

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS

**Drag kings in Cape Town: Space and the performance of
gendered subjectivities**



A minithesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister
Artium in the Department of Linguistics, University of the Western Cape.

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Abstract

Drag kings in Cape Town: Space and the performance of gendered subjectivities

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MA Thesis, Department of Linguistics, University of the Western Cape

The last few decades have seen the development of a large body of scholarly work on drag queens and performances of femininity by men (see Barrett 1995, 1999). However, performances of masculinity by women have largely been overlooked. Research by scholars like Judith Halberstam (see Halberstam 1997, 1998) on female masculinity and the drag king performer has attempted to address this imbalance, but the phenomenon has yet to receive any attention from sociolinguists. This study aims to bring attention to performances of masculinity by women in the South African context through a multi-sited ethnography of the country's first known drag king troupe, Bros B4 Ho's. The study will examine not only the group's stage performances, but also their activity on the online social networking platform of Facebook, using multimodal critical discourse analysis. The internet has revolutionised the way we communicate and share information, and has provided interesting new arenas for individuals to explore identity performance. In extending the investigation to include the group's online activity, the study will give a more complete picture of the negotiation of drag king subjectivities across different spaces.

November 2014

Keywords

Gender, Language, Performance, Drag kings, Multimodality, Critical discourse analysis, Computer-mediated communication, Social networking, Cape Town, South Africa

DECLARATION

I declare that *Drag kings in Cape Town: Space and the performance of gendered subjectivities* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Mooniq Shaikjee



December 2014

Signed:.....

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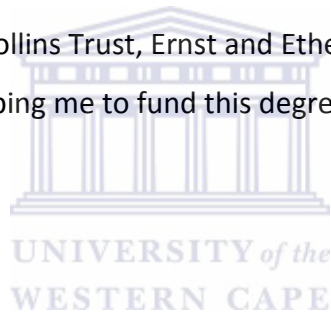
My sincere thanks go to my supervisors, Prof Stroud and Prof Milani, for their guidance, wisdom and support while writing this thesis. Thank you also to Dr Peck and Dr Williams for helping me to discover my dissertation topic.

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1 Introduction

In July 2012, the following image popped up on my Facebook news feed:



Figure 1 – Performance advert

It was a promotional poster circulating amongst some of my contacts, advertising a drag king performance in a small theatre in Observatory, Cape Town. I was intrigued, as I had never come across the term "drag king" before, so I decided to attend. I was pleasantly surprised. The performance was unusual, energetic and fun. My interest reasonably piqued, I did a little research after the show. According to cultural theorist Judith Halberstam (1997, 1998, 2001), a drag king is most often (but not always) a female who dresses up in costume that is recognizably masculine, and who performs theatrically in that costume. The intention is not simply to mimic or imitate men, but to parody and disrupt mainstream, dominant forms of masculinity. I soon realised, however, that other than Halberstam, very few scholars had looked into such performances, and sociolinguistic research on the phenomenon was basically non-existent. It was then that I decided to attempt to remedy the situation by making this drag king troupe, Bros B4 Ho's, the focus of my thesis.

Aware that I had come across this phenomenon through social media, and that I was using Facebook to keep track of how it was unfolding (by following the group's public page), I decided to include the kings' Facebook activity in my investigation alongside their stage

performances. In the years since Halberstam's research was conducted, the internet has revolutionised the way we communicate and share information. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have exploded in popularity, and provide interesting new arenas for individuals to explore identity performance. In extending the investigation to include the group's online activity, the study will give a more complete picture of the negotiation of drag king subjectivities in different spaces.

Before expanding on the specifics of this research, however, it would be useful to provide a little more background on the group under discussion here.

1.1 *The Drag King troupe – Introducing Bros B4 Ho's*



Figure 2 – Bros B4 Ho's

In November 2011, after attending a performance by drag king Johnny Deep at Bubbles Bar, a blogger posted a lament on her blog *The Butch Life* that there were too few drag kings active in Cape Town. A young student activist, Catherine Saint Jude Pretorius, decided to take up the challenge and created her own persona, rapper Saint Dude. Following a few successful performances at the open stage nights at Bubbles, and realising that other

women may also benefit from the catharsis she experienced while performing, Pretorius put out an invitation on the Facebook group Cape Town Lesbians for a gathering to discuss the possible formation of a drag king troupe. During this meeting, Pretorius explained what drag kings were and what motivated people to take up kinging, and by the end, four women and a transgender man had decided to create personas and join the troupe. At the time the data for this study was collected, the six personas regularly performed by the group were troupe leader Saint Dude, FreDDie, Umlilo John, Cory Lingus, Frankie H and Cole Steel Johnson.

The kings gradually made their debuts and started performing in pairs at Bubbles' open mic nights. They began to gain quite a following, so the bar introduced drag king Thursdays, taking place nearly every week. The troupe then organised their first sit-down event at Obz Cafe with the help of a burlesque group called Black Orchid Burlesque, and it was here that I was introduced to drag kinging. After a successful show, the troupe began to receive some recognition, with several blogs and small publications interviewing and writing articles about them. Their second formal show took place in December 2012 at Alexander Bar. A few months later, a local filmmaker who had been following the group from its conception, Samantha Lea, released her documentary called *Bros B4 Ho's* at the 2013 Out in Africa film festival. The documentary later screened at a similar festival in New Zealand.

It is clear from various interviews with the kings that the motivation behind starting Bros B4 Ho's was threefold. Firstly, Pretorius believed that a troupe could provide a safe, supportive space for a woman to experiment with kinging, where their gender-bending performances were encouraged. Frankie H, who at the time described himself as a "pre-op trans guy", said that the troupe was a space in which he could safely dress and behave as a man, and have his masculinity "celebrated".¹ He went as far as admitting that the affirmation he received while performing with the troupe allowed him to finally make the decision to transition (Frankie H, 2012). Another king, Umlilo John, said that being in Bros B4 Ho's allowed him to be butch without being ostracized, and that he viewed the troupe as a second family: it was as though he had gained new brothers and sisters at the same time (Lea, 2013). Several of

¹ Debut of Cape Town's First Drag King Troupe. (2012, July 20). TheButchLife.co.za. [Web Log Post]. Accessed 06/12/2013. Available URL: <http://thebutchlife.wordpress.com/2012/07/20/debut-of-cape-towns-first-drag-king-troupe/>

the other kings have also remarked on the familial nature of the troupe, particularly in terms of the acceptance and support that it brings them.

The second reason behind the group's formation is an overtly political one. In an interview with *Out* magazine, the kings explain that they "use satire, irony, and parody to subvert cultural hegemony and conventions and empower themselves".² In general, they appear to be familiar with the gender studies theory that has been used to analyse drag performances in the past. In an interview with Pretorius, I discovered that she felt it was her duty as the leader of the troupe to encourage the kings to do some research on what they were doing. "I don't like the idea of art just for the sake of nothing," she says. "It needs to have some kind of purpose."

Furthermore, Pretorius explains that kinging allows her to bring the complexities of her (and others') gender presentation to people's attention, and the fight for "gender presentation without persecution" (Lea, 2013) is part of her gender activism. When explaining her motivation to take up kinging, the performer who plays Cory Lingus expresses a desire to understand and relate to some degree of the difficulties that a trans friend has to experience every day, in order to become a better trans ally (Lea, 2013).

Another aspect of this political agenda, particularly on Saint Dude's part, is the desire to parody problematic types of masculinity, like St Dude's rapper/hip hop persona, in order to get the audience to question misogyny in music in particular. In an interview in their documentary, Pretorius admits that she was disgusted by her character when she saw him on screen for the first time, saying that he was obnoxious and annoying. She came to terms with him once she decided she needed the audience to be repulsed by this figure to drive her point about misogyny not being inherent in masculinity, but a trait that one can pick up and therefore as easily shed.

Lastly, the group aims to actively promote dragging as an alternate means of gender expression available to women. The kings intend to create a stronger drag king presence in

² Bros B4 Hos. (Spring, 2012). *OUT Africa Magazine*. pp. 40-41. Accessed 07/05/2013. Available URL: http://issuu.com/outafricamagazine/docs/out_africa_mag_issuu_12

the city of Cape Town, as well as demonstrate that it is possible for women to dress in drag as much as men.³ In an interview in their documentary, one of the performers, Marchané, admits that she would like her persona, FreDDie, to do for others what he has done for her – help people have the courage to be who they want to be and be accepting of whoever that is (Lea, 2013).

1.2 *Aims of the Study*

The aim of this project is to study the stage performances of the members of Cape Town's first known drag king troupe, Bros B4 Ho's, as well as their activity on the online social networking platform of Facebook, in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How do drag kings perform and parody masculinity on stage?
2. What semiotic and other resources can be used on Facebook for the performance of gendered subjectivities?
3. What are the broader political implications of the drag king phenomenon in this particular context? What do the performances accomplish by taking place here, that they would not had they been put on in Europe or the US?

More specifically, the aims of this study are

1. To discuss how these events allow audiences to reflect critically on ideologies of gender
2. To investigate to what extent the performances disrupt hegemonic masculinity
3. To explore the implications of these performances for Halberstam's (1998) theory of female masculinity
4. To explore the relationship between the two performance contexts (stage and online), and to determine how the kings negotiate their gendered subjectivities across the two domains
5. To explore to what extent performing a drag king act in this context can be viewed as an African decolonising project

³ Bros B4 Hos. (Spring, 2012). *OUT Africa Magazine*. pp. 40-41. Accessed 07/05/2013. Available URL: http://issuu.com/outafricamagazine/docs/out_africa_mag_issuu_12

1.3 *Thesis outline*

The next chapter will outline the main theories underpinning the study namely Butler's gender performativity, Coupland's high performances and Halberstam's female masculinity. It will also review Halberstam's study of the drag king phenomenon itself. Chapter three aims to give further background on the two ethnographic sites under investigation, specifically to consider the complexities of each in order to help us contextualise the performances better later in the discussion. In chapter four, I will outline the data-collection process, explain the challenges of doing a virtual ethnography, and give an explanation of the method of analysis I have chosen for this study, namely multimodal critical discourse analysis. Chapters five and six will include an analysis of the kings' strategies for performing and disrupting hegemonic masculinity on the stage and on Facebook respectively. Finally, chapter seven will bring the discussion to a close by exploring the political implications of these performances in this context.



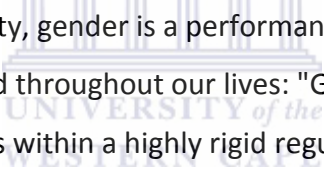
2 Literature review

2.1 *Gender performativity and female masculinity*

The past few decades have seen a change in the way sex, gender and sexuality have been conceptualised. There has been a shift away from conflating biological sex and gender, and then mapping this directly onto sexuality. In her work on gendered discourses, Jane Sunderland explains that gender is different to sex in that it refers only to differences between men and women that are “socially or culturally learned, mediated or constructed” (2004: 14), in other words, that individuals are not born with. At the same time, the terms “man” and “woman” have also been problematised, as they homogenise men and women by placing them into two monolithic categories. In addition, they present sex and gender differences in binary opposition, and do not take into account transsexual or transgender individuals. Baker breaks this binary down further by explaining that all people exist on a “gendered continuum” (2008: 63) rather than in two distinct, mutually exclusive groups, and their place on the continuum can shift in different contexts. Gender can therefore be seen as “contingent and fluid” (Sunderland, 2004: 19), and it is more constructive to talk about the existence of a multiplicity of gender identities, or the “masculinities” and “femininities” of individuals.

Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity has proven useful in conceptualising language users’ relationships with their gender (and other aspects of their identity as well). It has its origins in speech act theory, which argues that certain utterances said in the right contexts cause material changes in reality, such as promises, vows, prison sentences, and so on. Butler relates this idea to gender, saying that language can construct gender, that gender is not something someone has, but rather something that they do. This echoes the move from structuralist to post-structuralist conceptions of identity in sociolinguistics and related fields. From a structuralist point of view, language and conversational style are seen to reflect certain “stable” aspects of a person’s identity, such as ethnicity, race, social class and biological sex. The post-structuralist and postmodern perspective of language argues that people do not speak in a certain way because of who they are, but are a certain way

because of the way they speak (amongst other things). Sunderland (2004) explains that identity is not something that people have within them; rather it emerges from discourse – it is constantly constructed by individuals through their discursive practices. She draws on Foucault’s theory that discourses are potentially constitutive, and are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972: 49, cited in Sunderland, 2004: 8). Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that identity is the result of semiotic and linguistic practices, rather than their source. Although speakers can have some internal sense of self, it is only through language and discourse that they can communicate it to the outside world. Labels, implicatures, stances, styles, or linguistic structures and systems are some of the linguistic resources that can act as identity markers, but it is only in interaction that these resources have meaning. It is therefore possible for a person to use language and other semiotic practices to construct, present and perform their identity differently in different circumstances, in order to achieve different goals.



As with any other aspect of identity, gender is a performance that has to be constantly reiterated and publically displayed throughout our lives: "Gender is the repeated stylization 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" (Butler, 1990: 33). Over time, certain linguistic features and speech styles become associated with certain gender positions or identities, and are naturalized (or “congealed”). People are active producers of their gender identity, but they operate within a “rigid regulatory frame” that privileges some performances and punishes others. Looking at gender in this way allows us to focus on the linguistic (and other) resources that people draw on to index their place on the continuum, and we are able to investigate how they negotiate or resist the gender norms placed on them by culture and society.

Judith Halberstam's (1998) work on female masculinity is one such investigation. She aims to give a full account of the multitude of masculinities produced subculturally by female bodies, as well as to explore how these alternative masculinities "challenge the primacy, authenticity, and originality of dominant masculinities" (Halberstam, 2001: 433). Halberstam

(1998) argues that masculinity can exist without maleness and should not be reduced to the male body, and to support this argument she considers numerous instances where women have used masculinity as a resource to perform alternative gender identities. She looks primarily at butchness and butch lesbianism in history, literature and film, but also explores other personae such as "transgender dykes" and male impersonators. It is her belief that an examination of such identities allows us to see how masculinity is constructed. It also exposes the myths that make it difficult to separate masculinity from maleness, such as the idea that female masculinity is simply an imitation of maleness. According to Halberstam (1998), alternative masculinities are frequently framed in this way, as unoriginal and illegitimate, so that dominant masculinity can appear genuine and legitimate and thus retain and monopolise its power.

Halberstam's argument that masculinity can exist in isolation from men is challenged by Lucy Jones (2013) in her work on masculinity in lesbian discourse. She believes that even though masculinity is performative – a set of identifiable practices that are not inherent to men but that anyone can adopt – "hegemonic masculinity may be ideologically understood as synonymous with heterosexuality and fundamentally about maleness; it is relational, existing in opposition to women and homosexuals" (Jones, 2013: 4). She argues that if this is the case, then the term "masculinity" needs to be problematised when applied to women, specifically lesbian women. Jones (2013) questions discourses that associate stereotypical lesbian styles and behaviour with masculinity, and the idea that butchness is the same thing as masculinity. Her analysis of a conversation between members of a lesbian hiking group demonstrate that, for them, a butch identity is not about trying to emulate men, but a way for them to shun social scripts which say what kinds of bodies women should have or what lives they should lead. For these women, being butch is about the most appropriate way to be a non-heteronormative female, and masculinity is simply a vehicle for this identity, but not equal to it.

However, since the current project is an investigation of drag king performers, it is more concerned with instances of what Coupland (2007) terms "high performance" rather than

the quotidian identity performance under discussion in Jones' work. The next section examines his theories around such events.

2.2 *High performance and identity stylisation*

Coupland (2007) distinguishes between mundane, everyday identity performance during communicative events, and events which lie on the other end of the spectrum, which he terms "high" performance events. He cites a number of contextual features drawn up by linguistic anthropologist Richard Bauman (1992) which characterize high performances. High performance events are generally pre-planned and scheduled for a specific date and time. They typically follow a set programme, and are temporally and spatially bounded, meaning that the performance ends once you leave the performance venue, or once the time and date of the event passes. They are also coordinated occurrences, in that they rely on collaboration between different parties to be successful. Most importantly, they require the audience and performers to understand and keep to their respective participant roles. High performance events are generally also public events. Even if they are staged for very exclusive audiences, the audience members are positioned as part of a larger society.

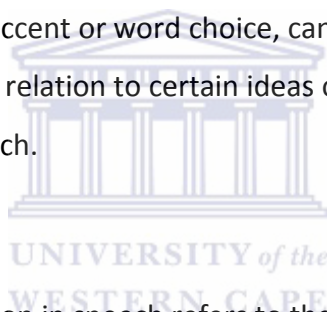
Coupland extends this description by arguing that high performance events involve different dimensions of communicative focusing. These include form focusing, where the linguistic form of speech during a high performance event becomes important, and the poetic and metalinguistic function of language is highlighted. Similarly, the meaning of utterances is focused as well, with an intensity or depth generally absent from everyday speech acts, termed meaning focusing. Situation focusing refers to the fact that in high performance events, the participants are not simply "co-present", but gathered specifically for this situation, and the participant roles of performer and audience are understood and followed. There is also a focus on the performer – termed performer focusing – where the performer holds the floor for most of the event, and there isn't the usual sequence of speaking turns we find in everyday conversation. Relational focusing refers to a focus on the relationship between the performer and the audience, and the fact that performances are often

performed for an audience, rather than just to it. High performances also involve a focus on achievement (achievement focusing) – they are attached to certain demands and expectations, which a performer can either succeed in or fail to fulfil. Lastly, a high performance is focused in terms of the repertoire, as the audience and performer are aware of what is given and new in a performance, which elements draw on existing pieces or genres, and what has been innovated.

Bauman (1996) argues that high performances are also often cultural performances, and that they function as a reflexive means of cultural expression. This reflexivity allows for cultural norms to be open for scrutiny by participants, and it is for this reason that high performances are useful for the study of society. He explains that high performances are reflexive in two ways: firstly, they are formally reflexive, in that they involve the manipulation of formal features of communication, and thus highlight and expose these features. High performances are therefore useful metacultural tools – cultural methods of objectifying and examining culture itself. Secondly, these performances are socio-psychologically reflexive. Performances involve putting the performing self on display to oneself and to others. Performers are therefore able to take the role of the "other" and then look back at themselves from that point of view, which allows for a critical analysis of identity.

During high performances, a relationship is formed between the performers and the audience, and a distinction is created between the performer-audience pair and wider cultural group or society. The meanings created by the pair are then seen in relation to the meanings present in the wider group, and this "duality of meaning" (Coupland, 2007: 149) is made evident and open for analysis. This is helpful for examining identity performances, because the identities projected during high performances are read in relation to meanings associated with those identities in society. When identity performances include out-group stereotypes of how members of particular groups behave, they "encourage a critical dialogue about the real versus the projected content of identity categories" (Coupland, 2007: 149).

In addition to theorising high performance, Coupland (2007) explores the notion of stylisation in order to understand how speakers use language to perform identities, in both high and everyday performances. As discussed earlier, sociolinguistic research in the post-structuralist tradition recognizes that speakers possess a degree of metalinguistic awareness: they are aware that different linguistic and semiotic choices will yield different communicative products. Even if they are not completely conscious of their options, or they find them difficult to explain, speakers are aware that they can make choices in order to achieve specific creative effects. According to Coupland, "Speakers design their talk in the awareness – at some level of consciousness and with some level of autonomous control – of alternative possibilities and of likely outcomes" (2007: 146). They are able to use this creativity to perform identities, for themselves or for an audience, since they are aware that different linguistic features, like accent or word choice, can present them in a certain way to other people, or position them in relation to certain ideas or values. Thus, it makes sense to say that speakers "perform" speech.



For Bakhtin (1981, 1986), stylisation in speech refers to the way we incorporate different voices into our own utterances in creative ways, often to achieve a subversive effect – to overturn and reappropriate hegemonic discourses or voices. Ben Rampton (1995) explored this idea in his work on Stylized Asian English, where he examined the ways in which school children creatively used elements of this variety to contrast their "usual" speech styles. These practices raised questions about whose "voices" the children were speaking in and what subversive effect they were trying to achieve with these choices.

Several significant criteria generally characterise instances of stylisation, according to Coupland (2007). Firstly, stylised utterances project personae and genres above those that are already within a speech event, and are familiar to the audience. As a result, stylisation is metaphorical. The characters and identities it projects are often stereotypical, and index

meanings and values linked to those groups of people or certain situations. By doing so, the speaker and her utterances are taken out of the immediate context of the speech event.

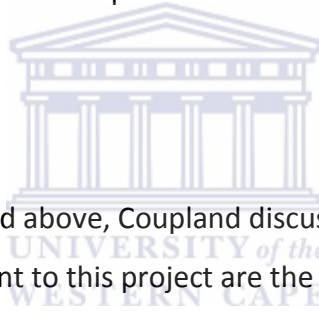
Moreover, stylisation brings attention to itself and its own processes. It is reflexive and metacommunicative in that it makes its own modality evident. To be understood and appreciated however, stylised utterances need an audience able to read the projected personae and make the semiotic links to the meanings they index. As a result, stylisation is closely linked to normative ideas about the speech styles of different discourse communities. By introducing a new social context within the situational frame of the current speech event, stylised utterances create a disruption that allows the participants to be critical about the "voices" and situations that are invoked. Participants in stylised speech events thus engage in comparing and evaluating the metaphorical identities that speakers are projecting and the real identities that the stereotypes obscure.

In addition, it is necessary that stylised utterances be exaggerated, emphatic versions of the styles they invoke in order to signal that the frame has shifted and that the speaker is playing with different voices and social meanings. A successful stylised utterance also needs creativity and performance. The speaker requires skill and the ability to learn how to accomplish these things. As a result, some people find stylization easier than others. Finally, stylisation can be considered "strategic inauthenticity" (Coupland, 2007: 154) that can affect personal and cultural authenticity in intricate ways.

Linked to ideas about high performance and stylisation are the processes of cultural entextualisation and decontextualisation. Bauman and Briggs (1990) argue for an understanding of culture as a discourse, which is performed by members creating and putting down "texts". Different ways of speaking and interacting are repeatedly used until they become common speech genres. This is termed entextualisation. In order to signal membership to a culture, and for a culture to continue existing, the texts must be constantly reproduced and reconstructed. If we take into consideration the fact that some speech

practices, like stylisation, perform a metacultural function, then we can say that "cultural continuity is achieved through creatively performed reiterations at the level of practice, alongside a process of critical reassessment of what these practices are like and how they define "us" and us relative to others" (Coupland, 2007: 154).

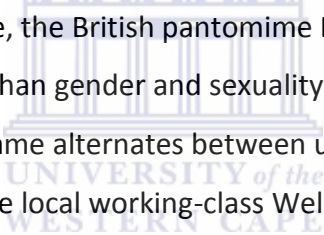
High performance events take these texts and ways of speaking out of their usual contexts and transfer them into new situations. These decontextualised texts can now be considered to be both within and outside the culture. This opens them up for reflection and scrutiny, and makes audiences aware that they can be moved around and applied creatively to new contexts. According to Coupland, this is important because it demonstrates that high performances should not be dismissed as "unreal", because they call attention to the disparity between real social practice and performed social practice, and in doing so, they allow for critical reflexivity.



To illustrate the theories discussed above, Coupland discusses several studies of high performance events. Most relevant to this project are the investigations into performances of gender and sexuality in drag and cross-dressing performances. He looks specifically at the use of accent and dialect in Rusty Barrett's study on African-American drag queens in the US and in his own work on the familiar pantomime Dame character in burlesque British theatre. Barrett (1999) examines the way in which African-American drag queens create a "white woman" persona with their language, to evoke American ideas about ideal femininity, and to experiment with "being a lady". They achieve this by using stereotypical "women's language", like hyper-polite forms, hedging and tag questions, and avoiding non-standard varieties like AAVE (African American Vernacular English). Barrett argues that the use of these speech styles and the performance of this persona is an ideologically laden choice linked to questions of identification as a black gay man. AAVE is frequently associated with young, working class, heterosexual black men. According to Barrett, this stereotype, as well as the cliché of the sexually potent heterosexual black man, leads to homophobia amongst African-Americans and racism amongst white gay men. Black gay men may then have

difficulties choosing between AAVE and all it signifies, and standard American English, which could index white gayness.

The white, upper-class, heterosexual woman persona allows these men to subvert assumptions about what their "real" identities should be. However, they do not portray this persona unproblematically. They often disrupt it by allowing AAVE markers to come through. In the extract Coupland reproduces, a drag queen apologises for swearing using the same swear words she says she is not supposed to be using. She also makes a sexual innuendo that reminds the audience that she really is a gay man. These shifts raise questions about issues of authenticity and inauthenticity, and remind the audience that identity is multilayered and fluid.



Although it is a cross-dressing role, the British pantomime Dame character Coupland examines plays with class rather than gender and sexuality. In this example, the show takes place in a Welsh town, and the Dame alternates between using very formal RP English, which indexes "poshness", and the local working-class Welsh vernacular. These shifts allow the Dame to be grouped alternatively with the working class Welsh audience, and with an upper-class of English descent. Sometimes her slip-ups make it seem as though she is faking her "poshness", and this strategic inauthenticity echoes the Dame's unconvincing femininity. As in the previous performance, the identity discontinuity here is subversive, highlighting the fact that identity is performative and multiple. Both performances also allow the audience to become aware of ideological and social meanings that are linked to sociolinguistic practices and different ways of speaking, and encourage it to reflect on, question and uncouple these links.

