University of Nevada, Reno

Drag Beyond Metronormativity
Experiences of Drag Performers in Small Towns and "Ordinary Cities"

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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December, 2019
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA RENO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Entitled

Drag Beyond Metronormativity
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be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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December, 2019
Abstract

Rural towns and small cities are not typically perceived as welcoming or safe environments for LGBTQ people. However, many LGBTQ people do live in rural towns and smaller cities. In this study, I interview 18 drag performers from Ordinary Cities (OC) and Small towns (ST). My findings that show that drag performers in OCs are more likely to feel unsafe within queer spaces than performers from STs. Participants of color in both ordinary cities and small towns reported experiences of tokenism and racial exclusion. Finally, my findings show that drag kings in both settings were the most likely to experience exclusion from local drag communities. I use these findings to argue that rural towns and small cities can be welcoming and safe environments for queer folks—specifically drag performers. Additionally, these city/town settings can impact the safety of performers dependent on availability of queer space.
Dedication

This master’s thesis is dedicated to my mother Maria. Without your time and dedication to helping me learn how to read at an early age and your sacrifice of leaving your family behind I would not be here today. I would also like to dedicate this to Juan and Jessica—this is for us!
Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Kjerstin Gruys for helping me become a skilled researcher, storyteller and writer. Dr. Gruys was instrumental in helping me complete my thesis in that she provided a learning environment where I was able to manifest a thesis project that was mutually exciting and poignant. Without the nurturing support from Dr. Gruys I am not sure I would have been motivated enough to finish my thesis journey, let alone be motivated enough to start a PhD program while completing my degree. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to my committee members; Dr. Lydia Huerta and Dr. Mariah Evans. Dr. Huerta not only helped me understand my unique positionality to the project, she also helped foster my development as a queer academic of color. Additionally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Evans for providing a research methods course in which I was able to conceptualize this thesis project. Dr. Evans also encouraged me to research issues regarding space within rural areas and small towns by helping me consider the experiences of queer folks living in these areas. Without their commitment to serving on my committee and critical input, this project could not have been successfully completed. I am just as grateful for each of my research participants and the narratives they were willing to share with me; “These are their stories and I am their ink” Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my godparents Ruth and Ed Sparks; undergraduate mentors Dr. Strangfeld and Dr. Strahm; and closest friends, Dylan, Jesús, Zach, Monica, and Ashley for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Thank you.
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Introduction

Rural towns and small cities are not typically perceived as welcoming or safe environments for LGBTQ people (Wienke & Hill, 2013). Despite this perception, many LGBTQ people do live in rural towns and smaller cities. Recent sociological work has noted a lack of research examining the experiences of LGBTQ people who do not live in major cities (Stone 2018). This study addresses the gaps in this literature by focusing on the experiences of LGBTQ folks who do not live in major cities. More specifically, this study will examine the experiences of drag performers who live and perform in what Stone (2018) refers to as Ordinary Cities (OC) and Small Towns (ST), focusing on their experiences and understandings of safety and of gender and racial inclusion.

Furthermore, the bulk of the extant research on drag performers has been centered in the humanities rather than the social sciences and has focused on media representations of drag performers rather than examining their experiences in their own words (i.e., Edgar 2011; Simmons 2014; Goldmark 2015; Moore 2013; LeMaster 2015; Gonzalez 2016). Therefore, in addition to responding to Stone’s “call to arms” regarding the need for research focusing on the experiences of LGBTQ folks who do not live in major cities, this research also addresses gaps in the literature specific to drag performers.

Below, I review the pertinent theoretical and empirical literatures that inform this project. I discuss previous research on LGBTQ+ people living in rural towns and small cities, pointing to unanswered questions. Second, I introduce important terminology and provide a background and history of drag performance in America. Third, I review the sociological research which includes a discussion of media representations of drag performers and examine the unanswered questions in this literature. I then describe the
methods I use to address these gaps in the literature. Finally, I present my findings, which show that, compared to participants in small towns, participants in OC’s generally felt safe in their current communities of residence (especially compared to their previous places of residence). However, these participants were more likely than participants in STs to express feeling unsafe in and around queer spaces. Additionally, regardless of setting, participants of color reported experiences of racial exclusion and tokenism by white performers, and all drag kings experienced exclusion from their local drag communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

LGBTQ+ People in Places and Spaces

Stone (2018) notes that, despite an increase of the amount of social science research done on LGBTQ folks in the past two decades, there has not been adequate representation of geographical diversity, with most research on LGBTQ populations focusing on their experiences within major cities like, San Francisco, New York City, and Los Angeles. These urban areas of the United States are often seen as “urban oases” (Gray, 2009) that are safe havens where LGBTQ people can find large and diverse queer communities. Noting that they receive a disproportionate amount of attention from sociologists, Stone (2018) calls these cities “Great Cities” and argues that the overwhelming attention received by these cites limits our view on LGBTQ culture and life (see also Brown-Saracino, 2011). In a call-to-arms for sociologists studying queer experiences, Stone challenges scholars to shift focus from queer life in “Great Cities” towards other geographic areas that can provide us with greater diversity in the experiences of queer people.
By providing more geographically expansive research on the LGBTQ populations, researchers will be better able to understand several theoretical puzzles. For example, research has found that non-LGBTQ residents of rural communities tend to have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than people who live in urban and suburban areas. In many studies, negative attitudes expressed by non-queer-identifying residents of rural towns are presumed to be a “surrogate” marker for intolerance, suggesting that gays and lesbians in rural areas may be more stigmatized than gays and lesbians living in urban suburban areas (Watkins & Jacoby, 2007). However, recent scholarship has found that these anti-queer attitudes do not seem to affect the happiness, health, and job satisfaction of adult gay men and lesbians living in these communities (Wienke and Hill, 2013). Rather, Wienke and Hill found that adult gay men and lesbians living in urban areas were more likely to experience lower levels of wellbeing due to the stress of the weakening of the traditional ties and shared traditions that are given up when a person moves from a smaller town of origin into a larger city. These findings suggest that LGBTQ adults who live in non-urban areas may not have to migrate to “Great cities” in order to feel content with living as an openly queer person.

In their recent work, Japonica Brown-Saracino (2011) conducted an ethnography in four small U.S. cities with growing numbers of lesbian couples. This study examined LBQ women’s role in their municipalities (compared to gay men and their concentrations in cities). By focusing on why LBQ women concentrate spatially, Brown-Saracino gained insights into how LBQ demographic and economic traits vary by site and influence residential choices and why certain places—namely, small cities with natural amenities and high proportions of lesbian couples—attract lesbian couples and how they build and
retain “lesbian-friendly” reputations. To do so Brown-Saracino examined LBQ women’s networks, identities, organizations, and businesses, asking how and why they vary within and between sites. At first, she hypothesized that age, class and race by site would direct variation in identity culture, but she ultimately found that each of these four cities had its own “sexual identity cultures,” showing that identity was not dependent on migration patterns nor informant demographic traits. Brown-Saracino’s findings serve to caution researchers from over-emphasizing the impact of demographic traits while ignoring the importance of a place’s broader culture, including a city’s social character or the city’s general attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals.

Notably, there seem to be differences in the experiences of LGBTQ adults versus LGBTQ youth in non-urban settings. For example, LGBTQ youth in smaller towns face bullying at much higher rates than youth who live in urban and suburban areas (Kosciw, Greystoke, & Diaz 2009), and the attitudes associated with homosexuality in these rural areas have been found to negatively impact the development of sexual identity and expression in youth (Gray, 2009; Poon & Saewyc, 2009).

In thinking about the differences between places (i.e. ordinary cities, small towns, and broader communities) and queer spaces (i.e. gay bars and LGBTQ community centers), Hulko and Hovanes (2017), in an intersectional study of LBTQ youth, found both positive and negative relationships between LGBTQ well-being and the availability of queer spaces. The presence of queer spaces, including nightclubs/bars, coffee shops, and areas of town one might think of as “gayborhoods” (Ghaziani 2010; Madden and Ruther 2015), have a positive influence over the expression of sexual identity on research
participants. Both places (i.e. cities and towns) and (gay) spaces-within-places are important essential for understanding LGBTQ experiences.

Brown-Saracino (2011) and Hulko and Hovanes (2017) both focus on the idea of place as a marker for LGBTQ youth, however Drumheller and McQuay (2010) focus on what these spaces have to offer in terms of services, using focus groups to look at how the services of an LGBT Outreach Center (LOC) promoted experiences of safety in a conservative “bible belt” community. This study used three focus groups; one group consisted of 14 educators and parents of LGBT youth, the second group consisted of 15 LGBT members of the community and the third groups consisted of 10 participants all mixed (parents, educated folks and LGBT people). Noting that “presenting external messages to a community-at-large that tends to be unsupportive of LGBT individuals is daunting,” (p. 70), the researchers noted the importance of LOC’s having clear “explicit internal identity” as well as strong external messaging in order to succeed within unaccepting communities. With both internal and external boundaries implied within the LOC, the LGBTQ participants were better able to compartmentalize their safety within the city while also managing their fears of being outed and/or of losing their jobs.

Similarly, to Brown-Saracino, Hartal (2017) looked at the importance and roles of LGBTQ+ spaces for queer folks in Jerusalem, Israel in an ethnographical study done over the course of 5 months in 2010, which included 10 in-depth interviews with the central activists involved at the Jerusalem Open House (JOH). Because Jerusalem is a “national city, symbolized by ‘holiness’” (Alfasi & Fenster, 2005) with strong religious cultural influences, it is difficult for openly LGBTQ+ people to live there safely. The JOH is an NGO and a queer community space in Jerusalem that provides, an HIV test clinic, social
groups, LGBT library, psycho-social services, and it organizes the annual pride parade. Using framing theory (Goffman 1974), Hartal found that the themes of control, anonymity, inclusion, and fortification were central to the discussion of “safe spaces” at this specific research site. The question of “When do we stop being inclusionary?” was central to the group, which navigated tensions between people’s desire for a space that felt safe because it was simultaneously inclusive while also having clear boundaries regarding who is allowed into a physical space designated for LGBTQ people.

