

It's All Glamour

**The Halifax Drag Community: A Study of Identity,
Community, and Region**

Greg Nepean

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Contents

Introduction	4
Background	4
Methodology	6
Data Analysis	10
The Path to Be Taken	11
Chapter 1: Drag as Creative Expression	13
Introduction: What Is Drag?	13
Types of Drag	15
Performing Career and Lifespan	19
Foundations of Drag as an Art Form: Naming	28
Foundations of Drag as an Art Form: Music	30
Foundations of Drag as an Art Form: “The Face”	32
Conclusion	34
Chapter 2: Institutions in the Halifax Drag Community	37
Is There a Drag Community?	35
Institutions of the Drag Community	37
ISCANS	39
Bars and Drag in Halifax: Clientele and Venue	47
Bars and Drag in Halifax: Venue and Performance	58
Bars and Drag in Halifax: Divisions between Downtown/Uptown Queens	59
Fundraising: A Call to Action	63
Value of Fundraising for a Performer’s Career	67
Conclusion	69
Chapter 3: Interpersonal Relationships in the Drag Community	70
Gossip and Communication	70
Generation Gap	76
Kinship: Families of Origin	79
Kinship: Drag Families	81
Drug and Alcohol Consumption	87
Conclusion	91
Chapter 4: Diversity in the Halifax Drag Community	93
Performance of Gender — On Stage	93
Femiphobia	104
Drag Kings’ Experience	110
Relationships between Drag Queens/Kings and Heterosexuals by Gender	117
Race and Ethnicity	120
Class and Drag	121
Conclusion	125

Chapter 5: Drag in the Halifax Regional Municipality	126
Region and Drag	126
Halifax as Urban Space and Its Relationship to Drag as Expression of Sexuality	131
Halifax and Other Urban Centers: A Comparative Assessment	140
Conclusion	150
Appendix A	152
Questions and Topics Used in the Interview Questionnaire	152
Works Cited	154

Introduction

Background

This thesis explores the intersections of drag as a creative art form with expressed norms, behaviours and structures of a community. The interest of this work for scholars in Atlantic Canada studies, regional studies, cultural studies, and sociology, is the synthesis of these forms of culture. Drag combines two forms of identity: as creative expression, it is a gender bending performance art; socially, it signifies one form of gay and lesbian identity.

Drag's subversion of essentialist notions of sexuality and gender can be one form of cultural expression (there are others, such as folklore, feminist folklore, and political comedy) that challenges hegemonic representations of Atlantic Canada. The art of drag, with its sometimes rough expression of sexuality, its graphic representations of the human body and its challenge to the binary conception of gender, provides an oppositional form of expression. It can encourage people to re-consider as individuals and as a collective society, what being Atlantic Canadian means. This thesis will bring into consideration and discussion what drag is, what the drag community is, and how this community relates to the larger subculture known as the gay and lesbian community.

To date, what has been researched on drag queens has primarily located drag in a cultural and theoretical viewpoint, rather than focussing on the norms and behaviours of drag performers. Judith Butler in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity and Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex locates drag within the notion of performativity of gender wherein "...Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through play

of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (173). Butler treats the drag queen as a theoretical category to be conceptualized, rather than a human individual who exists within the “social.” In Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety, Marjorie Garber subsumes the drag queen in the category of cross-dresser and transvestite, then further submerges her into the literary realm.

This thesis incorporates a variety of theoretical perspectives on the study of drag. In 1972, Esther Newton published the first study dealing with drag communities. Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America, based on Newton’s research in the late 1960s, was a revealing look into the world of drag queens. From the highs of performing, to the limitations created by legal and social repression, Newton reveals an important aspect of drag (and gay) life that existed in what historian John D’Emilio in Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University has described as an environment of social and legal repression. Prior to the Stonewall riots in the United States and decriminalization of sodomy in Canada in 1969, Newton argues that the drag queen community existed in a culture of secrecy. D’Emilio describes this secrecy as necessary; since the prevailing sanctions on gender and sexual deviance in 1950s America were both legal (imprisonment) and social (stigma, loss of work, family, housing). Newton’s study did not present psychologically well-adjusted persons; most of the participants she discussed had transient and vulnerable lives. Since she conducted her research thirty-five to forty years ago, there is a historicity to the study that limits its contemporary usefulness. However, Newton’s methodology of qualitative interviewing and field observation is sound. In the late 1990s Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor studied drag queens in the community of Key West. Entitled Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret, their work was the

first significant study of drag to be conducted since Newton. Rupp and Taylor reveal the full aspect of social life for drag queens in Key West; they examine the artistic performances of drag, interrogate tensions and relationships within the community of drag queens, as well as with gay men, lesbians and heterosexuals, and discuss the relationship of the geography of Key West to the existence of a drag community. Rupp and Taylor review the structure, systems and practices of the Key West drag community and locate drag as a form of performance that challenges binaries of gender and sex. Little or no study of drag communities in Canada has been undertaken so far. This study, therefore, is the start of the development of a literature on drag in Canada, and in its concepts of drag as oppositional will be applied to drag in Atlantic Canada.

Methodology

This thesis is an empirical exploratory study of drag in the Atlantic Canadian context. Given the small size of the community, and the limited time and resources available, I adopted a lifestyle approach that uses the experience of a small sample of Halifax drag performers. This study, therefore, lays the groundwork for more comprehensive qualitative or quantitative analyses of drag communities in Atlantic Canada.

Data collection for this study employed observation in the selected field and interviews with members of the drag community. Field research, as defined by Lawrence Neumann in Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches involves: “observing ordinary events in natural settings...a field researcher examines social meanings and grasps multiple perspectives in natural social settings” (368). Neumann also

notes the requirement for field researchers to “Acquire an insider’s point of view while maintaining the analytic perspective or distance of an outsider” (369). Consistent with Neumann’s definition I observed drag queens in their natural setting, onstage during shows and offstage within the gay bars of Halifax (Toolbox East, Reflections Cabaret, Club NRG2, and Club Vortex). Despite the fact that I am a member of the gay subculture (from which the drag satellite culture emerges) because I did not perform drag, I was, to some degree considered an outsider in the drag community. This perceptible distance allowed me to maintain an analytic focus. Observation in the field was thus helpful in providing context to the interviews that I later conducted.

For the qualitative interviewing, I employed selected snowball sampling to recruit participants. I used contacts that I had in the community who agreed to be interviewed and once the interview was done, they offered me names and phone numbers for other potential participants. For example, the first participant referred me to another queen who gave me contact information for two other queens. Likewise, the third queen I interviewed provided me with contact information for two other queens and one king. I interviewed a second drag king as a result of approaching him after a performance (with the recommendation of the other drag king to support me). It was important for me to recruit participants who were well-respected drag performers. I was successful in being fortunate enough to interview prominent drag performers in the community. With their support and cooperation other members of the drag community ended up agreeing to participate. In fact, without this cooperation I would have had no drag queen participants under the age of twenty-five. All the participants were given a choice of consent options (open consent allowing all information to be used, or limited consent) and each participant signed the

relevant consent form(s) before the interview began. All the interviews were recorded on an audio digital recorder and took place between 9 March and 30 April 2004, for a total of ten interviews with drag queens and two with drag kings. The length of interview varied from thirty minutes to two and one half hours, with most interviews lasting between sixty and seventy-five minutes. The interviews were semi-structured. Besides using an open-ended questionnaire, participants also had the opportunity to add ideas or provide fuller insights to me (through reviewing photographs or newspaper articles that featured the performer or their performance). I am aware that these statements reveal subjective viewpoints. In addition, I am well aware that a number of participants could engage in what Goffman calls impression management, where the self presented in the interview would be adjusted for the benefit of the audience, in this case for me as the interviewer. In fact, I thought that impression management was at work with several participants. The field observation therefore allowed me to measure and evaluate the interview data since I could use the field notes and observations as a check on the information that was being provided to me by participants. Overall, I found the interview data to be consistent with the observation and they therefore provide an accurate representation of the Halifax drag community at a particular point in time (March to August 2004).

I attempted to orient my sample to match the demographics of the drag community, where according to the participants, half of all performers are under the age of thirty. However, due to the snowball sampling technique, the interview sample was weighted in favour of queens, rather than kings and older queens, rather than younger queens. While three of ten drag queens interviewed for this study were under the age of thirty, both drag kings were under the age of thirty, so overall the sample is only

somewhat weighted in favour of performers over thirty. Another point is that while the age range of the sample was weighted in favour of older queens, age does not necessarily correlate with experience in the drag community. One queen had as little as ten months' experience, and one queen and one king eighteen months. One queen had two years experience, two queens and one king had four to five years' experience, and three queens had over fifteen years experience. Therefore, while age may be weighted, the range of years of experience doing drag that the participants had was divergent and this wealth of difference allowed me to gather a diversity of perspective based on both age and experience for the study.

As for the sample difference between drag queens and drag kings, there are eighty drag queens and twelve drag kings, a roughly eight to one ratio. The interview sample of ten queens to two drag kings (actually a ratio of five to one) meant that drag kings were proportionately more represented in this study than in the overall drag community.

Except for two participants who are paid for performing drag professionally, the rest of the participants worked in nondrag forms of employment. Therefore only one queen and one king earn any significant part of their income by doing drag.

Consistent with the Saint Mary's University policy on research subjects, which is based upon the Tri Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, an ethics application was made to undertake this study. The application outlined methodologies for the study, proposed treatment of research subjects, development of consent options and procedures for the protection of confidentiality, anonymity and security of research data. In January 2004, my application received approval from The Research Ethics Board. All participants were given forms outlining consent options, and

after prevue, each participant signed the relevant consent forms.

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were contracted for transcription to a third party, who then submitted all transcripts to me. I reviewed and edited (by listening to the audio-digital recording of the interview) all transcripts to ensure accuracy and reliability. Once all interviews were edited I began to analyze the interview content using categorical-content analysis, defined by Leiblich, Tuval-Marshiach and Zilber in Narrative Research: Reading Analysis and Interpretation as: “traditionally called content analysis, focuses on the content of narratives as manifested in separate parts of the story, irrespective of the context of the complete story” (16). Each participant’s interview was considered a story in this sense. I engaged in the process of “breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to either descriptive or statistical treatment” (112). The analysis was aided by the existence of the interview questionnaire, which had built into it units of analysis about which I was seeking information. This questionnaire (see Appendix A) had broad sections of inquiry (e.g. performance) and specifically within each section were questions designed to get at more detailed units of analysis. For example, under “Performance” I asked participants, “How does one build up a reputation as a top performer?” In my analysis I took the answers from all participants, tabulated them, and read them through for similarities and differences. The similarities and differences I found in their answers in the “Performance” section, for example, formed the basis for the content of the discussion on divas in Chapter 3. This method of analysis was employed for

all categories and subcategories emanating from the interview questionnaire and forms the basis for the chapters of this thesis.

In order to protect the privacy of participants and to respect the confidentiality of data provided to me, all participants have been coded in this study as either dragqueenhalifax (referred as dqh) or dragkinghalifax (referred to as dkh). Since there were ten drag queens interviewed there are dqh1 through dqh10, the two drag kings are referred to as dkh1 and dkh2.

The Path to Be Taken

This study is divided into six chapters, each dealing with a central question. Chapter 1 locates drag as creative expression, liberating drag as a performance art from its associations with other gender categories, such as cross-dressing, transvestism, transgender and transsexuals. Chapter 2 addresses issues of community, discussing questions as to whether a drag community exists, how it is structured, and how is it organized. Chapter 3 focuses on a micro examination of relationships that drag performers have to each other as members of the same community, including the method of communicating in the community. Chapter 4 broadly examines diversity in the drag community, beginning with an examination of the various theoretical arguments about drag as a gendered performance. It examines how gender and gender politics affect the drag community, focusing on the differential experience of drag kings, as women performing male gender and the relationship of drag queens to those gay men who do not do drag. It locates the possibilities of gender deconstruction in a drag/heterosexual relationship of spectacle and spectator. The experience of race and class in the community

is also discussed in the section. Chapter 5 examines the possibilities of a geographic and cultural space for a drag community. Beginning with a discussion of urban sections of Halifax as emerging gay and lesbian spaces, and the impact of this development on existing populations, it then contrasts the experience of Halifax drag with drag cultures in Toronto, Edmonton, Key West and Kansas City. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of region and drag.

Chapter 1: Drag as Creative Expression

Introduction: What Is Drag?

Esther Newton, in her classic drag study, Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America defines *drag queen*: “‘Queen’ is a generic noun for any homosexual man. ‘Drag’ can be used as an adjective or a noun. As a noun it means the clothing of one sex when worn by the other sex” (3). Newton’s definition is precise; however, the meaning of the word *queen* has evolved to become less associated with gay men in general and refers exclusively to drag queens. Carol Warren, in Identity and Community in the Gay World defines *drag* as: “a parody and an exaggeration of all the things that imply theatrical or pin up femininity (or masculinity)... [D]rag is unserious and fun, or it becomes a way of life and therefore an identity. Whereas transsexuals and transvestites wear female clothes because their very self-image depends on it, gay people get into drag to celebrate” (107). Warren’s definition is most appropriate for this study as she differentiates drag from transvestite, transsexual and transgender. Drag performers are not transgender; the people in this study had no permanent desire for identification with the “other” gender from that which they inhabit biologically. Nor are they transsexual; no participant in the study indicated an interest in altering their biologically assigned sex. It is important to distinguish the categories in order to establish the difference between the participants in this study (who are gay and lesbian stage performers) and transvestites (who are generally heterosexual men who find wearing women’s apparel sexually arousing). Further distinguishing between transvestites and transsexuals, participants asked to define drag

indicated that drag is a stage persona adopted for recreation and entertainment (dqh8 and dqh2). For the participants, drag represents a disguising of their original physical bodies to project an illusion of being a gender different from the biological gender assigned at birth (dqh3).

The present study deals with issues of community and identity. Richard R Troiden, in Gay and Lesbian Identity: A Sociological Analysis, defines *identity* as “an organized set of characteristics than an individual perceives as representing the self definitively in relation to a social situation, imagined or real” (27). He later expands identity into a definition of sexual identity: “an individual’s perception of self as heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual” (104). All the drag performers in this study indicated homosexual orientation; for drag queens, having sex with men, and for drag kings, having sex with women, was deeply connected with doing drag. This is similar to the sexual identification of drag performers in Newton’s and Rupp and Taylor’s studies. Therefore, for this study I employ Carol Warren’s definition: “The term drag is used in the gay world to describe a person who wears female clothes and avoids the unacceptable imputations of transvestism or transsexuals. Drag is worn in the spirit of camp, and it is the most extreme expression of camp; camp, in turn, is light-hearted, spoofing behaviour appropriate to the sociability settings of the gay community” (103).

While individuals can be creative and innovative with the art of drag, there are basic standards of performance and appearance that all queens and kings are expected to adhere to. The drag king or queen creates a gender specific illusion that must be authentic, in that it must represent a figure that is recognizable under the sign of ‘male’ or ‘female’, as widely recognized in North American society. This authentic illusion requires physical

alterations to the male (drag queen) or female (drag king) body, such as tucking, strapping, and the application of makeup. These alterations to face and body create the illusion of a body inverse to the performer's biological body. However, the changes are not just physical; there are also changes in personality. Performers can be more flirtatious than their usual selves, more reserved (as in the drag king who becomes the gentleman), more assertive (more opinionated in drag and more willing to talk), even to the extent of seeming a completely different person. In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Erving Goffman argued for a range of possibilities for the presentation of self. Some individuals completely accept the presentation of self they give publicly as their self (17); in drag these are drag queens who argue that their drag persona are no different from the persona they enact on a daily basis, therefore there is on-stage versus off-stage difference. At the opposite end of the spectrum, there are performers who do not believe at all in the persona as performed (18); these are drag performers who have completely distinct "boy" and "drag" persona, such as dqh10, who said that "they are entirely different people."

Types of Drag

Newton argues that: "all dance acts mimic some style of female dancing" (44). Encompassing the spectrum of drag performance, from leather to drag kings, to drag queens, there are seven forms of drag performance that can be identified; all involve dance, but beyond that their styles and expectations are very different. The first type of drag, skag drag, is in the tradition of radical drag, as described by Warren: "typified by the wearing of evening dress and gloves with boots and a beard.... [R]adical drag is designed

as a political strategy to freak out the straight world overtly” (109). Since Warren’s study, however, skag drag has evolved from its political roots in radical drag to a comedic form of performance. The skag drag queen is a cartoon animation or caricature of the drag queen. She achieves this caricature by wearing dresses with loud prints, overly applying makeup to the lips and cheeks, wearing full beards and moustaches that are not shaved, and creating breasts that are usually balloons or excessively large portions of compacted rice stuffed into a bra. The role of the skag drag queen is that of comedienne; through outrageous comedic performances, including dildo play, flashing the audience with fake genitals, or wobbling around on high heels, she parodies not only femininity, but also the art of drag itself.

The second type of drag is tranny drag; these individuals are men passing as women who will only infrequently perform lip-synch numbers and dance on stage. The tranny queen inhabits her space (as a woman) in the bar more than on stage. Newton argues that because tranny drag violates the glamour standard required of regular (or professional) drag performers (51), tranny queens are accepted only tentatively within the drag community.

The third type of drag, the female impersonator, finds its origins in what Roger Baker, in Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts, describes as the glamour girls of World War I and II revues. Most young queens define themselves as female impersonators, although several prominent older queens are very skilled in this form of drag. Newton and Rupp and Taylor note that female impersonators usually adopt a character to impersonate (for example, Madonna) and will use make up, voice, performance and clothing to create the illusion.

While skag, tranny and female impersonators are all incorporated under the identifying sign of the drag queen, the drag queen herself as the fourth type of drag is a separate category. Contemporary drag queens find their origins in the “dame” traditions of nineteenth century and early twentieth century vaudeville. According to Baker, vaudeville dame performances were intended to give impressions, not impersonations of women. Through dress and makeup the drag queen presents herself as woman; however, the gender presentation is ambiguous. Drag queens perform comedy, music, dance and/or mime acts as their own character. Newton notes that drag queens lyp-synch from popular musical songs from the early 1930s to contemporary music of the twentieth-first century. Some queens perform as mimes, using their face, arms and motion to communicate the meaning of the song. Drag queens perform artists from the mid 1920s and 1930s like Judy Garland to contemporary stars such as, Cher, Wynona Rider and The M-People. Other queens specialize in comedy numbers that range from performing the routines of Gilda Radner to comedic and music impressions to outrageous performance acts with cereal. According to Newton, comedy is one of the longest traditions in drag; in contrast, lyp-synching is a relatively recent development.

A related category of drag, the fifth category, is leather drag: gay men who dress in leather to perform dance and lyp-synch numbers. These acts can range from impersonations to lyp-synching popular music to S&M dance acts involving whips and chains. Leather drag is contested as a form of drag in the community since no gender illusion is involved. However, leather drag performers are accepted within the Imperial Court System (usually as male consorts to drag queens), which is an association of drag queens, drag kings, leather men, nondrag gay men and lesbians and heterosexuals that is

dedicated to fundraising for charity. The hyper masculinity of leather drag brings a male presence into the feminine drag culture, with interesting results. Leather men-drag queen pairings in the Imperial Court System in Halifax, such as Baron I Cameron Ballard and Baroness I Studio X Lenoir in Reign I and in the present reign in Halifax, Baron IV Joseph Penny and Baroness IV Boom Boom Lubalicious, result in a reinforcement of what Mary Louise Adams has called companionate hetero sexual marriage. Mary Louise Adams discusses heterosexuality role conformity and youth culture in Canada in the 1950 entitled The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality). Adams describes heterosexual companionate marriage as consisting of a dominant breadwinner male and a submissive, though attractive (or the spending much time of looking as attractive as she could) female maintaining the hearth and home. Leather men-drag queen pairings (or in fact drag king-drag queen pairings) provide visual and verbal representations, (e.g. when the Monarchs call their fellow Monarch “husband” and “wife” and discuss their drag “children”), but not an adherent reproduction of this model of heterosexual couplehood. In fact, these pairings subvert the central concept of companionate heterosexual marriage because the representations are false: these are two men, one of whom is dressed as, and playing a ‘role’ of woman. Or in the case of a drag king/drag queen couple (Baron III Ben Dover and Baroness III Shayda Black) these are women performing as male, and a man performing a woman.

The sixth category of drag involves the ‘butch’ or masculine drag king. According to Halberstam in The Drag King Book, the ‘butch’ drag king is involved in a process of appropriating masculinity on-stage (through performing) and off-stage, the appropriation of masculine styles and behaviours is inherent in the personality and lived experience of

the drag king, not merely a stage performance. The seventh category of drag is what Halberstam calls the androgynous or 'femme' drag king, who performs masculinity on-stage, but not off-stage, and for whom the performance of male is entertainment.

Performing Career and Lifespan

As with any other stage performances, drag acts have a beginning, a career and an ending. A drag career begins by the potential drag participant entering the gay and lesbian subculture. As Troiden argues, drag performers must: "learn that a social category representing the activity or feelings exists, learn that other people occupy their social category, learn that their own socially constructed needs and interests are similar to those who occupy the social category [so that they] begin to identify with those included in the social category, decide they qualify for membership in the social category and elect to label themselves in the social category" (42). Once a gay or lesbian person has entered the bar scene, it will not take them long to be exposed to drag. Once exposed, potential performers are recruited into the drag "satellite" in two ways. (Troiden argues that the gay and lesbian subculture is actually a series of subcultures that he calls satellites.) Firstly, a (usually senior) queen or king will approach them, usually in a bar, during and/or after a drag show, and comment on their suitability for drag, which is usually accompanied by an offer to put the person in face, as in the case of the youngest drag queen I interviewed: "last year probably right in the middle of Pride. [Queen X] said, "Why don't you come out and I'll buy everything for you and things like that?" I tried it. I thought it was going to be a one time thing but I'm still here doing it" (dqh5). Secondly, peer pressure is a major factor, as several queens reported that they began their careers on a dare: "They pushed

me on stage and that was that... We had a show in Sydney and they needed a host. They had to push me on the stage” (dqh10). Once they performed on stage they got hooked, in that they enjoyed the performance and became interested in developing a performing career. Drag careers are also a way to re-shape lives. Goffman discusses presentation of self, where individuals, through their actions and behaviours, attempt to create specific impressions in the minds of others. Adapting Goffman’s work, I would argue that drag performers do drag to change their presentation of self, to present different impressions of themselves. These impressions are not solely for the consumption of others, but to transition the performer out of self-perceived undesirable past selves. For example, two queens started out as prostitutes and moved into drag to become more respectable. In another example, one queen called his boy self a shady character, as he was engaging in deviant, anti-authority individualist masculinity behaviour (dqh8). Doing drag allowed this person to move from deviant, anti-authoritarian masculine self to a respectable, feminine self. For drag kings, appropriately masculinity allows them to access some degree of privilege, however drag kings are aware that only the ‘gentler’ sides of masculinity are available for access (dkh1).

Having decided on, or been pushed into a drag career, a new king or queen will then look for a stage to perform on. Usually they find their stage at a gay bar. In Halifax, they begin performing at Club NRG2’s Wednesday night talent show, called “Money for Makeup”, which is an open stage for old and new queens to come out and perform. As they acquire more skill and experience they move to performing in Sunday drag shows at NRG or Reflections, or occasionally compete in the Five Minutes of Fame Talent Show at Vortex (Thursday nights). Queens and kings generally start out inexperienced and hone

their skills as they perform time and time again. I asked each king or queen how their drag character has evolved over time. Some of the participants had been doing drag for ten months; others had been doing drag for thirty years:

Oh, my God, she went from a mess to ... well, I actually created her....
(Dqh6).

I've gotten better and I look much more flawless than I did when I started.
What's changed? I guess the respect level has changed for me as a performer. When we first started out there's absolutely no respect; you have to earn it. Now I think I have the respect and don't have to earn it anymore and [I'm] considered a fairly good performer (dqh10).

Oh my God, by leaps and bounds.... It all escalates, it all gets better and better; each and every time you do that sort of thing you improve with it.... (Dqh1).

All participants indicated that their acts had become better over time and that they also had become what they saw as better people. Newton argues that all new queens enter a glamour period, where they are continually obsessed with their look, and they constantly check themselves, "touching up" their faces (41). According to Newton, this stage lasts about six months to one year and is critical to the development of a young queen, as they must move beyond their glamour period to accept judgments that older queens make about their look. It is through this advice that younger queens improve their image and performance. Improvement is essential for a performing career as it means gaining

respect, and respect is a key element in drag performance. The differences between drag queens, female impersonators, tranny and skag drag require each performer to excel in what they do in order to win respect. While many drag queens would never do skag drag, the comedic and campy performances are so well received that the art form of skag drag itself is maintained. Female impersonators often see the non-dance drag queen as old fashioned; however, the glamour and movement of a Studio X Lenoir or a boisterous performance by BoomBoom Lubalicious, for example, maintain a respect for this form of performance in the community. Performers carry the banner of the theatre art they perform; thus, improvement of the act leads both to the maintenance of their career and of the art form they represent.

