Exploring the Intersecting Subjectivities of White Afrikaans-Speaking Drag Performers in the Context of a Shifting Post-Apartheid South Africa

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This research is submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the field of Critical Diversity Studies.

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this research report is my original work. Any ideas in this report that are not my own are acknowledged through proper references and citations. This report is being submitted for a Master of Arts in the field of Critical Diversity Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and no part of this report has been submitted in the past, or is being submitted, or will be submitted in the future for any degree or examination at any other university.

____28 April 2021_____

Date

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Abstract

Doing drag can constitute an important way to grapple with intersecting issues of embodied power and normativity, as it primes the performer to subvert (or, in fact, reproduce) various gendered, racial, classed, and sexual norms that play out on the body. This study explored whether white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers took up this opportunity to use their drag artistry to think critically about questions of their own identities, their sense of belonging, and how they made sense of their imagined drag communities in the post-apartheid South African context. Drawing on qualitative data from five in-depth, semi-structured interviews with white Afrikaans-speaking individuals who perform as drag artists, this research used critical discourse and thematic analysis to unpack how participants made sense of their identities and experiences as drag performers. The analysis demonstrated that participants identified with various normative understandings of drag culture that manifest symbolically and materially in complex ways. These played out through discourses where participants actively opted out of using drag to critically engage their white, Afrikaans and queer positionalities. This, in turn, had implications for questions of their imagined (non)belonging within the local drag community itself, with centres and margins being constructed along axes of gender and race in ways that continued to privilege a white cisgender masculine ideal and reified the haunting histories of white supremacy and cissexism in South Africa. Moreover, it was found that representations of drag from the global north were firmly cementing themselves in the post-apartheid South African space and subsequently contributed to participants' self-integration within a homogenising 'global' drag culture. As a result, their dominant sense-making around drag was increasingly depoliticised and entangled with neoliberal values that took on a lens of drag as a commodity for mainstream consumption, thus further closing down opportunities for participants to critically interrogate issues of power, oppression, and subversion through drag. The study offered reflections for the ways in which drag culture and divisions in the South African drag community were being made sense of through the perspectives of white Afrikaans-speaking drag artists and concluded with ideas of what this might mean for the future of drag in South Africa.

Chapter One: Introduction

> I want drag to offer new insights for the potential of queering gender, sexual, racial, and class expressions. I want drag to challenge and subvert our notions about normativity and all of the racist, capitalist, classist, sexist, misogynist systems that place demands and regulations on certain bodies […] I want drag to pull back the veil of mystification regarding intersectional identities so that everyone is expressing their gender authentically, being aroused sufficiently, and liberating themselves appropriately. (Hobson, 2013, p. 36)

> A superficial aspect of drag is mainstream. Like, the 'Ooh, girl' or 'Hey girlfriend!' or 'Yaaas'. That's mainstream culture. But true drag will never be mainstream. Because true drag has to do with seeing that this world is an illusion, and that everything that you say you are and everything it says that you are on your driver's license, it's all an illusion. (RuPaul Charles, 2019[1])

In the quotes offered above, there is a robust recognition that drag artistry – at its core – can serve as a way to rethink the norms governing our identities, our embodiment, and how we relate to those in the world around us. In other words, drag can provide us with opportunities to transgress, disrupt, or to collude with the 'mainstream' or dominant discourses that regulate how we make sense of ourselves and our social realities (Evans & Balfour, 2012). This research explores the question of whether these opportunities to think critically about issues of identity[2] through drag are, indeed, taken up by South African drag performers who are queer[3], white and Afrikaans-speaking. With such a particular focus, this research engages how the intersections of participants' queer identities, whiteness, and Afrikaans-ness are being negotiated in the context of drag. In doing so, this study offers valuable theorisations around the constitution

[1] Accessed from https://jezebel.com/rupaul-explains-why-true-drag-may-never-go-mainstream-1839959479
[2] See Key Terms on p. 12
[3] See Key Terms on p. 12

of intersectional identities and social relations in post-apartheid South Africa, as well as offering reflections for the ways in which drag culture is being made sense of from this particular point of view.

Drag has come to be understood as being far more complex than a mere parody of gender identity alone. Recent scholarship has shown how drag is also implicated in the production of various sexual (Swarr, 2004; Taylor & Rupp, 2004), racialised (Rhyne, 2004; Spruill, 2004; Swarr, 2004; Upadhyay, 2019), and classed (Spruill, 2004; Swarr, 2004) identities. In this sense, drag comprises the performance of multiple identities that are articulated through the sociocultural systems of power that give them meaning (Hobson, 2013). Thus, not only does drag foreground a number of the socially constructed differences that arrange the dynamics of power in a society (such as gender, race, sexuality, and class), but drag is also fundamental to the potential (re)production – or subversion – of these power dynamics (Swarr, 2004). Take, for instance, Sizemore-Barber's (2020) analysis of the drag performed by Pieter-Dirk Uys (as his famous persona, Evita Bezuidenhout) and Steven Cohen: both of these individuals used drag as a way to satirise and critique whiteness as an identity of (non)belonging in South Africa during its historic period of political transition. And given the power of the apartheid regime's monolithic definition of whiteness, Sizemore-Barber (2020) argues that Uys and Cohen effectively used their drag as a prism to start thinking differently about race. Herein lies a poignant and relevant instance of drag being used in the South African context by white performers who approached their drag with an intersectional lens.

In addition to its relevance in the making of shifting intersectional identities, drag culture has been – and may continue to be – a notable apparatus for political resistance and queer visibility in South Africa (McCormick, 2018). LGBTQIA+[4] South Africans continue to find themselves navigating a contradictory relationship to the post-apartheid nation-state: one where their legal protections are indeed enshrined as part of the democratic project, yet are undermined in the everyday context where discrimination and sexual violence remain rampant (Lease, 2015; 2017). In such a space where homophobia is still a reality for many LGBTQIA+ citizens and where the very notion of queerness is rejected as colonial and 'unAfrican' (Spruill, 2017), the project of solidifying the LGBTQIA+ community's belonging and legitimacy in post-apartheid South Africa is still in flux. Through the performance of drag and the ways in which it publicly

[4] See Key Terms on p. 12

disrupts the expected norms that are placed on bodies in terms of how they are contingently sexed, gendered, and sexualised, it becomes possible to not only celebrate the subversion of normative sexuality, but also to better understand how these norms operate (Evans & Balfour, 2012). In this regard, drag may be a powerful means through which to expose and interrogate our social practices, and to use the space where lines are blurred and binaries are deconstructed to explore new ways of being and belonging in the post-apartheid context.

As the above quote by Hobson (2013) alludes to, drag might offer us a space where the 'veil of mystification regarding intersectional identities' can be withdrawn and done differently. Thus, given its novel relevance to the enquiry of shifting relations of power and contemporary subjectivities in society, further research on drag in the post-apartheid South African context is needed (McCormick, 2018). To date, academic interest in drag from South Africa has been covered in publications by Cameron and Gevisser (1995), Swarr (2004), McCormick (2018), Spruill (2004), Evans and Balfour (2012), Prince (2017), Lease (2015; 2017) and Sizemore-Barber (2020). In response to McCormick's (2018) call for more contemporary and intersectional theorisations of drag from South Africa, this research explores the ways in which drag is made sense of, experienced, and constructed according to white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers in the post-apartheid context. Understanding drag from this particular social location may offer interesting insights regarding the articulation of identities as they comprise a negotiation of both dominant and non-dominant positionalities. By being white and Afrikaans, these individuals benefit from substantial historical privilege in terms of race, culture, and class, yet they may also experience considerable marginalisation on the basis of their queer identities. Navigating this complex 'in-between' space in terms of identity and power through drag may open up opportunities to rethink the harmful norms governing what it means to be white, Afrikaans, and queer in South Africa today. By making better sense of the inevitable 'messiness' of these interlocking social arrangements, bringing about more socially just realities are made possible (Steyn, 2015). The question that this research attempts to answer is whether these individuals do, in fact, animate these possibilities to use drag as a way to think differently about their identities in order to open up (or close down) more socially just, anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic imaginaries.

With the exception of Swarr's (2004) study on urban and township drag in South Africa and Sizemore-Barber's (2020) aforementioned exploration of white drag at the cusp of South Africa's political transition, there is a lack of scholarship focusing specifically on the

production of white drag artist subjectivities in the South African context. Historically, these drag performers were marginalised in South Africa for their association with homosexuality and a so-called 'failed masculinity' (Swarr, 2004). White Afrikaner men were policed vigorously in this regard during apartheid, since the production of heterosexuality and normative white masculinities were essential to the project of Afrikaner nationalism (Swarr, 2004). With the criminalisation of men dressing in feminine clothing (under the Prohibition of Disguises Act 16 of 1969), drag culture in South Africa was driven underground – but still flourished – throughout the apartheid era (Cameron & Gevisser, 1995; Swarr, 2004). Today, white drag performers mainly perform in urban and gay friendly clubs for pay (Swarr, 2004; Buck, 2019), reflecting a possible shift in the norms of space and meanings of drag culture taking place. Furthering this discussion around the fluidity of meanings attributed to drag culture, this research report has been produced during a time that Brennan and Gudelunas (2017, p. 1) consider to be "the golden age of drag". In other words, what formerly existed as a marginalised subculture in the LGBTQIA+ community is currently experiencing a rapid shift in the global zeitgeist, with drag culture gaining visibility and relevance in both mainstream and academic spaces all over the world (Ferrante, 2017). This research report is being produced in dialogue with this context and seeks to explore some of the complexities and challenges that may arise from the position of being a drag performer in South Africa during a time when global drag culture is undergoing rapid shifts in the realms of history, aesthetics, technology and experiencing newfound social, political, and commercial impacts (Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017). Therefore, this research offers both a timely contribution to the global conversations circulating around drag, as well as offering an exploration about how white Afrikaans-speaking drag performers are making sense of their drag artistry in the particular socio-political context of post-apartheid South Africa.

Given the monumental socio-political transformations that South Africa has undergone that ultimately led to the emergence of a democratic dispensation in 1994, there has been an urgent need for the nation and its citizens to redefine ourselves (Baines, 1998; Gqola, 2001). Metaphors of unity, multiculturalism, and freedom have quickly come to represent our 'rainbow nation'[5] as a place where people from all walks of life can finally co-

[5] The concept of the rainbow nation has come to serve as a central, yet dwindling metaphor for post-apartheid South Africa. Symbolising aspirations of nonracialism, unity and diversity, the term has also been criticised for glossing over the ongoing systemic oppression and inequalities that still shape people's lived experiences today as they did during apartheid (Turner, 2019)

exist (Gqola, 2001). Moreover, our 1996 constitution has been heralded as one of the most progressive in the world, enshrining the rights and protections of all people based on race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). In fact, ours was the first constitution in the world to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Munro, 2012). Yet, the hard-won freedoms afforded to South Africans have done little to stunt the persistence of inequality, prejudice, and segregation in people's everyday lives (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). White folks continue to yield most of the nation's wealth, whilst Black South African people remain disproportionately burdened by poverty (Durrheim et al., 2011; Statistic South Africa, 2020). Recent surveys show that the rate of income generated by white households is, on average, seven times higher than Black households (Statistics South Africa, 2019). And unsurprisingly, with a Gini coefficient of 0.63, South Africa is considered the most unequal country in the world (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Patterns of interpersonal racial segregation from apartheid have proved to be just as enduring, with the nature of interracial interactions often being superficial at best (Durrheim et al., 2011). In truth, people still live and socialise separately according to classed and racial boundaries. In addition, discrimination on the bases of gender and sexual identity continue to disadvantage women and queer people in South Africa, rendering them vulnerable to stigma, violence, and social isolation (Reygan & Lynette, 2014). These pervasive patterns of social inequality show that despite concerted efforts to reframe our contemporary society as equal, our lives are still significantly shaped by the unjust structures of the past (Durrheim et al., 2011). Today, South Africans are left to grapple with this sense of ambiguity: in some ways we relentlessly pursue change and seek to redefine ourselves anew, and in other ways we remain bound to the norms of the past (Moolman, 2013).

As a space of transition, the South African context arguably opens up opportunities for prevailing social identities and relations with others to be contested, refashioned, and practiced in new ways (Moolman, 2013). The reconstruction of white subjectivities in post-apartheid South Africa has been especially central to this inquiry in the academic literature. Predominantly, these studies highlight how contemporary white South African subjectivities are produced through contestations over integrating the prevailing norms from the country's past and present. However, a deeper understanding of shifting social identities in South Africa can only be gained when we expand our exploration beyond race (or any other single social category) in isolation and begin to unpack the particularity of identities as they are multiply

and intersectionally constituted. To nuance this topic further, Steyn (2004) argues that a distinction needs to be made between the constructions of white identities among Afrikaans- and English-speaking white South Africans. More specifically, white Afrikaners tend to problematically think of themselves as marginalised by global (English) white cultures (Steyn, 2004), resulting in tensions within the hierarchy of hegemonic subjectivities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Here, Steyn (2004) notes the importance of particularising whiteness(es) by paying attention to the politics of their specific social dynamics and the ways in which intersections of power manifest in those spaces. This requires a consideration not only of race as an axis of power in the production of social positionalities, but also of its interaction with other dynamics of power that manifest through one's class, gender, sexuality, culture, (dis)ability, and age (Steyn, 2004; Steyn, 2015). An intersectional understanding of white identities becomes particularly important in this regard when examining how some white subjectivities are marginalised through other axes of power, such as queer, Afrikaans-speaking white people who do drag.

1.1 Research Questions

The aim of this study is to answer the following research question:
How do white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers make sense of their identities and experiences in relation to local and/or global drag culture(s)?
With the sub-questions:

(1) What meanings do these individuals attribute to their experiences of doing drag?
(2) How are these individuals making sense of their intersecting positionalities in relation to doing drag?
(3) How do these individuals think of themselves in relation to global and local drag culture(s) and communities?

1.2 Key Terms

Identity

This research explores how white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers make sense of themselves, their situatedness and relationality in drag culture. Intrinsic to this line of enquiry

is the question of what constitutes being, becoming, subjectivity, and identity. This, in itself, is a widely theorised and vigorously contested concept in social theory that can be understood from a variety of theoretical lenses, but exploring them all is beyond the scope of this particular research project. For the purpose of clarity, my use of the term 'identity' in this report is understood from a post-modern perspective which is aptly summarised by Hall and Du Gay (2006, p. 277):

> Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self' […] If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves.

This quote highlights how identity can be understood to bridge the gap between our outside world of historical and cultural systems and the inside world of our personal, internal state of being. Another key framing of identity in this research is premised on Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, which is discussed in more detail later in the report. Thus, this research considers the process of identification wherein white, Afrikaans-speaking drag artists narratively and discursively construct themselves as subjects within their social contexts of meaning-making.

Queer

'Queer' is a controversial term that originated in the United States as a slur for people with non-dominant sexualities but has since been reclaimed by many people who defy heteronormative ideals (Epprecht, 2008). Whilst some consider it to be a subversive and inclusive umbrella term for non-dominant identities, its application in the South African context is still contested (Matebeni & Msibi, 2015; Sizemore-Barber, 2020). Because the term itself and the proliferation of Queer Theory predominantly speak to the logics of gender and sexuality from the global north, the question of what queer might mean in other spaces with

other sense-making systems around identity matters for this research as it is situated in the South African context.

As mentioned, the language around qualifiers of identity is ever evolving. In writing this report, I often found myself wondering what the implications would be of naming things and people in particular ways, especially given that their meanings may very well change or be rejected outright in the future. However, Butler (1990) considers the naming around identities to be a problematic but necessary violence in order to form coherent arguments. With this in mind, I would like to clarify my understanding of the term 'queer' as it is used in this report: I borrow from Devji (2016), who argues that 'queer' is useful to denote the existence of a variety of non-heteronormative sexualities in Africa as they exist on a *spectrum*, and not as distinct, independent identities.

LGBTQIA+

The LGBTQIA+ acronym and its many variations (LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA) generally refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual identities (Meer, 2014). The acronym is intended as a collective term for people with marginal identities in a heteronormative society (McEwen, 2020) and it is widely used in academic, non-profit, and activist spaces. However, the acronym has also been regarded as problematic for a number of reasons: one, it inevitably excludes a range of sexualities and gender identities; two, those that are represented in the acronym tend to denote a white and western understanding of gender and sexualities; and three, it glosses over the layers of difference and complexity that exist among different sexual and gender identities (Spencer, 2018). In other words, the acronym presumes a commonality among these groups of people who are, in reality, increasingly disparate in their experiences (Spencer, 2018). In my sparing use of the acronym throughout this report, I am aware of its issues and do not wish to conflate people who are differently marginalised for their gender and/or sexual identities. Rather, my application of the acronym is limited to contexts where another author has used it or where I make explicit reference to individuals who are variably marginalised in the context of a heteronormative society.