The studies outlined above suggest that tensions regarding inclusion and gatekeeping are likely common issues in the creation of safe spaces for LGBTQ groups. In fact, these boundary issues may actually be more pronounced in spaces used for drag performances, given that contemporary drag performances often take place in LGBTQ spaces, such as in gay bars, yet these bars are often viewed in contemporary culture as entertainment being accessible to, and even oriented towards, the broader, straight-identifying, public. Below, after briefly reviewing the history of drag in the United States, I more thoroughly discuss critical issues related to media representations of drag culture and how these representations impact public perceptions of drag performers and performances. Clearly both places (i.e. cities and towns) and (gay) spaces-within-places are important for understanding LGBTQ experiences.

In examining the literature on queer folks living in ordinary cities and small towns, it is apparent that researchers have not yet included the unique positionality that is offered by drag performers living in these places. Additionally, little is known about the ways that space and place create opportunity for drag performers. Understanding the experiences of drag performers who live and perform outside of major cities is important
because drag performances, and the spaces hosting these performances, have a long history as central institutions in gay communities (Taylor & Rupp, 2006). Drag performances solidify and unifying traditions that serve as norms and values for the broader queer communities. Yet, drag performances and performances spaces make up a category of “gay” spaces that have received limited attention in the already-limited research on queer experiences in OCs and STs.

The History and Modern Context of Drag Performers and Performances

In examining drag as a contemporary phenomenon we need to first define it and then discuss its origins. For the purposes of this research, I use the term “drag queen” when referring to cis-gendered men and masculine-presenting transgender people who dress to accentuate and exaggerate feminine features, typically in the context of drag performances. I use the term “drag king” when referring to cis-gendered women and feminine-presenting transgender people who dress performatively to accentuate and exaggerate masculine features, typically in the context of performance. I additionally use the term “bio queen” when referring to a cis-gendered woman who adopts the style of drag queens at drag shows. It is important to note that even though the terms “queen” and “king” are not limited to cisgender people, they reinforce the idea of a gender binary.

Although cross-gender dressing has historically served several social purposes, including religious, political, theatrical, social and sexual purposes (Baker, 1994; Senelick 2000; Drouin 2008), contemporary iterations of drag performances and drag balls, in particular, have been consistently associated with queer spaces since the 1920’s. Expressions of queer identity through the use of drag have been a part of the LGBTQ community for decades (Chauncey, 1994; D’Emillio, 1983; Rupp, 1999); These early
versions of contemporary drag performances originated in large urban areas of the U.S. primarily as a way for gay and trans folk from different class and ethnic backgrounds to find and build community in the shadows.

Notably, these early versions of drag were not inclusive of transgender women, and considered everyone who dressed in women’s clothing to be cis-gendered man who “masquerade” in woman’s clothes to dance with other gay men, leaving out transgender women who turned to drag as a resource (Baker, 2018; Beemyn 1997a, b; Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Chauncy, 1994; Newton, 1979). Aside from being a social and entertainment gathering, drag balls allowed for the subversion of hegemonic masculinity in that they parodied the transgression of gender expectation while drawing attention to the performative nature of gender and sexuality (Levitt et. al 2017). Over time, drag has transformed from a means of survival for transgender and queer folk, into an artistic outlet for this community in that it allowed them to create art, manipulate gender boundaries, and build community. Drag has allowed the transgender community a unique outlet that gives voice and provides language for different lived gendered experiences afforded by the existence of queer spaces (Taylor & Rupp, 2006).

During the late 1980’s and early 90s, in the midst of the AIDS/HIV crisis, many gay and trans folks were kicked out of their homes due to the stigma of homosexuality because it was believed that HIV/AIDS was only limited to homosexuals. As a result of the stigma surrounding queerness, QPOC often became homeless, (Phillips et al. 2011). “In building community, homeless queer and trans folks would often group up and create what are known as “Houses,” or performance troupes. These groups often times lived together as a result of being homeless for being queer. These original drag houses were
oriented broadly around taking in LGBTQ folks who were in need, providing food and shelter to those who had been shunned and kicked out of their original family homes for being queer. Another key aspect of ball culture is that these events often raised money for those in need (i.e. medication, help with rent, etc..) and worked toward the prevention of the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Drag balls” or “balls” became a way for queer men and transgender persons of color to find space and refuge to “meet and congregate for entertainment and social support” (Phillips et al. 2011).

In addition to being a space for social support and entertainment, drag balls provided a space and context for queer and transgender folk to openly embrace their queer identities without fear of rejection and violence. In doing this, performers are assessed based on their “realness” or, in other words, the “most stylized portrayal of a given gender role” (2017). In order to be successful at this, performers began recruiting queer people of color, who were often homeless, offering mentorship in performances in exchange shelter (Levitt et al. 2017). Thus, these original drag houses were oriented broadly around taking in LGBTQ folks from all walks of life who were in need, providing connection and shelter to those who had been shunned and kicked out of their original family homes for being queer.

In *Performing Protest: Drag Shows as Tactical Repertoire of the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, Taylor and Rupp (2004) explain how drag became an essential role in queer communities, not only for folks within these communities, but increasingly as a means of exposure, protest and activist organizing, such as through organizations like the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (Peterson, 2013; Blair 2017) and ACT UP! (Glenn, 2003). For example, in a historical study of drag in the San Francisco Gay Liberation
Movement from 1964-1972, Hillman (2011) quotes a local queer magazine that described drag performances outside of specifically queered spaces, as “the most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in.”

Moving a bit forward in time, the use of “campy drag” emerged as a way for drag performers to announce gay identity as well as a way to draw attention to the denial of HIV/AIDS by the United States government. (Cohen-Cruz, 1998; Senelick, 2000; Gamson, J, 1989). These ties to the broader (non-queer) community allow drag queens to operate within their communities as key members, while also being an important avenue for the exploration of gender and presentation for the local LGBTQ community member but also for cisgender heterosexual audience members (Taylor & Rupp 2003). These examples point to the expanding relevance of drag performances within straight culture, which has expanded LGBTQ awareness and acceptance while also creating situations in which some drag queens have become public faces as entertainers while their more political roles and importance within the LGBTQ community have been made invisible.

**Drag and Intersectionality**

As would be true for studying any seemingly homogenous group, drag performers can only be understood when considered through an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1989; Smith, 1997; Harding 2004; Hekman 1997). However, because drag performers have both everyday identities as well as performance identities; scholars must not only consider everyday gendered, racialized, and classed identities, but also how these identities interact and intersect with their drag counterparts.

For example, in *One Body, Some Genders: Drag performance and Technologies* (2002) Alana Kumbier draws on her own experiences as a drag performer in a way that
illustrates the intersections between everyday gender performance and drag gender performance. She considers her first-time dressing in drag as occurring on her high school prom night, when she wore a feminine fuchsia dress with a puffy skirt covered in sequins, rather than her usual, everyday “gender natural” outfits which consisted of flannels and combat boots. In other words, although Kumbier was a woman performing femininity at prom, she was not performing her daily version of femininity. Even though she did not perform cross-gender dressing, Kumbier still viewed her prom outfit as drag, because it was a means of “performing a specific part of [herself]for the prom and [her] date.” Another example of this appears in Taylor and Rupp’s ethnography of the Drag queens at the 801, which follows drag performers from the 801 Cabaret in the Florida Key West. Taylor and Rupp noted that the drag performers felt as though their performance identity (or drag character) was allowed to act obnoxiously or outlandishly as a part of their act, without being policed.

Another example from this same study, found in When the girls, are men: Negotiating gender and sexual dynamics in a study of drag queens (Taylor and Rupp 2005), examines the ways in which the drag queens from the 801 used their drag femininity to challenge sexual boundaries that they would typically have been be reprimanded for as men. For example, the ability to sexually arouse of straight cis-gendered men was a motivating factor in how the queens in the show moved through the crowd and how they touched the men (Taylor & Rupp 2006). Drag queens from the 801 were able to sexually arouse the cis-gender and heterosexual men in the audience. This example shows that drag can “destabilize gender and sexual categories” (Butler 1990, 1993; Garber 1992; Lorber 1994,1999; Halberstam 1998; Muñoz 1999) that are
perpetuated by hegemonic groups. This is important to note that the drag performers in this context were able to interact with the cis-gendered heterosexual men in such manner specifically because the men were in a *queer space* that protects of the drag performers. This is also additional support for how drag is used as a means of reinforcing gender and sexual inequalities that challenges broader hegemonic structures.

In addition to complicating gender and sexualities, drag performers complicate race and ethnicity as they intersect with these categories. In their 2003 book *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret*, Rupp and Taylor conducted an ethnography studying a group of drag queens in the Florida Key West. In doing so they met Sushi, a drag queen who described herself as “some place in between” a woman and a man. Sushi didn’t directly identify as trans but, like many “other” and trans identified people who do drag, embraced these feelings of the “in between” and used drag as a way to express their gender identity. Notably, Sushi chose a drag name that drew attention to her Asian heritage. Furthermore, Sushi regularly asked audience members to use sexualized racial slurs – specifically those associated with the fetishization of Asian women – to address her, in an attempt to reclaim these stereotypes and to make audience members aware of their biases. In these ways, we see the complexities of drag performers’ intersecting genders, sexualities, and races/ethnicities, both from their everyday identities and their performance identities.

**Drag Kings**

Notably, the majority of academic research on drag performers has focused on drag *queens* and not on their counterparts, drag kings. This is not to say that drag kings are newer, historically, but rather that the practices of drag queens are more well-known
than those of drag kings. In this section, I highlight the existing research and point to gaps in the literature.