Drag kings and queens begin performing careers at different ages. Drag kings enter the performance scene fairly young (around the age of eighteen to twenty), they perform semi-regularly, but tend to retire after two to five years of performing. Queens have a different career pattern, for some queens drag is a lifetime activity; others do drag for a few years regularly, then scale back participation to coming “out” on special occasions (e.g. Pride Week and Court shows). Others begin drag when they are older in years as a way to refresh and add new dimensions to their life experience (dqh8, dkh2). According to Newton, many queens begin drag young. Sometimes they do drag to enter the bar scene, since makeup can make one appear older, as well as younger (dqh7). They may wish to access possible sexual partners or do drag to transition from latent sexuality (known vernacularly as being in the closet) to living openly as a gay male (dqh5 and dqh7).

While drag kings are respected in the Halifax drag community, none have sustained enough for a long-term career to be considered a diva, therefore the ‘diva’ is a

drag queen status. For drag queens, however, performing for a number of years can elevate them to the status of a diva. I asked all participants what a diva was and, based on the responses, I have developed four types:

1. The “Attitude” Diva

This diva is known for her attitude, her outspokenness, her longevity of performance and sexual proclivity. Her personal behaviour is well known and discussed in the community and she has great friends or great enemies, but she is respected (and maybe feared). This diva is also an activist, albeit she is an indirect activist. She will prompt queens to perform and recruit people, even though she may not be the kindest mentor a new queen could have (dqh1). Dqh1 and dqh3 credit this kind of queen with advancing their careers. One was dqh3’s drag mother, and dqh1 credits her with “pulling me out of the drag closet.”

2. The Performance Diva

This type of diva is known for a high quality performance. Whether she is stationary mime, an active dancer or a great comedienne, she has: “been around for many years and [has] entertained, razzle-dazzle people. Really worked hard, like working the circuit, traveling” (dqh9). She gets on a stage and amazes the crowd with a powerful number, and does it year after year. BoomBoom, for example, performs Cher’s “When the Money’s Gone,” usually in a Cher style dress, with clogs on. During her number she kicks the clogs off and people literally duck to ensure they don’t get hit in the face. BoomBoom has ripped off her wig, jumped on a platform and straddled a rail. BoomBoom is a large queen, so her flexibility, energy and performance belie the restrictions of a heavy body. She has been performing drag for five years, which is somewhat early to have achieved

diva status. However, the quality of her performances, along with her prominent activism (Pride, ISCANS, her work to develop a gay and lesbian community center) has made her a diva in the Halifax drag community.

3. The “Charity” Diva

This diva is known for her skills as a fundraiser. She is there to support the community, in or out of face. She is at every show; performing, selling fifty/fifty tickets (where half the proceeds go to charity and the other half goes to the winner of the draw), and promoting her next upcoming show for the charity of her choice. She sees the purpose and role of her performing in the need to raise money for the community:

I find drag is what sells it — as a boy I don’t cut it, it seems like I have to be a drag queen at the time to make this money because they all know who [she] is and they know that she is a big time fund raising queen.... You can seriously raise some good cash ... as long as people are willing to work together, and that’s the thing, it’s called working together — not working against each other (dqh9).

When asked, all participants mentioned Mz.Vicki as the community’s top fundraiser; she has been called “the eighth wonder of the world” (Gay Halifax website). She is well known for her work for charity, and the charities she has supported verify her fund raising efforts. In total Mz.Vicki has raised over \$100 000 in fourteen years of performing in Halifax. The year Mz.Vicki was Baroness II ISCANS raised \$20 000, that paid off the debt and provided \$18 000 for charity. She started Manna For Health, a food bank service for HIV+ people, so they don’t have to stand in line during the cold of winter. Many younger queens mention her as an inspiration to them for their own work in

fund-raising for the community.

4. The “Goddess” Diva

The “goddess” or glamour diva has her roots in opera: “if you go back into history again, the divas were usually the opera singers, the very pretty, the very beautiful makeup, great costumes and the Prima Donna of the opera world — that was a diva. Any girl who sings now is a diva — any girl who sings that has a great following and makes lots of money is a diva. In terms of drag, a diva is someone who thinks they have lots of money, have a beautiful voice and have a great following” (dqh2). In the contemporary drag community, “A diva is someone who commands attention the minute you know that they are coming or that they are here. Now there is a flock of people around them wanting to do stuff for them. They have an entourage and these are devout followers...” (dqh3). The glamour queen has a following. When Studio X Lenoir performs more people will show up to see her. If Studio should appear unexpectedly at a show, people will respond to her performance enthusiastically and tip generously. Studio X Lenoir represents glamour drag; her image is flawless, and her makeup is completely perfect. According to Newton, the goddess is an important diva because she represents the ideal for professional drag performance (49).

While divas are distinctive, they all share the ability to connect with an audience (in that they can excite a crowd with their performance, hosting skills and personality), and raise money (draw people into the bar to get the cover that goes to the charity, and they also must be skilled in getting people to tip and to donate money), and they also have to be liked and respected by the audience. Audiences will return for shows when they know that their “diva” is performing, and thus a following is built. An example of this

type of performer would be dqh9, who doesn't do impersonations, but through her movement, her style, makeup and image creates a stage persona that will hold a crowd's attention. Dqh10 is another top performer. Her boisterous performances (including kicking off her shoes, straddling rails, having her wig blown off by a geyser caused by opening a shaken beer bottle) maintain crowd interest and bring in tips that are donated to charity. Dkh1 is well respected for his multi-talented performances that involve high energy dancing, costuming (according to the style of masculinity he is performing as, sometimes he performs gay male styles, other types he imitates rap musicians such as Enimem) and engagement with the audience.

There are divas in training; their fellow queens recognize those who have the possibility of achieving diva status and who are already highly respected with audiences as possible divas. Dqh10 made a point of noting to me that dqh6 has gone from a boy in a dress to a queen who can really entertain a crowd and hold their attention (private conversation with the author). As a diva, dqh10 was acknowledging dqh6's potential through her focus on audience, which has won dqh6 respect from both audiences and other queens. Darren Hagen in The Edmonton Queen: Not a Riverboat Story discusses how his drag persona (Gloria Hole) and the creativity of a group of queens he was performing with, overturned standards of theatre, performance and conduct for drag shows in Edmonton during the early 1980s. A similar process of change in performing style may be occurring at present in the Halifax drag community. Hagen's description of the work his group of queens did to change Edmonton drag seems analogous to the present situation in Halifax. This process is clearest in the performance style of younger queens, especially dqh6. She has unique abilities to combine impersonation and a drag queen persona to

create a new form of drag style. This fusion combined with her ability to connect with audiences gay and straight, means that she can advance the popularity of her style, forcing other queens to either make adjustments in their acts or to move into more marginal performing positions. Dqh6 may well effect a dramatic change in performance of drag in Halifax.

The diva status is not entirely bought into by older queens; one mentioned to me that the heart or the contribution one makes to the community is more important. Another queen noted: “In the drag community, a diva is anybody that thinks they are a diva — whether they have the talent or anything to back it up or not — it all just appears in their head” (dqh1). When I asked this participant if there was anyone she sees in the community as a diva she indicated that while Toronto had top drag performers who could be considered divas, she really did not feel that Halifax has performers of similar quality (dqh1). The participant’s image of what drag should be is based on an idea that drag synthesizes comedy, dance, lyp-synch and glamour. Queens who only dance/lyp-synch or project the glamour are not entitled to the privilege of the diva status (dqh1). This participant was an exception (among queens older than 30 years of age). She acknowledged that she does not fully participate in the local scene. In addition, she has lived and performed in other cities, and has a wider framework with which to compare drag. Therefore, her standards for drag tend to be higher than most in the community, because she sees drag as a professional act (rather than as a personal vocation, as many queens do). Nonetheless, her comments are an important commentary on the limited nature of the status of diva in the drag community.

Few queens become a diva; most have fruitful, if less recognized, drag careers.

After years of performing, queens or kings may grow tired of the demands and rigors of drag. These rigors affect both younger and older queens. Physical deterioration does take place as older queens find they need more makeup to maintain a proper face. Younger queens enter the drag world at sixteen, seventeen or eighteen and find by age twenty-three or twenty four that they have lost interest in drag. Either they have outgrown their need to perform in drag, or they have settled into partnerships, or have found jobs that do not leave enough time to perform drag (dqh1 and dqh7). Not all drag queens follow these stages; many are lifers, whether they perform regularly or not. Some queens and kings simply decide for work or relationship reasons to do drag on occasion. However, there are queens and kings who, faced with these life course changes, decide to retire, which is known as “hanging up their heels” (dqh8). When a drag queen or king decides to hang up their heels, they can communicate this in several ways: having a farewell show (top performers can often take the door, the proceeds of the cover charge, home with them), telling their drag mother they have stopped doing drag, or auctioning off their wardrobe. Some simply cease to perform and it becomes understood after a period of time that the performer has retired. In addition, with technology a new way to enter or leave the drag scene has arrived. Gay Halifax.com has a page devoted to drag queens, with pictures and profiles, and queens and/or kings who wish to retire simply move their picture and profile to the retired section of the site, thus denoting the end of their drag career.

Foundations of Drag as an Art Form: Naming

There exist various aspects that constitute the drag persona: naming, music, and “the face.” According to Judith Butler in Excitable Speech: Politics of the Performative (1997), naming provides a person with the opportunity for social existence. By being spoken about and addressed by name a person’s self-identity acquires a meaning in language. Therefore, by naming a queen or king, a life in language becomes a life in identity. The drag community follows a general pattern of naming that is consistent with what Butler outlines: “First, a name is offered or given, imposed by someone else or by some set of someones, and it is attributed to someone else” (29). Each drag performer’s name is different, but there are recognizable trends: names can be given to them by friends (dqh10 received her name from a friend in Sydney, developing the name shortly before she did her first number), by their drag mothers (dqh5 received her name from her drag mother), or they can derive from popular culture (dqh3 took her name from a character in the 1960s classic fantasy series Bewitched). However, not all names follow these trends. Dqh2 took her name from playing a game of cards. Dkh1 took his name from a story, written about a friend, as a teenager.

Names are significant because they represent the self the drag queen or drag king is performing, as one participant highlighted:

Dkh1 wasn’t going to be a frat boy. At the time the popular drag kings in Halifax were, you know, Harry Dick and Cranky Cock and they were all sort of really edgy, really sort of in your face with attitude, so I decided that I wanted to go the opposite of the spectrum and be the gentleman (dkh1).

The name represents the self and the type of masculinity this king wishes to

perform. Female impersonators describe their stage personality as similar to their male persona; for them the authenticity of the impersonation of the character they are imitating is of prime importance.

Foundations of Drag as an Art Form: Music

Music is used to develop a stage persona; each queen or king selects the music he or she performs to for particular purposes. Some may use it to express the emotion most prevalent in their thoughts at the time they perform, or the style of popular culture during their adolescence and early adulthood. Younger queens tend to perform pop music, contemporary music that appeals to the cohort group that is 18-23 at present (for example Pink, Christine Aguilera). Other queens perform music that was popular in their youth. Queens for whom the 1970s was a formative decade perform disco tunes, whereas queens for whom the 1980s was formative perform standards such as Madonna (Like a Virgin), Pat Benetar and Joan Jett. One queen specializes in country music standards and one very senior queen, in her sixties, performs Judy Garland classics. One king specializes in musical styles ranging from “Rat Pack” crooners of the 1960s, such as Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin to American rap performer Eminem. Kings and queens often preserve and transmit popular culture by performing older standards that younger audiences haven’t seen or heard previously. If the performance impresses the audience, they will, at least, remember the music and at best become fans. Knowledge of music, artists and songs is transmitted to new audiences. For example the recent film Chicago re-introduced songs popular with older generations of gay and lesbian people, like “All that Jazz” and “Be

Good to Mama,” to a new group of performers and audiences.

The selection of music develops the stage character. Impersonators will become identified as doing a certain character; for example, Meshally Crystal is known for impersonating Cher and Natasha N for her impersonations of Sarah MacLaughlin. Drag queens (belonging to the fourth category of drag) are recognized as versatile performers who perform a variety of artists while still being in the “drag” character. When dqh4 performs “Nobody Does It like Me” by Shirley Bassey, the audience is familiar with the music, but it is the movement, clothing and the persona of the queen that creates the enthusiastic reaction of the audience.

As a drag king, dkh1’s use of music has evolved with his stage act; while once fusing and emulating the Rat Pack “crooner” of the 1960s, his act has evolved into the use of rap artists like Eminem, hillbilly sounds (that are used as the basis for comic performances), and pop artists like Rick Springfield. When he is performing people know he is doing a number; they don’t believe that Eminem, for example, or Rick Springfield is performing. He reinterprets the music in his own style (dk1). Dkh2, on the other hand, emulates classic crooner standards and creates an illusion that the actual singer is on stage. He is as much known for his image and appearance as for the artists he performs when on stage. Music can ground some drag performers’ stage characters in that they are identified by the music they do, while for others the antics and style of their drag personality incorporate the music into their performance. For these queens, the music does not define them; they re-define the meaning of the music they use in their performances.

Foundations of Drag as an Art Form: “The Face”

Several queens identified for me the importance of makeup and of “putting on your face” correctly. The proper use of makeup is essential in constructing the effective illusion of female beauty that drag requires. Makeup alters the body, reducing the presence of male features and enhancing female features like cheekbones (dqh3). Makeup is the physical process of re-aligning the self. According to Goffman, impression management occurs when one adjusts the self in accordance with the social situation one finds oneself in. Drag queens are constantly engaged in the task of impression management and that task begins with doing the face properly. If the face isn’t right, then the offending queen will face social sanction from her peers. The proper use of makeup is central to the illusion the queen is expected to create. The face is the impression made to the world; as such it acts as a mask. Claude Levi-Strauss, in *The Way of the Masks*, discusses the uses of masks to project roles, both secular and sacred. Levi-Strauss notes the importance of the texture and style of the mask in conveying the proper social function, akin to the selection of the correct type of makeup. The wrong makeup will ruin the effect. Levi-Strauss also introduces the concept of dance masks, which the drag queen face is analogous to, since the face is developed not just for back stage or off stage (interaction with people in the bar or venue of performance), but is part of the performer that is presented in dance/lyp-synch on stage. Having the right face represents the self you want others to see; it is the projection of the self. If the face isn’t done properly, then the self the queens are trying to project is incomplete. Having a bad face (failing to project the image of the drag queen properly) signifies two qualities that negatively affect a queen’s reputation. Firstly, a bad face can be a sign of a lack of commitment, since other queens’

work extremely hard and long to develop their faces (and spend a fair bit of money, since makeup is expensive). A queen who enters the drag world with a bad face is one that is seen to not care enough to put in the work to maintain the standard, thus offending other queens. Secondly, a bad face is a sign of inexperience, of queens who do not know how to put on makeup properly. Bad faces diminish drag, as a performing art, and, therefore, queens will direct negative comments to other queens whose faces don't meet the standard. This criticism works as a tool of effective social control because, as Butler argues, to be addressed in an injurious way is to "not only be open to an uncertain future [but also] to suffer the disorientation of one's situation" (4 1997). For new queens this kind of criticism impairs their entry and acceptance into the community and leaves them outsiders. Therefore, new queens, unless they give up and decide not to pursue drag, will generally act to correct a bad face immediately, so they can end their disorientation and be accepted into the group. Experienced queens will not just criticize bad faces, but will offer to assist; a number of the participants have taken people aside and redone makeup or given tips and suggestions for improvement. The queen who accepts such suggestions boosts her performance standards and wins more respect from her fellow queens. Queens also develop bonds and respect through sharing of makeup tips and suggestions, building on reputations.

Drag kings are not subjected to these same standards, usually no makeup is necessary, as long as the illusion is a recognizable sign of masculinity, the drag king act will be accepted without as many aesthetic requirements as drag queens.

Conclusion

Drag is a distinctive form of performance art, incorporating song, dance, lip-synch, mime, motion, and makeup/costuming. It exists as an independent art form with its own definitions, requiring gender illusion and projection of an alternate persona. Drag acts are constructed through naming (which creates the character), selection of music (which develops the performance of the drag character) and “the face” (which symbolizes the image of the drag performer). Drag performance careers begin in smaller venues on amateur evenings, and if new performers accept the advice of experienced peers (or improve regardless of this advice), they can work their way up to Sunday night shows and special events. If the queen or king is a good performer and can maintain harmonious relations with the rest of the community, she can have a vital and active drag career and be respected. After a productive career, many queens and kings find that their bodies, life experiences or employment preclude active drag, so either they scale down participation or decide to hang up their heels.

Chapter 2: Institutions in the Halifax Drag Community

Is There a Drag Community?

For gays and lesbians, community is both a space and an idea. As Carol A. Warren argues: “the essence of the idea is psychic; those who form a community, whether it is one of tradition, idea or sexuality, have a sense of oneness” (13). According to Stephen Murray, a community can exist in a geographical area where there is a concentration of residents who are gay and lesbians. Warren notes that the idea of community can center on meeting places within the broader community, such as coffeehouses and gay nightclubs. Community is found through participation in movements that provide support and advocacy (e.g. PFLAG; Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gay People). Richard Dyer argues for a conceptualization of community centered on culture; for example, camp and drag.

According to Jeffrey Escoffier, in “Community and Academic Intellectuals: The Conquest for Cultural Authority in Identity Politics.” from Cultural Politics and Social Movements communities are created by the vernacular knowledge, practices and norms that constitute the social activity of the time. An example of this vernacular knowledge is camp, which uses ironic commentary, cultural expropriation and humour to create a gay (i.e., homosexual) style. Escoffier discusses how camp could be self-read, allowing gays to recognize each other; but those without this vernacular of knowledge could not read gay. Within a specific historical timeframe, the mid 1930s through to the early 1970s, vernacular camp created a type or recognized style of a gay community. The increasingly militant style of gay advocacy (since the 1970s) has made the secret code of camp

irrelevant and has changed the vernacular of the gay community. With legalization of the practices of sodomy, legal stigma around the gay community ceased to exist. Gay has also become more socially visible as the easing of restrictions on definitions of pornography have allowed new gay and lesbian forms of sexual expression, whether audio, visual, or written, to expand. New geographical spaces have opened as gay villages in major urban centers in Canada (e.g. Church Street in Toronto) and public attitudes towards gays and lesbians have liberalized. The result of these changes is a new sense of openness. An open environment means no secrets to keep, therefore, a code is not required to read gay any longer. Camp as a “code” for gay has ceased to have relevancy. Within this environment, drag, as a sister to camp, has at times offered critiques of hegemonic, dominant mainstream culture and at other times is seen to be a relic, or an outdated mode of reference for the gay community.

While the gay and lesbian community has become more open in its existence and has become increasingly accepted since decriminalization in 1969, it still exists as a subculture, as defined by Troiden: “A normative system of some groups or groups smaller than the whole society. Subcultures provide their members with a vocabulary of motives, verbal justifications, which allow them to rationalize, redefine as normal, and defend behaviours and identities that are saturated with public scorn” (71). Troiden further divides subcultures by arguing that the homosexual subculture is actually a satellite culture that has varying levels of scenes, which he defines as: “cultural units that spring up around recreational activities and have clearly delineated territories.... [M]embers support and train novices in special skills” (73). For example, in the gay and lesbian community, there are suburban dwellers, leather men and women, drag kings, drag queens,

bears/chubbs, muscle men, straight-acting gays, and gays who organize their sense of self around high culture. This list is not exclusive; it merely provides a representative sample of the scenes of the gay and lesbian community. The drag community is situated as a “satellite” culture within the gay and lesbian community of Halifax.

In this chapter I argue that the drag community is an imagined community, meaning it does not have a physical geography. The drag community exists for the practice of a form of culture (performance art of drag) that is situated spatially within the gay male bar culture of Halifax. Drag communities, like other communities, have structures, institutions, places and people that frame the social norms and mores of the community.

Institutions of the Drag Community

All but one participant identified the existence of a drag community in Halifax. This lone participant identified drag as part of the gay community, not a separate satellite culture. The diversity of social class, gender, age and life experience that drag performers bring to the community guarantees that divisions will exist. Despite divisions, however, a drag community exists, according to Newton, to provide kings and queens with validation against the backdrop of a hostile subculture (gay and lesbian) and dominant culture (heterosexual, mainstream culture). This is not to say there is unanimity; in fact, many drag performers have very different ideas about life, drag and community. However, drag is the unifier that brings these performers together in a space called community.

Participants offered three definitions of drag community. The first is a group of performers whose purpose is to raise money to assist less fortunate people. The vehicle for

this community is the Imperial Barony of Halifax, known as ISCANS, an organization devoted to fundraising:

The drag community is a group of quote unquote sisters who basically are at the forefront for raising money for gay charities in the city. Altogether there [are] 86 drag queens in Halifax and every one of them gets their part to help raise money. Six times a year the Imperial Sovereign Court of Nova Society puts on major functions where they spend a lot of money and then they charge you like five bucks to get in...there is a whole week's worth of entertainment and all these different events raise money for the charities that the newly elected monarchs have chosen (dqh3).

For those holding to this definition, ISCANS is the drag community, the organization through which drag makes its impact on Halifax and Nova Scotia.

Dkh1 offered a second description of the drag community:

There is a community of drag queens but it's the same as the gay community, where it's not like everybody knows each other, it's not like everyone is holding hands and everyone gets along. The drag community splits up into cliques (dkh1).

This participant does not feel drag kings are included. Given the divisions that exist among drag queens, the participant argues that drag performers are too fractured and divided to form their own community. Therefore, drag queens are one segment of the gay and lesbian community and so are drag kings. Drag kings can move between their own satellite of drag kingdom (e.g. the Dawgtown boys performing group) and between the drag queen venues (Court shows).

The third definition of drag community involves convergence of space and cultural activity:

I would call the drag community drag queens.... Anybody who actually comes out and does drag, I guess, is a member of the drag community (dqh10).

This definition provides an example of Richard Dyer's conception of community organizing around culture. This community of culture synthesizes with the accessibility of venue. Drag queens and kings come together to perform as artists and as such anyone who does drag is a drag performer and a member of the drag community. Since almost all performances of drag take place in the gay bars in Halifax, the drag community becomes synonymous with the gay bars, where the practice of this form of culture takes place. This linkage of venue and performance is similar to that of other cultural groups in Halifax. For example, if you want to listen to or perform folk music, you would go to the Dandelion Café. If musicians are interested in hard and/or alternative rock, they perform at the Marquee Club. Venues thus bring space and cultural practice together.

ISCANS

The Imperial Barony of Halifax, soon to be the Imperial Sovereign Court of Atlantic Nova Society Inc. (as of October 2004), is a drag-based organization (but open to all residents of Atlantic Canada), whose purpose is to raise money for charities in the Atlantic region. In the 1960s activist Jose Sarria was fired from his job as a schoolteacher when his sexual orientation was made public. In order to make a contribution and give back to the community, Sarria began a Court in San Francisco (dqh2). Sarria drew

inspiration for the Court from two traditions: the history of a late nineteenth century philanthropist named Norton who had declared himself Emperor of San Francisco, protector of California and Mexico, and from the Tavern Guild (an informal organization of staff from San Francisco gay bars) tradition of having annual parties (dqh2). Sarria declared herself (as a drag queen) Empress Jose I, Empress of San Francisco, protector of California and Mexico, by virtue of her identification as the 'widow Norton'. Empress Jose I visits Norton's grave each year, in drag. Empress Jose I began holding annual balls each year; these balls were about fun, camp and high spirits and the proceeds went to charity (dqh2). The success and fun of the annual balls led other queens to decide to hold balls and do fundraising in their own cities (dqh2). Courts as formal organizations began to run balls in cities across the west coast of the United States and eventually spreading across the continent. In 1970, Ted North brought The Court to Vancouver and eventually Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, Hamilton, London, Regina, Winnipeg, Surrey and Halifax all obtained Courts (dqh2). While Carol Warren's "Sun City" (her fictional name given to the city she studied) did not have a Court, she locates the Court system within hierarchies of drag that existed in the community prior to the development of ISCANs: "Those members of the gay world, generally career gays, who attend drag balls and enter drag contests elevate their mothers to the status of 'dowager queen' or 'dowager empress', giving them a role supportive to the new younger, drag queens. 'Princesses,' 'Empresses' and other honorific titles are given to the contest winners. Each geographical area of cities on the West Coast...has a gay royal family whose court reigns for a year by election and then is replaced by another court at the annual drag ball for each area" (110). Warren identified how relationships and hierarchies in communities became structured: an older

gay male or older drag queen becomes mentor to many younger people in the community. In gratitude they recognize her as mother and as a dowager. Since the time of Warren's work these structures have become more formalized. Rules and regulations now govern this system of associations. Courts are now very hierarchical, with titles coming from the Monarchs, not from "courtiers," and younger queens can be elected Empress and become "dowager" after they serve their term as Empress.