Racial signifiers

Throughout this research I make use of racial classifications such as white, Black, and Coloured. In doing so, I am aware of the risk of naturalising an antiquated notion of race that assumes race to be a stable, biological fact rather than a fluid and socially constructed signifier of difference (Posel, 2001). And although race as biology is fiction, the persistence of racism as a social issue is real (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). In other words, these classifiers still have enduring relevance in our contemporary context through people's own self-definitions and the correlation of these markers with the persisting patterns of inequality and power that were solidified during apartheid.

The drag 'community'

In this research I consider how white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers think of themselves in relation to a local and global drag 'community'. Although I refer to this drag 'community' in the singular form, I do recognise that people who do drag cannot be thought of as a homogenous collective. Rather, there are a number of individuals who come together to form differently positioned 'communities' around drag who inevitably experience differences in terms of accessing resources, spaces, representations, shared meaning-making, and are subject to power imbalances between themselves and other drag communities (Litwiller, 2020). By referring to white, Afrikaans-speaking drag artists' sense of belonging and relating in a drag 'community', I wish to uncover some of the fault lines along which divisions are being shaped in drag performer collectives. Moreover, my hope is for this line of enquiry to problematise and potentially unsettle the notion of a singular drag culture in South Africa.

1.3 Chapter Outline

Chapter Two presents the Literature Review, which builds on the background and context already provided in this Introduction chapter by providing an in-depth overview of the relevant literature for this research. It specifically includes a closer look at the existing scholarship on drag that has been produced both internationally and in South Africa. Additionally, this chapter reviews the existing research on Afrikaner identities and maps out its (dis)continuities from the apartheid era through to today's post-apartheid context.

Chapter Three goes on to describe the Theoretical Framework that informed this research project. It outlines the main tenets of four distinct theories: Steyn's (2015) critical diversity literacy, intersectionality, performativity and the field of critical whiteness studies: all of which provided a theoretical foundation for this study. Although distinct in their own right, all four approaches are grounded in a critical understanding of reality and adopt a critical framing of issues of power and identity that were essential to this research.

In Chapter Four, I outline the Methodology used for this research. Firstly, the study's methods are situated in a critical and qualitative paradigm. It also details key information regarding the data collection process: namely, the participant recruitment process is described and is followed by the provision of participants' demographic information. Thereafter, I discuss the data collection processes wherein semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants and transcribed accordingly. Then, this chapter describes the discourse analysis theory, critical discourse analysis, and thematic analysis methods that were used to analyse the data from participant interviews. Lastly, Chapter Four concludes with considerations for ethical issues and my reflexivity as a researcher that were pertinent to this research.

Chapter Five presents the Analysis of this research project and is the culmination of analysing the participant interview data that was outlined in Chapter Four. Using critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis methods, this chapter engages the data to reveal the pertinent themes that emerged from the data in relation to participants' sense-making around drag culture, their personal stakes in doing drag, and how they relate to others within the drag community. The first theme, *Being Afrikaans and Gay*, explores how participants' experiences of entering the drag scene have been textured by their Afrikaans backgrounds where queerphobic attitudes are still prevalent. This includes the subsection, *Being Afrikaans and doing drag*, where issues of respectable queerness and conservative attitudes towards drag culture are explored further. The final subsection of the first theme is *Gender performativity through drag*, which unpacks how participants discriminately tap into the performative dimension of drag to express themselves differently in terms of gender, but neglect to use drag to interrogate their privileged racial positionalities. In the second theme, *Centering, Othering and Belonging in the South African Drag Community*, participants' reflections on issues of (non)belonging in the local drag scene are explored. Its two subsections, *Racialised divisions in the local drag scene* and *Gender norms in the local drag scene* unpack how social divisions are solidified and experienced along axes of race and gender in South Africa's drag community

in ways that continue to centre normative white masculinities. The final theme of this analysis, *Depoliticising Drag*, considers the impact of global drag culture on the sense-making and experiences of doing drag for the participants of this research. Together, the three subsections of *The RuPaul's Drag Race (R)u-niverse, Framing drag as a profession,* and *Negotiating normative and subversive readings of drag* engage some of the central ways in which participants' discourses surrounding drag culture are mirroring the dominant logics from the global north, thus giving way to participants' assimilation within a homogenised and depoliticised drag culture.

This report ends by offering Conclusions in Chapter Six. Reflecting on the themes that were generated in the Analysis chapter, the discourses of white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers are framed in terms of the implications for drag culture(s) and drag communities in both the South African context and globally. Lastly, limitations of this research and prospects for future enquiry are explored.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter will discuss some of the existing literature on drag culture and Afrikaner identities in South Africa. By starting with an overview of the global research surrounding drag culture and then moving onto the relevant South African literature, I situate local theorisations of drag in conversation with broader trends, thus mapping out the dis/continuities that are present when looking at drag globally and locally. Then, I explore the literature on Afrikaner identities through a lens of understanding Afrikaans-ness as a particular and performative white identity. Overall, this literature review chapter demonstrates how my study is grounded in the existing scholarship on drag culture and may contribute to further theorisations around the complexities of drag and identity research in post-apartheid South Africa.

2.1 Drag

As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, there is a rich tapestry of research on drag that spans across diverse disciplinary and theoretical approaches. Drag has been explored in relation to sociolinguistics, new media, globalisation, performance and audience, fashion and embodiment, psychological wellbeing, queer activism, queer sense of community, and its situatedness in particular contexts of culture and identity. Given the expansive enquiry related to drag available to us from around the world, it also becomes clear where further study in South Africa is needed, especially when considering that the scope of research on drag is less abundant in our context. Overall, the purpose of this section of the review is to highlight the existing literature's arguments around what drag is, what drag looks like, what drag does in terms of power, and ends off by exploring what we already know about drag in the South African context.

2.1.1 Defining drag

In mainstream discourses, the world of drag appears to be ever-expanding[6]. Drag culture is becoming more visible and accessible than ever before, and more people are experimenting with drag than ever before (Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017). The literature is also reflective of

[6] See more at https://www.vulture.com/2019/06/how-drag-became-americas-new-national-pastime.html?utm_campaign=vulture&utm_source=tw&utm_medium=s1

shifting attitudes towards drag over time: earlier research stigmatised drag culture, categorising drag performers as 'failed men' and were loaded with negative assumptions that pathologised gay men and drag performance (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010). Some even argued that drag constitutes an insult to women in the same way that blackface is a mockery of Black people (Kleiman, 1999). Moreover, the literature was often based on a restrictive understanding of drag as a thing that is only performed by gay cisgender men who specifically do drag by dressing up and performing as women (Taylor & Rupp, 2004).

Although the world of drag appears to be opening up, these conservative conceptualisations of drag as female impersonation and gender transgression still exist today and are largely understood through Western (Euro-American) conceptions of binarised gender and sexuality. This underscores that the way drag tends to be understood in the literature is largely generated from a particular hegemonic cultural context, where its definition rests on taken-for-granted assumptions that masculine people dressing up in a feminine way is what constitutes drag. However, gender-queering identities and practices that may look similar to this particular notion of drag also manifest in other forms and in other spaces, but are understood differently because the broader logics of gender themselves are different in those spaces. Take, for instance, *hijra* – feminine-identifying, male-bodied people – who are recognised as a third gender in many South Asian countries (Hossain, 2017), or Thailand's identification of *kathoey* as a third sex which loosely refers to transgender women, intersex people and effeminate gay men (Käng, 2012). Bringing the discussion closer to home, *yan daudu* (a term meaning 'effeminate men' in the Hausa language) within West Africa broadly refers to people who were assigned male at birth, who have sex with men and express themselves effeminately, but are seen as being neither male or female (Salamone, 2005). Although limited, these examples critically highlight that the Western gender binary of male/female that many definitions of drag depend on is not universal. Given that the very assumptions around gender are understood and performed differently across different contexts, it stands to reason that theorising drag as an act of gender 'transgression' will also be particular to the issues of space, culture and context that govern what makes drag transgressive (Tamale, 2011).

In more recent literature, there is a growing recognition of drag as a more pluralistic and fluid practice than earlier conceptualisations allowed for. Presently, drag culture is seeing an increasing participation by transgender individuals, cisgender and heterosexual people, lesbian cisgender women, and queer people alike. Drag can often look like female impersonation (with

performers colloquially referred to as ‘drag queens’), male impersonation (‘drag kings’), or genderfucking. Hankins (2015, p. 447) defines genderfuck as “arguably the most complex and multisignifying mode of gender performance, eschews the male/female binary itself, incorporating extremely (de) (re) formed representations of masculinity and femininity alongside multigendered, nongendered, or even nonhuman signs, without privileging any one category of being”. Upadhyay (2019, p. 2) draws from this definition, considering drag to be “a creative practice of queerness and genderfucking” that seeks to subvert normative understandings of sexuality and gender. Put more simply, Butler (1999, p. 174) suggests that drag entails the parodying of gender which “mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity”. In essence, it is through producing a gender expression that is unexpected (through their appearance and/or mannerisms) that drag artists challenge the assumed congruence of multiple axes of gender, gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth and sexuality (Litwiller, 2020). Drag, then, can be understood as an embodied performance that plays with our culturally bound understandings of gender by deviating from the expectations, conventional presentations and behaviours associated with the body (Hanson, 2007). Some renditions of drag (such as drag queens and drag kings) seek to mock the normative gender framework by performing in ways that are campy, theatrical and imperfect (Moore, 2013). These expose that, inherently, everyday gender itself is also an embodied performance.

More nuanced and intersectional theorisations of drag are also increasingly prominent in the recent literature (McCormick, 2018; Upadhyay, 2019; Rhyne, 2004; Litwiller, 2020; Hobson, 2013). These postulate that drag’s true ideological impact can only be comprehended by analysing multiple axes of identity as they are implicated in drag performances, and not only by foregrounding the (re)production of gender identity alone. Moving beyond the view of drag as only being a parody of the normative gender framework, some literature has begun to map out the ways in which race, class, and culture are also articulated through drag, thus constructing drag as a complex political performance of identities where various normativities can be subverted and/or reinforced.

2.1.2 Exploring ideological implications of drag

This line of enquiry asks of us to consider drag’s implication in normative and/or subversive politics. In cis-heteropatriarchal societies, Upadhyay (2019) affirms that drag does indeed

challenge dominant notions of sexuality and gender. Other scholars (Shapiro, 2007; Barnett & Johnson, 2013; Litwiller, 2020) consider drag to be a site where resistance and activism can *potentially* be enacted due to the queering of gender and centering of queer desire. Drag may also serve as a space to generate dialogue about misogyny, racism, and patriarchy (Rupp et al., 2010). However, Butler observes that in the attempt to rewrite gender norms, drag may ultimately reify the very frameworks it seeks to mock. They clarify:

> Drag is not unproblematically subversive. It serves a subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized and undermines their power by virtue of effecting that exposure. But there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion. Heterosexuality can augment its hegemony through its denaturalization, as when we see denaturalizing parodies that reidealize heterosexual norms without calling them into question. (Butler, 2011, p. 575)

Butler critically calls into question that which is 'reidealized' through drag, suggesting this as a potentially problematic dimension of drag performance. Indeed, bell hooks (1992) takes issue with the documentary film, *Paris is Burning* (Livingstone, 1990), which centres around the Black drag and drag ball culture of New York City in the 1980s, for this very reason. She argues that "within the world of the black gay drag ball culture she [Jennie Livingstone, the director of the film who is a white woman] depicts, the idea of womanness and femininity is totally personified by whiteness" (p. 147). She goes on to detail her disdain for the ways in which the Black drag queens in the film are represented to "worship at the throne of whiteness" (p. 149), further critiquing how white supremacy shapes cultural production in this particular text without being questioned. Grappling with the debate about drag's subversive potential, Coles (2007, p. 2) offers us a succinct framing of the issue in arguing that "drag is ambiguous in its meaning, expression and consequences […] not any drag will do". Essentially, she calls for us to consider how gender (and other social identities) are being expressed through drag and whether they are generating new narratives that are transgressive, or whether they might simply perpetuate problematic gender and racial norms. This critical framing affirms that drag should not be understood as being *inherently* subversive or as *inherently* normative. Both are possible. Thus, researching drag and drag culture(s) requires a critical consideration of what

might be happening in terms of power and representation – not only regarding gender, but also in terms of race, class, culture, sexuality and the many other axes along which ideas of difference manifest.

2.1.3 Drag research in South Africa

Although extensive, what might be lost when only looking at the global literature is how drag might be uniquely understood and practiced in South African contexts. The research that has been conducted locally has indeed generated some fascinating findings that reflect how South Africans continue to negotiate their identities through drag in the new political dispensation. In Gevisser and Cameron's (1995) seminal text, *Defiant Desire*, various chapters engage the role of drag performers in the queering of history during South Africa's political transition to democracy. For some (Gevisser & Reid, 1995; Ricci, 1995), the highly contested debate that circulated in the early 1990s about whether drag performers should be able to participate in the annual Pride marches suggest two things about South Africa's attitude towards drag culture: on the one hand, drag was typically seen as undignified and shameful to straight-passing gay men. On the other hand, it was argued to increase the visibility of queer lives during a time when this visibility was sorely needed. Significantly, this evidence highlights that drag culture may not only be stigmatised in our broader (heteronormative and queerphobic) society, but also within the LGBTQIA+ community itself. Yet, its potential to uniquely visibilise queer identities and reconstruct exclusionary social practices has endured into the country's new dispensation (Evans & Balfour, 2012). Spruill (2004), for instance, explores the politicised dragging practices at contemporary Johannesburg Pride parades where Black drag artists don traditional African attire such as Zulu headpieces and Herero dresses in a variety of vibrant prints. In doing so, these drag artists challenge the notion that queer African people 'forfeit' their South African identity due to their sexual orientation. She writes:

> By invoking tradition through dress, traditional drag artists do more than fashion themselves as 'Africans'. Traditional drag is directed at political and cultural struggles prompted by new mobilizations of ethnic nationalism in South Africa that sexualize South African identity and 'ethnicity' […] In South Africa some ethno-nationalist discourses in South Africa construe homosexuality as 'unAfrican', a white, colonial defilement introduced to 'African' culture and

> undeserving of legal equality in postapartheid South Africa. (Spruill, 2004, p. 101)

Spruill's (2004) study effectively illustrates an example of how Black drag artists in South Africa make use of their drag to respond to the rejection of queer people in post-apartheid South Africa and instead, conjure a new sense of self and belonging in its wake.

Moving on, Prince (2017) offers an ethnographic case study and photo essay which explores an evening in the life of Lola Fine, a popular Cape Town-based drag artist. Through engaging Lola about her drag persona and documenting her performances for a day, Prince (2017) argues that the mainstream Cape Town drag scene mirrors the conventions of the global north, where drag is performed in clubs and bars for a live audience. Yet, Lease (2015; 2017) presents an alternative view of drag culture in the same city through an exploration of the drag pageant scene. With a particular focus on the Miss Gay Western Cape (MGWC) annual pageant, they consider how the MGWC pageant's contestants are mobilised through the formation of queer public identities and transnational drag influences such as RuPaul's Drag Race, all of which come to shape the aesthetics and culture of dragging in the Black and Coloured pageant scene.

Another ethnographic case study is presented by Swarr (2004), who spent seventeen months immersed in the urban and township drag scenes of South Africa. She argues that South African drag foregrounds the performance and constitution of gender, race, class, and sexuality in ways that reflect the country's segregated history. In her analysis, Swarr (2004) finds that urban drag is dominated by white gay men who consider drag to be an artistic form of self-expression and theatre that is strictly bound to commercialised spaces such as gay bars and clubs. It is only in these spaces that drag is seen as socially acceptable in white South African communities. Moreover, Swarr (2004) indicates how whiteness matters to the nature of performance, observing that drag produces whiteness as an unmarked category: a space in which to create characters and explore identity without considerations for racial embodiment.

Swarr (2004) contrasts this framework with the ways in which drag is practiced in township spaces by Black and Coloured drag artists, where drag is predominantly performed in the context of pageants. Significantly, drag is also an important aspect of individuals' everyday lives, especially in the formation of queer sexual relationships. In these spaces, drag constitutes its own expression of queer femininity and thus enables drag performers to enter relationships

with masculine men that imitate the heterosexual gender binary (Swarr, 2004). These relationships were reported to be more easily understood by their communities, since the binary of masculinity and femininity remain paired. In this sense, Swarr (2004) presents two different sex-gender-sexuality systems at play in urban versus township drag: urban drag being dominated by gay cisgender men who perform as women in gay friendly commercial spaces, whereas township drag is performed in pageants and can be used to express more fluid gender identities that form the basis of queer sexual relationships.

Overall, the literature on drag culture in South Africa paints a picture where drag has, indeed, been used to contest issues of discrimination and inequality in our context. But unfortunately, the pervasive practices of exclusion, re-racialisation and othering that persist within the country's LGBTQIA+ communities today may only serve to re-engender the logics of apartheid in ways that undermine the potential for drag to mobilise new ways of thinking about difference and diversity.

