

2016

Glue Sticks and Gaffs: Disassembling the Drag Queening Body

Ray Siebenkittel

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, raysiebenkittel@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Siebenkittel, Ray, "Glue Sticks and Gaffs: Disassembling the Drag Queening Body" (2016). *LSU Master's Theses*. 913.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/913

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

GLUE STICKS AND GAFFS:
DISASSEMBLING THE DRAG QUEENING BODY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
Ray Siebenkittel
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2014
May 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all of the drag queens of Baton Rouge, who gave me the confidence to be queer, fierce and fabulous.

Thank you to Dr. Dana Berkowitz for mentoring me as an undergraduate student. Without her initial guidance, this thesis would not be possible. I would like to thank Dr. Helen Regis, my advisor and chair, for being my Anthropology idol. A special shout out to Dr. Micha Rahder for reading countless drafts, and to Erin Jordan, my colleague, who always gave me the push I needed.

I would also like to acknowledge the resources of the LSU William T. Harry Oral History Center, especially Erin McMenamin and her help. And, Dr. Elaine Maccio and her students, who recorded critical pieces of Baton Rouge's LGBTQ history.

Last, I am indebted to Seth LeBlanc for his unrelenting support. Thank you for joining me on this journey, guiding me along, lifting me when I fall and fixing my makeup before I leave for the club. A couple that drags together stays together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Drag Queens.....	5
Framing the Body.....	8
Introducing “Hegemony Flowers”.....	10
Baton Rouge, Louisiana.....	15
The Gay Bar.....	20
The Drag Krewes of Baton Rouge.....	25
Constructing the Drag Body.....	29
Performing the Drag Body.....	36
Deconstructing the Drag Body.....	42
Conclusion.....	47
Works Cited.....	52
Vita.....	57

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Seth (left) and I in drag at Rush.....	12
Figure 2. Putting on eyeliner.....	30
Figure 3. Performing at Joe's Bar.....	37
Figure 4. Getting out of drag.....	43

ABSTRACT

Drag queening men, typically gay men who perform femininities for entertainment, use makeup, padding, injections and other tools to change their bodies for performance. I focus on the backstage activities of drag performers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, rather than conventional observations from the audience, to explore the negotiation, construction and implications of these bodies, both physically and discursively. Through autoethnographic accounts and participating in my own drag performance, I highlight the often unseen, less frequently discussed aspects of drag queening in order to lessen the distance between the efforts of performers and the stage. Drag queening men's bodies are a queer assemblage that contests the heteronormativity of the male body. Drag performer's corporeal crafting suggests the body is a multitude of coexisting processes that can be transgressive, but may still reify racist structures and heteronormative gender politics they seek to combat.

INTRODUCTION

After my own failed attempts, I inquired with a few local performers if anyone could “put me in drags” for a night. I was quickly directed to Rachel Starr since she had years of experience and the longest-running drag career.

“I’ll do your face one time,” she agreed. “Then it’s up to you.”

Rachel gave me specific directions to prepare: buy a wig, dress and high heels and shave my entire body. She arrived at my apartment with an extensive assortment of tools, including her own long, curly wig to replace the short “mop” I had foolishly purchased. She worked on my makeup for at least three hours, and finally it was time to get dressed:

“I’ve never actually tucked it,” I explain.

“Have you shaved?” Rachel asks, looking down at my crotch. I blush. Seth, my partner, laughs as he watches.

“Not really, but it’s managed,” I say.

Rachel sighs at my poor ability to follow her directions. “Take your pants off. I need a sock,” she directs. I hesitate as she pulls out a pair of nylon fishnets and cuts out a portion. She creates two leg-holes and leaves a square section of netting intact between them – a makeshift gaff to hold the tuck.

“Please don’t tell the other queens any details,” I groan, embarrassed and worried that Rachel may gossip (or “spill the tea”) about seeing me naked. I pull down my shorts and underwear. Rachel directs my feet through the piece of fishnet.

“Squat!” Rachel barks. She pushes my testicles into my body, grabs the leftover handful and pulls it between my butt cheeks. The sock goes in the middle of the gaff to protect from the harsh nylon netting. I pull up the contraption, successfully tidying my parts away. The slight physical discomfort is heavily outweighed by my embarrassment. Rachel takes a pair of pantyhose and cuts off the feet. “To help save your toes,” she explains.

I position a pad on each hip as Rachel and Seth work together to pull up the first pair of several pantyhose. I go to put on a second layer by myself, but realize it’s uncomfortable to lean forward and difficult to stretch the fresh nylon over my stuffed figure. “This is hard,” I whine to Seth for help.

Rachel stops him with a look – “She wants to *experience* being a queen; let the bitch do it herself!” (Fieldnotes 3/21/2014)

When I finished dressing, Rachel gave me a clutch and a pair of basic, black underwear (“Always wear panties!”) as a parting gift from the drag mother’s nest.

Later on, Rachel’s construction surrounded me in the nightclub’s mirrored walls. The anonymous reflection was striking. I was happy with the last-minute wig change, long hair draped over one shoulder was feminizing. A thick smoke of black eyeshadow exaggerated the size of my eyes, and my newly drawn brows were thin, dark arches. My padded figure filled the dress, and it was exciting to have a small part of my midriff exposed under a section of sheer material. Adding to the intensity, I towered at nearly seven feet. I loved it. Rachel’s gift to me was a glimpse of possibility, a tease of how it could feel to be a drag queen.

“Drag queen” usually describes gay, cis men who perform as women to an audience that is aware they are biologically considered male (Rupp and Taylor 2003). Although it is difficult to generalize into a stable definition, “drag performance” is most often heavily gendered entertainment with elements of camp or lip-syncing (moving your lips to match audio) to popular songs or references. Genevieve Berrick, in her analysis of drag kinging, gives a rather tongue-in-cheek definition for camp. “Add in a little theatricality,” she writes, “a dash of parody or irony and a fair sprinkle of style, and we have the perfect brew for the true Camp” (2010:210). Moe Myer defines camp more seriously as “the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a gay identity, with enactment understood as the production of social visibility” (2010:40). Drawing from these two definitions of camp situates drag performance as historically gay and politically queer.

Although audience members may feel they are aware drag queens are men, there is a crucial need to recognize how this assumption is complicated by drag queening transwomen, ciswomen

and non-binary individuals. For my thesis, “drag queen” is a more open term for all people who embody femininities through drag performance. I dislocate this term from the gay, cis male body to acknowledge the diverse breadth of gender identities who take part in the tradition. It is more appropriate and accurate to discuss “drag queening” as a process capable of manifesting through all types of bodies. Drag queening men, then, are masculine-identifying individuals who embody femininities.

I decided to open this thesis with a provocative story on tucking to satisfy the most common question from overly eager audience members – “Where does it go?” By telling the reader where the penis does indeed “go,” I expose the voyeuristic cravings of the audience and demystify the otherness of becoming in drag. The obsession with tucking, an emasculation of the self to fit comfortably in a leotard, reflects the societal fetishization of the phallus. Furthermore, the question of drag queens’ genitals aligns with society’s need to match gender performance to an appropriately sexed body. I combat these prying questions with the same blatancy of drag queening men when they discuss their penises on a microphone. Drag queening men are upfront and unapologetic, their greatest strength lies in stating the obvious. “Just to clarify,” queens often joke with the audience, “I do have a dick.”

In this thesis, I consider the mystery and ambiguity of drag queening men’s bodies with similar transparency. I focus on the backstage activities of drag performance, rather than conventional observations from the audience, to explore the processes which construct and maintain these bodies, both physically and discursively. I highlight the often unseen, less frequently discussed aspects of drag performance in order to lessen the distance between the efforts of performers and the stage. Since drag performance is a personal craft with many trade secrets, I describe my own methods to unveil the technologies of drag queening.

First, I review scholarly work on drag queens and their performance to indicate a lack of researchers participating in drag performance. Additionally, by demystifying the construction of the drag body, I am filling a gap in literature where drag queening men's efforts of investment, money and time are not equally represented compared to the number of ethnographies focusing on the audience's perspective. Following Rachel's words above, "the bitch" is doing it herself.

Next, I establish a theoretical framework of the body as a useful and innovative approach to analyzing drag queens. I extend the lens of performativity onto the body and theoretically present drag queening men's bodies as disruptively queer processes. I supplement this framework with autoethnography, a method I argue is especially concise for thinking about the body and embodiment. This reflexive approach adds a critical and needed perspective to the dialogue on drag.

I consider the historical context of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, highlight the importance of place and introduce the primary consultants for this research. Then, I detail how practicing the drag body constructs, performs and deconstructs in order to consider the implications of these processes. How is a drag body formed, and how does this experience interact with privilege and identity? How is the drag body used for entertainment? And finally, thinking of the broader theoretical discussion, in what ways does the drag body deconstruct and protest hegemonic narratives of engendering the body?

DRAG QUEENS

Through their performance, drag queens “put a paradoxical spin on the notion of ‘to be or not to be’ by demonstrating that ‘being’ need not be an either/or proposition and that there are actually multiple ways that gender can be performed and experienced” (Schacht and Underwood 2004:4). Drag queens turn the spotlight on the processes of doing, being and performing gender by presenting it on a stage for entertainment purposes. However, drag performances may also reify gender norms. Lanier Basenberg (2008) argued that since drag queening men perform and embody a heteronormative, emphasized femininity they do not challenge gender hegemony. Competitions such as drag pageants may enforce hegemonic femininity and remain within traditional gendered norms. Drag queening men sometimes seek gendered power over others through their embodiment of hyperfemininity, a power that can be viewed as an extension of masculinity and male privilege (Schacht 2002, Schacht and Underwood 2004). Steven Schacht argued that drag performance is “a mutated reflection of preexisting inequalities” (2002: 156) that is both reifying and protesting gender regimes. Drag queening men may demonstrate the performativity and fluidity of gender, arguably disrupting biological notions, while at the same time reinforcing the gendered binary, hegemonic femininity and male privilege.

Drag performance can be utilized politically for legal and social advocacy. Drag is an integral part of American gay and lesbian movements, with drag queens acting as public figures in pride marches and popular emcees for events. In many ways, they are queer celebrities (Rupp and Taylor 2003). From the “screaming queens” of the Compton’s Cafeteria Riot to Stonewall, drag queens are credited to revolutionary moments of the gay rights movement, acting not only as well-known personalities but venerated images of queer resistance (Zervigon 2004). Drag shows are frequently fundraisers for charities or members of the local community.

Although some drag queens may reach international fame, such as RuPaul and her “RuGirls” (the contestants on the reality show *RuPaul’s Drag Race*), most remain local, small-town personalities. Drag queening men are complicated public figures, having celebrity status but also facing segregation from other gay men (Berkowitz, Belgrave and Halberstein 2007). They are often romantically snubbed by gay men and other drag queens for being too feminine (Berkowitz and Belgrave 2010; Rupp and Taylor 2003). Additionally, most drag performers are unable to rely on drag as a primary source of income (Berkowitz and Belgrave 2010). Drag supplies and costumes can easily expand into thousands of dollars, which is rarely earned back in financial compensation. Tips from the audience are often minimal and sporadic. I witnessed several nights of performers leaving empty-handed. Occasionally, the venue may offer a small stipend (under \$50) if the performer successfully attracts customers. Thus, although drag queens are seen as important community figures, their celebrity status is complicated by minimal monetary gain, social distance and exclusion.