Courts were established for fun and the annual balls were a time of celebration. When the AIDS epidemic hit gay communities all across North America during the 1980s, the lack of funding for AIDS research and the need to support dying people drew the Courts into the major fundraising role they now occupy within local communities (dqh1). An example of this fundraising occurs in Halifax, where ISCANS raises anywhere between \$15 000 and \$20 000 per year and each charity that is sponsored for the year receives about \$3000 to \$4000. In 1991 dqh2 decided that the tradition of fundraising and the cohesion of the Court system might assist the growth of the Halifax drag community (which had only reached a bare minimal critical mass in 1988). By 1999, Courts were established in Canada and Halifax had achieved a strong enough drag community that a Barony (a trial court) could be established. In 2000, the Imperial Court of Atlantic Nova Society began and in 2001 it entered the International Court System as the Imperial Barony of Halifax. In 2004, the Imperial Barony of Halifax will become "sovereigned," becoming a full Imperial Court in the International System.

Besides weekly or biweekly drag show/fundraisers, the major fundraiser is the annual Ball (or Coronation) where the Reigning Monarchs step down and new Monarchs are elected. This event draws people from other Courts in a form of reciprocal exchange.

For example, if Halifax visits Toronto's Coronation, then members from Toronto's Court will come to Halifax's Coronation. The more out of towners that buy tickets for the Ball and attend Coronation Week events, the more money ISCANS makes. At events during Coronation Week, silver collections (requesting donations) are regularly held. In one evening during Adornment IV celebrations, \$400 was raised in one hour by passing the hat. Therefore, the more people that come to Coronation and Coronation week events, the more money a Court can raise. All Monarchs are required to travel out of town twice a year, usually to visit other Courts. As a full Court, Halifax now becomes a possible Court to visit, thereby bringing more people to the Coronation and adding to Halifax's ability to raise money. With impending elevation at the Coronation (where ISCANS will be formally raised to a full Court), other Courts will want to be present to recognize the new Court. As well, the extensive travel of the present Reigning Monarchs, His Most Imperial Gracious Excellency, Baron IV Joseph Penny and Her Most Imperial Gracious Excellency, Baroness IV BoomBoom Lubalicious, has resulted in the expectation that fourteen courts will be in attendance at Halifax's Coronation I.

While ISCANS is recognized internationally, the money raised stays within the community in which it is raised. Each Court is registered under its local jurisdiction (so the Imperial Barony of Halifax is a society under the Nova Scotia Societies Act). While the Court is bound to follow general principles of the International System, its by-laws are decided by the membership and duly registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies of Nova Scotia. For a fee of ten dollars (which is used to run ISCANS and support events that raise money for charity), one becomes a member of ISCANS. All ISCANS members are known as "courtiers." Since the system is hierarchical, each

courtier is granted a title by the Reigning Monarchs. The lowest ranking is that of Lord (a gay male, a heterosexual man, a drag king, transgender identified male) or Lady (a drag queen, lesbian, transgender identified woman or heterosexual woman). A Lord or Lady can participate at the Annual General Meeting (to elect Parliament or an Executive), cast a ballot each year for the election of the Monarchs, sit as a member of Parliament and, after one year, run for Emperor or Empress. Currently, the Reigning Monarchs of ISCANS are their Most Imperial Gracious Excellencies Baron IV Joseph Penny Lubalicious and Baroness IV BoomBoom Lubalicious. Their duties are to represent the society at all events held in the gay and lesbian community (e.g. Pride Parade), and attend functions elsewhere in the community with their consent and the agreement of Parliament (the Executive). The Monarchs must attend two out of town functions (generally other Courts' Coronations) and hold functions in their own community, with the proceeds of all shows going to charity. The Monarchs are the face of ISCANS; the actual governance is divided between the Monarchs and Parliament. Parliament is elected at the Annual General Meeting each year and serves as the Executive of the Society. Parliament consists of a Prime Minister (the Chair), the Premier (who mediates any disputes), Ministers of Communications, Finance, Public Relations/Media, Adornment (Coronation) and Events, plus additional positions as Parliament see fits, as long as Parliament does not exceed 15 persons (Memorandum of Association, ISCANS www.imperialcourt.ns.ca).

Each year the members go to the polls to elect the Reigning Monarchs (the Emperor and Empress, as of October 2004). The election is held in one of the gay bars and is conducted similar to federal, provincial and municipal elections; a secret ballot is used and a list of courtiers (members in good standing) is used to determine who can and has

voted. The results are then sealed and counted by a professional accounting firm. While specific results are not given, the winners are announced at Adornment (Coronation), where all members of the Society and guests from out of town gather for four days of celebrations to toast and celebrate the retiring monarchs and to witness the crowning of the new Monarchs. Once the results are announced, the new Monarchs walk down the aisle to the head of the room. There they are sworn in and crowned; then they receive courtiers and guests, accepting congratulations and giving thanks. The new Monarchs are now the most powerful people in ISCANS. The Monarchs can make proclamations on court matters, regulating forms of dress. They can fine members for infractions (to raise money and to “sanction” courtiers). Generally such fines are imposed for use of profane language during a Court show. By “wearing the crown” (being Monarchs) they wield power indirectly as well. The Monarchs enjoy an elevated status of greater respect from the community, but are obligated to a high degree of service.

The day after Coronation, at the Victory Brunch, the new Monarchs announce their deputies (Baronet and Baronette, soon to be Crown Prince and Crown Princess) and the charities that the Reign will support. All money raised at events held during the Reign is collected, and at the end of the year, donated to the four charities selected by the Monarchs. The power that can be exercised through the allocation of money fundraised throughout the year represents a new strength for drag queens and kings, who have traditionally existed as marginalized persons. Given the new strength of ISCANS, drag queens and kings see their participation in ISCANS as very important. Some participants indicated that they perform for ISCANS because they respect the present Reigning Monarchs (dqh5). The participant likes raising money for charity and thinks that

fundraising enhances drag as it represents the commitment of drag performers to the community. For other participants, ISCANS provides a space for members of the community to take on leadership roles. Further, these leadership roles are recognized by governments and by the larger community; therefore, they provide opportunities to participate in civic affairs, as the following participant argues:

I would call ISCANS a hierarchy for drag... it's primarily a fundraising organization, but they make it more fun for a drag queen, like they give them reasons to do it, like titles, and they give you opportunities to look a part that you would never even dream of being in regular life. [The] heads of state [are] two people that actually represent their organization [and] are actually elected from the community (dqh10).

As the participants indicated what courtiers, whether drag performers or not, get from joining ISCANS is: "A chance to be glamorous, to be dignified, and have fun. You don't have to be glamorous to have fun, you don't have to be dignified to have fun, but it's nice to have them both and it gives us some structure" (dqh2). Heterosexism can create barriers making it difficult for drag queens and king to participate in other charities. An example of this tension occurred in Reign IV (2003-2004). One of the charities selected was Brainchild, which provides support and assistance for children living with brain cancer. At one point in the reign, the Monarchs were invited to visit some of the children that Brainchild assists. BoomBoom felt that the children would not be able to understand her being in drag, so she went as her boy self to visit. Whether BoomBoom had been told directly, or understood herself, that being in drag would be unacceptable is unclear. Her decision resulted in a violation of protocol. Only the drag persona wears the

crown; BoomBoom cannot call herself the Baroness when she is a boy, so this accommodation to the heterosexism of the charity could potentially have meant that she would face criticism from other drag performers in the community. Therefore, navigating charities can be a difficult task for many drag performers. However, ISCANS provides an opportunity for a gay and lesbian oriented environment, and creates, as Max Kirsch notes, an outlet for community participation and creating bonds of social support. As dqh10 indicated, the Baron and Baroness are actually the only two formally elected positions that represent the gay and lesbian community; through them a powerful, formal voice can be used to advocate for the community.

Despite the participation of drag performers in ISCANS, participants indicated that ISCANS is not synonymous with the drag community. ISCANS is open to people of all sexual orientations, genders and ways of life; there are straight men and women, leather men and women, lesbians, non-drag performing gay males and drag performers. Therefore the composition of ISCANS is very diverse and it attempts, through its function as a community fundraiser and supporter of charities, to act as a unifier for the community and to bring people together (dqh10). Despite this broad-ranging goal, ISCANS, with a membership of approximately seventy people, does not have general appeal (as of yet) to people in the broader Halifax Regional Municipality. The fact that the fundraising takes place through performance and in particular through drag shows limits the appeal of the shows for those people in the Halifax Regional Municipality who are unfamiliar with or unsupportive of drag.

While ISCANS's membership is diverse, most performers in the shows that actually raise the money are queens or kings. Court structures, its titles, rituals,

ceremonies, and colour tend to hold appeal for those who appreciate drama and camp. While leather men, boy singers, girl singers, dancers and partners/family members of drag performers will participate in ISCANS, it is drag kings and queens who see it as providing an outlet for their creative and dramatic talents.

Bars and Drag in Halifax: Clientele and Venue

Warren locates the gay bar as one of the center sites of community activity for gay and lesbian people: “First, they are sexually defining spaces. Anyone inside them is presumed to be gay and if male, legitimate objects for a sexual advance.... Bars are used not only to make sexual contacts, but also to expand the circle of sociability.... Bars are also places to greet members ... and continue social relations” (22). Each of these functions is vital for the drag community; the bars are where possible sexual contacts can be made, new queens and kings or friends are met, and of course the bars are the venues in which drag is performed and in which queens and kings regularly gather. According to Warren, bars tend to specialize in serving a particular clientele. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the venues and specializations that exist in the gay bar scene in Halifax and how these specializations relate to drag. In Halifax, there are at present four gay bars, each specializing in different clientele: Toolbox East, Reflections Cabaret and Cigar Bar, Club Vortex / Mobeys, and Club NRG2 have different and evolving relationships with drag.

Toolbox East, located on 2104 Gottingen Street, (up one flight from the Apple Barrel Café) is a leather bar. Toolbox, physically, is a relatively small space. There is the

main bar (where patrons are served drinks), table and chair seating areas, a television (hang on a platform just opposite the front windows) is set to various sports and news channels, a pool table is at the back of the bar for the patrons use and there is an outside patio. The venue has no appropriate space for stag, therefore performances are difficult to arrange, most patrons will go across the street to ClubNRG2 to catch a show. The bar has recently undergone renovations and the walls have been re-painted from black to powder blue. New lights have been installed. The Rainbow Flag (symbol of Pride) flies outside and there is a “bear” flag (symbol of the leather/bear/chub satellite culture that patronizes the bar) flying inside. The clientele are leather men (in this case gay men who live a leather lifestyle) gay bears (these are usually older overweight gay males who form a separate satellite culture), uniform men (those men who have a ‘fetish’ or sexual attachment to the wearing of uniforms) and those that may not be part of these demographics, but are supportive of a exclusively masculine environment. While queens may patronize the establishment occasionally, it is a masculine environment catering principally to members of the leather/bear/chubbs community.

Reflections Cabaret and Cigar Bar, at 5184 Sackville Street, is the oldest of the gay bars in Halifax and, since opening in 1996, it has had a strong participation in the drag culture. The bar is open 4 pm to 4 am seven days a week and is known as where Halifax goes to dance (www.reflectionscabaret.com). When a patron enters the bar, they will first pass the box office/coat check area, pay their cover charge and go through security. Once in the bar, the patron will be standing near the back, close to their left is the main bar, where drink orders are taken, money received and drinks handed out. Continuing our view from the back, we see a small hallway that is for staff only. Next to that hallway is a

second bar that relieves overflow demands for drinks during peak periods. Next to the second bar space is the smoking room, which is furnished with leather couches, tables and chairs. A television is mounted in the right hand corner and the left hand wall has several video lottery terminal machines for people to gamble on. Leaving the glass encased smoking room the patron enters the main area of the bar. This is divided into three sections: there are a number of table chair seating are at the wall near the front entrance to the smoking room. There is a partition running through the middle third of the space, where tables and bar stools are provided for patrons to sit in. The section between the partition and the balcony has a few tables and chairs for seating nearer the sides and back. Closest to the street entrance is a balcony section, patrons climb a small number of stairs to an elevated space that has pool tables, an air hockey machine and some supplemental seating (so called VIP seating for the shows). Returning to the middle section, at the front is a dance floor (all flooring at Reflections is now in blue tile) for patrons to use. Dwarfing the dancing area is a large stage, equipping with state of the art lighting, video terminals and to the right the DJ booth. This is the largest stage drag is held on in the Atlantic region (with the exception of the Diamond Divas annual even in Moncton) The bar space is establish to encourage drinking, dances, gambling, games and some socializing (although the music generally is played too loud for people to converse in) Drag shows are held on the second Sunday on each month. Monday night is poor student night (with episodes of Queer as Folk when original episodes are being aired), Tuesday night is Karaoke night, Wednesday night is Dita Parlow's "Smart Ass" competition, a combination reality program and game show. Thursday night is bands night, where a variety of bands from rock to punk will be booked to play in the venue, usually followed by DJ music until 3:30

a.m. Friday night features special DJ's and is known as rave or underground music night, where younger patrons go to hear and dance to, alternative music. Saturday night is usually the busiest night in the bar and is for dancing, DJ Headfones 'spins the tunes' for patrons until 3:30 a.m.

Reflections Cabaret has a reigning Mz. Reflections, a drag queen who is elected each year to represent the bar in the community, to perform at functions and to host shows. In 2000, Mr. Reflections, a position for drag kings, was created in the bar to provide more visibility for the drag king community. In fact, Mr. Reflections was the first drag king title started in Halifax: "I used to dedicate myself at Reflections and that's because Reflections were the first bar really to give up a spot to drag kings; they were the first bar in the Atlantic Provinces to have a title for a drag king, and I was the first boy to get that title so I felt very loyal" (dkh1). Drag queens and kings have worked at Reflections, in and out of face, and Reflections has had a variety of nights with drag themes. Until recently, on Monday nights BoomBoom hosted an underwear party (mostly drag queens out of drag showing up to see cute boys in boxers), and Wednesday nights featured drag shows, with Studio X Lenoir, Dita Parlow, and Debbie hosting weekly drag competitions, where queens would perform on the Spot or in some other contest for a cash prize. Sunday nights would be major drag shows, ranging from medium sized performances to super events such as The Grammys (where queens imitated the Grammys held in Hollywood) and the Pride Drag Show (held the day after Pride Day, which celebrates Gay and Lesbian Pride in Halifax and includes activities mainly, the annual Pride Parade, the post Parade reception for the community and is held the second Saturday in July, therefore the Pride Drag Show is the second Sunday in July). Reflections

Cabaret is known for the high calibre of performance expected on its stage. However, Reflections Cabaret has changed over the past two years and in particular during the past year since the field observation began.

A variety of circumstances have changed the environment of Reflections Cabaret from an exclusively gay and lesbian bar to what Warren calls a “mixed bar” in which both gays and heterosexuals are present. The popularity of its dance music began to bring university/college aged heterosexual women into the bar as clientele (dqh4, dkh2). Then ownership of the bar changed and the heterosexual couple who now owns it began changing the activities that take place in the bar and the themes for each night. Importantly for drag, the Sunday night shows have been limited to once a month, or perhaps twice a month, being replaced by DJ music during the rest of the month. Drag queens who work at the bar can now only work some nights in the bar “in face.” Fewer events are held that attract drag queens and fewer drag queens work at Reflections than in previous years. According to Warren, mixed bars have a difficult time maintaining gay and lesbian patrons because the secretiveness of the gay world requires a degree of anonymity. I do not think the last part of Warren’s work is entirely relevant to the current situation, since the rise of gay and lesbian liberation movements and social and cultural changes in Canadian society allow for a more open gay and lesbian culture to exist. I would substitute the word “security” for secrecy, since gay and lesbian people still face threats of physical violence and verbal intimidation. Having heterosexual people in the bar, particularly heterosexual men, creates uneasiness about personal security. The presence of heterosexuals in the bar also removes the bar’s function as a sexually defining space. No longer can one presume males in the bar to be gay and, in fact, several gay

males have been sanctioned by bar security for approaching men for sexual contact (apparently the men approached were offended and complained to security). Some gay male patrons have felt suppressed by this new heterosexual dynamic and have left for Club Vortex. This departure involves mostly straight acting and younger gay men, not drag queens. During my observation, I noted that Reflections had further altered its programming to attract university age heterosexual patrons (e.g. the addition of a Poor Student Night on Mondays, the reduction of the number of drag shows held on Sundays each month, and the booking of punk rock bands on Thursday nights, which was seen by the queens in particular to have no appeal in the gay community). Therefore, Reflections, between its new heterosexual clientele and its traditional audience, actually is becoming more of a space shared (or mixed to use Warren's terminology) between heterosexual women, (some of) their homophile boyfriends and members of the gay community.

The opening of Club Vortex, on 2215 Gottingen Street, changed the balance of the gay and lesbian bar scene in Halifax. Open from 11:30 am to 2 am seven days a week, Vortex is actually a combination of two spaces, Club Vortex and Mobey's Eatery. In Mobey's, which is the restaurant section of the bar, the patron enters from a ramp outside and the front wall consists of windows (open in the daytime, closed at night) allowing a natural light to enter the space. In front of the windows are restaurant-style table and chair seating (with a few tables and bar stools) throughout the sides and the middle of the restaurant. A red couch for patrons to relax is on the far corner. The walls are decorated with artwork from produced by local lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and queer artists. On the opposite wall from the windows is the main bar, where patrons can be served drinks and can order food (although direct service by waiters and waitresses is

provided). The lighting is soft and the music is kept at a background level. Large couches are present near the door to the patio, where people can sit comfortably, the lighting is sufficiently strong for people to see each other clearly and to recognize people as they enter the bar, the music is also kept at a volume in which it becomes background, allowing people to comfortably carry on conversations). Games like crib and board games are provided at the couch space so people can carry on conversation, games and activities. Vortex, on the other hand, the main bar, is accessible from the main door on Gottingen Street. When one enters, they come in, can check their coats, do the necessary security checks and proceed up a small flight of stairs to the main area of the bar. To the patrons right is the main bar, where drink orders are taken and served. The opposite wall from the bar feature windows that open to a view of the neighbouring YMCA (usually the curtains are drawn on these windows at night). The spaces in between consist of table and chair seating and table and table and car stool seating. On the west side is the DJ booth and on the east side of the room is the main stage. On this stage, the performer can be seen from all sides (except the rear where curtains conceal waiting performers). There is stage area which feeds into a 'common area', which serves as a stage when performances are occurring, but also serves as a dance floor at times when shows are not going on. There are couches off the side of the stage positioned at the wall (north side). While the Vortex dance floor is small, table and chair seating is removed on Friday and Saturday nights to allow more space.

Vortex has a variety of activities each week. Monday night is Karaoke night with Trevor Probert, Tuesday night is Poor Student Night, Wednesday night, as mentioned before, is Womyn's Night, Thursday night is the talent show Five Minutes of Fame, with

Lulu LaRude, Friday night is Men's Night (with boy dancers and 'eye' candy as the posters for the event advertise it), Saturday night is dance night and Sunday night is DJ music. The bar is open 11:30 am to 2 am seven days a week.

Vortex's opening brought in a number of Reflections and Club NRG's clients, as well as drawing in people who had not patronized any bar before, especially lesbians. Vortex has a substantial clientele of women (even though Vortex does not release exact figures of patrons they estimate come into the bar, from the field observation I undertook, I estimated women to be over 50% of clientele that I saw in the bar on the evenings I was present) and the bar has developed programming designed to appeal to them. For example, Wednesday night is Womyn's Night, with female bands and singers, or movies oriented to women. While these developments are positive for the lesbian community, who needed a bar space to go to (feeling neither Reflections nor NRG reached out to them), the presence of women seems to act as a brake on drag.

Drag queens identified some tension between themselves and lesbians, and women who I worked with in other contexts (e.g. during my time as Co-Chair of Halifax Pride) indicated a desire to have activities for women that did not include drag queens. Vortex itself is not known as a drag friendly space. When it first opened, queens complained of being searched and of having to pay cover. Drag queens, because of their fundraising, have never had to pay cover at the other gay bars. Since queens are usually well known to the security staff, they are not subjected to searches. Vortex's policies divided the community at large and drag queens were offended and angry at their mistreatment. Anti-drag members of the community argued that drag queens were simply being subjected to the same conditions as anyone else in the community and they should realize they are

“just a boy in the dress” (personal conversation with the author). Vortex hired new, drag sensitive, security staff (including hiring a drag king). Compromises around searching and cover charges were made. The management of Vortex may not have understood the expectations of the drag community or may not have communicated to their staff expectations for treatment of drag queens at Vortex. Vortex has hosted a Court Show since then, and dqh1 was hired to host a talent night on Thursdays. Although dqh1 insists her being hired to do the talent show has nothing to do with the controversy with the drag community, her hiring has served to bridge the divide between Club Vortex and the drag community. However, despite being hosted by dqh1, the Five Minutes of Fame talent show consists mostly of non-drag performances: singers, dancers, burlesque performers, and even a bagpipe stripper. When drag queens have come to Five Minutes of Fame, they score relatively lower in the rankings than other types of performers. A number of queens argue that these lower scores indicate an anti-drag bias on the judges’ part. This bias was apparent during the field observation and I wondered whether it is symptomatic of broader resentments against drag in the gay and lesbian community of Halifax that drag queens themselves believe exist. However, dqh1 argues that a lot of drag performances in general are of poor quality and that judges, non-drag gay men and lesbians react against bad drag performances, not drag in general. Dqh1 indicates that for queens to win more respect at Five Minutes of Fame the level of performance needs to be brought up. At Five Minutes of Fame shows, drag queens that have shown up with top performances, authentic impersonation, props and high energy have won the contest that night, so top drag can carry a Five Minutes of Fame stage. But this stage is still a contested space and really has not been established yet as drag queen friendly or drag queen hostile. Drag kings however

have had a more open experience on the Five Minutes of Stage venue with dkh1 regularly winning such talent nights. As well, because of the prominence of lesbian patrons in Club Vortex, the venue is more aware of the need to provide diverse entertainment to satisfy this audience. One of the ways the venue does this is to open more stage opportunities for drag kings. Therefore, while the drag queen has not yet made inroads into Vortex, the drag king is well established.

First opened in 1998 and recently re-opened in 2004 after renovations, Club NRG2 is located 2099 Gottingen Street. Since Club NRG2 is located in the basement of this space, patrons must descend a full flight of stairs before entering the bar. Once in ClubNRG2, patrons will notice the small size of the bar. At the foot of the stairs is the coat check and security. From there the patron can walk straight ahead to a large hallway that has a number of table and chair seating areas where patrons can socialize and drink. On the opposite part of the wall are the staff entrances to the bar area, and the washrooms. At the end of the hall, is the patio where patrons can sit outside and smoke or just socialize. Returning down the hall from the washroom the patron turns right and is at the main bar, where patrons can order and be served drinks. A small kitchen is off to the side of the bar, used for the making of 'chicken' wings that are sold at cheap prices on karaoke evenings. Facing out from the bar the patron can see a relatively small stage with a dressing area to its left and to its right the DJ booth. The center of this space is the main stage where shows take place. There is a dance floor at the foot of the stage, and this space can extend into the center of the bar (usually divided off by partitions and the placement of the table/chair seating). Off to the left of the dance area (recently) new seating was installed. The bar is decorated in black and industrial motifs with grey carpet, black walls.

It has high quality sound equipment and a video monitor at the front. The bar is dark (due to its basement location, and the smaller size allows for more interactions between patrons). ClubNRG2 patrons are almost all gay, with smaller number of lesbian patrons and occasional heterosexual women will show up to view a drag show.

Club NRG2 is where most Court shows take place with regular drag nights on Wednesdays and Sundays. Wednesday nights are “Money for Makeup,” hosted by Studio X Lenoir. Currently, the show is well attended by drag queens, particularly younger and newer queens looking to establish a reputation practice their performance skills and win a \$75 prize. Two Sundays a month the bar is reserved for Court shows and functions, which range from dragathon fundraisers (two sets of drag performances with anywhere from ten to twenty queens coming out to perform) to events like Christmas and Easter Dinners, the Baronette’s Ball and King and Queen of Diamonds pageant. The other Sundays are reserved for Pride Committee or other community fundraisers (for example, shows for Manna for Health and the AIDS Coalition Emergency Fund), special events and pageants. The bar has several titles available: Mz. NRG, similar to Mz. Reflections in purpose, Mr. Leather NRG and Mz. Leather NRG. These titles are about outreach to the communities from which patrons are drawn (drag and leather). The staff at ClubNRG2 are mostly drag queens; Monday night’s DJ, who is also Thursday night’s Karaoke host, is a drag queen (although he does these nights as his boy self), and the host of Tuesday Karaoke also is a drag queen who does the show as a boy. A prominent drag queen, dqh4, hosts the Wednesday talent night. The bar manager is a drag queen and most of the bar staff and door staff are drag queens, so Club NRG2 is a very drag-centered space. NRG2 and Toolbox provide for a coalition of drag and leather and provide spaces that are centered to

the needs of these marginalized groups.