Now that we have considered gender performativity and high performance, it is possible to examine theories around a high performance of gender – drag kinging.

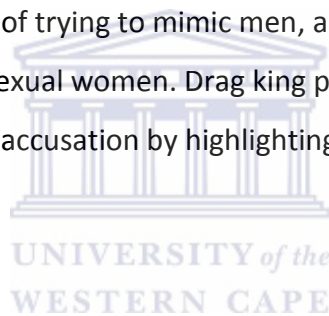
2.3 *Drag kings*

Unlike the male impersonator, whose goal is to pass as male and whose act is thus an attempt to pull off a plausible male performance, drag kings do not simply mimic or imitate men. They often seek to parody and disrupt mainstream, dominant forms of masculinity, by showing that they are not natural, "real", or stable, as they are believed to be, but purely performative. Drag performances function as a sub-cultural practice that attempts to disturb conventional beliefs about gender expression. Drag parades discontinuities between gender and sex or appearance and reality, but doesn't allow these discontinuities to be read as dysfunction (as they would be in ordinary circumstances). Instead, these inconsistencies become a site of gender creativity.

Halberstam (1998) argues that dominant masculinities are often presented as even more natural and "real" than dominant forms of femininity. Femininity is presented as artificial in mainstream culture, linked to a plenitude of props and "costumes": makeup to enhance facial features, underwear to accentuate curves, shoes to add height to the body, and so on. Masculinity, on the other hand, is made to seem practical and in need of no enhancement. Underwear and clothing adverts for men generally emphasise the sensible, no-nonsense aspects of their products, rather than aesthetic appeal. A drag king performance overturns and disrupts the idea that masculinity is natural and nonperformative by demonstrating that it is not inherently linked to maleness, and that a female or transgendered individual can perform masculinity as well as a male can. In doing so, it threatens the privilege that (white) males have traditionally held on to and the power that they derive from the assumption that masculinity is nonperformative, by allowing the audience to question this assumption. According to Halberstam (1998), this power and privilege comes from the belief that since masculinity is supposedly "natural", it cannot be affected or "put on". If this is accepted as true, then any forms of masculinity that seem performed or theatrical are questioned and treated with suspicion. Furthermore, they are labelled as derivative, a type of copy or imitation of an "original". The form of masculinity presented as the "original" is the most powerful and generally accepted as the norm. In most Western societies, it is generally white, middle class heterosexual masculinity that holds this privileged position.

An example of the privilege that comes with embodying a supposedly nonperformative masculinity can be seen when comparing black (male) "gansta" rappers with white (male) rock performers. The masculinity produced by the "gansta" rappers is generally showy and ostentatious, and very visible as performance when compared to the quiet, taken-for-granted masculinity of the rock performers. Sexism in rap music and performances is well known and often flagged up and discussed, and due to their visibility, these rappers have become symbols of male misogyny which conveniently overshadow the more obscure misogyny in white rock performances.

Like alternate masculinities, lesbian identity has also been labelled derivative or inauthentic. Butch lesbians are often accused of trying to mimic men, and femme lesbians of supposedly imitating drag queens or heterosexual women. Drag king performances function as a way for some lesbians to address this accusation by highlighting the artificiality present in all gender identities.



2.3.1 Halberstam's study of American Drag Kings

In her chapter on drag king performances within her larger work on female masculinity, Judith Halberstam investigates two different arenas within the development of a North American drag king culture in the nineties. She first examines the drag king contests that took place at Hershe Bar in New York between 1995 and 1996. Thereafter, she looks at the weekly drag king shows at Club Casanova that developed as a result of these contests. Both examinations reveal that different kinds of drag king culture emerged in these two spaces, with overlapping and diverging features.

The contests attracted mostly non-white, non-middle-class participants and audiences, and offered cash prizes to the winner. According to Halberstam, they consisted mainly of participants modelling their own masculinity, rather than performing a parody of

masculinity. They appeared to be judged based on how authentic and recognizable their brand of masculinity seemed to the audience and judges.

To make the drag scene in this arena easier to read, Halberstam sketches a typology of five different kinds of drag kings that appeared during the contests. This includes kings who display butch realness, where biological women attempt to portray convincing masculinities. These participants deal with dominant forms of masculinity by neither assimilating nor opposing them – Halberstam uses José Muñoz's term "active disidentification" (1998: 248) – and their performances become alternative masculinities in their own right. Other drag kings are femme pretenders, women who don exaggerated and overdone "male" costumes but don't attempt to conceal their femininity while doing so, so that the disjuncture between their biological sex and gender is evident. Male mimics are kings who attempt to pass as convincing men, without any irony or parody; in their performances the direct link between maleness and masculinity is left intact and reproduced uncritically. Some kings dress in fag drag, in which they reproduce gay male masculinities by producing drag aesthetics that gay men are known to adopt, like the "Castro clone" who dresses in leather and denim for a queer biker look. Lastly, some kings produce a denaturalized masculinity (Halberstam, 1998: 253), which, according to Halberstam, generally results in the most successful drag performances. Unlike butch realness and male mimicry, these acts attempt to uncouple the taken-for-granted link between masculinity and maleness through both imitation and theatricality, and so create alternate masculinities while parodying hegemonic masculinities.

The drag king contests gave rise to a new and popular subculture, a drag king nightlife. Club Casanova was specifically formed to be a drag king bar. Weekly drag shows were held, and these proved much more performative than the contests. The drag kings who performed developed various personae and entire comedy routines. However, in contrast to the contests, Club Casanova catered mostly for a white, punk, alternative crowd. The non-white, non-middle class participants and audiences with whom the contests were popular were largely absent in this arena. Halberstam notes that different forms of drag performances

seemed to form along these race and class divides. As mentioned earlier, the contestants at Hershe Bar paraded their own masculinities rather than perform as drag kings. She argues further that white drag kings' performances focus on humour and parody, whereas black and latino performances involve imitation of male role models and the appropriation of a black masculine style as a way to perform lesbian masculinity. As a result, the reproductions of sexy black masculinity were more successful during the contests, whereas parody and comedy were better suited to the longer, non-competitive performances at Club Casanova. Masculinities of colour and gay masculinities generally seemed easier for drag kings to perform because they were already visible and theatrical. White, heterosexual masculinities first had to be made visible in some way before they could be performed or parodied.

2.3.2 "Kinging"

The word "kinging" is a term coined by Halberstam to describe the theatrical performance of masculinity. It is intended as an alternative to the word "camp", which she believes does not accurately describe what drag kings do in their performances. Mainstream definitions of "camp" describe it as a style that is deliberately exaggerated and theatrical. However, this is generally understood to refer particularly to a theatrical performance of femininity by men. Halberstam argues that "[b]ecause camp is predicated on exposing and exploiting the theatricality of gender, it tends to be the genre for an outrageous performance of femininity rather than masculinity" (1998: 237). Camp is a critical comic style used mostly in drag queen performances to denaturalize femininity, usually through irony, incongruity, sarcasm and insult.

According to Halberstam, comic performances of masculinity require a different style and humour to be effective. As mentioned before, dominant forms of masculinity present themselves as real, natural and practical rather than theatrical. Therefore, a performance of masculinity is really a performance of non-performativity, or understated cool or macho. This would require a paring down of props and histrionics. The term "kinging" is meant to refer to a theatrical performance of masculinity, a reluctant and withholding performance

which "reads dominant male masculinity and explodes its effects through exaggeration, parody, and earnest mimicry" (Halberstam, 2001: 428). Halberstam also argues that the creation of a new term is necessary to avoiding conflating gay male histories and practices with lesbian ones.

"Kinging" a role can entail various styles that act as strategies to make masculinity theatrical and visible as performance. Some of these include quiet understatement, hyperbolic re-creation, doubling, masculine supplementarity and theatrical layering. The first of these techniques, understatement, involves withholding theatrics and performing a reluctance to perform, for example when a drag king pretends to be too shy or to have stage fright. In contrast to this, hyperbolic re-creation entails an exaggerated performance similar to camp. Whereas camp plays with the artificiality already within femininity itself, masculine hyperbole imitates itself. An example of this technique in action is drag king Murray Hill's performance of the Puffy Elvis, complete with tight white sequined jumpsuit and shades. In this performance, Hill does not simply impersonate Elvis in his golden years; he plays Elvis playing Elvis. Hill's other male personae are all middle-aged icons, like Bela Karolyi, the Olympic women's gymnastics coach, and John Travolta, and Hill uses these exaggerated performances to reveal the vulnerability of the male mid-life crisis.

Doubling and masculine supplementarity are techniques that require a second (or even third) performer on stage. Doubling involves two drag kings performing together in order to enhance and accentuate the drag masculinity, and this sometimes also creates an element of homoeroticism. With masculine supplementarity, a hyperfeminine drag queen or biological woman accompanies the drag king on stage. The woman's exaggerated feminine features both destabilize and confirm the drag king's masculinity. Firstly, they clearly highlight anything lacking in his masculinity. For example, in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*, the main female character, Vanessa Kensington, is confident, capable, and not to mention very tall, all traits lacking in the main male character, Austin Powers. At the same time however, the hyperfeminine woman positions the drag king as undoubtedly not female. Her femininity works to supplement any masculinity that he may lack.

Lastly, theatrical layering has to do with a drag king allowing his own butch masculinity to show through the male role that he is performing. Doing so allows the drag king to play with the boundaries between his off-stage and on-stage performances. It allows him to perform his own queerness as well as expose the artificial nature of gender. Layering often involves a striptease of some sort, in which a drag king strips off part or all of their costume to reveal the woman underneath. Some drag kings go even further by stripping to reveal a fake penis or dildo, or another persona or male costume. In doing so, they allow the audience to question the belief that hidden under the male image is their "true" form, a "real" woman. This kind of striptease attempts to demonstrate that gender is a continuum and not binary, and that all gender on the spectrum is, in fact, constructed.

Before embarking on an examination of how the drag king troupe Bros B4 Ho's makes use of these techniques, it is necessary to give some thought towards the context in which the troupe was created and now performs. As one of the aims of this study is to demonstrate how the online performances of masculinity by drag kings can work in conjunction with their theatrical stage performances, it is important to give equal consideration to both the online and offline performance environments. The next chapter aims to unpack the complexities of both contexts, in order to facilitate our analysis and aid us in our discussion of the broader implications of this phenomenon.

3 Ethnographic Context

In his work on the creation of an eroticised atmosphere in online chat rooms, Brian King (2012) has argued that the conflation of the terms "online" and "offline" with "virtual" and "real" respectively is problematic and simplistic, because it implies that online spaces are not "real". He challenges the idea that only tangible or material things should be considered "real", using Texas as an example. He argues that a place like Texas cannot really be seen or touched; it is merely the things that make up the place, such as the earth, rocks, and buildings that can be perceived, and yet Texas is very real to those who live there or know it. To someone who is not familiar with the place, Texas is no more real than an online chat room they have never visited. From this example it is clear that "material" and "tangible" do not automatically equal "real". King (2012) uses the term "places" to mean spaces which human beings have imbued with meaning. He explains that the meaning a space holds has to be constantly performed in interaction in order for it to be recognized as a place. Moreover, a place has to be a space that is recognizable to the human senses in some way. The only difference, then, between an offline place and an online place is that the first is both visible and tangible, whereas the second is only visible. Both are, however, very real to the people who use or "visit" them.

Identity work that is achieved by users in online domains should therefore be considered real, meaningful and as worthy of investigation as offline identity performances. It is for this reason that I would like to put equal emphasis on the kings' online performances of masculinity as their theatrical stage performances in this study. In addition, in order to move away from seeing the "online" world as a completely separate entity from the "offline" world, I mean not only to investigate both spaces equally, but also to examine the relationship between these two performance contexts and to explore how the kings negotiate their gendered subjectivities across the two domains. It is therefore necessary to consider the complexities of both ethnographic sites under investigation in this chapter.

Let us begin by examining the place in which the drag kings in question are most active online, namely the popular social networking site, Facebook.

3.2 Facebook

Facebook is an online social networking platform which allows users to connect with each other and share content. It was created by a Harvard student in 2004 as a means of intra-campus socializing between students, and later expanded to include other university campuses and high schools. By 2006 it was opened to other commercial organisations, and today any individual with a valid email address may sign up to the site. Facebook is particularly useful for examining identity construction and presentation as a major component of using the site involves self-presentation in the form of creating a personal profile that is on display to one's connections, or "Facebook friends". Zhao et al. (2008: 1832) refer to Facebook as a "multi-audience identity production site", as users can make use of the privacy settings to be selective in who sees what on their profiles, allowing them to present different "selves", or versions of themselves, to different audiences.

The look and feel of these profiles is regularly upgraded by Facebook administration in order to make them user-friendly, as well as to keep them fresh and exciting. Currently, the profiles are termed "Timelines" because they present a reverse-chronological log or mini-feed of a user's Facebook activity, with the most recent activity at the top. They are usually headed by the user's name, along with a profile picture and cover photo, as well as tabs which allow you to view the user's "About" section, additional photos, a list of their friends and networks, and their "Likes" (the pages that they follow, groups they are a part of, as well as their hobbies, interests, favourite books, movies, and music, etc.). The "About" section generally contains contact information, as well as information about the user's "gender", birth date, relationship status, religious beliefs, political affiliations, education, work history, and current location. In addition, it contains a list of their favourite quotes, as well as an "About me" blurb, which is a short, autobiographical statement about the user. Users are in control of the content of their profile information, and can choose not to include any of these elements as well. They are also able to control which elements are on display to which audiences through the site's privacy settings, as mentioned above. For example, a user may limit who can view their birth date, contact information and photographs, but may allow their profile picture, cover picture and "About me" blurb to be visible to anyone who looks them up on Facebook. The Timeline activity log itself contains

the content a user has posted, or "shared", which ranges from status updates, pictures and photographs, to video, audio, and links to other content online, such as articles or blog posts. Users are also able to control what appears on their Timeline activity log by editing posts or deleting posts made by their friends, as well as limiting the audience for individual items.

As Mehdizadeh (2010) observes, Facebook is an environment in which users have a high level of control over their self-presentation. It is an ideal platform for examining identity construction in a non-anonymous online setting, as users are required to make a series of formal decisions as they create and maintain their profiles. Users are able to exclude certain aspects of themselves, or emphasise or exaggerate others, in order to be read in a certain way by a certain audience. The transparency of the level of control that users have for self-presentation on Facebook has led much of the research around the site to focus primarily on the ways in which it is used to boost self-esteem, or how it has enabled narcissism, by allowing users to present more desirable, idealised versions of the self. (See Zhao et al., 2008 and Mehdizadeh, 2010) However, these studies are built on the assumption that offline identities are "stable", and that Facebook is a window into these "true" identities that can be manipulated so that only a certain (more desirable, attractive) view is presented. In doing so, however, they assume that similar self-presentation does not happen offline. As we discussed in chapter two, this kind of identity work happens in everyday interaction all the time. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue, identity is not the source of semiotic and linguistic practices, but rather the result of such practices. During everyday, "offline" interactions, individuals use language and other semiotic practices to construct, present and perform their identity differently in different circumstances, to achieve certain effects. In the same way, Facebook profiles do not simply reflect stable identities that are held offline, but are another linguistic and semiotic means for individuals to do everyday identity work.

Since Facebook allows for such a high level of control over self-presentation, it works equally well for creating and maintaining a drag persona online. Each of the kings in Bros B4 Ho's has their own Facebook page, in addition to managing the troupe's collective page. Pages are public profiles created for public figures, businesses, organizations, brands, and so

on. Facebook users are able to “like” pages, so that updates posted by the page administrators will appear in their news feed. Pages of public figures can be styled in a similar way to personal profiles. I believe that it would be beneficial to analyse the kings' pages in order to examine the ways in which the drag personas created onstage have been sustained online.

Studies investigating identity presentation on Facebook have identified several of the platform's features that are most often used as strategies for identity construction. In their study of college students' experiences on the site, Pempek et al. (2009) found that, in addition to describing themselves in clever or funny ways in the "About me" category, participants saw sharing lists of their media preferences – such as their favourite music, books and movies – as a way to say something about themselves to their friends. Zhao et al. (2008) arrange the identity strategies they identified on a continuum, from very explicit modes of self-presentation, like the autobiographical descriptions or status updates, to the more implicit, indirect modes, such as the display of users' activities, interests and affiliations through their photographs, lists of pages that they "like" and groups they are a part of. In this study, we will focus mainly on the cover and profile pictures, the autobiographical descriptions, and the information listed under the gender category of the kings' pages, in order to investigate how the performance of masculinity continues offstage.

More recent work on social media by Leppänen et al. (2013) attempts to move the focus away from simple identity presentation to processes of identification and disidentification. They argue that individuals do identity work by reflexively constructing themselves in relation to their surroundings, and that "identities are constructed in active processes of identification and selfunderstanding, seeking or eschewing commonality, connectedness and groupness" (2013: 2). Social media provides people with a meaningful space for shared social practice and interaction, and individuals are thus able to engage in the same processes of identification and disidentification that they do in other social environments. They are able to actively seek commonality with or dissociate from other individuals or groups in order to say something about themselves.

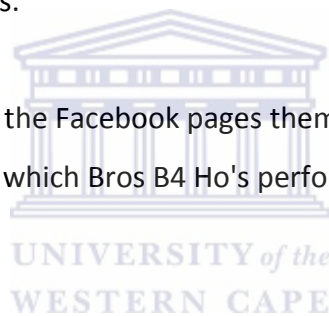
Furthermore, Leppänen et al. (2013) maintain that individuals are able to achieve this by mobilising Facebook's features through processes of entextualisation (Bauman and Briggs, 1990) and resemiotization (Iedema, 2003), which they argue are important resources for identity work on social media. As explained in the previous chapter, entextualisation is the process whereby texts and discourses are repeatedly used until they are sedimented into common speech genres. However, what is relevant for analysing identity on social media platforms are the two related processes of decontextualisation and recontextualisation. Through an examination of five case studies on different social networking platforms, Leppänen et al. demonstrate how users extract (or decontextualise) discourse material – or "instances of culture" (2013: 7) – from elsewhere, and then modify it while integrating it into the new context (recontextualisation), in order to communicate something meaningful about their identities. They also demonstrate how users resemiotise discourse material. Resemiotization refers to the process whereby discourses undergo semiotic change as they circulate. Users sometimes modify these texts in ways that allow them to take on new meaning and acquire new value.

Leppänen et al.'s (2013) focus on active (dis)identification, particularly through entextualisation, is relevant for our examination of the drag kings' Facebook pages, because the performances of their online personas are also relational – they perform their identities in relation to the well-known masculinities they are parodying, but also in relation to their stage acts. The kings decontextualise discourse and semiotic material relating to masculinity and recontextualise it on stage. In the process of creating their online personas, they then decontextualise the material from their live performances, and reposition it online. Entextualisation is thus a useful analytical tool for exploring the relationship between the two spaces in which the kings perform.

Over and above strategies for identity construction, Facebook's communication tools – like comments and messages – that allow users to interact with each other have interesting implications for drag performances. Firstly, they allow for the creation of a dialogue that isn't really possible during a stage performance. Members of the audience are able to interact with each other and with the kings themselves by commenting on the kings' Facebook activity and by posting messages on the page. They are able to give feedback to

the drag performances in a new way. Secondly, the communication tools make possible the formation of a network of people and organisations that all have an interest in or are linked in some way to the drag performances. It becomes possible for audience members to connect with each other beyond the performance events. In addition, the kings are able to follow, or "like", other pages which will then be on display to followers of the page. This means that audience members can be exposed to the pages of other drag kings, or groups or organisations that the kings are linked to or approve of. The third implication of the interactive nature of the pages is that the page acts as a way of bringing together or archiving any content linked to the performers or performances that appears on the web outside of Facebook. Kings and audience members are able to post links to the page that will be visible to anyone who follows the page. As we will see later, these usually include videos of past performances, links to blog posts by or about the kings, as well as articles about or interviews with the kings.

Before delving into an analysis of the Facebook pages themselves, let us take a closer look at the sociopolitical environment in which Bros B4 Ho's performs, namely, the city of Cape Town in South Africa.



3.2 Cape Town and De Waterkant

In his work on space, identity and interaction in Cape Town, Andrew Tucker (2009) points out that queer experiences cannot be generalised or homogenised across even one city. In South Africa in particular, queer experiences are made even more complex due to the way different communities had been spatially regulated under Apartheid. In order to take such complexities into account, he explores "queer visibilities" in his research, looking at how queer groups have attempted to overcome the heteronormativity of the particular urban spaces in which they find themselves. He also considers what options are available for them to do so and why, as well as how the communities perceive themselves and others when different visibilities are taken up.

In South African urban spaces, and in Cape Town in particular, queer visibilities are closely linked to the way people were classified according to "race" under the Apartheid regime. As

mentioned above, Apartheid's main strategy had to do with the spatial regulation of citizens – controlling how they could move and where they could live and work. As a result, different "racially defined" groups ended up being situated in different parts of the city. People were allowed to move around more freely once Apartheid came to an end in 1994, but this did not cause these communities to disappear. The unique history of this country has thus influenced the way its urban environments look today. This has consequences for the type of queer visibilities that arise, because since heteronormativity is not a monolithic entity and is shaped by other societal structures, it will take different forms in different spaces, and thus challenges to it will show similar variations. Therefore, it is important to remember that what is able to be made visible to the wider community and by whom is affected by the history of that particular space as well as the country as a whole. Taking all the above into account, it becomes clear that in order to understand the implications of the drag kings' actions beyond the confines of the theatre, we have to consider the kind of visibility that kinging offers in relation to the queer visibilities that are usually expressed in the spaces in which the troupe performs.

As explained in the opening chapter, the lead drag king in Bros B4 Ho's began performing solo at the open stage nights at a drag bar called Bubbles Bar. According to CapeTownMagazine.com, Bubbles Bar is "dedicated to the art of drag"⁴, but in practice it features primarily drag *queen* acts. Since the group's formation, nearly all their performances have taken place in this venue. The bar is situated in De Waterkant, a suburb located between Cape Town CBD and Green Point. Since one of the aims of this study is to gain an understanding of the broader political implications of these drag king performances, it is necessary to be familiar with the complexities of the space in which they take place. This section aims to provide some background into what is considered Cape Town's "gay" landscape, where this phenomenon began.

⁴ http://www.capetownmagazine.com/bars/Drag-yourself-to-Bubbles-Bar/53_22_17926 (accessed 15 September 2013).

It is not unusual to see Cape Town named South Africa's (or even Africa's) "gay capital" by magazines and websites.⁵ It is generally considered a liberal city, rated fifth in gay-friendliness after San Francisco, London, Sydney and Amsterdam. (Fine, 2001, cited in Visser, 2002) The Cape Town annual gay Pride parade attracts thousands of participants each year (Visser, 2002: 90), as does the Mother City Queer Project, a vast and extravagant themed costume party that takes place in December every year since 1994. The city has also become a popular destination for the "gay tourist", recommended in travel guides such as Spartacus⁶ and on travel websites like GayGuide.net, all aimed at gay travellers. The reason for its popularity is precisely because of the gay leisure spaces that were able to flourish thanks to the protection offered by the South African Constitution, in conjunction with the fact that Cape Town is an attractive holiday location which is able to offer typical "beach and romance" holidays similar to those available at European resorts at a much more affordable rate.

When the new South African constitution was being drafted in 1996 after the dissolution of the Apartheid regime, gay and lesbian rights activists were quick to make their case for the recognition of homosexual relationships in that document. Prior to this, homosexual practices and relationships had been prohibited. Since then, gay and lesbian communities in South Africa have become more and more involved in setting up "gay-centred" projects and organisations, many of which are dedicated to developing spaces in which gay identities and alternative sexualities can be expressed. According to Visser (2002), many of these spaces have centred around gay-friendly leisure activities, and this has set the context for the growth of a gay leisure market, particularly in Cape Town. One of these organisations, GALACTTIC⁷, has released a "Pink Map", which, like websites such as GayNetcapetown.co.za and q.co.za, provides potential gay tourists with information regarding leisure activities as well as gay-friendly establishments that would be of interest to them on their visit. These include clubs, restaurants, pubs, and at least eighteen guesthouses, clustered on the

⁵ For example, see Visser (2002: 87), as well as http://www.southafrica.info/pls/procs/iac.page?p_t1=2781&p_t2=7386&p_t3=0&p_t4=0&p_dynamic=YP&p_content_id=176937&p_site_id=38 (accessed 15 September 2013) and <http://www.mambaonline.com/article.asp?artid=6534> (accessed 15 September 2013).

⁶ <http://www.spartacusworld.com/en>

⁷ "Gay and Lesbian Association of Cape Town: tourism, industry and commerce". Created in 2000, GALACTTIC is a non-profit business forum that aims to foster a "stronger gay identity" in the city, as well as "promot[e] Cape Town's gay commercial and professional sectors" (Oswin, 2005: 573).

western edge of the CBD, in an area called De Waterkant. These gay leisure spaces have contributed to the development of a so-called "gay village" in Cape Town.

