

Sofonda: Oh, work, nice.

Joshua: Like, for sure. Um, so, how do you define drag? Like, overall, like, what, what do you think is, like, the definition of drag?

Sofonda: Oh nice. Yeah. To me, I think the definition of drag is an art form. So, it's... yeah, I'd say it's an art form. It's like watercolor. Anyone can paint with watercolors and say that they enjoy watercolors, but that doesn't make them a watercolor artist, or that's like something...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: That they have trained or specialized in or whatever.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: You know, I think that anyone can do drag, and anyone can call themselves a drag artist, and really, it's just, um, like a thing you can do, a, a community you can participate I, that kind of thing.

Joshua: Yeah. I think that's, like, a really important viewpoint to have, especially, you know, when we have, uh, drag, like, icons, who say the opposite. Like, what's your opinion on people... or who... people who don't think, like, um, bioqueens or AFAB queens should be, you know, in the drag scene? Like, what's your opinion on people who aren't cis gay men doing drag?

Sofonda: Yeah, right? I think that's just the weirdest take on it, you know? I'm like...

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: Why...? We are drag queens, we are, like, the forefront of, you know, trying to change culture, trying to change people's minds and be progressive. So, in what world does it make sense to be limiting how many people can be a part of this community? Like, like, if anyone enjoys doing drag and wants to do drag, like, that's all you need to be a part of the drag community. That's how I feel.

Joshua: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Sofonda: That there's no reason to, like, limit who can... who can be involved.

Joshua: Yeah. Okay. We have a few questions left. Okay. What do you think is the purpose of drag?

Sofonda: Hmm, the purpose? [Laughs] Um, good question. I really...

Joshua: Very open-ended question.

Sofonda: Yeah, right? Well, I guess it's, kind of, like any other art form. It's, it's an opportunity for creative expression. And then, because it's also, like, using your own body to express your art, it's, kind of, like, dance in that way that I think it... things are just a lot more personal, or can be more emotive, because you're using your own body as a canvas. Um, so, I think, maybe, that's its purpose, is just expression and creativity and, like, community building. That's how I see it. And it's just fun and uplifting and makes people happy. So, yeah, all good vibes.

Joshua: Right. Okay. How do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race? Like, what's your overall thoughts?

Sofonda: Oh, I love it.

Joshua: Yeah.

Sofonda: Yeah, best show in existence. Like, definitely the most entertaining thing I've ever watched. [Laughs]

Joshua: Yeah.

Sofonda: The only thing I've been, like, so obsessed over.

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: Um, I mean, there are definitely issues with it, and, you know, people talk all the time. There's, kind of, like, this whole twitter situation, or, I mean, people talk about toxic fanbase, or, like, you know, I think there's always gonna be something that can be brought up. But I think it's a great show. I think it's done wonders for representation and education, and for so many queer people out there, who just, kind of, need a jumping-off point or, like, information about the community. Um, it's just, like, the most mainstream representation for us at this point, I feel like.

Joshua: Yeah.

Sofonda: So, there's definitely some really good points about it. And, I mean, it's TV; it's, kind of, all... you know, there's producers and there's... it's just not real life, is what I'm trying to say. So, I don't think people can try to take it too seriously. That's my take on it.

Joshua: Yeah. Okay. Two questions left, and this one is, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Sofonda: If I could change anything, I would just, um... I wish that the drag scene were more... were more, I guess, mainstream, or, like, more inclusive to the way that we had more shows to represent drag culture than just RuPaul's Drag Race. Like, I think it's a great show, but we need other avenues, other, um, ways of expression. Like, I wish we had more drag queens in music videos, or, I wish we had drag queens just in other reality TV shows that, you know, don't normally have drag queens in them, you know?

Joshua: Right.

Sofonda: So, if I could change anything it's just, kind of, the exposure of drag. But I think we're definitely getting there. Like, with TikTok, and with just, kind of, this, sort of, generational shift

of... I, I just think we are getting more progressive and more, um, welcoming for the art of drag. So, I think that's very exciting.

Joshua: Agreed. Okay. If you could... or if you... sorry, I did not write that right. If you could choose... sorry, I just can't read... [laughs]

Sofonda: [Laughs] [Overtalking].

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

Sofonda: Um, hmm, one thing that anyone could learn about drag?

Joshua: Mm-hmm.

Sofonda: Um, maybe just to be yourself. Like, honestly, that's what drag has taught me, is that, um, you have things inside of you that you didn't know were there. And drag is, kind of, an opportunity to channel that, and be a different person, and not, um, be so worried about yourself, you know? You, you just have an opportunity to let your creativity and, and your expression shine, in a different way. So, I think, through transforming myself into somebody else, it has helped me become my own person, if that makes sense.

Joshua: Yeah, makes a lot of sense.

Sofonda: Mm-hmm. [Laughs]

Joshua: Well, Sofonda, that's all I have for you. Thank you so much. You were amazing!

Sofonda: Okay, perfect. Thank you.

Joshua: Thank you.

Sofonda: I hope I answered all those questions well enough.

Joshua: No, you did. Great answers, like, really. Thank you so much.

Sofonda: Okay.

Interview with Spjork

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Spjork: Let's party!

Makenzie: Alright. So, if you can go ahead and introduce yourself. My name is Makenzie Pickett, and I go by she/her.

Spjork: My name is Spjork, uh, I go by she/her or they/them. Oh, should I say more about myself? [Laughs]

Makenzie: Yeah, you can... you can say more about yourself [unclear].

Spjork: Um, I am a drag artist, um, who is currently in Iowa, but will be moving to Chicago, hopefully, here soon. Um, I post YouTube videos; I do virtual performances. I am easing into performing live again. I am halfway vaccinated, and I cannot wait to be back on stage again. Um, yeah.

Makenzie: Awesome. Okay. So, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Spjork: So, in high school, I actually... there was a bar that did, like, an all-ages drag show at, like, 5 p.m. or whatever. So, me and my friends, uh, snuck to that. We said we were studying [laugh], and then we went to, uh, that bar to watch an all-ages drag show. And that was when I first ever, like, experienced anything drag related.

Um, and then, after that, it was kind of the typical thing everyone, I think, goes through, where it's like, um, they watch maybe two... they watch, like, the essential seasons of RuPaul's Drag Race, and they act like they know everything.

Makenzie: Yes.

Spjork: Or they watch... they watch just Trixie and Katya, um, which... who I love, but I feel like that's, like, this... that's just like the typical thing that everyone kinda goes through. And then I started to... there was an opportunity in my... in the college town I was in to get into drag, and I was like, "Ooh, let's live my fantasy." And I think after that, I just, kind of, realized more and more that this is what I was, kind of, meant to be doing. So, it was, kind of, like, a weird little trip into it. It was like I slipped and fell into drag.

Makenzie: Yeah. So, when did you start performing as a drag artist after your first, um, experience with drag? And, like, why did you start performing?

Spjork: I, I started doing drag mostly 'cause all my friends were doing it, and 'cause there was a local competition, and I, basically, started drag to just be a part of that competition, or to aspire

to be in that competition. Um, and then... and that was like three years ago, I want to say-- or it's, it's almost been three years. I think it will be three years this December. Um, three to four, oh goodness.

Makenzie: Okay. So, how old were you, if you don't mind me asking?

Spjork: I... yeah, no. I was... I wanna say I was 19. I was 18 when I started messing with makeup, but 19 when I was performing.