Bars and Drag in Halifax: Venue and Performance

At present, NRG2 is where the largest number of drag shows are held. For those who want to come out to perform for the first time, the NRG stage is usually where queens make their debut. Despite the small stage, or more likely because of it, the NRG stage is very accessible and people who are less experienced are more likely to feel comfortable beginning there. The size of the stage makes a difference. While NRG2's stage is great for small shows and beginners, the Reflections and Vortex stages are larger and are more suitable for larger shows, as one participant stated:

When you are planning your number, you have to know what your stage is, how big it is, where can you enter and exit from, is there anything tricky that you have to do. Vortex has an interesting layout, well, much the same as Reflections at big shows, where you have three walls; at NRG it's one dimensional ... even if you are down on the floor everyone is in front of you, and at Vortex or Reflections there's right, left and in the front (dkh1).

Larger spaces allow for bigger performances to be held and for audience members to have a broader spatial experience of the act being performed. However, while Vortex and Reflections can put on larger shows, everyday drag is done at NRG2. The audiences at the bars are different; one participant mentioned she had done a show at Reflections and the music she had selected was "too old" for the crowd there (she is 32, most of the audience was 19-23), and the performance was not a success as a result. Another participant noted the importance of audience reaction to her shows, the music she performs to must be

music that the audiences like and can relate to; therefore, at Reflections it has to be drag classics (Cher, Madonna, Whitney Houston), contemporary pop rock, hard rock, rap, or top forty music. At Vortex, given that patrons are younger gay men (under 20), some men over 40 and women of a range of ages, drag shows must involve more retro music as well as more alternative music and alternate forms of cultural presentation (burlesque shows, singers, musicians) are necessary. At Club NRG2 the crowd is diverse enough so that most types of music will get some degree of response from the audience, whether that music is Broadway musicals (e.g. Chicago), or contemporary artists like Pink, as well as the drag classics of Cher, Whitney and Madonna.

Bars and Drag in Halifax: Divisions between Downtown/Uptown Queens

Queens have a very strong loyalty to the bars they come from; often queens will use the terms “Reflections queen” or “NRG queen” to describe each other. Drag kings because they are so few in number, tend to associate more freely between Reflections, Club NRG2 and Club Vortex, therefore the following analysis is restricted to the dynamics of drag queens. Uptown queens are those that are associated with Reflections and the downtown queens are associated with ClubNRG2. One participant discussed the differences between uptown and downtown queens:

An uptown queen is in the Reflections crowds; the downtown queens are the NRG crowds; and I don't think that Vortex has that many queens that go to it — you got Reflections, which is a little flashier, and the girls ... just seem to be flashing. The girls at NRG are far more fun, at least from

what I've seen ... but not as not as ... structured (dqh2).

Oh, yeah, definitely, we get branded all the time — I am definitely an NRG Queen, I'm Miss NRG, and I'm here all the time and would say someone like, let's say Y, she's a Reflections Queen, Mz. Reflections — she doesn't come here (dqh6).

Those labels have been going on forever. Like, when I used to work at Flashback in Edmonton, I used to go to the Roost to drink on Tuesday nights where all the drag queens were and I heard, well, you are a Flashback queen — well, not really, you know ... but it was the same sort of thing back then, years and years ago ... most people think of themselves, they identify as being a Flashback queen, or as Roost queen, or whatever, and it's the same thing that they do here now (dqh1).

The queens indicate that these divisions usually relate to where they came out as drag performers, where they did their first numbers, or where they began to perform regularly. Whichever bar she begins in, her home bar represents a safe space in which the queen feels accepted and comfortable performing (dqh8 and dqh10). Generally the first two months of a queen's career decide which bar she will be associated with. If she goes more to Reflections than NRG, she becomes a Reflections queen and vice versa (dqh10). There are also differences beyond simply going to one bar or another: the NRG girls are seen as more fun, and this reflects the perception of ClubNRG2 as a community or family bar, a close tight knit circle of people who come together to socialize and are fully aware

of all the activities going on in the lives of the people who go to the bar regularly. At CkubNRG2, drag is seen as a way to have fun, to be social, to perform and to raise money, but it is not necessarily regarded as a professional art form. In contrast, at Reflections drag is seen as more of a professional art. While drag shows are less regular there than at NRG2, when shows are held, they are larger in scope, involving rehearsals, choreography and sets. The whole performance is treated as a dance show, a professional cultural product to be consumed by audiences.

Some queens eschew the typology and the definitions:

I go wherever I want, I do what I want ... it's the attitude of the management that does that a lot, you know, titling people: while she hangs out at NRG, she's an NRG queen ... it just happens to be that a lot of my friends don't go down to Reflections, so I go to where my friends are (dqh9).

However, once branded a Reflections or NRG queen it can be difficult to transcend that brand:

You go to Reflections, but am I gonna make an appearance at NRG? I don't know how the stage is. I don't know the crowd who goes to NRG. All the drag queens perform at NRG, but I don't know how to relate to the crowd at NRG (dqh8).

One participant has been a reigning Mz. Reflections. She is a very good host and participant at NRG, and Reflections, and her partner works at Vortex. As a result, she has been able to cross these boundaries successfully. It is this ability to transcend that makes her a diva. In fact, all the Halifax divas I discuss in this thesis have been successful not only at

Reflections and NRG, but also in previous bars like Rumours or Studio.

There are differences in how drag is done in the various bars, and the bars also value drag differently. If one is a Reflections queen and one secures a Reflections title, the pay for hosting shows and events is much greater than at Club NRG. Drag shows at Reflections, because the bar is larger, have potential for larger audiences to perform to. Additionally, because the bar is mixed, there is an opportunity to perform to more diverse audiences than at NRG2. The entrance of Club Vortex into the gay community has changed the balance in the community by drawing some patrons from the other bars and bringing out new people who had not participated in the bar scene before. In terms of the impact on the drag community, although dqh1 hosts Five Minutes of Fame, there are no “Vortex queens” and Vortex has not yet developed strong linkages with the community. ISCANS has done one show at Vortex, but Vortex has not created titles (such as Mz.Vortex) or positions for drag queens to perform. Vortex has also not set aside evenings for drag queens and kings to come in and perform; no drag stage exists at Vortex. The impact of Vortex on the drag community is the impact of a new competitor on bars formerly in competition only with each other. Reflections queens have begun come to NRG Wednesday and Sunday nights to perform and more NRG queens have responded by going to perform at Reflections after 2 a.m. on Wednesdays and Sundays when NRG closes. There have also been more NRG queens going to Reflections to participate in major shows (such as Country Drag or the Mz.Vicki and Friends fundraiser). Whether the opening of Vortex has prompted a degree of unity among uptown and downtown queens is unclear at this point, but this is a future development to watch out for.

Fundraising: A Call to Action

Communities provide support, identification and connections. As Max Kirsch argues:

Communities act to connect individuals with the social. They provide the avenues for human social reproduction and serve as the basis for mutual support... [C]ommunities can be sanctuaries for people needing to recover from oppression, and they can provide for collective strategies against those who attempt to destroy and subjugate their members (113).

Fundraising in the drag community fulfills the purpose, as Kirsch notes, of reproducing human social capital and providing mutual support.

According to Esther Newton, the purpose of drag shows in the 1960s was originally for show and for contest. By the time of Rupp and Taylor's study, fundraising had become a major activity for drag queens and queens are known for their ability to raise money. Each participant was asked why drag queens do fundraising shows and what the importance of fundraising for the drag performers' career is:

Well, it started ... when the local government would not allocate money for funding for certain organizations that gay people need, HIV testing, long-term care, palliative care. There was no assisting to gay food banks, you know, where it is understood that you're gay. Mz. Vicki actually started Manna for Health and so we started to realize that, hey, there is no

support group for this, no support for that, you know, issues that are relevant to us [such as] the STD clinic ... legitimate places that will keep confidentiality... The AIDS Coalition Emergency Fund, for instance, is something that we raise money for a lot because they have no government funding, they rely on the Metropolitan Community Church, and the drag queens going out and raising money for this... They don't get money from the government for that — they have to raise the money to help out (dqh3).

Drag queens in particular in those court organizations in the west founded the early AIDS Movement hands down; all that money in the very early 80s, 1982 and 1983, came from those drag communities raising money as fundraisers in their local bars. And they still continue... (dqh1).

The difference between fundraising participation with the queens Esther Newton studied and those of Rupp and Taylor is the AIDS crisis of the early 1980s. Dqh1 noted when AIDS erupted in the early 1980s the gay community was the first in North America to be affected. Very few support services were in place for people literally dying around the queens. Therefore, realizing that research and support services were essential, queens took the form of entertainment they do, performing drag, and began to use it raise money. Drag performers are readily available, inexpensive, and people in the gay and lesbian community will come out to watch:

I think that when it comes to fundraising it's just the obvious choice in our community, because they can give you something ... to put a man up there

in just boy clothes and say he's going to entertain you, he better be pretty darn good. The fact that she looks the way she looks is entertainment enough — it's a start to being entertained without her even opening her mouth... I mean, you can [go] out back and come back in and look like a totally different person, and people like that, they come see that, they wanna see what you're wearing, what your look is this time ... whether your hair is great, and your shoes are great, and all your coordinates, your jewels if they shine... (dqh10).

Since music selection, costuming and performance are so variable, queens and kings are able to mix and match numbers and ensembles and personae that can be of continual interest to audiences (e.g. audiences are not seeing the same old drag every single show, there is variety and creativity in the numbers). Gay and lesbian patrons (those who are drag supportive) will attend shows to support community causes and because they anticipate the spectacle they are about to participate in. Therefore drag queens, because they had something people wanted to see, were in the position to raise money. The queens realized that, without money, gay and lesbian people would have no access to important social support services. Fundraising for these groups means the preservation of themselves and of the community. Fundraising has allowed queens to move into activism; by fundraising they gain influence and even formal positions of power within the organizations that battle against homophobic culture and institutions.

The method fundraisers use in the drag community is to present a show in one of the gay bars. The charity receives the proceeds from the “door” (the money raised by charging admission or “cover”). The charity keeps all the dollars raised by silver

collection and fifty/fifty ticket sales. The bar makes its money from whatever the patrons spend on drinks (the bar tab). Different clubs provide different levels of support for fundraising. Club NRG2 supports the drag community by providing drink tickets; each queen or king receives one to three drink tickets (depending on how much they plan to perform) as compensation for their time. The drink ticket is the system of exchange that exists between drag queens and the venue they perform in. The bars are not required to pay for entertainment and in return drag queens get a space to perform and material recognition for their work. Recently, Reflections Cabaret stopped providing drink tickets to queens who performed in their shows. A number of queens were unhappy about this. They spend a lot of money on makeup and costuming so they can come out and perform. All their performances are for special events or for charity, and they do not get paid for any of their work. The queens argue that the least the bar can do is show some good faith by providing the drink tickets. Bars have three advantages in providing these tickets. Firstly, drag performances bring in thirsty crowds that make money for the bar (since the bar tends to do well on the bar tab for the nights of the fundraisers). Secondly, queens will usually have more than two drinks, so the bar will make money off them. Thirdly, bars also receive positive publicity for the money they raise at their venue. What Reflections has done with their drink ticket policy is disrupt the system of exchange that exists between drag performers and venues. Whether this will affect fundraising in the future is unclear.

There are differences in fundraisers by region. As Rupp and Taylor note, in Key West, which is a large tourist destination (Halifax, although a tourist destination, is not on the same level as Key West), drag shows will tend to be larger and more elaborate, with

bigger and brighter costumes, audiences, performances and venues, designed as much for tourist consumption as for the entertainment of local people. In Halifax, most drag shows are run once a week, are local affairs, take place in the bars, have crowds of less than one hundred, and raise smaller amounts of money for charity. The Halifax drag community has not taken advantage of possible opportunities in tourism to expand their entertainment to appeal to more audiences and there is some opinion in the community that drag shows need to become better if they are to attract larger and more diverse audiences (dqh1).

Value of Fundraising for a Performer's Career

Since drag queens have the experience of running shows, and derive benefit from the fundraiser shows, many fundraisers tend to be run by drag queens:

Giving yourself out there to do fundraising first of all shows that you're not too high on your own name, and if I decided to sit down and say, "Well, I'm not going to do a show unless I'm being paid for it" ... people aren't going to call me. If you have willingness to help out your community and understand that there are causes that are good and causes that are bad and causes that are just causes, and you're willing to step out there ... the results are two-fold. I mean, your name helps bring people in to help the cause, and the cause that brings you in lets maybe three new people see you that might hire you the next time, so it's networking, but it's networking on both sides. The fundraisers are networking with you, but you are also networking the entire crowd ... that's going to see you on stage.... (dkh1).

For some queens, the dollars raised are the ultimate measure of how good a queen

is, while other queens argue that regardless of the dollars raised, it is the effort the queen spends to fundraise (the putting on of face, the giving of her time) that builds her reputation. Even if a large sum isn't raised, it is the continual effort of the queen as a fundraiser that builds her reputation. Queens understand that weather, time of year, and mood of the crowd all affect the amount raised. In January queens will often open a show to an empty house (at least until 12:30 am, but even then crowds are small). At Christmas, in the immediate pre-Pride period (usually a month before Pride) and during Pride Week, a lot of money can be raised, as audiences tend to be large and enthusiastic. A variety of factors come together in the purpose of fundraising for queens: a sense of altruism, satisfying a need for activism, and obtaining a place to perform, to show off beauty and skill (such as dancing) and to receive tips (if the performance is good). In Chapter 1, I discussed the drag queens (and kings) as theatre performers. However, mainstream theatre provides little space for drag performance; but the fundraiser drag show is a forum in which drag is completely open and accepted. With few professional opportunities for drag queens and kings in Halifax, one drag career has, in fact, been built entirely upon participation in fundraisers.

In relation to fundraising, drag kings in Halifax are not evaluated by the same standards as drag queens. According to Halberstam, kings are now a regular feature in the drag community in cities such as New York, San Francisco and London. However, in Halifax, kings are too new to have made an impact on fundraising and drag queens base part of their privilege in the community on their greater success in fundraising. However, drag kings are beginning to establish themselves as they come out to perform more, and the more performing they do, the more money they raise, with the end result that the more

money they raise the greater respect they will receive from the queens.

Conclusion

The Halifax drag community does have a recognizable existence. The drag community provides a sense of cohesion for those who feel alienated from the main gay and lesbian subculture, as well as alienated from the mainstream, heterosexual culture. One of the main institutions of the drag community is ISCANS, which provides drag performers with a purpose for their performance. ISCANS also provides a symbolic system of reference for drag performers and a chance for them to make civic contributions through participation in fundraisers.

Gay and lesbian bars are the other major centers of the drag community in Halifax. While each bar has a different relationship with drag, from non-drag (Toolbox East), to ambivalent (Club Vortex), to partial participation (Reflections), to full participation (Club NRG2), all the bars provide a place for drag queens to meet and socialize freely and some also provide a stage on which they can perform their craft.

Chapter 3: Interpersonal Relationships in the Drag Community

This chapter examines interpersonal relations in the drag community; in particular three forms of relations are examined: gossip and communication, the generation gap (differences between older and younger queens), and drag kinship.

Gossip and Communication

Gossip is defined as “talk about the private or public lives of other people — both negative and positive” (6) is a key instrument of communication. Gossiping is a speech act with varying connotations. Judith Butler, in her 1997 book, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative, argues that: “To be called a name is one of the first forms of linguistic injury that one learns.... [T]he problem of injurious speech raises the question of which words wound, which representations offend, suggesting that we focus on those parts of language that are uttered, utterable and explicit. And yet, linguistic injury appears to be the effect not only of words by which one is addressed, but by the mode of address itself” (2). What I read from Butler’s argument is that insult takes place not only from the act of, but also the manner in which, people are being ‘called’ something. This being called “something” takes place whether one is speaking directly or reporting indirectly (as is the case in gossip). For example, groups of young gay men will sometimes sit around and talk about other individuals who are not present. During the conversation they will sometimes refer sarcastically to a person being discussed as a *fag*. This use of *fag* is seen as acceptable as an insider use of terminology. However, for *fag* to be used by

outsiders would be seen as an insult, generally because outsiders use the word as an insult. Drag queens are used to this form of linguistic injury, which usually comes from two sources; internal criticism which comes from criticism/condemnation/rejection by fellow gays or lesbian people. Externally, drag queens face criticism/condemnation/rejection particular heterosexuals who do not comprehend the complicated binaries of gender/sex/performance that drag involves (see Chapter 4). The internal criticism creates utterances and linguistic acts that cause injury to individuals, offend those who are targeted by the utterances(Butler 1997), but also offend those who are NOT targeted by the utterances, but who may either be friends, supporters or simply those opposed to ‘gossip’ as an injurious act. It is this internal dynamic of criticism/condemnation/rejection that creates conflict in the Halifax drag community.

While using Butler’s concept of a speech act, I argue that gossiping itself is rooted within broader social and historical contexts, as Jack Levin and Arnold Arluke argue in Gossip: The Inside Scoop:

Prior to the nineteenth century, [the term] was used to refer to men’s drinking companions and to the warmth and fellowship between men, not to their talk. During this same period, the same term was also used to refer to the friends of a family, usually women, who congregated in their home to await the birth of a child.... [T]alk was neither cheap nor dirty; indeed, it was an expression of companionship and community support, if not a primary form of entertainment. By the turn of the twentieth century, gossip had lost whatever credibility it now possessed. It became essentially what it is now: a code word for sin, sex and slander; useless

small talk, or ‘catty’ backstabbing incidents (5).

According to Levin and Arluke, gossip is identified by who brings the message and who receives it; even when the person being directly discussed does not know. Those that have received the information know who first spoke the words. Levin and Arluke argue that gossip fulfills a need to be “other-directed” in order to be accepted as part of the group. By gossiping about someone else, the one who gossips inserts him or herself into the group dynamic, gains attention and temporarily enhances their status. For marginalized subgroups that are underrepresented (or misrepresented) in popular culture and social institutions, gossip represents solidarity. According to Levin and Arluke, all members of a group who are gossiped about must be from the same group in order for the message to have any meaning. Therefore, the necessity of a shared referent means that gossip serves as a way for contact to be maintained between members of the drag community. According to Newton, modes of communication in the gay and lesbian community are individual mobility and in person conversation. Through these older forms of communication, as well as newer modes such as email, or instant messenger, drag performers communicate with each other about their lives and the activities of others, creating and reinforcing friendships. Recalling Levin and Arluke’s history of gossip, the use of gossip to describe male-male socialization is very current for drag queens, since gossip can take place in a variety of settings, the most important of which is the bar. The bar is a male-male space where drinking men (in this case drag queens) share information about each other. Levin and Arluke note that gossip binds people together by keeping them in communication, through instant messenger, email, and telephone contact and, as discussed, social contact in the bar, and thus reduces isolation. Reducing isolation is

critically important to members of subcultures who may face isolation or loneliness in the heterosexual world and for whom contact through communication keeps them in touch with other drag queens (gay men, since most of this talk occurs out of drag). Levin and Arluke suggest that gossip is also a functional form of social control; it maintains divisions between those who are the “in group” and those who are outsiders. Gossip promotes conformity, since those who do not wish to be gossiped about adjust their behaviour accordingly. While certain people are regularly discussed, the flow of information is very fluid. One can be gossiping one night and gossiped about the next night; therefore the punitive aspect of gossip is minimized. If one is scrutinized too closely there is a risk of one’s removing from the community. Gossip serves to reveal underlying tension and prevent conflicts from escalating.

Gossip is centered in the subculture (gay and lesbian community), not the satellite culture (drag). Drag queens articulated a sense that they ‘get the blame’ for being gossipy, when the responsibility for it is shared by the broader community. This reflects the wider ambivalence, as Levin and Arluke note, to this form of communication in culture, partly because it is seen as secretive, but also because it is seen as feminine and trivial.

According to Levin and Arluke, everyday gossip may be especially pronounced in small communities, where people are highly visible. The Halifax drag community is numerically very small; there are eighty-six queens, of whom maybe thirty perform regularly, and therefore their activities are highly visible. The drag community is highly interdependent since drag is an expensive undertaking; queens extensively rely on borrowing clothes, accessories, and jewellery, and assist each other in providing makeup and makeup tips. Therefore, those queens who show that they are untrustworthy lose

access to vital communal resources. Since very few queens have the resources to do drag entirely on their own, losing trust means losing access to the resources to do drag. Gossip is an important measure of social control and self-monitoring. Queens know when they step outside the norms of the community and the level or intensity of the gossip allows them to gauge how far they can go before they are sanctioned. The following story, as gossip, demonstrates what can happen to queens who violate community standards of behaviour:

Queen M, another drag queen from Reflections, as a boy came up to NRG, and I was in drag and I'm very ticklish. Well, she knows this, so she kept poking me in the ribs every so often, and it just happened that I had a brand new bob tail and she spilled my alcohol, and I looked at her and said, "The next time that you poke me in the ribs I'm gonna burn you with my cigarette. I don't care if it's a new one, I don't care if it's a butt, I don't care if it's half finished — you're getting it..." About 10 minutes later she did it again, and I wasn't holding my drink, and I just turned around and went right on the end of the nose like perfect. I was aiming for her eyes but — and so she's got this little blister on the end of her nose, and she said, "You burnt me. I gotta do drag tomorrow." ... I warned her, I warned her twice, and warned her again the third time, and said, "This is what will happen, you do it again. Well, it's like baseball — three strikes, you are out" (dqh3).

The offending queen was told she needed to stop her behaviour. When the behaviour continued, the physical assault with the cigarette took place. Such acts are very

rare and always done with provocation. The importance of this story is not so much that it happened, but the politics that occurs when it is re-told. When this story is re-told as gossip, it serves a vitally important role by allowing queens to be aware of their behaviour before extreme sanction is taken. Similar actions occur in other drag communities, as Rupp and Taylor discuss; in Key West a prominent feud erupted between two senior queens who played out their conflict through gossip and in print (one had a newspaper column) and through physical action. One queen allegedly slipped a drug into another queen's drink to punish her for a negative remark the second queen had made. However, as one Key West queen noted: "And you know what? This is all love. It really is.... [W]e actually really love each other" (171). It should be noted that drag kings are not immune from these processes; kings are regularly gossiped about in the same manner in the Halifax drag community. While there are queens and kings who do not like each other, feuding tends to erupt over issues of misunderstanding and miscommunication or over differences in the philosophy of how to do drag. While the differences become personal, they do not always start out as personal per se. Behind the conflict drag performers have a lot of respect and regard for each other as performers; as one queen said to me, "It takes a lot of guts to go out in a dress" (dqh10).

While one queen noted how gossipy and tight the lesbian community is seen to be, drag kings, within their own drag king culture (they are still subject to the same processes when they are within the drag queen culture) do not experience the same kind of gossip used for sanction as drag queens do:

Yes and no, but it's much more minor. The kings in the community,
'cause there are not a lot of us, we do tend to have this extreme brotherly

love thing happening ...we leave our personal relationships to a certain degree at the door and we are all out to help each other out ... we want to get more stuff going, we want to stop [having] to use the queens in order to have a stage (dkh1).

This view is not entirely altruistic, since drag king culture is newly established in Halifax. In order to survive there has to be a great deal of support and cooperation, so that new kings will be birthed. Drag kings cannot afford the kind of gossip and conflict that exists among drag queens. Too much conflict could impair the growth of the drag king segment of the community; therefore, drag kings experience higher solidarity than queens do.

Generation Gap

While conflict can result from clashing personalities, violations of role expectation, or the censure of gossip, the greatest conflict in the Halifax drag community results from disagreements on how to do drag. These disagreements are generational; older queens noted that they tend (with the exception of certain key personality conflicts) to get along very well: they lunch together, shop together and party together; in many ways they are friends (dqh10). Older queens note that younger queens tend to be the source of conflict. Younger queens report as well that they get along quite well (with the occasional minimal conflict) and that it is the older queens that create problems. Older queens indicated that:

The older queens in actuality require from younger queens respect, and I

think that's only fair, they've been there, they've done it they've earned their right to earn respect. The younger queens don't always see that, as they see it as being bitchy and rude... [T]hey want you to respect their experience, respect the fact that they can go out there and do this and bring a crowd (dqh10).