Scholars Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor confessed feeling afraid for drag performers while walking the streets with them (2003:57). The queens were harassed by the general public and propositioned by men, both heterosexual and nonheterosexual, for sexual favors. Similarly, the drag queens who lived in the “gay haven” of Miami Beach told Berkowitz and Belgrave (2010) of their concerns about abuse and harassment by the public, feeling powerless and fearing for their lives. The authors explained: “Offstage there are no conventions of the theatre to protect a drag queen from ridicule, harassment, or physical violence” (2010:170). Focusing solely on the gender and sexual politics of drag can sometimes overshadow the very real threat of violence that performers face in their daily lives. Recognizing drag queens as a marginalized group is

essential, as performers are socially, financially and sometimes violently held accountable for the gender play and “deviance” glorified by scholars.

FRAMING THE BODY

Erving Goffman (1963) theorized the body as an individual's material property that is given meanings by a structural body idiom and contributes to self-identity. Other drag scholars have implemented this theory into their research, using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor of performing identity to setup drag performance as a back region behavior that is further from institutional influence (Friedman and Jones 2011). However, Dana Berkowitz and Linda Belgrave (2010) argue a Goffmanian perspective falls short since it assumes the performer is unaware and unpracticed. "The drag queen," they write, "plays a character, and he is transformed, in that he is able to do things 'in performance' he cannot do ordinarily" (2010:163). Therefore, because of a drag performer's practiced awareness, agency and creativity, I draw from a canon of scholarship in which the body is theorized as abstract, cultural processes of making and remaking meanings.

Marcel Mauss suggested humanity's "first and most natural instrument" (2007:56) was the body. He identified techniques of the body, a cultural knowledge of what the physical body is capable of and how to achieve it. By distinguishing a societal aspect, Mauss provides an early framework for thinking about bodies outside the flesh. Later, Michel Foucault (1988) introduced technologies of the self, the power and tools which allow individuals to transform their bodies and souls. Following this framework, drag performers are capable of crafting and manipulating their bodies while they are simultaneously influenced by structural and institutional forces.

On the outer layer of these bodies exists what Terence Turner conceptualizes as the social skin, a meta-surface that "imposes definite perspectival forms on the subjective identity of the embodied person" (2011:106). By emphasizing embodied social meanings, Turner describes how a body is constructed and perceived by an audience. Drag queens make use of not only the

material body, but the social skin as well, since they are performing a gender that is different than their own daily expression. The social skin encapsulates clothing and adornments, making it very fitting for the analysis of drag queening bodies since they are usually giving a temporary, outward presentation that conceals a private body. Drag queening men purposefully craft their bodies by drawing from a specific knowledge, one of the drag body, in which they learn to posit their flesh beyond rigid biological and social meanings of maleness.

In their anthology on the body, Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar write that “lived bodies have begun to be comprehended as *assemblages* of practices, discourses, images, institutional arrangements, and specific places and projects” (2007:1, emphasis added). Building off this synthesis, I present drag bodies as a skillful assemblage of processes. Through my autoethnographic narratives and my ethnographic data, I illustrate how drag queening men’s bodies are a queer assemblage of contradictions. Using each of these theoretical frameworks, I view the body as fluid processes of making and remaking social meanings. I show drag queening men are corporeal navigators who use their performance to encourage living between the lines.

INTRODUCING “HEGEMONY FLOWERS”

Through autoethnographic accounts, I provide perspective into the inward, reflexive meanings of drag performance and the body work associated with it. Autoethnography acts as “both process and product” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011:273) in its incorporation of autobiography and ethnography while accommodating “subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011:274). When studying the body, autoethnography holds a particular strength. Frances Mascia-Lees writes that “autoethnography is an embodied practice” (2011:46) and Stacy Jones elaborates this by stating “autoethnographic texts seek to invoke the corporeal, sensuous, and political nature of experience rather than collapse text into embodiment or politics into language play” (2005:767). Autoethnography effectively acts as a tool for documenting and deconstructing body processes.

This method of reflexive scholarship aligns with feminist thought, contesting objectivity and challenging dominant methodologies. Mascia-Lees praises autoethnography for its subversive nature:

Autoethnographic techniques were, and remain today, a tool of cultural criticism, a means to respond both to how power operates within traditional framework and realist forms of ethnographic representation and a way to challenge monolithic views of identity (2011:47).

I embrace the politics of autoethnography to maintain a feminist, critical lens in this research. Pushing back against objectivity and traditional science resonates with the resistance of drag performance. This thesis works to oppose not only deterministic conceptions of gender and binary thinking, but also methodologies that posit a false line between scholar and participant. I am both a drag performer and scholar, and it is in this blurred nexus that my research finds solace in queer thinking.

I am a 22 year old, gay, white, abled, genderqueer graduate student, otherwise known as Hegemony Flowers (or Gem) in drag. In regards to age, race and class, I am the target audience for most gay bars in Baton Rouge. During research, I noticed how my queer, male identity allowed me into certain spaces. Taylor and Rupp noted that their access to the dressing room was “not so easy” and some performers were very resistant to letting the lesbian women see them dress (2003:9). On the contrary, I found performers were not shy about their bodies or transformation in my presence, nor were they hesitant to discuss risqué topics. Despite these advantages, my positionality also posed challenges. Blending with other young, male exuberant fans, I had to attend several performances and tip until performers recognized me. Some of the queens perceived me as a sexual subject rather than a researcher – one in particular expressed relief after an interview that I had not made sexual advances or had ulterior motives. It took time for me to prove I was not an over-invested fan nor an under-invested student. I was younger than all the performers (20 at the start of this research) and often playfully chastised as “twelve years old.” My ultimate position within the Baton Rouge drag community was an aspiring, curious drag princess, which granted me further insight into how drag performance is accomplished.

During the course of this research I have pierced my ears, learned to walk in 6-inch platforms, waxed my eyebrows, shaved my body, corseted my torso, bonded my eye shut with eyelash glue and developed a fondness for acrylic and press on nails as part of my daily ensemble. I rely on my own experiences with drag performance as essential to analyzing the processes that create and disassemble the drag body. I recorded these experiences by video-blogging while getting into drag, jotting notes in public and writing reflective journal entries afterwards. Additionally, I’ve recorded discussions about my drag performance between myself and Seth, my long-time partner. Also interested in doing drag, he has accompanied me in the

field and crafted Cherry Nobyl, his own persona. We dedicated an entire bedroom in our apartment to drag: two makeup tables, three large mirrors, several lamps, a sewing machine, an assortment of makeup and brushes, storage bins of pantyhose and shape-wear, a dress form, dozens of wigs on foam heads and a closet of clothes and fabrics. By taking on drag performance as a hobby, we became financially invested in obtaining the necessary tools.



Figure 1. Seth (left) and I in drag at Rush

This research occurred from August 2013 to April 2016. It began through Louisiana State University's ASPIRE Undergraduate Research Program, then carried over into my graduate studies. I attended performances weekly at Rush Nightclub and Joe's Bar, both pseudonyms. A considerable amount of observation occurred at the weekly performances at Joe's arranged by Sharon and Samantha. Each Monday, they performed for free to try and reinvigorate the bar's business. In addition to this, I regularly attended the weekly shows at Rush, bi-weekly Krewe des Femmes shows at Joe's, drag queening men pageants, drag queening women pageants, several fundraising benefits and numerous touring performances of nationally-known drag queens.

I attended performances less frequently towards the end of this research to focus time and energy on practicing drag. After building the confidence and skill, I presented in drag at Rush

and Joe's in the audience. I performed on stage in drag at Joe's in August 2015. I remain active in the drag performance scene through social media, visits to the bars, attending performances and other events through the charity and community service networks of Baton Rouge. My relationships with the performers involved in this research have been fluid, and we frequently crossed paths throughout Baton Rouge and New Orleans. The balance between work and leisure was a messy task, since my fieldsites are the main – and arguably the only – public spaces for local gay nightlife and socialization.

I formally interviewed six drag queening men, who are more properly introduced later in chapter: Rachel Starr, Sharon Coxx, Mercedes Adams, Samantha Adams, Erica Anderson and Molly Hart. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to a few hours, totaling almost 12 hours. Interviews were carried out in convenient locations, such as Rush before opening, coffee shops and private residences. Most of the consultants had been interviewed in the past by other students from nearby universities, but they had not participated in any research projects spanning longer than a semester. This familiarity with ethnographic research aided in my initial entrance into the drag community. Interview questions inquired about general background information with prompts about drag performance and daily life. The questions sought to find patterns within the very diverse experiences of the performers, and I became focused on thinking about the body. The interviews were transcribed and coded by themes. These formal interviews are supplemented with informal interviews that occurred backstage, in the audience, behind the bar and after hours in conjunction with observation. I jotted notes on my smartphone in the field and wrote cathartic field notes when returning home, followed by editing them the next week.

The bar settings acted as a heavy variable for this research. Paying door covers (usually ranging from \$5 to \$20) and tipping the performers (\$1 per song) was a financial hindrance.

Observation occurred late at night in a setting with alcohol, drug use and the threat of unwanted sexual advances. In some cases, the drag performers stepped in as my protectors. I am not sure if my presence provided them any protection, but I could always count on a drag queen to help me out of an awkward situation with a stranger. Since drag shows are primarily held in a nightlife setting, alcohol consumption is a ritualistic requirement before performing. The majority of the performers were on some substance, at varying levels, during many of my observations. One consultant was intoxicated during an interview and her experiences were taken into account with consideration. Despite this party atmosphere, performers expected one another to maintain a certain level of sobriety for the stage and frequently spoke out against driving under the influence.

BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

Louisiana's Capital City has an estimated population of 228,895 (US Census Bureau 2014). An estimated 38.7% identify as white, 55.0% as black and 3.5% as Asian, and 3.3% identifying as Hispanic or Latino (US Census Bureau 2014). With an estimated median household income of \$38,790, 16.9% of residents lived below the poverty level for at least a year (US Census Bureau 2014). Baton Rouge has been described as "a utilitarian and rather pedestrian working capital city, a university town, a petrochemical center, a place which lacks the rich culture and history of its downstream cousin" (Hendry and Edwards 2009:1). The main campus for Louisiana State University (LSU) is the center of the city for students like myself (white, young Louisiana natives taking advantage of in-state scholarships). LSU outshines the nearby Capitol Building and Downtown area, both in terms of the state's pride for the football team and the economic support students provide the city as consumers.

Immediately north of LSU and the Capitol, crossing the racial and financial barrier of Government Street, Baton Rouge houses a highly industrialized portion of the Mississippi River. Here, Scenic Highway is decorated with chemical plants. Southern University (SU), the largest historically black college in Louisiana, rests against a bend of the river. SU is a major hub of North Baton Rouge, providing another center for aspiring students of color and a consumer market for students. Together, the students at SU and LSU make up a significant portion of the Baton Rouge community, evident through the location and marketing of local gay nightlife.