Much of the literature around this space has raised troubling issues that are not always acknowledged by mainstream media and advertising. The city's "gay village" is one of the biggest selling points of Cape Town as a gay-friendly city, and yet it is not as inclusive and progressive as it has been made to seem. Visser (2003) argues that gay spaces in De Waterkant do not provide a sense of community for all gay South Africans, but continue to disempower marginalized individuals by generally only welcoming wealthy, white males. He cites the extreme racial, gender and class inequalities and material imbalances brought about by Apartheid as the reason behind the area's inaccessibility to all but the "empowered White gay playboy" (2003: 124). Located in the heart of what was designated a white area before 1994, the "gay village" is situated quite a distance from where the majority of non-white Capetonians are currently living, in the former coloured and black townships of the city. Transport to De Waterkant at night is difficult for those without private vehicles, as public transport is limited and cabs are expensive. Middle class exclusivity is further reinforced by the high price of drinks and cover charges at these venues. In addition to race and class inequality, gender inequality exists in this space as well. At the time Visser conducted his research, there were no dedicated venues for gay women in De Waterkant. Currently this is still the case, as the only lesbian-oriented bar, Beulah, is open to both men and women. Other venues sometimes have designated lesbian evenings, but the women who frequent these are usually middle class white lesbians (Visser, 2003: 132).

Visser does concede, however, that the marginalised groups not represented by the "gay village" may have other ways of socialising and building community than participating in the leisure activities on offer in De Waterkant. In fact, William Leap's (2005) examination of the intersections between queer sexualities and geography in metropolitan Cape Town demonstrates that this is the case. Participants in his study were asked to draw maps of Cape Town "as a gay city" and then provided narratives to elaborate on their drawings, allowing the researcher to obtain both visual and verbal representations of queer experiences in relation to the geography of the city. While the sites of personal gay

experience of his white male participants did not reach beyond the city centre, other participants had a much less centralised portrayal of "gay Cape Town", with their maps showing that urban gay experience was not always limited to or even focused in the city centre. The maps drawn by the participants of colour often included the railway lines and highways that connected different parts of the city, representing Cape Town in terms of the routes they took when traversing these spaces on a regular basis. The drawings by the black participants also revealed that their experiences of the "gay city" were primarily township-based, but the city centre still had a prominent place in their narratives. One of the participants describes travelling from the township to the city centre as a movement towards safety, safety to be himself and the opportunity to express himself freely. However, he also relates an anecdote of being refused entry into one of the cities "gay" venues and thus acknowledges the problematic aspects of the space in relation to race and class. With regards to lesbian women, Leap noticed that the city centre was not the primary location of gay experience for them, and that, particularly for the black women participants, their social networks and the homes of their friends were more important than public locations. He also argues that, since most of the male participants did not comment on lesbian space at all, lesbian experiences were made invisible in their narratives in the same way that lesbian space is made invisible in the city's "gay" geography. Like Visser, Leap concludes that the Apartheid legacy still influences the experiences of gay South Africans, and even though they are gaining increasing visibility, the emerging urban gay culture retains old hierarchical mechanisms of exclusion.

Glen Elder (2005) takes a different angle in his discussion of this context by focusing on the representation of Cape Town as a "gay" tourist destination. Through a close reading of the promotional pamphlets, websites and other travel advertisements which market South African "gay" leisure experiences to international tourists, he argues that travel advertisers have attempted to invent a "gay landscape" in the city. He demonstrates how Cape Town is recast as an exotic but also familiar location for the international gay traveller, and in the process is *de-differentiated* (Elder, 2005: 44) from other urban gay centres around the world. In other words, the differences between the destinations are toned down or sometimes erased so that the city can be palatable to international consumers. He argues that this reimagination of Cape Town is problematic because not only does it downplay

complexities in order to make the city recognisable – and, in effect, interchangeable with other popular urban gay destinations around the world – it also masks social inequalities within the space to make it more relatable and less threatening to American and European visitors. Elder also points out that parts of the city are being refashioned into exclusively white, male spaces, and that men of colour are marginalized and women are made invisible in these spaces by these texts. His argument is that redefining the geography of the city in this way has real implications for Capetonians, because it is an attempt to disrupt real space in the city. This manufactured "gay" tourist landscape that excludes minorities is being casually imposed onto a landscape that still bears the scars of Apartheid spatial planning, and so will further marginalise these groups.

The studies by Visser, Leap and Elder have all demonstrated that this is a contentious space, as certain queer visibilities, like those by white men, are more easily expressed in this context, and that this is a space in which lesbian visibilities and queer visibilities of colour are hidden or erased. Against this backdrop, what does it mean, then, when a group like Bros B4 Ho's – made up of three white women, two black women and a white trans man – stages successful and popular drag performances in a space that is widely thought to be inaccessible and exclusionary towards women and people of colour? In this paper, I would like to consider the possibility that their performances could be seen as both a resistance to the exclusionary forces at play in these spaces, and as a challenge to the idea that "gay" leisure spaces in Cape Town only welcome the "empowered White gay playboy". Furthermore, I will explore to what extent this resistance can be seen as part of a larger African decolonising project that the kings are engaged in.

Before we do that, however, we need to take a closer look at the performances to understand exactly how the drag kings perform and parody masculinity. The next chapter details the methodology used to collect and analyse the data on which this study is based.

4 Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to examine the stage performances of the members of Cape Town's first known drag king troupe, Bros B4 Ho's, as well as their activity on the social networking site Facebook. I decided to adopt a multi-sited ethnographic approach for the data collection for this project. Ethnography was best suited for this study because extensive observations of the group's offline and online activity were needed in order to make sense of what these participants do as kings and to understand why they do it. As a methodology, ethnography aims to gain in-depth insight into human behaviour inside its context. Through immersing themselves in a setting and conducting interviews with participants, researchers are able to obtain rich data, in the form of very detailed descriptions of human actions and views, as well as how they interact with the context in which they are situated. This enables them to hypothesise about the meaning behind and function of human behaviour in the analysis of the data. Through observation, interviews and text analysis, ethnography helps us to understand people's lived experiences as embedded in their contexts. This is particularly useful for this study, which seeks to describe what the drag kings do, to try to understand why, to interpret possible meanings behind their actions and to speculate on the significance of their actions within the context.

One of the challenges that came with adopting this methodology for this study is that one of the ethnographic sites is located online. Christine Hine's (2000) work on virtual ethnography has been helpful in tackling this difficulty. It is an approach that aims to extend ethnographic methodologies to include the study of computer-mediated communication, and seeks to treat the things people do on the internet as sociological phenomena worthy of study. According to Hine, the internet provides interesting new forms of interaction and allows for novel community formation. In addition, it "can be seen as textual twice over: as a discursively performed culture and as a cultural artefact." (Hine, 2000: 39). In other words, it is both a cultural product (Woolgar, 1996) and a place where culture is constantly being created and recreated. Since ethnography strives to make sense of culture, it is well suited to studying human behaviour online.

Traditionally, ethnographic studies have treated written texts as less reliable than spoken data, because they are consciously constructed, and participants are able to put more thought into them and may make an effort to represent their actions or beliefs in a certain light in a way they wouldn't during a spoken interaction. Hine (2000) argues that texts created by participants are valuable for study because they give us insight into how our participants understand their reality. In the same way, digital texts created by participants should not be disregarded in ethnographic studies. During the analysis, both online and offline texts need to be "[tied] to particular circumstances of production and consumption" (Hine, 2000: 52), meaning that the reading and writing practices of the community under investigation need to be properly contextualised so that the texts are meaningful.

In this study, extending the ethnography to include an online environment gives us a look into how the kings perform masculinity using different semiotic resources available to them in this specific format, and also supplies texts in which they explain their actions and frame the practice of kinging in certain ways. Analysing these could give us an idea of how they understand what it is that they are doing and why. Furthermore, Wilson (2006) argues that integrating traditional and online ethnographic methods can be particularly useful for studies – like this one – which seek to trace connections between offline and online social practice.

I collected ethnographic data on this group from July 2012, when their first formal show was held, up until November 2013. Firstly, I attended four stage performances put on by the troupe in 2012, two of which were sit-down shows – the first at Obz Theatre Cafe in Observatory, and the second at Alexander Bar on Strand Street in the CBD – as well as two shows at Bubbles Bar in De Waterkant. At these events, my researcher status was that of participant observer, as I actively participated as an audience member, but also took field notes on costumes, songs performed, movements and dance, and the reactions of crowd.

After each event, I downloaded any available footage of the show off the group's Youtube channel for closer examination.

In addition to this, I was present at the official screening of the documentary about the group during the Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in April 2013. I noted down any interesting points that arose during the Q and A session with the group after the screening. The documentary was also downloaded from Youtube once it was put online, and viewed several times, with any interesting points or helpful information being noted.

With regards to the ethnography of the troupe's Facebook activity, I "liked" the group page and each of the individual kings' pages to ensure that updates to any of the pages would show up in my own news feed. Further than this, I did not participate as a "fan", refraining from commenting on posts, posting to the page or engaging in any kind of discussion. I merely observed, and captured screenshots of interesting or relevant occurrences relating to self-presentation specifically with regards to gender. I also used the Facebook pages to collect any online newspaper articles about or interviews conducted with the kings, as they regularly shared links to such content with their fans.

As Sade-Beck (2004) points out, one of the difficulties with conducting research online is the ephemeral nature of texts on the internet. They are not permanent or fixed – they can be changed, updated or removed completely at any time. I experienced this when I tried to access Saint Dude's page to double check a post near the end of my data collection period, only to find that the page had been removed because the performer had moved onto another project. This is why it was important for me to download and take screenshots of interesting moments on Facebook as soon as I came across them, so that I could have a permanent record and build my own database that I could access offline.

A further criticism that can be made of this methodological process is that deciding which moments of the online and offline performances are significant and worth noting is a subjective process. However, Hine (2000) reminds us that ethnographies should not be seen as faithful and unproblematic descriptions of culture, but as a researcher's individual interpretation of reality. She also points out that, due to the vastness of the Internet as a database, virtual ethnographies need to be strategic and focus on data that is relevant to specific research questions.

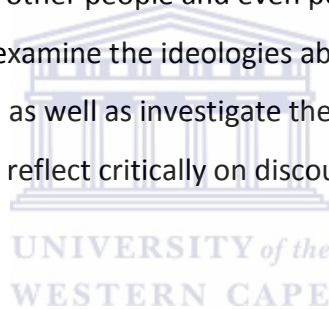
Once I had conducted preliminary analyses, I supplemented my data by conducting a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the founder of the troupe, Catherine Saint Jude Pretorius. This interview was meant to explore more deeply a few of the issues that had come up in my data, as well as to gain clarity on several points I was unsure about. I recruited my participant over the Internet, by sending a private message to her Facebook page which introduced me as the researcher, explained the research, and provided some detail about what the interview would cover. The questions and prompts used during this interview can be found in Appendix 5, and the full transcript of the interaction appears in Appendix 6.

In terms of ethical issues, I was granted permission by my participant to disclose her full name during the interview. Throughout this study, the other performers are referred to either by their stage names, or just their first names. With regards to the online content, any Facebook user can access the kings' Facebook pages by searching their names and then becoming a fan, and the Bro's B4 Ho's Youtube channel is public as well.

4.2 *Data Analysis*

In order to investigate to what extent ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative power structures are overturned or reproduced during these drag king performances, I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse my data. As a method of

analysis, CDA is primarily concerned with unravelling the ideologies and systems of belief behind discourse or meaning-making, in order to examine how power structures are created, negotiated and maintained through discourse. In order to investigate how power operates through discourse, CDA examines the way in which discourses – or patterns of talking or thinking about the world – compete. Underlying each of these discourses are ideologies and beliefs that compete with each other to become naturalized, or accepted as common-sense. For the most part, it is usually the discourses that serve the interests of the powerful in society that become naturalized and accepted as the way “the way the world is”. In turn, the ideologies that underlie these common-sense discourses become naturalized as well, and it is in this way that power is exercised through language. Rather than use physical force, powerful groups are able to maintain and exercise their power by manufacturing consent – by circulating their ideologies couched in discourses until they become naturalized, accepted by other people and even perpetuated by them. Using CDA for this study has allowed me to examine the ideologies about gender that underlie drag king performances in Cape Town, as well as investigate the ways in which these performances allow audiences to reflect critically on discourses and ideologies of gender that have become naturalized.



Discourse analysts base their analyses on the understanding that any text created is ideological because text producers constantly have to make certain semiotic choices and not others – consciously or unconsciously – when representing an aspect of reality. As analysts, we try to understand how and why certain semiotic resources have been used in a text to define reality in a certain way, and what the ideological implications of these choices might be. In this study, we are attempting to decode the discursive and semiotic choices made by the kings in the performance of masculinity, and to understand what they believe a disruption of such a performance looks like. This will give us insight into the ideologies of gender and masculinity that inform their performances.

Initially, studies which made use of CDA as a methodology focused only on texts from written or aural sources as data, such as newspaper articles or speeches. In recent years,

however, approaches to textual analysis have increasingly become more multimodal, with other modes such as visual images being included into conceptions of discourse. Ideas around multimodality originated from Halliday's early work, in which he argued that language is only one of several semiotic resources used in communication, and that other non-linguistic systems of representation, like images, can be used to construct discourse. A multimodal approach to CDA is useful in this study, since the drag king performers under investigation rely on various semiotic resources to perform masculinity, and much of the data I have collected, such as photographs and video clips, is multimodal in nature.

According to Halliday (1985), signs in a complex semiotic system do not have one fixed meaning, but could mean a variety of things depending on the elements they are combined with. He termed this a sign's meaning potential. The realisation of a sign's meaning potential depends entirely on the way it is combined with other signs in a kind of visual grammar. One is then able to interpret the meaning behind these combinations because signs fit within a system and their meaning lies in reference to the other signs in the system. It is our knowledge of the system allows us to understand why certain choices of signs were made, and why some were not. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) also remind us that this visual grammar is by no means universal, because the system that signs fit into are culturally specific. Not long after, there was a shift from using the "grammar metaphor", with its connotations of "rules", formality and stability to a focus on "semiotic resources". Kress (2010) explains that, unlike the unchanging nature of grammar, resources are not fixed but socially made, and are constantly remade according what is needed in a text or interaction at the time. In this study, we will be investigating the "semiotic resources" the kings make use of during their performances, rather than the visual grammar approach. In addition to this, when examining the Facebook data, I have tried to understand the "affordances" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) that the platform provides for a gendered identity performance. Kress (2010) explains that each technology that is used to create and communicate meaning has affordances, in that it facilitates some forms of meaning-making and inhibits others. These affordances then shape the way we communicate and perform identity.

Now that I have outlined the methodology used to collect and analyse the data of this study, we can move on to examining the drag king shows more closely, beginning with their stage performances.



5 Stage Performances

In this chapter, I will be examining the stage performances held by the kings of Bros B4 Ho's, in order to ascertain how they construct gendered subjectivities semiotically, as well as to investigate to what extent their performances disrupt *and reproduce* hegemonic ideas about gender. Before delving into an analysis of their performance strategies, however, I would like to consider Bauman's (1992) theorising around performance as a tool for reflecting critically on culture.

5.1 *Cultural performances*

As discussed in chapter two, *cultural performances* (Bauman, 1992: 44) are communicative events during which performance is the most important mode of communication. In these occasions, the communicative act is put on display for an audience, and is thus objectified and able to be intensely scrutinized. In order to be recognized and interpreted correctly, such events are keyed or framed in specific ways – they are scheduled to take place at a specific time; they are temporally bound with a clear beginning and end point; they are spatially bound, occurring within the confines of a set place; and they follow a pre-organised programme. In other words, they are highly coordinated and public occasions. According to these criteria, it is clear that the drag king events under discussion here can be considered cultural performances, and that the audience is meant to objectify and pay special attention to these performances of masculinity.

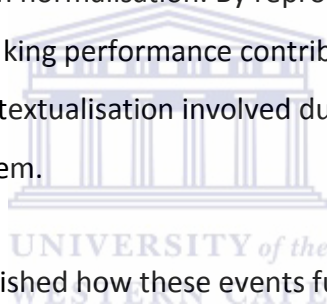
It is valuable to think of performances of drag in this way because it allows us to understand their usefulness for being critical about normative beliefs around gender in our culture. Cultural performance is a way for people to use a different mode – "sensuous images and performative action" (Bauman, 1992: page 47) rather than explicit verbal articulations – to express their understandings of reality, their cultural beliefs and values. It is also a way of scrutinising cultural norms, as well as culture as a system of meaning itself. Similarly, drag king performances are a way to display and hold up normative understandings of masculinity for interrogation.

Bauman goes on to argue that we are much more conscious of the formal features of communication during cultural performances than we are in everyday conversation, because of the obvious ways in which they are being manipulated. The same is true of such performances of gender, in that they highlight the strategies people use to evoke gendered identities, and make it visible as performance. In addition to being formally reflexive, cultural performances are socio-psychologically reflexive as well. The performing "self" or the character that is on stage is on display not only to the audience, but also to the performer, who is then able to remove themselves from and objectify their performance. This is useful for drag performers because it allows them look back at the persona they have presented on stage with a critical eye. In an interview in their documentary, one of the kings admits that she was disgusted by her character when she saw him on screen for the first time, saying that she thought he was obnoxious and annoying. She was able to come to terms with him once she decided she needed the audience to be repulsed by this figure so that they could understand her criticism of this version of masculinity (Lea, 2012).

Coupland (2007) argues that not only do cultural performances (or high performances, as he terms them) create meaning about culture and identity through the relationship that forms between the performer and the audience, but also through the distinction that is created between the performer-audience pair and the wider cultural group or society. The meanings created by the pair are then seen in relation to the meanings present in the wider group, and this "duality of meaning" (Coupland, 2007: 149) is made evident and open for analysis. In theatrical performances of gender, the portrayal and critique of masculinities that happens during the performance is read in relation to meanings associated with those masculinities in society. When these portrayals are stereotypical or exaggerated, the duality of meaning encourages the audience to reflect on the disparities between what is happening on stage, and "real", everyday performances of masculinity that are enacted outside the event.

High performances are also able to do critical work through decontextualisation (Coupland, 2007). How this works becomes clear once we think about the emergence of normative ideas around gender using Bauman and Briggs' (1990) concept of entextualisation. Entextualisation is the process whereby culture and cultural norms come into being through

the continual laying down or sedimentation of "texts", or ways of speaking and interacting, until they become common speech genres. This mirrors Butler's assertion that gender is "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" (1990: 33). High performance events like the drag king show contribute to entextualisation and build on cultural meaning because they too (re)produce texts. However, they also decontextualise the existing texts that they draw on, as they transfer them from their original contexts into a new context – that of the theatrical performance. In doing so, the audience is also temporarily transferred away from the context of the performance and into the context to which the text being drawn upon originally belongs. This movement between contexts then allows the performance of the cultural forms to exist both inside and outside of the culture, and this distance allows the participants to reflect on or think critically about things usually taken for granted or made invisible through normalisation. By reproducing gendered behaviour when performing masculinity, the drag king performance contributes to the sedimentation mentioned above, but the decontextualisation involved during the shows also makes it possible to reflect critically on them.



Now that we have broadly established how these events function as cultural performances and the ways in which they allow audiences to reflect critically on ideologies of gender, we can take a closer look at the drag king shows put on by the troupe Bros B4 Ho's.

5.2 *The drag king performances*

As mentioned in chapter 4, since the formation of Bros B4 Ho's in 2012 nearly all their performances have taken place at Bubbles Bar, with the exception of two shows, the first at Obz Theatre Cafe in Observatory, and the second at Alexander Bar on Strand Street in the CBD. These two events will be the focus of this analysis.

Both events were slightly more formal than those held at the drag bar: they were sit-down performances, advertised through the group's Facebook page with tickets sold online. They also had a set programme, opening and closing with a performance by the group as a whole, with a series of acts by individual kings in between. The group performances were

accompanied by choreographed dances, with the kings wearing matching costumes, and individual performers were introduced by another member of the group, usually through some witty dialogue or a funny or endearing anecdote. According to the founder of the group, Catherine Pretorius, audiences at their main events were predominantly queer women, and men who wanted to become drag queens making use of the open stage platform at the drag bar (personal communication).

Unlike the comedy routines Halberstam (1998) observed at drag king club Club Casanova, the drag kings of this troupe perform mostly through musical acts, choosing their personae based on musical genres and then lip syncing or singing appropriate songs, performing the masculinities they associate with those genres. I believe that there are several reasons the kings choose to perform in this way. Firstly, the environment played a role in shaping the form of these acts, as confirmed by Pretorius in our interview. The drag bar in which the kings started out usually featured queens doing live music performances. There is quite a strong drag queen culture in Cape Town, and nearly all the drag queen performances I have seen here have all included queens performing as well-known female singers, for example Shangela's performance of Beyoncé at Miss Gay Western Cape 2013, and Manila von Teez as Lady Gaga at Zer021 Lounge, a bar in the CBD. It is not surprising, then, that the kings chose to follow the example of the queens around them in designing their acts.

Secondly, Pretorius is particularly interested in using her drag persona to critique what she calls "hip hop masculinity". She explains,

Rapper Saint Dude is based on Lil Wayne, and exists to parody and satirise male cultural hegemony in hip hop music. I am a big fan of this genre but I feel that it is dominated by men who express masculinity through sexism and misogyny. By making a spectacle of this behaviour, I hope to draw attention to the problematic nature of hip hop masculinity. I also hope to show people through the rhymes I write myself, that there is no inherent link between masculinity and misogyny ("Bros B4 Hos", 2012: 40).

This focused critique led her to choose singing and rapping as Saint Dude's act during the open mike nights that were a prelude to forming the troupe, and that this simply continued

once more kings joined him. In my interview, she explains that this was "a comfortable process and it was one that just happened by itself". She goes on to say,

Because hip hop was really important for me, I encouraged the other boys to find a persona that really resonated with them. [...] Umlilo, funny enough, the only other black person– coloured person also took up a hip hop persona. The other boys did rock music. So I guess we just [...] modelled ourselves on characters, on men that already existed.⁸

Finally, choosing to perform masculinity through musical genres – particularly genres traditionally dominated by men – is a strategy for the kings to make masculinity, chiefly white masculinity, visible. As discussed in chapter two, Halberstam (1998) argues that dominant masculinities are often presented as more natural and "real" than dominant forms of femininity, not theatrical or "put on" in any way. In particular, white, middle class heterosexual masculinity is positioned as "normal", and thus made invisible. Halberstam (1998) points out that, because of this, it can only be performed once it has been made visible and theatrical. Choosing to perform through musical acts allows the kings achieve this visibility and theatricality, as they are able to perform the showier masculinities that accompany musical genres like rock and hip hop, and even the pop music of the "boy band".

Halberstam's term "kinging" (1998: 258) is meant to refer to a theatrical performance of masculinity, a reluctant and withholding performance which "reads dominant male masculinity and explodes its effects through exaggeration, parody, and earnest mimicry" (Halberstam, 2001: 428). "Kinging" a role can entail various styles that act as strategies to make masculinity theatrical and visible as performance, and generally requires a paring down of props and histrionics as it entails "performing nonperformativity" (Halberstam, 1998: 259). In the next section, we will unpack the strategies used by Bros B4 Ho's in the two sit-down performances that were put on in 2012, using multimodal analysis where appropriate.

⁸ See Appendix 6 for transcription conventions used.

5.2.1 Performing masculinity

As we established earlier through Butler's theory of performativity, gender is not something that is intrinsic, flowing directly from our bodies, but rather a performance that has to be constantly reiterated and publically displayed throughout our lives. People are active producers of their gender identity, but the "highly rigid regulatory frame" (Butler, 1990: 33) within which they operate privileges some performances and punishes others. Over time, certain linguistic features and speech styles become associated with certain gender positions or identities, and are naturalized (or "congealed"). Their socially constructed nature is obscured and it becomes generally accepted that "this is just the way things are". The constant repetition of certain behaviours by some genders functions as "on-going gendering processes that tightly link certain bodily poses, facial expressions, hair-cuts, clothing, and even drinks with either men or women" (Milani, 2014: 5). These ways of being and behaving become signifiers of gender over time, and these signifiers are used to communicate a person's gender identity to the world. The drag kings in this study are then able to draw upon these associations and fashion their acts, personae, and costumes from signifiers that are closely linked to men and masculinity.

We can begin examining the drag kings' performances of masculinity by focusing on the visual signifiers of masculinity they adopt in the costumes they don during these performances. Each outfit seems to be made up chiefly of elements from what is generally considered men's clothing, such as ties and hats, and collared button-up shirts, pants, and waistcoats.



Figure 3 – The Bros take a bow

In most cases, clothing is also chosen for its baggy quality. Tighter clothing tends to accentuate the curves of a person's body, whereas baggy clothing hides these and makes the wearer look more angular. Some of the kings also try to bring the angular look to their faces by using makeup to change the shape of their cheeks and jaws, to make them appear chiselled and more defined.



Figure 4 – Cole applying make-up

Machin (2013) points out that angular objects bring to mind hardness, because of the metaphorical association with hard objects that have angular edges. Things that have curves suggest softness, because soft objects usually have more rounded, curvier edges. Traditionally, hardness is a trait associated with masculinity, possibly because of associations of hardness with strength, and strength with masculinity. Curvy bodies are also

considered feminine because they are strongly linked to women, due to the hips and breasts associated with women's bodies, even though there are many parts of a man's body that may be considered curvy. Furthermore, men who wear tight clothing that shows off their bodies are often ridiculed, labelled effeminate, gay or narcissistic, or even threatened (See for example Penney, 2012).