Younger queens, however, see the conflict differently:

The older queens will pick you out for your makeup, and then you end up not liking that person, and they will talk behind your back (dqh6).

I think the older queens have a different style of entertainment (dqh5).

Generational conflict centers on differing conceptions of what performance is or should be. For example, dqh6 is often gossiped about because of the nature of her performances. She has done strip tease, removing layers of women's clothing as in a female striptease, performed back flips, and at one point danced in women's underwear with her rear partially exposed. Audiences are enthusiastic about such performance; however, these "antics" raise anxiety in older queens. Several queens noted that bars have rules and regulations, and if people violate them, what is at stake is the loss of venues to perform in. They are not willing to take the risk of losing the license just for the sake of an outrageous performance (dqh10). Dqh 6 responds to criticism of her act by saying:

Well, the thing is not a lot of drag queens don't really realize right... [A]ll my things that are private, that can be against the law are hidden well away, so the only thing that I'm showing when I'm down to a bra and

panties is a stuffed bra, and ... you can't see my penis, like it's not there, it's tucked away — you know what I mean, you are not seeing anything — you don't see my ass or anything, it's covered up.

It is not that her act isn't acceptable or a cause for legal sanction (i.e. losing the license of the bar), but rather the problem lies with older drag queens' perception of what performance is. From the point of view of the younger queens: “drag is transition ... it's not always about these big gigantic glittery dresses. Some of us like to go out and dress hip ... like just come in a pair of jeans, come in wearing a low cut ... they are not doing the big glitter thing. There is nothing wrong with it ... I have no problem with it, of course I don't, but ... a lot of us like to dress down and like to dress like a real girl” (dqh6). This queen is not alone; all three younger queens I interviewed noted that they perform as female impersonators, not drag queens (although all proudly accept the name of the drag queen). Carole-Anne Tyler discusses in Boys Will be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag how older and younger queens are represented pictorially: ““older' cod or comic/ugly dames [versus] the young glam queens [who are] seen in romantic soft focus, just like women” (45). The Halifax drag community has Tyler's typologies, there are the “dame” drag queens with their over-the-top behaviour, comedy and miming, whose style is giving way to a more “glam” style, where queens look, dance, sound and act like women during their performances. The younger queens simply see the older queens as a barrier, unable to adjust to change or to accept that others have the right to perform differently.

Younger queens argue that they do respect the older queens, but that they choose to do the art differently, and that older queens don't respect their right to innovation in the art of drag performance. Younger queens also respond that there is jealousy that occurs

because they are thinner or can move faster. Older queens deny this assertion, but recognize the popularity of younger queens, because they do numbers more familiar to the audience.

A creative process of change is occurring in the drag community, where the female impersonation style is threatening the hegemony of the traditional glitz, glamour and comedy of the drag queen. This creative tension is at heart of the generation gap in the community. According to Darrin Hagen, in the 1980s when the Edmonton drag scene faced new creative challenges to the art by dqh1 and Gloria Hole, changes resulted. Some in the old vanguard refused to change, other queens adapted the style of the younger queens, and others mixed the old and the new, the result being a drag community whose performances were sharper and stronger than before. In the Halifax drag community, there is a possibility for a similar fusion that will increase the expectation for higher quality drag performances in Halifax and will add to the reputation of Halifax as a center of drag performance in Canada. Drag kings, because of the newness of the phenomena to Halifax, have not yet developed these tensions over creativity and performance. While there are individual disagreements, for the most part there is still a degree of unity among drag kings as to what drag kinging is about.

Kinship: Families of Origin

This section will explore the relationship of drag queens and drag kings to family. I examine their relationship with their families of origin and then discuss the families of affinity that queens and kings have created for themselves in the drag community. Jerald

Bain argues that the family of origin can be the source of support, love and acceptance, or if rejects its queer member, the source of pain, alienation and loss. Bain further argues that acceptance from the family enhances the social and emotional wellbeing of the queer, while the refusal of parents or siblings to accept the sexual orientation of a family member can alienate a queer from the family. The same process applies to queens and kings who face a double coming out, an initial coming out as gay, and then a second (or a concurrent) coming out as a drag performer.

Adopting Bain's arguments on how relationships with queer family members and their families of origin are structured, I apply a similar analysis to Halifax drag performers' relationships with families of origin. 1. Acceptance: where family members accept the drag performers gender bending and sexuality and maintain a positive and loving relationship. 2. Ambivalence: where the family or family members still love and accept the drag performer, but are not necessarily accepting of their sexual orientation or comfortable dealing with potential partners/in-laws, or they are uncomfortable with having a relative "do drag". 3. Rejection, which according to Kath Weston exists when family members are unable to accept a gay or lesbian person. The same processes work in the case of drag performers. Family members after finding out that they do drag may subsequently reject them. Some drag kings and queens enjoyed accepting relationships with their families of origin. Studio X Lenoir's parents will attend shows and, in fact, one of Studio's shows was a birthday drag party for her mother. Dqh4's father "loves Dixie Landers, particularly her legs" (dqh4). Dkh1's mother is a popular member of the Imperial Barony of Halifax and has had many queens and kings stay with her in her home. Dqh3 and dqh7 both have similar situations, where their mothers see drag as another form of

theatre and attend shows on occasion. Fathers are more distant; they may have reservations about their son/daughter doing drag, or may be having trouble accepting their sexuality. Other queens have ambivalent relationships, where their families can accept their sexuality, but not doing drag. As one queen put it:

Yeah, because they don't want you embarrassing them, you know what I mean. In my family, not everybody in my family knows I do drag — the only one ... is my mom and her friends — but ... my brother, and his wife and his family, they don't really know ... well, one kinda suspects, but the other one doesn't know, so they are keeping it hush hush, because it will cause friction. But, you know, that's the whole point, it's learning to accept your children (dqh9).

Other drag performers did not mention family members at all; their family of origin simply had no place in their lives as drag performers. Whether they were rejected by family members or they feared rejection was unclear, but for these performers family of origin has no role. Rupp and Taylor found similar results in their work on Key West drag queens. Some drag performers had lived in very abusive homes that created hard circumstances, others faced negative reactions from family members, some had accepting relationships with families, and other queens navigated ambivalent relationships with family members.

Kinship: Drag Families

Drag kinship does not necessarily exist as a form of a biological family (although

in Halifax there is one father-son drag duo). Rather, drag kinship or drag families are families of association. Kath Weston in Families We Choose, discusses the possibilities of alternate (non-biological family structures) and who can be included: “Not only can these families embrace friends; they may also encompass lovers, co parents, adopted children, children from previous heterosexual relationships, and offspring conceived through alternative insemination. Although discourse on gay kinship features familiar symbols such as blood, choice and love, it also re-directs those symbols toward the task of demarcating different categories of family” (3). Drag, as a satellite of gay and lesbian subculture, has a well-entrenched system of alternative families. Performers are incorporated into family structures, usually through the taking of the last name as a sign of respect, and a whole series of expectations and relationships are created as a result. When a new drag queen enters the community, she usually does so with a “drag mother.” Usually this mother is an older or at least very experienced queen; however, new queens have recently begun to “birth” (the term used to describe the development of a new queen) other new queens. Dqh3 describes what a drag mother does:

Put me in drag, painted my face, showed me where things go, showed me how to tuck, where your tits should fit, all that kinda stuff... [T]each them how to walk. You never walked in high heels before, then you gotta learn how, because, you know, I’m not sending you out looking like you’re standing on pencils — how to tuck — this is where you put your genitalia between you legs and push up and then wear a tight pair of underwear to keep it there. And it takes practice, it literally takes the two of you getting ready in drag at the same time, and this is how you do it and literally

watch what you're doing....

This mother-daughter relationship involves mentoring, as well as providing what Weston calls affective and social support. The drag mother prepares everything from makeup, costuming, and performance tips to socializing the new queen into what the community expectations are. In order for drag to continue, new queens must enter the drag community, acquire the norms and values of the community and develop respect as performers. The drag daughter is expected to show respect for her elders, to learn the craft of drag, and to perform well (to maintain the credibility of her mother). The drag mother sees in her drag daughter an opportunity to continue the community and possibly found her own dynasty. For drag kings, the drag father-drag son works in a similar manner:

It's sort of the drag family. My drag parents are Cameron Ballard and Studio, and you know the drag kings, it's not like Studio would put me in a dress or give me a wig or show me how to do my makeup... So the relationship in crossing over with a drag queen and a drag king being family is that she gave me a stage, she gave me inspiration, she gave me a voice, she tells me that's it okay ... she helps me, and that's basically the point of drag families. [The] mentor in the drag community that takes the up and coming and says, "Oh, here, take my hand and I will help you," becomes their drag parent (dkh1).

For drag kings, the drag father-son relationship is crucial because the drag king community is very small. Having a respected drag father like dkh1 to sponsor them helps new drag kings navigate the rules, boundaries and expectations of the community. Drag fathers can provide spaces for their sons to perform, a crucially important point given the

lack of a drag king stage in Halifax.

The expectation is that the drag mother/drag father is a mentor, and sexual relationships between drag parents and children are frowned upon. There was one case in which this rule was violated:

But I sort of blew all the rules out of the water for the drag mother, drag daughter relationship.... [Y] you're not supposed to get involved with your drag daughter and your drag daughter is not supposed to get involved with your drag mother, so we sort of have an incestuous sort of drag daughter drag mother sort of thing, and then started out to be partners, and we're almost on the verge of getting married now (dqh8).

In this situation, the partners to some degree adopt a parent-child role in that one is dominant and one is passive (dqh8). Despite dqh8's comment on incest, there has been no real consequence or change of standing in the community for either queen as a result of their relationship.

There are also drag sisters, as well as drag mothers and daughters. Queens and kings will give each their last names as a sign of respect and an adoption into the drag family. This naming represents a brothering, sistering, or mothering, where queens give names and status to other queens and/or kings they respect. For example Diva D Widescreen Divine Fatale is sister to Rouge Fatale Divine; Shayda Black Starr 69 Geronimo Cool Chick Landers is sister to Dixie Landers. Weston argues that gay and lesbian kinship is flexible: there are no set boundaries, and membership varies. In drag families, this is certainly true, as people can be in and out of their drag families depending on their relationship with their drag mother/father/sisters/brothers/aunties. There are

occasions when, if a drag mother and daughter fall out, the queen will adopt a new mother. These family connections are voluntary. They usually include other drag queens or kings, and as such they are peer related; therefore, “the characterization of most ties to chosen kin as peer relationships brings families closer to so called ‘fictive kin’ relationship” (117). It should be noted that there are special people who, although not drag queens, are incorporated into drag families. Xlin, a mother of one of the drag kings, has become an adopted mother emotionally to many queens who have either lived with her in her home or found in her the emotional support they lacked in their families of origin. There is also a prominent patron, an African-Nova Scotia woman named “Mama Juggs,” who acts as mother to not only some of the queens, but to many of the patrons of one of the gay bars in Halifax. Drag families, therefore, are not just a mentorship culture; they are alternate forms of family, fictive kin. Rupp and Taylor note that in Key West, drag families existed, and incorporated bar patrons, straight women who supported queens (fictive kin mothers), the bar owner, and, on occasion, vacationers in the bar. According to Rupp and Taylor, drag kinship allows for the creation of an alternate family structure; a community is created and a sense of gay and lesbian identity reinforced.

However, this alternate kinship is not without its critics in the drag community. A proliferation of kinship in the community (i.e. giving out “names” frequently) has prompted something of a reaction from other queens who feel that the relationships that are developed become too stringent:

I don’t think you should expect anything from any relationship, I think that’s what kills the relationships... Personally speaking ... my drag daughters are generally ... my friends — especially younger people that

are coming into our group or our family ... if they are my friends then they generally pretty much just become my drag daughters because I help them — and it's just the natural thing you do when you help friends. It just happens to be drag I'm helping them with (dqh1).

Drag mother-drag daughter relationships can become restrictive and younger queens can be prevented from growing and becoming better performers if the drag mother is over protective or over regulatory. There is doubt as to the usefulness of the sister connections and whether the constant sistering of each other reflects self-indulgence and creates relationships that are not reciprocated. For example, queens can be sisters but be in competition; this is hardly seen as an ideal family relationship. For drag kings, father-son relationships are more reflective and flexible, and more focused on mentorship and support than on creating families of affinity. Drag kinship creates family and social support networks. If one queen really likes and appreciates the art and performance of another queen, adoption or the giving of the name shows respect, and recognizes the merit of a new generation of performers.

Kinship relationships in the Halifax drag community provide sponsorship and support for new members, serve to continue the values and existence of the community provide social support networks and provide a means of recognizing the artistic and performance achievements of members of the community. Drag kinship in Halifax is not distinctive at all to Halifax; Esther Newton's study on queens in Kansas City and New York and Rupp and Taylor's study on Key West all indicate a similarity and pattern of drag kinship. Drag families tend to have a common form across all drag cultures.

Drug and Alcohol Consumption

The association between drag and alcohol/drug consumption is so strong that all studies of drag communities include discussions on drug and alcohol use. Alcohol use is very visible (after all, most shows take place in the bar). However, drug use is more underground and you have to seek it out to find it. All participants were asked about the use of drugs and alcohol in the drag community.

Drag performers' responses are organized into three distinct categories. Firstly, those who perform around the scene partake in alcohol consumption but not drug use: "It all depends on the person. I don't do a whole lot of drugs, I'm against most of it. I do mild things. Regarding alcohol, I guess I perform a bit better" (dqh5). Secondly, those who recognize that there is an active drug and alcohol scene, and are more cognizant of drugs and alcohol use:

I guess drag queens are known for drugs, especially cocaine or whatever, and they are known for it so people automatically think that every drag queen does it and it's embarrassing... Alcohol, well, drag queens are known for getting drunk ... and getting guys buy them drinks ... I have guys buying me drinks constantly, just because I look good or whatever, and they like my entertainment (dqh6).

What this participant articulates is the classic stereotype of drag queens as drugged up and drunks. Newton's classic study of drag is replete with such representations of queens, which may reflect the scene of drag thirty to forty years ago, but which may no longer be accurate. This is not to say drugs and alcohol aren't issues. The participant acknowledges they are. But the perception of drug and alcohol consumption is greater

than the practice. Thirdly, there are those drag performers for whom drugs and alcohol consumption are a personal problem. Their consumption/ addiction may have become a health issue, as dqh8 described:

I personally had a problem with alcohol a while ago.... I had a problem when I started pouring Scotch on my cornflakes in the morning ... so then I put on three years of being sober — what they consider a dry drunk.

Another participant discussed her former drug habit:

But I used to be a coke and heroine addict and gave it up, because my friends — I asked them one day...in my living room in Vancouver, “Well, if I was to OD, what would you do?” Well, the answer was, “We’ll throw you out” (dqh9).

While participation in the use of alcohol and drugs in the drag community may not be as extreme as dqh9’s experience, consumption of these substances is part of the drag community. What are the possible explanations? Participants noted a variety of reasons for alcohol use in particular. Firstly, moderate drinking reduces the anxiety of performing. Secondly, alcohol and drug use is a response to the particular pressures and strain of being gay and living in a homophobic society:

I would love to tell you that it isn’t there, but it is a huge part of the drag community ... I mean the pressures of being gay are huge, they really are.

Anybody who lives within our community understands that (dqh10).

Alcohol use is also present because of the spatial organization of a drag community that is centered in the bars. Warren argues that: “In many of the gay bars in Sun City, however, there is pressure to drink alcohol specifically, especially if the drinker

is known to bartender or clientele ... getting drunk in gay bars is normal trouble in the gay community” (58). The pressure to drink and getting drunk work the same way in the drag satellite culture as one participant noted:

Well drugs and alcohol play a role because of the nature of our community and how it's bar oriented. I mean it always has been, it's club oriented. We don't have, especially in smaller cities like Halifax, the same sort of social outlets you would find like places in Toronto, where they have like a gay bowling league. Well Halifax doesn't have a gay bowling league ... but they have bars, so people are socialized in bars and, of course, drinking is part of being in a bar, so that just goes hand in hand (dqh1).

According to Warren, over consumption of alcohol is expected and accepted as a part of working in and performing in the bar community, but the expectations surrounding drugs are different. Warren argues that while drugs are used and are part of the bar scene, such use is not part of the bar sociability that surrounds alcohol use. Attitudes towards drugs are much harsher in the drag community, as one queen notes:

You don't get dressed up in drag, put on a face, and go out and score a line of coke — it's just not done. And then after you start your line of coke you get out of drag.... [I]f I see you doing any coke or any heroine or whatever I'm out that front door and you will never see me again (dqh8).

Except for one queen, most of the participants said they did not take drugs or act as part of the drug scene. Some knew better than others how to access the scene, while others simply

don't know how. Drug use in the drag community consists of "E" (ecstasy) and poppers: "popper" is a drug used recreationally and sexually in the gay community. Designed as a heart stimulant, poppers give a short-term, extreme high of five to ten minutes, characterized by euphoria and manic laughter... [poppers] come in large bottles or in small glass tubes which are broken under the nose and it is inhaled" (Warren 62). According to Warren, poppers are used for more sexual than social purposes in the community, because they enhance the sexual experience, while social use of poppers impairs sociability. Ecstasy, on the other hand, is used for sociability and as an escape. While use of "E" is acknowledged as a reality in the drag community, it is not well regarded. One queen showed up to a major Court show late, she was high on "E", and her performance was not very good. The resulting criticism was withering and that queen did not come out in drag for several months after that. According to Newton, drug use in the community is expected, acknowledged, but not condoned. In her study, other queens and bar owners (who wanted queens to be able to perform sober, but also to consume alcohol, rather than drugs) disapproved of any drug use.

Drag kings consume alcohol but not drugs:

From my experience I've heard rumours that there is some sort of drug scene with the queens... Personally, I would say that I will definitely have a couple of drinks before I go up on stage. Before I do anything really in public I'm inclined to have a beer or maybe two, and that's just more about sort of loosening up, but I don't see a really rapid drug scene, especially not in the king community. I've never heard of there being any sort of heavy scene (dkh1).

For some queens drag provides a relief to the pressures they face: one queen mentioned that drag was a way out of drug addiction. During the field observation, I noticed the possibility of drag for healing. One particular queen had an issue with drugs and alcohol that became aggravated when she stopped doing drag (during a period of burnout); her use of these substances increased, and her public behaviour became less desirable (which caused many to be concerned for her health and well-being). When she returned to doing drag, her drug and alcohol consumption decreased noticeably and her health improved.

Conclusion

The Halifax drag community is characterized by a series of complicated relationships. Gossip provides a means of social control and cohesion, allowing queens to be socialized into the drag culture appropriately and enforcing the morals that exist within the community. A significant generation gap exists between younger and older queens that focuses on the difference in style and performance of drag as an art form. Consistent with all prior studies of drag, alcohol and drug use are a health issue for the Halifax drag community. The homosocial life of the bar encourages alcohol consumption. Drug use, while frowned upon, is tolerated and addictions to illicit substances create health issues for several queens.

Whether relationships with families of origin are accepting, ambivalent or rejecting, drag families provide mentoring, social support and emotional connection. Markers of drag kinship, such as giving of names, provide for a form of symbolic

exchange and reinforce close relationships in the drag community.

Chapter 4: Diversity in the Halifax Drag Community

Rupp and Taylor identify the central question of the relationship between gender and drag when they note: “whether the spectacle of men dressing in women’s clothes (or women impersonating men as in the case of contemporary drag queens) challenges the concept of female and male as distinct, opposite and non-overlapping categories” (2). In the first section of this chapter, I discuss Rupp and Taylor’s question of how drag impacts on or is impacted by gender roles by drawing from a range of philosophical, feminist, social and queer theorists. The second section discusses sexism and femiphobia in the gay male community. The third section is an examination of drag kings’ experience in the Halifax drag community. Although drag kings impersonate and perform as men, their experience in the community is differentiated by their being biological women, and I examine how being a woman and performing as man makes a difference in the Halifax drag community. The fourth section deals with how drag challenges heterosexual men and women’s perceptions of gender. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of race and class in the drag community.

Performance of Gender — On Stage

Drag embodies ambiguity and ambivalence about gender and sexuality. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999) argues that the possibilities of gender as a unit of analysis are limited: “Gender can denote a *unity* of experience, of sex, gender and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to

necessitate gender — where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the ‘self and desire’ (30). Butler further argues for a separation of the binary categories in which gender is used to interrogate *heterosexual* as *the* human experience. Butler argues that the: “impersonation of women suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real. His/her performance destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates” (viii). Most significant for drag is Butler’s concept of gender performativity: “In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the *surface* of the body, through play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (173: 1999). This is what drag does; through constant performance of acts, gestures and desire, through onstage performance of lip-synch and dance numbers, as well as a thorough recitation of behaviour that occurs in drag off-stage, drag itself embodies gender performativity. This performativity is not a simple act (one drag queen going on stage is not gender performativity). Rather, performativity is the “reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect it names” (2: 1999). According to Butler, gender is never fully achieved, but is continually performed until a realistic copy passes for gender. Drag queens are continually performing gender, copying the real and destabilizing the boundaries of gender. However, this is not always, as Butler points out, a project of equality; in fact, drag can reinforce essentialist notions of what a female gender is. Butler argues that performativity is not a theatrical act, but rather a recitation of discourses of history. Since drag queens perform gender, both on stage (in shows, musical numbers and comedy) and off-stage (attending shows or events in drag, but not doing numbers),

performativity can be both theatre and discourse. According to Butler, gender performativity can involve the reification and creation of sexed bodies, a particular type of sexed body that fits within the regulatory regime.

Dqh9 outlines the expectations of the gender performativity to which drag queens subscribe:

You gotta learn how to dress properly, you gotta know how to talk to people... If you present yourself as a slut, tramp, skag, which is you're all full of attitude... A lot of them are coming out with jeans and tank tops because that is what they see on these videos now, tank tops, showing their vaginas or whatever in their costumes and their nipples or whatever, and they are playing the slut role ... but it's nice where there are ladies of the night, where they are not drunked up and drugged out looking like a bunch of floozies — it's nice to see a clean act, you know, a nice clean act.

This queen articulates an essentialist view of gender. According to Diana Fuss, in Essentially Speaking, essentialism “is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the whatness of a given entity” (xi). The quoted comments follow that pattern through the participant’s conceptualization of the female as a “lady.” When she talks about presenting one self as “slut, tramp, skag,” she refers to the graphic and sexual conversations that take place between drag queens. The attitude of queens belies an expectation of ladylike behaviour: a lady does not throw drinks, or get into fights, or create any kind of behaviour that would occupy space publicly. Clothing also constructs femininity. Older queens usually dress in

gowns for formal occasions (Coronation, Citations, any major functions), and for smaller shows dresses and jewellery are the standard means of attire. This kind of gender performance relays the image of the upper class lady of the manor, always elegantly attired, dignified and proper in her deportment (she does not get drunk or curse at people). The participant's expression of her distaste for the fashion of younger queens (jeans, t-shirts, tank tops) reflects a standard of proper dress and deportment that she sees her younger colleagues violating. Younger drag queens argue that their clothing allows them to perform better dance numbers, to move faster in their acts and to be more comfortable. Performance of proper feminine deportment on stage (some moves, some mime, but overall presenting a vision of female beauty and grace) clashes with younger queens' desire to infuse their gendered performances with dance and more active movements.

Despite expectations of adherence to feminine behaviour, many queens of all ages regularly contradict that standard. One queen, for example, notes that: "a lot of the time she's out there she is very verbose and she lets me do things.... Molesting, I can do more molesting ... I can say more things of an off colour nature.... But she can get away with belching out loud in a gown. She can get away with just about anything" (dqh2). Another queen notes that her persona is "a slut — she likes to entertain, joke around, she's very naughty — sometimes she can be a little too naughty at times" (dqh7). The contradictions of performing femininity while being male biologically are apparent in these participants' statements. When Butler argues that drag is not subversive, rather that it provides an illusionary image of a gender, she may be correct. Drag queens are men, and often they engage in public behaviour that is more associated with the masculine gender (e.g. engaging in comedy, grabbing other men's penises in public settings). If we look at

performativity as on and off stage, the possibilities of drag as subversion of gender roles can be limited. When a queen comes to the bar in drag, she performs her number on stage maybe two or three times per evening, and the rest of the time is spent in socialization. Masculine behaviour in these circumstances can be read simply; although the queens are in dresses, these are still men and their behaviour is a form of their privilege. They can act as ladies when they wish to. Underneath the costume, they are still men and they have full access to the expression of masculine behaviour. However, I would argue that the maintenance of the outward appearance of female gender with the behaviour of male gender destabilizes both, by modeling a social behaviour that defies both genders. As Butler says: “When such categories come into question, the *reality* of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal” (xxiii). People who observe this type of behaviour are exposed to a destabilization of gender roles and are opened up to the possibility of critically examining the binary of gender roles.

