Female impersonation and gender ambivalence: Does drag challenge gender norms?

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the question of whether drag, in the form of female impersonation, unsettles gender norms. Some scholars and analysts of drag performance, such as Rusty Barrett (1998), James Scott (1990), Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp (2003), argue that drag is a form of resistance to dominant gender norms. I depart from these assertions and maintain that such a perspective overlooks the complexity of drag. While it can be argued that drag highlights the performative attributes of gender (see Butler 1996), drag queens in many ways affirm the stigmatised effeminate stereotype of gay male sexuality. It is thus too simplistic to posit drag performance as either subversive or reaffirming of heteronormative gender models. Building on the insights of scholars such as Judith Butler (1990; 1996), Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), Keith McNeal (1999), Carol-Anne Tyler (2013) and Caitlin Greaf (2015), as well as drawing on some of Andre Charles RuPaul's drag race shows, I argue that drag does not aim to challenge dominant gender norms. Rather, I maintain that drag highlights the inherent ambivalence of gender generated by heteronormativity, simultaneously playing with the inconsistencies between gendered cultural paradigms and actual experience. It is in this interstice that drag performance, as an art of irony and parody, opens up possibilities for gender multiplicity.

Keywords: Drag performance, gender ambivalence, gender anxiety, gender norms, gender performance, RuPaul.

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Introduction

The main aim of this article is to explore whether female impersonation disrupts mainstream gender norms. Some scholars and analysts of drag performance, such as Rusty Barrett (1998), James Scott (1990), Matti Bunzl (2000), Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp (2006), argue that drag is an art of resistance to dominant gender norms. I depart from these assertions and maintain that such a perspective overlooks the complexity of drag. It is because of drag's complexity that no single interpretation or analysis of drag can claim a comprehensive understanding.

Before I continue with my reflections on female impersonation and its capacity to challenge heteronormative gender models, it is necessary to define the term "drag" and to demarcate the subject of my paper. Drag is a broad term and has a long history dating back to at least the thirteenth century when men and boys dressed up as women, performed on stage, and were trained to walk, talk and perform as "male transvestites". Roger Baker's (1986:51) extensive research on female impersonation and the performing arts reveal that certain forms of cross-dressing can be traced back to the dawn of theatre when the churches, whether Catholic or Protestant, prohibited the appearance of women on stage. Some scholars, such as K. Vogt (1985) and K.J. Torjesen (1996), trace the phenomenon of gender-crossing back to early Christianity, which was grounded in strict binary gender relations and gendered expectations. Torjesen (1996) refers to the martyrdom of Saint Perpetua and her slave, Felicity, who dressed as male gladiators. Other well-known historical examples of cross-dressing (female "transvestites") include Jeanne d'Arc and Pope Joan. As is evident from these few examples, binary gendered systems have long included male and female cross-dressers.

This brief historical synopsis serves to illustrate that cross-dressing comes in many forms, is complex, changes over time, and has a long-standing history. While it can be argued that such historical examples differ radically from contemporary drag, this observation could be correct because in recent years, drag saw a drastic change and widespread revival, emphasising glamour and humour through parody and self-parody (Baker 1986:159). However, it would be wrong to equate drag with homosexuality because drag is not an exclusively homosexual phenomenon . In fact, Louise Kaplan (1991:96) points out that straight male cross-dressers or transvestites markedly outnumber homosexual drag queens in demographic terms.

With this in mind, I now come to a working definition of drag and drag queens that I apply to the main focus of this paper. In the above historical synopsis, I used different

terms to refer to the tradition of dressing as the opposite sex – gender-crossing, cross-dressing, transvestism, drag, drag queens and drag kings. Although these terms are related, there are important differences between them. While all cross-dressing can be considered gender-crossing and a form of transvestism, a drag queen is different from a transvestite. A transvestite, who engages in cross-dressing, is usually considered to be a man in a private capacity, such as wearing feminine clothing underneath their exterior masculine attire, symbolising that the social behaviour and masculine clothing and sex-role behaviour are an act (Newton 2002:441). However, male transvestites do not perform femininity and can thus not be called drag queens or female impersonators. Similarly, drag queens cannot be called transvestites. Female impersonators/drag queens are biological males who wear women's couture and who publicly perform femininity in front of an audience who knows that they are "men". Schacht and Underwood (2004:4) observe that at the root of this conceptualisation of drag queens is

> the explicit recognition that the individual publicly performing femininity and being a woman is also simultaneously acknowledged to be a man and not a woman. An inevitable tension arises when one can successfully be what one is not, nor is ever supposed to be. Drag queens, like their drag king brothers, put a paradoxical spin on the notion of "to be or not to be" by demonstrating that "being" need not be an either/or proposition and that there are actually multiple ways that gender can be performed and experienced.

