

**TRANS-Gression: the game**

by

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## **Abstract**

In the art of drag, icons of masculinity and femininity are juxtaposed on one body, challenging heteronormativity. The goal of this project was to create a game that provided a safe space for players to negotiate their own identities of gender and sexuality through the framework provided by the game rules and affordances. The research behind this project challenges the criticisms of drag as purely gender representation, identifying drag as a signifier of the presence of the LGBTQ community. By iterating the design throughout the development process, I was able to create opportunities for players to reflect upon gender presentation and be in solidarity with one another. Conversations resulting from the play experience revealed the ability of games to provide a context for players to navigate complex understandings.

## Acknowledgements

I dedicate this project to all queer-identified people who have trouble discussing their experiences and identity with others. I also dedicate this game to all the fierce and sickening figures—drag queens, Gender queers, and LGBTQ activists—who have drawn attention to and sought equality for the LGBTQ community. Without their contributions, a project like this would have been unthinkable.

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## Introduction: Let's Kiki<sup>1</sup>

Drag is a spectacle of resistance and rebellion to *heteronormativity*, the established ideology that reinforces the heterosexual male identity. This policing force establishes heterosexuality as the norm, placing all people in rigid gender roles of male and female, and either neglects others from proper representation or positions them in subordinate roles. The construction of gender binaries dictates the way of being for people in each category, linking men to masculinity and women to femininity. This classification of roles is harmful to all, not only those who are left out of representation in the structure. The lack of equal opportunity for the LGBTQ (an umbrella acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-person, queer, questioning) community to receive proper sexual education is one instance of the way heteronormativity renders people of othered identities invisible. Intersex people are eliminated from the system. Simone de Beauvoir writes, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (283). de Beauvoir illuminates the influence of social training in recreating the structuralized subordination of women through the relationship of gender roles, influencing women to become the societal ideal of “woman,” the embodied feminine.

The ultimate goal of this project was to develop a game that created a play space for people to experiment with gender performativity and performance. The intended purpose of this game was to provide a vehicle for creating dialogue about queer gendered experiences, those that exist between the poles of masculine and feminine that are neglected from the structure of heteronormativity. I wanted to allow a Genderqueer male a palpable way to communicate his lived queer gender experience with others. My vision was for him to be able to take this game to

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<sup>1</sup> The term “kiki” (pronounced key-key) is used among drag queens to mean a gossip session. This is not to be confused with “kaikai,” (pronounced klh-klh) the term for drag queens having sex, as Dan Savage, one of the co-founders of the “It Gets Better Project,” did in “Frock The Vote” on episode 9 of *RuPaul's Drag Race* Season 4.

his friends, sit down and play, then discuss the events that occurred within the play space in order for this group to grow stronger through empathy. In this space, I wanted to allow for instances that both affirmed the identities of queer individuals, especially non-cisgendered<sup>2</sup> subjects—meaning those whose gender identity does not match the biological sex with which they were born—and allow for the other people involved to challenge their own conceptualizations of gender identity in order to empathize with the subject who brought the game to them. I chose to base my game around drag because of its resistance to the heteronormative hegemony and its firm stance as the central icon of Camp culture.

This paper reflects the theoretical research that influenced the design of the game, the process of the development, instances in play-testing that support or complicate the intended design of the game, and a postmortem. I begin by analyzing discourses of gender, exploring this discussion through the construction of the drag body using feminist theory and queer theory. I then turn to Camp theory to locate drag performances as resistance to heterosexual normativity. By looking at the construction of the drag body and performance, I intend to depict drag as a spectacle of resistance and rebellion to established binaries that reinforce heterosexual male order. When needed, I use events in the popular reality show, *RuPaul's Drag Race* to provide examples of critical theories. In viewing certain instances of *Drag Race* and the reflections and observations done by Rupp and Taylor, we are able to start conceiving drag as more than a form of gender play. By viewing drag through queer theory, we can see drag as a challenge to heteronormative confines of gender and sexuality, and Camp theory serves as a lens through which to view drag as a political signifier of the LGBTQ community. I understand that the

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<sup>2</sup> “Cisgender” is a word developed by trans and intersex allies to identify those who remain the biological sex with which they were born and match their gender identity and gender presentation.

sources I draw from are in conflict at times and much of the theory extends past the realm of gender identity, but I see these texts relevant in the discussion of the critique of gender identity and drag. I limit my use of these sources to their criticisms of and dealings with gender identity. I intend to discuss the conflict and tensions between these theories when needed and propose an original synthesis through the framework of the game that avoids the weaknesses of both. I then detail the design and development process of the game, relating the influence of the theories and discuss interesting moments in play-testing that detail pedagogical experiences of players in interacting with the framework of the game.

## Reading Gender

“Reading<sup>3</sup> is FUNDAMENTAL” -RuPaul

Gender is a strange code of behaviors, icons and speech that has been challenged in the articulation of the relation between gender and culture. The structure of gender is used to enforce a dominant category of one gender over others and to deny other forms of identity. This section serves to “read” gender by using the writings of feminist and queer theorists as lenses. From this “reading,” the structure and enforcement of gender roles will be deconstructed and reinterpreted from a force of oppression to the means of writing and (re)forming identity. I argue that drag is a challenge of masculinity through gender presentation.

The roles of cultural ideology and influences upon gender are important in understanding the conceptualizations and policing of the gender categories. One feminist theorist who has examined and challenged these categories is Susan Bordo. Bordo examines the layers of cultural

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<sup>3</sup> “Reading” is a term used in Drag culture as a way of insulting people for the purpose of challenging their wit and ability to develop a comeback. This form of criticizing serves to toughen one’s skin and build them up to face the challenges of a world that may not receive her well.



inscription upon masculinity and the male identity, interpreting this writing on the canvas of the male body. In this exploration, she identifies instances that have contributed to our gender training and the overarching gender structure. In *The Male Body*, Bordo studies the relationship between a culturally perpetuated, idealized or hegemonic masculine identity, heavily derived from phallogentric culture, and the male body, illuminating the social values that dictate the ideal of masculinity among men. She approaches masculinity by viewing the contribution of social and cultural values on bodies that develop the quotidian behaviors of masculinity, which are, in turn, invested in male dominance.

Judith Butler, a feminist theorist whose work is influential in queer theory, takes a different approach, criticizing society's use of certain points on the body as focal points for defining categories. Butler claims that through performativity and gender performance, we can change the gender structure. Butler's concept of gender performativity illuminates the influence of cultural and social values on the way we talk about and conceive our identities and bodies. Butler's theory strips away the evidence of culture that has trained us to label bodies.