Makeup and false hair applied with glue are also used to give the impression of facial hair and to lengthen sideburns. While people of any gender can have facial hair, hegemonic scripts of gender only allow for men to grow significant beards or moustaches. In contemporary Western society, dominant forms of femininity are associated with compulsory (body-) hairlessness. Body hair on women is generally considered unattractive and distasteful (Basow and Braman, 1998) and female facial hair thought to be freakish and abnormal (Hamlin, 2011).

In the picture above (Figure 4), we can also see how the performer who plays Cole has pinned and gelled her hair back to make it appear shorter than it is, while the other performers seem to keep their hair short off-stage as well (except for Pretorius, whose dreadlocks work well for her Lil Wayne-inspired persona). Short hair is currently linked primarily to men and masculinity, possibly because of associations with military hair cuts on men in modern wars, and with the connotations of short hair with practicality. However, long hair on men has recently become slightly more acceptable in Western cultures, although it is more likely to be linked with alternative masculinities, probably because of its associations to the hippie movement of the sixties.

A few of the kings also incorporate sunglasses into their costumes. Shades make the performer appear cool, serious and distant, by concealing the eyes and any emotion that could be read through them. Looking impassive gives the sense that the individual is in control of their feelings and their bodies, and that perhaps they value reason and logic over sentiment. Traditionally, men have been seen as logical and in control of their feelings, whereas women are stereotypically thought to be emotional and less logical. This explains why not showing emotion is generally associated with men. As we can see, the links between certain ways of being and specific genders are often based on – and reproduce –

problematic stereotypes about men and women. This is further discussed later in this chapter.

Lastly, the kings of Bros B4 Ho's also use binding and packing to alter their bodies to seem more manly, something they discuss amidst much laughter in their documentary. Binding involves wrapping bandages tightly across the breasts to flatten them and give the appearance of a flat, muscular chest (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – Frankie explains binding

Packing refers to stuffing the crotch of one's pants to give the appearance of bulk in that area, hinting at the presence of male genitalia, although Umlilo admits that, for him, it is more about the feeling of the packing between one's legs, and the way that the bulk changes one's walk. (Lea, 2012). Both packing and binding have to do with concealing or altering the female body, making the resemblance to the male body greater.

Another strategy for evoking masculinity has to do with body movement. At this point, I'd like to refer to one of the kinging strategies Halberstam discusses in her work, namely, quiet understatement (1998: 259). This is a term she uses to describe limiting theatrics and displaying a reluctance to perform, and it comes through quite clearly in the way the kings dance to their songs. Throughout most of the acts, the kings tended to restrict their movement to a small area of the stage, and although there was much jumping around and jerky head-bobbing, the dancing was nowhere near as frenetic as the dancing I observed in

the few drag queen shows I have attended (see Halberstam, 1998: 238 for the differences between the dancing during a drag queen and drag king performance). Once again, associations with curves and softness were limited by avoiding any sensuous or lithe movement. In fact, this strategy worked so well that when Umlilo had to perform a hip hop song sitting on a chair due to a hip injury, it seemed completely natural and not awkward or strange at all (Figure 6).



Figure 6 – Umlilo performs on a chair

Other strategic movements incorporated into the dancing included those linked to a music genre, like playing an air-guitar during a rock song or the hand movements that often accompany rapping, as well as hip thrusting and crotch-grabbing. Grabbing the crotch in public is something that is generally more acceptable for men to do than women, and is considered boastful and aggressive (Milani, 2014). It is also a move adopted by many male music performers during their dance routines on stage and in music videos (Michael Jackson's, for example). In the performances, the kings usually grab their crotches at moments when they are trying to show off their masculinity or sexual desire for a woman. For example, during their first group number at Obz Cafe, King Cory Lingus grabs his crotch when he sings the words "You wanna play with my new-found toy?", a direct reference to the "penis" that is a part of his costume.⁹

⁹BB4H (We Will Rock You) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nV37oYcS6g>



Figure 7 – Frankie grabbing his crotch

Hip thrusting occurs at similar points, and is overtly and aggressively sexual. In the performance mentioned above, Frankie thrusts his pelvis towards the audience when he sings "So hey girls, if you want some sudden exposure [gestures at crotch], come on, hike your skirt up and prepare to lean over!" This movement is probably linked to masculinity because it is reminiscent of the active partner in a sexual act, a role which, in sex between men and women, is stereotypically played by the man. Both crotch-grabbing and hip thrusting in this context are linked to performing heterosexuality, an important aspect of portraying normative masculinities. As Jones (2013: 4) explains, "hegemonic masculinity may be ideologically understood as synonymous with heterosexuality."

A good example of a performance of heterosexuality is Frankie H's rendition of Sir Mix-A-Lot's *Baby Got Back* at the show in Obz Cafe.¹⁰ During this act, Frankie wears a sleeveless black vest with the words GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS printed on it, and in smaller print, the words "Girls I do adore". Each letter "i" in the larger print is a silhouette of a thin, curvy woman posing in a suggestive way (See figure 8). The shirt acts as a prop that spells out Frankie's sexual preference.

¹⁰ Frankie H (I Like Big Butts) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTF-7GZkzAA>



Figure 8 – Frankie

To reiterate his heterosexuality, Frankie performs the song with two very feminine back-up dancers, whose appearances very carefully draw on elements closely linked with dominant narratives of femininity. They are dressed in short, tight black dresses that show off their legs and their curvy figures. The "sexy little black dress" is considered a classic and timeless feminine piece of clothing that some magazines insist all women should own. The women also have long, loose hair and wear makeup, which they have used to highlight their lips and eyes, unlike Frankie, whose makeup adds the appearance of facial hair to his face.

Halberstam refers to this strategy as masculine supplementarity (2001: 428), when a hyperfeminine woman or drag queen joins a drag king performance to both supplement the king's masculinity and destabilize it by highlighting anything he lacks. The back-up dancers also contribute to an intertextual link between this performance and the hip hop music videos screened frequently on music channels like MTV. Throughout the song, Frankie exaggerates his attraction to the women, touching their bodies and grinding against them as he dances. The song itself is also significant, as it expresses quite explicitly a man's sexual desire for a woman's body, for example with the well-known lyrics,

I like big butts and I cannot lie

You other brothers can't deny

That when a girl walks in with an itty bitty waist

And a round thing in your face

You get sprung

(Sir Mix-A-Lot, 1992)

In this context, the word "sprung" refers to having an erection, reiterated by the way the singer grabs his crotch at this point in the music video.

He once again signals the importance of heterosexuality to his masculinity by modifying some of the song's lyrics to emphasise this point. In the original, Sir-Mix-A-Lot praises black women's bodies with the line "Even white boys got to shout", implying that black women (with the "right" body shape, of course) are so desirable that even white men have to admit to being attracted to them – the assumption being that it is the norm for white men to desire white women. In Frankie's version, the line is "even gay boys got to shout", meaning that women with big behinds are so desirable that men who aren't usually expected to desire women's bodies would do so. In marking the "other men" as "gay", Frankie positions himself as a straight man.

At the same time, Frankie uses this song to perform misogyny and sexism as part of hegemonic masculinity. The lyrics objectify women by reducing them to a single body part that is highly sexualised. In the original music video for the song, when the camera is on the (women) dancers, it often focuses almost exclusively on their behinds. As discussed earlier, Bros B4 Ho's is explicit about wanting to critique masculinity expressed in this way, and Frankie's exaggerated and comic performance of Sir Mix-A-Lot's hit song parodies the male gaze and the objectification of the original song and music video.

In general, the decision to sing songs originally performed by male artists is an effective way of performing masculinity through intertextuality. Through the allusion to previous performances, the audience is invited to associate the meaning-making of the original act with the current performance, and the masculinity of the original singer with that of the drag king. However, it is important to remember that drawing on or repeating earlier texts – which is termed iterability – does not entail straightforward duplication. Butler argues that iterability is a "dynamic" process (Milani, 2007: 103): the differences that inevitably arise in the recurrence of discourses or visual tropes inflect the new text in ways that produce new meaning. In the drag king acts, the covers of existing songs and allusions to other

performances of masculinity, along with the costumes, body movement, and the enactment of heterosexuality all work together to evoke masculine personae. However, it is important to note that they do not simply attempt to present the most "authentic" performance of masculinity possible, but are shaped by the double meaning afforded by the drag performance. The reproduction of masculinity is troubled by the audience's knowledge that there is a non-male-bodied person behind each performance. This extra layer of meaning contributes to disrupting the normative scripts of masculinity evoked in these performances in interesting ways.

5.2.2 *Gender trouble*

The first and arguably most important work that this troubling knowledge does is that it makes the performativity of gender visible. By demonstrating that successful performances of masculinity can be produced by people who are not men, it denaturalises masculinity, bringing attention to all the props and strategies that are needed to perform it successfully (Milani, 2014). In doing so, it also disrupts the "coat-rack" model of gender (Nicholson, 1995): the idea that gender maps directly on biological sex, and that masculinity flows naturally from male bodies, and femininity from female bodies.

In addition to this, the audience's knowledge of the female performer behind each persona allows for the reinterpretation of the depictions of heterosexuality discussed earlier. For example, Frankie H's exaggerated attraction to his back-up dancers during his rendition of *Baby Got Back* takes on homoerotic overtones, because while it is a *performance* of a man desiring women, to the viewers it is also a demonstration of a woman desiring other women. This is confirmed by the audience reactions observed at these points during my fieldwork. Without fail, each time the kings performed sexual attraction – towards each other, towards supporting women performers or women in the audience – the crowd erupted with hollers, wolf whistles and laughter. Halberstam observed a similar phenomenon in her study, and termed this kinging technique *layering* (1998: 260) – when a drag king chooses to layer a male role over their own masculinity – which results in a sexy drag act that is very popular with lesbian audiences, who appreciate not the maleness on display but the butch (often lesbian) women they can see underneath. She goes on to say,

Layering really describes the theatricality of both drag queen and drag king acts and reveals their multiple ambiguities because in both cases the role playing reveals the permeable boundaries between acting and being; the drag actors are all performing their own queerness and simultaneously exposing the artificiality of conventional gender roles. (1998: 261)

In a similar way, the presence of the female performer also uncouples misogyny from male bodies. By demonstrating that a woman can successfully perform and parody sexism and misogyny, and thus that misogyny is not inherent in men, the drag kings expose this problematic behaviour as nothing more than a prop for a certain type of masculinity.

However, while the reproductions of masculinity are troubled by the audience's awareness of the non-male-bodied performer, it is important to acknowledge that reproduction *is* taking place. Although the drag performances do successfully disrupt mainstream ideas about gender, in relying on recognizable, stereotypical signifiers of masculinity to do so they reproduce and reinforce them even as they are overturning them. They contest *and* collude with problematic, normative scripts of masculinity simultaneously. A similar ambivalence is discussed in Milani's (2014) examination of an artwork that formed part of the *Queer and Trans Art-iculations* exhibition at Wits Art Museum in 2014. It focuses on the way the drawing and narrative of a transgender individual posing bare-chested challenges the gender binary while reinforcing it. The use of pronouns in the narrative and the pose work together to align the gender presentation directly with male-masculinity. However, this alignment is troubled by what is generally considered a female bodily presence – the breasts that dominate the portrait. According to Milani,

"the multimodal and multivocal arrangement of this work of art embodies a tension between, on the one hand, attempts to overcome identity categories altogether, and, on the other hand, the co-existence of gender identities which are simultaneously conventional and radical." (2014: 7).

This portrait and the performances by Bros B4 Ho's demonstrate the complexity of resistance to the gender binary, but also have implications for Halberstam's theory of female masculinity. Exploring such implications is a further aim of this study.

Halberstam describes female masculinity as a purely subversive phenomenon. She maintains that she is "using the topic of female masculinity to explore a queer subject position that can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity." (1998: 9). However, we have demonstrated that these performances of masculinity by women do not *automatically* trouble the gender binary or challenge hegemonic beliefs about gender. Furthermore, what we have concluded about Bros B4 Ho's confirms Lucy Jones' problematising of the term. Her criticism of the concept lies in the fact that it reuses categories from a binary that sets masculinity up as existing in opposition to femaleness *by definition*. As she explains, "hegemonic masculinity [...] is relational, existing in opposition to women and homosexuals." (2013: 4) Even though masculinity is a construct that can be performed, she argues that it is too closely linked ideologically to maleness to be easily applied to female bodies. She believes that simply reapplying the two categories from a problematic binary to look at non-normative gender presentations could cause us to misunderstand them. If we return to the drag performances under discussion, we have seen that there is much complexity and ambivalence in what the kings are doing – it is neither straightforward reproduction nor complete subversion, but a tense combination of the two. By terming drag king performances female masculinity as Halberstam does, we risk glossing over this complexity.

The next step in our discussion is to explore to what extent such ambiguity between contestation of and collusion with normative ideologies of gender also occurs in what the kings do on a social media platform.

6 Facebook

In this chapter, we will be examining Facebook as a discursive space, in order to make sense of the ways the drag kings of Bros B4 Ho's use the platform's semiotic resources to style their personae. We will focus in particular on the relationship between their online activity and their offline performances, as well as the ways in which they negotiate their gendered subjectivities across the two domains.

While the kings' performances on Facebook are not considered cultural events by Bauman's definition, his theory of entextualisation (Bauman and Briggs, 1990) – with its related processes of decontextualisation and recontextualisation – is still applicable here. More specifically, it is a useful analytical tool for exploring the relationship between the two spaces in which the kings perform. According to Leppänen et al. (2013), entextualisation is a key resource for identity performances online, particularly in social media environments. In their study, they examine five cases from different social media platforms in which users extract (or decontextualise) discourse material – or "instances of culture" (Leppänen et al., 2013: 7) – from elsewhere, and then modify it while integrating it into the new context (recontextualisation), in order to communicate something meaningful about their identities. A similar process is at work on the Facebook pages of the members of Bros B4 Ho's. The kings decontextualise discourse and semiotic material originating in their live performances, and then reposition them online, opening them up to scrutiny from a much wider audience than would be found at one of their events. The material they choose to draw upon to share on Facebook can be seen as key moments of their performances which they wish to emphasise, moments that they think are emblematic of the identities and masculinities they are attempting to portray through their personae. This means that their performances in both domains are constantly linked intertextually. The most obvious example of this process occurs when the kings post video clips of their acts onto their pages, which allows their performances to continue outside the spatial and temporal boundaries of the events in a format that fits the new context.

In this section we will examine other ways in which the kings' performances of masculinity are modified to fit the features of the social networking platform, as well as explore the additional resources such a platform allows.

6.1 *Performing masculinity online*

As in the previous chapter, we will be examining the strategies the kings use to make masculinity theatrical and visible as performance. Throughout the analysis, we will be keeping in mind signifiers of masculinity that the kings draw on, as well as the "on-going gendering processes" (Milani, 2014: 5) that have brought these signifiers about. We will look specifically at the visual signifiers in the kings' cover and profile pictures, as well as the more "autobiographical" information in the About sections of the pages. Let us begin with the latter, by considering the most obvious statement about gender on a Facebook page – the Gender feature under the Basic Information subsection.

6.1.1 *Basic Information – Gender*

For public pages of entertainers (as all but one of the kings opt to categorise their pages), the "Basic Information" section includes contact details, a birth and/or launch date, location, affiliation (to a group or organisation), as well as gender, which is of particular interest here. At the time this data was collected, only four options were available for selection in this category on public pages: "male", "female", "neutral" or no selection.¹¹

The fact that Facebook offered a restricted number of gender options is an illustration of Butler's system of performativity. Performativity is the system of repetition in society where the ideology that conflates gender with biological sex and that represents gender as a binary is constantly repeated until it becomes a naturalized system which restricts and regulates

¹¹ In February 2014, Facebook expanded this category by introducing a "custom" option in addition to the standard "male" and "female". Fifty-six other possibilities were added to that heading, including terms like "agender" and "intersex", as well as several variations prefixed by "trans-" or "cis-". Users were now also able to choose what pronoun would be used to refer to them on the site - "him", "her" or "them". However, this expanded selection was only available for Facebook users whose profile was set to US English.

(See

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=567587973337709&set=a.196865713743272.42938.105225179573993&type=1>)

any non-normative gender performances. This system of constraint is reproduced and reinforced by the architecture of Facebook, where only two options are available, and where these terms – "male" and "female"– are being used to describe gender when they actually refer to biological sex . The act of choosing one of the options is a localised performance within this system of performativity.

When we examine the pages of the drag kings, we see that the kings use the limited options of this feature to creatively express elements of their drag personae, and as another strategy for highlighting gender non-conformity. Two of the kings choose to list their "gender" as "male". Since the audience is aware that this is a drag king troupe – a group of women donning a recognizably masculine costume and performing theatrically in it – choosing to state that their persona's biological sex is "male" would be a meaningful choice, and would be understood by the audience to be part of their costume and in line with the performance. The choices made by the rest of group are equally significant. Three kings choose not to specify their "gender" at all. This is not unusual on the pages of most well-known public figures, probably because they feel it is unnecessary to provide information that they believe is self-evident. In this context, however, where the individuals concerned consciously play with sex and gender binaries, the fact that they have opted out of choosing a label that might not adequately describe them is noteworthy. One of these three kings, Cole Steel Johnson, describes himself as "androgynous" in his biography instead, using that tool to show his rejection of the options provided by Facebook and to communicate his preferred term to his audience. Saint Dude does something similar by choosing the term "Neutral" to describe himself (Figure 9). Opting out of a label or choosing an alternative one indicates a reluctance to participate in the conflation of sex and gender happening on Facebook at the time. It is way of expressing an unwillingness to accept the problematic binary that has been presented as the norm here. When the kings *choose not* to specify a gender option, they are actively resisting emerging as a gendered subject. Later, in Chapter 7, I argue that this rejection is an important element of a larger decolonising project that the kings are a part of.



Figure 9 – Saint Dude – Gender

6.1.2 Profile and cover pictures

As I mentioned previously, Facebook profiles and pages currently take the form of Timelines, and they present a reverse-chronological log of a user's Facebook activity with the most recent activity at the top. They are usually headed by the user's name, along with a profile picture and cover photo. The profile picture is the smaller image, and it is also the one that appears alongside the user's name whenever they are active anywhere on Facebook. It is the visual element that allows people to recognize each other easily on the platform. The cover picture is a much larger image that appears only at the top of one's profile. In their "Help" section, Facebook describes the cover as "your chance to feature a unique image that represents who you are or what you care about".¹² Profile and cover pictures are both automatically set to the "Public" privacy level, so that users who are not as yet connected can search for and recognize each other. This is where we will focus our discussion of the visual elements of their online performance, as these images are usually the first thing that a user will see when they visit one of these pages.

At the point that this data was collected, the group page featured the troupe's official logo as its profile picture (Figure 10). The logo also appears on the t-shirts worn by the three kings pictured in the larger cover image. It consists of a symbol in white on a black

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/help/388305657884730/> (Accessed 20/02/2014).

background, headed by the troupe's name in white letters. The symbol has been created by merging the biological signs for male and female, and is made to resemble a stick figure by the white crown perched at an angle on top of the circle, or the "head", of the symbol.



Figure 10 – Group profile picture

The blending of the familiar biological symbols is an effective emblem for a drag troupe, as it indicates a resistance to binary conceptions of gender and highlights the blurring of gender boundaries that the kings engage in. It is a symbolic representation of what they do during their stage performances. The crown is an important element that serves to link this gender non-conformity specifically to kinging, but the type of crown chosen is also significant. Its elongated points topped with small circles are reminiscent of a medieval court jester's hat, with its floppy tubes and round bells. The resemblance points to the comedic element that is a large part of drag performances, and the jaunty angle at which the crown is perched suggests a cheeky, playful attitude.

The sloping bowls of the letters "b" and "r", and the unequal legs of the letter "h" in the troupe's name above the symbol gives the font or typeface chosen here a graffiti-like quality that is worth mentioning. In his discussion of spatial narrations, Pennycook (2010) explores the nuances of graffiti writing in urban spaces. Although it is an element of the hip hop subculture (along with rapping, DJing, and breakdancing), graffiti has fast developed into a genre on its own. Central to graffiti writing is the element of struggle – it takes on meaning from the way it challenges authority by occupying spaces in which it is not "allowed" or "permitted" to be. It encompasses a struggle over the semiotics of the city, and questions the regulation of public space by individuals with power and money, and the

silencing of those without. In this way, graffiti writing is also a manifestation of a class struggle. Pennycook quotes Conquergood in saying that graffiti “performatively constitutes middle-class and public spaces into contested zones of contact, site-specific theatres of defiance where excluded others re-present themselves” (1997: 358). Using a graffiti-like font, then, would call to mind these associations for a viewer, and index subversion, deviation and defiance, as well as illicit and prohibited activity. What is more is that it would also project the trendiness of alternative subcultural forms of expression onto the practice of drag kinging. Two of the kings, Umlilo John and Frankie H, tap into these associations in a similar way by using walls covered in graffiti as backdrops in their own profile pictures (figures 11 and 12).



Figure 11 – Umlilo John



Figure 12 – Frankie H

Using this logo as the profile picture for the collective Facebook page, then, allows the group to portray themselves right from the outset as a hip, gender-bending, comedic drag king outfit engaging in deviant behaviour.

Another revealing profile picture is that of rapper Saint Dude, the leader of Bros B4 Ho's (figure 13). His is a studio photograph of himself in character, accompanied by two women dressed in little black dresses and posed to appear very feminine. This is another instance of "masculine supplementarity", similar to the one identified earlier in Frankie's performance of *Baby Got Back*. Here, the practice of having female performers assist a king's performance of masculinity is lifted up from the context of the stage and repositioned and recontextualised here in the form of a profile picture. The entextualisation continues in the fact that elements of a drag persona's "personality" sometimes come through in the content they share on their pages. When asked about how she decided what would go onto Saint Dude's Facebook page, Pretorius replied,

I thought about like (.) if my charac– if I was Saint Dude, like what would Saint Dude be posting? He'd be posting pictures of himself with other women, and you saw on my page, I had pictures of me with women, with condoms in my pockets, and like (.) me posing in the middle [...] That's the kind of thing I thought Saint Dude would (.) post.

This photograph then becomes a way for the performer to visually portray aspects of Saint Dude's persona that would usually be performed on stage.

This photograph also demonstrates quite well how the presence of the hyperfeminine women emphasises what is lacking in the king's masculinity, in that it highlights the fact that Saint Dude is noticeably shorter than his companions. While they don't tower over him as Vanessa Kensington towers over Austin Powers in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (Halberstam, 2001), they do dwarf him somewhat in this image. However, their presence also makes up for this lack: their exaggerated femininity boosts his masculinity by positioning him as clearly *not* feminine.



Figure 13 – Saint Dude's profile picture

Along with their clothing, the king and the women use their poses and facial expressions to index stereotypical associations of masculinity or femininity. Saint Dude poses quite rigidly, keeping his body tense, with a deadpan expression on his face. Like the strategy of using sunglasses to conceal emotion that we saw in the previous chapter, it is very likely that this control over the body and expression is an attempt to exhibit an air of "seriousness" and associations of reason linked with stereotypical masculinity. In fact, all the other drag kings in the troupe also have serious, unsmiling expressions in their profile pictures on display at this point. In the interview, Pretorius also explained that some of the kinging tutorials the group consulted on Youtube recommended clenching the jaw rather than smiling in photographs, because smiling causes one's cheeks to go up and one's face to look rounder, and thus more feminine.

The king is also facing directly towards the camera with his hands in his pockets. This makes his body appear angular, and allows him to take up more space in the picture. If we compare this to how the women are standing, we see that they are both showing one side of their bodies to the camera. This pose ensures that the curves of their backs, shoulders, arms and legs are on display, and that their bodies take up less of the frame. The bodies of the two women are also a lot less rigid than Saint Dude's – their arms and hands are draped

loosely over his shoulders. This is effective because, if we recall from the previous chapter, things that are angular bring to mind hardness, traditionally associated with masculinity, whereas things that have curves suggest softness, which is generally linked to femininity. The women also look coyly over their shoulders at the camera, the one smiling and the other pouting with a wide eyed expression. These facial expressions, the clothing, makeup and the way they hold their bodies are all geared towards indexing "sexiness", which indicates that the women are meant to evoke associations of traditional heterosexual female sexuality.

As with the back-up dancers in Frankie's performance, these women help the king perform heterosexuality, an important aspect of dominant masculinity. What is different here is that their performances of female sexuality are meant to present the king not only as a heterosexual man who would desire these women, but also as a man who is clearly desired *by* them. This is reinforced by the fact that the photograph has been staged to look like a depiction of an aloof male celebrity flanked by two adoring women, a trope frequently seen among hip hop and other celebrities. Saint Dude seems unaffected by his companions – he has made no move to engage with them or touch their bodies. He faces the camera, and behind his dark shades he looks straight ahead, giving no indication that he is aware of their presence. This makes him appear cool, distant, and unperturbed by their attention. They, on the other hand, are draped over his body, facing him rather than the camera. They keep their bodies and faces close to his – one woman has her leg slightly over his, while the other keeps her hand over his hand and her breasts touch his body. In addition to their posture, both women sport copies of Saint Dude's signature baseball cap with his name emblazoned underneath the visor, in the manner of fans emulating an idol. In fact, the viewer's attention is immediately drawn to these when looking at the women, as the caps are the only colourful item of clothing they wear. It is clear that the king's companions in this image are meant to mimic and parody the sexy, nameless and ultimately dispensable women that form part of a famous, wealthy rapper's entourage.