For people of color, Baton Rouge is a harsh city. Louisiana holds the highest incarceration rate in the world, with a disproportionate amount of black people facing arrests and longer sentences (Chang 2012, ACLU 2013). Environmental racism is evident throughout the city's geography. Historically black neighborhoods, especially the Old South area above LSU,

were negatively affected by the construction of Interstate 10 and unfair zoning (Hendry and Edwards 2009). During this research, a major dialogue on race in Baton Rouge was prompted by a group of white, middle-class residents who attempted to create their own city, St. George. The residents wanted to create their own public school system because they felt their taxes were going towards low-income (predominantly black) schools (Robertson 2014). The succession was quickly critiqued as white flight and made quite an upset in the community. One blogger writes, “A ‘better’ school district for St. George residents is one in which White middle and upper middle class students are free from the burden of attending school with poor Black children” (Wooten 2014). In July 2015, the St. George effort failed, but people are still adamant about the issue. The racial and class boundaries of Baton Rouge are a hot topic.

Historically, being gay in Louisiana has come with a price. Beginning around the 1950s, the names of those arrested for “crimes against nature” were regularly published by local newspapers, causing them to be ridiculed and shunned (Wolff 2012). Gay men were often arrested on purposefully vague charges of loitering or disturbing the peace, and police frequently raided suspected gay bars with lethal force (Carey 2006). In order to contextualize the LGBTQ+ history of Baton Rouge, I rely on a collection of oral histories coordinated by LSU professor Dr. Elaine Maccio and archived at the LSU T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History.

Larry Fremin, a gay Baton Rouge resident, describes what his older gay friend experienced around the 1950s and 1960s:

You couldn’t invite more than three guys at a time because the neighbors would see all single guys walking in this apartment or walking into this home and they would know you were gay and you’d just be like...you’d just be destroyed in the city or something. This was right here in Baton Rouge (Fremin 2009:12).

Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, being out in Baton Rouge was still a risk. Locals would frequently visit New Orleans, where the *laissez faire* attitude provided some protection. “I would go to New

Orleans a lot,” explains lesbian Baton Rouge resident Kathy. “I felt safer there, I felt relaxed there. I didn’t feel like I had to hide anything” (2009:9). Fremin recalls, “If you really wanted to be involved in gay stuff, like in New Orleans and Houston, you didn’t stay in Baton Rouge except you worked here, you lived here” (2009:14). Still, New Orleans had frequent bashings on people who lived, or were just walking through, the known gay parts of the city. Baton Rouge saw fewer hate crimes because gay men were arguably harder to recognize without their own neighborhood (Bourgeois 1994), but this also implies a lack of solidarity and community.

Most of the oral histories regarded the 1970s LGBTQ+ community in Baton Rouge as underground and disconnected. Resident Glenn Ducote, Sr., states, “It really was not acknowledged anywhere, anyway. There were a couple of gay bars...where the police regularly harassed people and that sort of thing. But there just really wasn’t a gay community as such, other than very private socialization things” (2009:12). He cites the outbreak of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s as a transition to a more unified gay Baton Rouge. During this time, a number of gay social groups (which Ducote notes were predominately upper class) formed to raise awareness and funds for those with HIV/AIDS in the community. In 2014, Baton Rouge was reported to have the highest rate of HIV infections in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015).

In 2000, two students at McKinley High School (less than a mile from a gay nightclub) applied to form a Gay Straight Alliance club, the first in Baton Rouge. Local church leaders protested out of concern, they said, for “the school’s image” (Millhollon 2000), and the case of “equal opportunity” for clubs went before the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board. There, a board member argued that the parish should ban all extracurricular clubs if it would prevent the GSA from meeting, but the board’s vote granted individual principals the right to manage their

school's clubs. McKinley students protested the Gay Straight Alliance with rallies, running through the halls and banging lockers and doors (Guarisco and King 2000). The principal allowed the club at McKinley to form, but many students across Louisiana still fight to establish their own GSA chapters.

Baton Rouge's Pride Fest began in 2007 and grows each year. Several local and statewide nonprofits work with LGBTQ+ people, most focusing on the high rates of HIV/AIDS or advocating the removal of discriminatory laws. However, between 2011 and 2013 a dozen gay men were still being arrested under Louisiana's "crime against nature" laws declared unconstitutional in 2003 by the U.S. Supreme Court. The East Baton Rouge Sheriff's office defended their actions and stated they would continue to enforce laws "on the Louisiana books" (Grindley 2013a). They quickly changed their stance by claiming they were never informed the anti-sodomy laws were unconstitutional and would no longer enforce them (Grindley 2013b). This scandal prompted efforts to remove the laws, but both the Baton Rouge Metro Council (Samuels 2014) and the Louisiana House of Representatives (O'Donoghue 2014) rejected the legislation and decided to keep the unenforceable sodomy bans.

Again, in 2015, two men were arrested for crimes against nature. The Baton Rouge police chief "sent a departmentwide memo to remind officers not to arrest people using that statute" (McKinney 2015). Louisiana law RS51:2232 explicitly states that "homosexuality, bisexuality, transvestism, transexualism" and "gender identity disorders" *cannot* be protected by anti-discrimination laws. The city of Baton Rouge and LSU both have anti-discrimination clauses considered illegal by the state. In 2015, this clash created controversy when a transwoman was legally barred from the women's restroom inside a Baton Rouge state courthouse (Allen 2015).

There are virtually no state protections for the Louisiana LGBTQ+ community (Human Rights Campaign 2014).

THE GAY BAR

In 1973, the Metropolitan Community Church, a fellowship of churches known for their LGBTQ acceptance, was holding a celebration for the end of Pride Week at the UpStairs Lounge, a gay bar in the New Orleans French Quarter. The entrance was doused in lighter fluid and set ablaze. When the front door opened, the draft created an inferno. Thirty-two people died, and this remains the deadliest attack on queer people in U.S. history (Goss 2009). This tragedy illustrates the complexity of Louisiana gay bars as safe spaces. Although they provide resources for community building and acceptance, these bars are historically targets of violence.

The aforementioned oral histories of gay Baton Rouge residents provide multiple stories about local gay bars. Fremin shares one of his memories:

Years ago at the Mirror Lounge, which was where the Shaw Building is now on Third Street, there was a big gay lounge...And a church from Baker would come on Friday and Saturday nights and bring like seventy-five people out of the church that carried wooden crosses and stood directly across the street from us...and holler things out, 'God's punishing you. You're going to burn in hell for this'...The police made them get away (2009:13).

Another resident shares an incident when police were called to a gay bar when straight men were harassing patrons and breaking into their cars. When the police arrived, they instead arrested the bar patrons for assault (Ducote 2009:19). The gay bar becomes a contested space of safety because it is ultimately public.

Despite this, gay bars were very private spaces for their regular customers. "There was a kind of healthy social scene at the gay bars," Ducote says (2009:14). The bars were often the first stop for recently out LGBTQ+ people. There, they made friends, found lovers and established a network. However, this feeling of community was not universal. Kathy explains, "It was very difficult to find a place where men and women could be in there...and everybody feel comfortable...you had that separation here in Baton Rouge. It was either a men's bar or a

women's bar" (2009:21). This separation is still evident today in the clear dominance of male-oriented bars in Louisiana.

Joe's Bar has been a staple in the Baton Rouge gay community for over forty years and is known as a friendly, welcoming place. Historically, the bar was a Downtown social spot for closeted, questioning and out men to go after work. The door is kept locked, and the "Ring Bell for Entry" sign, for me at least, stirs memories of the UpStairs Lounge. For others, such as people of color, the "ring for entry" policy may be a stark reminder of exclusionary practices used to segregate social spaces. Still, I have never witnessed a door attendant at Joe's turn someone away. Small, dim and lively, Joe's is now a common spot for men who have grown tired of or feel excluded from the nightclub scene at Rush. The music ranges from country classics to drag queen parodies of pop songs. There is a small stage for performances, but the setup is primarily designed for chatting in stools at the bar. The ceiling is rather low, and the most established performers have memorized where to duck. Drag queens barely fit inside the tiny space. There is seldom a cover charge at Joe's. At one point in this research, Joe's raised the entrance age to 21 and I could not attend for six months.

Contrasting with this atmosphere is Club Rush, a nightclub near LSU. Rush is one of the largest gay bars in Louisiana, boasting a large dance floor, several rooms, a full stage and backstage, dressing rooms, lighting system, a projector and cooling jets. Patrons can be 18 years old to enter and dance music is always playing. Although Rush is not as old as Joe's, the building and location has housed multiple gay nightclubs. There is always a cover charge, ranging from \$5 to \$10 on a regular night to high as \$30 when a "RuGirl," a drag queen who has competed on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, is performing. A section of the second floor was recently branded for lesbians, but the club caters to young, gay white male LSU students. This accommodation is

most evident through the club's strict rules on playing "top of the charts" dance and pop music, but one night at a wet boxer contest I witnessed a telling event:

The emcee, a white drag queening man in his thirties, provides comedic commentary as young boys in white boxers (volunteers from the audience) are sprayed with water through the wand of a pump-spray container. When a young gay black man steps into the inflatable kiddie pool for his turn, the drag queen emcee attempts to hype the crowd. She tells the audience to notice how the water glistens on his body. "Like he's in the fields working the cotton!" I cringe at the slavery remark, but not many take notice (Fieldnotes 9/1/14).

On another occasion, the same drag queen host misgendered a locally well-known drag kinging transman:

"What are you?" the drag queen asks. "Are you a man or a woman? Are you a lesbian?" I roll my eyes towards Sharon in disbelief. The transman entertainer only smiled, silent.

"Did she really just say that?" I asked Sharon. She says she will reprimand the emcee.

"This is *all* man," Erica quips in over the mic to fix the emcee's blunder. She seductively touches the drag kinging transman, smiling (Fieldnotes 3/7/15).

Rush's complicity with this particular emcee marked the bar as an exclusionary site, especially since some patrons felt the nightclub atmosphere was already unwelcoming towards anyone who wasn't a white, underage college student. Even though her comments were inappropriate, they were never publically addressed by the bar or management. In these situations, there was no upset over racism and transphobia because most of the audience members are privileged, white gay men who perceive the problematic statements as harmless jokes.

One night, early Summer 2015, Sharon Coxx mentioned she would be doing a show to raise awareness for a local charity at the Kruze Room (pseudonym). Kruze is a new bar in the northern part of Baton Rouge above the Government Street line of segregation, near Southern University, an HBCU. When I began my fieldwork two years prior, a third bar primarily frequented by black men in this area went out of business. Kruze had announced it was the newest in a legacy of black gay nightclubs, with a themed night dedicated to previous owners

and locations. When I told Sharon I would like to go, she was hesitant. I learned that white patrons may barhop between Joe's and Rush, but they tell me they will never go to Kruze. Even drag performers avoided the bar. They see it as "dangerous," a remark recognizable as racially coded language against poor African American neighborhoods (Bourgeois 2003).