Another theorist, Kate Davy, draws from female impersonation to discuss the transgressive—and overlooked—act of male impersonation. While much of Davy's work is important in displaying the gender dynamics in Camp, I will restrict my examination of her work to her criticisms of female impersonation/drag queens. In her article, "FE/Male IMPERSONATION: The discourse of Camp", Davy draws from her experiences watching impersonation theater, and ultimately finds male impersonation to be an empowering representation of lesbian women and women in general as it does not subscribe to typical phallogentric conventions in representation. Davy thus provides us with a critical lens through which to examine female impersonation. In a later section, I will insert the drag queen into some

of her articulations, in order to develop a provoking—and parodic—image of the relationship between Camp and the heterosexual hegemony.

### *Phallic Training*

Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo delves into examining a bodily site deeply entangled in the construction of the hegemonic norm of masculine identity. In her examination of the male body, Bordo places emphasis on the penis as it “holds the most promise for a deeper identification between men and women” (34). Her argument serves to identify the forces that transmute the penis, a bodily organ, into the phallus, a symbol of male dominance. Bordo examines the state of the penis, locating the change in perception as the penis hardens. It is in this change from the flaccid penis that “has a unique ability to suggest vulnerability, fragility, a sleepy sweetness” (Bordo, 44) to the erect penis which “is often endowed with a tumescent *consciousness* that is bold, unafraid, at the ready” (45) in which the “hard on,” “boner,” “throbbing dick” is endowed with the aura of the phallus. Reinforcing the influence of culture upon our perception of bodies, as de Beauvoir has also examined, Bordo recognizes “that when we look at bodies (including our own in the mirror), we don’t just see biological nature at work, but values and ideals, differences and similarities that *culture* has “written,” so to speak, on those bodies” (26). We have been taught by society to understand—even to value—the erect penis as the phallus.

While Bordo identifies the influence of the phallus on the male identity through its link to the penis, Butler argues against focusing on particular parts of the bodies as these create categories. Here, these theories are in opposition, but Butler’s assessment that “some parts of the body become conceivable foci of pleasure precisely because they correspond to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body” (90) becomes useful in articulating phallogocentric icons. Fryer

affirms this phallogocentric method of categorizing as “To be a man is to have a penis, to be strong and powerful, to grow facial hair, to have a deep voice, and to be master of the household. To be a woman is not to have a penis, to demur and acquiesce, to be delicate and gentle, to have breasts and hips, and to do what one’s husband demands” (41). In addition, women are judged on their ability to be submissive and receptive. Fryer has drawn attention to the many icons that represent male power, and thus uphold phallus ideology.

Like Bordo, Davy criticizes phallogocentric conventions, developing the idea of a phallogocentric contract that influences the way we structure gender power, sexuality, and desire. Davy poses homoeroticism as a disruption of the perceived relationship between the phallus and the penis.

More importantly, perhaps, homosexual practice is implicit in this presentation of homoerotic desire. Earl Jackson, Jr. argues that male homosexuality both promises and threatens to disestablish “the transcendence of the phallus from the penis, disinvesting male genitalia (and hence biological identity) of their former privilege to universal principles of order and signification” (470). In a cogent explication of the ways in which male homosexuality opposes, by not participating in, the Oedipal triangle, Jackson states, “Male homosexual desire for the penis does not require the penis to be hypostatized into a universal principle, embracing female subjectivity and sexuality as well (Davy, 471).

Davy illuminates that male homosexuality may not be a synthesis of masculine and feminine qualities, but does support a more tolerant relationship between these two (generally perceived) opposites. She, like Bordo, posits a homosexual identity not dependent on linking the phallus to

the penis. This denial renders the structure created by phallic ideology powerless, making space available for the female identity. I believe this is important because it displays the homosexual as both undermining of male dominance and as a freer form capable of defining its own “boundaries.” Davy turns to Ludlam, articulating his portrayal of gender in his female impersonation acts on stage, to exemplify the transgressive force of homoeroticism as it “signals homosexual practice, the subversive site of all that phallocratic culture attempts to suppress, contain, and eradicate” (140).

The influence of the phallus does not stop at the site of the penis. “We live in a culture that encourages men to think of themselves as their penises, a culture that still conflates male sexuality, with something we call “potency” and that gives men little encouragement to explore the rest of their bodies” (Bordo, 36). Understanding Bordo’s analyses of culture associations of the penis with the male body and with the phallus renders a connection of the male body to the phallus exemplified by the male porn star—judged solely on performance—and the hardened, space-occupying and unyielding muscular body. Bordo observes “the world of the porn actor is simply the most literalized embodiment-and a perfect metaphor-for a masculinity that demands constant performance from men” (34). The duty of the male porn actor is directly tied to the ideal phallus. At this moment, there is an exchange of human agency for the phallus. He must remain hard throughout the deed, displaying his and ability and willingness, lusting even, to perform sexually, he is not allowed to be vulnerable. The situation is no longer about his personal pleasure, but his performance, he is there to please others—not the accompanying person, but the viewers—by showing his dominance over the other person.

Like the porn actor, the muscular body is another instance of an embodied phallus. Identifying the cultural reading of muscles, Bordo observes that “unless one is a manual laborer,

muscles have little use value in our management- and service-oriented culture; the potency of muscles resides largely in their cultural meanings” (88). Bordo’s reflection illuminates that muscles have little utility value in our society, therefore their importance must come from another source. Muscles are symbols of potency and power; in the sense that a man’s strength is somehow indicative of his sexual performance. Bulking up suggests that one man has the power and the virility to dominate others. To engage in Butler’s criticism of categorizing bodies because of certain focal points, the presence, size and location muscles become ways of labeling bodies under gender categories. Bordo goes beyond the utility value of muscles as strength symbols, returning to the phallus, stating that “But unlike [muscles], the phallus stands, not for the superior fitness of an individual over other men, but for *generic* male superiority-not only over females but over other species” (89). Bordo turns to gay theorist Ron Long to navigate the motivation of gay men’s want to be muscular

It’s not just about looking good, but about dispelling homosexual stereotypes, by embodying an ideal of masculinity which announces that one is a real man whether or not one is a “top” or a “bottom.” The “butch bottom,” as he calls it, “does not stake its claim to manhood on penetrating another person’s body” but on being a certain *kind* of body itself. An inviolable body, whether or not it’s in a “masculine” or “feminine” sexual posture. A body that challenges the cultural gaze that has cast the gay man as soft and effeminate by presenting a surface that nothing can penetrate, granite chiseled according to its owner’s specifications (58).