This is a noteworthy instance of the tension between subversion and reproduction that we first noticed in the stage performances. On the one hand, the presence of these women can be read as part of the king's parody of the sexism and objectification of women that takes

place in the hip hop industry. In addition, the inclusion of the women is a strategy to make fun of masculinity by pointing out, as Halberstam (1998) does, that it relies on props, that even a misogynistic figure like Saint Dude is actually dependent on the women he treats so badly, and would be a lot less masculine without them there. At the same time, however, the performer playing Saint Dude is objectifying these women *as much as* her character is, because she is using their bodies as props, not only to complete her rapper persona, but also as tools to boost her own performance of masculinity. Therefore, as pointed out in the previous chapter, the performance is not a purely straightforward disruption of heteronormative masculinity; part of it reproduces and reinforces the very structures it seeks to critique.

From the composition of Saint Dude's profile picture, we have been able to analyse the ways in which he communicates to viewers of his page that his persona is that of a wealthy, popular and well-known celebrity. The gaze and frame size of images are also important elements that can tell us a lot about the ways the kings style themselves for their audience and fans. Let us examine the profile pictures chosen by Umlilo John and Frankie H (figures 11 and 12 above). What is striking about these images is that both kings gaze directly at the viewer rather intensely. In *Reading Images*, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argue that this acknowledgment of the viewer is a type of visual address in which the viewer is engaged in an imaginary relationship. They term this a "demand" image (1996: 124), as a response is demanded of anyone looking at it. Thus both kings use their gaze in their profile pictures to try to establish a relationship with their viewers.

With regards to the size of the frame, we see that Umlilo and Frankie have been photographed using a close up and a medium shot respectively. Umlilo is also leaning forward, and looks as though he is about to start an intimate conversation with the person looking at him. The seriousness of his expression, the size of the frame, his posture, and his gaze all work to create a close relationship with the viewer, as well as present him as approachable and sincere. Frankie is a little more guarded than Umlilo, standing further away, with his arms folded, closing off his body. He is not posing as rigidly as Saint Dude, however; he leans comfortably against the graffiti wall, regarding his audience intently. His

tilted head and wary expression appear to say to the viewer, "I know that you are observing me, but I am observing you too."

This kind of personal conversation between the king and his audience is missing in Saint Dude's profile picture. While he has not really used an "offer" image (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996: 124) – where the participant is looking away and the viewer is positioned as an onlooker) – his choice to wear large dark shades that conceal his eyes and cover up much of his face puts a distance between himself and anyone looking at his page. This distance is reiterated by the fact that the image is a medium long shot, meaning that, while most of the king's body is visible, he is also positioned further away from the viewer. We could argue that these images indicate that Saint Dude has styled his profile as a platform for his fans to celebrate him, whereas Umlilo and Frankie have styled theirs as a means for their audience to get "up close and personal" with them.

FreDDie also chooses a profile picture that creates intimacy with the viewer, but his cover picture frames his page in a slightly different way (figure 14).



Figure 14 – FreDDie's page header

As his name suggests, FreDDie is a Freddie Mercury impersonator, who bases his look and performances on the lead singer of the famous British band Queen. He generally performs medleys of the band's most famous songs, and his costume is designed to allow his audience to recognize the mimicry. He often sports a decorated black blazer similar to the

caricature of a military jacket worn by Mercury at his birthday party in Munich in 1985. He also wears large shades and a thick moustache, usually with his hair slicked back (figure 15).



Figure 15 – FreDDie's look



Figure 16 – Freddie Mercury at his birthday party at the Hilton Hotel in Munich, Germany, 1985¹³

What is interesting about what we see on FreDDie's Facebook page is that it is the result of entextualisation of entextualisation. The cover picture on his page is a case in point (figure 17). It is a black and white image featuring FreDDie in his jacket standing on rocky terrain, right arm raised in the air, hand in a fist, with a cloud-covered Table Mountain in the background. He does not face the camera, but looks off into the distance. Since he is not looking directly at the viewer, this is an "offer" image, and requires the audience to do nothing but observe.

¹³ Photo by Richard Young / Rex Features (458742ea). Source: <http://wewillrockyou.pl/foto/freddie-mercury-1980-86/shooting-stars-30-years-of-the-photography-of-richard-young/> Accessed: 28/02/2014



Figure 17 – FreDDie's cover picture

This is also a pose that I saw FreDDie perform twice at the show at Obz cafe, during his rendition of Queen classics *The Show Must Go On* and *We Are the Champions* (figure 18). Viewers who are even only vaguely familiar with Queen will recognize the stance as reminiscent of the famous pose Mercury often struck on stage during live performances (figure 19). What is happening here is that FreDDie is decontextualising a well-known element of Freddie Mercury's performances – a movement – and integrating into his stage act, and then taking this material from his stage performances and recontextualising it again, this time as an image, to fit into his Facebook page. This process is repeated in much of what FreDDie performs, and as a result, his page is full of intertextual references, both to the celebrated singer and to his own performances.

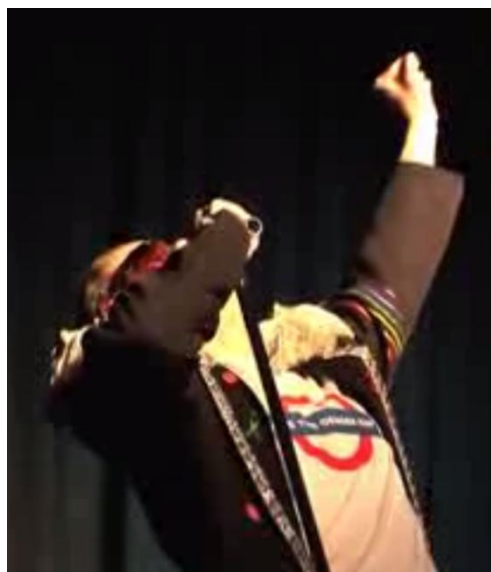


Figure 18 – FreDDie mid-performance



Figure 19 – Mercury during Queen's live performance at Wembley Stadium, 1986¹⁴

Freddie's pose in his cover picture is more than just an allusion, however. The raised fist is also significant in that it brings to mind a salute that is often used as a gesture of protest (such as the feminist fist and the Black Power salute) and has become a symbol of power, resistance and defiance. The fact that he is standing against the wind – which we can tell from the direction his hair is blowing – contributes to these connotations. In addition to this, Freddie's gaze is directed up into the upper left corner of the frame. Machin and Mayr (2012) explain that when a person looks off frame, they are being made to look thoughtful, and the viewer is being invited to imagine what they are thinking. When the gaze is directed slightly upwards, the connotations of "up" are triggered – the person in the image is presented positively, as looking forward, towards the future or up to "lofty ideals" (2012: 73). It is possible that Freddie's gaze is a symbol of him "looking up to" Freddie Mercury, striving to be more like him and to reach his level of talent or fame. Furthermore, the closeness of the mountain behind him along with the clouds and the wind allows the viewer to see that Freddie is standing somewhere high up. This height complements the connotations triggered by the upward direction of the king's gaze. The fact that Freddie's cover picture does not appear in colour is also significant. Black and white images are a symbol of the past, so choosing to create a modern photograph in this style may be an attempt to trigger feelings of nostalgia for a bygone era in the viewer. Using Table Mountain

¹⁴ Source: <http://89millionand7.blogspot.com/2012/11/but-he-collected-postage-stamps.html>
Accessed 28/02/2014.

specifically as the backdrop links the image to South Africa and situates FreDDie in Cape Town. FreDDie's cover picture thus presents him as powerful and defiant, looking forward with optimism, and we could also argue that it contains a figurative salute along with the literal one – it is a salute to his idol, a reminder that his performance is a tribute to an icon he admires.



Figure 20 – Frankie's cover picture

Lastly, the cover pictures used by three of the pages – namely the main page and the pages belonging to Frankie and Umlilo – depict the camaraderie that exists between the troupe members offline. For his cover picture, Frankie has chosen a photograph of the whole troupe on stage, taken at the end of their first sit-down performance as a group (figure 20). At this point, they are dressed in matching outfits and are holding hands in preparation to take a bow. This reinforces their identity as a collective, and the hand-holding also has connotations of support. It is clear that this is an important and emotional moment for all of them: they are basking in the success of their first performance together. Most of them are smiling broadly either at each other or at the audience. The cover picture heading Umlilo's page communicates a similar message. His is an image taken in Bubble's Bar, the venue in which they hold their weekly performances (figure 21). Three of the kings – FreDDie, Umlilo and Cole Steel Johnson – pose with their arms draped casually around each other, each wearing the same t-shirt featuring the group's logo. Their heads and bodies are also close together, and this posture suggests intimacy, comfort in each other's presence and a "brotherly" affection for one another. A similar picture of the three kings taken at the same time has been chosen for the cover of the main page. As we have seen, the cover picture is

a useful tool to *show* rather than *tell* an audience "who you are or what you care about", and it is clear that, for some of the kings, what they care about is being a part of a supportive group of drag kings.



Figure 21 – Umlilo's cover picture

The next section will focus on a more text-oriented element of the Facebook page. In contrast to the kings' profile pictures, the Biography feature in the "About" tab of their pages allows them to make much more explicit statements about themselves or their personae in ways they might not normally do on stage or in interaction. Examining these texts could give us insight into further ways the kings negotiate their drag subjectivities online.

6.1.3 Biography

It is important to note first that it is generally understood by Facebook users that the biographical statements that appear in these sections have been written by the owner of the profile or page, despite the use of the third person. What is interesting with the kings' biographies is that there is an extra level, in that it is understood by the viewer that it is the performer *behind* the persona who is the author of the text, and who is performing the drag king writing about himself in the third person. The biography will then be read as another part of the king's costume and an extension of his act. Frankie H's biography, for example, reads as follows:

Extract 1:

Frankie H is a drag king who started in Cape Town, SA, with Bros B4 Ho's and now performs in Trondheim, Norway. He likes to dance like everybody's watching.

Frankie H comes from the deep American South and isn't ashamed of it. For the last seven years, he's been touring the world in search of extraordinary cultures and mind-blowing sex. On stage, Frankie likes to show off his love for the ladies with somewhat erotic and undeniably crude song performances. Don't be fooled, though – somewhere underneath his rough, macho, arguably misogynistic exterior lies the heart of a warm, fuzzy puppy that loves a good belly rub.¹⁵

A closer examination of the extract gives us insight into the kind of masculinity Frankie is attempting to perform. The second sentence – "He likes to dance like everybody's watching" – sets the tone for the text. It is a humorous play on the saying "Dance like nobody's watching", which is meant to encourage people to overcome their self-consciousness and enjoy themselves without the fear of being judged by others. Frankie's version suggests that, by contrast, he revels in the presence of an audience. Phrases such as "on stage", "show off" and "exterior" hint at the centrality of drama and performance to his personality. However, not only is Frankie constantly aware that he is putting on a show, but it is also clear here that he is conscious of the type of masculinity he is performing. By mentioning "his love for the ladies" and his world-wide quest for "mind-blowing sex", he implies that he is heterosexual and promiscuous. He also goes on to describe himself as "crude", "rough", "macho". One could argue that, by trying to come across as a virile and boorish man, he is attempting to channel a normative, mainstream type of masculinity.

There is more to it than that, however. What is most interesting about Frankie's biography is that there is an element of self-criticism underlying his depiction of himself. The choice of the terms "rough" and "macho", as well as the declaration of promiscuity and heterosexuality, are descriptions that one might expect a man performing this type of

¹⁵ https://www.facebook.com/FrankieHardon/info?tab=page_info (Accessed 09/12/2014).

masculinity to use quite proudly. But he talks about his song performances rather unfavourably, calling them "somewhat erotic and undeniably crude", which seems slightly out of character. Using the word "somewhat" – which means "to a limited degree" – to modify "erotic" implies that the king's performances are not as sexy as he would like them to be. Similarly, we can assume that he would rather his serenades be "smooth" or "suave" than "undeniably crude". So why the negative self-portrayal? Frankie is using this unexpected and humorous account of his performance to mock and poke fun at himself, and by extension, the type of masculinity he performs. In a similar way, he admits that he is "arguably misogynistic", which is unusually self-reflective. By doing so, the king makes it clear that his performance is not a wholesale, uncritical reproduction of a problematic type of masculinity, but rather a light-hearted way of engaging with it.

The final sentence of the extract is also particularly intriguing and worth discussing. The phrase "Don't be fooled, though" makes the reader believe that there is about to be some kind of revelation, that the king thinks his biography may have led the reader to see him in a certain way, and he is about to confess something different. He makes it seem as though he is about to peel back a layer of his costume ("underneath his ... exterior"). We are led to believe that we are about to see the woman behind the performance, but by the second part of the sentence we realise that we have been denied. This playful teasing is very much like the theatrical layering mentioned in chapter two during our discussion of drag king techniques. The king does a striptease on stage, misleading the audience into believing that the woman underneath the costume will be exposed, but instead, another male persona is revealed, and the audience then questions the belief that hidden under the male image is a "true" form, a "real" woman. Furthermore, the fact that the king tries to convince us that deep inside he really is a playful and cute puppy that wants love and attention – contradictory to his "macho" outside – makes the "exterior" seem more like an act than ever, and serves as a reminder to the audience that masculinity – and gender more broadly – is a performance for all of us, not just for drag kings on a stage.

FreDDie's biography is also an extension of his stage act, but in a slightly different way.

Extract 2:

FreDDie is one of the members in South Africa's first Drag King Troupe situated in Cape Town: Bros B4 Ho's

The Freddie-concept was formed at the premier of Albert Nobbs, Followed by his debut on the 18 May 2012. Freddie has the ability to get crowds in a positive and nostalgic mood: dancing, feeling and just having fun. He is a Killer Queen, with the ability to BREAK Free, even Under Pressure. It's A Kind of Magic when he takes to the stage with his Rhapsody, he believes the show WILL go on, and thus he WILL rock you!!!¹⁶

The process of entextualisation we noticed in this king's cover picture is once again visible here. In the last two sentences, FreDDie draws on well-known Queen song titles and transforms them into part of the text describing himself. While the creative word-play depends on the viewer recognizing the references (though the capitalisation is a clue), it functions as a strategy that allows FreDDie to continue his stage performance in this context.

As in the previous extract, this biography is written as though FreDDie were the author, but the voice of the performer behind the persona is allowed to show through in the second sentence, with the phrase "Freddie-concept". One would not usually use the word "concept" to talk about a person, and it hints at the fact that, rather than being an actual individual, FreDDie is simply an idea that arose at a specific point in time (interestingly, at the premier of a movie about a woman living as a man in order to find work in 19th century Ireland).

In Saint Dude's biography (Figure 9 above) and in the group's description below, the performers' voices take over completely and the voices of the personae are silenced. The statements are written entirely in the first person, and in both cases function as a way to explain the motivation behind the drag performances, rather than as a strategy for the kings to continue their acts online.

¹⁶ https://www.facebook.com/freddieBB4H/info?tab=page_info (Accessed 09/12/2014).

Extract 3:

The Name "Bro's b4 Ho's" (sic): We believe that by reappropriating disempowered semantics, we can empower them, especially when employing gender bending and queer theory. We use irony, satire and parody – important tools in art, society and the media – to subvert cultural hegemony and conventions to make them our own. In order to debunk the hegemonic power that too often goes unaddressed and unchallenged, we must adopt the empowered personae so that we can expose it. We are proud to be a part of this endeavour and we feel that our efforts will not go unrecognised or without significant results.¹⁷

The first part of the statement is framed as an explanation of the troupe's name. The writer begins by describing the name choice as a "reappropriat[ion of] disempowered semantics". Reappropriation is an act in which a group of people take back a term that has been used to refer to them in a derogatory way, redefining it into something positive in the process and thus taking power away from those who use it to insult. The word "queer" is one such example. Outside of this group, the phrase "bros before hos" (or "hoes") often functions as a motto or unofficial "rule" between heterosexual men, in which they promise to put their male friends before female love interests or partners. The word "bros" is a shortened, slang version of "brothers", which reinforces the connection between the men in question by comparing it to a familial one. The word "ho" is slang for "whore", and is used to refer disparagingly to women who are deemed promiscuous for some reason. How, then, is the phrase "bros before hos" being reappropriated in this context? Evidently, the performers are repurposing the word "bros" to refer to their drag king personae and the relationships that exist between the kings, but it is unclear whether or not they are using the word "ho's" to describe themselves as women, or how it is being made positive at all, in fact. The phrase "bros before hos" is both heteronormative and misogynistic; it implies that the men to which it refers are heterosexual, and it labels all the women who are their love interests or partners as prostitutes. It frames these women as unimportant and disposable, and reduces them to playing only a sexual role in the lives of these men, while erasing aspects like love, companionship, or support from the relationships. It is clear that this attempt to imbue this

¹⁷ https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/info?tab=page_info (Accessed 09/12/2014).

phrase with a positive meaning is dubious, and this is confirmed by the negative feedback Pretorius reports receiving regarding the name choice. Once again, as was the case with Saint Dude's profile picture, the group's name reproduces and reinforces dominant, problematic forms of masculinity even as it tries to disrupt them, thus confirming our critique of female masculinity as a purely disruptive phenomenon made in the previous chapter.

Moving on from issues of nomination, I would like to focus on the writer's representation of the activity the group engages in. My argument is that kinging is framed as primarily a critical, academic exercise in this extract. Firstly, it is clear that the writer has reflected on the process of kinging, as the explanation displays a level of awareness of how drag works and what it can achieve. Secondly, she describes their performances as one would an experiment or piece of research: there are clear tools and methods being used during the activity (*irony, satire, parody, gender bending, adopting the empowered personae*), theories mentioned (*queer theory, reappropriation*), as well as clear aims in mind (*empower disempowered semantics, subvert cultural hegemony and conventions, debunk/ address/ challenge the hegemonic power*). The practice of kinging is seen as an "endeavour" which they hope will yield "significant results". Furthermore, many of the verbs chosen for this piece, such as "debunk", "address", "challenge" and "expose", reinforce the critical aspect of the group's kinging. Lastly, there is also a clear use of a feminist discourse in this text, as is evident from words like "empower", "disempowered", "reappropriate", "hegemony", and "subvert".

This kind of academic discourse reappears in the secondary interviews conducted by journalists and bloggers that I collected whenever the performers are asked to explain why they do drag. This is very much the opposite of what Halberstam reports experiencing when she interviewed drag kings in New York in the nineties. She found that most of her participants were largely uninterested in the theoretical implications of what they were doing, and seldom gave reasons for kinging beyond that it was enjoyable or "a crazy thing to do" (1998: 244). Why then, is there such a focus on framing the drag performance in academic terms in this case?

When asked to clarify this, Pretorius admits that the reframing was motivated in part by some of the negative feedback they received when they began performing:

To be quite honest it's because (.) um we were first met with a lot of criticism. People didn't understand why we had those personas and why our personas weren't (.) friendly (.) men [...] why they were aggressive men (.) you know why were our personas an ugly (.) um (.) take on masculinity. And we were trying to make a point so we felt like (.) it was very necessary for us to always explain that to people because in the context in which we were performing we were performing in bars (.) and at social events where people were drinking and kind of– (.) so they sometimes didn't understand the commentary we were trying to make (.) so it was very important that our existence (.) was kind of like– not justified but explained. [...]

When I was running Cape Town Lesbians I knew about it 'cause I was pretty involved in like the queer community having run Rainbow and all of that um (.) so I– I picked up that a lot of people just didn't understand and started boycotting some of our shows because they felt that (.) we were too misogynistic. They were making comments. People commented on the page. People approached my partner who was running Cape Town Lesbians with me at the time and told her– and asked that they stop promoting our events because we promote misogyny (.) So it was pretty difficult, it put us in a– it put me in a difficult situation (.) 'cause I had a conflict of interest with now running Cape Town Lesbians and now with doing the drag king thing at the same time. So (.) the best way for me to kind of get out of it was to really explain and be upfront.

Even though Pretorius tries to avoid saying that the academic discourse is meant to *justify* what they are doing, it's clear that it is an attempt to bring a measure of legitimacy the drag acts, and to get her out of a "difficult situation" by giving her a way to defend the group's actions as well as dismiss the criticisms. In this extract of the interview, she doesn't really consider the accusations levelled against them; she dismisses them as a lack of "understanding" on the part of the protestors, and also blames the context in which they performed, in "bars where people were drinking", implying where the audience was too drunk or not in the right frame of mind to engage in an academic exercise. Nevertheless, it

seems that some people picked up on the troubling issue of drag performances colluding with the gender binary and relying on problematic manifestations on gender "to make their points".

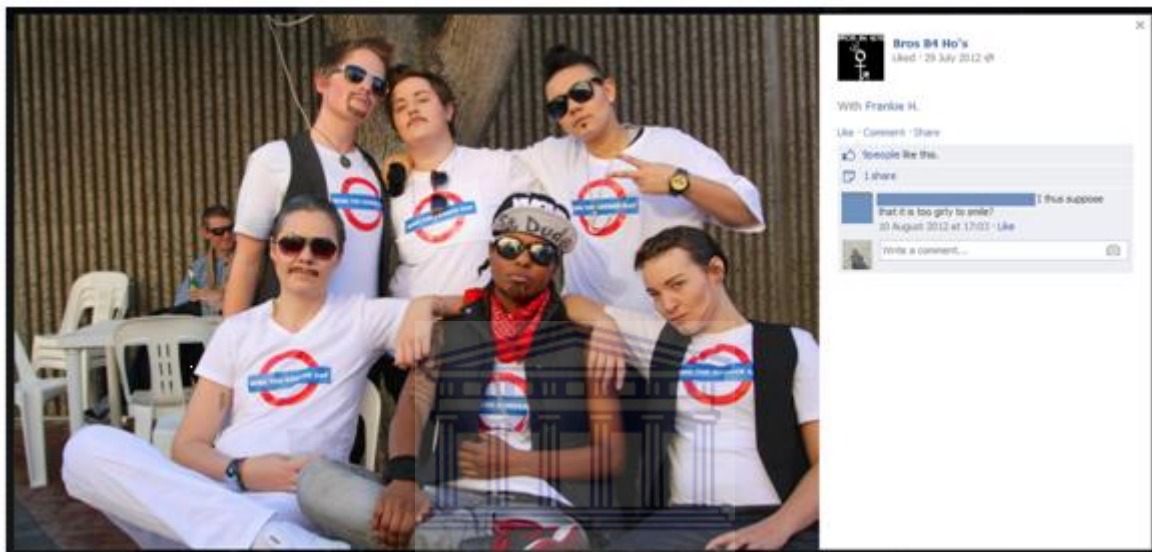
This incident also presents an interesting illustration of the way that something happening on one platform has ramifications for and leads to changes on another. As mentioned earlier, one of the aims of this study is to move away from treating "online" environments as completely separate entities from the "offline" world. Although I have separated my discussion of the two contexts into separate chapters, I do wish to demonstrate how the kings' performances in both realms are closely intertwined. In this case, it is the criticism that happened offline – people boycotting the performances or approaching individuals to stop promoting them – that led to the online reframing of the performances through academic discourse. Thereafter, the kings were able to draw on and refer back to this discourse when questioned. According to Pretorius,

It was just very important for us to have context and to understand the (.) importance of what we were doing. And also, I just really wanted to educate like (.) the boys 'cause like (.) for example like King Cory– (.) like he (.) like he didn't really (.) like grasp those topics and I just thought it was like important that he knew so that if anyone ever asked him he could like explain it from another perspective just– (.) instead of saying like "It makes me feel good". 'Cause yes, it does make you feel good (.) but also like here's the– like here's the language to explain like what you're actually doing.

From this we can see that the motivation behind the insistence on academic discourse was not only to "educate" the kings (and their audiences), but also to give them tools to deal with some of the criticism they received. It is also important to acknowledge the entextualisation in progress here: the kings are repeatedly trying to lay down or "sediment" a certain type of discourse on the Facebook page and in all their interviews around what they're doing, in order to drown out the criticism but also in the hope that it become the primary discourse drawn on when talking about them. This entextualisation, as well as the intertextual links the kings constantly form between their stage performances and online profiles, serve to blur the online/offline boundary even further.

6.2 *Other Resources*

In the interview extract above, Pretorius also mentions that some of the negative feedback they received happened online. As mentioned in chapter three, the interactive tools on Facebook open the group's activity up to further scrutiny and make it easier for the audience to comment on or criticise their performances, although they may choose not to engage, as in the instance below:



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Figure 22 – Comment on photograph

The comment on the photograph reads, "I thus suppose it is too girly to smile?" Here, a Facebook user comments on the strategy of not smiling in photographs that we saw earlier, which the kings adopt deliberately as part of their performance of masculinity. By implying that there is nothing inherently feminine about smiling, this person is not only questioning the stereotypes that link serious facial expressions with masculinity, but also criticising the kings for making use of it.