I was able to make two visits to Kruze, both times arriving around 10pm and leaving at closing, 2am. The Kruze Room looks like it could have been a restaurant before, especially since it is in a shopping center. Both times, I was the only non-black guest. On my first visit, I was surprised (and a little scared) by the metal detector, security pat-down and protected teller window. Cover was \$10. The floor was relatively empty and I chose a spot at the bar. The drinks were noticeably expensive, but they had witty and sexual names. The bartender, a young gay black man, asked if it was my first time at Kruze, and I laughed because I knew it must be obvious. He gave me a free shot by placing the shot beaker in his mouth and pouring it into mine, but the kind, flirty gesture was a failed attempt since I was too tall and had to awkwardly stoop lower.

On the second visit, I was called out by the emcee: "We got white boys in the house tonight!" The crowd gave a good-natured laugh. A stage is marked with tape on the floor, a large square area they call the "Black Box." I observed black drag queening men, drag queening transwomen, drag kinging men and male erotic dancers perform. Allan Bérubé, in his analysis on the whiteness of gay identity and community, states, "For many white owners, managers, and patrons of gay bars, only a white bar can be *just* gay; a bar where men of color go is seen as racialized" (2001:238). Since Kruze marketed towards the young gay black men of Southern University, it had become marked by the white, gay nightlife as unwelcoming and unsafe. This prejudice resulted in a highly segregated nightlife and drag scene. Because of these

circumstances and my positionality as a white young gay man, this network of black performers took me by surprise but provided a rich source of cross-analysis for exposing the racist structures of gay Baton Rouge nightlife.

In summary, the gay bars of Baton Rouge are a significant site of community building and entertainment for local LGBTQ+ people, but also attract homophobic attention from the public. However, this is complicated by the racist structures of Baton Rouge and sexism within gay male nightlife. The bars use advertising that focuses on friendliness and acceptance, but there are clear social rules for who is supposed to go where. The drag performers are seemingly fluid between Rush and Joe's, even mixing with several other bars across Louisiana, but the racial boundary surrounding Kruze is firm.

THE DRAG KREWES OF BATON ROUGE

Despite the harsh brutality against LGBTQ+ people in the 1950s, New Orleans relaxed its laws against cross-dressing for one day of the year – Mardi Gras. Gay men began to use this loophole to create their own queer space, a cross-dressing satire of the traditional Mardi Gras (Wolff 2012). New Orleans’ first gay Mardi Gras group, the Krewe of Yuga, formed in 1958. A krewe is a “highly organized social group, usually bound by ties of family or neighborhood or ethnicity or other shared interest, that stages a parade or party or ball during the carnival season” (Carey 2006). Gay Mardi Gras krewes typically hold balls and do not organize a parade. Yuga held the first ball in 1962. They were raided by police (Carey 2006), but the balls continued on, fighting both through waves of police harassment and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The tradition reached out of New Orleans and into Baton Rouge with the Krewe of Apollo’s ball in 1981.

It is because of this history that groups of drag queens in Baton Rouge opt to call themselves a “krewe.” Gay Mardi Gras krewes and Louisiana drag performance remains connected, and like other institutions, they are stratified (and often exclusionary) by hierarchies of class and race. The gay Mardi Gras krewes of Baton Rouge have hefty membership fees, and historically the elected queen is not a drag performer. Much like the heterosexual counterparts, the gay Mardi Gras organizations are largely open to white (cis)men of a higher class. Drag performers seldom have financial or social access to membership in the krewes, but are often asked to put the queen and other members into drag for their ball. They perform as entertainment during the ball and are encouraged to participate in the krewe’s pageant system to compete for titles.

In response to this exclusion and the need for networking between performers, the Krewe des Femmes (a pseudonym) were founded in 2004 by Baton Rouge drag performers, for drag

performers. They hold a *bal masqué* in June to celebrate Pride. The Queen, always a well-known and well-liked drag queen, is elected by other drag queens. Besides organizing the ball, des Femmes regularly performs in nightclubs and Pride events across the state. The organization mainly acts as a sort of entertainment agency, supplying drag performers for events and providing performers with “gigs.” Joe’s is their “home bar,” where they perform twice a month. Admittance to Krewe des Femmes is granted through a rather informal process. Beginning performers “spotlight,” meaning they receive the tips earned during their lip-sync but no stipend from the bar. Through des Femmes, I was given the opportunity to spotlight at Joe’s. When a spotlighting queen successfully performs a few times (knows the words, has an outfit and arrives on time), they are advertised under the des Femmes name.

Outside the krewe tradition is Rush’s cast. Drag queens must audition to join, but sometimes a spot can be awarded through a talent competition based on the format of *American Idol* or *America’s Next Top Model*. The cast of Rush performs weekly, in addition to performing on holidays and special party nights (which usually coincide with the LSU academic calendar). Cast members must perform a current “top hit” performed by a woman and follow rules of etiquette set by the show director and Rush’s management. Once, for the night’s final bow, Erica Anderson went on stage out of drag and was sternly reprimanded.

Despite these differences, Krewe des Femmes and the cast of Rush share a large portion of their members and sometimes rely on one another to fill empty performance sets. Most of these drag queens identify as men, with some transwomen, and a majority are between 21 to 40 years old. White and black performers dominate the scene. Latina drag queens fall in a particular “betweenness” (Moreman and McIntosh 2010) and are most often associated with white drag. None of the Baton Rouge queens have performed for longer than 20 years – drag is a rather short

career. As researchers have shown in other studies (Berkowitz 2007, Berkowitz 2010, Hopkins 2004), I found most performers in Baton Rouge use drag as supplementary income. Several of the performers hold jobs in bars, while others are hair stylists and work in retail. A few performers work part-time at multiple bars as bartenders and door attendants for a sustainable income. A significant number of the drag performers suggest “drag queen” is an unprofessional term and identify as entertainers, female impersonators or female illusionists. They feel drag is a serious business venture, career and art form.

Although I interacted with well over thirty performers, several became main characters in my experiences. All characters, excluding myself and Seth, are discussed in this thesis under a pseudonym. Miss Lady, an older Cajun-looking white man, takes on a maternal role in Krewe des Femmes despite lacking performance experience. She started her drag career later in life. Her catchphrase, “Bam!” is always accompanied with a kick. Her main job is in environmental services. Rachel Starr, a Mexican man in his thirties, has international performing experience. She has performed the longest and frequently announces her retirement, only to have a comeback show months later. She bartends at a few bars, but in 2015 began working as a stylist. Sharon Coxx, a man in his thirties with a Puerto Rican background, has a gothic-robot aesthetic on stage and was show director at Rush until September 2015. She is employed by an engineering consultant firm. Mercedes Adams, a man in his thirties from Puerto Rico, is known for her extraordinary height and ominous makeup. She usually works as a bartender at Rush or other clubs outside Baton Rouge on her days off the stage. Her drag daughter, Samantha Adams, is a young black Baton Rouge man who is known for her kindness and loud humor. In 2015, she gradually assumed the show director position at Joe’s and began working the door. Her drag sister is Erica Anderson, a Lebanese man. She has a theatre degree and gives her numbers a

thematic edge. She usually works the door at Rush to check IDs and cashier cover charges, in addition to working two jobs in retail. Molly Hart, a young white man from Louisiana who works in food services, gives “fish” looks¹ and is often compared to black performers because of her dancing and music choices.

¹ “Fish” or “fishy” describes drag queens who appear small and feminine. Fish originates from the stereotype about the vagina’s odor. A fishy queen looks and “smells” like a cisfemale with a vagina because no one would know she is male-bodied based on appearance.

CONSTRUCTING THE DRAG BODY

June 12, 2015. My apartment.

Around 3pm, I finish shaving my face. I began the day before by getting my eyebrows waxed (it makes it easier to cover them) and using clippers to trim and shave the hair on my chest, underarms, arms and hands. Only the top of my chest is shaved, creating an unusual pattern of hair that outlines the shape of cleavage. I put on a wig cap, then cover my face in milk of magnesia – Samantha says it prevents sweating off makeup and keeps your pores clean. When it dries, it leaves a white powdery film over my skin. Before I begin makeup, though, I need to fix myself an alcoholic drink and put on a playlist of queer anthems. It's strikingly similar to the opening scene of *To Wong Foo (1995)*: Salt n Pepa ask, "Where is the body?"

First, I remove loose hairs from my brow with a spoolie brush. I rub an Elmer's glue stick (disappearing purple is a drag queen's favorite) against the grains of hair, then with the grain. I use the spoolie to brush the hairs and distribute the glue, then smooth and press it with the spoolie's handle. Then, I put a hair dryer to my face to dry the gluey brows. This process is repeated for about 30 minutes, until there are no hairs sticking up and it feels smooth to the touch. Fine, white Ben Nye powder seals it together and counteracts some of the dark color. Then, a layer of light brown Kryolan TV paint stick, an extremely thick foundation. Matching the foundation's color to my skin is not a main concern because it will be covered in various shades of powder. The foundation is set with translucent Coty powder. Now, using the same paint stick, I dab the outside of my forehead, the sides of my nose and my neck and draw a thick line on each cheek bone, across my jawline, my chin and across the brow again for good measure. Using a lighter-colored paint stick, I draw a circle in the center of my forehead and a thin line down my nose. Two thick lines go under both eyes, the ends going at an upward angle into my hairline. The two foundations are blended with a Beauty Blender, a sponge-like tool. The two foundations are the first step to contouring, or using dark and light colors to create shadows and alter the appearance of the face. I "beat" my face with Coty powder to set it. When I'm finished, I put the white powder under my eyes using a small wedged foam paint brush, starting at the nose and angling it upwards into my hairline. I leave the powder to "cook."

It's now 4:30pm, and I need a refill on my drink. The eye makeup is next - "This is the scariest part because it can go the worst," I tell the camera. I take white eye shadow and generously apply it to my lid. Using a brown shadow, I draw a "new" crease for my eye that is higher and wider. This brown line, a redrawn orbital bone, will make my lids appear bigger. It's blended and then covered with black shadow. Now, I need to put more white on the lid, alternating between a sparkly white for the corners of my eyes and a matte white for the lid. I choose a pinkish-purple to go on the outside of the crease. I do my best to blend and continuously reapply colors to get the perfect shades and shape, then freshen the white powder under my eyes.

An hour later, it's time for the first run of eyeliner. I go for a cat eye look, making a triangle-like shape on my lids and angling the wings upward. Most of the lid will be covered by the false eyelashes when my eyes are open, so the wings need to be dramatic. Liquid eyeliners are best because they are a very dark black. Now, the shadows have faded and need a second

coat. Of course, I make mistakes and have to spend time erasing and redoing parts. Black always ends up where it's not wanted, and it's the hardest to erase.



Figure 2. Putting on eyeliner

Now that the eye has been formed, I begin drawing new eyebrows. I like to use a black cream, but most queens use a light brown. It's hard to see myself without dark brows. I begin with slow strokes, starting where my natural eyebrow begins, following the arch as a general guide but going much higher with a more definite arch. Once the first few strokes map out the general shape, I try to thicken and define them. I go too far with a tail and have to cover it with foundation – the first of many trials. Once the brows are perfect, the foundation from covering mistakes has inevitably mixed with the eye shadows and they must be redefined. Then, I finish up by putting eyeliner on the bottom lids and applying more white powder under the eyes.