Some gay men, especially “bottoms,” strive to achieve the muscular aesthetic to subvert the consequences of “being gay in this society,” in other words, being seen as less of a man or less

than a man. To an extent, it challenges the heterosexual confines placed upon both the act of sex and homosexuality requiring the roles of “the man,” the one penetrating, and “the woman,” the receiver. Note that there is an association between sexually receiving and being subordinate. Unfortunately, in recreating this appearance, gay men reaffirm the ideology of the heteronormative hegemony, allowing it to invade the boundaries of counter cultures.

While the muscular man—gay or straight—or the porn actor are examples of the corporeal phallus, they are still human and therefore unable to continually perform the tasks associated with this ideal. They cannot be hard, unyielding, and rough at all moments. Similar to the specific cases of these two examples, Bordo identifies that “The phallus is a cultural icon which men are taught to aspire to. They cannot succeed” (94). The phallus has become a symbol structured around male dominance, that influences society’s ideal of the masculine identity. Unfortunately, in society’s idolization of the phallus a rubric is created to rank men in terms of their masculinity both against one another and individually against the phallus. This challenge for maleness comes at the price of men’s suffering to constantly *be* depictions of masculinity: unyielding, invulnerable, assertive, etc. In aspiring or being required to become the phallus, men sacrifice the opportunity to explore other forms of gender expression and the freedom of living outside the rigid structures of the gender binary.

Due to the possibility of being perceived as gay or effeminate and having to deal with the “shame” that heteronormative society has placed on these categories, men are not able to experience the same freedoms as women or gay men, such as developing close platonic bonds with members of the same sex for fear of being perceived as gay, publicly showing vulnerability, or even jamming to Britney Spears.

*Articulating Gender Fluidity: It's More Like a Skill Meter*

The development of the term “cisgender” shows a consciousness of the presence of more complex structures of gender than we are trained to conceive. Butler invokes de Beauvoir to identify the constructed fixity between sex and gender, “Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex* that “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one.” For Beauvoir, gender is “constructed,” but implied in her formation is an agent, a *cogito*, who somehow takes on or appropriates that gender could, in principle, take on some other gender” (12). Butler’s theory here plays with de Beauvoir’s quote, challenging the development from “one” to “woman” as “one” could challenge this formation to become something else. Butler’s theory supposes that performativity and gender performance have the power to alter the creation and conceptualization of gender identity and gender structures. We have the ability to change the gender structure with the way we discuss and present gender.

In her examination, Davy confronts the formula of gender discourse, in a manner similar to Butler, in which the female subject is preconceived. She poses a discord in the link between gender representation and sex:

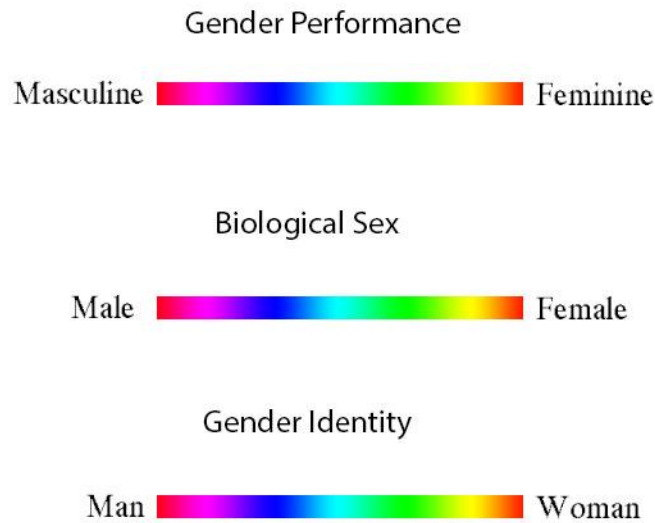
The female subject, on the other hand, is trapped in hegemonic discourses as “woman,” the always already spoken-for construction that replaces women as speaking subjects in representation. This construction is anathema to women as historical beings and social subjects because it signifies as (feminine) essence intrinsic to all women, thereby reducing them to “nature,” “mother,” and ultimately, the object of (male) desire. “Woman” replaces women and marks their absence (142).

Davy's criticism of this construction of "woman," idealized or represented in discourse, to be a signifier for the female subject is constructive. Unlike Butler, Davy addresses a female subjectivity in her deconstruction of femininity and the identity that has come to be known as "woman." Davy criticizes the roles often associated with women to be objects of male desire, inferring that this "feminine essence" is believed to be biologically bestowed upon them. Like Simone de Beauvoir, Davy affirms that "woman" is made.

Conceptualizing a new gender structure complicates the discourse of the current gender binary. Fryer defines a three-tiered system that makes discussing these fluid and complex identity fields easier. Reassessing our current (and rather muffled vocabulary), Fryer proposes "in the world of our current binary gender regime where we are either *M* or *F*, we can use the adjectives *masculine* and *feminine* (among others) to describe gender performance/attribution, we can use the adjectives/nouns *male* and *female* to describe sex, and we can use the nouns *man* and *woman* to describe gender identity. This three-tiered model... gives us better options for analyzing our experiences of gender in more radical ways" (57).

I would suggest an amendment to Fryer's tiers, which still involve the dialectic categories associated with male and female. Imagining his oppositions of male/female, man/woman and masculine/feminine as the endpoints of *spectrums* allows for a wider range of expressive possibilities.





**Figure 1 Identity Tiers**

*Locating Drag on the Spectrum*

The art of Drag simultaneously performs gender *and* satirizes the social gender/sex beliefs that surround the typical mentality by challenging what it means to be “man” by juxtaposing and hyperbolizing aspects of masculinity and femininity. Recall de Beauvoir’s quote that one becomes woman, observing the cultural training of gender roles. Butler challenges the typical conception of de Beauvoir’s theory, drawing attention to the act of forming identity and the performativity involved in “becoming woman.” Drag exemplifies this performative development of identity as one definitely is not born a woman—no, one in this case is born a man—but becomes one through an arsenal of illusionary techniques, crossing gender boundaries in appearance and fluctuating between gender boundaries in performance. While a drag queen is biologically male, his gender identity and gender performance fluctuates along the scales throughout her performances and acts on stage, drawing attention to gender as performance.

Icons associated with masculinity work against creating this illusion. In denying the presence of these icons, masculinity is challenged as it has no more bodily focal points. It is notable that effort must be put into subverting these masculine giveaways. Facial and some body hair must be removed to create the illusion of femininity. Leg hair is able to be hidden by wearing several pairs of hose and some facial hair can be glued down, but beards would have to first be shaved to allow for the face to become the canvas. Typically idealized male muscles are problematic in translating the structure of the body from male to female. Finally, the penis is usually tucked either using a specially compressor, called a gaff, or strategically using duct tape to restrain the penis.