It is easy to assume that the experiences of drag kings would be the same as those of drag queens, albeit with reversed gender. Indeed, Schacht (2003) points out that both Drag Kings and Queens have to develop an alternate personality in order to be as convincing as possible; drag kings must pull off performances of masculinity much like queens must pull off performances of femininity. Schacht further focuses on how drag kings need to maintain a level of masculinity that needs to be convincing, noting that “...drag kings carry themselves...in a stereotypically masculine fashion. Broad, almost swaggering, steps...legs are never crossed but instead comfortably spread apart when seated, most speak in a deeper, more authoritative voice” (Schacht, 2003). The challenge of presenting in a gender that is not one’s assigned gender exists for both queens and kings. However, the experiences are not entirely equivocal, which should not be surprising considering the fact that masculinity and femininity are not merely opposites, but hierarchical.

For example, Ru-Paul, arguably the most famous drag queen in America and likely the world, has been publicly dismissive of cis-gendered women and transgender people who perform as drag queens. In an interview with The Guardian (Aitkenhead 2018), RuPaul is quoted saying;

Drag loses its sense of danger and its sense of irony once it’s not men doing it, because at its core it’s a social statement and a big f-you to male-dominated culture. So for men to do it, it’s really punk rock, because it’s a real rejection of masculinity.
This quote suggests that cis-gendered women who do drag are not seen as contributing to the radical rejection of societal norms. This point of view arguably centers cis-gendered gay men and leaves out cis-gendered women and transgender people who perform in drag. It perpetuates misogyny and anti-transgender sentiment, in that it feeds into the narrative that men are the only ones who can be gender rebels while ignoring the opportunities that queer, transgender, and gender non-conforming people have contributed to rejection of societal norms.

In his ethnography, *Lesbian Drag Kings and the Feminine Embodiment of the Masculine*, Schacht (2003) notes that the term “Drag Queen” has been around far longer than the term “Drag King” and asks why it is more acceptable for women to play with gender than it is for men. Furthermore, Rupp et. al, (2010) compared two drag performance troupes, one made up of queens and one made up of kings. They found that drag queens tended to have engaged in “gender transgressions” early in life and had utilized drag to deal with questioning their gender, while drag kings were more likely to rethink their gender identities only after participating in drag (Rupp et. al). They also found differences in how the participants performed gender and sexuality. For example, the drag kings were able to “consciously and deliberately invoke queer theory” due to their knowledge and education, while the queens, who had lower levels of formal education, played with similar categories of gender and sexuality but based off of their own life experiences. Because of this, Rupp et. al described drag queens’ performances as a “visceral response to effeminacy” while Rupp et. al saw drag kings’ performances as a response to sexual desire with a critique of gender (Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Feinberg, 1996; Halberstam, 1998; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Rupp, 2009). These researchers further
found that drag queens and kings do not always agree with each other’s tactics of questioning gender. Drag kings in this study see drag queens as inherently misogynist whereas drag queens did not understand masculine drag (Rupp et. al 2010).

An example of the intersections between everyday gender identity and performance gender identity is addressed by Schacht (2005) in his analysis of drag kings and their “feminine embodiment of the masculine.” Schacht examines how gender impersonations through drag allow for fluidity between the masculine and the feminine, allowing drag kings in this study to carry their performance identity out into the “real world.” For example, Schact described how the lesbian drag kings dress and speak in performance spaces, compared to how they carried themselves outside of these spaces, finding that most of the lesbian women who perform as drag kings wore masculine clothing both and in and outside of performances spaces. In contrast, research suggests cisgender men who perform as drag queens are less likely to blur their drag gender performances with their everyday gender performances. Levi et. al (2018) conducted a study with drag queens who exclusively identified as male outside of drag. They found that the 13 of the 18 drag queens interviewed reported feeling unsafe being perceived as transgender while in drag, noting that “Drag femininity can be dangerous and lead to rejection or violence via heterosexism and transphobia so deciding when to be out and shifting gender expression could be important” (Levitt et al. 2018). Despite feeling this lack of safety, few participants deliberately presented as more masculine or straight at work or in other public settings.

**METHOD**

The present study examines the experiences of drag performers living and
performing outside of “great cities” using semi-structured in-depth interviews followed by a demographic survey. These methods provide greater depth and context, elaborating beyond the current data on queer populations in “ordinary cities” and small towns. The research design is composed of two distinct stages. Below, I describe the methodological process of data collection including the characteristics and recruitment of participants, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of drag performances beyond metronormativity, specifically the meanings constructed about drag in these social and physical locations, and the consequences.

**Participants and Recruitment**

Recruited participants included drag performers over the age of 18 with diverse ethnic and class backgrounds, who live and perform in Northern Nevada and/or Central California. Participants included drag performers who identified as men, women, and/or as non-binary in their everyday lives (i.e., outside of their drag performances), and who performed as drag queens, drag kings, and/or bio-queens. By including gender, racial/ethnic and class diversity and by not having a cap on age when recruiting participants, this research captures as much of the different lived experiences these drag performers provide as well as to include different general views on drag in the sample. While other demographic variables including, but not limited to, education status and sexual orientation may influence one’s involvement in drag, however these characteristics are not the primary interest of this study.

Participants were purposefully recruited from locations that fit Amy Stone’s (2018) models of “Ordinary Cities” and small towns, including the ordinary cities of
Reno, NV and Sacramento, CA, and the small towns of Modesto, CA, Turlock CA, and Stockton CA. Characteristics of these locations can be found in Table 1. Recruitment included actively getting in touch with various local performers through social media (Instagram, and Facebook), posting flyers (See Appendix A for: Qualitative Recruitment Flyer) in the community centers and gay bars in all locations of study, snowball sampling and networking with friends and acquaintances. Flyers called for participants in a “study about drag performers in rural/urban areas” and included criteria for participation (i.e., drag performers 18 and older). In addition, recruitment material outlined the study procedures, specifically their participation in an interview lasting “45-90 minutes” about cultural experiences, perspectives, and stories participating in drag. The information flyer specified that all interviews would be 1-on-1, and that participation would remain anonymous. Flyers included the phone number and email of the Primary Investigator (PI) for those interested in participation.

Data Collection

Qualitative research aims to understand how people make meaning out of their social world. One of the primary methods used to do this involves listening with the goal of giving “voice” to the respondent’s experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2010). As a part of this study, I included and prepared questions, as well as follow-up questions when elaboration or clarification is needed (See Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions). The questions guided the interview to ensure that specific topics regarding drag were addressed, including support from the community and payment for performances.). Participants were provided an informative consent sheet that detailed the study procedures while ensuring their anonymity (See Appendix C: Qualitative Consent Sheet).
Each participant was informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any time. In order to ensure confidentiality all qualitative participants were given pseudonyms, and any real names and identifiers of other people have been altered. All interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy of data reporting. Interviews were held in private spaces at the preference of the participants. The semi-structured interview questions were formulated out of the study’s broader research questions.

The interview questions used for this study were grouped into several themes including beginnings, places, spaces, support, performance, and income. The theme “Beginnings” is specific to the participants first time performing, first time learning about drag and how they got involved with performing within their local drag communities. “Place” refers to the participants experiences within their specific city or town. For example, participants are asked if they feel safe within their communities, as well as being asked about where they are from if they recently moved to the research sites. Following the questions about “Place”, questions about “Space” focused more specifically on LGBTQ+ spaces within the broader community, including performance spaces. Questions about “Support” ask about the ways in which the participants feel the most support by both the LGBTQ+ community and the broader community in general. “Performance” contained questions about the experience of doing drag including why they choose to invest time and money into drag as well as the best and the worst parts of being a drag performer. Lastly, under this theme I also ask about the institutions though which they do drag. Lastly, I ask participants about “Income” and what that looks like for them. Income was further broken down into three categories, primary income, secondary income, and other forms of payment. Primary sources of income are defined as paid
work that is outside of being a performer. Secondary sources of income refer to paid work, either through contracts or tips, for doing drag. Other forms of compensation refer to other ways these performers may be “paid” for their performances at a venue. Some examples include drink tickets or having their cover fee waived and if they think drag performers are compensated equally.

At the end of the interview participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, the information obtained from this was used to capture information about participants’ demographic background. Demographic information can help us contextualize the experiences of these performers and compare them to the larger population of the research sites. Demographic information for this study is important because it allows us to understand who is being impacted by further marginalization on the basis of other characteristics of the participants. In the questionnaire participants were also asked to describe any intersecting identities as they best relate to them (i.e. gender identity, sexual orientation, and racial identity). Participants were asked questions that included measures of income, and education, these are arbitrary categories that will not be defined for the participant. Other demographic measures were collected to categorize each participant by race and social class.

**Data Analysis**

To analyze my data I followed the methodological approach outlined by Deterding and Waters (2018) in their article, “Flexible Coding of In-depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach.” In this article, Deterding and Waters outlines steps or stages of coding and analyzing contemporary qualitative data with modern technology. They suggest that researchers first create broad codes, then separate them into smaller
codes, as opposed to a more traditional grounded theory approach of first creating specific codes and then piling them into broader codes (i.e., Glaser and Strauss 2017; Charmaz 2007; Bowen 2006). Their process of flexible coding consists of three specific stages (1) indexing and memoing, (2) applying analytical codes, and (3) exploring coding validity, testing, and refining theory.

The first stage of their approach, indexing and memoing, consists of identifying the main stories in the data while taking notes on each of the data. Creating index codes requires indexing by broader themes in the interview protocol and “represent large chunks of text, enabling data reduction and retrieval as the analyst proceeds through constructing and documenting their argument,” (Deterding & Waters, 2018:18). Setting up the data this way allows for ease in data retrieval. For example, one of the index codes that I created is “Place.” This code was attached to any episode in which participants referred to questions about a physical place that they live/lived or spent time at. Questions like “Where did you move here from?” or “Tell me about the venues you perform in?” fall under this index code.