2.2 Afrikaner Identities

Whilst the performativity of gender identity in the contexts of drag and everyday life have been explored at great lengths, the performative nature of race and ethnicity in those realms also warrant attention for this research. Just as gender is being understood as a performatively constituted and embodied identity, the same can be argued for the axis of race. Speaking to this idea, Inda (2000, p. 75) asserts that, "race, to the extent that it is a difference inscribed on the body, is nothing if not material, [but] only becomes materialised, and thus meaningful, within historically specific discourses". In other words, race does not exist an effect of biological truths, but rather as a social fiction through which we come to make sense of the racialised 'facts' about the world (Inda, 2000). In the South African context, our particular discourses about race remain profoundly informed by the country's history of colonisation and the logic of apartheid. The subsequent constitution of whiteness (and more specifically, Afrikaner whiteness) in South Africa was upheld through notions of Afrikaner nationalism, white supremacist values, patriarchy and Calvinist Christianity (van der Westhuizen, 2016). Through these discourses, the performative 'facts' regulating whiteness and Afrikaans-ness as 'superior' and ethnically distinct identities were solidified.

In Cloete's (1992, p. 42) essay on Afrikaner identity which was written at the cusp of South Africa's political transition, she wrote, "Afrikaners had always been fairly certain of what they were. Nowadays, they are no longer so sure". This statement still rings true and aptly represents the predominant theme that emerges from the existing literature on Afrikaner identity(ies). Historically, the Afrikaner identity was intentionally constructed as homogenous. The pillars of this identity – Calvinist Christian values, the importance of *die taal* (the language), strong connections with the land and agriculture, along with compulsory heterosexuality, patriarchy, and white supremacist values – served to establish Afrikaner-ness as a unique ethnicity, setting itself apart from white British (and English speaking) South Africans and Black indigenous South Africans. Van der Westhuizen (2016, p. 2) broadly defines the hegemonic Afrikaner identity as "an identity flavouring race, gender, class, and sexual elements with a particularism drawn from an ever-pliable and politically potent category of ethnicity". This hegemonic Afrikaner identity was further enabled by the political narrative of '*eendersdenkenheid'*[7] which was also fundamental to legitimising the apartheid project. The consequences of failing to conform to these values were considered treasonous and thus strengthened the relationship between the performance of a homogenous Afrikaner identity and fidelity to apartheid.

If the hegemonic Afrikaner identity can be understood as a cornerstone of the apartheid dispensation, then it can be argued that the post-apartheid context has provided both challenges and opportunities for Afrikaner identities to be renegotiated. Research from this period shows trends in Afrikaner-ness as a contested identity that sits at odds with its history and the values that define our new democratic dispensation. Responses to this sense of precarity are multiple, but tend to engender a resistance to assimilating with the broader South African community (Verwey & Quayle, 2012). For instance, Loubser's (2015) study on 'born-free'[8] Afrikaans people showed that despite being born into a 'new' South Africa, young Afrikaans people still identify heavily with the importance of the language, the Calvinist Christian faith, and admittedly struggle to fit in within multicultural environments. Supporting this argument, Visser (2007) found that psychological disinvestment and withdrawal from political life in South Africa is a common response to the call for embracing diversity among Afrikaans people. In this sense, it is clear that some of the core components of Afrikaner identity are still enduring

[7] An Afrikaans word referring to the idea of collectively thinking the same.
[8] 'Born-free' is a term referring to South Africans who were born post-1994 into the country's democratic dispensation.

in ways that re-establish the problematic logic of racial exclusivity, thus undermining the metaphors of unity and diversity that have come to define life in the new South Africa.

Furthering the research on resistances to racial integration, Steyn and Foster (2008) theorise that explicit racism and nostalgia for the so-called 'good old days' of apartheid have not disappeared, but are simply concealed through strategies of 'white talk'. This refers to ways in which Afrikaners dissociate themselves discursively from the injustices of apartheid and seek to sanitise their identity accordingly. Yet, this act of dissociation tends to be superficial at best, and only enables the reproduction of racist discourses without shame or accountability. Ahmed (2004a, p. 4) aptly articulates the problem with this performatively sanitised white identity:

> The white subject that is shamed by whiteness is also a white subject that is proud *about* its shame. The very claim to feel bad (about this or that) also involves a self-perception of 'being good'. *Anti-racism may even provide the conditions for a new discourse of white pride.*

This may certainly be the case for Afrikaner people in post-apartheid South Africa who discursively detach themselves from apartheid. One way in which this manifests is described by Steyn (2012, p. 21), who suggests that the perpetuation of wilful ignorance, or what she calls "non-relationality, of living past each other", serves as a powerful "insulating medium" for white South Africans so that they may continue to distance themselves from the country's racist history from which they have benefitted. After all, to know about the gruesome injustices that were carried out in the name of Afrikaner nationalism is to be implicated in choices to take (or not to take) accountability for those injustices. Moreover, this epistemology of ignorance has enabled a growing narrative among white Afrikaans-speaking people that they are oppressed and under threat in the current democratic dispensation (Steyn, 2019). Through establishing mythologies surrounding farm murders and 'white genocide', discourses of white victimhood and collective fear are actually serving to re-mobilise Afrikaners as an ethnic community in the post-apartheid context (Steyn, 2019).

Even though the word 'Afrikaner' literally means 'African' in the Afrikaans language, it is clear that Afrikaners do not necessarily take up opportunities to identify with a broader South African identity or wish to assimilate with citizens who they perceive as different. Yet, a number of scholars (van der Westhuizen, 2017; Steyn, 2001; Visser, 2007) have argued that

the Afrikaner identity, as it has been constructed historically, cannot be sustained in the post-apartheid context. Instead, they call for the re-imagining of what it means to be Afrikaans: for the racial boundedness of the identity as being exclusively white to be dismantled, for new values of 'thinking differently' instead of affecting *eendersdenkenheid*, to do the work of acknowledging the country's painful history and to restore social ties with the view to address their role in this painful history. Nevertheless, the realisation of a new, re-imagined, and integrated sense of Afrikaans-ness is yet to be seen.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter of this report, I unpacked some of the existing arguments around drag and Afrikaner identities that are pertinent to this research. In this chapter, I turn my attention toward the theories and frameworks of thinking that help me make sense of the nuances in my own study's data. In the sections below, I outline four distinct, yet interrelated theoretical approaches that inform my research: critical diversity literacy from Steyn (2015), the field of critical whiteness studies, Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality, and Butler's (1990) performativity theory. These concepts serve as the framework through which my methodology and analysis chapters have been formed.

3.1 Critical Diversity Literacy

In Steyn's (2015) preamble to the critical diversity literacy (CDL) framework, she presents an argument that is particularly apt in today's South African context (and thus, the context of this research): she asserts that the ways we make sense of issues of diversity and difference have critical implications for exposing or norming power. For instance, conceptualisations of diversity that aim to merely 'celebrate' or 'embrace' diversity (akin to our rainbow nation metaphor) may only serve to depoliticise and individualise difference, thus divorcing us from the fact that some groups remain socially, economically and structurally privileged over others. It is this normative framing of diversity that Steyn's (2015) CDL theory problematises.

CDL was developed as an analytical framework to enable one to "read prevailing social relations as one would a text, recognising the ways in which possibilities are being opened up or closed down for those differently positioned within the unfolding dynamics of specific social contexts" (Steyn, 2015, p 380). In essence, the CDL framework offers us a way to not only understand how difference is constructed and operationalised in society, but it also urges us to critique and expose these norms that thrive on difference to maintain social inequities (Steyn, 2015). For the purposes of my research, CDL serves as the overarching framework. In part, this is because the other three approaches I draw on are encompassed within the ten CDL criteria. It is also because this research is aimed at contributing to my qualification in critical diversity studies. Thus, this theory has heavily influenced my thinking at every stage of this project. Below, I briefly outline Steyn's (2015) ten criteria for CDL:

1. An understanding of the role of power in constructing differences that make a difference.
2. A recognition of the unequal symbolic and material value of different social locations. This includes acknowledging hegemonic positionalities and concomitant identities, such as whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, cisgender, ablebodiedness, middleclassness, etc. and how these dominant orders position those in non-hegemonic spaces.
3. Analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other, and how they are reproduced, resisted and reframed.
4. A definition of oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems and (not only) a historical legacy.
5. An understanding that social identities are learned and are an outcome of social practices.
6. The possession of a diversity grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of privilege and oppression.
7. The ability to 'translate' (see through) and interpret hegemonic practices.
8. An analysis of the ways that diversity hierarchies and institutionalised oppressions are inflected through specific social contexts and material arrangements.
9. An understanding of the role of emotions, including our own emotional investment, in all of the above.
10. An engagement with issues of the transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening social justice at all levels of social organisation.

In addition to these particular criteria that the CDL framework offers through which to make sense of this research, a general principle from CDL that underpins this project is its intention to be explicitly value-driven and social justice oriented in the knowledge production process.

3.2 Critical Whiteness Studies

Studies on whiteness have emerged from a number of intellectual movements, including (but not limited to) critical race theory, cultural studies, feminist scholarship, legal studies, post- and decolonial theory, and historical studies. Across these disciplines, researchers have addressed questions surrounding white subjectivities by examining the historical emergence of

whiteness and its implications in processes of racialisation, power, and oppression (Anderson et al., 2003). Early studies on race and racism tended to focus solely on the subjectivities of 'non-white' people, which reinforced the idea that racialisation is only experienced by those who are not white (Hurtado & Stewart, 2004). Critical whiteness studies, on the other hand, examines whiteness as a particular category of experience that only becomes obscured because of its apparent 'worldliness' or presumed universality (Ahmed, 2007). Indeed, Mills (2002) provides a compelling account of the inherent racialisation (and perpetuation of white supremacy) that takes place through the treatment of whiteness as an unmarked symbolic system. In this tradition, the broad aim of this field of scholarship is to counter the conception of whiteness as an invisible norm (Anderson, 2003; Hurtado & Stewart, 2004; Steyn, 2001) by examining, destabilising, and challenging the very foundations that white identities are built on. Central to this approach is exposing the constructedness of white identity and the performativity of race itself. Theorising whiteness as a "master narrative", Steyn (2001b) posits that whiteness is sustained relationally: limiting those who are not considered white to the realm of the 'other', and subsequently defining itself as superior to that 'other' (Shabangu, 2015). For Steyn (2001b), the fact that whiteness has harnessed the power to define not only itself but also the idea of racial otherness is central to our understandings of race and racism as they exist historically and presently.

As I already noted in the introduction chapter, making the particularity of whiteness and the power of white identity explicit is fundamental to the work of deconstructing ideologies of racial ignorance (Steyn, 2012), colourblindness (Ansell, 2006), and reverse discrimination (Durrheim et al., 2011) that have largely shaped white South Africa's current discourses around race. In truth, the dominant position afforded to white people from our history of colonialism and apartheid has remained largely intact, despite South Africa's significant political transition in recent decades (Durrheim et al., 2011). However, white South Africans today do find themselves having to renegotiate their identities in relation to other South Africans, the continent of Africa, and their histories and heritage in it (Steyn, 2001). This is especially urgent for Afrikaans South Africans who tend to think of themselves as Africans in the sense of laying claim to the country being their only home, but do not necessarily identify with a broader African identity (Verwey & Quayle, 2012). In part, their resistance can be attributed to the idea that Afrikaans people may view themselves as marginalised in today's dispensation (as was discussed in the previous chapter of this report): this, despite the contradiction that they still yield significant socio-economic and political power in the country (Steyn, 2004; Verwey &

Quayle, 2012). Nevertheless, this demographic's sense of intense instability in our democracy has resulted in the formation of some extremist political factions, increased rates of emigration, social isolation, and melancholic nostalgia for 'the good old days' (Steyn, 2014). Because Afrikaans-speaking people possess such a precarious sense of (non)belonging in South Africa, the politics of difference that underpin their particular subjectivities are especially relevant to critical whiteness studies (Shabangu, 2015), and by extension, this research project.

3.3 Intersectionality

Although critical whiteness serves as a major theoretical foundation for this research project due to my focus on white, Afrikaans-speaking participants and their particular racial positioning as white South Africans, my study's scope also requires further engagement with the multiple other axes of difference that shape my participants' subjectivities. After all, my study is not merely focusing on how whiteness manifests itself in the discourses of my participants; it is equally concerned with how their experiences are mitigated by being racialised *and* classed *and* gendered *and* sexed *and* sexualised beings. To focus on their whiteness alone would be to neglect the many facets through which their experiences are shaped. Indeed, Johnson (1997) asserts that issues of identity are complex and multiple, and therefore the workings of differently (dis)empowered subjectivities in society cannot be properly captured through a single-axis framework (Nash, 2008). Instead, an *intersectional* approach that considers how identities are multiply constituted is necessary. Intersectionality theory enables us to frame issues of identity, power and relationality according to the multiple positionalities people occupy simultaneously and urges us to grapple with what Butler (1990) thinks of as the inevitable 'etc.': acknowledging the illimitability that comes when exploring identities.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) has been credited with devising the concept of intersectionality to illustrate the doubly oppressive conditions that Black women in the United States of America face by virtue of them being Black *and* being women. However, even before Crenshaw's seminal analysis of how the legal field has failed to thoughtfully consider the complexities of discrimination that Black women face, feminist and womanist writers have long been documenting the lived experiences of Black women who find themselves marginalised within the margins. An intersectional approach further accounts for the fact that identities can be woven in complex relationships with power by being privileged in some aspects of their lives

and marginalised in others (Staunæs, 2003): in other words, people are implicated in various centres and margins in society. The objective, then, is to resist essentialising and separating these power dynamics, and to think instead of how our identities consist of multiple intermeshing and colliding facets of difference that, together, make up the particularities of our social positions (Bowleg, 2008; Steyn, 2015). Crenshaw (1989, p. 149) provides a compelling metaphor to describe this idea:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination… But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm.

This analogy crucially reminds us that doing intersectional research is not about trying to dissect and disjoint different aspects of identities or to treat them as an additive checklist: rather, intersectionality compels us to frame experiences and subjectivities as being constituted by their particular positioning in the tapestries of power and relationality.

When Crenshaw conceptualised intersectionality, she was seeking a way to make sense of the multiplicity of Black women's experiences of discrimination in the United States. Since then, intersectionality theory has grown in popularity and has been applied to contexts and populations that are different from Crenshaw's initial theorising. This study is one such example. Although this research does not focus on the discrimination faced by Black women, my intent is to use intersectional theory as a lens through which to appreciate how white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers might navigate positionalities of both privilege *and* marginalisation based on different aspects of their identities. Indeed, May (2015, p. 124) asserts that intersectionality is well suited to inform how we make sense of privileged groups, and not only those who experience disadvantage from multiple dimensions:

> Assertions that intersectionality 'only' focuses on 'the oppressed' do more than distort intersectional histories and premises: they treat 'the oppressed' and 'the powerful' as neatly bifurcated (not as positionalities sometimes occupied simultaneously) and imply that 'the oppressed' (or the privileged) are fully (and only) so. Not only do intersectional questions of relative power and inequality fall away, so do pivotal concerns about ongoing resistance to subordination in the face of persistent, structural inequality.

This research speaks to May's argument. It seeks to make space for the complexities that may arise from occupying a social positioning that is neither wholly dominant, nor wholly marginalised. Rather, it is concerned with how white, Afrikaans-speaking, and queer drag performers are making sense of themselves in relation to issues of normativity and power.

3.4 Performativity Theory

The theory of performativity is one that I simply could not neglect in this report, given its immense prominence and relevance in the existing literature on drag. This is understandable, given that Butler's (1990) initial conceptualisation of the theory specifically mentions drag in the discussion of their theory. Simply put, performativity theory posits that gender is not something that one inherently 'is'; instead, it is an identity that one performs – or 'does' over and over (Butler, 1990). Thus, being read as 'male' or 'female' depends on the repetition of particular expressions and acts that solidify those identities. To quote Butler (1990, p. 25), "gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being". Their theory offers an important departure from biologically essentialist views of gender as an inherent or natural thing (Nelson, 1999). However, performativity does not posit that gender is a thing we can simply choose to perform on a whim in the same way that we choose what clothes to put on in the morning (Butler, 1993). Rather, performativity refers to the ways in which we reiterate the norms by which we have *already* been constituted by virtue of being born into the world. In other words, we are always already being interpellated in gendered ways, thus we come to understand ourselves as gendered subjects. In Butler's (1990) theorisation of performativity, they also highlight that drag might offer a lens through

which to understand gender identity as being an explicit imitation that challenges the assumed truth of biological sex and its contingency to gender and sexuality. However, they do not claim that drag might be inherently subversive or illustrative of political agency regarding identity (re)construction. Rather, this theory offers us a way to think of drag as a means through which to expose how reality and the self are not necessarily as fixed as we might think, and thus enables us to re-imagine or think differently about the norms that prevail around us.