Drag performers provide counterexamples to the idea of men subscribing to a male essence or women subscribing to a female essence. I propose a repositioning of the drag queen as an example of “the male-centered frame of reference in which gender and sexuality are (re)produced by the discourse of male sexuality” (142). In this framework, the drag queen challenges heterosexual male dominance. As the Drag queen is a male impersonating a female—of depicting hyper-femininity—she finds herself within a male-centered reference in which femininity is confined to a particular space to reify the qualities of masculinity. I do see the Drag queen as reifying *femininity*, but displacing the perceived link between gender presentation and biological sex, affirming non-cisgender identities.

Drawing from Bordo, the cultural inscriptions of gender are illuminated. It becomes apparent that we are trained to fit within the confines and ideology gender. Butler criticizes the foci of the body used to create categories. She complicates the gender fixity by discussing the performance and performative aspects of gender.

## *Sinvergüenza* Drag Queens as Rebels

Like gender binaries, shame serves as a policing force for identities that are denied access to proper representation within the structure of heteronormativity. Shame coerces individuals and society to self-discipline. In the case of men, particularly straight men (and closeted gay men), shame serves to train men to self-monitor the way they act, how they dress, the type of music they listen to, the way they dance -- the list goes on, but the point is clear. Drag presents a productive way to work around shame by allowing performers a way in which to present themselves as spectacles of resistance.

Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes responds to shame/Shame through what he calls *sinvergüenzeria*. The opposite of shame, as he identifies, is not pride, but shamelessness. Translated, shame is *vergüenza*, but the Spanish translation of shamelessness, loosely *sinvergüenza*, means more than not having shame. La Fountain-Stokes identifies, “To be *sinvergüenza* is to have no shame: to disobey, break the law, disrespect authority (the family, the church, the state), and in a perverse and curious way to be proud of one’s transgression, or at the very least lack a feeling of guilt” (72). This word carries with it resistance and reveling in this shamelessness; an act *sinvergüenza* does not end at being shameless, but flaunts itself as a spectacle of resistance. Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes reflects that shame for Latin's specifically and society in general, “is a central constitutive behavior of Latina/o cultures, engaged as they are with Catholic religiosity, feelings of guilt, and remorse about improper behavior, be it religious (sins) or the failing of family or social obligations. Shame is a structuring device that works especially in the maintenance of female subordination but also in the reification of (heterosexual) male masculinity” (72). Society’s masculine ideology teaches men to feel shame

when these actions may be perceived “too effeminate” or “not manly enough,” it is a double edged sword. For some in the gay community, Gay Shame has arisen as a counter-cultural criticism to the commercialism and capitalism of Gay Pride, which is perceived as affirming the heteronormative hegemony. But as La Fountain-Stokes relates:

The discussion of gay shame became central to the development of (white) queer theory in the 1990s, perhaps most clearly articulated in the 1993 essay “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *the Art of the Novel*” by the white scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. This discussion (also picked up by the queer and feminist philosopher Judith Butler) also had important activist and community dimensions, manifested in the global anti-Gay Pride celebration movement which started in New York in 1998 and then spread to San Francisco, /Toronto, Sweden and elsewhere. Activists argued that Gay Pride had been co-opted by apolitical (or conservative), normalizing, consumerist (pro-capitalist) interests; as Sara Jaffe stated, “Increasing numbers of queers feel disillusioned, alienated by and bored with Pride events,” and as such defended the “celebration” or embrace of gay shame as a radical alternative. (61)

The concept of Gay Shame has developed into Shame parades that respond to Pride by organizing similar events, purchasing the necessary items through services owned and provided by members of the GLBTQ community. One of La Fountain-Stokes’s criticisms of Shame specifically and (white) Queer Theory in general is that it exists within a vacuum, neglecting racial and socio-economic identities. I infer that he resists Gay Shame partly due to it being a privilege of social class and whiteness.

Drag is shameless in dealing with the confines of gender. It appropriates the symbols of femininity—gowns, garments, jewelry, makeup, hair—to create the female illusion by disguising or hiding the male figure and concealing masculinity, tucking this away along with the penis. On stage we see a man who has veiled his masculinity and taken up a feminine identity. I do not want to say that we see or are presented with a woman because not all drag looks produce the image of a woman—adhering to the opposite end of the gender spectrum—but sometimes the Campy image of a Drag queen—located somewhere in the middle of the gender spectrum (refer to Divine and Nina Flowers)—or even an androgynous figure who really toys with the minds of audience as they struggle for signs to help categorize the performer. In this transformation, masculinity is veiled and traded in for signs of femininity, but there is more to the act, the act is one of *sinvergüenzeria*. In this appropriation of femininity—that is, *Camp*--the male/female binary is rearticulated onto a single body in a way that defiantly transitions into the area between the binary and, through playing with the normalized ideals of masculinity and femininity, reconfiguring these boundaries.

### On Stage: WERKING! Gender Identity and Camp

Camp is loud, gaudy, in your face, and unapologetic. It mocks, teases, and taunts the hegemony *sinvergüenza*. Meyer indicates that the purpose of Camp is to provide social visibility to queer identities through performativity and practice that allows for queer representation (Meyer, 5). Meyer not only reclaims Camp as a symbol of queer identity, but identifies it as a tool for queer influence. Queer identity can be understood as a self-(en)acting performative discourse and performance aside from the heterosexual hegemony. In other words, queer identity

is understood through one's representation of non-heteronormative behaviors. Camp is useful in discussing drag as a form of resistance to heteronormativity. In this section, I view Camp as an interpretive tool of queer discourse. I will illustrate this approach with my own analysis of identity development.