Makenzie: Okay. And how did your family, friends and other loved ones react to you becoming a drag artist?

Spjork: Um, I think it took a minute before they realized, like, how serious it was. My dad watched the local competition and literally sent me a super sweet message that was like, "I can see you doing this forev--" like, it was just, like, basically, what I needed to hear. It was just, "I can see you doing this forever," and that I have a future with it. Which he was telling me that stuff before even I kinda came to terms with that being, like, what I wanted to do. So, even he saw something in it. Um, my mom, I... she had some questions [laughs] about it. But after talking about it, she understood it more. And then, she even went... she's been to a couple of my shows, um, so has my grandma and my older sister.

Makenzie: So, you said that she had some questions. What type of questions did she ask you?

Spjork: It was questions regarding my gender identity. She felt... she was like, "Oh, why do you want to?" blah-blah-blah. Or why... she also was confused about... [laughs] she was like, "What about people who want to have sex with drag queens? What's their... what's their tea?" pretty much, was her question. And I was like, "I don't know, I'm not... I was like, "I'm just the drag queen portion of that question." So...

Makenzie: Oh, my goodness!

Spjork: But, like, after... it was a pretty quick talk, and she was like, "Okay, whatever. If that's what your... if that's what your tea is, Momma, go ahead and do it.

Makenzie: Right.

Spjork: And my grandma loves that I do it, because she is just happy I'm performing again, 'cause I used to do it in high school, and she knows I used to love it. Although she wants me to perform, like, my own original songs, and not, like, lip-sync songs.

Makenzie: So, I'm just curious, so, how old is your grandma?

Spjork: Oh um... [laughs] I am so bad at, uh, ages.

Makenzie: That's okay. [Laughs] I was just curious, like a general range 'cause she...

Spjork: I want to say... Yeah. I want to say that she is... she's probably, like, 60. I think, in my head, she is, like, 54 still.

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: I guess, I'm not sure. [Laughs] Love you grandma.

Makenzie: [Laughs] And where does your drag name come from? Is it original, or did you get it off of something, or...?

Spjork: Um, it's, kind of... it's... I was just looking at silverware, and I wanted to make it. Like, dumb, but have a spin, like an artistic spin, 'cause I felt, like, at the start of drag, that's, like, just exactly what the... I wanted to encompass. So, um, it was just a mix of silverware with Bjork, who is... who I'm not necessarily a super fan of, but they just have this great artistic aesthetic that is kinda mysterious, that I was like, ooh, that, but camp it up with silverware, so it became Spjork. Um, and at first, it really bugged me that no one could really pronounce it. But now it's kinda, like, a funny thing that I like to be like, "Yeah, they got my name in their tongue, but they don't know how to say it."

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: You know? So...

Makenzie: And there are lots of terms for types and styles of drag, from drag queen to drag queen, to glamor queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queer artists, bioqueen, camp queen, among others. Are there particular labels that you would use to characterize your drag?

Spjork: Um, I, I mean, for me, it comes... it's just like me being... at least, lately, it is just me being me, and just being like, "Hey, this is... I made this, and this fabric ma-- told me how to make this outfit, kind of thing. That... I hope that makes sense. [Laughs]

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: But, like, uh, what other people have described me as, I definitely heard comedy queen, um, I've definitely heard... I, I... lat—recently I loved the... someone said, uh, they like my non-ba... nonbinary, uh, aspect of things, and I really liked that 'cause I never was intentionally trying to do that kind of thing. I also heard—I really like the Club Kid movement. It's been, like, my whole tea. Um, so I will, like... I really like to just push what, uh, something... what an outfit can be, I guess, but also give it a little bit of me that's still cute. So, I guess, I don't really know what categories I fit. I know I'm funny. Um, I'm like...

Makenzie: Yeah. You don't have to fit in a category, anyway.

Spjork: Yeah.

Makenzie: I mean, like, you just be you.

Spjork: I'm the hardest-working bedroom queen in Iowa...

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: Is what I like to describe myself as.

Makenzie: That's awesome. What kind of drag... Um, oh, sorry. [Laughs]

Spjork: You're good.

Makenzie: So, does that type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist?

Spjork: Um, sometimes...

Makenzie: Like, you said that you're, like, sort of, like a nonbinary queen. So, do people say anything about that? Or are people very supportive or...?

Spjork: I mean, that's more just the way that my drag character presents themselves, sometimes. I wouldn't say that I necessarily identify as that. 'Cause I know some amazing nonbinary performers who literally do not get the time of day in some shows just because they don't... some people don't understand. Or I've, I've heard about people locally that have literally bullied other people for their pronoun usage, you know? And, um, that definitely affects a lot of people in the community.

Um, I know I have an amazing drag sister named Hazy Buchanan, who, um, is a, I believe, cisgendered woman, um, but they were running for a pageant, and they got a lot of flack for that because there were a lot of tea and drama about if a, a woman-presenting person could run for a pageant, for some reason. Um, and that's... and that was really upsetting for her and for everyone. We were all really mad that that was even a question, you know?

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: So, um, that definitely is something in the... even drag community that people are working to be better at, for sure, or need to be better at, you know?

Makenzie: Mm-hmm. Um, who or what has influenced your drag?

Spjork: Um, I, I... lately, a lot of my confidence to, kind of, be myself has been coming from the iconic women in my life, like my friends. Um, my mom, lately, I like to think about too, 'cause she, she's gone through a lot in her life, and she, like, has always been the first person to make a joke about it to get through it. And I just... I really am inspired by that, because that's always, kind of, been how I thought, and I never really unders-- really understood why. But lately, I recently\ was like, oh yeah, it's 'cause my mom is an actual clown, and that's why I'm a clown, you know?

Makenzie: Yeah. So, she, kind of, experie-- or influenced, uh, your... like, 'cause you're a comedy queen, is, like...

Spjork: Yeah.

Makenzie: one label that you, kind of, gave yourself and, like, other people have given you. So, yeah.

Spjork: She, she influences my ability to, kind of, handle life and be like, "You know, life is hilarious in the worst ways and the best ways. And if you're... if you... if you get a bad hand, the best you can do is crack a good joke about it." [Laughs]

Makenzie: Right.

Spjork: So, I'm always inspired by a lot of my friends and performers that I see. Uh, I also love, like, cartoons and anime and stuff like that. So, like, that, obviously, influences me a little bit.

Makenzie: Yeah. And do you consider your drag political? And why or why not?

Spjork: Uh, I mean, I, I think every... it's like a known thing, like, drag in every sense is political every single time. Um, I have always wanted my drag to represent... if... no matter what shitty time is going on, there's always love, and there's always... you can always laugh at some point. Like, no matter how hard or dark your head gets mentally, like, you can... there's still gonna be a... you can still crack, like, a knock-knock joke and get a smile, you know?

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: So, I, I think, in my sense, I always wanna use my drag as that, to give people a break from reality. But I also know that reality is reality, and you need to use your voice. And I like to use my platform in every sense possible to uplift those who don't have as big of a platform or don't have the platform to share. Uh, I always want to echo voices. I don't... 'cause when it's not me suffering, I don't need to be the one's saying things. I want to echo voices, 'cause those are the voices that need to be heard. I can shut up and just make those voices a little louder.

Makenzie: That's really inspiring. And can you talk about what in your life... what your life is like as a drag artist? Like, are you a part of a drag family, a house or a collective?