Chapter Four: Methodology

As discussed in the previous chapters of the report, this research seeks to understand whether white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers use their drag artistry to think critically about questions of their own identities, their sense of belonging, and how they make sense of their imagined drag communities in the post-apartheid South African context. By exploring intersections of race, culture and gender performance from the perspectives of drag artists who are white and Afrikaans-speaking, this research offers important contributions to the theorisation of white identities, queer identities, and the making of local and/or global drag culture(s) in South Africa. Additionally, I am interested in the meanings that these individuals ascribe to doing drag – both personally and politically – as the proliferation and delineation of drag continues to evolve in mainstream and queer spaces around the world. I aim to uncover whether the sense-making embedded in doing drag and the work of understanding the self are indeed in conversation with one another; and if so, how might this open up (or close down) opportunities for new, subversive, or otherwise normative understandings of identity. Underlying and interlinking these questions is my primary interest in exploring how issues of power might be implicated in shaping the discourses that emerge from the data.

Given the focus of this research on subjectivities, the most appropriate methodological approach for this study is qualitative. In the previous section of this report, I outlined the theoretical approaches through which I frame my research enquiry. Although I am mindful of these four theories – namely critical diversity literacy, critical whiteness, intersectionality, and performativity – as being distinctive in their own right, a key underlying current that flows through all of these approaches is a critical understanding of reality that also seeks to uncover and critique the ways in which power might be implicated in shaping our everyday lives. The methods outlined in this chapter are grounded in this very same logic, with my aim being to generate and unpack discourses from white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers, and then working with these discourses as things that meaningfully construct personal, social, and political realities that are always, already in conversation with issues of power and relationality.

Generally speaking, qualitative research is concerned with knowing "the *life-world* as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138). In qualitative enquiries, the aim is to generate a depth of understanding and uncover the subjective meanings, contexts, perspectives, and actions of the phenomena or

people under study (Fossey et al., 2002). In other words, the contribution of qualitative work is to enable inductive interpretations of social contexts and generate theory from the everyday (Fossey et al., 2002). For studies such as this one which is grounded in a critical approach, qualitative methods further allow me to not only understand my data for understanding's sake, but to rather direct my understanding toward the project of (re)imagining practices and norms that could bring the phenomenon under study closer to realising social justice (Fossey et al., 2002). Essentially, a critical qualitative enquiry requires researchers to move beyond simply accepting what is discovered in the research process, it asks us to self-reflect and to use our research to promote transformation of the very thing itself for the better.

4.1 Data Sources

For this research, I drew on one source of data: in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with five queer, white and Afrikaans-speaking drag performers. Participants for the interviews were identified purposively through personal networks and through the use of snowball sampling. Initially, I drafted a Participant Information Sheet document (see Appendix A) containing information about the study's aims, what to expect during the data collection process, highlighting the participants' rights to confidentiality, informed consent and their right to withdraw at any stage of the study without consequence. Contact information for myself and my project supervisors were also provided. This letter, along with a message of invitation, were distributed throughout my personal networks. The response to my invitation was mixed: some individuals were quick to respond and eager to be interviewed, but I also had a large volume of non-responses. Another portion of respondents were willing to be interviewed, but conveyed that their schedules were too busy and that they could not set aside the time, or they would cease communication with me shortly before confirming the interviews. I ultimately interviewed five respondents between September of 2019 and June of 2020.

Looking back, one of the reasons I may not have gotten a strong response is because my letter of invitation was written in English, despite me looking for Afrikaans-speaking participants. Had I composed an Afrikaans letter of invitation, perhaps this would have allowed me to establish rapport with my participants more quickly. Additionally, some respondents were initially hesitant to be interviewed by me as I am a cisgender woman who is not a part of the drag community myself. In these cases, their initial communications with me were guarded: I was asked about my intentions with the research, and whether I had any personal stake in its

line of enquiry. Usually, after disclosing my Afrikaans background and my own queer identity, these individuals would feel more comfortable about moving forward with the interviews. Harvey (2003) suggests that this negotiation between researchers and participants is an important step in conducting ethical research: it is only through being invited into dialogue with my participants that the data collection was made possible.

Once respondents agreed to participate, I provided them with a consent form (See Appendix B) and re-explained the purpose of the study before beginning the interview. In order to form part of the target population for my study, participants were expected to identify themselves as drag artists and to relate (to some degree) with whiteness and Afrikaans-ness as part of their identity. I did not have any other inclusion criteria regarding, for instance, their gender or sexual identities, or how long they had been doing drag. In Table 1 below, some key demographic information about my participants is provided.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Place of Residence	Gender Identity (self-described)	Sexual Orientation (self-described)	Years of Experience Doing Drag
Jenny C.	36	Pretoria	Cisgender male	Gay	14
Ruby B.	23	Johannesburg	Cisgender male	Gay	2
Angela G.	21	Pretoria	Cisgender male	Gay	2
Karina B.	23	Johannesburg	Assigned female at birth, non-binary	Asexual panromantic	3
Lady G.	24	Johannesburg & Cape Town	Cisgender male	Gay	1

Evidently, there were some trends in the demographic backgrounds of participants' gender and sexual identities, as well as their age and subsequent number of years doing drag.

Predominantly, my participants identified as gay cisgender men which is congruent with the prevailing norm of who has historically been represented in drag communities (Fitwiller, 2020). One participant, Karina B., identified as assigned female at birth (AFAB) and nonbinary. As will be explored in the Analysis chapter, this aspect of their identity was highly contested by their fellow drag sisters and thus enabled for some key insights regarding the construction of gendered centres and margins within the drag community. Had they not participated in this study, these findings would have likely gone amiss. In terms of the age range and level of experience of participants, the overall youthfulness of participants arguably enabled for more current and novel observations about the world of drag, but on the other hand this also resulted in a relative silence regarding historicised reflections and an inability to comment on the ways in which the drag scene may have shifted or changed in recent years.

4.2 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with five white Afrikaans-speaking drag artist participants. Once consent and agreement was reached between participants and myself, data was collected via in depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant (see Appendix C). This form of data collection is well-suited to capture the voices of respondents and draw out how they make meaning of their experiences (Rabionet, 2011). It typically involves the use of a schedule of open-ended questions and prompts that can facilitate rich discussions with respondents that are both flexible, yet topic-focused (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The interview schedule I developed for this research was loosely derived from the Jozi Queens project by Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (2017), which involved a number of semi-structured interviews with drag pageant contestants residing in Johannesburg. The decision to use a semi-structured format was based on my objective to consistently cover some key areas of enquiry about drag culture and participants' experiences of doing drag as Afrikaans-speaking individuals, whilst still keeping the conversation fluid enough to explore and adapt to the information being shared with me by each participant (Turner, 2010). In terms of structure, the interviews started with some basic demographic questions, followed by a discussion about the participant's personal histories and how their journeys of doing drag started, then went on to exploring responses from their communities, and ended with a conversation about how participants perceived drag culture and its place in their futures. After conducting the first two interviews, I also had to revise the schedule to add more directed questions about participants' experiences at the intersection of being Afrikaans and doing drag. Here, I followed Bowleg's

(2008, p. 315) suggestion that intersectional research requires one to "ask precisely what you want to know" about particular intersectional dynamics and experiences. These interviews were audio recorded digitally and lasted between 45 – 75 minutes on average. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown in 2020, some of the interviews were conducted telephonically whilst those that were conducted in 2019 took place face-to-face. In preparation for analysis, the audio recordings were transcribed et verbatim and translated to English in cases where the discussion had taken place in Afrikaans.

4.3 Data Analysis

As already discussed in the report, this research is concerned with understanding how white, Afrikaans-speaking drag artists are making sense of themselves, their experiences, and their place in their social worlds from a constructivist and critical approach. As is standard in constructivist traditions, my gateway into extracting meaning from the data sources was accessed via discourses and analysed using methods that enable a critical reading of those discourses. To reiterate Steyn's (2015) stance on the CDL framework, the aim of critical research should be to expose normative relations of power as a way of revealing the possibilities for those relations to be changed. When reading the literature on critical research analysis approaches, a sentiment that tends to emerge is that critical work is drenched in pessimism and undermines issues of agency (Denzin, 2017). However, Giroux (2014) argues that central to critical research should be a practice of subversive hope. To quote Giroux further (2014, p. 39):

> What hope offers is the belief, simply, that different futures are possible. In this way, hope can become a subversive force, pluralizing politics by opening up a space for dissent, contingency, indeterminacy […] the goal of educated hope is not to liberate the individual from the social–a central tenet of neoliberalism—but to take individual can only be liberated through the social.

Giroux's position of critical research being a means through which to reimagine and reclaim justice is one that I held close during the data analysis process. Below, I outline the discourse theory and analytic methods that guided my analysis and resulted in the formation of the findings that are presented in the next chapter.

4.3.1 Discourse theory

The analysis presented in chapter five depends on linguistic data from interviews to make meaning of the subjectivities and experiences of white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers. Doing so is enabled through discourse theory's conceptualisations around language, identity, and power. Wodak and Meyer (2008) note that discourse theory (and by extension, discourse analysis) have been defined in multiple ways. For the purposes of this research, I depend on the school of thought that Torfing (2005) calls 'poststructuralist discourse theory': an approach informed by the works of Foucault, Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek. In this tradition, discourse theory seeks to understand identity construction within linguistic systems, positing that identity formation is relational and contextual (Torfing, 2005). For instance, we can only understand an identity such as 'white' through its contextualised relationship to 'Black' and other categories related to race. Identity, then, is constructed within particular discourses and contexts: they are relational, co-constitutive and historically specific ensembles of meaning-making. In this sense, discourse can also be understood as a social practice which solidifies identities relationally (Fairclough, 2013).

The other key aspect of discourse theory is its thinking about power relations. As mentioned above, discourse coexists with the social, whilst the broader discursive order is structured around processes of inclusion and exclusion, i.e. the exercise of power (Torfing, 2005). Over time, the hierarchies of politically constructed identities are sedimented in the social, repressing their political origins (Torfing, 2005). Ainsworth and Hardy (2004, p. 237) agree, stating "rather than autonomous subjects using discourse to construct identities, it is discourse that produces power-knowledge relations within which subjects are positioned, identities are constructed and bodies are disciplined". Simply put, our identities are shaped by (and actively participate in shaping and further solidify) relations of power, meaning that our subjectivities are always already existing in dialogue with power.

4.3.2 Critical discourse analysis

With theory on discourse and the four aforementioned theoretical frameworks informing my research methods, I chose to analyse my data by using a critical discourse analysis approach (CDA). CDA is guided by "its view of the relationship between language and society, and its critical approach to methodology" (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 357). In other words, CDA is concerned with the ways in which language (discourse) can give rise to, legitimise, contest and express social inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). With the understanding of CDA's overall aims and framework, I followed Tenorio's (2011) suggestion of how to practically approach such an analysis: they recommend examining both the linguistic details of the data (the literal signification of an utterance) along with how it is significant in its particular context. In this sense, the process of reading and analysing the data requires the identification of what is being said, how things are being made sense of, what the possible effects of these sense-making strategies might be, and how they may be linked with ideology and power (Tenorio, 2011).

4.3.3 Thematic analysis

As an additional analytic method, I based my analysis on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013, 2017) thematic analysis (TA) approach. They consider TA as a method for "identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes')" in qualitative data (Terry et al., 2017, p. 17). Although TA is theoretically fluid, its systematic procedures offer a clear framework through which to organise research observations by identifying and interpreting the key features of the data in terms of themes. Their approach for thematic analysis entails six phases: familiarisation with the data, generating codes, constructing themes, reviewing potential themes, defining themes, and producing a report (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p. 23). For the purposes of analysing and presenting the data for the next chapter of this report, I followed the six phase steps of TA for my research.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I immersed myself in the transcripts, (re)reading them several times over whilst taking notes. During the reading process, I started identifying broad codes in the data and organised them into themes to generate an understanding of the key features of the data. In my analytic process, the key questions guiding me were: (1) What discourses are circulating in my data which serve to sediment, shape, or frame particular subjectivities and realities? (2) In what ways are drag culture, Afrikaans-ness, and issues of relationality being framed? (3) Whose interests are being served (and whose are being disserved) in this sense-making process? It is important to note that my analysis was not

focused on the narratives of individual participants themselves, but rather on the values underlying the predominant discourses that emerged across participants.

4.3.4 Reflexivity

Being reflexive in critical research requires a measured consideration of "*who* we are and from *where* we speak" (Dussel as cited in Moya, 2011, p. 79). In other words, our positionalities inform how readily we see, listen, understand, and concern ourselves with particular social issues and lived experiences (Moya, 2011). This certainly rings true for this research, as I am intimately connected with the questions under study in this research. For many years, I have been grappling with my own sense of self as an Afrikaans and queer South African person, and so the process of conducting this research proved to be both challenging and illuminating with regards to my own existential questions. I aimed to implement what Madison (2011, p. 129) calls "the labour of reflexivity" in my research: doing the work of not only reflecting on my reactions to the data, but also turning further inwards to understand how I am speaking through my sense-making, values and vocabularies to shape this research's very purpose and impact (Madison, 2011). Reflexivity, then, is realised as an act of labour when "it self-consciously embraces a purpose toward a greater material freedom for others, beyond and extricable to the self" (Madison, 2011, p. 136). Hence, I have intentionally made use of the 'I' and 'my' pronouns throughout this report, as lingering artefacts to signify the labour of reflexivity being performed in the research. In doing so, my aim is to remind myself the reader that the research – from the very inception of the research questions, through to the methods and frameworks selected, to the analysis and conclusion – has been articulated through my intention, as researcher, to meditate on what freedom might look like for myself and for others that are implicated through this research.

4.3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand School of Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (protocol number: DIV190806, see Appendix D). Thereafter, I sought to uphold the ethical principles of autonomy, confidentiality, and non-maleficence throughout the process of engaging with the study's participants (Jelsma & Clow, 2005). In the participant information sheet that was distributed to all potential participants, I highlight the risks, methods, objectives, and participants' rights to withdraw or

deny participation at any stage of the research without penalty. In order to ensure that participation was both informed and consensual, I did not offer individuals any incentives for their participation either. In addition to the use of a participant information sheet, I also reviewed the details therein with my participants and invited them to share any questions or concerns with me before commencing with the interview. Consent for participating in the research was confirmed verbally and through the use of a consent sheet (see Appendix B). In order to observe participants' rights to confidentiality (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012), I make use of pseudonyms to represent them throughout the report, as well as anonymising any information that was discussed in the interviews that would inadvertently reveal their identities.

Related to my last point, an ethical concern I wish to discuss further was my use of pseudonyms to represent my interview participants in this report. During the process of obtaining consent from them, all of my participants expressed a willingness to forego their right to confidentiality: they wished for their actual drag names to be used in this report. I have chosen to proceed with using pseudonyms, despite their consent to do otherwise, due to the oftentimes sensitive and personal information shared in most of the interviews. This decision was communicated to participants as I began analysing the data and they accepted my reason for doing so. Unfortunately, one aspect of the data which was lost in this process is the significance that my participants' drag names held in relation to their drag personas. Nevertheless, I have chosen to do this, being mindful that this research report may become available to a wider audience and so I would like to err on the side of caution when exposing personal information publicly. Additionally, Fitzpatrick (2013) notes that naming a participant (even when they have consented), inevitably also names those that they are associated with (such as siblings, parents, and friends) who have not consented. Although I do feel ambivalent about reinforcing an imbalanced hierarchy between myself (as researcher) and my participants by making the ultimate decision about how to represent them in my report, my hope was to remain true to the ethic of accountability and confidentiality in doing so.

By conducting research with white Afrikaans-speaking participants who do drag, my own status as an insider/outsider to their communities also matters to the ethics of knowledge production in this research (Moya, 2011). Because I am white and Afrikaans-speaking, participants may have felt more comfortable entering an interview setting with me and speaking candidly about their views. However, it is for this very reason that there is a real risk of reproducing hegemonic whiteness as a white researcher (Foste, 2020). Foste (2020) argues

that these contexts of racial comfort can foster complicity on behalf of the researcher, despite any intentions to disrupt whiteness through the research. Therefore, it is important to consider the research process as one where the co-production of knowledge can be problematic if there is a shared insider status with participants that leaves certain positionalities unquestioned (Hoel, 2013). I initially sought to mitigate this by making my intentions to understand whiteness and Afrikaans-ness as dominant and potentially problematic identities clear to participants from the onset of our communication. This could have, in part, contributed to the large amount of non-responses to my initial invitations, and exemplifies Dwyer and Buckle's (2009) argument that sharing membership to the same group does not necessarily denote a complete sense of sameness within it. However, when I started analysing the transcripts of the interviews I also noted a few moments when I had failed to bring a critical lens to our conversations, and thus I had contributed to producing some of the silences around issues of whiteness that are explored in the Analysis chapter. Moreover, it was apparent that my non-participation in drag artistry was met with scepticism by some prospective participants: given the fact that gender and sexual minority groups have long been 'subjects' of social sciences research that frame them as perverse or sick (Price, 2011), their hesitation was certainly understandable and I sought to address these concerns sensitively by sharing my stake in positively representing queer culture as a queer person. In this regard, I arguably navigated an ambiguous 'in-between' space in terms of being both an insider and outsider in relation to the participants of this research. By being honest and vulnerable about my own positionality and intentions as I established relationships with them, I was able to engage participants in ways that addressed issues of equity and reflexivity whilst cultivating a trusting environment. Additionally, it is important to conclude by acknowledging the role of my positionality in enabling certain silences and findings to come forward in the interviews.