The above definition helps us to distinguish between drag queens and other forms of gender non-conforming individuals, such as transgender people, and emphasises that the drag queen is typically a male individual who performs exaggerated femininity in front of an audience who is aware that the performer is male-bodied. Schacht and Underwood's (2004:3-4) definition also draws our attention to the reliance of drag on heterosexual gendered systems and that female impersonators in our societies are seen as representing/performing incongruent, 'often contradictory cultural values, limitations and possibilities'. This poses the double-binded question whether female impersonation disrupts a heteronormative gender system, or whether it reaffirms the stigmatised effeminate stereotype of gay male sexuality. I explore this issue in the sections that follow.

Does female impersonation challenge mainstream gender norms?

I have chosen to discuss female impersonation and its complexities as this phenomenon brings to light three crucial aspects that are vital to gender and sexuality, which, in turn, are complexly related to social life. First, female impersonation highlights ambiguous cultural values and stereotypes of homophobic societies in which drag

queens and kings (and others) live, perform, and struggle to come to terms with their gender and sexuality (Schacht & Underwood 2004). Second, female impersonation stresses that there is no natural gender or sexuality. Poststructuralist theorists, such as Michel Foucault (1984; 1997; 2000), Jack Halberstam (2005) and Judith Butler (1990; 1996) have shown that gender and sexuality are never self-evident, determinate and stable; rather, they are ambivalent, continually interpreted, flexible, and always adaptable, which secures the survival of individuals of an ambivalent nature. Third, and with reference to the previous point, female impersonation emphasises and acts out internalised gender ambivalence created by an enforced heterosexual paradigm. Accordingly, the question remains: does female impersonation resist and effectively disrupt the heteropatriarchal binary gender system?

Scholars, such as Scott (1990), Bunzl (2000), and Taylor and Rupp (2006) argue that drag is an art of resistance that challenges heterosexual gender norms. These scholars draw on Butler's theory (1990, 1996) of the performativity of gender and the potential of drag to expose the naturalised categories of gender within a heterosexual paradigm. Taylor and Rupp (2006:15) contend that there is much to learn from drag queens, 'because the drag shows have the potential to arouse powerful desires that people perceive as contrary to their sexual identities, they have a real impact on people's thinking about the boundaries of heterosexuality'. Likewise, Bunzl (2000) maintains that drag and inverted appellation among gay men offer a disruptive critique of heterosexism through the parodic exposure of its naturalising strategies. Drawing on Butler's notion of performativity (1996), Bunzl (2000:229, 231) argues that drag

> functions as a localized strategy … effectively disrupting the normalizing reproduction of hegemonic forms … [and] much like Judith Butler's conception of politically efficacious drag – a theatricalized performance, temporarily exposing and destabilizing the injurious and arbitrary regime of heteronormativity through a resignification of the dichotomous grid of "maleness" and "femaleness" and the field of cultural narratives (such as heterosexuality) it enacts on bodily surfaces.

Bunzl (2000) makes the point that the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity is a social convention that is sustained by the heterosexist fiction of normative gender. I agree that there is no natural gender and that the heteronormative matrix of "maleness" and "femaleness" is a historical, cultural and social fabrication, as mentioned during my discussion of the concept of drag and its complexity. I also agree that hetero-normative gender stereotypes must be exposed and questioned. However, contrary to the view of drag commentators who are confident in drag's ability to resist and effectively undermine gender ideologies, I maintain that drag, in the form of female impersonation, does not disrupt and destabilise the regime of heteronormativity, but rather responds to or acts out the illusion of masculinity and femininity as fixed by

nature. In many ways, drag queens affirm the stigmatised effeminate stereotype of gay male sexuality. Yet, at the same time, they ingeniously play with the inconsistencies between gendered cultural paradigms and experience.