It is this ability of drag queens to employ masculine privilege while performing femininity that has led some feminists to argue that drag is misogynistic. Janice Raymond argues in The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male that drag queens (who she aligns with transsexuals, and transgender) through ridiculing and degrading women in their acts, as well as performing as women, represent a misogynistic hatred of women. According to Raymond, performing femininity allows drag queens as men, and the men who view them, to ignore the oppression and hatred women face in patriarchal societies. Drag reinforces, rather than parodies, patriarchal gender roles. She further argues that the necessity for some to perform any gender role (transvestite, transgender or transsexual) is simply the result of sex stereotyping in a patriarchal society. Raymond’s viewpoint is that

drag queens are both a subterfuge designed to enforce patriarchal gender roles (by restating patriarchal expectations of gender), and sabotage — by becoming women drag queens can enter the world of women and disrupt attempts for women to experience women-centered environments, in which they can be empowered. Butler has argued in response that Raymond ignores the experience of women who cross-dress as men, female to male transsexual people and female to male transgender people. Raymond makes the error of aligning a variety of categories such as transvestite, transsexual, transgender, cross dresser and drag queen into one unit of analysis. This alignment ignores the differences in gender identification, sexual orientation, and biological assignment of each of these categories. Raymond's attacks seem to be more directly related to transsexuals (who physically cross the gender divide) and drag queens who are seen to appropriate femininity for parody. Butler refutes Raymond's charge of drag as misogyny when she says: "although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized" (176: 1993). I disagree with Raymond's view of drag queens as misogynistic, while I concur that essentialism exists in drag queens' performance of femininity. But this is the result of the success of the patriarchal socialization of gender roles, rather than a deliberate project to destabilize feminism. Raymond need not worry about men "infiltrating" the women's movement, since as Diana Fuss argues: "experience emerges to fend off the entry of men into feminism and further to naturalize and authorize the relation between biological woman and social woman" (27). Fuss argues if that even if men were inclined to enter feminism, the need of feminism for a "woman's experience" would keep men out. Returning to Raymond's argument, transsexuals and drag queens (who Raymond centers

on as “saboteurs”) would be hard pressed to enter feminism with a “woman’s experience” that would be validated by the feminists around them, and the saboteurs would be instantly exposed.

Drag queens themselves understand very well that some women resent what they do and why the resentment exists: “some of the older gals, the staunch lesbians, the die-hard dykes ... don’t like drag period. Feminists don’t like drag at all. Feminists find that drag is offensive and that’s the feminine side, not the feminist in general. The feminist lesbian doesn’t like drag at all” (dqh2). What the participant articulates is lesbian-feminist resistance to the idea of essentialism which: “seeks to locate and to contain the subject within a fixed set of differences” (Fuss xi). Lesbian-feminists also object to the practice of essentialism, which “appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted” (2). According to Fuss, lesbian-feminist perspectives do not necessarily object to an essentialist female, since it underwrites the claims for an autonomous female voice. However, they have no desire to see this female essence appropriated by men in drag for their own entertainment and amusement. The second lesbian-feminist argument against the essentialism of drag comes from social constructionists who “take the refusal of essence as the inaugural moment of their own projects and proceed to demonstrate the way previously assumed self-evident kinds ... are in fact the effects of complicated discursive practices” (2). Simply by performing femininity, drag posits that there exists essentialist femininity, ignoring the ways that “discursive practices” create femininity. According to Fuss, since there is little agreement on what a woman is or what women’s experience is, then the risk of drag is that it will appropriate one version of women’s experience that will serve to reinforce a patriarchal

version of femininity. The response of queens to this argument ranges; however, all argue that they do not demean women in drag. Some argue drag opened the way for feminism by fighting for the right to cross gender boundaries (dqh2). Other queens argue that women love drag because of the beauty and glamour it represents and the compliment it pays women (dqh9 and dqh10). One interviewee argued that drag is actually an act of solidarity with women:

We are still gay men, we still fight every day with the fact that we are gay and we are discriminated against.... [F]or someone to imitate you, that's respect, that isn't anything more than respect.... [I]t's not [that] they were out there making women looking terrible, but they fight on a regular basis for rights in this city dressed as a woman.... Why would a woman have a problem with that? (dqh10).

Queens argue for the right to have their identity position. Beyond whether drag challenges gender roles or not, drag queens have been subject to criticism that drag is in fact sexist, and that lesbians are targets for queens' on-stage humour. While queens acknowledge that some of their humour may have sexist orientations, in fact, what drag does is parody gender roles, making people see that gender isn't fixed, and drag as much parodies men and masculinity as it does women and femininity. In the interviews some drag queens have used terminology like "cunt" in the jokes, or referred to lesbians wearing plaid and watching hockey. Drag queens point out that they also make fun of gay proclivities (dick size, relationship length and effeminacy in men) equally to lesbians. However, where queens are gay males, some lesbians find the subject identity position to be problematic (i.e. Are queens making jokes to show solidarity with lesbians or to

demean them?).

A second criticism of queens is that they do possess essentialist stereotypes, as in this case:

Lesbians oh I love them they are so much fun compared to gay men — they are not into men not at all... [W]e look better than they do and that's what gets them. It's like, "Hello, you guys are guys and you look better than we do," and I hear this all the time. I said, "Well, put your hair up, throw some makeup on and wear a skirt or a dress, then you will see who you really are." Lesbians love wearing pants, jeans, tank top or sweatshirt; they do not like wearing dresses. I don't know why they are not truck drivers or anything, and they are not men, they are women, and there is nothing wrong with women wearing dresses. I think it looks very sexy and I think it makes them look good — it's how they all want to look (dqh9).

Most of the queens, like the one who made this last statement, held an essential perspective on gender: gay men are like women (effeminate) and lesbians are mannish (butch). Drag queens are men who, as Alexander Doty argues, identify with a hybrid hyper femininity based upon assertive on and off-stage personalities of major Hollywood actresses, such as Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Barbara Streisand, and Greta Garbo, television stars like Roseanne and Candice Bergen, and operatic stars such as Maria Callas. Essentialist views were not expressed as criticism but as an a priori assumption. Drag queens identify with women (at least in their stage personae); they adapt the ultra feminine identities of the opera, film, television and theatre stars they admire. Given being socialized in such a culture, it is easy for them to believe that, since they are feminine,

lesbians must be mannish. Interview participants were not aware of the broader spectrum of behaviour, body type and identity of lesbian culture and life.

Thirdly, queens believe that to some degree they are in competition with lesbians for beauty or that lesbians resent their beauty: “Well, look at it. Queens are beautiful women, they pride themselves on having the right makeup and having the right hair style, and having the right clothes and looking... [L]esbians don’t pride themselves in a female look...[Y]ou show me very many lesbians who pride themselves in looking like a female and my jaw [will be] on the ground over there” (dqh10). Despite these essentialist views, drag kings and drag queens report that queens have good experiences with lesbians:

Anytime that I have ever seen a drag queen attracted to a lesbian it’s always been a pleasurable, amusing experience.... [T]he way that drag queens pick on lesbians is unlike, I think, the way that drag queens pick on anyone else. It is good humour ... but yeah, it’s definitely good humour, it’s definitely good fun spirited and there is definitely a respect that I have always found encountered (dkh1).

Dqh1 notes that half of her audience for her 5 Minutes of Fame show are lesbians and that they “get” the humour and are not offended. While queens and kings noted the support of the lesbians who attend their shows, they well understood that other lesbians did not support what they do. The difference lies in an insider/outsider perspective. Those lesbians who attend the shows understand (at the level of audience reception) that the presence of camp in the humour of the queens means that the comedy is oriented, as dqh1 claims, to fun. Lesbians who do not attend the shows, but see drag as outsiders, perceive the obvious sexism in drag and drag humour, without the mitigating factor of experiencing

camp as part of the performance. The attendance and support of the insider lesbians for the show (despite the lesbian jokes that are made) supports Butler's argument that: "what drag exposes, however, is the normal constitution of gender presentation in which gender is performed ... what is performed in drag is, of course, the sign of gender, a sign that is not the same as the body it figures" (237). Adapting Butler's argument, drag thus serves to expose the inefficacy of heterosexual gender roles and the necessity of ongoing performance to maintain heterosexual gender roles.

Moving from the theoretical to the practical, Rupp and Taylor argue that: "what ties these performances together is a persistent if sometimes subtle questioning of the meaning of gender and sexuality ... it is in this sense that drag queens perform protest" (117). According to Rupp and Taylor, drag queens can destabilize or reinforce gender through the use of songs, music or performance: for example, when a queen performs "All that Jazz", or "Le Jazz Hot", or a Celine Dion impersonation, and does so in a "straight" way, simply lip-synching and moving or dancing to the song, then what happens is that this presents no challenge to conventional ideas of femininity. However, drag queens do have the possibility to perform in a way that rejects or mocks conventional femininity: "The Fifth Dimension's version of Wedding Bell Blues is a perfect example. In a ripped up wedding dress, coke-bottle glasses, and a mouthful of fake rotten buck teeth and gripping what looks like a silk dogwood tree in a cement flower pot, Scabby laments her rotten treatment by Bill and then grabs an attractive man from the audience, hugging and clutching him and begging him to marry her" (117). In Halifax drag shows, most drag acts fall into the first category, where a simple impersonation or performance is done and femininity is not critiqued. However, some performers like BoomBoom and Rouge Fatale

will do numbers with an implicit critique of femininity. Rouge Fatale in particular can interrogate class and gender with her version of “I’m a Redneck Woman” by Gretchen Wilson. She performs this number as an impersonation, but she uses her hand gestures to emphasize key points in the text that break down gender and class. For example, when the lyric goes, “let’s have a hell yeah from the redneck girls like me,” Rouge will mouth the words and then gesture outwards and the audience will respond by saying “Hell yeah.” Overall, Rouge impresses her audience with the authenticity of the song while communicating the song’s message about accepting divergent feminine positions that are (re) defined by class.

Femiphobia

One of the participants argued passionately that “drag queens get the bum rap” (dqh10) in the gay and lesbian community, in that drag queens are always criticized for performing as women, that negative aspects of human behaviour (like being bitchy or difficult or aloof) are attributed to them, that they are disavowed by the rest of the gay community because of their femininity, and that they are seen as “freaks” by mainstream society. This section discusses the consequences of performing female gender on stage for the off-stage gay male within the drag community. I asked drag queens how they felt the gay community (defined as gay men who do not do drag performances) perceive queens. This was one of the hardest questions to answer for participants. It was not that they lacked the knowledge to answer, but asking the question exposed a major divide in the gay community. Each queen reported different experiences along different themes:

1. Preference by gay men for “masculine looking men,” as demonstrated by dqh6:

A lot of them find us annoying because a lot of them doesn't like drag queens. They don't understand how guys can go out and dress like girls. A lot of them don't really understand, and until they talk to a drag queen they figured it's not fun. There are problems I noticed when I first came here, like a lot of guys were attracted to me as a boy, and then when I started doing drag, people looked at me so differently. You are not attractive to people.

Dqh10 has a defiant attitude towards gay men who do not like drag. She argues that other gay men need to get over their problems with drag queens because drag queens are not scary or intimidating, and if other gay men bothered to talk to the queens, they might find that they like them.

2. Rejection. Dqh1 and dqh2 articulate how drag queens are rejected by other gay men:

There is so called straight acting gay men who think that drag is an abomination. It's the only thing that the public ever sees in the drag community, and they are tired of that type of imagery and that representation (dqh1).

When I first started out I got a lot of looks like, oh, my God, I can't believe you are a drag king or a drag queen, and they liked me insofar as I entertained them, but beyond that they had no real time for me.... [T]hey say, “You know, I think you are a great guy and I can tolerate you doing

drag, but don't bring it home." It's [a] very hard and lonely life in that respect (dqh2).

Dqh1 and dqh2 articulate a variety of responses on the part of gay men to their drag counterparts. There is rejection (the abomination) because of the stereotype drag presents. The rejection is also understood as a lack of understanding, as people do not know why some gay men are drag queens. Some gay men are simply sexually turned off by the femininity of drag (dqh2).

3. Acceptance, as articulated by dqh3:

There are guys in the audience that are just in love with drag queens. They love the fact that you can create the illusion that they would walk down Spring Garden Road with you and nobody will look twice.

Tim Herling, in Sissyphobia: Gay Men and Effeminate Behaviour, expands on the three categories of treatment drag queen experience from straight acting gay males to examine effeminacy in the gay community. While his research primarily focuses on the American context, what the queens report and the field observation show is that treatment of effeminate men is similar in the Atlantic Canadian context. Within the past one hundred years the majority of social science research, medical science and popular opinion believed male homosexuality is rooted in effeminacy, which, according to Lynne Segal in Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities: Changing Men, is a lack of ability or willingness to adhere to hegemonic standards of masculinity. This inversion theory (gay male = feminine, lesbian= masculine) according to Segal has served for a century to structure society's perspective about gay men and as Segal notes: "the male homosexual stereotype of effeminacy and travesties has had a profound complex on men who see themselves as a

homosexual” (139). Segal’s analysis is reinforced by Esther Newton’s work, that found similar gender equations and hegemonies present in the drag communities she studied. Herling reconstitutes Segal’s discussion of male aversion to femininity as “Femiphobia, a deep ambivalence that gay men have about effeminate behaviour” (56). Many gay men believe that, excepting their sexual orientation, they are like heterosexual men, and since as boys they were punished for any effeminate behaviour, then as adults they orient their behaviour away from effeminacy. Herling argues that straight acting gay males dislike effeminate men because they represent what they don’t wish to see in themselves or remember from their childhoods. Segal points out that the masculine role is socially privileged in patriarchal societies like North America; gay men who can pass or act like heterosexual males access the privilege of maleness that patriarchy provides. Herling’s work also adds to Segal’s evidence of a trend of misogyny in the gay community that results from patriarchal teachings against the feminine. In addition to the childhood trauma and simple hatred of women theories, effeminate gay men are disliked because they contradict straight acting gay male claims to be just like straight men, except for sleeping with men. One participant commented on how some gay males are tired of “the stereotype” drag queens, as the ultimate form of effeminate behaviour (dqh10). What these men are tired of is not the drag queen, but what she stands in for gayness in the popular imagination. As a result, a popular opinion emerges that all gay men are effeminate, and as such they cannot be permitted to access the socially constructed privilege of masculinity.

Rupp and Taylor discussed the difficulties that Key West drag queens also indicated they have catching the sexual interest of the straight acting guys they desire.

According to Rupp and Taylor, drag queens are caught in an interesting contradiction; they don't sleep with each other generally, because the drag queens are very much family; therefore, they are unavailable as sexual objects. As dqh2 noted: "very few of us are lesbians." On the other hand, the gay men they desire are not interested. While drag is performed as an expression of gay identity, the actual drag queen may experience long periods of celibacy (dqh2).

Herling identifies what Sissyphobia is, but why does it take place? Butler argues in The Psychic Life of Power (1997) that "If a man becomes heterosexual by repudiating the feminine where could that repudiation live except in an identification which his heterosexual career seeks to deny?... [H]e wants the woman he would never be ... one of the most anxious aims of his desire will be to elaborate the difference between him and her" (137). So-called straight acting gay men enact the same scenario as heterosexual men; they repudiate the feminine that they secretly want. This repudiation is necessary for them to access the privilege of masculinity. However, there is a melancholy; to use Butler's comment, they mourn the loss the feminine, the woman they will never be. As Butler would argue, "drag thus allegorizes heterosexual melancholy, the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love.... In this sense ... the 'truest' gay male melancholic is the strictly straight male" (147). I would argue that the straight acting gay male and not the drag queen enacts the melancholy Butler refers to. Since drag queens are simultaneously male and female, they need not repudiate any facet of their psyche (male or female). One of the participants was well aware of the freedom (or lack of melancholy) in:

A drag queen can do whatever she wants, and still come out the next week.

Whether you're mad at her or not, it doesn't matter; she's still going to come out next week (dqh10).

The straight acting gay male melancholia over his repudiated femininity acts out as resentment against drag queens because they can navigate gender boundaries. According to Segal, this resentment is furthered by the pressure to adhere to a rigid masculinity that creates in them anxiety over the precariousness of masculinity. Therefore, although drag queens are marginalized by some elements of the gay community for their performance of femininity, this same performance eases psychic tensions that exist in the straight acting gay male and gives the drag queen a sense of power, and contributes to her mystique in the gay community. I should also note that not all gay men are hostile to drag; in fact, many support drag and admire the performers, even though they may not wish to do drag themselves. Many gay men (particularly leather men) work with drag queens in Courts and many come out to support the shows. Rupp and Taylor and Esther Newton found similar trends of gay male support in the drag communities of Key West, Chicago and Kansas City.

Drag kings do not report this experience, since they are supported in their performances by other lesbians in the Halifax community. Halberstam and Troka in The Drag King Anthology discuss how lesbians see drag kinging as a way to appropriate male power and privilege, and blur the lines of gender binaries, thus undermining, not just appropriating, patriarchal privilege. According to Halberstam, those who seek to appropriate power away from privilege are more readily supported than those who are seen to "move down" and be subordinate. Both Halberstam and Troka found in their studies that lesbians actually find drag kinging to be attractive and sexually arousing.

Therefore, performing in drag as a king does not limit the drag kings' opportunities for sexual contact and relationships. I would argue that lesbians in fact have achieved a greater synthesis of perceptible gender roles that allows space to integrate aspects of masculinity and femininity while maintaining a same-sex orientation.

Drag Kings' Experience

It's the new cool thing. I don't know why, but apparently it is the new cool thing (Dkh1).

Although drag kings are part of the drag community in Halifax and I have attempted to integrate their experiences into the narrative, there are intricacies involved in the experience of female to male drag performance. Drag kinging has emerged as a new and fresh form of cultural production and academic scholarship over the last ten years. However, there are historical precedents to women performing as men. Judith (Jack) Halberstam describes the flourishing of drag king culture: "the contemporary Drag King is something of a contradiction in terms and an unexpected late-comer to the scene of drag and gender bending.... [H]owever, over the past five years, images of masculine women have become more common in mainstream culture and the butch dyke has made stunning appearances in popular cinema" (32). According to Halberstam, what makes drag kings different from drag queens is the degree of physical accessorizing; while drag queens add things (like breasts, hips, make up) the drag king has to take things off, tone things down (strapping of breasts). Masculinity thus has to be performed as understatement, of cool

relaxed macho. Drag as an act of performing gender is more diverse for the drag king than the drag queen: “drag queens do not imitate women. It’s a whole other world. It’s a whole other universe of gestures, another language that exists independently of the feminine reality.... we [drag kings] practically have to create masculine traits that are not exaggerated” (65).

According to Newton, drag queens signify gayness and are a figure of power for those who accept, and are seen as a sign of shame for those who abhor effeminacy. Halberstam argues that the drag king does not signify lesbian in the same way a queen signifies gayness. While for over a century an association has existed between lesbian and female masculinity, because drag kings have not been present in the bar culture they have not achieved the iconic status of the drag queen. Lesbian bar culture is resplendent with the “butch” lesbian, dressed in men’s clothes; this does not operate in the same way as gay males. Halberstam notes that while a gay man in a dress will be labelled a drag queen, a woman in men’s clothes is not called a drag king. Being a drag king “is a performer who makes masculinity into his or her act. The Drag King may make costume into the whole of her performance, or he/she may lip-synch or play air guitar or tell crude jokes” (36). A male impersonator will perform as the character they seek to imitate, as one participant discussed the nature of being a male impersonator versus a drag king:

I don’t do impersonations, you know, and I think that there are definitions, and I think a male impersonator, you know, defines what character he is going to do, tries to dress as the character, tries to alter his appearance to closely resemble that character as much as possible and gets the movements down.... And I think that drag kings, same as drag queens ...

say this is my interpretation of this, and this is my character that I have created, my drag performer doing Jessie's Girl by Rick Springfield, you know and, yeah, you're hearing Rick Springfield. I don't look like Rick Springfield, I'm not moving like Rick Springfield, but somehow I am still entertaining you, and you are not looking at me and saying "Oh, wow, they don't look like Rick Springfield at all" (dkh1).

Having made distinctions between male impersonators and drag kings, Halberstam subdivides the performance role of drag king into two separate categories: "in the first, the Drag King act is continuous with and elaborates an off-stage female masculinity. The 'butch' Drag King performs, we may say, what comes naturally, and she/he celebrates her masculinity or distinguishes between her [performed] masculinity and [hegemonic] male masculinity" (36). In the Halifax drag community, performer dkh1 fits into this first category. Halberstam defines the second type of drag king as "the 'femme' drag king or 'androgynous' drag king, who assumes her masculinity as an act. "She/he understands herself to be engaged in some kind of parody of men and she/he leaves her masculinity behind when she takes off the fake hair and the boxers and the chest binding" (36). In the Halifax drag community, dkh2 would most fit this second category as he alternates between a convincing performance of masculinity and an outward state of female appearance.

When queens were asked what the forms of drag were, they indicated skag drag, tranny drag, female impersonation and the drag queen. For Halifax drag kings, drag performances are more closely related to the subcultures of the lesbian community: "then there's this like butch type being, there's the baby dyke, then there's the lipstick lesbian

and the femmes, you know, the victim, you know, like no matter ... there is going to be ... a spectrum of different types and that identifies drag as well” (dkh1).

The conditions of performance for drag kings in the Halifax community are different from the drag queens, since male privilege is prevalent in the drag community. Drag kings are vastly outnumbered by drag queens, reflecting Newton’s argument about the gender balance of the gay and lesbian community, where men outnumber women anywhere from two to one and half to one (depending on the statistics used). Numerically the community is dominated by men, the bars kings perform in are generally owned by men, the drag queens who run ISCANS and put on the shows are men, and the bars kings perform in are oriented to a clientele of gay men (with the exception of Club Vortex, which has a 50/50 balance of men and women). Drag queens themselves are privileged vis-à-vis drag kings because while queens can represent the sexy and powerful parts of women’s roles, as Dkh1 notes:

they still have the privilege of being a bio boy, while the girls [kings] get ... to embrace a more gentle side, that sensitive side of masculinity ... and before you know they’re bad ass hard, or they are a motorcycle boy, or they’re whatever it is they are going for. They get to have that, but it’s still very much a façade, because they are not carrying themselves in that way.

Drag kings in Halifax conform to the drag queen hierarchy; they have to “get along” in order to make advances:

I quickly figured out that the queens in this city kinda ... had the most say, especially when it comes to shows, so if you want to get the stage then you have to be nice to the queens. The character that I developed at

that time was this gentleman.... so if I'm backstage getting ready ... even just trying to get my act on stage in the first place, it doesn't help if I see a drag queen sit down and I don't go down and pull her chair, or I just walk up to them and say, "Hello, don't you look lovely this evening?" and ... we develop a rapport, and then they see you perform and if you're consistent and you bring what you have to table every single time, they are going to start realizing, Hey, I don't need to use that guy friend of mine for that duet, there's that drag king I can use, and that's how that started. I started weaning out the boys for the duet (dkh1).

What the participant articulates is a lack of power in the drag king community and the need to play into the drag queen structures of power in order to advance as a performer in the community. This lack of power in the drag king community and the lack of drag king stage represents a major difference between Halberstam's work, which focused on New York, San Francisco and London and the situation in Halifax. Stage performance is only one aspect of a drag king's ability to be successful; the ability of the kings to make friends and influence the network of queens allows them access into the drag community. Once drag kings are established in the community, they can then build reputations that allow them to take their own place in the community. For example, dkh1 entered the drag community "playing" the rules, and has now acquired a reputation as a top performer, and is not only invited to shows, but now is asked to host them. The opening of Club Vortex and its reliance on women as the bar's main clientele has given lesbians in the Halifax community new economic clout. Vortex and one of its competitors Club NRG increasingly cater to women: dkh1 is part of that appeal. Since dkh1 is popular with

women, bars that wish to attract women must have at least one of the major drag kings as part of their entertainment. With a top reputation and increasing demand for his performances, dkh1 can now open the doors for other drag kings by acting as a drag father to new drag kings (e.g. Monte Carlo) and by sponsoring his children to participate in shows run by queens. Despite this new found strength, drag kings in Halifax are few. While top performers with clout, like dkh1, are available to sponsor, very few women do drag kinging. Dkh1 estimates that out of five people per week who ask about being drag kings, only about one every six months actually develops as a performer. Women admire the drag king, but are reluctant to step into these shoes. The power imbalance in the drag community between kings and queens accounts for the lack of a “drag king friendly stage ... where they don’t need to step up to the drag queens, they don’t need to really work it to have a show” (dkh1). Cultural forums tend to be male dominated and women do not have sufficient spaces to create a woman-centered culture.