Spjork: Yes. Um, my drag family, my drag mom, is, uh, Kimmy Blac, um, formerly known as Eboné Bell. They just recently changed their name, um, and they are my drag mom. [Laughs] And I think our drag house is House of Aress.

Makenzie: Mm-hmm.

Spjork: Um, and then, Hazy Buchanan, like I said, is one-- is my drag sister. Um, I also have a lovely drag daughter by the name of Dusty Rose. Um, and we are just... we are quite the, the group of gals, if I do say so myself. Um...

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: We... I would say we are all iconic, fashion ladies, is the best way to describe it.

Makenzie: Do you guys, like, perform together, or do you guys, like...?

Spjork: Sometimes.

Makenzie: Sometimes?

Spjork: Yeah, we got... we... almost all of us got our start with the local competition that we... uh, in Iowa city that we did. Um, but, after that, we, kind of, have since become, like, really close going through that. And Dusty never got the chance to compete. They were like a newer queen that started. Um, but they did the same thing that I did to get into drag the first time. It was like a... like a... where... I don't know, where they grab random twinks from the audience and put them in drag, basically. [Laughs]

Makenzie: [Laughs] Yeah.

Spjork: And so, I got to put them in drag the first time. And after that, the rest is kinda just history. We're all just, kind of, a little family who likes to talk about horror movies. They love horror movies. Like, that's... That's, like, all three of them's, like, biggest inspiration. Then you have me, who, I'm like... I don't... I can watch a horror movie, but I got to watch it with people [laughs, like...]

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: So, odd one out, but we're... I love them so much. They're, they're really great and inspiring.

Makenzie: How often do you perform, and, like, where do you perform?

Spjork: So, during COVID, I didn't perform for, like, almost a year. Um, I perfor-- I'm starting to perform now a little more at the Blazing Saddle in Des Moines. Um, but, like I said, I'm going to be moving in June. So, I'm trying to just collect some money, save it up, and kinda keep my head down, in a way, I guess, if that makes sense.

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: So, Blazing Saddle and Studio sometimes I perform at.

Makenzie: Okay.

Spjork: But I don't really have a set schedule.

Makenzie: Right. You just kinda do it whenever you feel like it or, like, when there's an opening, like...?

Spjork: Yeah.

Makenzie: And what goes into getting ready for a performance?

Spjork: Um, it's kinda like, a little ceremony. I like to, um, play some music, or if I'm watching YouTube or a movie, and I just get into my makeup. It's, kind of, an interesting process, I guess. I, I feel like one drag queen's makeup process is almost the same as every other drag queen's. There's always gonna be some differences but... I don't know, I guess I just... I've never really felt like my, my makeup transition is, like, super crazy. 'Cause most of the time, I just blink, and next thing I know, I'm glamorous, I guess, is how I like to think about it. So, I don't even know. I don't like to rush. I like to take my time.

Makenzie: Yeah. And what are the biggest challenges to doing drag and being a drag artist?

Spjork: Hmm... I mean, I've always really... I've never really felt that people necessarily get it. I know that that's partially in my head, because if there... if no one's outwardly being like, "Hey, I don't understand," then I shouldn't assume that they don't understand. But I always feel, like, the people around me are like, "Oh, ha-ha, you do drag." Like, they never are, like, "Oh, this is, like..." I feel like it's like, if your friends joined clown college, is what I feel like sometimes,

where I'm genui-- where I'm genuinely like a clown for a living, and that's them just being like, "Oh, ha-ha-ha-ha."

So, that's probably the biggest difficulty. But usually, I'm able to drown stuff like that out. And if you're able to do that and just keep focusing on what you love doing, it's, like, really... it's, it's easy. 'Cause you know at the end of the day, they're right. I am a clown. It's funny. I'm still serious about it. Doesn't... does... just because they think it's funny, doesn't mean I'm not serious about it.

Makenzie: Mm-hmm. So, have they said anything to you, specifically, that...?

Spjork: Not like... they've just been like...that's just how they talk to you sometimes when you're like, "Oh I do drag," they're just like, "Ohh, cool," like... Uh, well, when people are like, "Can you do my makeup?" But that's not even what I'm talking about. I just feel like... I've known my... I know my family doesn't always understand. Or, like, they'll see something I do on stage, and they're like, "You really did that," you know? [Laughs]

Makenzie: [Laughs] Yeah.

Spjork: So... I mean, I just did a YouTube video not that long ago where I had hotdogs dangling from the ceiling.

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: So, I can only imagine what their thought process is.

Makenzie: Yeah. I'll have to check that out.

Spjork: Yes, [youtube.com/Spjork](https://www.youtube.com/Spjork).

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

Spjork: Iowa city is like Comedy Central of Iowa, I think. It's, it's... I have... I laugh so hard sometimes going to those drag shows, or at least I used to. Like, oh, there... I think my... I convinced my old roommate Beep Beep to do a number. Well, they just... they did the X Files theme that has no words but it's four minutes long, and all they did was stare at the audience. And they made...

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: They made so much money, and it was so funny, like, we're clowns.

Makenzie: [Laughs] And is there... or how has COVID affected you or, um, what has it meant for your life as a drag artist?

Spjork: Um, honestly, drag, drag, like, really saved me, in a way. Like, I, I find that when I'm doing drag, I am the most Zen and comfortable and confident with myself, lately. And it's, it's... it really is, what, like, I'm meant to be doing. In some facet, it's, it's the outlet I can use. So, COVID, COVID was scary because it's like, oh god, [laughs] what...? Does this mean anything

[laughs], like, any drag? But I think what it did was redefine... almost redefine happiness, in a way. So...

Makenzie: Is drag like a therapy for you?

Spjork: Yeah. I think, uh... I thi-- I just watched this video. Someone said that, "So, if you can't afford a therapist, you can afford to sew." And so, I find... I've been lately finding that sewing and creating and stuff like that has been very therapeutic.

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: So...

Makenzie: Okay. So, we, kind of, covered this one, um, but how do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag? Like, what, what pronouns do you use in and out of drag?

Spjork: Um, out of drag, I have always... well not always. I, I know... I... it's hard for me to explain, because I don't even know exactly what I would use to explain me, because a lot of times I like to joke that I don't have a physical form. Um, and, like, I think that I... oh goodness. I am... trying to find the right words here.

Makenzie: It's okay. Take your time.

Spjork: I like to think... I like to think that I just don't... it's not that I don't have a gender, because I definitely know that I am a male, but I also don't always feel comfortable with that. And I also know that I have internalized fear of, like, being too feminine and it being in public and being perceived that way. So, I think I'm, kind of, rediscovering that. Uh, but for now, I would say still, still a cis man, if I absolutely have to put, uh, stuff, labels down. But just, I am... I just would prefer, like, don't put me in a box, you know? Just...

Makenzie: Right.

Spjork: Just leave me be. Just call me Spjork or, you know, my out-of-drag name or they/them, she/her, he/him. Just don't be mean is all I really care about. But if I am in drag, and you call me he, I will... I will make you feel bad... Well, not make you feel bad, I will...

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: I will joke about it, because if I am outwardly trying to be my drag performer self, I don't... I would prefer to be called she.

Makenzie: Right. So, would you say that drag has influenced your sex and gender identities? Like, has it changed, um, like, ever since you started doing drag, or...?