It's dinner time. I've been working for about four hours. Seth brings me takeout Greek food (quick and easy). I begin again, using bronzer to further contour my face. I put two dark lines on each side of my face that start at my sideburns and end near the corners of my mouth. The goal is to strengthen the cheekbones. I would apply blush, but I'm not feeling adventurous tonight. Too much blush could easily ruin my efforts, so I go without it. More bronzer goes on the hairline, and I make distinct lines from the outside of each eye to the hairline, going above the white powder. Using a small brush, I contour the nose with the same bronzer to make it look smaller and more defined. Two dark lines outline the bridge and I draw a circle on the tip of the nose. I use a dark pink lip liner to exaggerate the size and shape of my lips, filling them in with a bright pink lipstick and gloss. I squeeze black eyelash glue onto a hand mirror, leaving it to dry while I clean up any mistakes. I dip the seam of the false eyelashes into the glue and blow on it a bit, then rest them onto my lash line until they dry. My eyes water and I use Q-tips to try and catch running eyeliner. The lashes are finished with mascara.

It's almost 10pm, so I quickly put on the body. First, though, I go to the bathroom since it's my last chance. No time to polish my nails. I use my gaff (the same one Rachel made me) to tuck. I position the hip pads, large pieces of foam padding carved into a sort of L-shape, usually referred to as the outline of Africa. I cover them with five pairs of control-top pantyhose and a

final pair of fishnets to help disguise the color of the legs. I struggle to put on a corset, pulling tight to make the waistline and hourglass figure. Next, a padded bra. I carefully slip on my dress without messing up any makeup. I put on my favorite wig (a long, brown curly “shake’n go” with highlights) and big, gold earrings. I accessorize with a belt and one ring, wishing I had more jewelry. With six-inch platform heels, the look is complete.

When I asked Sharon, Samantha and the other entertainers how to start doing drag, they often started by stressing the need to “find your face.” Drag is about accentuating your face and body’s natural features, they explained. Their narrative suggests makeup and other methods should be used to highlight aspects of the face and body that are considered feminine. Drag crafts sexualized and gendered markers on the body: eyebrows, eyes, lashes, nose, cheekbones, lips, skin, hair, breasts, butt, hips and waist. In my case, for example, I can easily overdraw my lips for a more exaggerated pout, and pads fill in the inward dips of my hips. Alternatively, performers turn to medical procedures, like surgery, hormones and fillers. Drag queening men are experts in body work, “the intentional nature of interventions into the body and...the technological and personal labor involved in those transformations” (Shapiro 2010:149). With an arsenal of drag technologies, performers play with boundaries of the body and manipulate carnal reality. You never tell a drag queen you like her wig, it’s her *hair*² – an embodied, living extension.

Successful drag makeup appears to move parts of the face: lifting the eyes, cutting the cheek and carving the jaw. This is accomplished by using lighter and darker colors to alter shadows, a technique known as contouring. Drag queens and some professional makeup artists claim the method was developed by early drag performers long before its use in theatre and recent pop culture status (Racco 2015, WOWPresents 2015). Since drag makeup relies on

² This popular phrase inspired the single and music video “This is My Hair” by Alaska Thunderfuck (2015).

creating shadows and highlights against one's own skin tone, black performers sometimes use yellow colors instead of brown to contour. When discussing this with Samantha, a black performer who most frequently performs at Joe's, she explained that because she prefers to use brown tones other black performers criticize her for having a "white" style of drag. Samantha elaborated her situation:

[Another black performer told me], "You don't paint yourself like a black queen." And I'm like, "Explain how a black queen is supposed paint themselves?" This is how I was taught... If I wear like ghetto looking hair – like you see [the Mad TV character] Bon Qui Qui wear – maybe I'll look like that. But I know for a fact that the black queens are not a big fan of me. They respect me, I'll give them that, but they're not a big fan of me. They're always like, "She's not like us." How am I not like you? I mean you're human right? Yeah. How am I not like you? Because I don't act like you? Because I don't perform like you do with death drops and wearing hairpieces that look like a beehive, like stung somebody and swole up with a big lump on my head? I don't wear that because I don't like the way it looks on me... She was like, "You *need* to wear your hair like this, you need to do that."

Although this remark grew out of a discussion on makeup, it is evident that drag performance is performed with the entire body and its motion. Body work and performance are heavily marked with notions of racial identity. Because Samantha does not use yellow contour, glued hairpieces or vogue like the ball queens of *Paris is Burning*, she does not embody traits associated with blackness. She distances herself by using class and race markers, comparing other black performers to "ghetto" stereotypes. Although everyone is encouraged to "find" their face, there are expectations and standards performers are expected to follow. Drag bodies may contest fleshy boundaries, but they remain entrapped within racist structures.

Continuing this discussion of race and makeup, Erica, a Lebanese performer and first-generation American, incorporates her Lebanese identity into drag by using her natural brows and filling them in. Her brows are noticeably darker and thicker than the other entertainers. "It looks more ethnic, and real," she said. However, Erica claims in drag she is usually perceived as

white. “Erica’s the drag queen that I’ve created who is not an Arab,” she said. Here, within the tradition of drag queening, race is still policed by a post-9/11 racial mentality of the “Arab” as a dangerous Other (Abrahamn, Howell and Shryock 2011), and whether for resistance or survival, Erica uses drag to negotiate race as well as gender. Some of the entertainers have stated that Erica doesn’t “count” as a performer of color because she is “actually white” in her behavior, but still call her racial slurs. “I mean people say it jokingly,” Erica said, “but believe me after a while and after so many people say it...it gets to you.” In a Southern city, performers are interpolated into a racial matrix that reflects the historic binaries – everyone had to be either white or black. In this situation, Erica uses drag as a medium for traversing this racial binary. Just as Samantha’s story illustrates how race is embodied through specific styles of makeup and performance, Erica carefully constructs racial drag, playing between cultural meanings of whiteness and her Lebanese identity.

Although my narrative at the beginning of this section focuses on body work thought of as more temporary, like makeup and padding, others, such as Mercedes Adams, may incorporate more permanent technologies. She plans on having surgery on her nose, cheeks and lips. “Because this is the industry I want to go into,” she said. “Because this is my passion and I do want to go onto *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and it’s a lot easier [after having plastic surgery].” In a similar conversation, Rachel Starr told me she had cooking oil injected into her behind, a very risky procedure:

So every time she would go put [an injection], put it on, and it will feel like really weird, like a burning sensation and I mean whenever it was done she would like take it off and put another one and it would go and I just felt my butt go [motions hands apart] ↑whoop. When she was done she was like, “Okay you can look at it.” And I looked at it, I mean it was just like, it wasn’t like big ass but it was perky. It was really cute. So, funny stuff, I wanted to go so bad to the bathroom after she was done that I went and I sat and I slid off my ass it was so greasy. It was just like oil everywhere. And I mean I felt like I had this big ole ass and I don’t know it felt weird just sitting there and it was going [motions

hands up and down separately] ↑wamp ↓wamp... It was for the shows. When I had that done I didn't have to wear pads or anything like that.

Medical technologies are generally seen as “easier” because they require little time, less effort and generally have longer lasting effects. However, most queens, like Rachel, turn to cheaper and unsafe at-home procedures done by friends or fellow entertainers. In 2013, Breneisha Hall, a transwoman in New Orleans, died after complications from illegal injections administered by an award-winning drag queen and transwoman, Armani Nicole Davenport, who was charged with negligent homicide (Freund 2014). Hall's death was a taboo discussion since many Baton Rouge performers consider Davenport a friend and “sister.” Illegal cosmetic procedures can be fatal, but many transwomen and drag performers have no alternative method for making permanent changes to their bodies.

For drag queening men, feminizing body work complicates their embodied gender expression and identity. Molly Hart, for example, said she tries to limit how much she changes her body. “I promised myself when I started – no work.” Some entertainers see surgeries, hormones and injections as too long-term of a commitment, especially since they cannot be removed after performing. She continued, “I'm all boy and I'll always be all boy, before and after this...Just my eyebrows,” she said in reference to her thinly tweezed brows. “So it's like, I can grow them back if I quit doing drag.” Molly, like other drag queening men, attempts to stay “boy” by keeping a personal limit on how much she will change her body. But with hair past her shoulders, thin brows and long nails, her off-stage appearance is still ambiguously gendered. Avoiding body work with permanent effects alludes to the drag queening dilemma of wanting to *perform* as a woman rather than to *be* a woman. Performers find themselves traversing this boundary between performing and being, creating personal limits between maleness and femaleness.

In 2013, Rachel Starr retired from drag performance after 18 years of experience. Rush held a farewell night in her honor featuring her iconic Spice Girls routine. When I asked about her retirement, she explained, “I wanted to be me. I wanna do more like guys’ stuff...I’ve never had this much facial hair in my life until right now.” For Rachel, and other drag queening men who perform regularly, facial hair is often a rare luxury since they must shave.³ This negotiation between “guys’ stuff” and drag queening shows how drag queening men find their bodies and identities split by the male-female dichotomy, existing in between or moving back and forth, but never quite at rest. Performers attempt to rely on the binary to describe themselves, but this narrative fails to capture the full unstable and expanding nature of drag bodies. They are sites of queer assemblage that do not fit within this rigid stability.

³ “Bearded” or “bear” drag, when a drag queening man does not shave, has become increasingly popular the last few years in places like San Francisco and Brooklyn but has yet to appear in Baton Rouge.

PERFORMING THE DRAG BODY

August 8, 2015. Krewe des Femmes show at Joe's Bar.

Backstage is a corner of the bar decorated with mirrors and a dresser, closed off with a sheet hanging across on a string. Sharon Coxx brings me into the backstage office (a closet) to write my name on the set list. I wait anxiously, heels off to conserve my feet. I am only going once at the middle of the show, when the others will be preparing for their second and final number. They dress around me, moving quickly, asking for help with difficult clasps and holding small conversations. I arrived with a dress over my performance garment, a tank top and cut-off shorts, so I do not need to change. Molly Hart mentions that Joe's now gives their regular performers a small stipend for performing. She groans about the small crowd and the Red Dress Run in New Orleans, a charity event where (mostly straight and cis) men are encouraged to drink alcohol wearing red dresses. Everyone agrees it will be a slow night. I anxiously study my face, regret makeup choices and play with my hair in a mirror, interrupted by pool sticks and elbows breaking through the privacy sheet.

Putting on my heels, I leave backstage to stand next to the vending machine and plan my walk to the stage: on your toes; head up; don't fall. Miss Lady gives me a grand introduction, "Like a beautiful gemstone...it's her first time performing...Gem Flowers!" I make it to the stage by looking past the crowd and concentrating completely on my feet and balance.

The opening piano riff of the song finishes as I nervously tousle my hair, turning to the back of the stage with closed eyes waiting on Carrie Underwood's nostalgic track, "Before He Cheats," to cue me in. My knees shake uncontrollably. The stage lights blur my vision. My limbs are vague memories, lost to nerves. I finally look down at the audience – uninterested faces, older men looking into their drinks. The cheap wood of the stage warps and curves under my platform heels. By the end of the first chorus I remember to walk into the crowd and find relief in a more solid and trustworthy floor. I can't tell if my lips are moving to the words, but I trust that I've trained them well. I memorized the lyrics back in 2005.