The second stage is the application of analytical codes to the data. These analytical codes come from both initial readings of the data and based on “sensitizing concepts” (Bowen 2006) identified from previous literature. This stage differs from the first in that only relevant areas of the interview transcriptions are being read, while mostly avoiding making any broad pattern connections with the participant attributes (Deterding & Waters, 2018). Using the index codes organizes the amount of text to be read, allowing this analytical stage to be more efficient and focused.

The last stage in this coding procedure allows for the examination of how “deep”
the story is embedded into the body of the text (Deterding & Waters, 2018). In other words, it allows for more concrete explanation of what has been observed. This process is made easier using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) like Dedoose or ATLAS.ti that “[allow] researchers to examine cross-case reliability of thematic coding,” (Deterding & Waters, 2018). The process of analyzing data in these stages is for researchers to look at patterns observed in the prior stage, assessing whether or not participants have been misclassified. If that is the case, QDA software allows for ease in revising their classification, assuring the construct validity.

Dedoose, the QDA software selected for this qualitative research project, allowed for ease in the application of this method of flexible coding. After the interviews were transcribed, they were uploaded to the QDA and indexed into five different codes. These codes are the same as the themes discussed in the data collection and procedures section of this thesis: beginnings, places/ spaces, support, performance, and income. Each of these codes are based on the themes in the interview protocol. Organizing the data in this manner via Dedoose allowed for the ease in the application of the analytical codes.

**Resulting Sample**

The original goal of the project was to collect a large enough sample that would show diversity of experiences across “ordinary cities” versus “small towns,” with the hope of also achieving gender and racial diversity. The first and second of these goals was accomplished (see above for comments on racial/ethnic diversity). The resulting sample consisted of 18 participants, with 9 from Northern Nevada and 9 from Central California. The study was initially designed such that all participants from Northern Nevada would have been from Reno, NV, an “ordinary city,” while all participants from
Central California would have been from Turlock, Modesto, and Stockton, which are all categorized as small towns. However, because one participant from Central California lived in Sacramento, CA, (an ordinary city) the sample is best described – in analytical terms – as including 10 participants from “ordinary cities” and 8 from “small towns,” as described below and represented in Table 2.

Participants were asked about their everyday gender identities, their gender identities portrayed when performing, race/ethnicity, total yearly income, education, and sexuality. The overall sample was made up of mostly White cis-gay men who perform as drag queens. The participants from the ordinary cities were mostly White, with the majority being cis-gendered gay men, although 20% identified as cis-gendered women who performed as “Bio-Queens” (cis-women that perform as drag queens). The participants from small towns were more racially and gender-diverse in that the sample contained more racial and gender identity as opposed to the participants from ordinary cities. For example, these participants were more likely to be people of color and were more likely to be gender non-conforming in their everyday lives. The majority of all participants had degrees in higher education and reported feeling financially secure. This is an important thing to point out because queer people have historically been financially disenfranchised.

Participants in the study mainly identified as cis-gender with, nine participants identifying as cis-gender men and four identifying as cis-gender women. One participant identified as a trans woman, two participants identified as non-binary and two other participants did not specify their gender. Participants additionally had gender identities tied specifically to their drag performances, with ten participants identifying as drag
queen, three participants identifying as drag kings, two others identifying as bio queens and one participant identifying herself as a trans entertainer.

Nine participants identified as white, three identified as Latinx, two identified as African-American, two identified as Asian, one identified as middle-eastern and another identified as biracial. Participants also provided information about their total yearly income and highest levels of education. Two participants reported that they earn less than $25,000 a year, two others did not provide a response. Three participants reported they earned between $25,000 and $34,000, Five other participants reported that they made between $35,000- $49,000, and three reported making $50,000-$74,000. Five participants reported only having a high school diploma, seven reported having a 2-year degree, four reported having a 4-year degree and two reported having graduate degrees. Lastly, Participants provided their sexual orientations, eleven participants identified as homosexual, three identified as queer, two as heterosexual, one as bisexual and one as pansexual.

Note: because each participant had both an everyday name and gender identity, as well as a performance name and gender identity, when describing the findings of this study I refer to each participant using both names in all cases, separated by a “/” such as “Finn/Starlet.” When referring to participants without specifying their names I use the gender pronouns matching their everyday gender identities.

**Author Positionality and Potential Biases**

Standpoint theory focuses on the positionality of ones lived experiences and how those experiences help them interpret their realities based on epistemic privilege or the ability to notice or “see” things that others may not (Collins, 1989; Smith, 1997; Harding
2004; Hekman 1997). For example, my status as a non-binary, queer person of color, in my mid-twenties who previously participated in drag, grants me entry into the participants lived experiences as a result of our shared identities. This adds benefits and biases to this research. Every single one of my interviewees had a queer identity, which we shared.

Researchers recount the number of ways they had to prove themselves to the performers by in When the girls are Men, a behind the scenes article from their ethnography The Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret. They talk about having to put up with misogyny from the participants as well as having to dress as men in drag in order to understand the experience. Taylor and Rupp (2003) describe how their research process included negotiating power with the drag queens. Research acknowledged that, as academics, they had certain privileges that the drag performers did not have, but that they saw certain interactions with the drag performers as “leveling processes” because their participants occasionally enacted male dominance through performance. For example, Taylor and Rupp were regularly incorporated and included into the performances, including having their tops pulled down or having their pubic areas groped by the drag queens as a form of entertainment for the audience. They let the drag queens do these things despite their inappropriateness, because they viewed it as a leveling process that equalized power because it diminished their own status while increasing their participants’ status, at least situationally.

While gaining access to minority communities has proven to be challenging, I did not encounter many of the gatekeeping strategies researchers Taylor and Rupp described above in a gay-male (mostly cisgender) spaces, nor did I have to experience humiliating
sexual attention in order to enact a “leveling process.” I am a nonbinary person of color in my early twenties and I have experience performing in drag as both king and queen. In addition to presenting as nonbinary, I additionally revealed these identity characteristics to my participants in our initial conversations. A significant portion of my participants identified as people of color and whose everyday gender identity was not binary (See Table 2 for sample characteristics), and many were also similarly in their early-to-mid-twenties. These similarities, and the fact that I have experience participating in drag, meant that many of my participants likely felt more comfortable talking with me about sensitive topics that related their experiences, such as experiencing violence as a queer person, difficulties in coming out as queer and the difficulties within the local drag communities.

Of course, it is also possible that my own experiences may have caused me to presume things about their experiences that are unique to me. In other words, my similar positionality to many participants had advantages but also introduced the possibility of bias on my part. Additionally, several participants did not share as many identity characteristics with me, which may have caused different experiences. For example, these participants may not have felt quite as comfortable speaking with me if we had racial, gender, or age differences, although they were likely more comfortable speaking with me than they would have been if speaking to an interviewer who did not share a queer identity at all. My positionality allows me to see certain things more clearly, while obscuring other things that could more easily be seen by researchers with different
Weaknesses of the Study

One weakness of this study is the limited sample size and relative lack of racial diversity. Ideally, I would have liked to have a greater number of persons of color in order to draw stronger conclusions about their experiences. However, the lack of racial diversity within some of these communities, echoed the overall demographics of the areas, such that Northern Nevada interviewees were more likely to be White, while interviewees from Central California were more likely to be Black, Latinx, and/or of Asian descent. Future research should focus on sampling techniques that more effectively recruit POCs, to make sure that the diversity across and within these groups is properly accounted for.

Findings

Below, I outline my findings. I first describe participants’ experiences and understandings of safety regarding place (small towns vs. ordinary cities) as well as space (queer spaces within these communities), finding that participants who identified as POC who lived in smaller towns were less likely to experience race-based exclusion than those who lived in ordinary cities, a finding I attribute to the racial makeup of the smaller towns. I then turn to the experiences of participants of color, analyzing their experiences of race-based inclusion and/or exclusion. Finally, I outline the experiences of the three drag kings in my sample, who all experienced exclusion, regardless of place or space.

Safety in Places and Spaces

When asked to talk about their experiences of safety, 15 (83.3%) of all participants reported at least one instance of feeling safe while 11 (61.1%) of participants
reported at least one instance of feeling unsafe. These concepts are not mutually exclusive. Thus, of these, 10 (55.56%) participants reported both, meaning that they reported at least one instance of feeling safe and at least one instance of feeling unsafe.

Two participants (11%) did not discuss safety at all in their interviews. Although these general statistics are informative, for the purposes of my research questions it is crucial to understand the contexts – particularly in terms of place(s) and space(s) – that were associated with feeling safe or unsafe. Below, my findings regarding safety are organized into two sub-sections. The first sub-section focuses on experiences of safety in references to place by comparing the experiences of participant in ordinary cites versus those in small towns. It is important to differentiate between how participants perceive safety within the places they live and how participants perceive safety within the spaces that they perform because it informs us on how drag performers in ST’s and OC’s navigate issues of safety within OCs and STs. Thus, the second sub-section focuses on experiences of safety in reference to queer spaces within STs and OCs.

**Safety in Places**

When asked about their experiences of safety specifically in reference to place, 14 (77.7%) of participants reported at least once instance of feeling safe in the places they live, while 10 (55.56%) of participants reported feeling unsafe. Of these participants, eight (44.4%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling both safe and at least one instance of feeling unsafe. When asked about safety in relation to places, 9 (90%) of participant’s in OCs reported having at least one instance of feeling safe in performance spaces, while 7 (70%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling unsafe. Of these, 6 (60%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling safe and at least one
instance of feeling unsafe in reference to place. When asked about safety in relation to places, 5 (62.5%) of participant’s in STs reported having at least one instance of feeling safe in performance spaces, while 3 (37.5%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling unsafe. Of these, 2 (25%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling safe and at least one instance of feeling unsafe in reference to place. 2 (25%) of the participants did not discuss safety in relation to place. These statistics not only help visualize how participants perceive safety in the places in they live, but they are helpful in understanding how participants navigate issues of safety within these places.