Drag queens regard drag kings in two ways; they recognize the top performances drag kings do, but there is scepticism as to the degree to which drag kings participate in the community. However, the interviews I conducted with ten drag queens, there was a general support for drag kinging as an art form that was legitimate in the community:

I love it, I love it, I love it — just because to me it’s much fresher ... sort of making the seams of foundations with drag queens, the same sort of input in the community, and I love it because I think they are great — they do such a good job (dqh1).

One of the reasons that dkh1 is respected is that his performances imitate gay male style, as dqh1 noted:

Dkh1, hands down, she's like the king of the kings at the moment, and it's not just because she looks like a really cute boy, and she's really talented, and she does really good numbers, you know, better ... than the drag queens because she knows all the words, she can sing to it, she's got a personality, she's animated, and she looks like a cute nineteen year old boy — I told her that I would marry her, because when she's forty-five she will still look like a cute nineteen year old boy (dqh1).

Dkh1 describes himself as “a gay boy with class.” Dkh1's ability to perform gay masculinities ensures his act appeals to gay men. The performance of straight masculinity appeals to lesbians. These multiple forms of appeal are responsible for dkh1's ranking as one of the community's top performers.

Dkh1's success also works against the current in the drag community, which recognizes that drag kings have more difficulty in getting started. Firstly, there are not as many kings as queens in the community. Secondly, kings also face the argument from some queens that in the fundraising queens do, the queens deserve more prominence in performance, and if drag kings want more respect they need to come out and perform. This is countered by the argument that since queens had to struggle so much to be accepted, they shouldn't perpetuate the same discrimination against kings. Dkh1 is well aware of this divide when he notes that: “Yes, the community is ready to have drag kings. But are drag kings ready to... I mean, to find the men, and are drag kings ready to put the work into it that they need to do, and that remains to be seen.” Therefore, while the drag king scene is advancing in Halifax, drag kings still have difficulties to face in achieving full equality with their drag queen counterparts.

Relationships between Drag Queens/Kings and Heterosexuals by Gender

Heterosexual communities themselves are not unitary structures and not all people hold the same opinions. Segal has argued that masculinity is privileged and that gay forms of expression that are effeminate are very threatening to hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, my hypothesis was that straight women would accept drag more than straight men. However, as the following examples demonstrate, drag performers thought the relationship between drag, heterosexual women and heterosexual men was more complicated:

I think woman are less okay straight women are less supportive of drag than straight men...[I]t's the whole triangle thing and the mystery thing. Women have certain mysteries and they don't want to share them, and men have certain mysteries that men don't want to share with women. Men were meant to be men and women: were meant to be women: this is in the straight world. Lesbians, I find, are supportive when they are doing drag of their favourite actors or singers or stuff like that, but when they are doing something else they are not so supportive.... Because of the fact of the women's mystery thing I think again.... I think it's a really a relation problem — how can I relate, is there a common ground? Is there a commonality? And I think there's fear, I think there is a fear factor in there as well, and it's unknown — people just shy away from (dqh8).

Kings and queens noted both solidarity and tension between gay men and

heterosexual women. In patriarchal culture, where women's beauty acts as the currency of power, the construction of beauty that the drag queen represents can be a challenge to traditional femininity. Straight women can find that threatening. What dqh8 articulates is the way that patriarchy divides groups, in this case gay men and straight women, from making a coalition by constructing the problem as drag queens appropriating femininity. In reality, drag queens and heterosexual women are being co-opted into patriarchal configurations of gender roles. It should also be noted that many straight women act in coalition with gay men. In fact, dqh8's argument was surprising in that it was an outlier. Most queens identified straight women as supportive of drag and straight men as being in opposition to drag. Another participant was an outlier on the question of straight men and whether they support drag. In contrast to most participants, who identified straight men as either rejecting or ambivalent about drag, dqh10 argues that:

You know straight men are amazed with their beauty ... they come up to you all the time and tell you how good you look, how nice your lips are, how great your eyes are, your hair, your cleavage (dqh10).

Dqh10 is basically arguing that straight men can accept drag when it conforms to the standards of beauty expected in patriarchal western societies. Straight men are consumers of feminine beauty no matter what or who the projection screen is. Dqh9 makes an interesting point about the attraction of heterosexual men to drag queens:

They think they are lovely. They think they are lovely. I've had more offers than one from straight people than I've had from gay people.... But the straight guy who looks at a drag queen and goes, "Wow, that's some foxy lady...." (dqh9).

Rupp and Taylor noted: “there are also straight men attracted to drag queens. Gugi describes going to straight bars in drag when he was depressed over his father’s death. Men would approach him” (81). Dqh7 also indicated that in heterosexual bars she would be approached by straight men interested in sexual encounters.

Interestingly, although Esther Newton studied drag in Chicago and Kansas City in the 1960s, the same trends of ambivalence, sexual interest and rejection persist. What has changed is the proportion of people whose responses would fall in each of those categories. Given the liberalization of public attitudes to gay and lesbian people since Newton’s work I suspect in the 1960s the majority of responses would have been mainly rejection, with a smaller proportion that was ambivalence, and an even smaller proportion that was sexual interest. I suspect today that, given the change in gender role expectations that has taken place in North American societies, there would be a higher percentage of sexual interest, some responses would be ambivalent, and fewer would be inclined to rejection as a response to drag, and there would be a fourth category: interest as theatre and performance.

Sexual interest can take place beyond simply drag queens being approached for encounters by heterosexual men. According to Rupp and Taylor, drag provides possibilities of playing with gender and sexuality as categories through illusion and through play. Drag shows in places like Key West were a space of conflation of gender and sexuality. Flirting and touching patterns were inherently bisexual in orientation, as both men and women, on stage and off, took part in antics (touching certain parts of the drag queen, being touched with certain points) that crossed boundaries of hegemonic gender and sexuality. Rupp and Taylor do note that this boundary crossing has limitations,

since the radical possibilities of this audience participation for a project of social/attitude change is contained by the tourist nature of Key West (people do not stay long and do not retain much of what they have been exposed to), the nature of drag shows as performance, and the consumption of alcohol. In Halifax, the shows are far less radical in that audiences do not take active parts in shows and are more passive. However, I would argue that the possibility exists that more passive reception may allow for processing and changing of attitudes that would move members of the audiences from more rigid to more fluid definitions of gender and sexuality. Audience reception at drag shows is an area warranting future research.

Race and Ethnicity

When I set out to learn more about the drag community in Halifax, it became clear there were no African Nova Scotian or First Nations queens or kings on the stage. It was important to establish whether this was a genuine absence or whether I had missed the presence of people of colour (by not being at enough shows). I asked queens and kings about class and race/ethnicity:

They are around — there's not a lot of them; there are more white drag queens, yeah, it's mostly white drag queens, but there has been black drag queens, Chinese. There is not a lot here. I mean, there was Mz. Cosmo, and then there was Staging, who was actually Miss NRG, but I mean bigger places than in Halifax there is a lot more ethnicity, so there is a lot more people there that do it (dqh6).

Most indicated that with the exception of Cosmopolitan, there were not a lot of people of colour in the Halifax drag community. Rupp and Taylor noted that in Key West, there is a great deal of ethnic diversity; from people of Latin background to Asian to African-American, the spectrum of human race and ethnicity is on view at the 801 Cabaret. In contrast, a critical mass of performers of colour does not exist in Halifax. All the participants in this study felt that homophobia in African-Nova Scotia and First Nations communities prevents gay and lesbian people of colour from being “out” and limits the freedom people of colour to do drag.

Class and Drag

Esther Newton notes that: “Social class distinctions are important. As in the heterosexual world, one of the most important methods of “placing” any given individual, is hooking him into his place in the social structure in his work” (28). Given Newton’s comments I developed a hypothesis that socio-economic status would determine positive (higher socioeconomic) or negative (lower socioeconomic) status in the drag community. The broader segment of community that drag is drawn from, the gay and lesbian community, is deeply classed. As David Becker notes in *Growing Up in Two Closets: Class and Privilege in the Gay and Lesbian Community.*” from Queerly Classed: Gay Men and Lesbians Write about Class: “Money and economic status play as powerful a role within the lesbian/gay community as they do in the larger society, even with racial and gender oppressions ... economic status retains in most instances the ultimate power” (230). William Mann, B. Michael Hunter and John Albert Manzon- Stantos in different chapters

of Queerly Classed: Gay Men and Lesbians Write about Class write that “gay” is classed within a context of whiteness and privilege. D’Emilio has situated this classing as “gay” equating with effeminate, focused on high culture, childless, economically secure and elite. According to Joanna Kadi, this association of “gay” with upper/middle class and with whiteness prevents “gay” activism from making coalitions with other marginalized groups. Therefore my hypothesis that socioeconomic status would be related to the success or popularity of drag would have demonstrated that the drag community itself was classed.

However, the hypothesis was not valid for two reasons. Firstly, the participants did not provide direct answers on what impact social class had on members of the drag community. Susan Raffo, in her introduction to Queerly Classed: Gay Men and Lesbian Write About Class provides appropriate insights on the problem of defining and discussion class: “class systems and classism in the United States and queer identities and communities are subjects in flux. The definitions are as contested as the sites of social change” (2). In a changing global economy, where forms of work are being re-defined, spheres of work are expanding into all aspects of life, “class” as category of analysis and as a condition of social reality (i.e. how people live “class” is changing as the conditions of wealth and poverty have shifted in the last decade of the twentieth century) is a difficult concept to interrogate. The participants found it difficult to discuss what class meant to the drag community. One participant when asked about class commented on the difference in “class” on airplane flights and said therefore she didn’t wish to discuss it (dqh9). I concur with Raffo on the issue of self-defining class when she notes that: “I do not believe that people ... generally know how to talk about class, even though we all live and experience

it. We focus on individual aspects of culture and name it class, or we focus on aspects of class and name it something else. I don't believe we currently have the political vocabulary to talk about class systems in a way that automatically includes issues of economic inequality, cultural difference, race and ethnicity, internationalism, imperialism and social change" (3).

Since most drag performers are not paid for their work and those that are paid are not paid well, performing drag can't finance the makeup and costumes. Therefore socio-economic status should matter, in that those drag performers whose day jobs pay more money would be able to costume themselves in ways that would make them appear grander than their less well-to-do peers. Ruth Ann Robson argues in "To Market, To Market: Considering Class in the Context of Lesbian Legal Theories and Reforms." In another chapter of Queerly Classed: Gay Men and Lesbians Write about Class that certain conditions must be in place for "class" to exist as a category in any community: "in the first instance, economic status is a social marker that engenders bias or privilege ... class operates to mark certain people as 'classed,' the usual inference being that such persons are 'lower-classed' [I]n the second ... instance economic relations are the structures of participation in the market economy, not only including monetary exchanges for goods but also the market for 'symbolic goods' which would include artistic and legal production" (165). To interrogate Robson's first instance, all queens and kings in this study emphatically rejected the idea that social class means anything in the community and argued that drag is a leveller of socio-economic status because no one is "classed." This is not egalitarianism; rather, socio-economic knowledge is required to "class" a person, and in the drag community, where in drag a person may be an entirely different

personality from their boy self, the occupation of the boy persona may not be known. In terms of Robson's second instance, drag queens and kings use different models of market participation. Firstly, for monetary exchange, drag queens pride themselves on finding bargains for the outfits they perform in at shows. For example, one queen came to a Sunday show in a blue sequinned outfit that would cost over \$300 in a retail store, but which, as the hostess told the crowd, the queen acquired for \$2 at the Salvation Army. Therefore, minimizing expense in the full market economy is one strategy drag performers use to avoid being "classed." Another method drag queens and kings use to avoid participating in the market economy is craftsmanship; queens in particular are known for their sewing and craft skills (i.e. as makeup artists), so they can not only create their own outfits, but also their own images, thus locating them in Robson's sphere of symbolic goods production. However, where Robson would argue that inclusion in this category opens a space for queens to be "classed," I argue the inverse in that participation in a limited monetary economy and the deployment of strategies to avoid expenditures in the market economy serve as a form of resistance to hegemonic class structures. Operating outside a market economy allows drag to avoid "classing" its members according to that structure. Most drag queens and kings I interviewed for the study tend to have relatively similar jobs. They work in call centers, at one of the bars or in retail.

When participants provided an answer on the question of the impact of class in the drag community, two responses were common. The first was that there is no effect of social class on the drag community. Secondly, it was argued that performance of drag is what wins respect among peers, not the socio-economic status of the "boy" persona (dqh2). Having said that, money does make a difference in doing drag; if one cannot

afford it one doesn't go out in face (dqh2).

Conclusion

Despite making major advances in terms of acceptance and respect as performers, drag kings in the Halifax drag community perform within systems that are run, performed and geared to the interests of men. Drag queens in Halifax occupy an ambivalent gender performance; expectations that behaviour will accord to patriarchal constructed femininity are undermined by the use of female tools of resistance (e.g.. the drag queen with the cigarette) and the masculinity performed in everyday interactions. Drag queens continue to face oppression for female performance within a system that accords value to butch expectations. Gender roles and differential gender expectations will continue to form factors in the performance and politics of the community.

The lack of people of colour in the Halifax drag community represents a powerful marginalization and absence of voices that add to the experience of social life in a multicultural society such as Canada. Drag acts as a leveller of social status, providing a brake on the highly classed and consumerist nature of contemporary gay and lesbian (but particularly gay male) culture. Socio-economic status is unrelated to the successful performance of drag in the Halifax community.

Chapter 5: Drag in the Halifax Regional Municipality

This chapter addresses the relationship of region and space to drag. What is it about Halifax that allows a vital drag community to flourish? The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first I discuss whether drag differs by region, and how. In the second section, moving from regional analysis to local analysis, I discuss Halifax as an urban space; and the relationship of city space to drag. The third section contrasts Halifax drag communities with drag communities in Key West, Toronto, Edmonton and the United States, demonstrating the similarities and difference of various regional drag cultures.

Region and Drag

The concept of region has a particular meaning in the Canadian context, since as Gerald Friesen in *The Evolving Meanings of Region in Canada* argues that: “Canadians accepted as conventional wisdom that the local territory in which they lived — often termed a region — was a defining force in their lives and in their nationality” (533). Atlantic Canadians generally have believed that there is an ontological thing called region that exists and as Atlantic Canadians they are distinctive from people from other parts of Canada. Friesen expands on this idea of region as creating difference:

The notion of region conveyed powerful meanings to the listener. It was not simply a term intended to define physically distinct ... units of settled territory ... but was also employed in functional terms as a relatively subtle and realistic assertion of the political and social differences created over a certain span of time by the spatial patterns of language, religion and

economy and by popular discussion of community stereotypes. The decisive quality in Canadians' approach to region ... was the firm attachment that they perceived between the social experience and the specific territory ... between people and place as well as between past and present (536).

The idea of cultural difference, that Atlantic Canadians are different from, for example, Ontarians has become entrenched as a part of an Atlantic Canada consciousness. However, such differences serve not just cultural or even social purposes, but also political purposes. As Ian McKay notes: "The boundaries of region have sown a disquieting tendency not to behave like permanent fixtures on the landscape. They are socio-political boundaries... Atlantic Canada came into common usage ... what very likely began as a census category has since been naturalized as a regional inevitability and a focus of identity" (96: 2000). The division of region and the definition of region in Canada codes different regions with different political power. Atlantic Canada as a region has become defined by its powerlessness; the idea that as Atlantic Canadians we lack political power in the Canadian state has become part of the identification of our region. Yet this was not always the case. The powerlessness in Atlantic Canada has become coded in our culture as a result of the economic and social politics of the post-Confederation Canadian state. As David Savoie has noted in "Looking Ahead." The Maritime Provinces: Looking to the Future, the removal of subsidies for economic development, the reduction of support for transportation infrastructure, and the introduction of equalization in the 1950s shifted Atlantic Canada from a self-sustaining region to a dependent region.

The Atlantic region is changing as new opportunities in oil and gas have created a

tentative scene of prosperity (located in a few centers such as Halifax). Socially, the post-modern fragmentation of unitary conceptions of identity has created a crisis concerning the identity of “Atlantic Canada.” I tend to agree with McKay’s assertion that “this multiplication of subject positions, epistemologies and methodologies places a question mark over the very concept of an ‘Atlantic Canada’” (90:2000). Studying drag as a practice of gays and lesbians calls attention to how cultures and practices of sexuality cross geographical boundaries and make a quantifiable definition of Atlantic Canadian sexuality harder to achieve. The heterosexist orientation of “the folk” and the development of the folk as a proxy for representations of Atlantic Canadian culture provide little space for drag queens and kings to participate in this representation, and therefore they don’t. Drag queens and kings do not perform (for the most part) Atlantic folk music, or even pop music performed by Atlantic Canadian artists (Sarah McLaughlin, Rita MacNeil, the Rankins are found very rarely in drag shows). Most numbers performed are British or American popular culture hits. The costumes and performances of queens do not bear any of the standard tourist signifiers of Atlantic Canada (for example, tartans and bagpipes); instead they model the glamour or impersonate the style of American popular singers. So neither music nor performances are Atlantic Canadian. Rather queens and kings draw from the popular culture of the United States (Hollywood divas and stars) as the inspiration for their performances. The impact of this external cultural orientation for region means that a segment of the Atlantic Canadian population is being more influenced by American than Atlantic Canadian popular culture. Being part of a sexuality and cultural group outside the mainstream means some loss of a sense of region in this section of the region’s population.

While drag performances may destabilize notions of Atlantic Canada, as represented by ‘the folk’, however, drag performers themselves identify an attachment to Atlantic Canada and some of the socio-cultural values associated with region. Queens who have lived elsewhere in Canada assert that there is an East Coast imagination or territory where people are friendlier, more hospitable, where life is less harried (an anti-modernist wish) and where a connection to land, sea and people can exist. Part of the attraction for queens to this region is the space to be the sexual orientation they are and to perform in the gender they wish to project.

I began this study with the idea that there is something distinctive to region and drag; however, as the analysis of the data and the arguments presented in this thesis emerged, I realized that many of the relationships and structures of the drag community are similar to drag cultures across Canada and the United States. What makes Atlantic Canadian drag different is not artistic or historical, but socio-cultural; it is the values of Atlantic Canadian people that make the difference in drag. As to the question of an Atlantic Canadian drag, one participant noted that:

What drag is in Halifax is drag in Toronto, is drag ... in San Francisco, it's drag in New York, it's drag that's in Miami, it's drag that's in Washington, it's drag that's in Washington, the State of Washington or Seattle. I think I covered pretty much the geographic map of the United States. Drag is drag — you have to be accepting of everything and it's this question of acceptance. Drag will always be here. Men will always wear dresses, women will always wear suits, drag queens will always perform, [and] drag kings will always perform (dqh8).

With these words she shattered my hopes that through asking people I will be able to identify what region is and how performing in a region makes drag different. There are regional differences in drag, however, as Rupp and Taylor note: “We knew that drag has a long and rich history in American communities with people of same-sex desires, and we knew as well that drag shows in tourist destinations such as New Orleans, San Francisco, Princetown and Key West have long served as a unique window through which straight women and men can view gay life” (2). Rupp and Taylor’s point is interesting because it raises the possibility it is not region itself, but the particular type of region that makes a difference. Areas of Canada and the United States that are tourist destinations may allow for different types of drag culture to emerge. Shows in tourist destinations, like Key West, may be more oriented to larger spectacles designed for mixed (gay, lesbian and heterosexual) audiences, while shows in non-tourist destinations may be smaller, less spectacular and designed for the consumption of local, community audiences. Differences may also relate to the size of region; larger urban centers like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver will foster different drag cultures than smaller centers such as Halifax, Hamilton and Surrey. In larger urban centers, larger critical masses of performers exist and a wider variety of spectacle goes on. Larger centers can cater to a variety of audiences, mixed audiences, audiences that are exclusively gay or exclusively lesbian, or audiences that are of different ethnicities. Thus the possibility for drag is different in these centers. In smaller urban areas like Halifax, a smaller number of active performers means that only a certain number of people can be counted on to do shows, and the availability of shows depends on these performers, not the audience. Audiences are also smaller and tend to be more homogenous; usually audiences are gay and/or lesbian, with occasional

heterosexual participants.

Halifax as Urban Space and Its Relationship to Drag as Expression of Sexuality

Jim Meek, in a July 2003 article in The Chronicle Herald (a local Halifax daily that serves all of Nova Scotia), used the imagery of two drag queens posing as mannequins in the display window at Mills Brothers to argue that this new visibility for queens was a symbol of progress, of the economical and social progress that Halifax has experienced. According to Meek, creativity is linked with prosperity; not only because creative people develop the innovations that advance science, the arts, business and technology, but also because they tend to have income to spend, particularly childless gays. Halifax's economic development is dependent upon the creative and innovative contributions of marginalized groups, including drag queens. However, as Meek himself commented: "As for those drag queens in the Mills Brothers window, I swear one of them winked at me as I stood outside on the sidewalk and gawked. Maybe he or she figures he or she knows something I don't know. It probably has something to do with the economy." Even in Meek's article, an examination of culture, society and economy, the sexy campiness of the drag queen flashes through, reminding readers that the queen is a signifier of gender and sexuality.

What Meek observed is a changing of the nature of Halifax that is rooted in the diversity of urban life; as Lawrence Knopp in "Sexuality and Urban Space: A Framework for Analysis". Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities outlines: "Cities and sexualities both shape and are shaped by the dynamics of human social life. They reflect

the ways in which social life is organized, the ways in which it is represented, perceived and understood, and the ways in which various groups cope with and react to these conditions” (150). As Bell and Valentine note in their Introduction to Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities, urban sociologists have argued for years that gays and lesbian people lead a distinctive lifestyle and that they seek out spaces in which they can create social, political and cultural landscapes in which sexuality is firmly encoded in the geography of the space (4). Further, Newton’s work in Kansas and Chicago indicated that as early as the 1960s urban communities in North America provided a (relatively) safer space for gay men to perform drag as part of their distinctive lifestyle. Traditionally, Halifax as a city has shaped people’s sexual experience as they have come to live there from other parts of Atlantic Canada and find a more open and tolerant space in which to exist as gay men or lesbians. Currently sexuality is beginning to re-shape the social life and organization of the Halifax Regional Municipality. This (re)shaping of space is occurring generally in the Spring Garden Road business district (with an increasing presence of gay and lesbian businesses and gay and lesbian workers), and there is also a significant re-mapping of space in north end Halifax. Neighbourhoods in Creighton, Cunard, Gottingen and Brunswick streets in the peninsular core are being re-developed, with condos, new gay bars (Club Vortex), other gay and lesbian run businesses and new residential developments providing the nucleus for a gay village to emerge in this area. Drag queens and kings are heavily involved in the process. Some queens and kings are involved in efforts to bring a gay and lesbian community center to the area. Others are involved in the re-population of this district. Most of the drag performers I interviewed lived within the developing gay and lesbian spaces of downtown-north end Halifax:

Cunard, Gottingen, Creighton, Brunswick. Bell and Valentine argue that there has historically been “an intimate link between the urban and the deviant” (17). The urban renewal itself and the increasing gay presence in this geographic area represent what Bell and Valentine, drawing on Sue Golding, call “a task of revisioning sexual politics, dispensing with tired notions of community, and ... creating a radically pluralistic and democratic society” (17). The renewal underway in downtown north end Halifax has a gay and lesbian presence, but is not exclusively gay or lesbian. This same area is home to a strong working class, an African Nova Scotian, and an artists’ community. This area is a new pluralistic geographical area that will represent a rich cultural diversity, the one Meek refers to as creating the engine for social and economic progress.

As the space of the new gay village in Halifax is being mapped out, these streets become safer for gay men and lesbians to show open affection, to have visible signs of gayness present (such as rainbow flags and pride buttons), and drag performers are freer to move around. Some actually walk to the shows from their homes in drag without harassment. The landscapes of desire that these city streets represent are as Bell and Valentine argue: “eroticized topographies — both real and imagined — in which sexual acts can occur and identities are performed and consumed ... spaces of sex and the sexes of space are being mapped out across the social and cultural terrain” (1).

However, a new mobility does not erase insider/outsider tensions. This is part of a broader social process wherein “Urban images and experiences are now seen as manipulated, struggled over and reformulated in ways which are every bit as important to the accumulation (or loss) of social power by different groups” (Knopp 151). While Halifax as an urban space is undergoing renewal, what Knopp calls the struggle to

reinterpret the urban images and experiences reveals that tensions exist between drag and particular segments of the population within the heterosexual community of the Halifax Regional Municipality.