Moe Meyer insists that Camp theory is closely related to queer identity, understood and enacted through one's gender identity. "Queer" as it is used here signifies the identities and practices that are aside from normative behavior, not solely the LGBTQ community. Meyer, in reclaiming Camp, describes the relationship between gender identity and Camp. The necessity to reclaim Camp comes from the appropriation of Camp into mainstream culture as it is used for kitsch icons, examples of this are the "Campy Horror Flick" that subscribes to conventional horror tactics. Because mainstream culture has attempted to appropriate Camp as a type of kitsch or style, the theorists working to reclaim it all align their definitions of Camp to Meyer's:

Camp is political; Camp is solely a queer (and/or something gay and lesbian) discourse; and Camp embodies a specifically queer cultural critique....Additionally, because Camp is defined as a solely queer discourse, all un-queer activities that have been previously accepted as "camp," such as Pop culture expressions, have been redefined as examples of the appropriation of queer praxis. Because un-queer appropriations interpret Camp within the context of compulsory reproductive heterosexuality, they no longer qualify as Camp as it is defined here. In other words, the un-queer do not have access to the discourse of Camp, only to derivatives constructed through the act of appropriation. (1)

It is important to recognize here that Meyer is calling out mainstream appropriation of “Camp” as something that can no longer qualify as Camp because it is no longer a queer discourse. Therefore, he believes, these instances are not Camp, but Camp-inspired or derivatives of Camp, as Camp cannot be represented through compulsory heterosexuality. Pulling this discourse from the clutches of the heterosexual hegemony, Meyer marks the use of Camp as queer discourse by proving its link to queer identity. “Because gender identity is instituted by repetitive acts,” he writes, “then queer performance is not expressive of the social identity but is, rather, the reverse – the identity is self-reflexively constituted by the performances themselves” (4). Meyer, relating to Butler’s theory of performative identity, determines that queer identity is established through performances, and the performance impacts the performativity, recursively impacting the identity. One’s agency is then enacted through the subject’s gender expression. Strengthening his argument, Meyer suggests “that queer identity emerges as self-consciousness of one’s gay and lesbian performativity sets in” (4).

This articulation of the use of Camp restructures the appropriation of Camp by un-queer producers as a way the un-queer culture is informed by queer culture. Meyer differentiates Camp, the signifier of queer identity, from its kitsch heteronormative counterparts, locating this performativity as queer resistance towards heterosexual hegemony. Kate Davy turns to Wayne R. Dynes for a definition that “‘Camp is not grounded in speech or writing as much as it is in gesture, performance, and public display. When it is verbal, it is expressed less through... direct statement than through implication, innuendo, and intonation’ (180)” (139).

The battle for the ownership of Camp is larger than the kitsch-like spectacle itself, it is about the authorship of culture, and because of the link between queer identity and Camp, it is also about queer representation. In proving the proprietary rights of Camp to the queer, Meyer

sets the queer as an influential agent in representation. For Meyer, it is through Camp that the queer identity is displayed, articulated, and defined. Meyer explains the power of this phenomenon, depicting the trickery done to the hegemony: “Because the queer is rendered invisible at the moment when values are reassigned in the act of appropriation, it looks as if the objects of Camp have suddenly materialized from nowhere (which is precisely where the queer lives), appearing miraculously as an act of discovery” (15). While hegemony resists representation of the queer, it appropriates culture in an attempt to assimilate this counterculture, yet in doing so, it is processing and proliferating the symbols and icons of the queer. Meyer places importance on the invisibility of the queer because the un-queer then takes what it is given by this specter (17-18). The queer can act as a trickster, instating its own agency through the unknown channels of distribution from the queer identity to the hegemony. The hegemony is left representing queerness.

I find some of Meyer’s theory problematic. Firstly, it emphasizes the signification of identity through performativity and practice in the present moment, but does not view the formation of identity through lived experience of embodied practice in day-to-day life, *lo cotidiano*, “the everyday,” which are crucial in determining and forming identity. Recalling Bordo, gender is a system of coded symbols and behaviors to which society is trained and reestablishes. Our identities and understandings are shaped through our embodied and (en)gendered experiences. I believe that understanding gender codes then allows us to better articulate our own gender and sexual identities and better critique the creation of these codes. Involving *lo cotidiano* in the articulation the “queer identity” allows Camp to engender critiques of identity politics. Furthermore, Meyer’s theory of the “invisible queer” overlooks hegemonic powers of assimilation to capitalize upon these markets, reifying its own power. It also misplaces



the queer within the confines of the hegemonic gender system as if unaffected as it is “invisible” yet draws no attention to the harm of being invisible. As previously stated, one way this is harmful for different communities is the denial of the existence of gay, lesbian and trans-identified people that make it difficult for them to receive relevant sexual education and access to proper medical attention. While I find Meyer’s theory problematic, I do see validity in what he is discussing as it pertains to popular culture.

### More than Gender Performance, A Developed Identity

Drag is often criticized for the reflection of gender stereotypes it presents. When it is theorized, the discourse generally revolves around drag as an art of performing gender. Historian Leila Rupp and sociologist Verna Taylor have contributed to the discussion of drag by interacting with actual drag performers, observing the performances and surveying audience members. They complicate the discourse of drag by viewing the political resistance occurring within the drag performances. These two theorists observe the stage performances of Drag queens as significant political and cultural symbols. This section explains how I have incorporated ideas from Rupp and Taylor, the documentary *Paris is Burning* and the popular television show *RuPaul’s Drag Race* into my project to depict the complexities of discussing drag in terms of identity.

The drag queen presents an embodied discourse that publicly professes a queer vision of resistance to heteronormativity. Rupp and Taylor identify this instance of performed gender transgression on stage in their study at the 801, articulating the complexities behind the performances done by the “girls”:

The vast majority of the girls' numbers appropriate dominant gender and sexual categories and practices, neither embracing nor rejecting them, but instead using the fact that femininity and heterosexuality are being performed by gay men to make something quite different. They do this in a variety of ways, sometimes commenting directly on sexuality and gender, sometimes challenging their apparent femaleness with their actual maleness, sometimes arousing erotic responses that do not fit into the categories of heterosexuality or homosexuality, thus confusing or exploding those categories (124)

Above, Rupp and Taylor list the methods employed by Drag queens which, in addition to adding to this type of entertainment, are also an instance of political resistance to the predefined gender structure. Yet there is an appropriation that occurs in the stylizations of masculinity and femininity and performances that begin through the appropriation of the framework of the dominant gender structure, but which transforms it into something that is only vaguely identifiable through this same framework of gender as specters of masculinity and femininity. The performances then signify more than the entertainment and talent of a drag queen; they are indicative of the instability of gender/sex categories. Rupp and Taylor's categorization of the types of performances are helpful in associating the methods of transgression performance and performativity done on stage. "Their performances fall into three categories: some (but hardly any) embrace traditional images of femininity and heterosexuality; some explicitly reject those images; and others transform femininity and heterosexuality into something else, what we have been calling "drag-queenness." In other words, when the curtain opens, there is more than entertainment taking place onstage" (116).