Several of the respondents reported feeling either “comfortable” or “supported” about living in their current Ordinary Cities. For example, Finn/Starlet said, “I feel comfortable walking downtown in drag at night by myself…I don't feel uncomfortable anywhere.” Similarly, Greyson/Yeti said “I feel safer up here in [current OC] than I did in [previous place] …it’s a smaller [place] and [smaller places] kind of have a stereotype of, if you're gay in a smaller town…it’s not gonna be that great for you.” Finally, Ian /Linda said, “I've gotten a lot of great support from the straight community and I have a lot of straight friends that they give me a ton of support and are really into [Drag].” Here we see that feeling safe has had a positive impact on these performers and has been essential in developing and maintaining relationships with non-queer folks in the drag scene.

Greyson/Yeti who is a White cis-man says that he feels safer living in their current OC opposed to when he was living in Las Vegas (which would be a Great City, per Stone, 2018). Greyson/Yeti recalls a being a target of a hate crime while he was talking home from work. He expresses the frustration he felt at the time by stating that he
played out his workday in his mind and was only able to note that maybe it was his
dancing that was perceived as “gay.” He went on to describe his work attire, mentioning
that he was not wearing anything that could have announced his sexual orientation to
those around him.

I was a waiter …in Las Vegas, and, I had been gay bashed on my way home. So the whole shtick [at the restaurant], [was] when certain songs come on, the waiters get on top of the tables and start dancing or they'll lead line dances during dinner… So, one night, and I'm guessing they- this group of guys had picked up on [my sexuality] from [my] dancing…. They waited for me to get off, it was[close], so I didn't see a point in driving. [As] I was walking… and all of a sudden, this Ford Bronco comes barreling out of the shopping center and they just hit me. And, uh, the only thing I remember is [someone yelling], "this is what you get you effing faggot."

Continuing, Greyson/Yeti explained,

I was kind of in shock. And I was, like, I didn't feel I had any, like, tell signs of my sexuality, but, [my dancing] is the only thing I could think of… I don't really feel like it matters if you are screaming gay, or if you're just like trying to get through work. Not really letting anybody know about your sexuality, people are going to target you no matter what. So, it- it doesn't really bother me dressing up in drag anymore 'cause after that experience, I was like, you know what, I was wearing my Joe's Crab Shack shirt, black Dickey's, and black shoes.

Even though Greyson/Yeti’s clothes did not signal in any way that he is gay, he was still a victim of a hate crime. This example works to contextualize that levels of violence though already heightened for queer folk, these threats to safety may be more present in larger places.

Compared to the participants in Ordinary Cities,12 (or 66%) of the participants from small towns reported “confident” or “unstoppable” in reference to safety. For example, Patrick/Janet says “I've gone to work in drag a few times and…. I've always gotten like positive feedback for it.” Similarly, Harrison/Tina says “I legit can go into a
gas station with a full face of makeup and not think twice about it. [I] walk in everywhere being like, "I'm unstoppable. You can't touch me." Finally, Sandra/Jimmy, who is a Bisexual black drag king who is married to a white man, notes that her feelings of safety seem to be more tied to race than her gender presentation, saying “Oh, I feel- feel pretty good, actually. Like, it's ... You know, the- the- the hard part for me is... we're an interracial couple, you know, so, of course, we still get stares.” In other words, although she is comfortable being a queer person in her small town, Sandra/Jimmy is often made to feel uncomfortable when she notices people staring at her and her husband. I will discuss the issue of racial inclusion/exclusion in greater detail below. These excerpts illustrate that ST participants felt safe living in their small towns as queer people in and out of drag.

Safety in Spaces

When asked about safety in relation to spaces, 12 (66%) of all participants reported having at least one instance of feeling safe in performance spaces, while 8 (44.4%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling unsafe. Of these, 6 (33.3%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling safe and at least one instance of feeling unsafe in performance spaces. Four (22.2%) of the participants did not discuss safety in relation to queer spaces. When asked about safety in relation to spaces, 8 (80%) of participant’s in OCs reported having at least one instance of feeling safe in performance spaces, while 5 (50%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling unsafe. Of these, 3 (30%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling safe and at least one instance of feeling unsafe in performance spaces. Three (30%) of the participants did not discuss safety in relation to queer spaces. When asked about safety in
relation to spaces, 5 (62.5%) of participant’s in STs reported having at least one instance of feeling safe in performance spaces, while 1 (12.5%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling unsafe. Of these, 2 (25%) participants reported at least one instance of feeling safe and at least one instance of feeling unsafe in performance spaces. Two (25%) of the participants did not discuss safety in relation to queer spaces.

Some OC respondents reported feeling “threatened” or “endangered” in queer spaces despite feeling safe on the general place level. For example, Ian/Linda describes a situation in which he felt unsafe, saying, “I mean we at one time, this wasn't even that long ago, we were at 5 Star and we went, uh, we went out back for a minute to smoke a cigarette, um, and this car drove up through the alley and said he was gonna fucking shoot and kill everybody.” Similarly, Eric/Jenna discusses that the event Ian/Linda described above changed how they viewed safety: “I used to feel safe here doing drag… with recent things that have happened, no, I don't feel entirely safe.” Finally, Louis/Angela, who was also present during my interview with Eric/Jenna, added that prior to the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, FL, no one would take threats like that seriously, “…you didn't actually feel like you were in danger like somebody who's going to actually hurt you until that incident….That night changed a lot for a lot of us.”

Eric/Jenna said:

…we were huddled there. And I mean, Pulse in Orlando, you know, it's been two years. Um, one of our close drag friends who is basically like my drag step-mom, um, was having an anxiety attack because she, like lost friends at the Pulse shooting. So, I immediately let us up here and shut the doors behind us. And we just sat up here and like, I held her while she cried. And, um, they ... someone told us later that they said that the police had found him or caught him, um, and that he did have gun in his car. I guess, in a nutshell.
Reflecting on the June 12th 2016, Pulse Nightclub shooting, participants note that this is the first time that they truly thought about their safety within their local queer spaces.

Although, the majority of ST participants reported feeling safe in the contexts of queer spaces, one participant reported feeling unsafe. Quinn/Charlie is a drag king from Turlock, CA, who initially began her drag career in Stockton, which is a 45-minute drive from Turlock. When asked why she would drive 45 minutes north of her town to perform, Quinn/Charlie reported that having non-performers in the dressing rooms has made her feel uncomfortable in addition to a threatening environment. “[This one person] hangs out in the dressing room and is kinda creepy... Like I've been there when there's been fights, and like cops [are] called and stuff…” Additionally, the bar that Quinn/Charlie speaks of is located in an area near the south end of the town, which Quinn/Charlie describes as unsafe and isolated. As Quinn/Charlie explained, “if something were to go down here, I don't know if I'd be [safe].” Regardless of where participants were from, they mention being able to navigate instances of when their safety has been at risk. Participants also mention that while they enjoy performing in drag, they have to remain vigilant and take extra precautions in order to maintain their safety.

**Racial Inclusion and Exclusion**

My findings regarding POC participants’ experiences of racial inclusion suggest that many experienced tokenism (Yoder, Aniakudo, & Berendsen, 1996; Stroshine, & Brandl, 2011). Racial inclusion as a means of exclusion, or in other words tokenisms disguised as racial inclusion, is a common theme throughout the experiences of many of the participants. As described above 9 participants identified as white, 3 identified as Latinx, 2 identified as African-American or Black, 2 identified as Asian or Asian and
white, 1 identified as middle-eastern and 1 identified as biracial. In other words, half of the participants in the overall study were persons of color. Among participants in small towns, 7 (38.8%) were persons of color. Of these, 1 person (or 5%) reported experiences of racial exclusion. Among participants in ordinary cities, 2 (or 11%) were persons of color. Of these, 1 (or 50%) participant reported experiences of racial exclusion.

Furthermore, 4 (40%) of the white participants from the ordinary cites reported that they had observed racial exclusion toward drag performers of color, particularly by noting that White queens are more frequently booked than queens of color. In comparison, one (12.5%) of white participants from small towns reported that they had observed racial exclusion toward drag performers of color. These numbers suggest that POC participants from small towns were less likely than POC participants from ordinary cities to experience racial inclusion, though I cannot be certain of this, given the small sample size. Below, I center on the experiences of the two participants who describe racial exclusion, Finn/Starlet and Sandra/Jimmy I then focus on how several white participants described seeing racial exclusion.

For example, Finn/Starlet, who is a Black gay gender non-conforming drag queen, moved to their current OC from a small town in Michigan where they first started doing drag. Finn/Starlet describes their first time being exposed to the drag scene at the age 15. Being that Finn/Starlet and their sister shared many physical similarities, that allowed Finn/Starlet to use their sister’s I.D. in order to sneak into the bars in the area. Finn/Starlet laughed as they said all of this because they were able to get away with taking the I.D. by convincing their sister that she dropped it somewhere. While telling the
story of how they were able to sneak into the local bars, Finn/Starlet describes their ST in Michigan in detail, noting that

it's not very big at all. It's [similar] like [Nv OC], the tourism, and, you know, all the little festivals, and stuff like that, you know, the college, like, but it's just, like, that big [demonstrated by making a small circle with their hand*] and it's, like, predominately white, Christian, so [being queer] it wasn't really talked about or advertised, or anything like that. If, if ... and if you wanted any of that, you had to go to, like [nearby towns]

Moreover, Finn/Starlet described their ST as rural, sparse, and unwelcoming of queer folks. Finn/Starlet was able to find a gay bar in a nearby town, and although this bar was far away from their hometown, the negative attitudes toward queer folks followed.

