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Don't Be a Drag, Just Be a Queen! Assessing the Popularity of Drag Queens as Opposed to Levels of Anti-Transgender Prejudice in Modern American Society

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Don't Be a Drag, Just Be a Queen!

Assessing the Popularity of Drag Queens as Opposed to Levels of Anti-Transgender Prejudice in Modern American Society

Introduction

Over the past few decades, drag queen shows have become a popular sensation among men and women, homosexuals and heterosexuals alike. On the other hand, transgender individuals are subjected to more prejudice than gays, lesbians, or bisexuals are.

Although drag queens do not intend to conceal their biological sex, some researchers classify many of these girls as transgender and gender non-conformists. What about drag queens sets them apart from anti-transgender prejudice? By understanding the factor behind this discrepancy, researchers will be better equipped to retaliate to the criticism that these individuals endure on a daily basis.



Methods

For this study, I analyzed several scholarly journal articles for research on the practices of drag queens during their performances and their appeal. I compared this analysis with research on the perception and treatment of transgenders, cross-dressers, and/or gender non-conforming individuals in heterosexually-dominant communities. To explore the aspects of drag shows that separate drag queens from this stigma, I attended a drag brunch in a local gay bar in Richmond and observed how each performance compelled audience members to question perceptions of gender and sexuality.



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Drag Queens and Transgender Stigma

Esther Tebbe and Bonnie Moradi (2012) state that cross-dressers/transgenders face adverse job outcomes, police disrespect or harassment, and severe bullying in school on a daily basis. Stacey Horn (2007) also found that among straight adolescents, cross-dressing students were rated as the least acceptable individuals.

Since drag queens are established as men who are involved with "gender transgression" (Rupp, et. al., 2011, p. 281), the stigma toward cross-dressers and transgenders contrasts the popularity that drag queens have.

Factors that are noted to contribute to the popularity of these shows include:

- Blurring stereotypes associated with different ethnicities though linguistics (Mann, 2011).
- Degrading sexuality and gender identifications through the lack of hiding biological sex (Rupp & Verta, 2005)
- Encouraging male hegemony by outdoing women in feminine behavior and expectations (Schacht & Underwood, 2004).



The Drag Show

Similar to the findings of Schacht, many of my straight male friends were uncomfortable with the idea of a drag show, and did not attend. I brought a group of all females my age, and we were left alone. However, every straight male received a kiss, a lap dance, or an exotic dance on the table. The queens did not differentiate between race, class, or age when interacting with the men, but did so with the women with regard to age, calling us younger women 'babies' and older women 'bitches', contradicting to Mann's findings. Each queen had high, arched eyebrows, and an extremely curvaceous body with unnaturally large breasts. Their bodies were not simply presented, but flaunted through graceful, lively erotic performances.

Conclusion

From both the analysis of prior research and observing the various performances at the drag brunch, I have concluded that what sets drag queens apart from most of the anti-transgender prejudice is the emphasis on hyper-femininity; in fact, the exaggerated feminine appearances are what usually draw audience members, particularly straight ones, to a drag queen. Through this exuberant female impersonation, drag queens blur barriers between different social identifications and create a new form of entertainment. The study of drag queens indicates that their performances portray a paradox between degrading gender roles and demeaning the role of females. The existence of drag queens suggest that despite the progression of women's and LGBT rights, true equality in our society will not be realized until we find new ways of identifying and relating to others.



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