Needless to say, not all the interaction that takes place on the pages is negative; the majority of the comments and posts are messages of support and encouragement. Furthermore, Facebook's interactive tools connect the audience members not only to the kings, but also to each other. The implication of this is that it facilitates the creation of an online community around the troupe, who can then share content and discuss material with each other.

Facebook also allows the kings to tap into wider, global communities through the "Like" function. As explained earlier in chapter three, a Facebook user's "Likes" refer to the pages that they follow, groups they are a part of, as well as their hobbies, interests, favourite books, movies, and music, etc. Users generally "like" a page when they are interested in receiving its updates in their news feed. This list appears on a profile alongside the timeline, and can also be viewed by clicking on "Likes" in the drop-down menu underneath the cover picture. Figures with public pages are also able to "like" other pages, which will then be on display to followers of the page. Of the thirty-six pages FreDDie had in his list at the time this data was collected, seven pages were about drag and kinging (figure 23). By liking these pages, FreDDie connects himself and his audience to a wider, global network of drag kings.

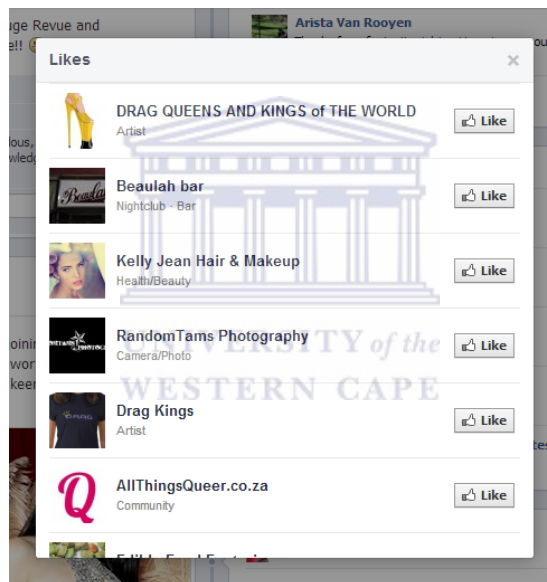


Figure 23 – A few of FreDDie's "likes"

A further advantage of having a following on a social media platform is the relative ease with which an event can be marketed. The troupe regularly advertised their shows by sharing digital fliers such as the one below (figure 24) with their fans.



Figure 24 – Promotional image

This method of advertising is cheap, and has the added bonus of reaching people who may not be exposed to other forms of advertising because they are not part of "the gay scene" (as Pretorius puts it), or may not usually visit a drag bar. In fact, my first glimpse of this troupe was of this very poster, which someone had shared on a mutual friend's wall.

Lastly, the pages act as an effective way of sharing with fans, as well as gathering and archiving, any content linked to the performers or performances appearing online outside of Facebook, such as links to blog posts by or about the kings, as well as articles about or interviews with the kings.

This chapter has demonstrated that Facebook can be used effectively to sustain a drag king performance outside the confines of the actual stage performance. Through entextualisation, the kings extract key moments of their theatrical performances to present online, manipulating them to fit the context's semiotic resources, such as the profile and cover pictures or the biography. The chapter also briefly explores additional affordances an online presence allows the troupe.

So far, we have only discussed the kings' activity in relation to the immediate contexts in which they are performing, namely the stage and the Facebook platform. We have yet to

discuss the political implications of their activity more broadly, particularly within the South African and African contexts. Once we have briefly reviewed the key findings of this study, I would like to use the next chapter to reflect on the queerness of this drag king phenomenon, and to explore to what extent we can argue that the kings of Bros B4 Ho's are engaged in "an authentically African decolonising project that questions Northern, colonial ideologies of gender and sexual normativities" (Milani, 2014: 2).



7 Discussion – Bros B4 Ho's: A queer, decolonising project?

I see the boy inside you
And he lives within our crew
I see the girl in you too
I saw her as she slowly grew
We don't have to pick one
We don't have to pick two
We can be what we want
We're the rainbow
Different colours
But we are a crew
~ Rainbow, by Saint Dude

This study aimed to examine the stage and online performances of the drag king troupe Bros B4 Ho's in order to investigate not only how they performed and parodied masculinity, but also how the performances allowed audiences to reflect critically on ideologies of gender. We found that, on stage, the kings used semiotic resources like costume design, body movement, musical acts, as well as the performance of heterosexuality and misogyny to make their performances recognizable as hegemonic masculinity. Audiences were able to think critically about what they saw because, as cultural performances, the shows were formally and socio-psychologically reflexive, and held cultural norms up for scrutiny (Bauman, 1992). In addition, the knowledge of the non-male-bodied performers behind the personas troubled the portrayal of masculinity and heterosexuality, and allowed the audience to question and denaturalise the conflation of biological sex and gender. Furthermore, the study found that these performances continued on the kings' Facebook pages, primarily through the process of entextualisation, in which the performers drew on material from their stage performances and then recontextualised them online. It was concluded that the kings primarily used their profile pictures, their biographies and the "Gender" feature to perform masculinity on Facebook. By including online activity, the study explored the relationship between the two performance contexts and attempted to

understand how the performers negotiated their gendered subjectivities across the two spaces.

A further aim of the study was to re-examine Halberstam's theory of female masculinity in light of these findings. We found that the female masculinity on display during these events was not a purely subversive phenomenon as Halberstam first proposed. It was concluded that, because the drag acts regularly had to rely on recognizable, stereotypical signifiers of masculinity to be successful, elements of the performances actually reinforced hegemonic ideologies of masculinity. The performances thus displayed interesting ambiguities by reproducing the very structures they worked to undermine. Taking this ambiguity into account, can we establish whether or not Bros B4 Ho's' performances qualify as a queer enterprise? Jagose explains that queer endeavours work to question "normative consolidations of biological sex, gender and sexuality" (1996: 99). A queer project thus tries to disentangle the straightforward alignment of gender with biological sex (i.e. female = feminine and male = masculine), and to expose how this understanding is made to seem normal and commonsensical. It is clear from our analyses in the previous chapters that the kings successfully overturn the above commonsense understanding of the relationship between sex and gender by demonstrating that behaviour normally linked with masculinity can successfully be produced by non-male-bodied individuals. However, queer also refers to "a critical practice in which nonnormative [genders] and sexualities infiltrate dominant discourses to loosen their political stronghold" (Hayes, 2000: 7). While the kings do denaturalise the mapping of gender directly onto sex – and that *is* a queer exercise – we have noticed that, in doing so, they reproduce normative forms of masculinity. They decide that certain behaviours are prototypical of masculinity and reproduce those. Of course, this is necessary to some degree in order for the audience to be able to recognize their gender performances as masculinity, but we have to acknowledge that by doing this, they reinforce the belief that these versions of masculinity are "normal". This strengthens rather than loosens the political stronghold of dominant discourses around masculinity.

At one point in the interview, Pretorius uses the phrase "I beat them at their own game" to describe the success of her performances as a black woman in a space that is often seen as

inaccessible to black women. This statement neatly encapsulates the paradox above. To find a way to succeed at a game which is designed so that you usually lose requires that you "play the game" in the first place. It requires that you be complicit in an oppressive system, rather than stepping out of it entirely. Perhaps such complicity is inescapable when engaging in a critical project, because it is necessary to reference the object of one's criticism. Even so, while the kings' success at resistance should not be diminished, their collusion with the systems they are resisting should not be ignored either.

So then, is it possible that the performances by the kings of Bros B4 Ho's are queer and not queer at the same time? We should bear in mind that different readings of a text can co-exist, and that choosing one reading over another may be too simplistic and would erase the complexities and interesting tensions we have uncovered in their work. As Jagose reminds us, "queer is a category in the process of formation [...] its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics" (1996: 1). Perhaps it is this very elasticity that allows it to apply to a situation such as this.

Now that we have reflected on the queerness of this enterprise, we can move on to the next step in this discussion, which is to speculate on the broader political implications of drag king performances such as these. Is Bros B4 Ho's more than just a queer project? What meaning do these performances take on in the unique context in which they are staged? To address these questions and to fulfil the final aim of this study, I would now like to explore to what extent we can argue that the drag king troupe is engaged in a decolonising project that resists colonial ideologies of gender as well as the neo-colonial shaping of space in the city.

Before we do so, however, we need to consider the legacy that colonialism has had on the African context with regards to ideologies about biological sex and gender. Firstly, as Milani (2014) points out, historian Thomas Laqueur (1990) concluded that the importance of the biological sex binary to the difference between men and women is not only a social construction, but it is one that was created relatively recently. Laqueur (1990) argues that it was only after the eighteenth century that the differences between male and female genitalia came to be seen in binary opposition in western medicine. From then on, it was

believed that this opposition was to be found throughout the body and not just in these organs, and the "universality" of this biological dimorphism became a dominant ideology. Subsequently, this ideology was carried over to the colonies during colonisation. According to Kitch (2009:), "sexual difference and the gender binary became basic tenets of the ideology of racial hierarchy and white supremacy during processes of nation formation in the West". The previous two chapters have demonstrated the diverse ways in which the drag kings of this troupe play with, overturn, and sometimes opt out of the gender binary completely (see for example Saint Dude's song, *Rainbow*, above). The fact that they are African kings who do so in an African context is significant. We can argue that, in addition to interrogating masculinity and gender more broadly, they are also rejecting these colonial ideologies of biological dimorphism that were imported to the continent, and thus their performances can be seen as part of an African decolonising project. Of course, we must acknowledge that the strength of this argument is lessened somewhat by the fact that they do not mention such a decolonising project in their statements of motivation and that it is based solely on the context the kings' find themselves in. However, it is possible that the performances could have an impact beyond what the kings envisioned, and I believe that an analysis of the activity of these drag kings is incomplete without exploring the interplay between their performances and the context in which they are staged.

Secondly, colonialism has also impacted sexuality in Africa by causing it to intersect with race in complex ways. Gunkel (2010) explains that, through hypersexualising the (black) Other, "colonialism constituted race as a sexualised category, and sexuality a racialised category. Racialised bodies are reproduced through (hetero)sexuality" (2010: 11). Therefore, the discourse that non-normative genders and sexualities are unAfrican – reiterated time and again by African politicians – is actually deeply rooted in colonial ideologies of race and sexuality. This neo-colonial discourse results in black queer individuals experiencing double marginalisation due to their blackness as well as their non-normative sexuality and/or gender identity, often rendering them invisible (Milani, 2014). The performers under investigation in this study – two of whom are black lesbian-identified women – have managed to resist this erasure and gain some visibility through performing as part of Bros B4 Ho's. The drag king troupe has also been an avenue through which they

could articulate their lived realities by performing original songs that often detail personal struggles.

Not only has Bros B4 Ho's given a voice to marginalised individuals, it has also been a way for them to reject being labelled unAfrican. The kings proudly emphasise the fact that they are South African, regularly referring to themselves as "South Africa's first ever drag king troupe" on Facebook and in nearly all the news articles written about them. We should note, however, that much of their material and inspiration is drawn from American pop-culture, and this is unfortunate for a group that flags up their South African identity. On the other hand, it could be argued that the reliance on American masculinities comes with the territory in drag performances, as they depend on well-known and recognizable personas to be effective. It is possible that parodying South African public figures may not have achieved the same effect as those drawn from the influential American cultural landscape. That being said, the kings of Bros B4 Ho's do occasionally try to give their performances local flavour through the inclusion of words or phrases in other South African languages. For example, Saint Dude puts a multilingual spin on his rendition of Nelly's *Hot in Herre* when he includes the line "Dis warm, kushushu namhlanje!" (which translates to "it's hot" and "it's hot today" in Afrikaans and isiXhosa respectively). However, the lack of recognizable (South) African masculinities portrayed does not diminish the performers' insistence on being seen as a South African troupe, and this insistence is yet another rejection of a colonial ideology around gender in Africa.

The argument that Bros B4 Ho's is engaged in a decolonising project is strengthened if we consider Glen Elder's (2005) arguments about space in Cape Town being "colonized" (2005: 53) as "gay space" by the tourism industry. As discussed in chapter three, he argues that, "these thematic reimaginings of the city seek to create a segregated space of exclusion" (Elder, 2005: 46). Through a close reading of promotional material on "gay Cape Town", Elder demonstrates how the city has been refashioned to be easily consumed by the international traveller. Hand-in-hand with this refashioning is the invention of "gay space", by which tourism advertisers have tried to label locations as "gay", and then bring together these noncontiguous or non-adjacent spaces to create a "gay" landscape. Once this happens, Elder argues, these territories are subtly remade into *male* space using several

strategies, one of which is to attach global "gay" signifiers to a place. These signifiers are usually descriptions of what are considered "gay specific activities", and descriptions of these activities are often framed in ways that suggest the possibility of sex between men is not far away. Furthermore, many of the travel brochures visually and discursively imply that it is the norm to be *white* and male in these spaces. Images generally depict young, good-looking white men as the clientele, and references to lesbian women, transgender individuals and people of colour are always marked. It's clear that, while these spaces are being referred to as "gay", in reality they only cater to white, middle class gay men. According to Elder, "[t]hrough rhetorical and spatial strategies, non-white male and female homosexual Capetonians [...] become invisible urban subjects and the white masculine body becomes the defining presence on the landscape" (2005: 56).

Under these circumstances, a performance in which a group of women enter one of these male spaces, literally take over a stage that usually showcases men and fill the drag bar with an audience of women is active resistance to being excluded and marginalized in this way. The success with which they have staked a claim over space that has been colonized is apparent when we consider that the kings went from performing at the bar's open mike nights to having their own dedicated drag king nights nearly every week in a relatively short space of time. Once again, it is clear that Bros B4 Ho's has been a means for these individuals to achieve a level of visibility and a voice in a situation in which they are usually rendered invisible and voiceless.

Furthermore, it is clear from the interview that claiming space specifically as a *black* woman was an important act for Pretorius:

I know for a fact that I drew a black crowd— more of a black and coloured crowd which was exciting for me [...] it was challenging because a lot of the people didn't understand hip hop, and it was important for me to perform hip hop because (.) hip hop is a— like for me a black art form. So it was important for me to kind of also (.) uh claim that space with my hip hop music. [...]Performing in— (.) like as a black lesbian in these white spaces (..) I feel like I owned it, and I killed them, like I— I beat them at their own game, like they ended up loving me a lot.

They really liked what I did, and that's exactly what I wanted to do. [...] I don't even mean that in a– like in– like a arrogant way, I mean like (.) it was a triumph for black people (.) you know? Um (.) 'cause black lesbians started coming in and um coloured lesbians came in and they came just for the hip hop they came just for– to hear the Drake songs, they came to hear the Lil Wayne songs you know? And then when the rock music played, they kind of like calmed down a bit. But it was exciting that– that that's what was happening, and that it was being led by– um (.) like hip hop was leading this– this– um (.) this movement.

She highlights in particular the role that her choice to perform hip hop music – which she rather simplistically terms a "black art form" – played in making blackness visible in this space. Her aim was to fill the space not only with black individuals, but also with what she considers black art. Her awareness that she had entered a space considered "white" comes through in her explanation that part of the challenge of performing in the space was that "a lot of the people didn't understand hip hop", thus indirectly positioning these people as "not black". Note that this discourse of "not understanding" mirrors the discourse she used to dismiss the people who criticised their performances for being misogynistic. Through the words "triumph" and "movement", Pretorius frames her activity as a drag king as "struggle", and by clarifying that she is not being "arrogant" when she is talking about her success, she implies that she does not claim this success as her own, but represents it as a victory on behalf of all black people in this larger "struggle".

At the same time, she is not unaware of the fact that other black South Africans may not have access to these spaces the way she does:

I acknowledge my privilege as like a coloured person in Cape Town who is educated in like Southern Suburbs schools, and that I went to UCT and that I speak with a certain type of accent. I acknowledge that privilege, I always do. Um (.) but,[...] because people perceive that as better, I use that to my advantage [...] I'm going to use that as a tool (.) to make you think.

Lastly, the kings actively resist the colonising of space in the city as "gay" by deliberately choosing to perform their two sit-down shows at other venues:

We didn't only want to perform in queer spaces, we thought it was extremely important (.) to perform in straight spaces, like typically straight spaces, [...] 'cause we thought it was important to reclaim spaces (.) and also to educate people (.) people who wouldn't usually go into a drag bar [...] would come to Obz Cafe and see us perform.

What we see here are lesbian-identified Capetonians deciding that "gay" experiences can (and should) take place in other parts of the city, in locations that have not been dictated to them by tourism advertisers.

What is noteworthy about this analysis of the implications of Bros B4 Ho's performances within the "gay village" of Cape Town is that it complexifies the discussions of the space that were reviewed in chapter three. While "gay" spaces in the city *are* often fashioned in a way that is exclusionary to marginalised groups, this does not mean that there aren't successful moments of resistance to this exclusion. This study thus provides counter-data to previous research that paints Cape Town's "gay" landscape as wholly inaccessible to all but wealthy white men.

By taking all the above points into account, I believe we have a convincing argument for reading the drag king troupe's activity as both a resistance to the neo-colonial refashioning of space in the city of Cape Town, and also as a small project in a larger movement to decolonise the African continent of imported ideologies of gender.

In conclusion, this study has revealed that, while drag king performances are effective at troubling ideologies of gender, their subversive work is limited in that they rely on the very concepts they critique for their message to be understood. I have thus argued that, in light of this data, Halberstam's conception of female masculinity as a purely subversive phenomenon needs rethinking. In addition, the study has also demonstrated the very close relationship that exists between the two ethnographic environments and how they cannot be treated as two completely separate entities in this context. It has also provided data that

speaks back to the literature on Cape Town that paints the "gay village" in the city centre as an exclusionary space that only welcomes the "empowered white gay playboy" (Visser, 2003: 124). All in all, this study has attempted to remedy the lack of sociolinguistic research into theatrical performances of masculinity by women through a detailed investigation into the stage performances and online activity of South African drag troupe Bros B4 Ho's. Moreover, I believe that this exploration of the complexities and ambiguities of a drag king performance has contributed to the growing body of research on queer experiences and phenomena on the African continent.



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Appendix 1 List of Data

Video data

Bros B4 Ho's Documentary.

Lea, S. (Director). (2012) *Bros B4 Ho's*. Available URL:

<http://youtu.be/GjFIQvzhwXA?list=UULMDxdIQ9YYBj8EDphco0bg>. Accessed 30/10/2014.

brosb4hosCT Youtube Channel.

Available URL: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLMDxdIQ9YYBj8EDphco0bg>

Facebook data

Bros B4 Ho's Facebook page. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT?ref=ts&fref=ts>

Cole Steel Johnson's Facebook page. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/ColeSteelJohnson?fref=ts>

FreDDie's Facebook page. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/freddieBB4H?fref=ts>

Frankie H's Facebook page. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/FrankieHardon?fref=ts>

King Cory Lingus' Facebook page. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/CoryLingus?fref=ts>

Saint Dude's Facebook page.

No longer accessible.

Umlilo John's Facebook page. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/UmliloJohn?fref=ts>

Secondary interviews and news articles

Bros B4 Hos. (Spring, 2012). *OUT Africa Magazine*. pp. 40-41. Accessed 07/05/2013.

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<http://www.allthingsqueer.co.za/archives/gender/376-before-im-dragged-away-from-dragging.html>

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Women. Accessed 15/10/2012. Available URL: <http://bow2012.mg.co.za/catherine-st-jude-pretorius/>



Appendix 2 Image sources

Chapter 1

Figure 1 – Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed 11/09/2012. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/freddieBB4H/photos/o.140769169392245/368808779855217/?type=3&theater>

Figure 2 – Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed 15/10/2012. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/photos/a.140776156058213.28571.140769169392245/144839178985244/?type=3&theater>

Chapter 5

Figure 3 – Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed 30/01/2014. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/photos/a.168657233270105.39192.140769169392245/168665383269290/?type=3&theater>

Figure 4 – Still from Bros B4 Ho's documentary. Accessed 30/09/2014. Available URL:

<http://youtu.be/GjFIQvzhwXA?list=UULMDxdIQ9YYBj8EDphco0bg>

Figure 5 – Still from Bros B4 Ho's documentary. Accessed 27/08/2014. Available URL:

<http://youtu.be/GjFIQvzhwXA?list=UULMDxdIQ9YYBj8EDphco0bg>

Figure 6 – Still from Umlilo John (Beez in the Trap) video clip. Accessed 27/08/2014.

Available URL: http://youtu.be/z_gYgzKQJCQ?list=UULMDxdIQ9YYBj8EDphco0bg

Figure 7 – Still from Frankie (I'm a Man) video clip. Accessed 27/08/2014. Available URL:

<http://youtu.be/ChHlqq-2b18?list=UULMDxdIQ9YYBj8EDphco0bg>

Figure 8 – Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed 14/11/2013. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/photos/pb.140769169392245.-2207520000.1415820698./170405949761900/?type=3&theater>

Chapter 6

Figure 9 – Screenshot of Saint Dude's Facebook profile page. Accessed: 28/10/2013. No available URL.

Figure 10 – Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed: 15/04/2013. Available URL:
<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/photos/pb.140769169392245.-2207520000.1415820902./168279809974514/?type=3&theater>

Figure 11 – Umlilo John 's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed: 30/01/2014. Available URL:
<https://www.facebook.com/UmliloJohn/photos/a.436560173041336.96660.436559979708022/603728772991141/?type=1&theater>

Figure 12 – Frankie H's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed: 14/11/2013. Available URL:
<https://www.facebook.com/FrankieHardon/photos/a.242862812490484.48728.242862695823829/295754057201359/?type=1&theater>

Figure 13 – Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed: 12/11/2014. Available URL:
<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/photos/a.148118875323941.31046.140769169392245/148119508657211/?type=3&theater>

Figure 14 – Screenshot of FreDDie's Facebook page. Accessed: 12/11/2014. Available URL:
<https://www.facebook.com/freddieBB4H?fref=ts>

Figure 15 – FreDDie's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed: 28/02/2014. Available URL:
<https://www.facebook.com/freddieBB4H/photos/a.361453253924103.84374.346282682107827/361453440590751/?type=3&theater>

Figure 16 – Photo by Richard Young / Rex Features (458742ea). Accessed: 28/02/2014. Available URL: <http://wewillrockyou.pl/foto/freddie-mercury-1980-86/shooting-stars-30-years-of-the-photography-of-richard-young/>

Figure 17 – FreDDie's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed: 12/11/2013. Available URL:
<https://www.facebook.com/freddieBB4H/photos/a.411090128960415.98682.346282682107827/411091152293646/?type=3&theater>

Figure 18 – Still from Drag King FreDDie (MashUp Medley) video clip. Accessed: 10/11/2014. Available URL:
<http://youtu.be/AUVVCMeJ89Q?list=UULMDxdIQ9YYBj8EDphco0bg>

Figure 19 – Photo of Freddie Mercury at Wembley Stadium, 1986. Accessed 28/02/2014.

Available URL: <http://89millionand7.blogspot.com/2012/11/but-he-collected-postage-stamps.html>

Figure 20– Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed 30/01/2014. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/photos/a.168657233270105.39192.140769169392245/168665383269290/?type=3&theater>

Figure 21 – Umlilo John's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed: 30/01/2014. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/UmliloJohn/photos/a.436627569701263.96670.436559979708022/620848491279169/?type=3&theater>

Figure 22 – Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed 09/07/2013. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/photos/pb.140769169392245.-2207520000.1415820902./165581276911034/?type=3&theater>

Figure 23 – Screenshot of FreDDie's Facebook page. Accessed: 28/10/2013. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/freddieBB4H?fref=ts>

Figure 24 – Bros B4 Ho's Facebook photo gallery. Accessed 09/12/2014. Available URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/brosb4hosCT/photos/a.140776156058213.28571.140769169392245/178115678990927/?type=3&theater>

Appendix 3 Information Sheet

FACULTY OF ARTS

Linguistics Department

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535
South Africa
Tel: +27 (021) 959-2978/2380
Fax: +27 (021) 959-1212
Website: www.uwc.ac.za

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Email: fbanda@uwc.ac.za

25 April 2013

Information Sheet: Interviews with Drag King Performers

I, Mooniq Shaikjee, am a Masters student in the Department of Linguistics, at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. For this degree, I am exploring performances of masculinity by women in the South African context through a linguistic ethnography of the country's first drag king troupe, Bros B4 Ho's.

The aim of this project is to study the stage performances of the members of Cape Town's first drag king troupe, Bros B4 Ho's, as well as their activity in virtual spaces like blogs and social networking sites, in order to investigate

- how drag kings perform and parody masculinity on stage
- how they negotiate their subjectivities across spaces other than the stage
- how activity on social networking sites and coverage in the media act as dialogues that leads up to the stage performances
- how audiences read drag king performances on stage and online
- what the potential implications of the deconstruction of dominant masculinities in an African context are

More specifically, this study aims to:

- Examine the existing literature around drag king performances in the US and UK
- Discuss the emergence of drag kings in South Africa
- Analyse live or video recorded stage performances of SA drag kings
 - To examine how they perform and/or parody masculine subjectivities.
 - To examine how they construct these subjectivities semiotically (through costume, props, voice, movement, dance, etc.) and discursively (through speech and song) in relation to drag king techniques and modes as discussed by Halberstam (1998, 2001).
 - To examine how these performances are received by the audience.
 - To examine to what extent the audience reads these performances as a disruption of dominant, heteronormative masculinity.
- Examine the drag kings' social networking activity in relation to their stage performances to determine the level of interdiscursivity – or connections between genres and discourses – that exists between these spaces.
- Discuss the implications of the increased visibility these spaces grant drag kings, particularly in South Africa.