Finn/Starlet would often make the journey to the nearby town to seek belonging and comfort at its gay bar. Happy to have a place to be able to let loose, Finn/Starlet noted the inconvenience of the bar's distance and its hostile environment. Police were constantly called to the bar after “gay nights” and found themselves having to control the locals and bar patrons. Eventually, the city ordered the bar stop hosting “gay nights” because the hostility was getting to be too much for police to handle. Finn/Starlet explained:

> These country bumkins, you know, [Hillbilly]assholes would wait outside the club after 2:00 o'clock and, you know, do their hate crime, beat fags, you know what I mean? .... The police were there every single Tuesday after the bar [closed] and they just stopped having [gay nights] because it was... costing the city a lot of money to have all those police there to safeguard all the gay people as they were getting in their cars or walking back to their dorms or whatever, you know what I mean? They're- all trying to go out and have fun and meet other gay people in the community, but then we have to worry about running to our car and protecting ourselves, you know what I mean, or catchin' the taxi from ... that's, like, three blocks away...that's not fair....

As Finn/Starlet spoke about their experiences acclimating to the night life and essentially dressing as their sister in order to gain access to the bar scene, they mentioned that
resident drag queens approached them on the first night out and invited Finn/Starlet back to perform the following week. Excited at the invitation, Finn/Starlet agreed to come back the following week to perform. With that, Finn/Starlet became a regular cast member at the bar in the small town in Michigan. Further into the conversation Finn/Starlet mentioned that the queens needed “more black girls” as a part of the show. Finn/Starlet does not state that they felt tokenized at this time, instead they playfully hinted at this being a positive thing for them at the time.

Aria Felicity is the one that was just like, "No, we need more black girls, we need more black girls, get your ass in here," and I'm like, "Oh, ah, ah, okay." (Laughs), so she kinda, like, kicked my butt into it. And I would go stay the night at her house on the weekends and... would help me make my own clothes. Like, taught me how to measure myself and what materials to buy.

Finn/Starlet credits these drag queens for showing them the ropes and introducing them to the drag scene. Given that this was the first time Finn/Starlet became a regular cast member in a show, this opened up the doors for creativity and eventually opportunity to leave Michigan presented itself.

In 2006 Finn/Starlet moved to Nevada where they continued their passion for drag, this move came with new opportunities. Finn/Starlet was able to put together a mixed drag troupe of kings and queens that eventually became a popular show to the point that, according to Finn/Starlet, underage audience members were sneaking in to catch the show. Finn’s/Starlet’s group found a regular venue, that is now rebranded, to performed at. After spending some time establishing themselves in Nevada they made the decision to move back to Michigan for a while before returning to Nevada. When Finn/Starlet moved back to the Nevada OC from Michigan for the second time, they
noted that the drag scene had grown and changed. Finn’s/Starlet’s once regular venue was now closed, and Finn/Starlet found themselves performing with a new group of drag performers at the only gay bar located in the downtown area. The growth of Finn’s/Starlet’s OC brought more queer establishments; the first one they noticed was another gay venue that opened up down the street from the downtown venue where they were re-established.

Though they have enjoyed their time being a drag performer, Finn/Starlet says that it hasn’t come without conflict. Finn/Starlet expressed that for them the worst part about being a drag performer has been the way they have been treated by other drag performers in addition to being racially excluded at shows. Likewise, Finn/Starlet expressed that while they do feel represented within their drag community to an extent, the representation that queens of color receive at shows comes off as a form of tokenism. Finn/Starlet further explained that the representation or visibility that queens of color often receive is out of convenience. Finn expresses their frustrations with the struggle of being a drag queen of color living in their majority white OC. Speaking to the culture of racial tokenism that has developed as a way to emphasize diversity, Finn/Starlet said that its often difficult to plan a performance without one of the white queens making a comment about their race. For example, Finn/Starlet says that before each show, the queen who are scheduled to performer have a meeting a week in advance. This is to make sure they don’t wear the same outfits or perform the same songs, in addition to other productions (i.e. special guest, contests, etc.). Furthermore, Finn/Starlet articulates their experiences of being put on a pedestal on one night to being policed for wanting to perform music by white signers on another night.
The following excerpt outlines Finn’s/Starlet’s experience in one of the planning meetings:

…all the Caucasian queens all do white girl music, you know what I mean, and then, like, almost every time we have a meeting, …a couple of weeks before our show, you know, so that we can, you know, get music and setup group numbers, somebody's always like, "Oh, you should do this number because it's a black girl. You're the only black girl, so you should do this, it's an obligation to make it a point to say, "Hey [so and so] is the only [ethnic] queen," 'cause all the rest of 'em are white, they [do]... with [other queens of color]. I mean, like, yes, we're represented, but I don't feel like we're wholeheartedly represented like the Caucasian queens. Like, we're represented because it's something that they feel they have to do because we're minority.

Finn/Starlet then brings up a specific instance of this, in which the bar where they and other queens often perform at, hosted an event titled “The Night of a thousand Xtinas,” an homage to the singer Christina Aguilera and her fashion versatility. As part of this event, the drag queens scheduled to perform that night prepared Christina Aguilera numbers and dressed in Christina inspired outfits. However, when it came to Finn’s turn to perform, a white drag queen, who she often had disagreements with, pulled them aside to inform them that they were not allowed to perform the Christina number they had prepared because Finn/Starlet was black while Christina Aguilera was not. This wasn’t the first time Finn had this argument with the same queen, but it was the first time the other queen had interrupted Finn’s number over this. Finn/Starlet was still able to perform their number despite the interruption. for a handful of queens who host some of the other drag shows in the Nevada OC. Furthermore, Finn/Starlet mentions that anytime there has been a drag performer that doesn’t fit the “mold” of what the majority of the local performers like, they are often forced out of the community.
Not only does Finn/Starlett state that they have seen exclusion of other queens of color but that this had happened to drag kings as well.

Back in the day, we had Little City Kings, which was a group of, like, seven or eight drag kings,…Mel, she's the one that ran Little City Kings, and it was just like, um, the queens of Q bar, and-like, I left and was gone for three years, went back to Michigan and then I came back, and, like, there's no drag kings anywhere. But that is part of [specific drag queens] pushing people out because we did have one drag king and all of us loved havin' him there, 'cause then that opens up a plethora of music for us because then we can do duets and stuff…but the one drag king we had [was pushed] out, [and] made…feel like he wasn't as good as us or deserved what we got. Just made him feel like shit, so he stopped performing…”

Finn/Starlett mentions that exclusion was not only aimed at the drag queens of color but also toward the drag kings in the community. Finn/Starlett’s comments help contextualize the lack of drag kings in the ordinary city sample, noting the negativity that is often aimed at drag kings.

On the other hand, Sandra/Jimmy who is a black, bisexual drag king living in a small town shares what it is like to be the only black drag king in her community. When asked whether Sandra/Jimmy felt represented in her community, she responded by saying she is the representation. When asked to elaborate on what she meant by this, Sandra/Jimmy discusses her positionality as the only black drag performer it is her responsibility to preserve representation of black drag kings in her community.

Sandra/Jimmy shares her first time performing at the local pride celebrations where she dressed as Prince for her number. During the performance, Sandra/Jimmy catches a glimpse of a young girl in the audience:

I remember there was this kid, probably about, like, I don't know, like 14 or so, and she basically was, like, so in awe that somebody of color was doing drag ... I think that for people around this area, they're not trying to, you know, look up to everybody in LA. They want somebody that's a little bit closer to home and somebody that looks like them, you know?
Sandra/Jimmy uses this instance as way to explain what she means by feeling responsible, she also emphasizes at the importance of visibility and inclusion of drag kings and people of color. Sandra/Jimmy adds that she understands that not everyone has the privilege of being an out and open bisexual drag king, however, she does note she wishes there were more people who did drag that look like her.

I mean, there are not many people like me, unfortunately…that are doing drag, especially within the Black community, it's just ... You know, it- it's hard enough for people to come out to their families, and then doing drag is a whole 'nother level... It just kind of makes me sad because as much as I appreciate, like, everybody that does drag, you know, no matter what the race and everything, I think that it'd be nicer if there were more people of color that did drag.

Additionally, Sandra/Jimmy discusses how her race isn’t necessarily the main issue when it comes to drag, however, she does note that being a black person living in her small town has had some challenges. Sandra/Jimmy is married to her husband Joe who is a tall white man. She describes that often while out doing errands with her husband she will notice people staring at them or hear comments people make about them. For example, Sandra/Jimmy has green eyes and wears glasses, she is often asked if her eye color is real. She says that racial microaggressions like these happen often. She says that these comments are often masked as curiosity. Sandra/Jimmy makes the comparison between being a black bi-racial person in the Midwest to her small town in California and reports saying that microaggressions back in the Midwest are worse than the ones in her small town.

In the following paragraphs I additionally choose to include instances in which white performers report and discuss observing racial inclusion/exclusion within their
communities. I choose to include these narratives because they are firsthand accounts of how explicit racial exclusion is apparent for performers of color. Stacy/Kylie, who identifies as a white and as a bio-queen, notes that there has been a long-time controversy over race within the drag community in Reno, and that recently a queen of color had voiced his grievances over the way queens of color are treated in the community.

There's this whole thing happening right now that's just, it's a big fight in our community that's just been nuts. But part of it comes from that one of the participants [who is] Latino, and he's [voicing] the things that are bothering him. And the other part of it is the white queens [who are uncomfortable] talking about this, and [say to him] 'you shouldn't feel like this and you shouldn't...' so it's this big fight that's happening... I think a lot of it is [that's] just always the way it's been done.

Stacy/Kylie acknowledges this problematic way of thinking because it ignores the core issue that is that thin white men are more easily accepted in the community compared to people of color. She mentioned an influx of new drag performers in the area who are white, noting that those drag performers have been booked more than the queens of color who have been involved for years:

I mean it's also kind of weird because there are girls who are new, since the time I've been here, who are white who have been asked to perform a lot. And there are queens of color who have been around for a while who don't [get] asked that much. I know that we're working on um... or at least my house is working on putting on a show with only queens of color.