Makeup, padding and clothing all contribute to the creation of the character on stage, but once the spotlight hits the queen she relies on her charisma and personality to allow the audience to buy into the illusion. In my experiences at Drag shows, the queens will often engage with the audience, either during lip-sync performances as they collect tips, special interactive segments of the shows in which audience members will be interviewed or called on stage for some reason, and in meet and greet sessions. In these instances, Drag queens complicate the discourse of sexual orientation and desire. Discussing the complexities in the discourse of sexual identity and sexual orientation involving the relationship between the Drag performance and the audience, Rupp and Taylor observe that “perhaps the most powerful numbers are the sexy ones that evoke responses in audience members that cannot be characterized as heterosexual or homosexual, because it’s not clear what about the drag queens – their maleness or femaleness – is the cause of the response” (126). At clubs, I have seen audience members, both male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, anxiously wait for the performer’s attention, eagerly holding up their dollar bills as homage to the performer. In response, depending on the venue, the performer may respond to these offerings with pecks on the cheek or allowing the person to stuff the bill into her cleavage or waist band, depending on her outfit. In a more extravagant instance, I witnessed a drag queen, lip-synching to “Fuck U Betta” by Neon Hitch, suggest that, as can be implied by the title of the song, she could perform certain tasks for him better than his girlfriend, who was sitting right next to him. In response to this, the girl wrapped her arm firmly around the guy to suggest to both the drag queen and the guy that he was “spoken for.” These examples of interactions between the Drag performer and audiences showcase Rupp and Taylor’s identification of the way Drag queens “affirm gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender identities in contrast to heterosexual ones; but they also break down those differences...” (210). They also

provide a lens that exemplifies the ambiguity of the character—her maleness or femaleness— attracts members of the audience.

Here, there is a complex negotiation of sexuality that becomes difficult to articulate because of the presence of feminine gender representation from a male subject that queers the interpretation and articulation of sexuality. Rupp and Taylor notice similar instances in their surveys conducted on fans at drag shows, revealing that “drag queens make it impossible to think of the categories of man/woman and gay/straight in any simple way” (201). The articulation within this specific instance—spawned by this man/woman juxtaposition—of attraction requires the negotiation of polar categories. Rupp and Taylor suggest that this should expand the categories to allow for these identities to exist rather than eliminating the categories (209). It is most reassuring that when Rupp and Taylor asked audiences to think critically about this experience, these subjects responded that “the labels of 'gay' and 'straight' (or 'male' and 'female') just don't fit” (201). This conclusion reflects a queering of understanding complex identity categories that renders openness for the affirmation of more identities.

### *Start Your Engines!*

The pop culture phenomenon, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, premiered in 2009 on Logo, a cable television network dedicated to LGBTQ themed content. In this section, I use *Drag Race* as a means to illuminate some key concepts of the theories. I also use particular events within the show to depict drag as a culture that supports community building, drawing drag further than the way it is typically discussed.

RuPaul became a notable icon in Drag history (“herstory,” according to Ru herself) when he began a talk show in Drag. Since this time, she has released three albums and two books and

now hosts *RuPaul's Drag Race*, beginning in 2009 and now (in 2013) on its fifth season, with a mini season, *All Stars*, in between Seasons 4 and 5. In this reality show, competitors are chosen from across the United States and Puerto Rico based on audition videos that display their personalities and drag style(s). Over the course of the competitions, the queens are given several challenges that test their “charisma, uniqueness, nerve and talent” and must also create runway drag looks for each show. The challenges are centered on drag and LGBTQ knowledge, from designing an AIDS awareness video to celebrity impersonation. Some of these challenges showcase the ways in which Drag surmounts performance and becomes a political entity that illuminates issues faced by the GLBTQ community; but other challenges display bad faith that reinvest certain values of the hegemony, especially in promoting objects of femininity for the purposes of empowering women—I would like to note that the bad faith of these instances would be nullified if they were instead marketed toward men or other Drag queens. The queen that does the best on each show is given a reward, the two queens with the lowest score must “lip-synch for their lives.” The queen with the better performance stays on the show, the other goes home.

As Meyer has theorized, the practice of drag, a product of Camp, has now been assimilated into the hegemony and marketed towards LGBTQ audiences. Yet, while drag has become a topic assimilated by the hegemony through a television show, it is able to signify the LGBTQ identity through this media and become accessible for the community to watch. In this instance, it is both signifying the existence of queer identity and affirming the art and practice of drag. This show, in affirming the work and identity of drag queens, has provided a threshold for drag queens to affirm their professionalization and become validated as artists. For competing on this show, not only does a competitor receive the opportunity to become “America’s Next Drag Superstar,” but also becomes a wanted figure to perform in different venues.

The competitors across seasons often refer to one another as “sisters” during and after the competition, depicting that this show also establishes a bond between drag queens. It is in these intimate moments that the drag becomes difficult to talk about merely as an act of gender presentation and play. These instances depict drag as an identity in which performers are able to establish supporting bonds.

The act of making the presence of other identities in society known carries more weight for drag queens than one might realize. It is through this awareness of non-normative identities that society may become aware of and affirm these identities, allowing for the creation of safe spaces. I believe drag queens are stakeholders for this progress to happen because, unlike gay and lesbian identities, drag queens may have to come out twice, first as a gay male and secondly as a drag queen—revealing the conception of a more fluid gender identity. The act of “coming out” is itself a result of heteronormative structures that assume heterosexuality as the norm. Being disowned by parents is a fear that keeps adolescents from coming out until they find themselves in safe situations in which they are self-sufficient.

In the documentary *Paris Is Burning*, for example, we encounter several gay drag performers who had been disowned by their families upon coming out. The subjects in the film reveal forming “Houses” (sometimes spelled Hauses) or drag families as the solution to find the support, care and mentorship that was denied to them upon coming out. Drag mothers specifically serve as mentors to young people beginning to do drag, cultivating their talents, sharing their sense of style and methods for creating the illusion of gender. These families or “Houses” are usually signified by a name that is used to claim reign at a clubs by competing in pageants. A few houses mentioned in the documentary are “the House of Eleganza” and “the House of LaBella.” The act of creating a House or seeking out a drag mother depicts an intimate

moment in life that accentuates the need for growth within a community. In contemporary settings, in which coming out is more accepted, drag families serve as mentoring relationships to cultivate a performer's capabilities and talents. That is not to neglect the bond formed through this process of mentorship. It does show that, for some, there is more involvement in drag than representing and performing gender; there is the opportunity to form community and identity.