Spjork: I think, in a way. It's, it's, kind of, been my play on gender. It's, kind of, been, like, whenever I feel anxious about, um, how I'm presenting out of drag, when I'm in drag, it's like, "Oh, it doesn't matter, I can literally do whatever. Who's gonna tell me I can't do that?" you know? So, it's, kind of... I'm trying to ease that mindset in everyday life and be like, "Oh, you know, if I wanna wear a crop top, I can wear a crop top. Or if I wanna wear whatever I wanna

wear, you know, I don't have to worry about what people are gonna see or think of me, because who cares, 'cause it's me, you know?

Makenzie: Mm-hmm. So, have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag in any way?

Spjork: Um, on a way, I think, lately, because I have been able to really mess with that and do my more club kid, where I, kind of, push what the shape is or push what my body looks like, you know, or what my face looks like.

Makenzie: Mm-hmm. And how has drag impacted or changed you? Has it impacted...? I... you, kind of, talked about how it impacted your confidence as a person. Um, but has it impacted your confidence as a person when you're out of drag?

Spjork: Oh, for sure. I... 'cause realized, especially with COVID, that life is so short. Um, like, if I wanna do... be si-- be silly in a grocery store, I don't need to be wearing a wig to do that, or... I mean, drag is nice because it is, kind of, like, a disguise. But not necessarily a disguise, I think it more, like, if I'm in drag, most, most people aren't gonna say anything mean; they're gonna be like, "You better work," you know?

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: But when I'm out of drag, being flamboyantly ma-- I guess, male presenting, for some reason, at least in my head still, there is, like, a weird stigma with that. And I am trying to move past that and be like... and be like, "Who cares? I have just as much of a right to be in this space and be a... be as queer presenting as I wanna be" you know?

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: And I think that's, that what drag has lately been impacting me with is, it's all... it's all me still. It's like Spjork is still me, it's just me being... wearing a wig sometimes, you know?

Makenzie: Mm-hmm. So, if you could go back in time as Spjork, what advice would you give Spjork? And what advice would you give to your younger self?

Spjork: Um, to my younger self, I would wanna go back and make my mom take away all social media for a while. I think that social media really, like, as... when... I grew up with it, so it's kinda like, huh, I never really experienced... I never really found out myself without social media. So, it's kinda like, huh, that's, that something that I would... I wish would have changed just because it, it's just kind of a gross habit, I guess, to be on your... my phone so much.

Um, but to tell past Spjork, I would go back and be like... and tell them, "Who cares?" I would just scream at them, "Who cares?" but in the best way. Because I think I would need to know that the only people that are judging you are in... truthfully, in my head, because that's the only judge that matters. And I think I... starting drag in a competition setting, kind of, messed up my mind a little to where it feels that I can only create things if it's going to be well received. When in reality, I can just create things, so...

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: That, that's probably what I would tell my past self is, "Just chill, create, have fun."

Makenzie: I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experiences of drag or vice versa. How has drag 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 has drag impacted your experience of this social identity?

Spjork: Oh, wooo, come on, question. [Laughs]

Makenzie: I know. It's a loaded question. [Laughs]

Spjork: Um... no, I... could you repeat it one more time while I form this?

Makenzie: Yeah, of course. So, how has your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa? How has drag 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 your... the interaction of these social identities have impacted your experience of with drag and/or how has drag impacted your experience of this social identity?

Spjork: Okay, period. Um, I think that drag has impacted me socially, in a way. I don't know, I feel like when I am with just any, like, hetero people, um, when you tell them you do drag or you're gay, you... they... I, I feel like they just automatically assume that you're the funniest person in the world. And so, [laughs] I... sometimes, when I'm with more hetero presenting people, I feel more of, like... just like the gay one that's just with them. And I think that through drag I've, kind of, realized what that feeling was and, like, that it... and, like, seeing how celebrated I can be in, like... with queer people and queer presenting people, I prefer... I feel more comfortable with people like that versus any hetero people, [laughs] basically. Um, I guess there's just like... 'cause you know, sometimes, straight people will be like, "Oh, that's so gay," and that really bugs me. [Laughs]

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: Makes me think of that Hillary Duff commercial, and it gets me real mad. [Laughs]

Makenzie: [Laughs] I can see how that could be irritating.

Spjork: Yeah.

Makenzie: Okay. So, how do you define drag?

Spjork: Um, for me, drag is, um, everything around me and everything about existing into one three-minute and 45-second number. Um, I've always, kind of, felt that it was... it's just my outlet to feel like the superstar that I know that I am and feel as iconic as I am. Because even if I'm doing a really dumb number, and the audience is confused by it, if, if I think it's dumb and funny, I'm gonna be like, "You know what, I don't care if no one liked it. That was iconic," you know? And it's just... it's just the outlet for me to actually be myself and feel myself and feel comfortable.

Makenzie: Mm-hmm. So, what do you think is the purpose of drag, if you had to give it a purpose?

Spjork: I think that is different for everyone. The purpose for drag for me is just my purpose. I... It's just the best outlet for me, at least in my life right now, to do all of these things that I wanna do. I like filming, I like filmmaking, I like this creative outlet, and I love makeup, I love fashion. I've always loved fashion. I've always loved the idea of performing. Even though I've never been the best singer, I can make that up. [Laughs]

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: And I... for me, it's just... just everything about it.

Makenzie: And do you think drag is sexual? Why or why not? And if so, how and in what way? [Laughs]

Spjork: Well, [laughs] this is what my mom basically asked me. Um, I, I think it can be sexualized. I think... I think I want to use it more as a way to be more comfortable with my own sexuality out of drag, because, you know, it... you can feel... there are moments where you can feel sex-- like, some people wanna do drag to feel sexy, and that's their prerogative, you know?

Makenzie: Mm-hmm.

Spjork: Um, but I don't think all drag is sexu-- sexual. That's, kind of, like, sexualizing everything, you know?

Makenzie: Right.

Spjork: Like, what do you...? You think me performing Crazy Frog is sexy, you know?

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: Then, you know, you're a little weird to me. [Laughs]

Makenzie: [Laughs]

Spjork: So...

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

Spjork: Um, I think they can definitely work on diversifying, um, obviously. I do watch it; I am an avid watcher. I would love to be on it, because as I've said before, I've always wanted to echo voices, and I think that with that platform, I can really use that to my best ability. And not only do that, but also use my ability to keep people... I don't... make people happy, is, kind of, like... I want people to smile and, like, take a break from their hard days and just, like, laugh a little. So, I think, with that... it's a great outlet for people, is basically what I'm saying. It's, yeah, it's a great outlet.

Makenzie: If you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene, or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Spjork: Uh, I would change how catty it can be. I hate when, like, a baby queen will, like, be at an open stage, and then two other baby queens see that one's makeup, and they laugh with each other or something. It's... and it's just... it's a very toxic behavior that I think, locally, it needs to be outgrown. Um, because there's room for everyone. Not everyone is going to be at the same level when they start. Um, and everyone can learn something from everyone. So, I would like to change the cattiness.

Makenzie: Yeah. What do you think are misconceptions that people have about drag? And where does it come from? What do you think would help change that?

Spjork: I think that, at least lately, the misconception would be that, you know, not everyone can do drag. Um, everyone can do it. It's really easy. [Laughs] Well, it's not easy, but it's, it's really easy to have fun with it. So, I think that's a big misconception. And I'm not really sure how we can change it, other than slowly but surely opening our minds and our hearts to things.