Stacy/Kylie is able to note that while there have been POC who have been performing in her OC for some time, they have been looked over in exchange for the white newcomers. Noting this, Stacy/Kylie mentions that her “house” is working on putting together a show that will center and feature drag performers of color in order to combat the racial exclusion that is perpetuated by other white performers.
Another participant, Ian/Linda, who is also white and identifies as a drag queen, states that participating in drag as a white male is a different lived experience than it is for a person of color. Ian/Linda goes on to explain how important it is for white performers to be more aware of their privilege and how it affects others, saying “I think more white male performers need to take note and need to really work on their perspective and how they view their experience with other people.” By being aware of the power structures at play, white performers can help by supporting queens of color by advocating for them to be included.

**Exclusion of Drag Kings**

Only three interviewees of the overall sample identified as drag kings, but all three reported instances of exclusion. Two of the three drag kings in the study are from small towns, while the third is from an ordinary city. Although the number of drag kings in this study makes it difficult to make generalizations beyond my sample, it is worth capturing their experiences of exclusion because drag kings in largely drag queen dominated spaces has not been discussed in the existing literature. This finding that was additionally supported by a number of drag queens who reported observing the exclusion of drag kings, often noting that drag kings had been pushed out of LGBTQ communities.

One of the small town drag kings expressed that she felt excluded from the drag community because her drag aesthetic did not conform to the popular drag aesthetic in her community. Sandra/Jimmy, who is a biracial, bisexual drag king, moved to California from the mid-west in the early 2000’s for school. Sandra/Jimmy reflects on what it was like during that time period when there wasn’t much exposure of local drag shows or even mentions of drag performers. Sandra’s first introduction to drag was though theater
in college. She notes that the parts she played were not inherently drag performance, but that the art of playing male roles had peaked her curiosity for the practice of playing male characters. Moreover, Sandra recounts the first time she was exposed to RuPaul’s Drag Race, and how excited she felt when she saw drag queens on T.V. for the first time. “I was like ‘This is just so magical. How do I be a part of this?’ I then thought, ‘Man, this is super-cool that there could be, like, a male version of it as well too.’” [transition sentence].

The fact that that RuPaul’s Drag race has always centered on gay cis-men, as described previously, was a cause of confusion for Sandra/Jimmy. On one hand she adored the drag queens and wanted to be like them, but on the other, she received the message that there is no room for performers like her. Moreover, Sandra’s/Jimmy’s curiosity grew to the point that she began to search for the slightest representation of women in drag anywhere and everywhere. She eventually came across drag king troupes online. She found this interesting because her introduction to drag was centered on an individualistic view than a cast one. For Sandra/Jimmy, this was an added plus to the fact that there wasn’t just one other drag king but that a group of them existed. As Sandra/Jimmy spent more time trying to find drag kings who she could meet, she was asked to be a part of a cast for the local gay bar. Because of Sandra’s/Jimmy’s interest in theater, her friend Toni asked Sandra/Jimmy to be a part of the cast. Over the years, Sandra, as Jimmy, has been able to meet other drag kings who are more local to her than those she initially discovered. During this interview, Sandra/Jimmy was in the process of getting ready for a performance in an all kings show hosted by another drag king from Sacramento.
Quin/Charlie from Turlock was the other small town king. Quin/Charlie expresses that even though there is a nearby town that has queer bars that offer drag shows, she often felt out of place just as a bar patron. This town is located about 15 minutes from where she lives that has three queer bars and two of the three bars often host drag shows. However, Charlie noted that her/his drag aesthetic did not “fit in” with those drag performers, explaining:

I don't really feel like even just to go there and watch a show and hang out...like, I just feel kind of out of place there. And I feel like there, the performers,... kinda have a similar style, and it tends to be like kinda similar makeup, similar costuming, um, it's a lot of kinda... high energy...dance stuff...Um, but a lot, there's also some of them that like can't really deliver a lip sync...I'd much rather just see someone who can really deliver like a really emotional moving lip sync. [Even] if they don't move at all. Like I just don't feel like it's really my style... I think just like being in the [Stanislaus] area, your access to like...really weird, bizarre, strange drag, [is limited] and there's just like not a lot of that here.

Because of this Quin/Charlie would travel 45 minutes north to another small town in the next county over where she felt more welcomed and where there was a variety of different styles of drag. Although, she was welcomed with open arms at the other bar, she expressed that drag was often isolating because of the time spent traveling alone:

I think drag can be, at least for me, it was often like a really lonely endeavor 'cause I was often driving places by myself because they're like on weird nights or weird hours—And my other friends with...grown up jobs- Can't [come], I've had like a really flexible work schedule,... so it kind of allowed me to go off and do this stuff.... I got kind of burnt out on it. Just like always going everywhere by myself.

Quin/Charlie followed this up by describing her community as “dispersed” because she meets a lot of people who live in San Francisco and Los Angeles. but she is not easily able to maintain those connections because of distance. Quin/Charlie says that because of
this, it limits her ability to grow as a performer because of the distance away from others who share a similar aesthetic.

And so much of like what you learn as a performer is like bouncing your energy and ideas off of other people, and it's like, you know I was, you know, I had been performing with that group up in Stockton for like a year or two. I just, I kind of felt, I just felt like what I was doing was so different...Like they were really supportive, but I just felt really limited with how much I could grow there.

Quin's/Charlie’s aesthetic can be described as a mixture between Punk and Club kid (footnote) styles of drag. Quin's/Charlie’s main influences stem from pop icons from the early 80’s and 90’s, because of this Quin/Charlie feels that,

... i'ts just I'm kind of out here on my own. I'm just not sure how to keep progressing...as a performer. And it’s hard just always kind of working on routines by yourself and- and I don't really feel like there's a venue out here...but I don't really feel like I fit in with them even if people are super nice to me and stuff... I Just feel like an oddball.

Although, these feelings of exclusion are not a direct result of an individual or group of people singling her out, Quin/Charlie still felt excluded because of the available drag in the area.

This feeling of exclusion on the basis of drag king aesthetic was not unique to Quin/Charlie. Marie/Adam, a drag king from Sacramento, also expressed feelings of exclusion not only on the basis of her type of drag but also due to her body’s physiological sex traits.

The bookers and the promoters are the ones who mostly make me feel like I'm out of place. I've had a couple times where I've had a drag queen make me feel out of place... [For example] I was taping myself down and I had [a drag queen] get mad because my breasts were exposed, and you know, [They were like], "What are you doing? Why are you dr- why are you undressing in here? You shouldn't be undressing in here," and [I said] um, "Sorry?" Like for a long time I actually dressed down in the bathrooms because of it, because I didn't want to offend anybody, and even now,
before I undress, I ask, I say anything, I'm like "Is anybody gonna be offended if I undress?" But I've never, I've never seen anybody get mad at a drag queen for dropping trout and taping up... you know, there is a stigma and kind of... an unfairness to how [kings are] treated.

Marie/Adam, the only king living in an ordinary city, also spoke about their experiences with a double standard in the drag community. Often when drag performers are getting ready for a performance, they make adjustments or modifications to their bodies to convince the audience of their character. For example, cis-men who perform as drag queens will “tuck” or adjust their genitals so that their crotches appear flat, while drag kings tape their breasts down so that their chests appear flat. Marie/Adam talks about a specific instance in which she realized a double standard existed in terms of what body parts were acceptable backstage, explaining, “I was taping myself down and I had somebody get mad because my breasts were exposed, [I was met with] "What are you doing? Why are you undressing in here? You shouldn't be undressing in here." To avoid feeling awkward, Marie/Adam resorted to getting ready in the bar bathrooms instead of in the backstage areas where drag queens got ready:

Like for a long time I actually dressed down in the bathrooms because of it, because I didn't want to offend anybody, and even now, before I undress, I ask. I say anything, I'm like "Is anybody gonna be offended if I undress?" But I've never, I've never seen anybody get mad at a drag queen for dropping trou and taping up, and I've never, you know, there is a stigma and kind of, oh, what do you call it, an unfairness to how we're treated.

Marie/Adam believes that club promoters booking drag queens more often than drag kings because they think drag kings don’t put as much effort into preparing for a show and/or that they do not bring in large crowds compared to drag queens. When asked if she felt represented within the drag community, Marie/Adam responds by saying that, at first,
not she did not, and that she had to fight to make a place for herself in her local drag community.

I kinda made…them accept me. And even now, being accepted, I'm accepted as a drag king, but I'm not accepted for the type of drag king I am…I'm not your typical drag king. I don't…wear suits for certain numbers… I don't like to wear suits[at all], and I like to have a mohawk, and I like to wear leather, and I like combat boots and I like rock music, and when I do competitions, I do things that are more oriented to being emotional and things that are more rock-oriented, and it kinda scares the community…

Marie/Adam expressed here that her type of drag style is so different that she perceives it as “scaring” the community. It’s interesting that, despite noting a double standard regarding who is and isn’t allowed to be naked while getting ready, while she feels accepted as a drag performer, she does not feel that her drag aesthetic is accepted by the community, saying

I feel accepted as a drag king, but I don't fully feel accepted because of the type of person I am [in my everyday life], if that makes any sense…I don't really see a whole lot of gay punks out there…you hear about them in straight culture. (laughs)

Marie/Adam’s feelings about not feeling fully accepted relate to those feeling expressed by both Quinn/Charlie and Sandra/Jimmy in that they have felt responsible in making people accept them for the type of drag performers they are. Both drag kings and performers who are persons of color share similar feelings in that they must make space for themselves in the local drag scenes as well as working twice as hard to be accepted into a scene dominated by white cis-gendered men.