Through the lens of queer theory, drag is seen as a challenge to heteronormative confines of gender and sexuality. Camp theory articulates drag as a political signifier of the LGBTQ community. But it is in viewing and understanding the levels of identity and community depicted through the reflections and observations done by Rupp and Taylor and in *RuPaul's Drag Race* that we are able to most clearly grasp or understand drag as a culture and identity. And it is from Rupp and Taylor's work that drag becomes apparent as a stakeholder in its own process of signifying more complicated conceptions of gender and sexuality. It is in working through the body of this work and viewing the formation of community that drag may begin to be formulated as an identity as opposed to gender representation and performance.

#### TRANS-Gression: the game

The following section details the translation and synthesis of the theoretical work into game play. In this section, I detail the development of the game, reflecting upon iterations. I then interpret interesting moments in play-testing, reflecting these play experience back on the design intention of the game to gauge the success of the game. I finish with a postmortem that details the events that went well, surprises in the development process and things that I would have done differently.

Ian Bogost defines the term procedural rhetoric as “The art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writings, images, or moving pictures” (ix). Here, Bogost identifies that the authorial intent embedded into the game is most effective when carried out through the way the player interacts and manipulates the game. The rules then become the method of communication between the designer and players through which the players experience the designer’s message of the game. I wanted to create a game that provided a game experience that creates a space for people to play with gender, but more importantly to allow non-queer individuals an in-game method to experience some of the complexities and hardships experienced by non-cisgendered people. My vision for the use of this game is for a gender queer man, a man who is not cisgendered, to take this to others, either an individual or a group, to play together in order to develop a dialogue around this game space in which players encounter more fluid gender identity experiences. Identifying a mechanic that would lend itself to creating this play experience proved challenging gender norms and a better understanding of the experience of living outside these gender norms.

I decided to base my game on drag because it embodies Camp and is an articulation of gender in portrayal, performance and discourse. Yet articulating the experience and translating it into a game was a tougher challenge than I had anticipated. I also thought the culture of drag resonated well in forming intimate communities, known as Houses, that I thought would be interesting if applied to a game. I did not want to fall into the trap of the postmodern mindset outlined by Uma Narayan in which Western culture consumes food from Othered, often third-world, cultures as a form to appear sophisticated, yet do not concern themselves with the political problems in these countries (126). Applying Narayan’s critique of postmodernism to



this situation, I did not want to draw from Drag in a matter to consume it, only taking the positive while neglecting to engage with the issues.

I realized the play experience of this game would have to be created for two different audiences: men who fall within the gender queer spectrum (including but not limited to transsexual, transgendered, and transgenered) and straight people. The message had to be communicated through gameplay. For players who already understood gender queerness, I wanted them to understand a sense of community and standing up for one another; and for the straight audience who would be reached by their queer friends, I wanted them to leave the play space with the liberating experience of breaking socially constructed gender norms. Because I wanted the game to instigate a conversation about one's own encounter with challenging gender, I wanted to limit play time to about twenty-five minutes.

Developing the game required several early iterations to test different mechanics that would work to get the message across through the gameplay. Iterative design allows for the development team to quickly test changes made to the game and easily incorporate feedback from play-testing sessions. In this design process, elements are added to and removed from the game based on the complications identified in the current game design to strengthen the game play experience in the future. Creating iterations was easy to implement after having a concept. For this process, I used index cards to create mockup trials of the game. This method allowed me many affordances in the iteration process:

- A cheap and easy way to edit and amend cards that I wanted to keep which were confusing in their wording. This especially became useful during play-testing at times that I needed to quickly make changes on the cards.

- A cheap way to discard the unnecessary or unwanted cards and create other cards that added to gameplay and sped up the time to play a game.
- A way to implement newly conceptualized ideas to test how these impacted games.

I tried not to make drastic changes to the game in between iterations so that I might better locate consistent variables that lend themselves to the message of the game, and so that I might see the effects of removing the game elements that seemed to hinder the impact of the game. One of the largest changes to the games occurred when I introduced the fashion items.

Adding a dress-up component, using costume materials, created the experience of living outside the gender norms. My first iteration was a complicated attempt at a resource management deck-building game that did not convey my intention as a designer, but was especially too complicated for the players to understand. This iteration forced player interaction by shuffling and moving around cards between the main deck, to a monetized bartering system, players' own decks, and players' hands. This game format would not lend itself to accessibility for people to take to their friends and play in about 25 minutes. My advisors reminded me that some of the people playing this game will not be "hardcore" table-top gamers, so the rules and game play had to be simple and understandable. The time to explain the rules of this game would create a tedious and confusing step to the instance I envisioned. In 45 minutes of play, only one player obtained one item. Furthermore, this early iteration was too slow, lacked character and interest, and the card directions were too complex. I was reminded by my advisors that I was making a game about transgressing gender boundaries, focusing on Drag, which takes joy in mocking and complicating the gender system. I realized that my game needed character; it needed to embody the *sinvergüenza* of Drag.

In the next iteration, four players gathered around a single deck comprised of cards that each player would use differently according to their role. The roles in this system were: the stereotypical *machismo*—one that behaves stereotypically macho—who was trying to keep the order of the hegemony intact; a “closeted” player; and two Drag queens. Initially, only the straight role would be known, players would have to discern the roles of the other players through how they played the game. The straight player won if he could keep all players from having any fashion items or item cards; the closeted player won if he could reveal a hand of five items; and the drag queens one when they were wearing five items. In this version, the Drag queens were the only ones who would want to do the performing challenges in the game while the players in the straight and closeted roles sat back and watched as the other two danced and strutted to try to beat out one another. One of the flaws in this iteration was that it limited the challenge put on players to perform masculinity, by requiring two of the players to be feminine. The result was play situated around rearranging cards. For the closeted and straight roles, the game was not fun as they could sit back, watch, and shift around cards. In terms of procedural rhetoric, the game did not properly reflect the theory, nor did it address issues faced by drag queens in a heteronormative context.

My following iteration kept the roles from the previous iteration, but added in a second deck that enforced additional rules that either required players to act a certain way or made it harder for certain non-heteronormative plays to be made. In this prototype, the player in the straight role was privileged with a helping deck that added rules to his favor and so enforced masculine behavior among players, such as acting macho and talking in deep voices, illuminating the ways masculinity is also performed. In addition, it added cards that allowed for items to be traded between players, meaning that even the straight player could be wearing items.

This game was still slow and overly complex for the intended audience. Members of my thesis committee advised me to focus the effect of every card to instantiate a feeling that I wanted players to experience. I had to reflect upon what was at stake for players in the game, potential instances in game play that would represent real life events. Between this prototype and the next, I sat down and thought about my own queer gendered experiences as well as others to create a “story” for the game players.