In order to argue my point, I draw on Butler's (1996) insights on imitation, inversion and illusion with reference to heterosexual gender constructions and drag performance. I will also refer to some of RuPaul's (2014–2016) drag race shows, as well as Keith McNeal's (1999) analysis of drag performance ritual to illustrate that, while drag has the potential to draw attention to a distorted heterosexist binary system, it does not, by itself, undermine dominant gender norms. Rather, it highlights the inherent ambivalence of gender, which is generated by heteronormativity.

Parody, self-parody and gender ambivalence

In her article, 'Imitation and gender insubordination', Butler (1996:374, 378) argues,

> [i]f sexuality is to be disclosed, what will be taken as the true determinant of its meaning: the phantasy structure, the act, the orifice, the gender, the anatomy? And if the practice engages a complex interplay of all of those, which one of these erotic dimensions will come to stand for the sexuality that requires them all? … [T]he naturalistic effects of heterosexualized genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation as its effect … [T]he "reality" of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin and the ground of all imitations. In other words, heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself – and failing.

Butler (1996) not only questions the assumption of a basic, natural sex distinction that underlies gender, but also emphasises that bodies (and individuals) become gendered through the repeated performance of gender norms and their attendant activities and functions. There is no "I" or inner essence, labelled male or female, that 'precedes the gender that it is said to perform' (Butler 1996:376). Butler (1996) maintains that the notions of maleness and femaleness as features of identity are illusions produced by a heterosexual order. Gender, rather than being part of an inner core, is performative – to be feminine is to perform femininity. In her analysis of drag, Butler (1996:378) asserts that drag represents the 'mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation'.

Butler's (1996) point that the idea that masculinity and femininity are natural gender categories is an illusion, produced by a heterosexual order and theatrically worn, is well illustrated by the renowned drag icon RuPaul. RuPaul plays with gender through

a resourceful blending of glamorous feminine couture, style and physical appearance. In his reality television series, *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2014-2016), RuPaul, through her emcee performance and by coaching the drag contestants, demonstrates that gender is not a given, but a kind of imitation and impersonation. In order to substantiate this point, I engage in a brief analysis of some episodes from *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2014-2016). I do not claim to offer an extensive analysis of RuPaul's drag races; rather, my interpretation should be seen as partial truth and as a step toward future analyses of drag and its complexities.

The observant reader may have noticed that I refer to RuPaul as both he and she. There is a specific reason for this. RuPaul is undisturbed by gender-specific pronouns and he states, '[y]ou can call me he. You can call me she. You can call me Regis and Kathie Lee; I don't care! Just as long as you call me' (RuPaul 1995:27). My interpretation of this statement is that it talks back to stereotypical gender roles. This is noticeable in RuPaul's drag race shows where she performs as emcee – she is as comfortable and stylish in men's clothing as in women's attire. When asked about the male/female dichotomy, RuPaul (1995:iii) states, '[y]ou're all born naked and the rest is drag', meaning that, metaphorically speaking, we are all drag queens. With this statement, RuPaul (1995) draws our attention to the performative nature of gender and the heterosexist illusion of normative gender. This is noticeable in episode 6 of season 10, 1995 of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, where he invites fierce and "manly" women ("girl fighters") to the show. These women have never worn make-up, wigs, "feminine" clothes, or walked in high-heeled shoes. Each drag queen is assigned a tough and "masculine" woman and is instructed to teach and coach their woman partner on how to dress, walk and perform in feminine attire. The drag queen contestants are told to make copies of themselves as drag queens. At the end of the show, the woman partners walk in high heels (although their feet hurt), have their make-up applied, dress in revealing women's outfits, and woear hairpieces to perform as copies of their drag queen partners. The drag queens succeeded in transforming the "manly" women into glamorous performers in drag outfits. In this drag show, RuPaul illustrates that the masculine/feminine dichotomy is an illusion. The lines between masculine and feminine, male and female, and the lines within these categories themselves, were blurred and questioned. As Butler (1996:378) points out, '[t]here is no "proper" gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property'.