Chapter Five: Analysis

Participant discourses surrounding drag and their particular positionalities in drag culture reflect some of the contested debates that have arisen due to the shifting relevance of drag within queer and mainstream spaces. Their experiences demonstrate complex negotiations surrounding the meanings, purpose and significance of drag in their present-day context, where drag culture's visibility and social currency are shifting and highly contested. Furthermore, their discourses reveal a negotiation of their personal stake in this shifting world of drag and the ways in which they navigate their intersectional subjectivities in a post-apartheid South African space where further fluctuations surrounding race, sexuality and gender are prevalent. Because this research aims to explore questions of identity and meaning-making in relation to drag from white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers, this chapter critically engages participant discourses and outlines the predominant sense-making strategies that they draw from in their reflections on drag culture and their personal stakes in it. Guiding this analytic process were the following questions: how are participants making sense of their identities in relation to drag? What are the motivations, experiences, and challenges that arise from their participation in drag culture? How do they imagine and reflect on their sense of community in relation to drag? And what are the consequences of these sense making processes in terms of potentially subverting and/or reinforcing normative relations of power and identity? In addition to using these questions to guide my analysis, I drew on Critical Discourse Analysis and thematic analysis processes to develop a critical exploration of participants' discourses surrounding drag, how they reflect on the contested and shifting meanings of drag culture, and what the resulting implications are in terms of subverting or reifying dominant power dynamics in South Africa.

To briefly frame the analysis which is presented below, it is important to note that (1) the data on which this chapter is based were generated from in-depth semi-structured interviews with white, Afrikaans-speaking drag artists who were engaging with me from an out-of-drag perspective (i.e. they were speaking as their everyday selves, and not as their particular drag personas); and (2) there was no ethnographic component to this research with which to observe and analyse the actual performances, aesthetics, and personas of participants in the spaces where they typically do drag. Therefore, this analysis is purely based on the reflections and discourses of participants regarding drag culture from interviews. Explorations of participants' drag personas, aesthetics, performances, and their interactions with their audiences would

certainly yield rich analytic data to supplement the discursive data presented below, but unfortunately this line of enquiry is beyond the scope of this particular research project.

The presentation of the main themes and sub-themes that emerged from participant interviews are structured as follows: the first theme, (5.1) *Being Afrikaans and Gay* explores how participants negotiate the intersections of their non-dominant sexual identities with their sense of belonging in a conservative Afrikaner culture. The subsection *Being Afrikaans and doing drag* further extrapolates the stigma associated with participants' involvement in drag culture through responses from their Afrikaans communities. The final subsection of this theme is *Gender performativity through drag*, which highlights participants' sense-making around performing alternative Afrikaner and/or global identities through drag. The next theme is (5.2) *Centering, Othering and Belonging in the South African Drag Community,* wherein I analyse participants' imaginaries of a local drag community of (non)belonging. The two subsections of this theme, *Racialised divisions in the local drag scene* and *Gender norms in the local drag scene* explore the ways in which whiteness and cisgender masculinity emerge as dominant in participants' constructions of a normative drag identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The final theme of this analysis is (5.3) *Depoliticising Drag*, which explores how participants' discourses frame drag as a normative and mainstream practice. This theme has three subsections: *The RuPaul's Drag Race Ru-niverse, Framing drag as a profession*, and *Negotiating normative and subversive readings of drag.* Together, these three subsections illustrate how global trends of co-opting drag culture into neoliberal discourses of profitability and entertainment show up in participants' own sense-making around drag and close down possibilities of propelling queer visibility, subversion and activism through their involvement in drag.

5.1 '*There Was No Such Thing as Being Out the Closet':* Being Afrikaans and Gay

For this study's participants, negotiating the intersections of their sexual identities and their participation in drag culture with their Afrikaans-ness was fraught with experiences of stigma. Although, of course, the rejection of gayness and non-heterosexuality remains prevalent throughout western gender ideology in general, there is a particular rigidity of compulsory heterosexuality that underpins the logic of hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity (Sonnekus, 2013). Du Pisani (2001, p. 158) defines this as deeply a puritanical identity, with "rigid austerity and strictness in conduct and morals". Historically, this has been heavily reinforced by the Dutch

Reformed Church's valuing of Afrikaner nationalism, puritanism, homophobia and patriarchy, all of which serve to sediment an Afrikaner masculine ideal that is embedded in hierarchical social logics and militarism (Kruger & van der Merwe, 2017; Morrell et al., 2012; Sonnekus, 2013). As a result, homosexuality in the Afrikaner community has been widely viewed as unnatural and sinful (Schaap, 2011) and at best, the so-called 'sexual deviance' of queer people (and gay Afrikaner men in particular) tends to be kept a family secret and is not to be discussed or expressed openly (Visser, 2007). For the participants of this research, their traditional Afrikaans upbringings were reported to play a significant role in making their entry into drag culture a challenging one due to the silence that queer identities are expected to be shrouded in. Reflecting more on their experiences of coming to terms with being gay and Afrikaans, it is evident that participants felt isolated from their communities on the basis of their sexualities. Sharing more about this, Angela G. stated:

> I grew up in a little boere[9] community. It was rough growing up. There was no such thing as being out the closet […] It was very bad to be gay. It was very frowned upon and there was a lot of bullying.

Lady G. recounted a similar experience of knowing that being gay would not be accepted in their Afrikaans community:

> I come from a super conservative middle-class white Afrikaans family, Christian. Grew up going to the NG Kerk[10] every Sunday [...] As a gay boy growing up, I was always a bit flamboyant and on the sassy side. It was never a great time at school. I was bullied in grade four until grade ten when I came out, and the word moffie[11] or gay or whatever had no power over me anymore.

Both Angela G. and Lady G. recollected growing up in contexts where homosexuality was shrouded in silence, stigma and bullying. Significantly, Angela G.'s remark that there was 'no such thing as being out the closet' also highlights the pervasiveness of compulsory heterosexuality and a repression of queer identities in Afrikaner culture that contribute to participants' sense of non-belonging. Sonnekus (2013) addresses this in their research, showing that although experiences of homosexual desire and intimacy are, in fact, quite common among

[9] Afrikaans word for farmer. It is often used synonymously with the term 'Afrikaner'.
[10] Afrikaans name for the Dutch Reformed Church.
[11] Derogatory Afrikaans slur referring to effeminate gay men.

Afrikaner men, the immense stigma associated with the identity and its implications for masculinity result in most of these relationships occurring in secret. What results from this level of secrecy around homosexuality in the Afrikaner community is, indeed, what Angela G. identifies as a culture where there is little to no representation or acceptance of being openly gay.

For some participants, the stigma associated with being gay and Afrikaans was not only socially isolating, but also resulted in experiencing difficulties with reconciling these two aspects of their identities internally. Jenny C. reflected:

> I would definitely say that I would dissociate from any kind of reference to being an Afrikaner […] the stereotypical Afrikaner has very, like, specific views which inherently is homophobic as well. So, in that sense I wouldn't stand for something that, on a basic level, discriminates against me.

Jenny C. articulated a sense of incompatibility between their sexual identity as a gay person and their Afrikaner cultural background, which they understood as being 'inherently homophobic'. This made the reconciliation of these two intersecting axes of their identity seemingly impossible for Jenny C. and led to their outright rejection of an Afrikaner identity for the sake of embracing their sexuality. Indeed, Gunnarsson (2017) highlights that the nature of identity intersections are often fraught with tensions over their perceived separateness and/or inseparability. And although Bowleg (2008) argues that intersectional research should avoid separating different axes of identity or treat them as independent, in Jenny C.'s case it is clear that they viewed their Afrikaans-ness and their homosexuality as two distinct aspects of their identity that could not be enmeshed without undermining one another. In their experience, being an openly gay person who does drag would probably not be possible if they had internalised the (homophobic) values that underpin identifying as an Afrikaner.

These findings highlight a key framing point for this chapter's discussion. As will be elaborated in the pages to follow, participants' discourses around drag predominantly framed drag performance as a space of personal liberation, self-discovery, and freedom for expressions of queerness. Through emphasising this sense of freedom for self-expression that doing drag affords participants, it is critical to trace back the question: drag affords them freedom, but freedom from *what*? As the quotes above suggest, a shared experience among participants as white Afrikaans-speaking individuals was a conservative, Christian upbringing where there

was no space to be openly gay. In fact, for Jenny C., the 'inherently homophobic' nature of Afrikaner culture is so ingrained that they could no longer associate with an Afrikaner identity at all. Thus, given the stigma participants unanimously reported experiencing from their communities, the following discussion around personal freedom and self-expression through drag gains its significance through considering participants' broader cultural context, where expressions of queerness are still stigmatised and stifled.

With that being said, it is also important to consider the irony of participants seeking to partially reject this aspect of their cultural identity that has positioned them as socially, politically, and economically dominant in the South African context due to the country's violent and racist history that was perpetuated in the name of Afrikaner nationalism (Steyn, 2004). Although it is well documented that Afrikaners tend to view themselves as disenfranchised in the country's new political dispensation, key indices (Davies, 2007, 2012; Durrheim et al., 2011) suggest that this social group continues to benefit disproportionately from its privileged history, even in a post-apartheid climate. As a result, it is important to problematise participants' partial rejection of Afrikaner cultural values only in cases when they marginalised the participants themselves on the grounds of their sexualities. Given the silences in this line of enquiry regarding the racial, colonial violence perpetuated against Black, Coloured and Indian South Africans in the name of Afrikaner nationalism, it is important to take note of how historical injustices are being amplified or silenced differently according to participants' emotional investments in them (Steyn, 2015). It is evident that what is at stake for participants in their discourses was merely that which marginalised them: the perpetuation of heteronormativity as a cornerstone of Afrikaner culture. Turning this logic towards drag, what may result is an understanding of drag that only critically interrogates issues of sexuality and gender, whilst leaving other axes of identity such as whiteness and masculinity uninterrupted.

5.1.1 *'Don't be that gay'*: Being Afrikaans and doing drag

As participants Angela G., Jenny C. and Lady G. have already vocalised, there is a dearth of representation for being openly queer or gay in Afrikaans communities. Yet, even in cases where participants reported that they were able to come out to their families and (eventually) gain some form of acceptance from them for being queer, the same could not necessarily be said for their involvement in drag culture. As Lady G. put it in their interview, responses from their family would convey a problematic message around drag and performing respectable

queerness: “It’s like they’re saying, ‘you can be gay, but not that gay’. They think a gay guy is a masculine guy who likes men. The moment there’s some femininity there, then they don’t like it”. Again, Lady G.’s comment highlights how the policing of gender and sexuality in the Afrikaner community is contingent on the ideals of a hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity, so much so that a gay identity can be palatable only if it is expressed as masculine. This might relate to what Joshi (2012, p. 415) calls “respectable queerness”. This refers to the demands placed on LGBTQIA+ individuals to practice a ‘socially acceptable’ public identity whilst reserving the expression of their queer identity for the private realm. Given this logic, it is evident how doing drag might serve as a major subversion of the expectations surrounding respectable queerness in Afrikaner culture, not only due to the visibility of drag but also its non-conformity to normative masculinity.

For the participants of this research, it was clear that their Afrikaner communities did not understand or embrace their involvement in drag culture. Elaborating further on the stigma they experienced from their family for doing drag, Jenny C. shared:

> I was asked not to post pictures of myself in my family [WhatsApp] group. So, I said to them, ‘Fuck you, you can send photos of where you shot all these deer and kudus dead and pose with that. But, you know, you don’t want to see my drag’.

Ruby B. also recounted their family’s response to their participation in drag culture:

> They might not have always understood my path in terms of drag, and they might not want to go to my shows, but they accept it and they will fight for me. They will never let anyone say anything negative. It might not be their cup of tea, but they will still keep that tea in the cupboard and keep it there for me. And they respect it. So, it’s been a journey of respect. They respect my boundaries, I respect their boundaries.

Because drag is an explicit and highly visible expression of queerness, it arguably disrupts the ways in which it is expected that being gay should be shrouded in silence and treated as a family secret among Afrikaner families (Schaap, 2011). Thus, participants such as Ruby B. and Jenny C. highlighted how they experienced pressure to keep their drag artistry separate from their Afrikaans families and to respect those ‘boundaries’ of (in)visibility, as Ruby B. put

it. For the participants' families, their involvement in drag culture was clearly seen as a violation of the bounds of respectable, secretive queerness, and so their families' acceptance of them for being drag artists was often contingent on keeping their familial lives completely separate from their drag lives. Once again, these tensions seemed to reinforce the need for participants to actively pull apart their identities at the intersection of queerness, drag, and Afrikaans-ness. Highlighting this point further, Jenny C.'s comment suggests that they were aware of the fact that doing drag undermines a hegemonic Afrikaner masculine ideal as they juxtaposed their drag with the practice of game hunting: a far more socially acceptable and 'masculine' pastime which is popular among Afrikaner men. Their observation also hints at something interesting about how the ideal Afrikaner masculine identity is related to land, a mastery of nature and violence, and thus reifies a particular way that whiteness is understood in South Africa. In 'choosing' queerness so visibly, Jenny C. is not only rejecting this culture, but it also challenges broader beliefs around white masculinity in their culture.

Yet again, the notion of Afrikaans-ness and participating in queer culture were being framed as incompatible and fractured for participants, who would subsequently need to dissociate from an Afrikaner identity or have to relinquish to practicing their drag in private and separately from their Afrikaans communities in order to maintain their familial relationships and connections. Returning briefly to Gunnarsson's (2017) theorisations of intersectionality to frame participants' reflections, it is clear that a seemingly irreconcilable tension exists at the intersections of being Afrikaans, being queer, and even more significantly, participating in the unabashedly visible queer culture of drag.

5.1.2 '*I realised I had been performing gender every day of my life*': Gender performativity through drag

If participants' reflections on their everyday, non-drag lives were being understood as stifling and stigmatised on the basis of their sexualities, then their reflections on being in drag were the antithesis to that: an opportunity to feel free, authentic and empowered. Remembering the significance of their entry into drag culture, Angela G. mused, "When I came out, because of the Afrikaans community, I didn't know where to go. I found my safe space in drag […] just from seeing there are people like me out there". In the previous section of this analysis, it was made clear that queerness tends to be shrouded in secrecy and shame in Afrikaner spaces. Thus,

Angela G. highlighted the importance of discovering drag as Afrikaans-speaking person, particularly because it centres around queer expression, community and belonging. To enable this space for freedom, the explicitly performative nature of drag was not only integral to the ways in which participants formulated their drag personas and did their drag, it also became a way to unleash and express parts of themselves that they did not have access to in other conservative Afrikaans contexts.

Coming from their Afrikaner cultural communities where expressions of gender and sexuality are rigidly structured and policed, participants found drag to be a space where they could subvert those expectations openly. Reflecting more on what made them feel empowered when they were in drag, Jenny C. said:

> Knowing that I can be anything, and I could do anything. And just bringing out that feminine side of me, of being a queen and a princess. It's nice to know that I can step into whatever role I want to.

Jenny C. highlighted that drag affords them a way to subvert norms of masculinity and femininity in ways that make space for them to construct an identity of their own. Similarly, Karina B. reported that, for them, drag signifies "the values of just empowering yourself and stepping into a creative world where you're allowed to be you and allowed to play with gender and the constructs of society". Or, as Ruby. B. suggested:

> What have I discovered? Authenticity more than anything else. Realising that there are no boundaries of what to be and what you want to achieve. In a very short period I became very successful in drag and just realising that I can do what I want to do, being recognised for that and being in a safe space – whatever it may be – I am free to explore.

Considering these quotes, it is apparent that participants thought of drag as a way to freely express those aspects of their identities that were otherwise shrouded in stigma. Moreover, the idea of being encompassed in a safe space within a community of other queer people was integral to their processes of self-acceptance. In this sense, drag became a propelling force in how they came to embrace their non-dominant gender identities and sexualities.

Much has already been written about the performance of drag and the implications of performing a drag identity through drag performance (Evans & Balfour, 2012; Spruill, 2004; Swarr, 2004). Yet, for this research's participants, the impact of drag also extended beyond the confines of the stage alone. Consider Karina B.'s statement on their journey of identifying with a non-binary gender identity:

> I wasn't out as nonbinary yet. I only sort of worked that out because of drag […] because I realised I had been performing gender every day of my life. And suddenly when I was hyper – like performing it actively – I was like wait. I don't identify as this, this isn't me. So, I came out as nonbinary a few months ago.