You are kindly requested to participate in an interview because as a member of this troupe you can provide valuable insights on issues around performances of masculinity by women. It will take only about 20 minutes of your time.

My supervisor is Professor Christopher Stroud in the Department of Linguistics, University of the Western Cape, South Africa. He can be contacted at +27 21 959 2978 or cstroud@uwc.ac.za.

A place of quality, a place to grow, from hope to action through knowledge

My contact details are as follows: Mooniq Shaikjee, Linguistics Dept., UWC, phone: 021 959 3746 or email mooniq.shaikjee@gmail.com.

This information sheet is for you to keep so that you can be aware of the purpose of the interview. With your signature on the attached document, you indicate that you understand the purpose of the exercise.

Yours truly,

Mooniq Shaikjee





FACULTY OF ARTS

Linguistics Department

University of the Western Cape

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South Africa
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Cell: 082 362 1100

Email: fbanda@uwc.ac.za

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR MASTERS THESIS

25 April 2013

Study Title or Topic:	Drag kings in Cape Town: Space and the performance of gendered subjectivities
------------------------------	---

Researcher: Mooniq Shaikjee, Masters candidate, Linguistics Department, University of the Western Cape.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study which will take place between February 2013 and December 2013. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

The purposes of this study are:

- 1) to fulfil the course requirement for M.A. degree in Linguistics,
- 2) to gain insight into the phenomenon of female masculinity and the drag king performer in South Africa in 2013.

I will be using linguistic ethnography to collect data on this topic, including interviews, observations of performances and online activity, as well as textual analysis of articles and other relevant visual material.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met:

Your participation is voluntary.

You have the right to withdraw at any stage.

If you decide to withdraw, all material contributed by you will be deleted.

If you so choose, your real name will not be used in any records.

Interviews will not be video recorded.

If you grant permission for audio recordings, no recordings will be used for any purpose other than for this study.

If at any stage you have questions about the study please contact:

Mooniq Shaikjee

3265359@uwc.ac.za or

mooniq.shaikjee@gmail.com

Are you willing to be interviewed?

Yes No

Are you aware that you will not receive any monetary remuneration for participating?

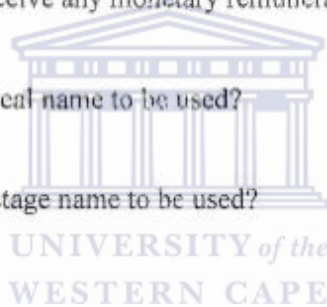
Yes No

Do you grant permission for your real name to be used?

Yes No

Do you grant permission for your stage name to be used?

Yes No



I, CATHERINE SAINT JUDE PRETORIUS, agree to the above terms.

Signature  Date 10.10.14

Participant

Signature  Date 10/10/2014

Researcher

Appendix 5 Interview guide

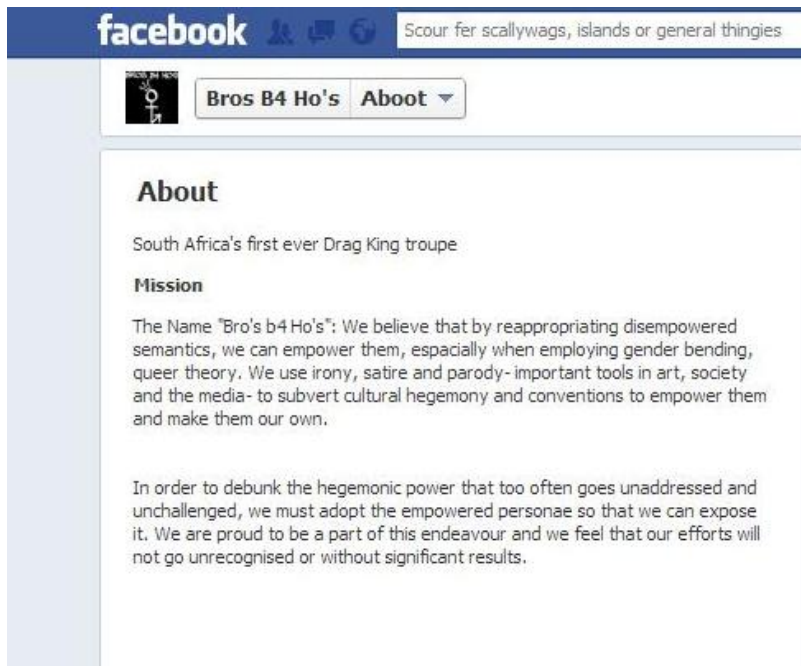
Interview with Catherine Saint Jude Pretorius

10 October 2014

- ❖ Remember to get information sheet and consent form signed, and to explain the study.

Questions

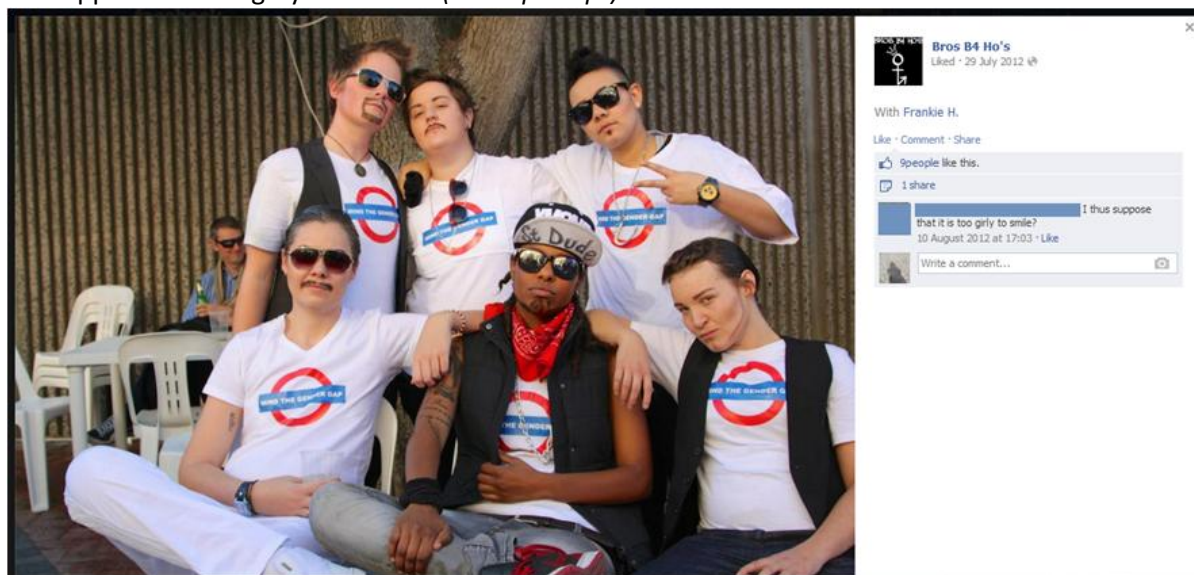
1. When I started following the troupe, there were six members. Could you give me a little background to the original performers?
 - a. For example, did you know them all before the group was formed? How did you all meet?
2. Bros B4 Ho's has been called SA's first drag king troupe several times. Why do you think we haven't seen a drag king troupe in SA before now?
 - a. What is it about the current circumstances – place, time, people – that allowed such a phenomenon to emerge?
3. You've talked a lot about how the troupe was formed, and what went into choosing personae and costumes and so on. I was wondering if you could tell me more about what guided you through the whole process. How did you know what you needed to do to have a successful drag king show?
4. What made you decide to perform masculinity through music, rather than for example comedy routines or sketches, like Halberstam's drag kings?
5. I've noticed that most of the songs you performed at your two main shows were originally sung by male artists. Was this a conscious choice? Why?
6. Can you explain the motivation behind Umlilo choosing to sing Nicki Minaj's Beez in the trap at the show in Obz? In that show it was the only song by a woman.
7. (*Show prompt*) This is a screenshot of the About section of the group's page.



I've noticed that you put a lot of energy into explaining the motivations behind your drag performances. This also happens in the other interviews I've found online and in the documentary. Can you explain why is it so important to you?

8. Why is there such a heavy focus on queer theory in your explanations? What role does it play in what you do?
9. An aspect that I am really interested in is space, so I'd like to ask you a little about the spaces you performed in – Obz Cafe, Alexander Bar, Bubbles bar.
 - a. Can you explain why the group chose those spaces to perform in?
 - b. Was there anything challenging about performing in those spaces?
10. Many people criticize De Waterkant for not being a very inclusive or easily accessible place for many Capetonians. How do you feel about this criticism?
11. What was it like for you, as a black, lesbian woman to enter this space and perform in this space?
12. Can you tell me a little bit about your audiences? In the performances I attended, the audiences seemed to be mostly women. Do you agree?
13. How have people responded to your performances?
 - a. Audience, family, other lesbians, other people?

14. This is a screenshot of a comment on one of the group's photos on Facebook. It reads, "I suppose it is too girly to smile?" (Show prompt)



What is your response to a criticism like that?

15. What would you say to someone who might argue that you're also reinforcing stereotypes when you perform?

16. Have you had many people questioning what you are doing?

17. Why did you guys decide to create Facebook pages for your personae?
a. Do you think they allow you to do things you may not be able to do with just performances?

18. Do you think it has impacted on the success of your performances? How?

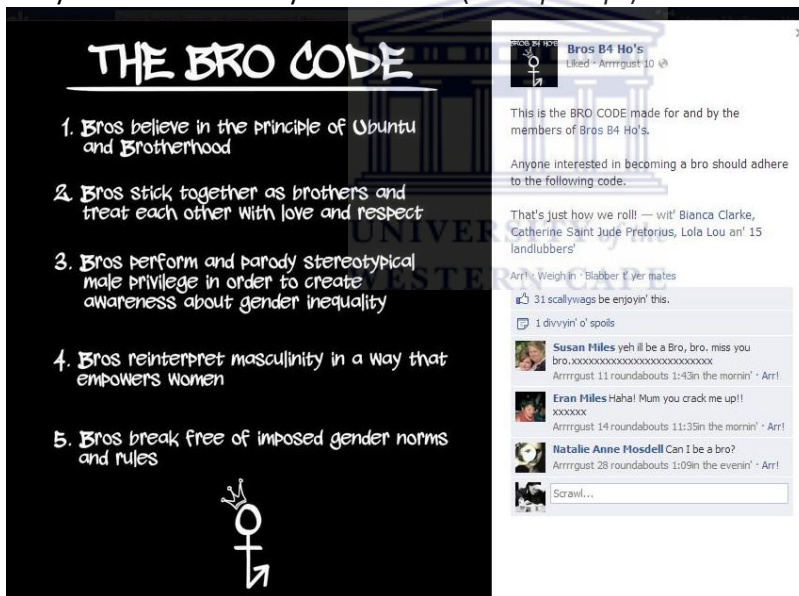
19. What went into putting the pages together?

20. Can you explain this to me? (Show prompt of "neutral" gender)



21. I know that this was before Facebook had more gender options for profiles, so how did this come about?

22. Can you tell me the story behind this? (*Show prompt*)



23. Is this a reference to Barney Stinson's Bro Code in HIMYM?
 a. What would you say to someone who might point out that this is a problematic association (due to misogyny, objectification of women, etc?)

24. What has been the most challenging thing about performing as a drag king for you?

25. What has been the best thing?

26. I noticed that Saint Dude's page has changed to Dope Saint Jude. Can you explain this?
 a. What are you up to now? Have you moved on from drag kinging to other things?

27. Have your feelings about doing drag changed at all from when you started?
28. Closing questions:
- a. Do you have anything you want to bring up or ask about before we finish the interview?
 - b. What do you think I should have asked you that I didn't think to ask?
29. May I contact you further if I need any clarification?
- a. How can I do so?
30. Explain how the data will be used
31. Thank the participant.



Appendix 6 Interview transcription

Interview with Catherine Saint Dude Pretorius

10 October 2014

Key:

word-	false start
[onset of overlapping speech
=	latching
so::	lengthening
(.)	short pause
(..)	longer pause
(...)	very long pause
(ya)	Minimal response/feedback from interlocutor
[laughter]	Extralinguistic feature

- M: So basically, the stuff that I– I've done analysis and stuff (ya) what I– what I need now– I've got questions just to kinda supplement what I've got already (okay) so that I'm not (.) guessing about what you guys are trying to do (ya) about certain things um:: and just– just to make stuff a bit more substantial [so–
- C: [ya so, the thing is there's something I need to say is that (.) a lot of my ideas and my perspectives have changed since then.
- M: Okay cool we can talk about that.
- C: Okay ya [great.
- M: [Ya that's great we can talk about that. (..) Okay (.) so– where my questions? Okay here they are. Okay so:: um:: as you said things have changed (.) I know when I started following you guys in 2012 there were six of you (ya) and now it feels like the group (.) dynamic has changed a bit. There's less members. (ya) Is that true?
- C: Ya I left I left the group (okay) um:: and ya the group is smaller I think it slowly whittled down, I think there are only three members now.
- M: Okay
- C: Ya um:: and that's just like individual dynamics, no social dynamics and also me wanting to pursue something else (okay) um but I am (.) interested in doing my drag king act again (okay) ya just recently in the last (.) few months I've decided I'm going to (.) be going for it again because I've started a new persona, which is a more feminine persona (okay cool) ya I created a new one.

M: Okay that's cool (ya) umm but in terms of the original members umm like h– can you give me a bit of background on– on some of them? Like how did you guys (.) meet each other, [how did you know them?

C: [Okay, so how it started was I (.) um the Butch Life, the blog (.) posted a– a thing uh uh saying like why aren't there any drag kings in Cape Town and I was like (.) "yo, that's an opening for me." So I be– I became a drag king. I took them up on their challenge and then after doing it for a while, I kinda gained some following (.) people were really interested in what I was doing, so I put out a call (.) and at the time I was running Cape Town Lesbians so (.) I used that as a platform to kind of (ya) find out where I could get people. So I put out a call (.) "Who wants to be a drag king?" and then everyone (.) pitched up (.) the group (.) and then there's Umlilo (.) Shinéad who is from Mitchell's Plain (.) and she's a physio (.) well *he's* a physio student um the little one, (mm) the baby of the group. Then there was Frankie, who's from the US from New Orleans (ya) doing his thesis. He's a trans man also doing his thesis is gender I think um then there was Marchane (.) who's a lecturer, a soc– like a social worker lecturer. She joined Freddie um Chantal who was uh King Cory (.) Cory Lingus [laughter] um from the Northern Suburbs (mmm) Afrikaans background (.) um and then– (.)

M: All at UCT?

C: No. The only person from UCT was actually Shinéad. (okay) Ya and we weren't even (.) connected at UCT at the time (.) [but he–

M: [Okay so (.) none of you were connected before this?

C: No.

M: [Oh that's so cool!

C: [I mean we kind of knew each other from the scene, like we had seen each other in the gay scene but (.) we didn't really know each other well and then we became (.) we– ya we started this brotherhood. We were going through this transition together (.) ya.

M: Okay, that's (.) pretty cool. Okay so um:: the other thing I wanted to ask you was (.) like Bros B4 Hos got this big (..) people were naming it like SA's first drag king troupe. (yes) And as far as we know, it is [the first.

C: [as far [as we know! [laughter]

M: [As far as we know [laughter] ya. But I wanted to ask you like why do you think we've never seen (.) a drag king troupe before in South Africa? What do you think it was about *now* that kind of allowed this kind of (um::) what's your (.) take on that?

C: I think that uh we weren't in a (..) I don't think we were in a— like in a accommodating space, and to be quite honest, I think Cape Town's queer politics is quite behind (mm) I mean South Africa's queer politics (still) I mean we considered the gay capital (ya) and the queer capital but like we're still pretty behind. Um. So I just think (..) no one actually just no one just like no one did it. I don't know why I don't think that um it actually had to do with (..) the environment. I think had anyone else done it it would've been well received. I think it just took the right group of people who were willing to do it (okay) um I c— I can't honestly say that um our our environment didn't allow for it before. I mean post— post South Africa getting (..) like having gay marriage, I think there's— it's been a pretty open space. (mm) and there's safe spaces, queer people know where the safe spaces are. And there's a very strong drag queen culture (ya) so I think it was just— um (..)

M: A matter of time.

C: Ya um a matter of time and also just um breaking through like you need the first people to do it you know (..) and then it it becomes a norm (..) becomes s—something comfortable that other people pick up. Ya.

M: Cool. Okay. And then:: (..) in terms of what (..) I mean I read a lot of stuff— a lot of your interviews and things you've done with other people, about how you chose your personas and how you (..) decided what you were gonna do but like how— (..) what guided you through the whole process? Nobody had done it before here (ya) so how did you know what to do? I mean (umm [laughter])(..) what was it like?

C: We did— we did some research. We uh— well I did some— I did some research I guess into (..) like But— like Judith Butler (mm) and all that kind of stuff (..) but then also just li— like my— for myself it was um it was my love for hip hop that actually guided me through my persona (mm) um creating Saint Dude (..) as a parody and a— a commentary on hip hop masculinity. And then because hip hop was really important for me, I encouraged the other boys to find (..) a persona that really resonated with them (..) you know that they kinda felt comfortable and mine was based in hip hop music (..) um it was something I was comfortable with. Also being (..) besides Umlilo the only black (..) person in the group (ya) [laughter] and Umlilo funny enough the only other black person— coloured person also took up a hip hop persona (okay) the other boys did rock music. So I guess (..) we just kinda went by a— we modelled ourselves on characters (..) on men that already existed. (mm) So mine was based on Lil Wayne, Umlilo's was based on Drake (mm) then Freddie was based on (Freddie) on Freddie Mercury um (..) yeah and then the others kinda took an amalgama— like a you know an amalgamation of different personas and put them together (ya). Ya we— it was a process that we— it was a comfortable process and it was one that just happened by itself.

M: Okay so you didn't have anybody (..) else who was maybe guiding you [through—

C: [No, no I— I led the process

- M: [laughter]
- C: But like (.) leading through my own experience.
- M: Okay. 'Cause I know with drag queens sometimes they have drag mothers and things like that (yeah) so were you the drag daddy?
- C: Well, not daddy, more like big brother (okay) ya. That was the– the relationship was that I was the (.) big brother (okay) um (.) And then– but I specifically was (.) uh mentoring Umlilo (okay cool) uh uh Sinéad. Ya.
- M: Um:: Okay this actually leads into my n– I was asking why– what made you choose music (.) because I know in– with Hal– Judith Halberstam a lot of the drag qu– kings she looked at (.) were doing like comedy routines (ya) and like comedy sketches (ya) and (.) so you guys it was the process that led you to (.) the music?
- C: Ya. Um (.) it's also the environment because (.) my first performance was at Bubbles Bar which was a drag bar and it was a– like it's performance (.) it's uh like live performance (okay). So (.) that's what led us to do– (.) to have personas that um (.) were kind of based in music. Although (.) my persona kind of drifted away from that where I was like often interacting and speaking with the audience (mm) pr– like in a pretty misogynistic way to get my point across more (ya) um (..) but ya I guess it's just– it's just the environment that kind of created the whole music thing. And also music is a nice mask to hide behind (ya) I think it's (.) quite difficult when you actually have to talk (.) to people in your persona (ya) because then you r– you have to have quite a developed persona (ya) and you have to know what you doing (.) um and music is nice because you can hide behind your performance (.) just a performance and that's all people see.
- M: Cool. And you can also like– (.) you're referencing the original performance (ya) which is pretty cool cause like people will think okay this is Lil Wayne then they think about Lil Wayne's masculinity and they kind of like put it on your own (yes) that's pretty cool. (ya) Okay, so that answered my question perfectly. Umm oh and it goes into the next question. Is this maybe why a lot of your songs were by male artists? Was that a conscious choice?–
- C: =Yes definitely. (okay) All– ya. I encouraged the boys to have songs by male artists.
- M: Well I find that very cool cause I know Umlilo did a song by Nicki Minaj (yeah) in the first show (yeah) and I did a presentation (.) of (.) some of my paper at a conference and people were like (.) "But why is– why's he doing Nicki Minaj? This is confusing!" (ya) So do you know anything about why Umlilo chose Nicki Minaj for that one? She did– He did *Beez in the Trap* (yeah) and I really enjoyed that one [laughter].
- C: Yeah, *Beez in the Trap*. (ya) Umm (.) Because also– because Nicki Minaj is an interesting character (yeah she is) that's why. It's because Nicki Minaj plays with her masculine identity (mm). So what Umlilo did was take the masculinity out of what

Nicki Minaj was saying (.) and flip it and s– have it from a male perspective. (ya) Um so ya it's pretty much based on like the way Nicki Minaj plays with gender (ya) because then what happens is (.) you can divorce what– like divorce her lyrics from her gender identity and apply it to like– the like the masculine and then she's doing it through like (.) a feminine um (.) voice like her voice is feminine and then having that you can s– I mean if you listen to the words (ya) she talks about like "bitches" and all of that (.) Ya it's interesting also because (.) just as a side note we always used to discuss how Nicki Minaj um (..) some people call her a feminist, but it's interesting that she exploits women in the same way that (.) male hip hop performers do. So it's interesting that like a woman needs to do that too to be like deemed powerful. Ya, so we were kinda like exploring that whole (.) (ya) idea like (.)

M: I thought that was very interesting so I wanted to ask you about it.

C: [laughter]

M: Uh, okay, so that's that. (.) Oh and then I wanted to show you, this is a screenshot– [shows the prompts] I don't know if you're gonna see it properly but– (ya) umm it's from the "About" section of the– the m– the group page=

C: =Yes?

M: And then this is– I know your page has changed. Saint Dude's page has changed so I had a screenshot of the old page=

C: =Oh great

M: And I just wanted to ask you I s– I've noticed there that you guys have put a lot of energy into explaining the motivations behind doing drag.

C: Yes.

M: And I've noticed this in a lot of the other interviews you guys did (yes) as well. You spend a lot of time explaining why=

C: =Ya why we're doing drag=

M: =Ya why you're doing drag. Umm can you explain to me maybe why it's so important for you to explain or justify why– (yes) why you guys are doing drag?

C: Umm. To be quite honest it's because (.) um we were first met with a lot of criticism. People didn't understand why we had those personas and why our personas weren't (.) friendly (.) men.

M: Okay.

C: Do you understand?



- M: Ya. Why were they uncomfortable [men.
- C: [So like why they were aggressive men (.) you know why were our personas an ugly (.) um (.) take on masculinity. (.) And we were trying to make a point so we felt like (.) it was very necessary for us to always explain that to people because in the context in which we were performing we were performing in bars (.) and at social events where people were drinking and kind of– (.) so they sometimes didn't understand the commentary we were trying to make (.) so it was very important that our existence (.) was kind of like– not justified but explained (okay). Ya, so we put a lot of (.) effort into explaining like this is why we do it and this is (.) why it's important to us (okay). Also just umm (.) I– I– I encouraged the group to do a lot of research (.) because I also believe– I mean 'cause my goal in like– my end goal well eventually in a few years time is to become an academic so (.) I'm gonna follow in your footsteps [laughter]
- M: [laughter] Okay, okay.
- C: Um (.) And I just think it's important to kind of back up (.) what you're doing– I don't like the idea of art just for the sake of (.) nothing (okay) you know? I feel like (.) uh we should always be– (.) okay not even (.) making commentary but it needs to have some kind of purpose.
- M: Okay. (ya) So can you tell me more about who it was who was– (.) or just the people in the audience? Or=
- C: =Um well (.) when I was running Cape Town Lesbians I knew about it 'cause I was pretty involved in like the queer community having run Rainbow and all of that um (.) so I– I picked up that a lot of people just didn't understand and started boycotting some of our shows because they felt that (.) we were too misogynistic. They were making comments. People commented on the page. People approached my partner who was running Cape Town Lesbians with me at the time and told her– and asked that they stop promoting our events because we promote misogyny (.) So it was pretty difficult, it put us in a– it put me in a difficult situation (.) 'cause I had a conflict of interest (yes) with now running Cape Town Lesbians and now with doing the drag king thing at the same time. So (.) the best way for me to kind of get out of it was to really explain and be upfront. (Okay). Ya there were just random people (.) you know s– people also just wanna catch on kak you know what I'm saying [laughter].
- M: Okay, I didn't know that that had happened.
- C: Ya it was actually– it was pretty difficult for us at first because (.) like this was such a– (.) it was such a– (.) um it was such a process like a sensitive process that put us in a very (ya, personal)vulnerable state. And then to be met with (.) people attacking us (.) was very difficult. And then there was this like juxtaposition because at some point– like we present ourselves as really tough (mm) but then we come back and then we like be upset about it like "Yo guys" like (.) "they didn't respond very well,

we're putting ourselves out there". And I don't think people really understood. We're girls– or like– ya, we're girls who are going through a process. And it's a very vulnerable– like it takes a lot for you to do that (ya) to dress up like a boy (ya) and wear a beard and really put yourself out there (ya) so (.) we needed to explain to people so they could have some kind of like (.) context and understanding.=

M: =Okay.