One night at ClubNRG2, a gay friend, watching the onstage antics of one drag queen turned to me and said, “We live in a strange world, don’t we, Greg?” nodding at the queen. What my friend articulated is a sense of insider/outsider. Not all gay people fit into the drag scene. For non-initiated heterosexuals, a different sense of the normative creates a huge gap of understanding between gay spectators, heterosexual spectators and drag performers. This question of inside/outside was illustrated one night at ClubNRG2. A heterosexual couple came into the bar, sat around drinking a bit, and then during BoomBoom’s number began to kiss and neck. The other bar patrons became agitated, and a confrontation ensued between BoomBoom and the couple. Eventually the show went on and the heterosexual couple left. What was in dispute was not the particular actions of the heterosexual couple but their usurpation of space. NRG2 is not Reflections; it is not a mixed space, it is a gay space, and a drag space. Therefore, the intrusion of heterosexual outsiders became unwelcome when their behaviour violated the norms of the space. What happened that night at ClubNRG2 was an example of what Warren calls territorial invasion, when heterosexuals enter the bar and change the nature of the space. What happened to the heterosexual couple was a process that Warren calls routing, where formally (through BoomBoom coming over to talk to the couple) and informally (the hostility of the regulars) the social environment makes it clear to the newcomers that they are not welcome.

Looking to determine the relationship of insider/outsider, insiders being queens

and outsiders being the general community of the Halifax Regional Municipality, I asked each queen and king about how they think the heterosexual community perceives drag. Based on the answers given, I have developed five categories to analyze the insider/outsider relationship:

1. Heterosexuals as New Audience/Consumers of Drag

In Moncton, for the Diamond Divas, most of the people in the audience are a straight society, and ... parents of some of the performers, but a lot of the people work for the Crisis Help Line, [the] organization that we raise the money for, and so they are there to see how their money is being raised, and ... most people in the straight community in Moncton and here really do appreciate the fact ...that they can go see people who look like their favourite performers, doing their favourite numbers and it doesn't cost them anything except door cover.. [S]traight, gay, undetermined it doesn't matter; everyone has a favourite singer and if you can find a location where you can pretend to watch that famous singer or famous artist you are going to pay that five bucks to get in (dqh3).

Quality drag performances will be accepted by liberal straight audiences who see drag as another form of entertainment and as a legitimate form for fundraising. Drag queens and kings indicated that they saw heterosexuals as the new drag audience, since "the gay community seems tired of drag since they have seen it for years" (dqh1). The renaissance of dqh1's career as a drag queen has been her participation in a variety of awards shows, functions and business openings in the Halifax community. She has professional agents who recognize, along with the businesses that book her, that quality

drag performances that combine song, dance and comedy can be entertaining and profitable.

2. Confidence

At this point, 2004, I don't think they care. I don't care what a straight woman thinks about me. I would hope that she has respect for me, but if she doesn't [and] says, "I don't like what you are doing," well, I don't like what you are doing either. I am living the life that I want to live and I have enough self-respect to say I'm doing exactly what I want to do (dqh2).

As Teal observed, the Stonewall Riots in the United States in 1969 began a new phase of gay and lesbian liberation. Also as both Tom Warner in Never Turning Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada notes, sodomy was removed as a crime from the Criminal Code of Canada. MacLeod observes that these changes have led to a growing gay and lesbian presence in Canadian society, and chronicles the early changes in his work, Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1964-1975, this growing presence is reflected in a new attitude among drag queens and kings; they are defiant and open, not afraid of engaging with people and social structures outside the gay and lesbian community, and do so regularly. Younger queens will go to heterosexual bars in drag and older queens now have a sense of their own history (as initiators of the Stonewall riots) and future. The heterosexual community does not concern these queens; they do what they want to do.

3. Pluralistic Tolerance within Canadian Multiculturalism

It's a pretty good attitude.... Most of the people that are on the sidelines

have children. It's a parade, and they know that they are going to see colourful costumes and big huge costumes. That's what they are expecting and those aren't ordinary parades — it's a parade, it's for everybody — throw on your brightest and most loudest outfit you have, grab a tambourine and come on and join us (dqh3).

Since the success of Pride Week 2003 (where the number of participants and spectators at the Pride Parade doubled), there is a new feeling in the drag community of increasing acceptance. The pluralistic idealism of the multicultural framework of society allows space for drag queens and kings to be accepted as part of the continuum of diversity in Canada. Equal rights values that are current in contemporary Canadian conceptualizations of nationhood incorporate equal rights for gays and lesbians and an acceptance of drag as a legitimate part of the community. This pluralistic tolerance is reflected in a growing solidarity between gay men and straight women, who face some of the same forms of oppression and struggle. Straight women can find in drag spaces the ability to have fun without danger of assault. In return straight women participate in ISCANS, they go to drag shows and serve as a new constituency of support for gays.

4. Ambivalence

Straight people are very torn about it. A lot of them are like freaks, disgust, a lot of them are. And there's people that want to beat you up and stuff like that — outcasts because we are different. They don't realize what we are doing ... not as much as I think maybe in terms of support (dqh6).

I would say if they are homophobic they would probably downplay it and try to talk about something else very, very, very quickly (dqh8).

This is reflective of ambivalence towards drag; while moderation and toleration exists in Halifax, homophobia and tranny phobia is still present. Not all heterosexual people in the community understand or accept drag. Drag performers are aware of this tension and are always prepared to defend themselves in cases of assault. People are also surprised to find that Halifax has a drag community to begin with. This reaction is very similar to Newton's discussion of drag and region: "Many people seem surprised when I say that Kansas City is a center for drag shows, as if drag would only exist in Europe or on the more sophisticated east coast... [It] is not an accident or mistake... It is an organic part of American culture — many impersonators are from small towns in middle and southern America, they are home grown" (113). As the impersonators Newton studied are "home grown" so are Halifax's drag queens. The attitude of ambivalence ignores the reality that the instinct and ability to do drag was developed in the same communities that reflect ambivalence to and/or rejection of drag.

5. Rejection

In one of my interviews, I discussed with a drag king who had some personal experience of violence the nature of homophobia and the rejection of drag that violence entails:

A: I would say that there is still some work to do. A drag queen walks on the street might have a problem, a drag king walks on the street might have a problem, if they are recognized as not being the gender specific illusion that they are trying to pass.

Q: I remember ... there had been some violence and there was a lot of shock in the community that it would happen... I don't know if you agree with me that these are not gay bashings, they are drag bashings.

A: I completely agree. I wouldn't say that I was gay bashed; I've been saying that I was tranny bashed.... I was in violation of a community standard of conformity and that wasn't cool (dkh1).

“Bashings” (physical assaults) against several drag queens and drag kings that have taken place since September 2003 bring home to the drag community the most extreme negative response to drag rejection and violence. While Halifax is seen by drag queens as a fairly liberal city for the display of sexual orientation and gender, they understand that there is still danger around them. Since reactionary segments of the Halifax community use gender behaviour as code for gay or lesbian, drag queens and drag kings will be bashed more frequently because they do not pass as straight. As such they are the most accessible signifiers of gay or lesbian, and as a result are frequent targets of anti-gay or lesbian violence. Such violence is not exclusive to Halifax; as Rupp and Taylor note, gay bashing, in particular drag bashings, took place in Key West, which is an urban center that attracts gay and lesbian people and where gay and lesbian people form a significant part of the population. Therefore, what Gill and Valentine call the “gay-friendliness” of an urban center is no guarantee that violence will not occur; rather it is less prevalent in large urban than smaller urban spaces.

Halifax and Other Urban Centers: A Comparative Assessment

Queens who have lived in the other centers and now live in Halifax describe Halifax as:

Well, I like Halifax because ... I find it's got more giving people here. Yes, people have a tendency to be very obnoxious, but at the same [time] they are still very giving, and that's what I like about Nova Scotia. They are still willing to give no matter what hurts; it's laid back and there is quite the gay community here — we seem to have more diversity here than a big city. And in a big city it's hard to work with millions of people every day, whereas working with thousands ... because at least there is a number of people in a small area of the City that you can deal with, and work with, and get them to come together as friends instead of enemies (dqh9).

To these queens Halifax is a space of acceptance and cooperation, where change can be made, diversity is respected, and where people live together and genuinely like and respect one another. Queens from away have accepted what I would term a social 'buy in,' where a marginalized person buys into the mythology of a society (how that society sees itself, its values and its culture) as demonstrated in the following quote:

I love Halifax as a city whether I am a drag performer or not. I love Halifax — I feel a touch of serene calmness in Halifax that I never enjoyed in my life, and I don't know what that is, but Halifax to me is just a wonderful place. I love it here. I was never intending to move here. I came here for a couple of days and decided, hey, I'm staying here, I love

this place... I like the people a lot, I love the city, I love the pedestrian city you can walk around, and always meet a pedestrian. It means a lot to me, Halifax ... but I actually contemplated moving a couple of times in the last few years, because my career as a makeup artist would advance immensely if I was in a larger center, because I'm really good at what I do. Unfortunately, the type of ad agencies and what not, that I choose to work for are not in Nova Scotia. But it's the pull of the city that keeps me here because I really love this city (dqh1).

This sense of connection is to space; the participant articulates what Knopp refers to as a humanist viewpoint that there is a connection to space. In the case of Atlantic Canada this connection is both to the land and to the sea. What the drag queens have brought into is a perception of region. Scholars like Ian MacKay have pointed to the commodification of culture and the re-interpretation of traditional cultures that serve to maintain hegemony. McKay, in "History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1936-1964." (1994) has been critical of the glamorization of poverty, the robbing of culture and the simplification of values inherent in the "folk" economy created by Helen Creighton and Mary Black. However, the core values — hospitality, performance and drink — epitomized by "the folk" have application for the Halifax drag community, as dqh3 notes:

We have always been where you have a juxtaposition of two particular situations. Oh, how ironic! ... Nova Scotia and the Atlantic Provinces have always been thought of as the poor relations to the rest of the country. A lot of the money that's allotted from the federal government

goes to Ontario and Quebec and Vancouver. The Prairies, they pretty much get left to the dirt, and so do we, and not because we don't deserve it, but because there is less ... population.... We're a little more friendly. We won't stand at the end of the bar and eye ball the cute guys; we'll walk over and say "Hi!" ... We'll put out buffets of food and make sure people are fed and that's the East Coast attitude (dqh3).

Drag has much similarity to "the folk" articulated in McKay's 1993 book, Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia; it is focused on performance (lyp-synch and dance versus song and dance of the folk), and it is interdependent and based on the culture of poverty (as reflected in folk songs versus drag queens, who as one of the most economically marginalized groups in the gay community will occasionally perform music that reflects the struggle they face). I argue that a regional culture that experiences oppression provides opportunities for oppressed peoples to carve out social spheres and spaces. This "folk" hospitality does not operate from dominant to marginal culture, but it exists within the drag culture itself: "For drag it's very accepted, because all you do is come in here, and if you look horrible some one will take you in the bathroom, and boom, before you know it, someone's gonna mould you and help the way you look" (dqh6). Drag queens will help each other and support each other in Halifax. In other communities, like Edmonton as Hagen notes, the environment is far more competitive. Queens will actually let others fail so they can succeed and the networks of support and cooperation are more based on whether a queen is in a drag family or not. Those in the family will receive support, those outside will not. In contrast, Halifax queens (although they have their own competitiveness) provide support on both a personal

basis (if they know the queen or king as a friend or acquaintance) and a community basis (if queens see other queens out without a proper face, even if they don't know them, they will go up and offer to assist them).

As Forbes, in *Looking Backward: Reflections on the Maritime Experience in an Evolving Canadian Constitution.*” The Maritime Provinces: Looking to the Future notes, the Atlantic region has had limited economic opportunities in Confederation: “Unable to maintain a modern infrastructure and sometimes discriminated against nationally ... existing industries closed their doors while new ones passed them by” (14). This economic difficulty in the private sector was aggravated by, as Forbes observes, the retrenchment of federal government spending in the Atlantic region in the 1990s, thereby adding to the region's vulnerable economic condition. The result of this was that “people in the most productive years left” (14). This out-migration to other regions creates an Atlantic Diaspora, where people in many communities across Canada can point to the Atlantic region as their home area. Conversely an Atlantic Drag Diaspora exists as well. Promising queens who want to advance their careers in drag will leave for the bigger cities like Ottawa and Montreal to pursue greater economic opportunities, leaving behind a community of interest and roots in this region. This Diaspora, however, does not mean the Halifax drag community is in danger of evaporating from emigration, because the community also receives people drawn from rural parts of the Atlantic region. As one queen commented:

Halifax is my drag home for sure. Actually it's my home of all homes. I'm from Newfoundland, so as a performer I like Halifax, I want to keep this city ... because it's more entertaining. I want to, like, [see Halifax as] the

top drag queen place so that gay couples that ... travel can come here for venues to see.... Oh, I couldn't be myself at home [Grand Falls, NFLD].

Like I couldn't be gay (dqh6).

In rural and smaller urban communities, the heterosexist and familial focus of Atlantic Canadian communities creates oppressive spaces that drag performers seek to escape. As articulated by McKay, the values of community/communal support, hospitality, family, simplicity and primitiveness conveyed by what McKay calls “the folk” create a space that pushes performers out of the rural regions and into Halifax. Once in Halifax, drag performers enter an urban space that is characterized by what Knopp calls “anonymity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, consumption, authority, tacitly, modernity, motion, danger, power, navigation and restlessness” (151). Thus the migrant from the rural regions finds that the safety and freedom of the city simultaneously exists with the values of hospitality (drag shows in Halifax are well know in the International System for the values of friendliness, down-home feelings and good times that the region is said to represent), communal support (fundraising, mentoring, giving advice to young queens), family (alternative drag families are created to provide support and social networks), and simplicity (adherence to conventional morality) that they originally experienced in their home communities. The synthesis of these elements creates a unique community space of freedom and support, creativity and structure. With other migrants from other parts of Atlantic Canada, a critical mass of queens exists, enough so that people can see each other perform, learn from each other, and talk and drink together. From the ranks of the mostly non-professional, the aspiring professional queen can see and experience enough to improve her act, perform regularly and build a reputation that she can take to other cities.

Queens who come from away find in the Halifax drag community a more relaxed environment, without the competitiveness and separation inherent in larger communities.

As Knopp argues: “the density and cultural complexity of cities has led to frequent portrayals of sexual diversity and freedom as particularly urban phenomena. As a result, minority sexual subcultures, and the communities and social movements sometimes associated with these, have tended to be more institutionally developed in the cities” (150). As the major urban center and city in the region, Halifax is the recipient of emigration from rural areas of Atlantic Canada. Halifax thus represents an urban center of safety and, simultaneously, a re-signification of the values of “the folk.” It provides a sense of community and interconnectness, and by this means the social space to support a sexual subculture (gay and lesbian) and its satellite culture, drag. I was fortunate in this study because a number of queens and kings had lived in and performed in other cities and were therefore able to bring to our discussion an excellent comparative perspective on doing drag in Halifax. What Halifax meant to them as drag performers was that it was not drag per se that was accepted, rather, it was the larger openness of Halifax to gayness that made it safe to do drag.

Toronto, as the largest urban center, has one of the most active drag scenes in Canada:

In Toronto everybody and their dog does drag and gets paid for it, but there is not a lot of really good drag queens.... There is five that are fantastic, maybe the best in the country (dqh1).

However, the quality of drag may not necessarily be better in major urban centers. In Toronto the same drag show is basically repeated several times a week, and what

changes is the audience, not the act. There is, therefore, less incentive for kings and queens to keep their act fresh (dqh2).

The Halifax and Toronto drag communities differ on the existence of unity in their broader gay and lesbian communities. As dkh1 noted:

Unlike Toronto, which is my only other experience, there is a unity in this community. We're like unified. They hang together; kings and queens perform together — We're unified in a way that I haven't seen in bigger cities.... I would say that it's not always an accepting community in general, but I would say that it is more progressive than the bigger cities.... We all get along to a certain degree, and so that sort of openness to each other also gives way to lucrativeness of idea, and so I've seen acts in Halifax with a lot more originality that I've seen in other cities (dkh1).

In large centers like Toronto gay men and lesbians are separate, in Halifax they bump up against each other all the time. In venues like Club Vortex, men and women equally share space, although on different nights. The Pride Committee has recently had an influx of women entering its formerly male preserve. In Halifax, lesbians and gay men have to work together to advance the community. This integration also applies to drag; drag kings are a small part of the community at this time, so they have to share stages with drag queens, since there are no "king" stages in Halifax. Drag performers also live with and are always in contact with the dominant heterosexual culture. Thus the act of moving inside and outside of community, space and sexuality is a constant factor of life in Halifax. Drag performers can exist in spaces that range from the totally gay, like the bars where they do drag, to workplaces that are generally heterosexual (although more gay

work spaces like call centers are now beginning to develop). Toronto is segregated into queer communities; in fact even more so than the North America gay center, San Francisco. There, one can live in a space that is so gay that one can literally not know a heterosexual person (dqh2Dqh2 and dqh1). Several participants who have lived in Toronto commented on the lack of connection with a community, the anonymity that existed in the gay spaces, and the tendency of people to disappear and for no one to know what happened to them. In Halifax they argue that, because people are more interconnected, there is a greater sense of community and a greater safety for gay people (i.e. people will know and care what happens to someone).

The other major center the queens discussed was Edmonton:

Halifax is a great city, because even ten years ago when I first moved here I could kiss a guy full of the lips on Spring Garden Road and nobody gave a flying fuck ... nobody even blinked at you. It's like they couldn't care less. You know, I have never been called fag in my life in Halifax. You know, I go back to Edmonton — I could be there ten minutes in downtown Edmonton and somebody, oh, some faggot.... I find that the people in Halifax ... are very liberal minded... I like being in a larger community that shares basically the same political values as I do or the same liberal philosophies that I enjoy. It makes, you know, the living environment you want to live in, and a community that reflects your own personal philosophies, and I find that in Halifax. The cities are different. I mean, Edmonton is a very redneck sort of city. (dqh1).

The situation described in Edmonton reflects a difference of values between

regions; Edmonton, as a very large city in Alberta, represents different values from those of Halifax. Both dqh1 and Hagen noted that while Edmonton may have the space, freedom and anonymity of a city, it also has a significant population of persons resistant to diversity, race, class, gender difference and sexual orientation. Unlike Edmonton, Halifax has a synthesis of urban freedom and folksy hospitality that creates a social structure in which people are more inclined to acceptance rather than judgment, and the nature of power operates differently. As Knopp argues: "Power in this context is an extremely slippery slope. It would seem fundamentally to be about the capacity to produce, reproduce and appropriate human life and the socially defined values associated with it, in a way consistent with one's own interests ... but power is a strangely contradictory thing. It seems always to contain the seeds of its own subversion. As difference is constructed (spatially) to facilitate the accumulation of power, that (spatialized) difference is also empowered" (159). Knopp's argument is key for discussing the difference between Edmonton and Halifax because it is this spatial power that makes the difference. Although, as Hagen notes, Edmonton has had a drag community existing formally for many years, power is deployed very oppressively. There, gay life is produced and appropriated within the economic power structures of the city and the wealth of the city allows for a cultural and economic hegemony. In Halifax, by contrast, because of the lack of wealth, spaces exist within which gay, lesbian and drag communities can carve spatial arrangements (like the new gay village) that subvert heterosexual cultural and economic hegemony. In fact, because the gay and lesbian people residing in the cradle of the new gay and lesbian village (Cunard, Creighton, Gottingen and Brunswick streets) have economic spending power, they are empowered to become part of the economic, as well

as cultural, engine that drives the re-development of these neighbourhoods in north end Halifax. This economic power gives cultural power, as Meek demonstrated in his example of the drag queens in the window and his discussion of the contribution of cultural to economic prosperity.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the relationship of drag to region, beginning with an examination of the meanings of Atlantic Canada as region. The growth of the drag community is intricately linked with urban renewal, as this renewal has resulted in the development of the nucleus for a gay and lesbian village in downtown-north end Halifax. This development provides safer spaces for drag queens and kings to live, perform and socialize in. The study found that drag cultures in Halifax and drag cultures in other North American urban centers are relatively similar. The distinctiveness of drag in Halifax is a result of the values of hospitality and congeniality associated with Atlantic Canada. Halifax provides the necessary social tolerance and acceptance that allows for the growth and development of the drag community.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the intersection of drag as creative art and as a community with distinctive norms, behaviours and structures. Chapter 1 examined the various definitions and types of drag, differentiating it as a form of creative expression from other gender categories. Drag, as performance art, synthesizes music, dance, lip-synch and makeup to create a unique form of entertainment. Continuing with the argument that drag is an art form, an outline of the lifespan of a drag career was provided: how one starts a career, the possibilities for success in a drag career, and how one retires from a drag career. Special emphasis was placed on examining the privileged, yet contested, role of the diva in the drag community. Chapter 2 introduced readers to the key institutions in the drag community; ISCANS and the various gay bars in Halifax. The history of ISCANS, its role as a fundraising organization, the importance of fundraising to the drag community and the relationship of drag performance careers to this fundraising was reviewed. The chapter also discussed the function and role of bars in the general gay and lesbian subculture and the importance of these venues to the maintenance of a drag subculture.

Chapter 3 examined aspects of interpersonal relationships in the drag community. Gossip maintains social control in the drag community and maintains a sense of identity by facilitating in-group contact. The generation gap in the drag community was discussed; as age, experience and perceptions of how drag as an art form should be performed create conflict between older and younger queens. Drag performers often have ambivalent relationships with their families; therefore, drag kinship provides an alternative measure of emotional support and assistance.

Chapter 4 examined how gender, race and class affect the everyday lives of drag performers. Based on the discussion undertaken on the varying theoretical conceptions of drag as a gender performance, I argue that there is a lack of consensus in the scholarship on whether drag subverts or reinforces hegemonic gender roles. The chapter further argues that drag queens face discrimination from some other members of the gay male community because they perform as women. While drag kings are a fresh and new form of drag performer, they operate under limitations: the absence of a drag king stage, control of the drag community by the queens and a lack of a critical mass of performers. While there are people of colour performing as drag kings, the small size and relative ethnic homogeneity in Halifax means that there is an absence of queens of colour. Based on the participants' statements and the period of field observation, socio-economic status was not found to be a factor in the drag community.

The final chapter examined the relationship of drag to region, beginning with an examination of the meanings of Atlantic Canada as region. The growth of the drag community is intricately linked with urban renewal, as this renewal has resulted in the development of the nucleus for a gay and lesbian village in downtown-north end Halifax. This development provides safer spaces for drag queens and kings to live, perform and socialize in. The study found that drag cultures in Halifax and drag cultures in other North American urban centers are relatively similar. The distinctiveness of drag in Halifax is a result of the values of hospitality and congeniality associated with Atlantic Canada. Halifax provides the necessary social tolerance and acceptance that allows for the growth and development of the drag community.

Appendix A

Questions and Topics Used in the Interview Questionnaire

A. Life Issues

- Biography. Could you tell me a bit about yourself (basic information, age, gender, race, etc.), and how you came to be in the community?
- What are relationships with members of your family like? Did they accept your being gay and doing drag? How has their attitude changed?
- Occupation. What work do you do to “make a living”?

B. Performance/Personae

- How do people get into “drag”? What did they have to do?
- What were the “rules, codes and conventions” of drag at the time (i.e. what is drag supposed to look like)?
- How does one build up a reputation as a top drag performer (become a diva)?
- When somebody wants to retire or become inactive, how do they make that known?
- Tell me how you started in your own act. Select a name, select a persona? What was the style (attitude, performance, dress) of the persona? (Glamour, comedy, dance, singing.)
- How and what music did you select to perform to?
- Do you see a difference between drag queen and female impersonator?

C. Drag “Community”

— Is there a drag community at this time, consisting of a group of performers who would regularly perform around town? How do you define it? How do you feel about being part of it (if you are)?

— Where do people perform? How do the different venues affect performance?

— How do queens see “their” community? How are they regarded by other gays and lesbians? (Being seen with, recognized by other gays.)

— How do queens see themselves being perceived by the wider (straight) NS/HRM community?

— Tell me about the kinship or family system that seems to exist in the drag community.

— What is the role of the use of drugs and alcohol within the club scene?

— How do queens interact with each other (language, role with lesbians)?

— Race. Are there First Nations or Black queens? Other ethnic queens?

— Class. Does it cross boundaries?

D. The Halifax Region

— What does Halifax mean to you, then, as a drag performer? Is Halifax an accepting community, both from other gays and lesbians, and from people in the wider community?

— Did you come from away (other parts of Canada, NS)? Is the climate of Halifax different from where you came from? If so, how is it different?

— What is the LGBT community like? How open is it? How prevalent is homophobia? Who do you see as activists? Who are they? What do they do? Do they work with feminists or A-NS activists?

E. Other Questions (that may arise in conversation during the interviews).

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