Karina B.'s reflection encapsulates Butler′s (1990) foundational idea that gender identity is performatively constituted in the context of the everyday, and not only in openly theatrical contexts such as drag performances. Yet, because the performative element of gender is intentionally parodied and exaggerated through drag, it brought Karina B. to the awareness of how the same thing was being done unconsciously in their everyday life. Essentially, doing drag brought forth a new way for Karina B. to understand themselves and the world around them. Theoretically, this could be explained using the concept of nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti, 1994) to demonstrate drag′s potential in helping participants make new connections with themselves and their context. Explaining further, Braidotti (1994, p. 22) writes: "the nomadic subject is a myth, that is to say a political fiction, that allows me to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges […] This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity". This concept importantly highlights not only the fluidity and pluralism of identity construction that might happen through drag performance, but also how it might instigate a critical reflection regarding gender and identity beyond the confines of drag performance alone (Fragkou, 1988). In other words, Karina B.'s experience shows that there is indeed a way in which participants' non-drag and drag subjectivities are critically interconnected, albeit in a fractured sense, due to the dynamics of the context they find themselves in. Or, as Evans and Balfour (2012, p. 316) assert, "the creative tension between 'being' and 'performative being' is the rich ground from which new meanings and understandings emerge". In light of their Afrikaner community's intolerance for queer identities, participants coordinated themselves in ways so that they could

traverse both spaces, with drag constituting a significant mode through which to express the parts of themselves that had been relegated to the margins.

Although participants effectively foregrounded drag as a space to play with these issues of normative gender and sexuality that had deeply affected them as queer Afrikaans-speaking people, this was not accompanied by a similarly critical engagement with the dominance of their white identities as an axis of power requiring disruption. As individuals who navigate a complicated 'in-between' space in terms of situational power (with regards to being queer, Afrikaans, and white), it is important to call attention to the perpetuation of whiteness as a 'universal' or naturalised identity category (Ahmed, 2007) in participants' discourses surrounding drag. Given the performative nature of our social identities – not only in terms of gender but also in terms of race – there remains an untapped opportunity to use drag as a means to think differently about our embodiment and relationalities as white, Afrikaans-speaking people in post-apartheid South Africa. However, a precursor to undoing the normativity of whiteness in drag spaces requires the foregrounding of whiteness as being a constructed and unstable identity, much like the way gender was being understood by participants. Perhaps the 'invisibility' of whiteness in participants' discourses was further enabled by the relational space created with me as a white researcher, where issues of race may have been problematically taken for granted between myself and the participants during our interviews (Steyn, 2001; Fitzpatrick, 2013). This only strengthens the need to bring whiteness into the conversation when researching drag in South Africa, particularly when such significant silences in the data are present.

5.2. '*It's Silly Stuff Like That Which Create Divisions':* Centering, Othering and Belonging in the South African Drag Community

The previous theme of this analysis established that participants made sense of their drag predominantly through a lens of gender and sexual identity subversion. Indeed, drag artists are well-known to effectively challenge notions of heterosexism and straight male privilege in their performances, but may not do the same in terms of other aspects of oppression such as racism, classism and cissexism (Schacht & Underwood, 2004; Litwiller, 2020). As a result, drag performances can be thought of as sites where both normative and resistant dynamics of gender, sexuality, class and race can play out (Hobson, 2017). Using ethnographic methods that focus specifically on how different drag artists perform and represent themselves

stylistically, scholars such as Upadhyay (2019), Hobson (2013) and Swarr (2004) have persuasively shown how the normative positionalities of some white, male and middle-class drag artists can result in expressions of drag that come at the expense of other social groups on the margins. Since it is well established that drag performances themselves constitute complex intersectional parodies of power and identity, this theme explores whether the same be said for participants' sense of belonging and relationality in the drag community. Although this research cannot readily analyse the nature of participants' actual performances, their discourses surrounding the drag scene in South Africa suggest that there are indeed various tensions regarding diversity and belonging in the imagined local drag 'community'. More particularly, these tensions play out in relation to participants' sense-making around issues of racial and gender representation in the drag scene.

As a queer subculture and collective that is growing and shifting as it progresses further toward the mainstream, the boundaries of belonging in the drag community are decidedly contested and in flux. In this theme, I explore how participants are discursively constructing themselves in a political community of belonging, or in other words, how they might be perpetuating boundaries of 'us' versus 'them' along particular axes of difference when reflecting on their positionalities in the drag community (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 199) suggests that this phenomenon of (non)belonging is constructed on three levels: "The first level concerns social locations; the second relates to individuals' identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings; the third relates to ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging/s". Essentially, this theory posits that participants' sense of belonging is a multidimensional psychosocial construct that involves an interplay between issues of power, affect, relationality and ideology. In the discourses of participants, issues of race and gender served as highly contentious social locations through which belonging, otherness, and a normative drag identity were being constructed in the South African drag community.

5.2.1 '*We were all white queens':* Racialised divisions in the local drag scene

As Swarr (2004) and Lease (2015; 2017) have already evidenced in their research, South Africa's present-day drag scene is still largely segregated according to the contingent fault lines of race and space that were enforced during apartheid. What this has resulted in is the

continuation of two distinct sense-making systems, performance networks, and communities in local drag: where urban city spaces are dominated by white (and mainly cisgender male) folks who do their drag as paid performances in gay-friendly bars and clubs, whilst Black and Coloured drag artists dominate the drag scene in township spaces where drag also forms part of the nightlife, but is more popular in queer pageants. The participants of this study clearly situated themselves in an imagined drag community that reflects this distinct sense-making system, thus reinforcing (and normalising) boundaries of belonging in the drag community according to race and space. Consider Jenny C.'s statement about divisions of race and space they observed in the local drag circuits:

> I think you'll find that the biggest - I don't want to say divide - but the biggest difference in drag if you're coming from the point of view of Afrikaans and like, white versus to Cape Town drag […] you don't have many white queens there. There's very little of them. And you'd have your Coloured and Black girls that would feature much more. But historically you always have, like, the events that happen for the white side of the fence and then for the Coloured side and the Black community.

Also note Ruby B.'s observation, corroborating Jenny C.'s claim:

> Your mainstream drag queens that perform on the public stages, if you want to call it that, they are predominantly white. So, I would actually put it in a ratio of 30 to 70 or something to that extent, because there are very few queens of colour in Joburg. In Cape Town, there's a much wider spectrum of queens of colour.

Jenny C. and Ruby B.'s reflections both indicate that the local drag scene is still significantly divided along racialised lines. In their own social circles in Johannesburg and Pretoria especially, the drag community is predominantly white. Moreover, Jenny C.'s comment that there are events 'that happen for the white side of the fence' also suggests that their audiences are similarly segregated. Ruby B.'s comment indicates that the 'mainstream' drag scene is dominated by white drag performers as well, which suggests that centres and margins within the drag community in terms of visibility and recognition are decidedly racialised.

A clear example of this segregationist logic was illustrated by Jenny C., who spoke at length about a drag show that happened in Johannesburg in 2019, where the headlining act was a popular *RuPaul's Drag Race* personality. Jenny C. had been responsible for booking a local line-up of drag performers to open for this international act. When the line-up for the show was revealed to the public (where all eleven chosen performers were white), the clear lack of racial diversity and representation was met with scrutiny from people on social media platforms. As Jenny C. reflected on the criticism that was garnered for the lack of racial diversity in the show's line-up that they were responsible for booking, they stated:

> Some people were saying very nasty things about the demographics, that we were all white queens. Now I warned the organisers about this, but also from their side, they looked at the demographics that were buying tickets. And they said, 'No, it's on par with the demographics that are buying tickets' […] you know there's always backlash about this. Ja, and it's a racist line-up and all that stuff, but I presented what I had because I had a brief and I presented the artists that I had and so I'm doing that. There's always a backlash about something, always. Everybody wants to lay their little egg.

Jenny C. defended the decision to book an all-white line-up for the show by justifying that a white-dominated audience would want to see a white-dominated line-up. Inherently, this discourse naturalises the idea that white drag artists perform for white audiences. Moreover, Jenny C. trivialised the criticism that their decision attracted by stating that 'there's always backlash about something' and that people just 'want to lay their little egg'. Discursively, this works to construct the criticism itself as the real problem, and not the actual thing that sparked the criticism to begin with. What Ahmed (2016, p. 39) writes about this idea of being constructed as a 'killjoy' for identifying issues of injustice is useful in making sense of Jenny C.'s narrative: "it is as if these problems are not there until you point them out; it is as if pointing them out is what makes them there". Although she was speaking in relation to backlash against feminism, Ahmed's notion of being dismissed and problematised for pointing out a problem is evident in Jenny C.'s reflections, who affectively constructed those who took issue with the lack of diversity at this drag show as frivolous. This in itself constitutes an assertion of power and groupness in terms of whiteness (Steyn, 2015), where there is a clear disinvestment from identifying racial segregation in the post-apartheid drag community as a problem.

The logic of apartheid was, of course, not only premised on segregating people according to race, but also on instilling a hierarchy of racial difference that sought to naturalise whiteness as superior to any 'other' race. This speaks to Steyn's (2015, p. 381) critical diversity literacy framework in articulating that "all our categories for thinking about difference are socially constructed within unequal power relations". In their research, Swarr (2004) and Lease (2015; 2017) have already identified a hierarchy in the imaginaries of white drag performers who viewed their drag as elevated and more artistic than the drag of Black and Coloured performers. Karina B. affirmed the continuation of this ideology in their interview:

> There's a huge issue with white queens who tend to see Black queens, that if they don't do the elaborate makeup then they're not as valid or they're not as good as us […] A lot of the Black queens that I'm friends with focus a lot more on their performance style than on their makeup style. So, a lot of white queens will focus more on their makeup. It's silly stuff like that which create divisions.

Karina B., who sits at the margins of the drag community in their own right due to being an AFAB and nonbinary performer, was able to identify another way in which the white Afrikaans-speaking drag community thinks of whiteness as a presumed norm. In so doing, this further substantiates Swarr's (2004) findings that white South African drag artists have their own metric with which they judge how 'good' someone's style of drag is and consequently establish boundaries of othering that place their articulations of drag performance at the centre. Thus, racialised boundaries of belonging in the local drag scene were reinforced and normalised through these interconnecting discourses that (1) audiences themselves are racially homogenous and would only want to see drag performances from people whose skin colour looks like theirs, (2) that white and Black drag artists are inherently different in how they view and do their drag (and therefore it is justified that they cannot or should not collaborate in the same spaces), and (3) that voices calling for more racial diversity in the drag scene are trivial and insincere. Together, these discourses close down opportunities to reimagine and advocate for a drag community that subverts the logics of racial segregation and racialised spaces that were sedimented during apartheid and are still enduring today.

5.2.2 '*Stop pretending to be a drag queen':* Gender norms in the local drag scene

Because the dominant image of queerness has been constructed in their likeness, it is clear that white, able-bodied, middle-class, cisgender gay men tend to benefit from being considered the norm in many gay subcultures, including drag culture (Leatt & Hendricks, 2005). As a result, cisgender men who do drag as 'drag queens' impersonating women remain dominant in drag scenes, whilst other iterations of drag such as drag kings, AFAB drag queens, genderfucking, and transgender drag artists are not yet seen as equally legitimate to cisgender male drag queens (Litwiller, 2020). This imbalance of access and inclusion reflects the broader social hierarchies that position cisgender men as dominant in society. Moreover, the exclusion of non-dominant genders and sexualities in the drag community is perpetuated in global trends in drag representation as well: until recently, *RuPaul's Drag Race* has explicitly excluded transgender contestants from participating in the show, thus reinforcing a narrow image of who can do drag in mainstream imaginaries (Litwiller, 2020).

As an AFAB and nonbinary drag performer, Karina B. reflected on a number of ways in which they felt excluded from the local drag community based on their non-dominant gender identity:

> [I experience] a lot of sexism. A lot. Especially from some of the drag queens, I feel like they talk behind my back more than they say it to my face. And a lot from patrons of the spaces I go to. I got an Instagram message […] from some guy, when I looked through his page I saw he was a Babylon patron. He was like, 'Stop doing drag, you're not actually doing drag, stop pretending to be a drag queen'.

Explaining more about the marginalisation they experienced in the local drag scene, Karina B. noted:

> Even when they [other drag queens] are, like, really woke and can talk about their white privilege, they can't grapple with the fact that they have privilege in the drag world. Because they're like, 'We're drag queens, even queer people don't like us'. And I'm like, 'Yes but you still have more privilege than I do'. Like the amount of effort it takes me to get a gig versus that they get a gig in like 10 seconds […] they'd rather book a man.

Karina B. found themselves in a situation where their claim to belonging in the drag world is under scrutiny from multiple stakeholders in the queer community. On the one hand, Karina B. felt othered by their fellow drag sisters who, at best, did not recognise Karina B.'s particular and intersecting challenges as an AFAB drag artist. Moreover, the venues where they did drag also became problematic spaces as they struggled to get booked for events over other cisgender male drag artists. Then, even in cases where they did manage to get booked and were able to perform, they clearly grappled with experiences of harassment from audience members who invalidated their right to take up space on the stage.

The sense of isolation and vulnerability in Karina B.'s narrative is palpable and further demonstrates some of the consequences that arise from upholding normative understandings what constitutes drag. Referring back to Steyn's (2015) critical diversity framework, it is evident that the local drag community remains identified with, dominated by, and centered upon the interests of cisgender male performers. Karina B.'s narrative also confirms Steyn's (2015) assertion that these conditions are being experienced as normal (and even ideal) for those who benefit from this social arrangement, which results in the dismissal of Karina B.'s experiences and further relegates them to the margins of the drag scene as an AFAB person. Yet, if drag is to be understood as a way to unpack the gendered norms and regulations that are placed on particular bodies, then the notion that only some people (i.e. cisgender men) can authentically do drag only reinforces biological essentialism and thus undermines the subversive potential that drag offers us to perform social identities differently.

5.3 *'It's a Commodity'*: Depoliticising Drag

Prior to South Africa's transition to democracy and the recent rise of the golden age of drag, drag culture was relegated to the shadows of society as a vibrant but oppressed queer subculture (McCormick, 2018). As such, drag performers were predominantly confined to underground gay and lesbian friendly venues in urbanised parts of the country. Reflecting South Africa's racial policies of the time, these spaces were segregated according to race, with white and Black queer people frequenting bars and shebeens separately and close to the racially demarcated spaces where they lived (McCormick 2018). And as already highlighted elsewhere in this report, it is critical to keep in mind that South Africa's history of drag culture was deeply suppressed and threatened due to a number of racial and sexual laws from the apartheid era, including the Prohibition of Disguises Act 16 of 1969 and the criminalisation of homosexuality

under the amended Immorality Act of 1969. In contrast to this repressive history, we are presently experiencing drag culture's global movement from the margins towards the centres of society, with more people being interested in and consuming drag culture than ever before, and consequently, drag performers may stand to gain more than ever before as being part of the culture (Litwiller, 2020). This theme explores participants' discourses on the growing social currency of drag culture around the world and in South Africa, and how they make sense of their consequent stake in these global and local shifts.

5.3.1 '*Drag Race is my only point of reference*': The RuPaul's Drag Race (R)universe

It is well documented elsewhere (Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017; Lease, 2017) that RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR) has played an instrumental role in bringing drag culture to mainstream audiences around the world since its first season aired in 2009 on Logo TV in the USA. In addition to its original US-based series, RPDR now has spin-offs in several countries, including Drag Race Canada, Drag Race UK, Drag Race Down Under (Australia and New Zealand), and Drag Race Thailand. Although South Africa does not have its own iteration of RPDR (yet), a number of former contestants from the show (the likes of Morgan McMichaels, Detox, Brooke Lynn Hytes and Alaska Thunderfuck) have landed on our shores in recent years to perform. Evidently, RPDR is seeking to broaden its reach not only for American audiences, but for global consumption as well. What Brennan and Gudelunas (2017, p. 3) consider to be these "global reverberations of RPDR" have also been explored in other contexts such as Mexico (de la Garza Villaerreal et al., 2017), Brazil (Castellano & Machado, 2017), and Greece (Chronaki, 2017), reflecting the intricate nuances that arise from the consumption of this US-based television program in other cultural and political contexts. What makes RPDR particularly significant in some of these cases is the likelihood that it might be the only positive portrayal of queer culture available to those audiences (Chronaki, 2017), thus making it a powerful (and oftentimes the sole) disseminator of drag culture for many people around the world (Brennan & Gudelanas, 2017).