Um, I also think that, that drag... I've always loved doing someone's makeup and seeing them transform into this dragged-out version of them, because you really see who they are. So, I, I wish it were possible to give some crazy... not Republican, necessarily, but [laughs] some... someone who doesn't quite understand and, like, just put them in drag, complete drag, and see if they... like, with... them with an open mind, me with an open mind, just see what happens, you know? Someone who doesn't understand it. Because I think once you get into that costume, you get into that makeup and that wig, no matter who you are, you're gonna... you gonna somewhat... you're gonna play it up a little bit. Like, even, even straight guys will put on a skirt, and they'll, like, do a little strut, like, make a joke, you know? And I feel like that's them being confident.

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: So, I think drag comes in all forms.

Makenzie: And if you could choose one thing that you want people to know about or learn about drag, what would it be?

Spjork: Um, support local girls. Not everyone, uh, that's super amazing is on... is gonna be on RuPaul's Drag Race. So, get on that Instagram; look up some local girls. Some, some of us have YouTube channels; some of us have Tiktoks. And, like, just go, go comment on a drag queen's post, go like a drag queen's post that's not a RuPaul girl. Just be supportive. It's super easy. You're already on the phone doing nothing. Just go like, comment, maybe share it, you know?

Makenzie: Yeah.

Spjork: It'd be just like if your friend did painting... it's just like, if your friend paints for a living or does art for a living, just support 'em, you know?

Makenzie: Mm-hmm. So, would you be comfortable, like, dropping your Instagram or your YouTube for people to follow and support you?

Spjork: Oh yes. My YouTube is youtube.com/Spjork, S-P-J-O-R-K. My Instagram is @thespjork, S-P-J-O-R-K. And the Twitter is, [laughs] is Spjork but the o is an x. So, S-P-J-X-R-K. And my TikTok is just @spjork, spelled regular.

Makenzie: Okay.

Spjork: But I barely post on TikTok; I'm bad at TikTok.

Makenzie: Thank you so much for sharing.

Spjork: Oh, of course.

Makenzie: I really appreciate that.

Spjork: Thank you guys for reaching out, This was fun.

Makenzie: Alright. Well, give it up for Spjork. [Laughs]

Spjork: Yes. Thank you, studio audience. [Laughs] Thank you.

Interview with Trina Diamond

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Amy: Okay, So, I have a list of lots of questions to ask. Some of them are more, like, general questions about drag in itself, and then some are more targeted towards your personal story with drag. So, I'm gonna go ahead and start off with the more general questions about drag. Um, so let me... okay, so, I'm just gonna go ahead and jump right in. Um, how do you define drag?

Trina: Um, to me, drag is any type of, um, expression. And it's really about freedom and being able to be yourself and, you know, not just putting on a wig and makeup. It's really just art.

Amy: Mm-hmm, absolutely. Awesome. And then, do you think... um, what do you think the purpose of drag is? Do you think that, kind of, goes into what you said about it's more than just dressing up?

Trina: Yeah, it's... I definitely feel that it's more than just dressing up. Um, it really allows you to, um, kind of, create this alter ego, where you get to live in a fantasy for, you know, a few short minutes, or however long your performance is. And it allows you to be creative and artistic. And, you know, even some of the most sensitive people, you know, who are super shy, you know, they get into their character, and it's like something just takes over them, and they're able to light up the stage and entertain and...

Amy: Awesome, awesome. Sorry, I'm, kind of, bad at, like, responding 'cause...

Trina: You're fine.

Amy: Drag is extremely new to me. Not extremely new, like, I've always known about it, but, like, I've only known about it through, like, social media.

Trina: Right.

Amy: So, like, taking this class, like, my mind...

Trina: [Laughs]

Amy: Is just so open to it, I'm like, "Whoa!" like... and I love it; it's an awesome class. So, like, a lot of this is just super new to me, but I love it.

Trina: Yeah.

Amy: Um, okay. Um, how do you feel about RuPaul's Drag Race?

Trina: Oh... [Laughter]

Amy: We're watching it in class right now, so...

Trina: So, I love the fact that it has really allowed drag to go mainstream. Um, and it's really giving, you know, these artists... it's giving them a chance to showcase their talent to millions and millions of people. Um, and they're able to live their dreams and make careers off of it.

Um, I definitely would like RuPaul to be more open-minded about the type of performers she allows, um, to be on the shows. Um, right now it's very, you know, centered around cis men. Um, this year, or this season, Season 13, um, is the first openly trans male, who is a female drag impersonator. Um, and I would like to see more of that. Um, RuPaul definitely has the platform that, you know, she could showcase a lot more talent, um, than, you know, just the... what people are used to...

Amy: Right.

Trina: As far as, you know, assigned male at birth performers dressing up like women.

Amy: Right, right, absolutely. I totally understand, Um, okay, if you could change one thing about drag, the drag scene or the drag community, what would it be and why?

Trina: Um, 100% it would be making drag shows more inclusive. Um, not just having your standard, um, type of drag queens in every show. Um, you know, there's a lot of, you know, assigned female at birth performers and nonbinary performers and, um, people of color that, you know, are incredibly talented, but don't... you know, they often get overlooked for, you know, the bigger shows and things like that.

Amy: Right.

Trina: So, um, there's definitely a lot... there's a lot of room for improvement. Um, but I do feel like it is getting better.

Amy: Awesome, awesome. Um, what do you think are misconceptions that people have about drag?

Trina: I think one of the biggest misconceptions, especially for, um, I would say the quote-unquote straight community, that, you know, is not really surrounded by, um, gay people in general, um, biggest misconception of drag is that drag queens are men who secretly wish they were women. You know? It... there's a huge difference, you know, between being transgender and being a drag performer. Just because, you know, we put on the wig, the makeup, and, you know, it's, it's art. It's not... um, it doesn't have anything to do with gender.

Amy: Right, right. Absolutely. Um, if you chose one thing you want people to know or learn about drag, what would that be?

Trina: Um, drag is art. Drag is, you know, not just... it's not just putting on a wig and makeup. It's, you know, that... creating that alter ego and going on stage and entertaining people. Um, it doesn't have to be your standard, you know, what you see on RuPaul's Drag Race. Um, there's, there's a huge umbrella of artistry that is under the term drag that, um... I like the fact that, you know, they're finally showcasing that.

Amy: Right. Absolutely. Um, okay, so, these questions are more targeted towards, kind of, like your personal experience with drag. Um, so, when did you first hear about drag, and what was your initial reaction to it?

Trina: I first heard about drag... gosh this... probably would have been... I was like 15 or 16. And just, um, like, being in high school, um, I had friends that, you know, had older siblings that were in the bar scene. Um, and as I started getting into my adulthood, like 18, 19, um, that was my first experience with drag. Um, not to put my age out there, but... [laughs]

Amy: [Laughs]

Trina: Not to age myself, but the internet started being more, um, useful as far as social media. The Myspace days were rolling around. Um, it wasn't just AIM chat anymore.

Amy: Right.

Trina: Um, and so, that, that's, kind of, where I started getting exposed. And then, as I started getting into adulthood, I was like, "Oh my god, like, this is... we have this right here in my own hometown and, you know, had no idea. And thankfully, with social media, um, it's a lot more accessible to younger people who, you know, they can't go to bars. And, you know, now we're moving into the direction where we're doing, you know, dinner shows and all-age brunch shows and... Um, so, it's it's definitely a lot easier to be exposed to it nowadays than, that the mid-2000s when...

Amy: Right.

Trina: I was, kind of, coming into, um, you know, my own sexuality and, um, just finding out a lot more about, you know, the gay culture and drag and how it all started and...