Throughout his shows, RuPaul continually refers to the illusionist room where drag queen contestants have to wait after the shows while she and the judges deliberate who will be the winner of the show. In my reading, this particular show, or drama acted by the drag queens and their "masculine-appearing" woman partners, demon-

strates how we unthinkingly tap into stereotypical gender norms and ambivalently participate in the gendered performance assumed by the heterosexual template of gender and sexuality. It also brings to light the important but unacknowledged ways in which people undermine these categories in everyday life by not, for example, wearing high heels or make-up as a woman.

In his drag race shows, RuPaul constantly emphasises and reminds the drag queen competitors, '[i]f you can't love yourself, then who the hell are you going to love!?'. As this line suggests, RuPaul is aware that many gay men experience self-hatred via internalised homophobia and, without explicitly saying so, she repetitively reminds drag queen participants of the illusion of gender construction through heteronormative expectations to conform to a binary gender system and dress code. This is telling in episode 7 of season 11 (1995) of RuPaul's Drag Race when he says to Akashia, one of the drag queen contestants, '[y]ou are too perfect, where is your vulnerability?'. After a performance by Akashia, her glamorous and impressive hair piece comes off and reveals the face of a gay man. The whole audience, including RuPaul and the judges, gasp for air and fall into silence. But Akashia pulls herself together and while she lip-syncs as if her life depends on it, she takes the rest of her top garment and false breasts off to the loud applause of RuPaul and the judges.

This is one of the highlights of RuPaul's drag race series and carries a deeper meaning with reference to drag, dress and femininity. What happens when the spectacular and spectacled façade of femininity is removed? Does it reveal the mundane ("sissy-boy" stereotype)? Crawl Evans and John Balfour (2012:310) point out that dress is a defining factor of femininity and 'by exercising control of dress, femininity is reinforced in order to maintain a particular gendered construct'. Without her glamorous dress through which she displayed a stylised form of femininity, Akashia is exposed as a gay man. Akashia's gesture of taking the rest of her top attire reaffirms his authenticity; "I am what I am" – a gay man. Yet, in the brave act of taking off the rest of the dress and revealing his gay body, Akashia, perhaps without realising it at that moment, challenges conventions of dress and femininity. The inherent paradox of gender is remarkably demonstrated by Akashia's performance: on the one hand, as a female impersonator, he adopts the dress and style of women and challenges gendered constructs of dress and femininity. On the other hand, she takes off the dress and 'compulsory femininity' (Evans & Balfour 2012:313), and thus takes back control of her appearance from heterosexual men.

The above event illustrates that a unitary and naturalised gender core of either maleness or femaleness is a heteronormative fabrication that needs to be questioned and exposed. It also underscores the view that gender is ambivalent and 'a complex,

multivalent construction whose particulars have to be disclosed, not assumed pre-discursively' (Morris & Leap 2007:36). Caitlin Greaf (2015:1) has the following to say about the ambivalence and complexity of gender,

> [h]eteronormativity within our society has a significant impact on how we come to view and understand gender identity. Drag queens allow a break in the heteronormative gender guideline while also reinforcing the social image of what it means to look like a woman. Although drag queens merely reflect the preexisting image of a woman, they still present an image of both gender bending and the ways that gender is socially taught in the public and private space. My personal experience in deconstructing my own gender identity has allowed me to explore my social self-identity and how powerful our social heteronormative gender guidelines are. By dressing in male clothing for the first time in a public space, I challenged the daily heteronormative idea of gender while shattering my own self-identity. The gender constructions and guidelines that were socially taught to me throughout my life were broken when I put on a fake beard.

Gender anxiety and heteronormativity

In this section, I revisit the issue of whether drag, in the form of female impersonation, successfully undermines heteronormative gender constructs. It is telling that behind the scenes in RuPaul's series, despite the painted nails, make-up, wigs, dresses and high heels, the drag queens experience fights, drama and tears. A point in case is Jiggly Caliente (in the episode Untucked), whom the other queens call 'a lost girl'. Jiggly, who is clearly unhappy about himself, projects anger and negativity onto the other drag queens and calls them by derogatory names. After a number of fights with the queens, Jiggly breaks down in tears and shares his life experience with the group. As a young boy, he was beaten up for being a "sissy-boy" and feminine. He was mocked and kicked for not being a "real man". Jiggly internalised this homophobic stigma and felt unhappy in himself. He remarks in the same episode that '[g]ay people are trash'. Like many other gay men who had similar life experiences, Jiggly's internalised self-hatred surfaces as misogyny projected onto the group. As this example demonstrates, there is no guarantee that gay men and gender-nonconforming individuals will understand their own gender identity. Jiggly's gender anxiety and ambivalence manifest beneath the disguise of drag and glamour, and consequently tap into mainstream stereotypes that perform the patriarchal male/female dualism that oppressed him in the first place.