Discussion and Conclusion

Rural towns and small cities are not typically perceived as welcoming or safe environments for LGBTQ people. However, many LGBTQ people do live in rural towns
and smaller cities, but their experiences are not well-represented in the sociological literature. In this study, I interview 18 drag performers from Ordinary Cities (OC) and Small Towns (ST), examining their experiences of safety and inclusion. My findings show that drag performers in OCs are more likely to feel unsafe within the queer spaces in their communities, compared to drag performers from STs. Additionally, participants of color in both ordinary cities and small towns reported experiences of tokenism and racial exclusion. Finally, I find that all three of the drag kings I interviewed, from both STs and OCs, reported experiencing exclusion from local drag communities. Below, I describe these findings in greater detail.

In terms of safety by place, the participants from the Ordinary Cities generally felt safe in their current places of residence as compared to their previous places of residence. However, these participants often described themselves as feeling unsafe in and around queer spaces within their OCs. Specifically, this occurred in areas of the OCs where queer bars are within walking distances of each other. These areas were places where people were more likely to heckle and pester drag performers as they walked between venues and these areas were thought to be easy targets for anti-LGBTQ hate crimes.

Participants of color often felt proud to contribute to the representation of performers of color within their communities. However, the intersections of drag performance identity and race/ethnicity caused participants to feel tokenized and/or feel responsible for representing their race/ethnicity within the drag community. This demonstrates that even in seemingly racially diverse LGBTQ+ communities, drag performers of color can still experience exclusion. Notably, the participants from small towns were more likely to be persons of color, and only one of these participants
described experiences of exclusion and tokenism. On the other hand, only two participants from the Ordinary Cities were persons of color, and one of these similarly described experiences of exclusion and tokenism. This suggests that drag performers of color living in small towns may be relatively less likely to experience exclusion and tokenism. However, given the small sample size, this possibility cannot be claimed with certainty and should be pursued in future research.

Finally, my data revealed that all three of the drag kings in my sample experienced exclusion that they felt was tied to their performance identities as kings. More specifically, my findings suggest that although kings may feel generally included overall in the drag community, they identify that differences in performance style and creative interests do make them feel excluded. This included drag kings living in ordinary cities as well as kings living in small towns. These drag kings provided a point of view on drag that is not often included in the broader narrative. Because the experiences of drag kings are rarely included in the broader sociological literature, my findings are a valuable contribution. However, again, given my small sample size, this should be pursued in future research.

Given the lack of research on LGBTQ+ people living in small cities, this study helps fill a meaningful gap in the extant sociological literature. Indeed, this is the first study, to my knowledge, that qualitatively examines the experiences of drag performers living in small towns. In addition to the findings I describe above, this work also provides support for future studies on drag performers and other LGBTQ+ people living outside of “metronormative” communities.
References


Schacht & Underwood, eds. The Drag Queen Anthology (Harrington Park Press, 2004).


**Table 1. Sample Description (N = 18)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cis women</td>
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<td>African American/Black</td>
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<td>Asian</td>
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<tr>
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<td>US$100,000 – US$124,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aaron/Deb</td>
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<tr>
<td>April/Victory</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad/Rose</td>
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<td>Ruth/Kylie</td>
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<td>Eric/Jenna</td>
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<td>Finn/Starlet</td>
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<td>Grayson/Yeti</td>
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<td>Harrison/Tina</td>
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<td>Ian/Linda</td>
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<td>Jacob/Angela</td>
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<td>Keith/Britney</td>
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<td>Luke/Holly</td>
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<td>Owen/Bebe</td>
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<td>Patrick/Janet</td>
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<td>Quin/Charlie</td>
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<td>Marie/Adam</td>
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</table>
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

UNR RESEARCH STUDY ON DRAG QUEENS AND KINGS 18+

My name is Dr. Kjerstin Gruys. I am an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Nevada, Reno. My graduate student, Steph Landeros and I are researching the cultural experiences, perspectives, and stories of drag performers 18 and older. I am conducting in-person 1-on-1 interviews with eligible participants. If you are interested in being interviewed, please contact me at:

Questions You May Have

What is this study about?
This research is about the cultural experiences, perspectives, and stories of drag performers in rural/urban areas.

Who is eligible to participate in this study?
We are currently recruiting people who are drag performers 18 years of age or older. People of all sexual orientations and gender identities are welcome to participate.

What does my participation in this study involve?
If you agree to be part of the study, I will interview you at a time and location of your choosing. Each interview will last anywhere from 45-90 minutes.

What if I change my mind about participating?
Your participation in this project is voluntary, and all data are kept confidential. You may change your mind about participating before the interview, and during the interview you can also skip any questions you’d rather not answer. You may also stop at any time, without penalty, even in the middle of the interview. You may ask us any questions about this study at any time during the process, including after the interview has ended.

What are the benefits of participating?
Your contribution in this research will help others better understand the experience of diverse gender presentation and performance. Additionally, you will get the opportunity to express your thoughts, feelings, and opinions on a variety of topics during the interview.

Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?
If you have questions about the study, including your eligibility to participate, how to schedule an interview, or how to request additional information, you may contact:

Dr. Kjerstin Gruys
kgruys@unr.edu
415.802.9956
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

(Frame as interested in the experiences of drag performers)

1. General thoughts on, and involvement with LGBTQ community (Identity, Safety, Support)
   A. What you think of safety as an out LGBTQ person here in Northern Nevada what does that mean to you?
   B. Have you ever been a victim of harassment because you are LGBTQ?
      i. Yes- can you describe your experience?
      ii. No- Move on
   B. Do you feel supported by the local general community?
      i. Yes-How do you feel the most supported?
      ii. No- What makes it seem like you are not supported?
   C. Do you have a support system?
      i. Yes-Who is it?
      ii. No- Do you have resources?
   C. Who do you think are the most visible members of the LGBTQ+ community?
   D. How would you describe the LGBTQ+ community in Northern Nevada?

2. General thoughts on, and involvement with Drag community and experiences
   A. In what ways does drag highlight the LGBTQ community?
      i. Do you think members of the LGBTQ community support drag performers
         1. Yes- why
         2. No- Why?
   B. Do you think that Drag brings visibility to the gender spectrum?
      i. Yes-How so?
      ii. No- How so?
   C. How did you learned about drag?
   D. Tell me about how you got started doing drag?
      i. Was there anyone in particular that got you involved in drag?
      ii. Can you tell me about the first time you did drag?
         1. How did you feel about it before
         2. How did you feel after
   E. How long have you been a drag performer?
   F. Why do you do drag?
      A. Do you make any money doing drag?
         i. If so, about how much per event?
            1. How many events in the average month?
         ii. Is the income from drag one of the reasons you do it?
   G. What kinds of services does the drag community provide in Northern Nevada?
      i. How many times a year do you participate in non-profit work?
      ii. Why do you think drag is a popular form of charity work?
      iii. Do you think drag performers at fundraisers bring visibility to the LGBTQ+ community?
         1. Yes-How so?
         2. No- How so?
H. Taking into consideration our local environment, how does drag in Northern Nevada compare to drag in places like, San Francisco or West Hollywood?
   i. What are some obvious differences?
   ii. How would you describe the drag community of Northern Nevada?
   iii. Is there an active drag community that you know of in Southern Nevada?
   iv. Do you feel represented in the drag community in northern Nevada?
   v. How does someone get started doing drag here?

4. Okay, let’s shift our focus to the physical aspects of drag performance (Appearance/style/body image).
   A. Can you describe to me your style of drag?
   B. Since you began doing drag, how has your stage appearance changed over time?
   C. Are there times during a performance when are you particularly aware of your body?
   D. Has there ever been a time when another performer or audience member have made a comment about your body?
      a. Can you tell me about that?
      b. How did it make you feel?

5. Social networks, and relationships
   A. How has drag helped you connect with others in your local community?
   B. Can you tell me about a time when drag has intervened in your friendships?
   C. Can you tell me about a time when drag intervened in a romantic the relationship?
      a. Have you ever run into someone that wanted to be with you romantically or sexually because you are a drag queen?

6. Demographics
   What is your gender identity?
   What is your racial or ethnic identity?
   How do you describe your sexuality?
   What is your highest level of education? (High school? Associates degree? 4-year college? Grad degree?)
   Do you generally feel financially secure?
   What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?
      Less than $25,000.
      $25,000 to $34,999.
      $35,000 to $49,999.
      $50,000 to $74,999.
      $75,000 to $99,999.
      $100,000 to $149,999.
      $150,000 to $199,999.
      $200,000 or more

7. Closing the interview, is there anything you would like to add that I did not cover?
8. Can you think of anyone else who is a drag performer and might be willing to be interviewed?
### Appendix C: Consent to Participate in Research

<table>
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<th><strong>Title of Study:</strong></th>
<th>Experiences of Drag Performers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principle:</strong></td>
<td>Kjerstin Gruys, Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investigator:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-Investigators or</strong></td>
<td>Steph Landeros</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Study Contacts</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sponsor:</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

You are being asked to participate in a research study.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences and perspectives of drag performers.

**GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS:** If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed at a time and location of your choosing. Each interview will last anywhere from 45-90 minutes.

**RISKS:** There are minimal risks for participating in the study. You will be asked to share personal experiences, you may withdraw from the study with no penalty.

**BENEFITS:** Your contribution in this research will help others better understand the experiences of diverse gender presentation and performance. Additionally, you will get the opportunity to express your thoughts, feelings, and opinions on a variety of topics during the interview.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** No personally identifying information collected from you at any time, ensuring your identity will not be matched to the information you provide.

**COSTS/COMPENSATION:** There will be no cost to you (other than your time).

**RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW:** You may change your mind about participating before the interview, and during the interview you can also skip any questions you’d rather not answer. You may also stop at any time, without penalty, even in the middle of the interview.

**QUESTIONS:**

If you have additional questions at any point, contact Kjerstin Gruys (kgruys@unr.edu) or Steph Landeros (slanderos@nevada.unr.edu)

You may ask about your rights as a research subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints to the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (775) 327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o UNR Office of Human Research Protection, 205 Ross Hall / 331, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada 89557.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

/Yes

☐ No