Indeed, the global Drag Race phenomenon rings true in the experiences of this study's participants, particularly those in their young adulthood. For these individuals, RPDR played an instrumental and formative role in their drag journeys by introducing them to drag culture and subsequently sparking their interest in drag performance. As Lady G. noted, "I think the

first time I was introduced to drag that I can remember was around 13 or 14, when the first season of RuPaul's Drag Race came out […] it intrigued me, and I just kept watching it". Similarly to Lady G., Angela G. reported, "I never knew drag culture existed […] I mean, in South Africa there's no exposure to these things, so it [Drag Race] is my only point of reference. We don't have anything like that in South Africa". For these participants, RPDR served as the sole starting point for their interest in drag culture due to its positive and aspirational representations of drag artistry and queer culture. Further highlighting its significance, Ruby B. shared the following: "It [Drag Race] got me to a point where I accepted myself. And in accepting myself, I allowed myself to dabble around in drag initially and then to go on to be a full-on queen, darling". These experiences suggest that the value of the series for participants laid in its portrayal of a queer culture and queer identities that participants did not have access to anywhere else. The quote from Angela G. corroborates this: they substantiated that there is a dearth of local content in South Africa that caters to queer audiences, and thus any sources of exposure to drag culture could only be found beyond our nation's borders. Moreover, knowing that participants' particularly conservative upbringings framed homosexuality as a shameful secret, it is understandable that RPDR would be their first exposure to visible expressions of queer culture and drag artistry.

In addition to RPDR being attributed to sparking participants' initial interest in drag culture, another key dimension of the series relates to its ongoing influence that is particularly evident in the urban, white South African drag scene. In other words, the significance of RPDR to participants' drag journeys extended beyond the point of merely introducing them to drag culture. It also served as a constant point of reference and was often framed as the pinnacle of drag culture and drag aesthetics to which they aspired. In fact, the influence of Drag Race was understood as being somewhat inescapable. Reflecting on this sense of inevitably encountering comparisons with RPDR, Jenny C. astutely remarked, "It's not a matter of *if* you're getting compared with RuPaul's Drag Race, it's a matter of *when* in your drag process you'll get exposed to that". For Jenny C., RPDR has clearly become ingrained as a foundational part of drag life in South Africa. This is not only in terms of its representation of drag culture in general, but even in terms of standardising the particular types of performances and aesthetic styles it endorses. Sharing more on this phenomenon, Karina B. said:

> Even just performance styles, like how people view their standard of drag is always pointing back to it [Drag Race]. It's always about 'Oh I'm like this queen or that queen'.

> Because like, I do that white line under my eyes, I always get 'Oh, you look like Trixie Mattel[12]. Oh, you look like Kim Chi[13]'.

In Karina B.'s experience, the ways people made sense of their aesthetics and performance styles were always already being articulated through RPDR as a common reference point. Even in cases where such similarities were not intentional, it is clear that participants were still making sense of themselves (and were being made sense of by others) through a RPDR lens. For instance, Karina B.'s drag makeup was not being understood as their own stylistic choice, it was being interpreted as a mimicry of other RPDR contestants' aesthetics. These reflections illustrate some of the ways in which the local world of drag seems to be revolving around a Drag Race universe for this study's participants and thus constructs a dominant way of understanding the very nature of drag culture (Steyn, 2015).

Given the fact that RPDR was one of the only ways in which participants were able to access drag culture initially, it is understandable that the series would continue to function as an important reference point for comparison, with contestants from RPDR serving as inspiration for participants' drag personas, aesthetics and performance styles. Yet, one of the consequences of having RPDR as the only mechanism through which participants felt connected to drag culture is that it also begins to define (and thus, limits) how participants might imagine possibilities to cultivate novel and contextually relevant expressions of drag and queer culture. Consider Karina B.'s reflection on the implications of the show's restrictive representation of gender diversity in drag culture:

> On RuPaul's Drag Race, like, the majority of queens are cis white men – I mean he doesn't allow anyone on the show who isn't cis really […] and I think it's become so ingrained in drag culture now that this is what drag is. So white cis men are the standard by which drag is judged now.

For Karina B., the influence of RPDR on shaping drag culture was so potent that its failure to include non-cisgender male contestants had inadvertently set a standard that this is simply what drag looks like, and that this is how drag communities should be. The implications of this sense-making on Karina B.'s experiences as an AFAB person in the local drag community

[12] Trixie Mattel is a former contestant from RuPaul's Drag Race season seven and the winner of season three's RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars spin-off.
[13] Kim Chi is a former contestant and finalist from RuPaul's Drag Race season eight.

have already been discussed above. With this type of dominance, Drag Race is able to effectively define the world of drag culture. Imagining and articulating drag culture without RPDR becomes near impossible to participants, even in other seemingly innocuous ways. For instance, Ruby B. observed that, "It's even in, like, just the language. Like people using Americanised terms like 'slay' and 'yaaas'. And yes, they're part of queer culture but it's also very much westernised". An important point was made here by Ruby B. who highlighted that even in ways of talking and relating to each other, the local drag scene was beginning to mimic language from the global north. In her critical diversity framework, Steyn (2015) observes that generalising assumptions and practices from one context to another can indeed have an imperialising and misleading effect that may lead to problematic outcomes for the ways that hegemonic practices are translated in different spaces. Because these dominant reference points for drag culture are situated in a global north context, participants noted that their own drag community was increasingly mirroring these logics, styles, and vocabularies of queer culture. Borrowing from Lease's (2017) work, what is evident in participants discourses regarding RPDR suggests that these Afrikaans-speaking, white drag performers are implicating themselves in the making of a more transnational, global drag culture, aesthetic and style.

It is evident that RPDR tends to sit at the centre of how participants imagine and make sense of the ever-expanding drag universe and their subsequent place in it. From functioning as participants' formative introduction to drag culture, to serving as a key point of reference and comparison in their drag journeys, to solidifying an ability to define the standards through which drag is judged in the local drag scene, participants consistently referred to RPDR as an authoritative voice on drag culture and drag aesthetics. What results from these discourses is a homogenised and westernised framing of drag from participants. Consequently, despite the aim of this research being to explore the particularity of drag at an intersection of Afrikaans-ness and queerness in the broader South African context, participant discourses on drag culture tended to more closely reflect the dominant sense-making from RPDR and the global north. This observation has also been documented elsewhere, particularly in Brennan and Gudelunas' (2017) anthology of research, *RuPaul's Drag Race and the shifting visibility of drag culture*, which unpacks the influence of RPDR on a global scale and the ramifications thereof. Similar to findings from research conducted elsewhere (Lease, 2017; Schottmiller, 2017), this section highlights that the consequence of only having RPDR as the sole point of reference for drag culture is that it has a homogenising effect on the drag scene among white Afrikaans-speaking

drag artists in South Africa and restricts the formation of alternative, context-specific imaginaries of drag.

5.3.2 '*There is the personal journey of drag, but there is also the career of drag*': Framing drag as a profession

As I have unpacked in the previous subsection, Alexander's (2017) argument that RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR) operates as a key disseminator of drag culture certainly rings true in the experiences of these white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers who participated in this research. In this subsection, another parallel in meaning-making when it comes to participants' accounts of drag in relation to broader global drag culture trends is explored: the rise of drag as a profession. To briefly encapsulate this idea in the words of a former RPDR contestant Latrice Royale, "Drag is not a hobby, it's a career"[14]. This statement appears to be relatively apparent at first glance, given the fact that a substantial number of drag performers (with no better example than RuPaul themselves) have come to establish themselves as globally recognised figures in the worlds of entertainment, music, fashion, comedy and frontrunners of pop culture in general (Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017). However, the prospect of making a handsome living from being a professional drag performer is a decidedly new phenomenon. Whereas previous research (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010; Hopkins, 2004; Knutson et al., 2018) tended to focus on intrinsic motivating factors for doing drag in terms of self-affirmation, self-empowerment and creative self-expression, it is clear that opportunities for profit-making and celebrity are becoming more powerful incentives for prospective drag performers today (Buck, 2019). In the discourses of this study's participants, these shifts in meaning-making around what makes drag rewarding were no different.

In participants' reflections about the trajectories and rewards of their drag journeys (or drag careers, rather), motivating factors were identified in terms of gaining more fans, getting paid more for bookings, and making a name for their drag personas on social media. For instance, when speaking with Lady G. about their long-term goals in terms of doing drag, they said, "At this stage, from an entertainment point of view, it would be to create fans – superfans – not just

[14] See https://theconversation.com/rupauls-drag-race-how-social-media-made-drags-subversive-art-form-into-a-capitalist-money-maker-144967

for myself but for all the queens and for drag in general". Underlying this sentiment is Lady G.'s ambition to enjoy the spotlight of drag and to be a part of the local culture's movement toward the mainstream. Given the unprecedented success of RPDR in making celebrities out of its former contestants, it is apparent that participants made sense of doing drag through the very same lens and hoped to experience their own drag trajectories in the same way. Ruby B. corroborated this as they reflected on shifts in the local drag scene:

> A lot of the local queens tend to become divas. Especially after working with the Drag Race queens […] I think they see that standard of which the international queens are treated with. They are international superstars. I think the local queens want to be treated like that.

It is clear that participants made sense of themselves as part of a local drag community that is increasingly structured according to prevailing conventions from the global north in terms of what meaningful drag looks like. In fact, some participants even expressed an eagerness to accelerate the local drag scene's popularity and commercial success akin to what is happening in the global north. In this regard, Angela G. reflected, "I would love for it [the local drag scene] to become a lot more mainstream like it is in America". Rather than conceiving a South African drag community that could be different from what they see in global north spaces, participants hoped to sediment their place in that very same mainstreaming process of drag culture. An important silence underpinning this discourse relates to issues of privilege and access: as white, middle-class drag performers, participants were able to (1) readily identify with the shifts in drag culture taking place abroad, and (2) they did not perceive any barriers to participating in this consumption- and image-driven mainstream drag culture (such as not having enough money to access resources for doing drag or having concerns that their drag styles would be rejected for being different). Essentially, participants' discourses about aligning with a global drag culture reflect the privilege that comes with embodying what Lease (2015) thinks of as a universalised white, gay and male-centred image of queerness.

Although drag culture was predominantly being understood from a global north lens, some participants did talk specifically about propelling the visibility of drag in their own Afrikaans communities. Hoping to capitalise on the perceived devotion of an Afrikaner audience in particular, Jenny C. shared their hopes for hosting a late-night Afrikaans television talk show (whilst in drag):

> The first interview I want is Bobby van Jaarsveld[15]. I want him. To make it [drag] more commercial in the mainstream Afrikaans industry. And if you go look at the Afrikaans music industry, it is one of the most profitable music industries in the world. Because your fans are very loyal. An Afrikaans following is a very committed following.

Echoing Angela G.'s remark that drag should become more mainstream in South Africa, Jenny C. hoped to take their place in commercialising drag for Afrikaans audiences in particular. Yet, Jenny C's motivation behind this vision was rooted in potentially tapping into a fan-base that they thought would be very lucrative. A notable silence in this discourse is evident: rather than thinking of the possibilities of transforming attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people in Afrikaans culture by visibilising drag and making queer culture more accessible and approachable, Jenny C. was solely focused on the personal and financial rewards that could be reaped from this venture: gaining a committed fanbase and making a name for themselves. Herein, Steyn's (2015) articulation that hegemonic practices and dominant ways of talking about things can often be applied in different contexts with misleading consequences is apparent. Although Jenny C.'s aspiration for drag representation in mainstream Afrikaans media yields rich opportunities to challenge conservative ideologies in their community, they rather framed this according to the dominant way of talking about drag that is emerging globally: gaining fans and fame.

The notion that drag is about being marketable and making money was ubiquitous among participants. Beyond the personal incentives available to them, this was also attributed to the gaze and desires of their audience. In the relational space between them, there was an acute awareness that participants did not only do drag for themselves, but also for the pleasure of others. Reflecting on this power dynamic, Ruby B. reported, "There is the personal journey of drag, but there is also the career of drag […] Because you work as a drag queen, you need to do what the audience commands". Through juxtaposing the tensions between honouring their personal or professional impulses in doing drag, Ruby B. made it clear that issues of agency and self-expression are always being negotiated with the need to do what others want as a professional drag artist. In light of these tensions, Karina B. also noted, "[Drag] is a commodity.

[15] Bobby van Jaarsveld is a well-known Afrikaans singer-songwriter.

You're someone people want to be around, people want to hire, want to talk to, and at the same time you're completely fetishised". In Karina B.'s statement, there is the sense that a commodified view of drag also enables the making of a commodity (a 'fetishised' object) out of them as a drag performer. It becomes clear that making sense of drag as a job has implications for destabilising participants' personal boundaries in their drag identities (Steyn, 2015)

Another predominant reason why money and profitability were seen as so important to participants' experiences of doing drag was attributed to the norms of the spaces where they performed. Because all of the participants reported doing drag only in the contexts of urban, gay-friendly bars, the commercialisation of the establishments themselves was another important factor contributing to their framing of drag as a profession. On the one hand, participants benefited from this arrangement because they got paid for being booked in these spaces. In fact, Jenny C.'s response to the question of where they do their drag was simply, "Where ever I get booked darling. If they pay, I'm there!". On the other hand of this transaction, participants knew that they had to curate their personas and performances to be marketable for the venues. In Steyn's (2015) critical diversity framework, making sense of material arrangements and symbolism in the built environment are essential when acknowledging the circulation of relational power between people. In the case of this study's participants, the spaces where they did drag carried with them a structure of how drag performers are meant to relate with others in the space: by making money for the venue. Angela G. shared their thoughts on this dynamic:

> A drag queen's job is to make the club money. They know what people want and to cater to them and they know what to say. They perform, bring people in, put on a show, then they hand out shooters, and so they are built to have a public image and to tell people what they want. It's our job.

Angela G. understood that doing drag in the clubbing scene reinforces a commodified view of drag artistry. Whereas other contesting discourses might frame drag as a form of creative self-expression or as a political act of identity subversion, it is clear that a number of factors enabled the participants of this research to identify their drag as simply being a profession. In doing so, questions of marketability, profit, and status mattered most.

As discussed above, participant discourses framed drag as an entrepreneurial venture: a means through which to make money and gain fame. In light of the increasing visibility and popularity of drag culture, participants were motivated to use their involvement in drag as an opportunity to accelerate themselves and participate in making drag culture more visible in South Africa. In this sense, participant discourses reflected a generally favourable attitude towards the mainstreaming of drag, and as something they could stand to personally benefit from. However, participants also reflected an awareness that this commodification of drag comes at a cost: as Ruby B. astutely observed, aligning one's personal journey of drag might not always be in harmony with the demands of one's drag 'career'. What these discourses might suggest is that there is, indeed, a change in the values and meaning being attributed to drag culture (Buck, 2019). Instead of understanding its proliferation as being rooted in more accepting attitudes toward the LGBTQIA+ community and as a subsequent marker of progress in this regard, it seems that drag culture is being increasingly understood in terms of neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurship and consumerism, all of which construct drag as a thing that rewards success and profit over being transgressive or subversive.

5.3.3 '*They see it as entertainment, so they ignore the rest*': Negotiating normative and subversive readings of drag

In the literature, a key debate surrounding drag is whether it is subversive in terms of power and identity or whether it, in fact, does little to undermine the hegemonic logics of gender, sexuality, race and class that it parodies. As discussed in this report's literature review, the debate remains largely unsettled, with some scholars (Hobson, 2013; Litwiller, 2020) effectively arguing that drag is a significant means through which to reimagine identity and power, whilst others (Upadhyay, 2019) have effectively shown that drag can also be used to reinforce dominant relations of power and oppression. Given that both perspectives have been proven to hold some truth, it may be most useful to consider Hobson's (2013, p. 27) position that there is "no such thing as one drag performance" and that "we must be willing to employ an intersectional queer lens of analysis through which we sense the fine lines we walk: making and breaking art; resisting and implementing norms; and being willing to reflexively recognise the moments where our liberation is at the expense of someone belonging to another identity group". Essentially, Hobson asserts that there is a very fine line to tread between sustaining

normativity and/or subversion in drag performances, and that in many cases, expressions of self-liberation through drag may come at the cost of the liberation of others.

For this research's participants, the question of using drag as a vehicle for potential political engagement and norm subversion was highly contested and, at times, rejected outright. Predominantly, participants actively dissociated from viewing their drag as being political and rather considered what they do as a light-hearted form of theatre and entertainment that should not be taken too seriously. Angela G.'s viewpoint on this was that, "As a drag queen, I'm supposed to make you feel happy and help you escape your everyday suit and tie life". For them, the very purpose of drag is to help people escape the serious, the mundane, and to make them feel good. Similarly, Ruby B. said, "At the end of the day, it's really just about entertainment. That's it. It's about entertainment and entertaining the audience". As these quotes illustrate, participants primarily thought of themselves as entertainers, and considered drag as simply being a way to have fun, to entertain others, and to feel good together. This view of drag as being entertainment was also situated in opposition to the view of drag as a vehicle for activism and social justice. In Jenny C.'s opinion:

> A lot of people come with this human rights thing towards me and I'm like, bitch, stop wasting my fucking time. I know you have human rights […] my drag is very much focused on entertainment. I don't feel you should think too much about drag.