Related to Jiggly's gender ambivalence is Victoria's introduction of himself and his explanation of his stage persona. In episode 7 of season 11 (1995) of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Victoria Parker significantly says, '[h]i, my real name is Victor. My stage name is Victoria. I can get away with things being Victoria that I can never get away with

being Victor. Victoria is very different from Victor. Victoria is very outgoing, flirtatious and likes to entertain and I can do things with Victoria that I can never get away with as Victor'. This gender ambivalence and double-bind of gay selfhood is also expressed by some of the other drag contestants when they refer to their alter egos. Remarks such as the following reveal the split in Victor/Victoria's persona: '[s]he (reading stage personality) has more balls than I have'; and 'always the mask – the judges do not even know who I am. When I'm on stage, I love what I do because that is my alter ego. I am a quiet person – that is what I am naturally'.

The above observations should not be read as suggesting that I understand drag queens as effeminate and failed men. To the contrary, I strongly oppose outdated stereotypes that stigmatise, shame and control drag queens, drag kings and gay people in general. Many drag queens experience drama, pain and ambivalence about their identity as a result of the heteronormative model of gender and sexuality, and the homophobic perception of the inferiority of femininity. As SJ Hopkins (2004:145) observes, 'the drag persona is often used to assert and repair perceived social deficiencies in the performer's male persona'.

McNeal (1999) gives an excellent analysis of gender ambivalence in relation to heteronormativity and drag performance. In his article, 'Behind the make-up: gender ambivalence and the double-bind of gay selfhood in drag performance', McNeal (1999) highlights the dynamic conflict and ambivalence that manifest beneath the façade of drag's glamour and comedy. McNeal (1999:344) observes, '[d]rag ritual has evolved as an institutionalized performance genre in response to a core set of ambivalent conflicts in the culturally-modelled subjectivities of gay men due to the psychocultural hegemony of hetero-normative models of gender and sexuality'. McNeal (1999) makes the point that culturally modelled reality may produce intense conflicts and ambivalence on the part of social actors. McNeal (1999:348) suggests that 'gender anxiety and ambivalence seem the most salient motivating factors in the genesis of drag as a psychologically meaningful performance genre. In other words, motivation toward drag has to do with concern and ambivalence about the models and their internal psychic conflict and juxtaposition', rather than straightforwardly challenging the heterosexual matrix. The point is that, although drag queens demonstrate that oppressive boundaries can be transgressed, gender inversion is not purely liberating. A careful analysis of drag performance reveals that, at certain moments, the internalised self-hatred of gay male subjectivity surfaces as misogyny articulated by the drag queens (McNeal 1999). This subtle relation between parody and self-parody (Sontag 1964) is aptly described by Esther Newton (1979:37) when she states that '[t]he drag queen looks in the mirror of the audience and sees his female image reflected back approvingly'.

Building on Butler's (1996) notion that a drag queen performance is safe on stage, McNeal (1999:347) points out that drag is a form of defence in which gay men 'vicariously and ambivalently participate in the gendered drama presupposed by the hetero-normative model of gender and sexuality, but they do so relatively safely because the drag queen is also "not me". Painful identity indictment is thus avoided'. On stage, the drag queen can perform and rule, and thus retaliate against homophobia and sexism. However, offstage – in public – drag queens will not dare perform in their high heels, stockings, wigs and feminine attire. If they do, they may be the victims of brutal homophobic assaults – they may even be murdered and found in a park, like Brandon Teena and his two friends, who were shot to death, executive style, on 31 December 1993 in Falls City in rural Nebraska (Halberstam 2005:23).