The band of the wig cap presses into my head. The wig's hard, cheap lace prickles my forehead. False eyelashes are heavy on my lid, the corners of my eyes are irritated, watering, itching. The waistbands of several pairs of pantyhose dig into my hipbones, reaching for my ribs. My legs are exposed, but it is hot underneath the layers. It is weird not to feel the clothes you are wearing against your skin. I try to get a glimpse of my body in the walled mirrors for a sense of bearing, but I know watching myself instead of the crowd is an amateur mistake.



Figure 3. Performing at Joe's Bar

I walk around the square-shaped bar (like a “wet noodle in heels,” I told my friends afterwards). I try to make eye contact and scan for anyone who is willing to invest in my performance. As the song progresses, so does my confidence. I caress chairs and sway my body to ask for tips. In the moment, believing my legs are my best selling point, I stroke my thighs and padding to draw attention away from my eyebrow hairs breaking through their gluey prison. Through the dim light all I can see are a few shy smiles and blushing cheeks. While my lips mechanically move, I begin to doubt myself. Are they embarrassed for me or themselves? Is this dollar out of pity for my beginner’s attempt, or is it genuine admiration? I offer myself back with the gusto of an inexperienced performer hoping to distract with dramatic arm movements. I am, at least, an alternative to the ice in their now empty glasses.

I find myself back at the stage for the last chorus, throwing myself in what I hope resembles dance. Seth approaches the stage and hands me four dollar bills – slowly, one by one. I point to him and sync the final lyrics: “Maybe next time he’ll think before he cheats.” Lady hands me the microphone, catching me off guard because she said she would handle the crowd when I finished. Still on autopilot, I start telling jokes.

“Wow. You were a great first audience, and I’ve learned it’s much harder to walk in heels on a stage than the carpet in your apartment!” I say a few more lines that barely land to kill time.

“I’ll give you a dollar if you let me kiss you!” a man in the audience yells. He is around 30 years old, white and intoxicated. Who would want to kiss me when I look like this? I turn to Miss Lady and ask what she thinks.

“At least ten dollars for that,” she says in a harsh whisper. I think about the need to say “yes.” For myself. For the research. I feel the pressure of the audience and the stage. The reality

of doing my first drag show late Saturday night in a seedy gay bar...Lady gives a supportive nod. This is not something I imagined myself doing. I am not myself – I am a drag queen. So, I tell him okay, but Lady interjects with an idea to increase the pay. “Her fiancé is right over here, how about \$20 for a kiss from each of them?”

Seth answers to Lady’s belligerent call, embarrassed but brave. The man holds my face as I’m met with a forceful tongue. I close my mouth and feel his teeth scratch my lips. My eyes widen as I look at Miss Lady. She whispers an apology. The man is aggravated but turns to take his kiss from Seth – equally forced and rejected.

“Come on, I paid for a real kiss,” he says, but Miss Lady uses her seasoned emceeing abilities to lead him back to his seat.

I walk over to the cigarette machine to count my tips, excluding Seth’s donation. I have \$24: my lip-sync earned four dollars. The money feels validating. I was tipped a dollar by five separate men! Finally. I’ve invested hundreds of dollars, possibly a thousand over the past couple years.

Molly begins her number. The \$20 kiss man is up at the stage, grabbing and reaching at her. Lady narrates over the mic: “He’s tryna’ put a twenty in her pussy!” Molly walks to the back of the stage where he cannot reach her. Sharon is next, and when he approaches her she dances with him and gropes him back.

Afterwards, Miss Lady comes by to invite me to perform again at a future show. “I’m sorry about that,” she says, “But it’s part of the business. It pays for the water bill, you know? For the water bill.” I use all of my tips to buy Seth and myself a final round of drinks.

When a drag queen performs, she offers her whole self to the audience, including her body. Audience members reciprocate this with a public offering of money and applause.

Although tipping is one of the most popular traditions of a drag show (“Tipping is not a city in China,” the queens tell the audience), a request for a kiss is allowed by the “anything goes” attitude of Joe’s Bar and Miss Lady’s affinity for keeping it raunchy. An incident like this would not be tolerated at Rush. Still, the \$20 kiss inducted me and soon-to-be performer Seth into an economy of consumption, rewards and exploitation.

The treatment of drag queens during a show compares to ciswomen working as exotic dancers or burlesque performers. These bodies, all read as feminine by the audience and presented on a stage, undergo similar processes. Berkowitz, Belgrave and Halberstein cite

instances of gay men putting money into the entertainers' pants, skirts and mouths and other interactions as strikingly similar to activities in a heterosexual exotic dance club (2007:21). Drag queens and strippers both perform femininities through their bodies in exchange for money and are heavily objectified.

“They want to stick a dollar bill wherever the hell they can stick a dollar bill,” Sharon Coxx said. “It doesn't matter. They could care less. They think you're a stripper.” Erica Anderson, another performer, echoed this. “The people who [grope] drag queens, they're doing it as if they're disrespecting women,” said Erica. She believes the gay community sees drag queens as strippers because they perform in bars and accept tips. Based on what I have witnessed, entertainers can be groped by all sexualities and genders. While alcohol may act as a catalyst for this behavior, there is a clear power relationship. Drag queens are laborers within the nightlife economy and audience members are customers with cash.

Tips are conventionally given by wrapping the bill around the index finger and holding it out for the entertainer to easily grab, but a large portion of tippers make performers work for the money. They will force money into a queen's bosom, backside or mouth, or try to exchange the tip through the mouth with a kiss. Sometimes they will pull on the queens' outfits, grabbing at fringe or loose accessories, desperate for a touch. When the body is performed on the stage and a queen *serves* eyes, lips and legs, the audience is eating the Other (hooks 1992). Drag queens have tools to fight back – embarrassing rowdy audience members on the microphone, pulling them on stage, groping them to reverse the situation or ignoring their tip – but ultimately the audience has monetary power. Just as Miss Lady told me, “It's for the water bill.”

One night, when Seth and I both went to Rush one night in drag, a stranger asked us for sex while we sat at the bar counter:

A stranger comes up to my partner and sits next to him. I hear the stranger say he looks pretty, and I continue to take pictures of myself and scroll social media. An uncomfortable amount of time passes and I make eye contact with Mercedes Adams behind the bar. We both look at each other, then the stranger, looking for clues that Seth may need help. We find none and look back to one another in silent solidarity. Eventually the stranger leaves.

“What was that?” I ask Seth.

“He said I looked very pretty; that I turned him on. Wanted to know if either of us did stuff in drag. I kept saying no. He told me that he has a weird attraction to women who are men and wanted to explore...he found ‘people like us’ most attractive. I told him you were my boyfriend and he asked if you would have sex with him instead.”

“Tell him to go fuck himself,” Mercedes chimes in. (Fieldnotes 10/30/14)

The stranger continued to harass me and Seth and shouted at us to consider his “deal” when we left. Mercedes recognized him as a frequent “tranny chaser.”

Drag queens experience a pattern of violence that may stem from a conflation with the fetishized transsexual female body exploited within pornography. Desire for male-perceived bodies with traits read as female may fall within healthy sexuality, and I do not want to suggest that any attraction to gender ambiguity or trans identities is a deviant fetish. However, some men eroticize the Otherness of transwomen’s bodies, sexualizing a mythic being that is both female and male (Escoffier 2011). The queens refer to these men as “tranny chasers,” which may be a term used to enforce stigma against desiring transwomen (Tompkins 2014) but in this context refers specifically to men who abusively and violently pursue drag queens for sex, evident in the stranger’s interest for “people like us.” This is problematized since drag queening men are not usually the stereotypical “shemale” (breasts with a penis) body that is crafted in porn.

I have experienced a considerable amount of sexual harassment when out in drag or even when out of drag sitting with performers. One night at Joe’s in the parking lot after closing, a man pulled up in his truck and suggestively offered a ride until the entertainers sternly told him

to leave. There was a trend in men approaching me and other performers, explaining they were looking for a woman with a penis. On the first few occasions I would try and start a conversation about transwomen, gender identity and sexuality, but this was not a very successful defense. My “Hegemony Flowers” Facebook account receives a multitude of sexual messages with similar interest in a male/female fantasy.

Because entertainers are mini-celebrities and exposed to the public, this attracts unwanted attention that is then intensified by this “chasing” fetishization. Once again, drag queening men find themselves split between another binary, the subject-object tensions regarding individuals who participate in sex work, erotic dance and similar occupations (Murphy 2003). Drag queens may have an unapologetic attitude on the stage and flip the voyeuristic gaze of the audience back on itself through their emceeding quips, but their feminine performance leaves them susceptible to violence and harassment.

DECONSTRUCTING THE DRAG BODY

May 21, 2015. Going home after a night in drag at Rush with Seth.

I take off my heels to drive. My toes are swollen, throbbing. They refuse to straighten and stay curled, cramped. I still feel the heels on my feet. I take off my wig and lay it in the backseat. I've had enough of the hair in my mouth and face, and my head has a numb circle from the wig cap's elastic. I run my fingers through my own hair and brush it forward – it hurts. My hair isn't used to being kept back under a wig all night. The false lashes are getting too heavy; the corners of my eyes are unforgiving. When people see me next to them at the red light I know it must be a sight. Two tired drag queens, wigless.

Getting home, I cannot brave the stairs in heels so I sacrifice the bottom of the fishnets to the concrete. I run to the drag room and start the best part of the night – undressing and removing the drag body. The earrings are first to go, my lobes sore from swinging with the weight. Then, I rip off the press-on nails so I don't have to worry about scratching my eyes out. I grab the outer corner of the false lashes, pulling very slowly, my lids hypersensitive to the stringy, ripping glue. After both pairs are off it's like seeing for the first time. I pick at remains of the glue, rubbing clumps of my lashes between the tips of my fingers.

I undo my corset. I'm hit with a wall of fresh air and my first full breath in four hours. Removing the chemise and bra, I move on to the four layers of pantyhose. One by one, I shed the skin. On the last pair, I move quickly – the sweaty pads fall to the floor and I involuntarily groan. I take off the gaff. The impressions in my skin sting. Walking to the bathroom is difficult; I still feel the high heels.

I pause for a minute to survey my body in the mirror: greased hair, crumbling makeup, itchy chest, red-lined torso and unfolding genitals. Taking a makeup wipe, I start rubbing at my eyes. It always burns. My skin is angry, suffocated. I move onto the glued eyebrows next, moving on once the hairs are exposed. I work down the face, negotiating the remaining clean spaces of the wipe to take off the pink mess over my lips. It smears. My entire face tingles, still burning. I make a second pass at the smudged eyeliner around my eye until giving up. I put my head in the sink and wash out my eyebrows under the faucet with hand soap, scratching out the glue. A long shower washes off the cigarettes and alcohol of the bar.

The next morning, there is a pile of drag on the floor, a heap of discarded femininity. I find missed clumps of lash glue and liner dried into the corners of my eyes. The dry cracks of my lips are stained pink, and there is resilient foundation embedded into my pores. My eyes are smudged and dark with remaining eyeliner and shadows. Toes still swollen. The entire day is an adjustment. Even though I am out of drag, it remains. Some call this “drag lag,” a slow return to a familiar body.