To suggest that their drag might be implicated in issues of politics and power was often met with aversion and disdain, such as in the case of Jenny C. who argued that involving activism in their drag would be a waste of time. The fervour with which the potential to be political through drag was rejected by some participants might be explained by criterion nine of Steyn's (2015) critical diversity framework: in it, she cites Ahmed's (2004b) notion of an affective economy to sustain that our emotional (dis)investments are always already implicated in issues of power and unequal social formations. That which we find threatening, repulsive, valuable, or worthy is channelled through a flow of collective feelings: feelings that then materialise certain ways of relating or excluding ourselves from social processes (Steyn, 2015). In the case of these participants, there was a clear affective response to our social justice conversations wherein they distanced themselves from subversive readings of drag culture and instead resonated towards the idea of drag's purpose to simply be fun and entertaining. This act of

dissociating from an understanding of drag as political has implications for sustaining normative power relations and closing down opportunities to address ongoing social issues (such as cissexism, racism, and heteronormativity) through drag. Instead, by emotionally resonating with the notion that drag should be about entertainment, participants identified themselves as entertainers and performers, and not necessarily as agents who make political statements through their performances.

In addition to their own views that drag's purpose is to be a source of light-hearted fun, some participants also reflected that their audiences reinforced this type of framing, and thus strengthened the affective flow away from thinking of drag as a subversive practice. Consider Ruby B.'s account of performing for an Afrikaans audience that clearly did not view it as a politically engaging experience:

> Everyone accepted me as a drag queen who went to the bar to watch the performance, but they might not have accepted other people that were gay or queer. Because they get so excited to see you they don't really care that you're a drag queen, that you're a queer person. They just want that performance […] Most of the people who went to this show were Afrikaans, proper boere people. And it was sad to see that they accepted me, but not anyone else that was queer.

Ruby B.'s recollection offers some important insight regarding the ways that drag might not only be depoliticised through the sense-making of drag performers themselves, but also by their (presumed white) audiences. Because of Ruby B.'s shared cultural background of being Afrikaans, they knew that their audience members were likely to sustain harmful and prejudicial attitudes towards queer people in their everyday lives. Yet, because they were so eager to be entertained by Ruby B., the fact that they were performing as a visibly queer person using a queer method of self-expression was overlooked and irrelevant. Referring back to Steyn (2015), it is clear that Ruby B.'s audience divorced their performance from the idea of queerness in order to retain their own sense of material and psychological comfort. Steyn (2015) elaborates further on this, arguing that it is particularly difficult for subordinated people to express themselves authentically and in ways that challenge social norms, especially in public or when interacting with dominant groups. In the case of Ruby B.'s interaction with their white and predominantly Afrikaans audience, it was only made possible due to the discursive availability of understanding drag as a normative, depoliticised practice. Moreover,

Ruby B.'s recollection calls back to the normatively white enclaves that exist in these venues where participants typically did their drag. As discussed in subtheme 2.1 *'We were all white queens'*, it is clear that the racial homogeneity within these spaces closes down opportunities for participants to recognise the particularity of their white identities, to destabilise them through drag, and perform them differently. Instead, what prevails in these encounters with their audiences is what Ahmed (2007, p. 150) considers to be the 'worldliness' of whiteness, where whiteness exists as "a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience". In other words, it is also through the disappearance of whiteness in these discourses that drag is being upheld as a normative and depoliticised experience.

The question of framing drag performance as a source of light-hearted entertainment and/or as a medium for activism and political engagement was highly contested, varied and ambiguous for participants. Predominantly, participants made sense of their drag journeys in terms of entertainment and dissociated themselves from political rhetoric. This also aligns with the prior subthemes related to RPDR′s proliferation and the notion of drag as a profession. Together, the consequence of this framing of drag culture enabled its depoliticisation and the foregrounding of drag as something that one should not take too seriously. Participants perceived it as difficult, or even undesirable, to intentionally incorporate politics in their drag given that their ultimate aim was to be entertaining. Instead, their discourses further engendered an understanding of drag that is neoliberal, profit- and consumption-driven, rather than being a means through which to mobilise and disturb the norms of what their audiences expect in terms of gendered, sexualised, and racialised Afrikaans identities.

In this final theme, I analysed participant discourses about the proliferation and depoliticisation of drag culture, particularly where the significance of RPDR, viewing drag as a profession and thinking of its purpose as entertainment were explored. Together, these three subthemes indicate how present day drag culture in South Africa is proliferating and shifting towards normative and mainstream discourses. Yet, the growing visibility of drag culture does not simply constitute a marker of 'progress' or the ushering in of more positive attitudes towards queerness. Rather, these subthemes suggest that there is an inherent shift in the sense-making taking place around drag that propels ideals of consumption, entrepreneurship and entertainment over those of queer expression and the subversion of social norms (Buck, 2019). This marks a significant departure from South Africa's deeply subversive history of drag

performance, and risks what Steyn (2015) articulates as setting in motion problematic consequences for the future. She (2015, p. 384) argues, “When we depoliticise the present by refusing a critical memory of the past, we render it impossible to understand the depth and scope of current challenges”. Keeping this risk in mind, it appears that a normative framing of drag is emerging as dominant in participant discourses, reflecting logics of the global north and thus muting any particular nuances that may arise from being a white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performer in South Africa where our context presents its own opportunities and challenges to politicise issues of culture, race, and sexuality through drag.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

Drag has played a central role in visibilising LGBTQIA+ people, communities and cultures both globally and in South Africa's own history. This politically potent aspect of drag was particularly significant during the country's political transition to democracy when the question of including LGBTQIA+ people in the 'rainbow nation's' construction was highly contested and politicised (Cameron & Gevisser, 1995; Sizemore-Barber, 2020). Yet, despite the hard-won legal protections afforded to queer citizens today, there remains an enduring climate of homophobic discrimination and violence in South Africa (Lease, 2017), as well as a growing global resistance seeking to counter the progress made for queer people's rights (McEwen, 2020). Given this highly precarious context, Sizemore-Barber (2020) and McEwen (2020) argue that the work of advocating for LGBTQIA+ visibility and justice remains urgent and unfinished. Drag, constituting an explicit performance of queerness and subversion of gendered and sexual norms, may indeed have a critical role to play in this movement. However, this report has also evidenced how many of the inequalities that prevail in our broader society (such as racism and cissexism) are circulating within drag communities themselves, and potentially diluting the subversive potential that lies within drag performance.

To reiterate Brennan and Gudelunas' (2017, p. 1) claim, we are currently living in "the golden age of drag": a time where drag culture is becoming increasingly visible and intertwined with mainstream culture (Litwiller, 2020). Yet, the very nature of what constitutes drag remains highly disputed, not only due to this movement of drag culture from the margins of society towards the centre, but also because drag performances have been known to perpetuate both subversive *and* normative logics of identity and power with regards to representations of gender, sex, race, class and sexuality. For white drag artists in particular, it has been found that their performances may indeed expose and mock the normative gender framework, but often fail to do the same regarding the construction of normative whiteness as an axis of identity that requires critical reflection through drag (Rhyne, 2004; Swarr, 2004; Taylor & Rupp, 2004). This may in turn perpetuate epistemologies of ignorance regarding racism and white privilege amongst white folks (and white drag performers), enabling whiteness to continue operating as an unquestioned, unmarked norm (Steyn, 2012). This research has explored how white, Afrikaans-speaking drag performers engage these issues, with the aim to understand how they discursively construct their positionalities in relation to drag culture and as drag artists in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Because the meanings attributed to drag are shifting

globally (Buck, 2019), along with the South African nation-state's precarious treatment of LGBTQIA+ people (Sizemore-Barber, 2020), there are a number of complex and multi-layered discursive frames available for participants to draw on in their sense-making around drag. For the participants of this study, the negotiation of these discourses traversed both the global and local logics of drag and identity in complex ways that show resistances and reinforcements of normative understandings of drag culture taking place. Through this, the implications of their sense-making in relation to issues of power, identity and the political horizons of drag can be considered.

Because this study's participants were white Afrikaans-speaking drag performers, they possess a complex relationship to the country's history of oppression and domination. As white Afrikaans-speaking people, they benefit from substantial privilege in terms of race and class, but also find themselves being marginalised for their queer identities. Moreover, their experiences of discrimination on the basis of their sexualities are doubly stigmatised due to the highly conservative values underpinning the Afrikaner culture they come from. Then, considering issues of privilege within the drag community itself, the norms governing sex and gender continue to relegate drag artists who are not white or cisgender men to the margins. Thus, for the participants of this research, the 'in-between' spaces they navigate in terms of power and identity are complex and may open up possibilities to renegotiate how they relate to others in the drag community and in their broader contexts as well. As this report has already discussed, drag may arguably serve as a unique way to grapple with some of these issues since it primes the performer to blur the lines of identity and embodiment, to subvert the expectations of others, and to interrogate normative social practices (Evans & Balfour, 2012). Or, as Hobson (2013, p. 36) succinctly states, drag might allow one to "pull back the veil of mystification" governing intersectional identities and relationality. The question that this research has addressed is whether its participants, as white Afrikaans-speaking drag artists with complicated intersectional identities, actually take up the opportunity to do so; and subsequently explores the sense-making strategies that animate participants' choices regarding this question.

Given that this study's participants all come from a conservative and homophobic Afrikaner culture, participants reflected on finding a great sense of internal freedom and joy through expressing themselves in their drag identities. Their discourses constructed drag performance as a way to accept their sexualities fully, to be playful, and to free themselves from the stigma associated with being queer and effeminate as Afrikaans people. However, challenges arose

for participants in this regard: one, their Afrikaner communities and families were reported to reject their participation in drag culture; and two, their abilities to fully explore the expressive potentials of drag were overpowered by their need to remain marketable and successful as drag performers. As such, their internal journeys related to drag were being met with a number of external constraints that close down any opportunities to be political in how they think about their drag. To further problematise drag as a space to subvert identity norms, there was a notable silence in participants' discourses regarding their whiteness and the possibilities of using their drag to think about their race as a constructed social identity. In fact, their sense-making around this question revealed that participants actively pulled apart and separated their Afrikaans-ness (and whiteness) from their drag identities.

Moreover, in light of the normative framing of drag culture and its contingent underpinning values that are prevailing in the data, there is also a clear norming of certain identities over others within the local drag community. Globally, we are seeing a growing call for cisgender women, non-binary people, and transgender people to be included and recognised in the drag community (Fitwiller, 2020), but this research evidenced that cisgender masculinity continues to centre itself as the most legitimate identity from which to do drag in South Africa's drag scene. The findings also suggest that the historical disenfranchisement of Black and Coloured drag artists in urban queer spaces seems to be enduring, along with the continuation of a highly segregated drag community along the fault lines of race. Because of these prevailing tensions in terms of gender and race that continue to privilege a cisgender white masculinity in the local drag scene, these normativities remain sedimented in our new dispensation along with any critical engagement on issues of racial and gender diversity being trivialised. Thus, opportunities for drag to be fully understood as an intersectional practice are yet to be taken up.

The lens of mainstreaming and depoliticising drag is also an important one for this research because of how it opens up and closes down opportunities for participants to think of themselves as political agents and to discursively explore the subversive potentials of drag in post-apartheid South Africa. Other scholars based in the global north have already suggested that the shifting visibility of drag culture is being accompanied by a change in the perceived values that underpin it (Buck, 2019; Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017). In other words, they assert that the growing popularity of drag culture does not necessarily mean the world is becoming more accepting of LGBTQIA+ people, but rather that this delineation is enabled through

framing drag differently in terms of (more palatable) neoliberal values. This gives rise to discourses of drag as being a profession, drag serving as a means of entertainment, and drag's need to appeal to mainstream consumer preferences. In turn, these discourses destabilise notions of drag as a mode of historical queer self-expression and activism that is social justice orientated. With the multiple and contesting discursive options available to them, this research established that participants overwhelmingly dissociate from a politicised understanding of their drag, and instead they constructed their experiences according to the neoliberal values that have been found to prevail in the research on drag culture from the global north. Another significant way in which the discourses of this study's participants seem to mirror the global north's logic around drag culture relates to the impact of RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR) as a formative disseminator (and definer) of drag culture. Even though South Africa does arguably offer some of its own key local drag influences, the centrality of RPDR to their sense-making around drag was emphasised greatly: not only as their introduction to drag culture, but also as a source for ongoing comparison, inspiration, and aspiration in their drag journeys and aesthetics. As a result, participants' discourses suggest that South Africa's local (and white) drag scene is being increasingly influenced by global drag culture and aesthetics, thereby taking on global logics of sexuality and gender as well.

While this research does offer insights for the ways in which drag culture and divisions in the drag community are being made sense of and experienced through the discourses of white Afrikaans-speaking drag artists, it is limited by its lack of ethnographic data. Other research on drag performances that draw on ethnographic methods have yielded rich results that allow for drag performance styles, aesthetic embodiments, audience interactions, and the politics of space to be considered. Because this research depends on interview data alone, the inclusion of some ethnographic data sources would have enabled a much more comprehensive analysis of power and identity to be explored. This key limitation may be taken up in future ethnographic research on the making of drag culture(s) in South Africa.

Through an exploration of the discourses and experiences of white Afrikaans-speaking drag performers, this research established that normative understandings of drag are manifesting symbolically and materially in a number of complex ways. Significantly, this implicates the politics of belonging within the local drag community itself, with centres and margins enduring along the axes of gender and race that continue to privilege a white cisgender masculinity and reify the haunting histories of racial segregation in South Africa. Moreover, it is evident that

norms governing drag culture in the global north are sedimenting themselves in the post-apartheid South African context and contributing to participants' self-integration within a homogenising 'global' drag culture. As a result, the dominant sense-making around drag is also becoming increasingly depoliticised and entangled with neoliberal values that commodify it for mainstream consumption, thereby closing down opportunities for participants to critically interrogate issues of power, oppression, and identity subversion through their drag. Thus, if we are to realise Hobson's (2013, p. 36) call for drag to "pull back the veil of mystification regarding intersectional identities", then the implications for these issues of power, normativity, and exclusion that texture the discourses of white Afrikaans-speaking drag artists are to be seriously considered as the 'golden age of drag' continues to unfold before us.

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Good day

My name is Amber Eksteen and I am a Masters student in Critical Diversity Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating how white Afrikaans speaking drag performers are making sense of their identities within the context of post-apartheid South Africa. The aim of this research project is to find out how drag might be used as a mode of identity (re)construction regarding issues of power in our current context.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview with me. This will involve us having a conversation about your experiences as a drag performer and will take around 60-90 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device. You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information; and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. You may choose to be represented using a pseudonym (false name) or your drag name in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge:
SADAG: 0800 121 314
Wits Emthonjeni Clinic: 011 717 4513

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me via the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix B: Consent Form

Exploring the intersecting subjectivities of white Afrikaans speaking drag queens in the context of a shifting post-apartheid South Africa

Researcher: Amber Eksteen

I, …….., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. Please indicate the relevant options below by ticking or circling your choice.

I choose for my participation to remain confidential	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use quotes from my interview in her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I understand that the audio of my interview will only be accessed by the researcher, will be transcribed, anonymised, and the audio file will be stored securely for five years after which it will be deleted permanently by the researcher	YES	NO
I understand that only the researcher and her supervisor(s) may access the transcripts of my interview (which will be anonymised)	YES	NO
I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty	YES	NO

…… (signature)

…… (date)

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

1. Demographic questions

What year were you born?

Where were you born and raised?

Where do you live now?

How do you identify in terms of: Sexual orientation

Culture

Gender

Religious background

2. Open-ended questions

Tell me about your life growing up: give me a brief background of yourself.

When and how were you introduced to drag?

What made you interested in doing drag?

How did you access the drag scene?

What resources did you need to access the drag scene?

What skills did you need to learn in order to do drag?

Where do you do drag now?

What challenges, if any, have you faced in doing drag?

Has the drag scene changed at all since you started doing it? If so, then how?

How did you come up with your drag persona?

Tell me about who your drag persona is and how she is different and/or similar to you.

Who is your audience and how do they influence your drag?

How, in turn, do you try to influence your audience through drag?

How do your family and friends respond to you doing drag?

What values are represented in drag for you?

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance Certificate

SOSS Human Research Ethics Committee

Clearance Certificate

Protocol Number: **DIV190806**

Project Title: **Exploring the intersecting subjectivities of white Afrikaans-speaking drag performers in the context of a shifting post-apartheid South Africa**

Investigator's Name: **Amber Rain Eksteen (1036169)**

Department: **Wits Centre for Diversity Studies**

Date Reviewed: **August 2019**

Decision of Committee: **Approved / Unconditionally**

Expiry Date: **July 2021**

Date:

Head of School _____ _____

Professor Mucha Musemwa

CC supervisor: **Melissa Steyn**

Declaration of Investigator

To be completed in duplicate and one copy to be returned to Ms. Sarah Mfupa in the School of Social Sciences, Room 152, 1st Floor, Robert Sobukwe Block.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorised to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. If any departure from the research procedure as approved, I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the committee.

_____Amber Eksteen_____ **___2/09/2019_____**

Student Signature **Date**