C: Ya. (okay) Also so they can be nicer to us [laughter]. 'Cause sometimes they weren't nice.

M: Okay. But that wasn't– was that the overwhelming response, or that was just a part of the response?

C: No the overwhelming response was (.) pos[itive].

M: [Positive, okay.

C: But also because I'm– I think a lot, and also I see through an academic lens I was like "Yo (.) now it's time to explain". [Ya.

M: [Okay. So that also le– leads to my next question about the focus on queer theory (ya) and I wanted to ask what role do you think queer theory plays in what you guys are doing?

C: Um (..) a very– I think it plays a really really strong– like a big role in what we're doing (.) um (.) it– (.) but then you know (.) you need to refresh– like when– when you talk about queer theory you can talk about lots of different things right? But I mean (.) it was very important for us to be familiar with queer theory. Frankie explains it in the– (.)

M: Mm, in– in the documentary, ya, mm.

C: Just the– (.) and also like the– like g– like a whole lot of things like gender theory and all of that kak like– [laughter] it was important for us to– um to really grasp those topics because even though (.) the other guys weren't doing it (.) because of the theory (ya) ya because of like all the academic texts, it was good for them to understand what they doing (.) like w– like how what they were doing (.) impacted (.) (okay) um. For example like the whole idea of like sep– like gender as a construct and (ya) separating your gender from your– (.) like gender as a performance th–like th– that whole idea. It was important because I don't think like Umlilo knew that, but that's what he was doing, that's essentially what (.) Sinead was doing (ya) So it was just very important for us to have context and to understand the (.) importance of what we were doing. And also, I just really wanted to educate like (.) the boys 'cause like (..) um (..) like (.) for example like King Cory– (.) like he (.) like he didn't really (.) like grasp those topics (ya) and I just thought it was like important that he knew so that if anyone ever asked him he could like explain it from another perspective just–

(.) instead of saying like "It makes me feel good". 'Cause yes, it does make you feel good (.) but also like here's the— like here's the language to explain like what you're actually doing.=

M: =Okay cool (ya) so to give them the tools to kind of explain what they were doing.

C: Ya.

M: Okay that— that's interesting. (.) Um, okay so the other part of my thesis, not just the drag kings— I'm looking at space (ya?) okay so the spaces that you guys performed in (ya) and I've identified Obz Cafe, Alexander Bar and Bubbles.

C: Yes.

M: That's the three spaces. And I wanted you to talk about why you guys (.) chose— I mean Bubbles bar is (.) kind of obvious, it's a drag bar.

C: Yes.

M: The other spaces, why did you choose=

C: =okay, we chose Obz Cafe because Obz Cafe first of all isn't in the queer— in the queer space. We wanted to— we didn't only want to perform in queer spaces, we thought it was extremely important (.) to perform in straight spaces, like typically straight spaces, (ya) and Obz is a hub— is a social hub that's not in the CBD (.) so we were like "Yo, we need to capitalize on that". And then also— ya, 'cause we thought it was important to reclaim spaces (.) and also to educate people (.) people who wouldn't usually go into a drag bar (.) (okay) would come to Obz Cafe and see us perform. Then Alexander Bar, the same— the same idea (..) um ya, basically reclaiming spaces. But I'm— at the same time I must acknowledge that those *are* still safe spaces (ya). Like as much as they straight spaces, I mean they— (.) they're not the kind of spaces where we'll be attacked. We— we know (.) like we knew we were safe. Like they're predominantly like (.) white (.) middle—upper class=

M: [alternative

C: [spaces. Ya, alternative, so we knew we would be (.) like fairly well received. (okay) But still, it was important to make that initial step.

M: Okay (ya). That's interesting. Um. But (.) Even so, was there anything challenging about (.) performing in those spaces?

C: Um, ya [laughter] ya. You're not as safe as when you perform in a drag bar.

[laughter]

- C: Um, the way people respond to you (..) and how that makes you feel about yourself [laughter] um (...) I guess the biggest challenge (.) was (...) ya just people being (.) ups– not upset but confused by what we were doing (oh okay) and then being met with that when you're already feeling vulnerable and then having to explain yourself, and win– and winning people over, you know? (okay) But it was an exciting process, and it– it made all of us grow a lot.
- M: Okay, that's good.=
- C: =Ya [laughter]
- M: Well, just to get back to (.) the *gay* space. (Ya). Like, of course there's been a lot of criticism about the space (yes) and how uh it's not– it's not always inclusive t– to lots of Capetonians=
- C: =yes, definitely=
- M: =so I wanted to ask *you*, what was it like for you as a black lesbian (ya?) to go into those spaces and to perform in those spaces, I mean, (um) what was your experience?
- C: I was pretty excited 'cause I know for a fact that I drew a black crowd– more of a black and coloured crowd (okay) which was exciting for me. And it was ex– it was (...) it was challenging because a lot of the people didn't understand hip hop, and it was important for me to perform hip hop because (.) hip hop is a– like for me a black art form. So it was important for me to kind of also (.) uh claim that space with my hip hop music. Um (.) ya performing in– (.) like as a black lesbian in these white spaces (..) um I feel like I owned it, and I killed them, like I– I beat them at their own game, like they ended up loving me a lot. They really liked what I did, and that's exactly what I wanted to do. Not– I– and I– I don't even mean that in a– like in– like a arrogant way, I mean like (.) it was a triumph for black people (.) you know? Um (.) 'cause black lesbians started coming in (okay) and um coloured lesbians came in and they came just for the hip hop they came just for– to hear the Drake songs, they came to hear the Lil Wayne songs you know? (ya). And then when the rock music played, they kind of like calmed down a bit (ya). But it was exciting that– that that's what was happening, and that it was being led by– um (.) like hip hop was leading this– this– um (.) this movement. Ya.
- M: But– (.) okay that's great, (ya) but you still have to admit that you are able to get into those spaces (yes!) the way other people can't.=
- C: =No, definitely. I– I definitely acknowledge that. I– (.) um but I s– but I also see (.) I– (.) okay, I acknowledge my privilege as like a coloured person in Cape Town who is educated in like Southern Suburbs schools, and that I went to UCT and that I speak with a certain type of accent. I acknowledge that privilege, I always do. Um (.) but, I also see it– (.) 'cause that's like– (.) people– (.) because people perceive that as

better, I use that to my advantage (ya). Like I'll u– then I'm going to use that as a tool (.) to make you think, and to– (.)

M: And to get other people (.) to come in (.) [who won't be able to

C: [ye– exactly. 'Cause I see myself then in a crucial position. I've been given a gift. So like I think– ev– (.) like it has been– (.) 'cause I'm in a very special space where I can– um I can g– go into lots of different groups, like I'm welcome around white people, I'm welcome around black people, I'm welcome around coloured people (ya), so I use that as a tool to kind of try and bring (.) all of that [together

M: [I've never thought about that, about myself either.

C: Ya [laughter]

M: That's so c– (.) I've always thought about it as (.) uncomfortable (yeah) you know? Like not feeling like I belong anywhere. But that's interesting that (.) you can actually use it to your advantage.=

C: =Ya, and not even– (.) it's not even using it to your own advantage. (ya) Use it to the advantage of your people.

M: Okay.

C: Do you understand [what I mean?

M: [ya

C: It's a res– like you were given a gift, and with great power comes [responsibility.

M: [ya.

C: Ya [laughter]

M: Okay, that's awesome. I'm gonna put that in somewhere.

[laughter]

M: Umm (.) Oh ya, just (.) a bit more about your audience (ya). Like (..) I know– I– uh there was a point in my– in my paper where I was gonna say, "okay, the audience of lesbians", and I c– I can't say that they were all lesbians (ya) because I don't know (yeah). I mean it felt like it was majority women (.) (ya) but can you tell me what do you know about your audiences?

C: Um (.) I know that it was a big audience, 'cause I still get people today who I see in Bellville (.) saying, "Hey, Saint Dude, what's up?" (Okay::), ya so I know that I had a– okay, a predominantly queer audience (okay) um (.) and then a lot of (.) ya,

predominantly queer, a lot of women and a lot of (.) um (.) like scene–ster gay people like who h– who I met on the scene, and a lot of effeminate men who had dr– like drag queen dreams. I know that like that was a thing. A lot of people who wanted to become drag queens (.) came to our shows (.) (okay) ya and would ask us for a platform (.) for themselves, because often we had the open– open stage nights (okay) sometimes, and then people were welcome to come up and perform.

M: Okay, that's great (ya), so it was a mix of people.

C: Ya, it was a mix of people, predominantly women.

M: Mm. But not all people that you knew?

C: Ya no no=

M: =well of course, because I was there, and you didn't know ([laughter]) me at the time, so=

C: =Ya, I– I'm actually quite surprised, like back then I thought it was people I knew (.) but now w– like in retrospect there were a lot of people who I didn't know who s– like (.) were following– following us.

M: Okay (ya). Cool. Okay, umm (..) Oh and then you did talk about the s– how people responded to your performance. Um but like family? (.) [[laughter]

C: [That's interesting. Um I told my parents about it, but they didn't actually ever come watch me perform (.) but then they came to watch my documentary (.) (mm) and at first I thought they'd respond really badly, and like it was in the cinema, and the documentary is playing, and then afterwards like the– the cinema's packed, and I'm making a lot of sex jokes like right through the film [laughter] so– and I was kind of like– my parents– like my mom's always been kind of like uncomfortable with my– (.) with my masculinity (.) She's fine with me being queer but like (.) she always wi– 'cause I have four brothers, so she always wished that I was like– like a bit more feminine, so to be like that extremely masculine (.) I think was a bit of a shock for her. But then, at the end of the film, when it was the Q and A session (.) at the end of that, they were like, "Any last questions?", and my dad raised his hand, and I was like "Oh fuck" [[laughter]

M: [I remember that=

C: =and then he goes, "That's my daughter, (yeah) I'm so proud of [her"

M: [and she was– he was so proud of you, [ya

C: [yeah, and so like (.) I think my parents were just (.) um (.) like– just you know, parents are proud like when they see you doing something that like (.)

M: And that so many people came out (.) [to see.

C: [Ya ya

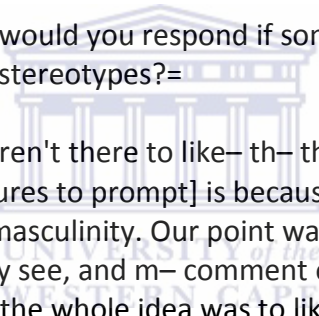
M: That's pretty cool (ya). Okay (.) umm okay, now the c- (.) I was gonna talk about the criticism. Like this was one of the examples that I had. [shows prompt] You guys are all looking hot ([laughter]) and then somebody replies and says something like, "Is it too girly to smile?" (...) (yes) I don't know if you can read it (yes) ya. So I just thought- (.) what is your response to- (.) to a criticism like that?

C: Well, y- as you can see we didn't respond!

[laughter]

M: Ya, (umm) but like what would you- (.)

C: Well, how we felt about it? Or like (.) like how I would respond if someone [said that to me?

M: [Ya, how- (.) like also how would you respond if someone said that (.) part of what you're doing is reinforcing stereotypes?=


C: =Ya. Um (...) well (.) we weren't there to like- th- that's also why we have this- all of this written out here [gestures to prompt] is because our point wasn't to re- (.) like to create a new mould of masculinity. Our point was to take the kind of masculini- masculinity that we already see, and m- comment on it (..) you know through like- (..) because (.) like- (.) like the whole idea was to like umm take a woman and then have a woman saying exactly what it is a man says and see how uncomfortable people feel, 'cause we're just used to (.) a certain (ya) type of masculinity from men. So, umm, like (.) I guess there is- like there is validity in saying that we are definitely reinforcing stereotypes. I understand that if you look at it from that angle, but then you also need to understand our purpose. 'Cause you could say that- (.) I mean you could look at any artist and say that they are either making commentary or they reinforcing s- things but like (..) w- we were using parody- (.) ya, like that was what we were doing. I mean I gue- you could definitely say that but we can't let that get to us (.) like we can't please everybody (.) you know? Like I wasn't gonna now (.) break (.) character and then be like, "Actually, but this is how men should be" (.) like people can do that for themselves, they can think for themselves.

M: Okay.

C: Um, is it- [reading from the prompt] "I thus suppose it is too girly to smile".=

M: =Ya, 'cause you're all looking really serious.

C: Ya.

- M: So I think (.) maybe the person was commenting on the fact that (..) in your performance you're relegating certain behaviours to masculinity (ya) and others to femininity (ya) (.) so– and (.) this person obviously has a problem with the fact that (.) (ya) guys are not smiling, or something like that. (.) So, I just wanted to– but exactly what you say I think that's– that's interesting.
- C: And (.) also just like as a side note (.) the thing about the whole drag king– (.) when we take photos (.) is that we try not to smile because it does (.) make your facial features look more like– like it accentuates your femininity (ya) when you smile. Your cheekbones go up and then– (.) look when I smile [smiles to demonstrate] (ya). Like my cheekbones go [up
- M: [ya you do=
- C: =and then you can see I look like a girl. So (.) we were always– um (.) when we watched all these like documentaries– not documentaries but like Youtube clips on being a drag king and keeping your face masculine, they'd say you clench your jaw (...) [demonstrates] and like (.) keep it like (.) serious and clench your jaw to [kind of
- M: [to get that=
- C: =yes exactly. So that's also– (.) but now we're not gonna explain that to these people.
- [laughter]
- C: You know we were just like [whatever
- M: [so you did use like onli– online resources and stuff?
- C: Ya, we watched a lot of like (.) how to get facial hair ([laughter]) ya we watched a whole lot of like these US drag kings 'cause they pretty progressive, they have crazy troupes, and in our year we wanted like a whole lot of troupes in South Africa, and– (.)
- M: Ah, we'll get there.
- C: Ya, ya we will get there.
- M: Cool. Okay, what else still? Okay, so let's move onto Facebook because that's a whole chapter of my (.) thesis, what you guys do on Facebook, and (.) can you talk about why you guys decided to create these pages and– (.) did it just happen? Or [did you talk about it?
- C: [Um ya because– we– we spoke about it, 'cause I initially had a Facebook page to gain followers (okay) because I wanted people to come and watch my shows. I wanted a following. Um (..) so ya, we used Facebook as a way f– (.) as another– (.) as



just a way for our personas to interact with the public when we're not (.) interacting on stage (mm), to remind people about our shows, um to post pictures of ourselves, and then also just to kind of (.) create a drag king online community, because you know that we exist in two realms, we exist in this realm, and then we exist in the online realm (mm) and that's a very big thing. People spend all their time (.) online, looking at things. So it was important for us to exist in that space too. And have our persona— it's also a nice way to have a persona (.) when you online because— (.) like even— (.) like your personal Facebook is a persona, like it's not really you, do you know? So it's like (ya) it's an— it's just another platform for your persona to exist=

M: =so I— okay, let's talk about that (.) like (.) what (.) kind of things did you think about when you were creating this online persona?

C: Um (.) I thought about like (.) if my charac— if I was Saint Dude, like what would Saint Dude be posting? He'd be posting pictures of himself with other women, and you saw on my page (ya) I had pictures of me with women, with condoms in my pockets, and like (.) me posing in the middle looking— (.) ya I just— that's the kind of thing I thought Saint Dude would (.) post. But then also (.) at the same time I tried to balance it (.) so like post Saint Dude's stuff, but then also— um (.) like the pictures were more— (.) the pictures were like all (.) like Saint Dude (ya) but then like the actual writing that was like the more educated stuff that we tried to put out. (Okay) Ya, so people would read, and educate themselves [on the Facebook page.

M: [Okay, that's pretty cool. (.) Okay, so that's what I asked. And then, talking about Saint Dude, I noticed something really interesting which I really— I just— this is curiosity. Under "gender" you've got "Neutral (it)". How did (.) that happen? Because (.) ([laughter]) I know at the time— (.) I know Facebook now kind of allows a bit— a bit more leeway in (.) (ya) what you choose for your gender but this is the only thing I've— I'd ever seen (.) ([laughter]) at the time. I wanted to know, how did you achieve that? [Was there an option?

C: [I think there was— there was an option of like choosing m— "male" of "female" and I didn't choose either.

M: And it automatically=

C: =I think— I think that's what happened, I'm not sure.

M: That's so cool.

[laughter]

M: 'Cause I w— I— I thought I— I could talk about that as a performance of gender, the decision not to— (.)

C: Ya, I didn't– um (.) ya I didn't want to put "male" or "female" under Saint Dude, even though like Saint Dude– I get s– [indecipherable] Saint Dude is a boy (.) but like (.) I really wanted to kind of get this point across over here (okay) so I didn't wanna– (..)

M: So you just didn't [click on any–

C: [Didn't specify.

M: Okay. Maybe nobody's thought not to specify before.

[laughter]

M: Okay, that was just a side note. Um::: Oh and then this is the Bro Code. [shows prompt]

C: The Bro Code!

M: The Bro Co::de

C: [laughter]

M: I wanted to ask you what's the story behind [the Bro Code.

C: [Can I just read through it?

M: Ya.

C: [reads through quickly] Okay ya.

M: What's the story behind the Bro Code?

C: Okay (...) Um, ya, this was also a response to the criticism (.) and then also for us to understand what we were doing.

M: So you guys sat down and [came up–

C: [And we came up with this together. We sat down, we had a meeting, and we were like, "We need to create like– we need to have a mission statement, we need to have like aims, objectives." And then we were like "okay, we're not gonna be formal, and like have a mission statement and all of that kind of thing", and then we came up with the Bro Code. [indecipherable]

M: Which is a reference to How I Met Your Mother (.) Barney Stinson? Or did you (.) just–

C: Uh:: no actually it wasn't a reference to that (okay) but now there's like that double thing.



- M: Ya.
- C: Ya. Ya, like a code by which we would govern ourselves.
- M: Okay.
- C: Ya, so this is what we came up with. [reading] "Bros reinterpret masculinity in a way that empowers women. Bros break free of imposed gender norms and rules." Yeah, this came from– not– (.) from us sitting together, Frankie's input (.) my input, and then at the time I was dating this girl {*name removed*}, I'm sure you see her in the documentary here and there, and she is a performer, she's an actress (.) and her– um she did her Honours or Masters in– (.) um (.) also in (.) performance art. So she really helped us understand (..) like as– as performers the importance of (.) making political commentary. 'Cause she– That's what she did, so her input really helped us. And at the time she was– ya, she was i– quite influential. She was– she played a very big part in um (.) me actually forming my artistic identity. So ya, this was also her work. [laughter]
- M: Okay, cool. (ya). That's just reminded me of a question that I actually didn't put down here. The name (.) [Bros B4 Ho's.
- C: [Bros B4 Ho's.
- M: I know you start explaining it here [points to prompt] but just (.) off the top of your head like (.) why did you choose it? Was it just catchy:?
- C: Um (...) Ya, it was catchy, and it also embodied like everything that we were doing. It just did. "Bros B4 Ho's", like (.) it– (.) 'cause gu– (.) that's what guys say all the time, they always say "bros before hoes", and were like "Yo, we're girls, now (.) let's flip it around". And also we felt that we were making commentary. A lot of people had a problem with our name. (okay) Yeah. But– (...) ya, at the top of our head it was also 'cause it was catchy, you know?
- M: Something people would remember.=
- C: =Ya.
- M: Okay, cool.
- C: And it's a cool name for a drag king troupe [[laughter].
- M: [Ya, it is. Um::: okay so just off the top of your head, what has been the best thing about being a drag king and what is the most challenging?
- C: The best thing about being a drag king? (.)

M: Or this whole experience? =

C: =This whole experience?

M: Ya.

C: At the time I would've said something different, but right now I can tell you (.) um (.) it really made me understand my gender identity, and also to separate myself (.) from like an imposed gender identity, 'cause- (.) I embraced my femininity in a crazy way after this. I became- (.) like now I- I've- (.) like hyper-feminine like- (.) I mean not- maybe not now but I wear skirts now. I *never* wore *any* skirts before this whole process, and I think it was kind of really going the one extreme that made me embrace my femininity, and understand that it's a performance, it's not- (.) 'Cause we're held back a lot, we- like a lot we- (.) a lot of things are imposed on us. (..) It really helped me understand that. Another good thing about this was (.) like as an artist, it made me understand the importance of personas and- (..) And then from a- (..) ya this whole experience has been amazing in every single way, like in terms of political co- soci- soci- social commentary, it's been amazing to be able to make social commentary. It developed me as a leader. I- uh I had never- like this was kind of- (.) I put myself in this leadership position, and it developed me as a person and made m- me understand (.) myself in that context. From what we were doing for our community and for the queer community, in every single way this has been a positive (.) [powerful experience.

M: [So you were saying you would've said something different before?

C: Ya.

M: Do you know what you would've said(.) before?

C: Um (...) before, it would've been just like centred on "Oh it made me feel (.) good, it made me (.) feel more confident and more comfortable". But now it's- (..) now it's kind of- it also has to do with my community, like I really (.) see how this has impact- like especially post, now it's been two years since we started this (.) and um (.) yo, the impact it's had on the community has been incredible (.) you know? And then the most challenging thing? W- I would say (...) I can't think- like when you say challenging- (.) all of these things were like eq- everything I said has been a challenge, but nothing is negative. All of these things yielded positive results. (Okay) Ya, they like taught me so much, taught us so much, made us grow. Okay, the most challenging thing: (.) the social dynamic in the group. That- that is the most [challenging thing.

M: [Oh really?

C: Ya, like the interpersonal relationships with the group.

M: Okay. I suppose that's with- working with anybody in [anything.

C: [Yeah. Yeah, especially I think also like w- (.) I as the y- I was the second youngest in the group, leading people who were (.) quite a bit older than I am. Then also (.) the racial dynamic, that was another factor. Dealing with like Afrikaans, white lesbians who didn't really understand (.) like where I was coming from, having to like educate them. Even now, like one of my drag kings recently deleted me off Facebook [laughter] because (.) um because of like r- comments I was making about race (.) you know? And like- I love that person, I still love that person and we- we're close, but like it just shows you that like there was a lot of tension when it came to race in our group.

M: Okay.

C: Ya, that didn't really come through in the documentary, [we tried-

M: [It didn't come through in anything!=-

C: =Yeah, we tried to keep that quiet because that was like- that's a n- whole different thing we have to deal with. (okay) Yeah.

M: That's interesting. (..) Um:: (..) And then you said- at the beginning you said your views about drag (.) have changed.

C: Ya.

M: Have you- Do you feel like you've talked about it enough? About [what y-

C: [Ya, it- it has changed, I just mean like (..) I've just grown a lot and I- I kind of have more knowledge now, so (.) now I feel like it's not necessary- (.) I- I just mean- I guess I meant like it's not necessary for me to (.) exclusively perform in drag. I feel comfortable now having a- like a more ma- like a more feminine persona, mixing the two up. So (..) um (.) ya. Ya [laughter].

M: Okay, cool. Um (.) Oh ya, so I wanted to ask you what you're doing know. I mean I noticed that (.) Saint Dude has become Dope Saint Jude?

C: Ya. I actually should have kept my Saint Dude page, now that I think about it. Um:: but Dope Saint Jude now is a different- (.) is a different persona. It's a- like a more- it's a feminine persona, more queen-like, regal persona. F- a lot more feminine, but also embodying a lot of the masculinity that Saint Dude had. Like- (.) and the whole hip hop thing. Um (..) I- I- (.) but I am thinking- (.) not- (.) not even thinking, I'm going to be performing as Saint Dude again. Actually, UWC (.) asked me to perform at their next event as Saint Dude, and I'm going to p- be performing in drag bars as Saint Dude and then keeping Dope Saint Jude as well. And you know I'm doing this film internship with {name removed}?

M: Okay!

- C: And one of my films I've just recently decided is going to be focused on (.) um (.) my performance personas, Dope Saint Jude and Saint Dude (okay) mixing the two up.
- M: So you're kind of moving on to your own personal project now.
- C: Um. Ya, I'm moving on to it and I'm going to include Saint Dude because (.) I can't throw away Saint Dude, there's so much— just like Saint Dude is such a rich character, I can't just throw him away. I don't want to, he's important. And I— I needed to personally first explore Dope Saint Jude. Now I'm at a point where I can comfortable move between the two, and I'm excited as an artist to be making commentary. Also just as someone— like showing how fluid gender is, and like (.) what a— a— (.) like it— how— like what a performance it is. It can be hyper (.) masculine and then be like hyper—feminine. I— I don't know if you've seen my video— have you seen [the video?
- M: [Yes, I have.
- C: And you can see, that's quite like (.) a very strong feminine though— (ya) very strong feminine persona. And then you see Saint Dude is very aggressive and masculine, and I really wanna play with the two. And I actually also wanna work with Manila Von Tease on (.) some kind of project, she's amazing.
- M: Okay, I've asked you that [turns page]. Okay, so, kind of closing questions (ya). Do you have anything that you want to talk about that I haven't=
- C: =No, you've covered everything. [laughter]
- M: Is there anything you thing I could've as— I should've asked you that I didn't ask you?
- C: (...) No, actually I'm pretty impressed with the questions you've asked.
- M: Okay, that's nice. [laughter] Okay, so if— Can I contact you if I need clarification on [anything?
- C: [Please do.