Amy: Right. Okay.

Trina: Sorry, I'm a rambler.

Amy: Oh my gosh, no, the more the better.

Trina: [Laughs]

Amy: Trust me. Like, even aside from my class, I love learning about this stuff. Like, it seems like a whole new world to me, 'cause, like, I grew up in small-town Illinois, so, like, this just... I really didn't really hear much about drag at all, unless it was through social media. And I was like, well, I, I wanna know more but there's no opportunity to learn about it. So then, I saw this class, and I was like, "Oh, yes!" Like, finally, I can learn about it. So, trust me, the more the better. I love learning about it. Um, okay, when did you start performing as a drag artist, and why did you start performing?

Trina: So, I started performing in 2014. My now drag mother, um, there was a bar in Des Moines called Le Boi Bar. And it was, kind of, centered off of RuPaul's Drag Race. Um, there was a competition called Tyona's Drag Race. And, um, very similar concept. It was just for our little... um, our town. And, um, with a bunch of, like, local artists. And, um, one of the

entertainers that was competing in the competition, um, there was this competition where they had to put people who don't do drag in drag. Um, and then, we, basically, had to, like, put on a show and, like, do a performance. And that was the first time I had ever actually performed in drag. And, um, it was supposed to just be a one-time thing. And, um, caught the bug...

Amy: Oh!

Trina: And [laughs] it was all down and up [unclear].

Amy: [Laughs] That's so fun. So, where was that at again? It was your hometown?

Trina: Yeah, in Des Moines, Iowa.

Amy: Gotcha, gotcha, So, like, did you... so, was it, like, fun? Did you have a good time doing it?

Trina: Yeah. And, it was... it was such a blast. And, um, I... and that's, kind of, where I was going back to, like, the whole, like, um, you know, being, kind of, shy. I was never really, like, a shy person, but I do have, um, a lot of, like, social anxiety.

Amy: Right.

Trina: Um, and, you know, just being in front of people... um, I was never good at, like, public speaking. Um, before doing drag, I never would have been able to do, like, an interview like this. And then, um, it really taught me how to, um, be in front of a large crowd and, and just entertain and talk and...

Amy: Right.

Trina: Um, all of those things. So, drag definitely is the reason why I'm able to... you know, I can stand in a crowd of 100,000 people and just talk, talk, talk...

Amy: Yeah.

Trina: And it's totally fine.

Amy: That's awesome. I can tell... like, you're ve—I, like, noticed this from the get-go, you're very well-spoken. I'm jealous, 'cause I am...

Trina; [Laughs]

Amy: I need to practice drag or something because I need to get better at that. I get anxious too, and, like... [unclear] I don't get anxious in situations like this, but I can just tell, like, you are very well-spoken, and I'm so jealous. [Laughs]

Trina: Thank you. It just comes with practice. You just...

Amy: Right, right. Okay. Um, how did your family, friends, and other loved ones receive you becoming a drag artist?

Trina: Um, I think... and it always seems like everybody has similar stories, you know? It's harder for the male figures in your life, um, just, just being, you know, gay, trans, nonbinary, things like that. Um, it always seems like it's harder for, like, your dad and...

Amy: Right.

Trina: Uh, people like that. Um, my mom was very receptive from the get-go. Um, and, you know, the rest of my family, like, was completely fine. And I am thankful that I have had a very good experience, 'cause I know a lot of people, you know, they don't have, you know, the support system, um, and things like that.

Amy: Right.

Trina: So, for me personally, yeah, um, it was... my family took it just fine. They come to my shows.

Amy: Good. That's awesome. I'm so happy to hear that. Um, where does your drag name come from?

Trina: Um, so, Trina Diamond is my drag name. Trina, um, is a rapper...

Amy: Mm-hmm.

Trina: Um, and literally one of my favorites. But back then, um, before I even started doing drag, she was always one of my favorite artists. And, um, I would listen obsessively, and anytime we'd go to a party, I'd be putting on a Trina song, and it just... it hypes you up, and you're just ready to rage. And, um, so, my friends were already calling me Trina, um, just because I was so obsessed with her as an artist. And so, when I decided that I was gonna do drag, I was like, "Well, obviously, you know, people already call me Trina, so it's a natural fit."

And, um... and then, so, in the drag community, you have, like, drag families. Um, and the first family when I first started, the person who put me in drag, um, their last name was Michaels. And so, I was Trina Michaels. And then, my current drag mom is Tyona Diamond, um, and she was the one who ran the competition show, and just from, like, my growth, um, doing... I actually went back and competed for Season 2 of that competition, and, um, I did well, and she saw the potential in me, and then I became Trina Diamond.

Amy: Awesome. I love it. I absolutely love it. Okay. There are a lot of terms for types and styles of drags, from drag queen and drag king, to glamor queen, male impersonator, comedy queen, bearded queen, queen artist, bioqueen, and camp queen, among others. Are there particular labels you would use to characterize your drag? And what kind of drag do you do?

Trina: So, yeah. And there, there are all of those terms. And, um, nowadays, you know, there's a big push, um, because drag is about art. And we have really been wanting to showcase it as that. So, there is a push right now to, um, you know, focus more on, you know, the terminology of drag performer or drag artist, um, because it really is an umbrella term. You don't have to be a cis male to do drag. Um, but, you know, obviously everybody is... they can, you know, use the labels that, um, that they wish.

And, um, for me, personally, my style of drag is more female impersonator. Um, when I am performing, I want you to look at me and be like, "Damn, that's a whole-ass woman on stage right now."

Amy: Mm-hmm.

Trina: Um, and so that's... you know, I don't do, like, the big eyebrows and over-exaggeration and things like that, um, which I love that style of drag, but for me, personally, I prefer the more, uh, female impersonator style of drag.

Amy: Right. Awesome. Does the... oh, does the type of sty-- or does the type of drag that you do affect your life as a drag artist?

Trina: Um, not really so much.

Amy: Mm-hmm.

Trina: Um, my life has definitely, at this point, you know, with the years I've been doing drag and, um, you know, developing and growing as an entertainer, um, my personality's pretty much the same, whether I'm in drag, out of drag. It's not so much that I'm having to create an alter ego anymore. Um, so, it's all just very intertwined.

Amy: Gotcha, gotcha. Who or what has influenced your drag?

Trina: Um, I would definitely say my drag mother, Tyona Diamond, um, literally one of the most stunning drag queens, um, I've ever met. Um, and, you know, nowadays, it's like, the younger generation is what keeps me pushing and wanting to do more and grow. Um, I really stopped looking at the... you know, I love learning about drag and the gay community and things like that from the older generation but it really is the young queens that are popping out and slaying the game. Um, that's who I look for for inspiration and ideas and motivation to want to keep going. And, you know, they look up to me, you know, being a little older and having the years of experience. So, yeah, definitely would say the younger generation.

Amy: Awesome. Um, do you consider your drag political? Why or why not?

Trina: I... Not necessarily in the performances itself. But, I do - as I've been growing a quote-unquote fanbase or followers and things like that, um, with social media, um, I, I've always been an opinionated person. Um, so, I wouldn't consider myself, like, a social justice lawyer, um, but, you know, when it comes to, like, Black Lives Matter and, um, LGBTQ rights and things like that, um, I, I'm very opinionated. [Laughs]

Amy: Right, right. As you should be.