Figure 4. Getting out of drag

The day after a night in drag is dedicated to recovery. The events have to be digested; my body is left messy. Performing as a “woman” for the night, embodying a femininity that male-perceived bodies have been taught to exclude, leaves behind more than smudges of makeup under my eyes. The deviance of effeminacy lingers on the male body, permanently marked.

Drag lag can be a risk for drag queening men. Samantha explained she makes sure not to make plans the day after a show, not only because she is tired, but because makeup may still be visible on her face. “My mom’s like, ‘Wanna go to church?’ I have a show Saturday,” she said rolling her eyes. “Walking up there getting right for Jesus and I still got foundation on? And a little bit of glitter and a bit of eyeshadow on...The day after [a show] don’t try to make plans with me.” Erica had similar concerns and shared a story about an uncomfortable confrontation:

Once I was at a Pita Pit, and there were these two Arab [men]. And I knew what they were saying. And I’ll say it in Arabic and you’ll see how vulgar it sounds. [Speaks Arabic] Like, “Look at this guy. What is he doing with his fucking eyes?”...And I look at them – and I obviously said it in Arabic – and I said, “Before you talk about people you better make sure they don’t understand the language.” And their mouths dropped, and

their dicks fell off their bodies. That's how bad it was for them...I learned to take extra precaution to get out of [drag] completely.

In this narrative, Erica describes castrating two men through an aggressive read, a drag queening tradition of “confronting someone with witty and creative language” (Jones 2007:83). With a surprise knowledge of Arabic, Erica locates the men’s masculinity within the body, specifically the penis, and removes it in defense of their cruel comment.

Erica’s story is a clear example of individuals enforcing systemic notions of masculinity. Samantha alludes to this system of accountability as well, suggesting she avoids going out in public the day after a show because she has makeup stains on her face. Sometimes, when drag queening men are unable to physically remove or hide the “queen” from their bodies, they face repercussions outside the safety of the gay bar. Turning to theories of masculinity, the “Act Like a Man” Box (Kivel 1999:56) is a helpful diagram for conceptualizing the ways drag queening men encounter hegemonic masculinity. Within the box is an ideal, heteropatriarchal and racist masculinity, and men who escape or wander outside the lines are punished. I view drag queening as a way to break out of this box, and perhaps even destroy it. Although drag queening may reify traditional femininity, it is a transgressive act of male bodies deviating from and deconstructing the normative binary of gender. When drag queening men participate in practices reserved strictly for women, they are performing a rebellion against hegemonic masculinity and the heteropatriarchy by embracing femininity within bodies assigned male.

By looking specifically at the bodies of drag queening men, it is clear they are a queer assemblage of both femininity and masculinity, a paradox that enables the audience to reconsider dominant rules of gender. Shapiro writes that participating in drag may “function as a form of consciousness raising and a site of identity transformation for performers” (2007:251). I encountered this consciousness through my drag performance, when I used drag queening as a

vehicle to explore my femininity and queerness. While drag may have started as an excuse for me to cross gender lines, it inevitably resulted in an internal reevaluation of the limits I placed on my own gender expression. Then, when an audience consumes drag entertainment and its public refusal of dominant gender roles, they are seduced into possibilities of gender play and creativity. Drag queening men's bodies are a direct defiance of heteronormative notions and expose the myth of an essentialist and dichotomous gender system.

Their bodies are unstable, shifting between "man" and "woman," never quite returning. This is visible through men who medically alter specific parts of their bodies, or as Samantha says, "I only shave what you can see." The naked, deconstructed drag body is a collision between meanings of gender. Damien Riggs argues that drag performers challenge the "*a priori* status of normative gendered embodiment" and are useful in exploring how "discourses of materiality shape queer bodies, and exclude them from representation" (2005:2). Drag bodies are unique spaces of unrest.

Through my own participation in drag queening, I suggest there is a critical importance through *being* and performing this deconstruction as a man. For me, drag performance, and this research, became a bargaining tool for unconventional gender play. Drag lag extends further than the skin and permeates deep into the body, changing how I see myself. Engaging in unfamiliar body work of the presumed opposite gender triggers a reflexive evaluation, a reconsidering of the self. As RuPaul says, "Ego loves identity; drag mocks identity." In constructing a drag body, the former body is dismantled. Roger Lancaster writes, drag queening men have "an ecstatic body whose appendages traversed geographies, whose parts were interchangeable...at body at once unique and universal, particular and general" (2011:54). Drag queening breaks and expands

the body, lifts the restrictions of gender norms and constructs a fluid, queer assemblage capable of embracing social deviance and contradictions.

CONCLUSION

June 20, 2015. My first visit to the Kruze Room.

I've moved from the bar counter to stand directly front and center of the Black Box. I pick a small standing table by a support beam out in the open, where I will have a clear view of the performers. The club is packed and clusters of people are smoking joints of marijuana in the far back. Laughter, squeals and conversation challenge the thundering speaker system. I am reminded of the first time I visited Rush as a recently out college freshman. Then, I remember how the gay bar felt like a place I could safely be myself and my identity was validated. Here, instead of overwhelming belonging I feel I am the odd one out since I am the only nonblack individual. Still, despite racial differences, Kruze, Rush and Joe's cater to gay men and queens. The emcee, a young, androgynous black man in eyeliner and heels, reviews tonight's entertainment: drag queening men, drag queening transwomen, drag kinging men with male erotic dancers as a finale.

I notice the night's tips seem to be going well, but I realize I am one of the few audience members applauding after each number. The other bar patrons are more concerned with walking around and catching up with friends. The emcee introduces the next performer – "Give it up for Mister!"

I assume it is a drag kinging man, since two had performed previously and the stage name was masculine, but I am shocked to see someone approach in a large, light brown curly wig. A young black individual, who I perceived as male-bodied with a feminine presentation. They (and I use "they" to capture the gender ambiguity of the performer, and especially since I do not know their stage pronouns) are wearing a sleeveless black leotard, no padding, with a piece of black and white fabric tied around the waist as a train. They are not wearing any makeup and a glistening necklace drips over their flat bosom. They are wearing pantyhose with high black socks that reach the upper thigh, accentuating the length of their legs. Barefoot.

Rush or Joe's would never let someone perform without makeup or shoes, much less without padding. I look around to try and judge the crowd's reaction. Is this a typical performance for Kruze? The crowd seems indifferent, still focused on making conversation. Mister brings two chairs into the center of the Black Box and faces them towards another.

Ciara's "Dance Like We're Making Love" begins as they wave their hands down the body, crisscrossing, then snapping perfectly in sync – "Sweat drippin' from my body..." I am in disbelief, having judged them on what I had assumed to be a lack of effort in putting together an outfit. They are giving me pure sensuality, seduction and confidence. A perfect blending of femininity and masculinity.

When the beat hits again, they throw a choreographed arm to the ceiling and lip sync the words – "We both at this party..." Then, rotating their hands and hips with a slow, deliberate swivel – "So come on and show me your moves..." They end the line with a head cock and snaps on the beat.

Mister jumps on the chairs at the height of the beat to drop down at the fall of the chorus and lands sitting with legs spread. I'm awestruck.

I cheer, "Yaaas!" Mister commands attention. I'm unaware of the other audience members, completely focused and absorbed in the performance. It feels like drag, that "it factor," the fierce look they give the crowd. Here is an entertainer who is performing with whatever means they could gather. The piece of fabric is transformed into a high fashion garment. Mister is giving the "full fantasy," no shoes necessary.

This performance was a strong contrast to my previous observations, unlike any drag I had seen in Baton Rouge. Not only does the performance challenge meanings of gender and sexuality with Mister's blatant male body in a wig and leotard, but it explicitly breaks cardinal rules of drag queening. A performer is always expected to wear heels, but even more radical is to perform without any regards to makeup, a component considered the most crucial part of drag. Mister, whom I never had the opportunity to meet, exposed the fluidity of their body and challenged my own preconceptions.

Mister's performance stands as a prime example of drag's subversive possibilities. No attempt was made to hide any maleness of the body – it was embraced. A prime example of the drag body's power in contradiction. Evelyn Blackwood states that "the body that confirms gender may also deny it" (2011:208), but in this instance Mister's body confirmed its maleness through the lack of makeup and padding while simultaneously denying it through the wig, leotard and incarnation of Ciara. The performance, an embodied protest presented on a stage, disputed the stability of each body in the audience. It was an alluring glimpse at the possibility of non-binary gender play and queer embodiment.

That night, I was reminded of a situation I had with Sharon six months earlier. It was a bad night for my makeup and I was wearing a loose top with a pencil skirt. No corset, but I was padded. "I wouldn't have let you leave the house like this," she told me. "You're giving hog body. I should do your makeup if you want to perform." For Sharon, my "hog body" meant that I

was not giving an appropriate hourglass figure, a clear example of fat shaming and body policing. Even though I had padding, my waist was not emphasized enough. Her comment, although made in the spirit of humor and shade, reinforced traditional notions of femininity. What would some of the Krewe des Femmes and Rush performers think about Mister's performance at Kruze, a bar they warned me to avoid? The Kruze Room closed down in October 2015. It has been replaced by a new bar that is only open one day a week. Contrasting this is the lasting legacy of Joe's Bar and Rush Nightclub, prompting questions about the stability, mobility and structural position of the gay black community in Baton Rouge.

Throughout this thesis, I have established drag queening not only as a craft and tradition, but an institution. And as an institution, Baton Rouge drag is susceptible to pre-existing racist and heteropatriarchal structures. Yet, Mister's performance and the Kruze Room show a different drag performance that subversively protests these problematic structures within drag. Ultimately, the implications of this performance illustrate the diversity within drag queening and how drag, once again, contradicts itself. In addition, these findings suggest racial boundaries may not be visible at an immediate glance. Although a considerable amount of the performers at Joe's are black or Latina, the bar's target audience suggested through their promotions and marketing is overwhelmingly white. I am hopeful that my thesis can facilitate a dialogue in the Baton Rouge drag community and raise questions about exclusionary boundaries and how to dismantle them.

Expanding past the popular celebration of drag queening men embracing femininity requires a critical look into the ways drag queening technologies and practices are stratified with racial meanings. The Baton Rouge drag queen scene is racially segregated, and ideas of what is good or proper drag is heavily enforced through rules set by the bars and the entertainers themselves, such as when Erica was reprimanded for going on stage for the final bow at Rush out

of drag. Drag performers may abuse privilege and impose problematic messages of race and gender regardless of their intent. Further research, especially looking at the segregation of drag pageant competitions, could provide further insight into how drag institutionally affirms racist and heteronormative structures.

For Baton Rouge's drag queening men, their performance is a job, hobby and tradition. Drag has a significant meaning for the visibility and existence of LGBTQ+ people in Louisiana and evokes a history of queer visibility and resistance against an oppressive and exclusionary social climate. This thesis documents marginalized histories and experiences of Baton Rouge seldom included in the city's official history. In addition to this history, I record and analyze the bodily experiences of drag queening from start to finish so that it may foster future research on drag performance. Drag queening men invest thousands of dollars and endless hours into their performance, and I know the narratives presented here still fail to capture the passion and work entertainers put into their performances. A three minute lip-sync requires months of preparation and training to master the technologies and practices of drag. Drag performers risk violence, social isolation, even bodily harm, to master their craft.