Reality, like all its sub-systems, has inherent contradictory dispositions and can thus not claim consistency, uniformity and stability. In relation to a binary gender system, there is much to learn from Hegel's view on contradiction and inconsistencies. According to Hegel (2010:382), ordinary life experience itself harbours many contradictory elements and contradictory dispositions, 'of which the contradiction is present not in any external reflection but right in them'. Hegel's (2010) view on contradiction is an inclusionary one that departs radically from traditional views on contradiction, such as those held by Aristotle. Aristotle follows an exclusionary perspective where X excludes not X and not X excludes X. According to a Hegelian viewpoint on contradiction, it follows that in the concept of X, X and not X are exclusive, but to understand X, not X must also be understood and vice versa. If we apply this dialectical understanding to a binary gender system, then it follows that in the concept of male, male and not male are exclusive, but to understand male, not male must also be understood. This contrastive understanding is inclusionary because the opposition (not X = not male) creates an additional meaning of the concepts (X = male and not X = not male) together. This additional meaning is something new, a kind of synthesis, and is dynamic and creative. Yet it can also be transgressive and diverse. Contradiction or ambivalence is not to be taken as an abnormality, but rather as a part of reality.

I addition to the above, I cite a quote from Carol-Anne Tyler (2003:2-3), which refers to Hegel, de Beauvoir and Fanon; and reflects on narcissism, victim and oppressor, and transcendence through choice,

> [w]hat could counter a narcissism so pervasive that both victim and oppressor are said to suffer from it? Beauvoir believes the answer is what existentialism promotes as "reciprocity" or mutual recognition between "equal" subjects, who must take the "risk of liberty" and transcend themselves through "freely chosen projects" … As Jacques Lacan emphasizes, narcissism cannot be undone by a philosophy that grasps the negativity of the subject "only within the limits of a

> self-sufficiency of consciousness … the illusion of autonomy" and a theory of society that "refuse[s] to recognize that it has any function other than the utilitarian one … This is the same solution Frantz Fanon proposes to racism in Black Skin, White Masks … In it, he argues that the members of the "second" race respond to their treatment as inferior with an "impersonation" that only seems to confirm their differences as inferiority and suggests that equality and reciprocity would end racism … a voyeuristicsadistic idealization of the sexual relation [and, I would add, race and class relations]; a personality that realizes itself only in suicide; a consciousness of the other than [sic] can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder.

Binary gendered societies through all the ages followed an exclusionary view of contradiction where the concepts of male and not male were viewed as mutually exclusive opposites. Societies based on a binary gendered system are oftentimes blind to their own inherent contradictory dispositions that, inevitably, give rise to spaces of ambivalence and transgression. It is in these spaces of contradiction and ambivalence that drag is born.

Conclusion

While drag highlights the performative factors of gender and is subversive and parodic, it is questionable, as I have shown, whether drag effectively challenges heteronormative gender norms. As scholars such as Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), Butler (1990; 1996), Weston (1993), Bruce Mannheim (1995) and McNeal (1999) point out, drag performance is subversive to a certain extent because it mocks the heterosexual binary divide but, at the same time, it reaffirms the mainstream cultural models of gender and sexuality. Abu-Lughod (1990 cited by McNeal 1999:360) reminds us that we should be mindful of the romance of resistance, because individuals and groups may worsen and even intensify certain oppressions at the same time as they attempt to reclaim and transform others. Also, as Butler (1996:376) points out, '[t]here is no question that gays and lesbians are threatened by the violence of public erasure, but the decision to counter that violence must be careful not to reinstall another in its place'. Although Butler (1996) calls attention to the subversive potential of drag and gender insubordination, she does not claim that drag has a political agenda that sets itself up to challenge compulsory heterosexuality. Rather, she emphasises that drag performance is a symbolic inversion of hegemonic gender norms, and a blurring and playing with gender boundaries, as is displayed in RuPaul's drag races.

If liberty – freeing oneself from oppression – amounts to little more than an imitation of a heterosexual mirror as the only passage, it remains slavish mimicry. For what is liberty if I cannot be my authentic self, instead copying what I am not? I am queer and I love it. In conclusion, drag does not aim to challenge dominant gender norms

but, rather, highlights the inherent ambivalence of gender generated by heteronormativity and at the same time ingeniously plays with the inconsistencies between gendered cultural paradigms and actual experience. It is in this interstice that drag performance as an art of irony, parody and self-parody opens up possibilities of gender diversity.

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