Trina: And I don't, like... it's not like that's my goal. Uh, I'm not... it's, it's not my... it's not the purpose of me doing drag, per se. Um, it just so happens that I'm a very opinionated person, and I have somewhat of a platform and it is what it is.

Amy: Right. Absolutely. I totally understand. Um... okay, so, this one's more of, like, a broader question. It says, "Can you talk about what your life is like as a drag artist?" And then, there's

other questions, things you can pinpoint. Um, are you part of a drag family, which we, kind of, hit on. Um, how often do you perform? What goes into getting ready for a performance? What are some challenges of doing drag, um, is there... and is there anything unique to the drag scene where you live compared to other places in the country or the world?

Trina: Yeah. So, I would... I'll start with, um, what I feel is unique about our drag scene here.

Amy: Mm-hmm.

Trina: Um, we're very open and welcoming. We're... you know, at least, here, in Iowa, I'll focus specifically more on Des Moines but it... you know, it goes into Iowa City and, um, Cedar Rapids, um, and we have a bunch of, like, smaller towns that are even starting to do drag shows at their local bars. Um, we're not... it's not as cliquey as I feel like, um, a lot of other scenes are in different, uh, cities, um, especially larger cities. You know, Des Moines' not a tiny town, but, um, so...

And knowing you have your... you have your groups that they just click better together. But, um, you know, we booked different styles of drag. Um, it's not so focused on what you would see on RuPauls' Drag Race, you know? We have artists who are magicians, and they go onstage... or, you know, live singers. Um, so it's, it's a very open community and very welcoming.

Um, I would als-- as far as, um, what I do, um, I am... I work for the Garden NightClub. Um, we're in the middle of transitioning to a new building right now. Um, I am the show director of the, um, Black... it's... it was Black Opulence with the former person, um, but I'm switching the focus to a decadence show where it will showcase, um, artists for... from different, um, perspectives, not just Black performers, but people of color in general - Asians, Hispanics, Black people, people of color in general. And so, I will be the show director for that show, specifically.

Um, and then, you know, performing on... so, that will be every Sunday or every second Sunday. And then, just performing on Fridays and Saturdays throughout the month. I also perform at the Blazing Saddle. I'm still part of their Black Opulence shows. Um, as far as... sorry, I'm jumbling because I'm thinking of the questions as I'm speaking.

Amy: No, go for it. [Laughs]

Trina: [Laughs] Um, as far as what it takes to get ready, um, it doesn't take me as long nowadays. I would say about an hour and a half. Just getting in the mindset that I got to put on makeup, and then put on tights and hip pads and figure out what outfits I'm gonna do and what songs I want to perform and things like that. So, I would say the whole process is about... for me, about six hours.

Amy: Oh wow.

Trina: Just getting in the mindset, um, figuring out the outfits, the songs. Um, you know, if I'm hosting that night, um, going through the, um, the lineup, who's performing? Um, making sure that... um, you know, 'cause when you're on the microphone, nobody wants to hear you just standing up there saying, "Coming up next to the stage..." So, you know, it's nice to know who is

in the show with you, um, so that way, you know, you can, kind of, banter back and forth, and, um, talk about the artist. And, um, yeah, so the whole process is about six hours...

Amy: Exactly.

Trina: Um, to do, you know, 10-15 minutes' worth of drag. [Laughs]

Amy: Right. That is crazy. Is it...?

Trina: Um, but a big... but a big thing for me is, I like to be ready an hour or two before the show starts, so that way I can go mingle with the crowd, um, the other patrons in the bar, um, to try and get them pumped up for the show and...

Amy: Right. Can it be...? This is a personal question of mine, 'cause that is... I'm, like, thinking of myself getting ready. Obviously, I'm not getting ready for a show, but, like, I... once I hit an hour, I'm like, "Oh, I'm done. I don't care what I look like." Like, do you like that it takes a long time to get ready? Or are there some days where it's just like, uh, like, it can feel more like a chore?

Trina: Uh, oh yeah, definitely, definitely done a lot of shows where, um, it felt more like a chore. Um, and usually, on those nights, um, the focus is more on, let's just get a quick mug on. And, um, the nice thing about doing drag is, you know, I always try and do, like, fresh numbers and things like that. Um, but usually, you know, once you start learning songs, um, if you are having an off night, I'm like, "You know what, I haven't performed this in a couple of months. I'm gonna pull out a couple of old numbers and, uh, just make it a fun, light night."

Amy: Mm-hmm. Gotcha, gotcha. Okay. Um, what has the COVID-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?

Trina: Um, so with COVID, I personally, um... I just took a step back from drag. Our bars were closed down. Sorry if you can hear my Roomba going off. I don't want turn [overtalking].

Amy: No, you're fine. [Laughs]

Trina: [Laughs] Um, I, kind of, took a step back. I mean, the bars were closed, and even when the bars first started opening back up... I think they were closed for about three months, majority of summer for sure. Um, once bars started opening back up, um, I just wasn't really interested in, um, performing. I had, kind of... you know we had gone so long where I was, you know, show, show, show, nothing.

Amy: Right.

Trina: And, um, during that time, I kinda just lost the motivation to do it. And, um, you know, obviously, we're in the middle of a pandemic, so it just wasn't an option. Um, other artists, the local bars here, virtual shows started becoming extremely popular. Um, and I toyed around with the idea of doing virtual shows, um, and instead, me and my old roommate... my old roommate was doing virtual shows. And so, I, I had just, kind of, come to the decision that I didn't wanna personally do the virtual shows. And so, I became more of a... we're gonna turn the house into a stage, um, you know, and our close friends, um, that were performers, were like, "They can come

over and perform on the deck. I'll help record and set up sound." And so, I came... more of like a... like a backstage-type person. Um, and I was completely fine with that.

Amy: Good.

Trina: I... but I just had no interest in performing. [Laughs]

Amy: Right. Is it still, like, kind of a...? 'Cause I know, like, uh, even just drag aside, I know a lot of people have been feeling that low motivation kind of thing for the past, like, year to year and a half. Has it slowly... has that motivation slowly started to come back, or is it still kinda lingering a little?

Trina: I would say New Year's was weirdly a reset for me. That's when I was like, "Okay, I'm back in the headspace, drag, drag, drag, drag." And so, now I'm back to doing shows again. And, um, I honestly feel like the reset helped me fall back in love with drag where it's no longer a chore to go out and perform, um, it's that I actually want to. And so, I'm actually really happy about that.

Amy: Good.

Trina: Um, my mind's... my state of mind has, kind of, reset with COVID and... yeah. But we're getting back in action; more people are getting vaccinated, so...

Amy: Right.

Trina: It's nice to see bars and entertainment, entertainment venues in general, um, being able to bring drag back.

Amy: Right. Oh, it's like a breath of fresh air. Things are finally starting to feel normal again.

Trina: Right. [Laughs]

Amy: Um, sorry, my dog is barking like crazy. I'm so sorry.

Trina: No, you're fine. You're fine.

Amy: Um, let's see. How do you identify in terms of your sex, gender identity, and gender expression out of drag?

Trina: So, I identify as gender nonconforming. Um, I... I'm gonna watch how I say this.

Amy: Mm-hmm.

Trina: It's a very personal thing for me.

Amy: Sure.

Trina: Um, I would say I identify as gender nonconforming, um, or male. [Laughs]

Amy: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Trina: Like, like, I, obviously... I wear nails...

Amy: Oh, love 'em.