By demystifying the backstage activities of drag I add greater depth to the literature on gender theory. Drag queens have become a token metaphor for *doing* and *performing* gender through Butler's (1990, 1999) famous analysis, even gracing the cover of a textbook on gender (Wade and Ferree 2014). The imagery of drag queens is titillating and exotic – my research easily becomes the popular conversation at dinner. But here, for this thesis, I broaden and extend this surface understanding of drag as a clever (and almost cliché) symbol by providing a thorough interpretation of how drag performance is constructed, presented, and what it means for the performers, their audience and to me.

Through my thesis, I contribute the needed perspective of a male-identified researcher investing in their own drag queening performance. I suggest that in my position as a queer man working within a tradition that is heavily dominated by other queer men, I have a significant experience with drag queening that allows a glimpse into gender shifting possibilities. Additionally, using autoethnography to reflect on the construction processes of drag bodies complements the wealth of research on drag performers from the audience's perspective. Thinking about *how* drag queening men utilize their bodies provides an empirical illustration of theories of the body and embodiment, especially in relation to gender and the performativity of identities.

The theoretical implications of drag queening men's body work suggests the body is more versatile than dominant conceptions of the body suggest. It is important to remember that drag queening men are *men*, and do not have a desire to fully transition to women. Instead, most fluidly move between the binary, embodying femininity through technologies of makeup, padding, injections and surgeries. The entertainers go against narratives that suggest one must be fully male or female. They are queer assemblages, exploding sites of unrest between masculinity and femininity. The body is not just a process, but a multitude of processes that work both together and against one another to create and destroy meanings of identity. Drag queening continuously reassembles the bodies of performers and the audience to form new, queer possibilities of identity and embodiment. With their arsenal of wigs, platform heels, glue sticks and gaffs, drag queening men take advantage of the cultural and physical malleability of their bodies to produce rebellious entertainment that opens the rigid walls of gender.

WORKS CITED

- Abrahamn, Nabeel, Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, eds. 2011. *Arab Detroit 9/11*. Detroit: Wayne State Univeristy Press.
- Allen, Rebekah. 2015. "Bathroom access for transgender woman at Baton Rouge courthouse causes stir." *The Advocate*, May 11.
- Basenberg, Lanier. 2008. "Doing Emphasized Femininity for Pay: How Sex Workers and Drag Queens use Femininity for Profit." Paper presented at annual meeting for the American Sociological Association, Boston, Massachusetts, July 31-August 4.
- Bérubé, Allan. 2001. "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays." In *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, edited by Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica and Matt Wray. 234-233. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Berkowitz, Dana, and Linda Belgrave. 2010. "She Works Hard for the Money: Drag Queens and the Management of their Contradictory Status of Celebrity and Marginality." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 39:159-186.
- Berrick, Genevieve. 2010. "Drag King: Camp Acts, Queer Bodies, Desiring Audiences." *Traffic* 10.
<https://www.academia.edu/245174/Drag_King_Camp_Acts_Queer_Bodies_Desiring_Audiences>
- Berkowitz, Dana, Linda Belgrave and Robert Halberstein. 2007. "The Interactions of Drag Queens and Gay Men in Public and Private Spaces." *Journal of Homosexuality* 52:11-32.
- Blackwood, Evelyn. 2011. "(Trans)gender: Tomboi Embodiment." In *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, 1st ed, edited by Frances Mascia-Lees, 207-222. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing.
- Bourgeois, Philippe. 2003. *In Search of Respect*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourgeois, Kevin. 1994. "An assessment of the preceived discrimination and victimization against gay men in New Orleans and Baton Rouge." Master's thesis, Louisiana State University.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- 1999. "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion." In *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham, 336-349. New York: NYU Press.
- Carey, Albert. 2006. "New Orleans Mardi Gras Krewes." *Glbtc: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture*. Glbtq, Inc. Accessed 2 January 2014.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2015. *HIV Surveillance Report, 2014*. Volume 26. Accessed 16 March 2016.
- Chang, Cindy. 2012. "Louisiana is the world's prison capital." *The Times-Picayune*, May 13.
- Ducote, Sr., Glenn. Interview by Whitney Craig and Elaine Maccio, audio recording, 11 November 2009, 4700.2115. LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- Ellis, Carolyn, Tony Adams and Arthur Bochner. 2011. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12:1-18.
- Escoffier, Jeffrey. 2011. "Imagining the she/male." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 12:268-281.
- Foucault, Michel. 1988. *Technologies of the Self*. Edited by Luther Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick Hutton. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Fremin, Larry. Interview by Melanie Russo and Elaine Maccio, audio recording, 16 November 2009, 4700.2118. LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- Freund, Helen. 2014. "Transgender woman accused of administering fatal silicone injections held on \$100K bond." *NOLA.com/The Times-Picayune*, May 13.
- Friedman, Rachel, and Adam Jones. 2011. "Corsets, Headpieces and Tape: An Ethnography of Gendered Performance." *Cross-Cultural Communication* 7:82-91.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- 1963. *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. New York: The Free Press.
- Goss, Robert. 2009. "Silencing Queers at the Upstairs Lounge: The Stonewall of New Orleans." *Southern Communication Journal* 74:269-277.
- Grindley, Lucas. 2013a. "Louisiana Sheriff Refuses to Stop Enforcing Anti-Sodomy Law." *Advocate*, July 28. Accessed December 7, 2015.
- 2013b. "Sheriff Claims He Didn't Know Anti-Sodomy Laws Weren't Valid Anymore." *Advocate*, July 29. Accessed December 7, 2015.
- Guarisco, Tom, and Kristen King. 2000. "Gay Straight supporters shaken by group of protesting students," *The Advocate*, February 19.
- Hendry, Petra, and Jay Edwards. 2009. *Old South Baton Rouge: The Roots of Hope*. Lafayette: University of Louisiana Press.
- hooks, bell. 1992. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. New York: South End Press.

- Hopkins, Steven. 2004. "Let the Drag Race Begin: The Rewards of Becoming a Queen." *Journal of Homosexuality* 46:135-149.
- Human Rights Council. 2014. "Louisiana: 2014 State Equality Index." *Human Rights Council*. Accessed December 7, 2015.
- Jones, Stacy. 2005. "Autoethnography: Making the Personal Political." In *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed., edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincon. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Jones, Richard. 2007. "Drag Queens, Drama Queens, and Friends: Drama and Performace as a Solidarity-Building Function in a Gay Male Friendship Circle." *Kaleidoscope* 6:61-84.
- Kathy, Interview by Hope McPhatter and Whitney Craig, audio recording, 14 October 2009, 4700.2144. LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- Kivel, Paul. 1999. *Boys Will Be Men: Raising our Sons for Courage, Caring and Community*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.
- Lancaster, Roger. 2011. "Autoethnography. When I was a Girl (Notes on Contrivance)." In *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, 1st ed., edited by Frances Mascia-Lees, 46-71. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lock, Margaret, and Judith Farquhar. 2007. *Reading the Body Proper*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mascia-Lees, Frances. 2011. "Autoethnography." In *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, 1st ed., edited by Frances Mascia-Lees, 46-49. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing.
- McKinney, Matt. 2015. "Arrest on unconstitutional sodomy law prompts Baton Rouge police chief to send memo to all officers," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, February 15.
- Millhollon, Michelle. 2000. "Gay Straight club gets McKinley High Approval," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, February 22.
- Moreman, Shane, and Dawn McIntosh. 2010. "Brown Scriptings and Rescriptings: A Critical Performance Ethnography of Latina Drag Queens." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7:115-135.
- Murphy, Alexandra. 2003. "The Dialectical Gaze: Exploring the Subject-Object Tension in the Performances of Women who Strip." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 23:305-335.
- O'Donoghue, Julia. 2014. "Louisiana House votes 27-67 to keep unconstitutional anti-sodomy law on the books," *Nola.com/The Times-Picayune*, April 15.

- Racco, Marilisa. 2015. "From on-stage to on-trend, contouring has gone mainstream (and you can thank Kim Kardashian)." *The Globe and Mail*, March 27.
- Riggs, Damien. 2005. "Caught 'n'e Frame? Queer Embodiment under heteropatriarchy." *Philament* 7:1-11.
- Robertson, Mary. 2014. *Frontline: Separate and Unequal*. WGBH Educational Foundation.
- Rupp, Leila, and Verta Taylor. 2003. *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Samuels, Diana. 2014. "Baton Rouge Metro Council votes against removing unconstitutional 'crimes against nature' provisions." *Nola.com/The Times-Picayune*, February 12.
- Schacht, Steven, and Lisa Underwood. 2004. "The Absolutely Fabulous but Flawlessly Customary World of Female Impersonation." *Journal of Homosexuality* 46:1-17.
- Schacht, Steven. 2002. "Turnabout: Gay Drag Queens and the Masculine Embodiment of the Feminine." In *Revealing Male Bodies*, edited by Nancy Tuana, William Cowling, Maurice Hamington, Greg Johnson and Terrance MacMullen, 155-170. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Shapiro, Eve. 2010. *Gender Circuits: Bodies and Identities in a Technological Age*. New York: Routledge.
- 2007. "Drag Kinging and the Transformation of Gender Identities." *Gender and Society* 21:250-271.
- Thunderfuck, Alaska. 2015. "This is My Hair." *Anus*. Sidecar Records.
- Tompkins, Avery. 2014. "'There's No Chasing Involved': Cis/Trans Relationships, 'Tranny Chasers,' and the Future of a Sex-Positive Trans Politics." *Journal of Homosexuality* 61:766-780.
- Turner, Terrence. 2011. "Bodliness. The Body Beyond the Body: Social, Material and Spiritual Dimensions of Bodliness." In *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, 1st ed., edited by Frances Mascia-Lees, 102-118. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing.
- US Census Bureau. 2014. "2014 Population Estimates." *American FactFinder*. Web.
- Wolff, Tim. 2012. *The Sons of Tennessee Williams*. First Run Features.
- Wooten, Carrie. 2014. "Resources, racism, and the state of public education: A lesson in St. George." *Louisiana Progress*, February 11. Accessed 16 March 2016.

WOWPresents. 2015. "Glen Alen and James St. James: Upside Down Girl – Transformations." YouTube video, 8 minutes 51 seconds. Posted August 19.

Zervigon, Andres. 2004. "Drag Shows: Drag Queens and Female Impersonators." In *The Queer Encyclopedia of Music, Dance & Musical Theater*, edited by Claude Summers, 89-91. Jersey City: Cleis Press.

VITA

Ray Siebenkittel is an interdisciplinary scholar who focuses on gender and sexuality. After graduating from Louisiana State University with a BA in Anthropology and Women's & Gender Studies, they continued at LSU to research the local drag community in the pursuit of a master's degree in Anthropology. Siebenkittel studies drag performance through a variety of topics, ranging from the ways performers use Facebook to the politics of drag queen music videos. After completing studies at LSU, they will begin at George Mason University for a PhD in Cultural Studies.