Trina: I do drag. Just... I don't really think about my gender a lot. Um, but I would say gender nonconforming. I can switch it up, um, depending on how I'm presenting. Um, but I just... I don't really care for the labels.

Amy: Sure.

Trina: Um, so, for me, personally, um, that is the best way that I could identify.

Amy: Sure, absolutely. Um, how... I'm sorry, I'm gonna step out and calm down my dog down.

Trina: Okay, right.

Amy: She's going crazy. Give me one second.

Trina: [Laughs] You're okay.

[Silence from 00:29:40 to 00:30:19]

Amy: Oh, sorry. She was barking at a squirrel.

Trina: No worries.

Amy: Oh. [laughs] Okay. Um, oh, where did it go? Okay. Um, how has drag, um, if it has, has drag influenced your sex and gender identities?

Trina: Mm, I definitely feel like drag... it allows you to, kind of, play around and, um... you know, a lot of people... even just, you know, being trans or nonbinary, um, it allows you to really toy around with, um, drag by per—performing and putting on the wig and the makeup and things like that. Um, I personally feel like it makes it easier to transition and, kind of, come out, you know, as, you know, gender nonconforming or transgender, um, or nonbinary, um, where you don't have to... I feel like it, kind of, takes away the shock...

Amy: Mm-hmm.

Trina: Um, you know, when you are, you know, a drag artist, um, and, you know, you start... I wouldn't say, like, it really has anything to do with your sexuality, but, you know, your gender, for sure. Um, you know, it kinda helps you feel more comfortable, um, when your friends and family, you know, they're already getting a taste of you, you know, putting on the wig and the makeup, it, it becomes more normal for them. And I feel like it's less shocking to them, you know, if you do, you know, decide to come out as trans or nonbinary or gender nonconforming or, um, really, anything else. Um, for me, personally, I feel like it makes it easier.

Amy: Gotcha, gotcha. Um, has drag influenced how you think about gender?

Trina: I would say that, um, in the beginning, no. But, as I'm learning about, you know, new terminology and, um, you know... god, when I first came out, this was in the mid to late 2000s, you know, you never heard of nonbinary or gender nonconforming. Um, but, you know, being in the scene and doing drag, um, I definitely think that it has helped start the conversations of, you

know, hey, you know, I don't really feel like a boy, but maybe I also don't feel like a woman or... you know? [Laughs]

Amy: Mm-hmm. Right.

Trina: I, I think that it has, um, opened up the conversation with the different styles of drag that people do. Um, it allows for more people to showcase, you know, who they are a lot easier.

Amy: Right. Gotcha. Um, have your sex and gender identities influenced your drag?

Trina: No.

Amy: Gotcha. [Laughs] Straight to the point, no. [Laughs]

Trina: Right. [Laughs]

Amy: Um, let's see. How has drag impacted or changed you in any way?

Trina: I would say it, it's allowed me to be more vocal and find my voice. And, um, you know, kind of going back to the whole soc-- social anxiety thing, um, it's really allowed me to develop those skills that I use in my everyday life. And even, you know, with my... with my career outside of drag, um, you know, being a people leader, um, it's helped me develop those skills that I probably never would have developed. I certainly didn't develop them going to school. [Laughs]

Amy: Mm-hmm. Right.

Trina: Um, speech class did nothing for me. [Laughs]

Amy: Right. Oh, I can relate. Oh. Um, let's see. Has drag imp-- impacted your confidence as a person when you are out of drag?

Trina: Oh, 100%. Um, I would say that doing drag... and I feel like it's a... it's that way for a lot of people that I know, um, that by doing drag, you're... it's, kind of, like, you're able to get your name out there, and it's the recognition, it's the... you know, when you go out, um, even people that you're like, "I've never met you in my life," um, they're like, "Oh my god!" and things like that. And it, kind of, allows you to be like a little, mini-celebrity even in, like, in your little hometown.

Amy: Sure.

Trina: Um, just like any other type of art would do that, you know... but with drag you don't have to, you know, be a good singer, you don't have to, um, be what you would consider the normal ways of becoming quote-unquote famous.

Amy: Right, right. Okay. Um, I think this one is the last one. It's a bit longer. It says, I'm curious if and how your social identities have impacted your experience of drag or vice versa. Um, can you share about how one or more of your social identities such as gender, race, class, age, etc., um, or the interaction of these social identities have impacted your experience of drag?

Trina: Yeah. Um, just being a person of color even, um... I have personally, as well as, um, you know, with, um... we have, like, um... it's called Iowa Black Drag Council. And, um, last year, especially with the Black Lives Matter movement and things like that going on, we've really been pushing for, you know, bars to, um, have more diverse casts, um, and not just your standard cis white male performers, um, and not just poor people of color but for people with different gender identities, um, you know, nonbinary performers, trans performers, um, just really holding bars and event venues, um, accountable for, you know, being more diverse.

Amy: Exactly.

Trina: And, um, it is the way it should be; it's the way of the future. Um, there is more to drag than just cis white male artists, wh-- they deserve a platform, for sure, um, and nobody's trying to take that away from them. Um, but, you know, there's more to drag than just a cis white male...

Amy: Right.

Trina: That puts on a wig. And, um, you know, at least the bars here locally have been doing a really good job at making sure that, you know, the shows are more inclusive and that they're, you know, giving space to, um, all performers and all types of performers. And, um, I really feel like it's really... it's really brought in a new crowd to come and see the shows as well. Um, you know, they're not just coming to see, you know, that stereotypical drag show. They're coming to a show, and not even realizing that, you know, the next person on stage is a magician who is gonna pull, you know, birds out of a hat, um...

Amy: Right.

Trina: And just different styles of drag. Um, I really think that it's, it's been a breath of fresh air in the drag world and, um, you know, even other bars, you know... I did a show, um, last year in Ottumwa, Iowa. It's a small town, mostly Republican, um, where, you know, you just would never think that there'd be a sold-out drag show with 300 people.

Amy: Right.

Trina: Um, it was the year before. I forget last year happened. Thanks, COVID. [Laughs]

Amy: Yeah. [Laughs]

Trina: Um, but, yeah, and it was sold out, and they loved it. And, um, so, yeah, I, I think drag is becoming more acceptable, and it's becoming, um, more mainstream. And, um, now is the perfect time to, you know, start showing the more diverse drag. And I also think that it helps fight the stereotypes, you know, when you're having a diverse cast. Um, it help... it helps fight the stereotype that, oh, you do drag because you secretly wanna be a woman.

Amy: Right.

Trina: Um, by showing the different talents in that drag is more than just putting on a wig and makeup, um, it's really helping us show the world that it's really about the art form, not necessarily because, you know, we don't identify as, you know, cis, basically.

Amy: Mm-hmm. Right. Well, that is all the questions I have. I really appreciate you doing this and answering all my questions.

Trina: Yeah, no worries.

Amy: It was so fun. This is all just so interesting to me.

Trina: **Amy:** Right.

Trina: [Laughs]

Amy: I wish... I wish this class could last, like, all year, I feel like we're just smushing too much in such a small amount of time. I wanna know more. But I really appreciate it, especially with such a last-minute notice. I really appreciate it. And it was so awesome to meet you.

Trina: No worries. Nice to meet you as well, and good luck.

Amy: Thank you. Have a good day.

Trina: Thanks. You too.

Amy: Bye bye.

Trina: 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 glamor 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?
 - f. What has the Covid-19 pandemic meant for your life as a drag artist?
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?