In this time, I scoured Facebook and Twitter for feeds from Drag queens, seeing how they presented themselves online, what stories they shared with their followers, and what issues, both personal and political, they illuminated. I also avidly rewatched certain episodes of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* for episodes in which contestants shared events from their personal lives with one another and were challenged to interact with other people for an understanding among different groups of age, gender, and sexuality.

I reflected on the experience of designing, realizing a large flaw in my design. I had fallen into the proceduralist mindset that creates a hierarchy privileging the designer in game space, simultaneously subjecting the players to his vision. Miguel Sicart critiques proceduralist rhetoric as it denies the players as agents in play space. Sicart comments that proceduralism has “fostered a way of researching and designing games that deprives them of the richness, pleasures and challenges that players bring to the game” (par 5). I too, was only looking at the rules I was embedding into my game, ignoring capacity for players to negotiate their own identities through their interaction with the game objects, rules, space and other players. “Proceduralism often disregards the importance of play and players as activities that have creative, performative properties” (Sicart, par 21). Here Sicart draws attention back to the importance in understanding play and players’ agency when designing.

Sicart identifies that for proceduralist “[p]layers are important, but only as activators of the process” (par 29). I had designed the previous iterations from the perspective of embedding values into the rules of a game for players to experience. What I was forgetting was that my agency is limited through the rules of the game, while the players’ own agency and the play space are other factors that impact the way the game is experienced. “What players do is reconfigure the meanings embedded in the rules defined by designers. Playing, then, becomes accepting *and learning from* the system-based message embedded in the game” (Sicart, par 36). Sicart illuminates that “the meaning of a game cannot be reduced to its rules, nor to the behaviors derived from the rules, since play will be a process of appropriation of those rules, a dialogue between the system and the player...” (Sicart, par 50). From this, it can be concluded that the rules are only one contributor to meaning-making in the game. The players and play are two other impacting forces upon the message of the game, both of which negotiate with one another and the rules of the game to form meaning.

In rethinking the relationship between the player and rules, we are able to see that a more complex system exists in games that impacts the encoding and decoding processes. Considering the multiple forces that act in this space “liberates us from considering that players are determined and conditioned by the game rules; in fact, it considers that the player can be reflective precisely by abandoning the rule-determinism...” (Sicart, par 51). This important realization returns subjectivity to the players in the design. Game designers author the game space and moderate the interaction of players through the rules, but the experience is morphed by players. “Games structure play, facilitate it by means of rules. This is not to say that rules determine play: they focus it, they frame it, but they are still subject to the very act of play. Play, again, is an act of appropriation of the game by players” (Sicart, par 52). It is important for

designers to remember that players are active agents that involve their own identities and perspectives in game space. The designer then becomes the one who frames the experience. Yet Sicart's point is not without its flaws. "Play belongs to players, and the games' meaning resides in the actions of players" (Sicart, par 68). Here, Sicart over privileges the role of play in game space as players do subject themselves to the rules of play and their roles in game space. This complex relationship between rules, game space, play and players is not one of hierarchy, but a loop that creates a dialectic between the rhetoric of the game and the identity of the player.



**Figure 2 Negotiating Identity within Play Space**

After reflecting on these instances and reviewing *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret*, I created the next iteration. While still a dress-up card game, this game was very different from the previous designs. The first major change was doing away with the different player roles; all players were now competing to be the most fabulous queen. I did like that all roles were male and thought this properly limited the scope of the game. This evaluation led to the implementation of the rule that all players enter the magic circle of game space as male.

This rule limited the scope of the game to provide a clearer game experience. Referring back to Kate Davy's article allowed me to identify the importance of writing different styles of Camp that target different audiences. As Davy reasons in her article, the styles of Camp differ depending on the producers and the target audience. Davy identifies the ways in which male impersonation subverts masculine hegemony, while female impersonation interacts with the hegemony in a way that taunts and teases its values. Because the values of Camp differ drastically for male and female subjects, the scope of such a game would be immense and the meaning of the game might be lost. Limiting the game to one gender allowed me to plan the size of the project accordingly and appropriately define the experiences that would be brought forth in the game.

Because I was limiting the game to men, I had to create a meaningful method for women to enter game space. Susan Bordo includes Pat Califa's reflection on putting on a dildo and taking on a masculine identity as she dresses like a butch biker in *The Male Body*. In this episode, Califa describes her embodied experience of holding her new member, allowing her chest to show through her leather jacket, feeling like she took up more space and becoming cruder in her gestures (100). Because it would be strange, difficult, and especially awkward to package an entire wardrobe and enough strap-ons for female players to redress their identities like Califa, I attempted to create a similar effect by having female players take on male names at the beginning of the game and requiring them to act in stereotypically masculine ways. In addition to limiting the scope of the game, this rule also made wording the rules and cards easier as I could justify using the male pronoun throughout the game and in the rules.



**Figure 3 Starting Life Cards**

Initially, players would be given three types of cards that serve as health points: BIOLOGICAL FAMILY, DAY JOB, and FRIENDS. I did away with the deck that modified and created different rules that enforced gender binaries. To take its place, I implemented a predefined heteronormative order by instantiating three specific in-game rules that players would need to break to win:

- Dress like a guy
- Act like a guy
- Don't show intimacy towards other guys





**Figure 4 Decks**

A “punishment deck” was also created to punish people for breaking the rules of the hegemony. These cards reflected real life hardships, reflecting hate speech and discrimination. The effects of these cards took away cards in players’ hands, health point cards and the items they were trying to collect to win. To help another player subvert the consequences of breaking gender rules, players may discard SOLIDARITY cards from their hands. I implemented the message I was trying to communicate with players through these cards, detailing that our communities, though we are in competition, should be in solidarity with one another in troubling times. Implementing

this deck, I cut the index cards that the players would draw in half and made these cards. The punishment deck was made of full-sized index cards.



**Figure 5 Drag Life Cards**

The incentives for players to break rules are, first, gaining items—which aid to their winning—and second, gaining more health cards: DRAG FAMILY, DRAG JOB, and FANS. In obtaining the DRAG JOB card players choose their Drag name. Usually in choosing Drag names, performers will draw from iconic figures, pay tribute to important people in their lives, and incorporate some double entendre. FANS provided one SOLIDARITY card value for the player. Five different items were available for players to gain by playing cards: a feather boa, a ring, glasses, gloves and a crown. All five items had to be worn for a player to win.

Play-testing illuminated many flaws in the current build of this game. First, the game took too long, with only three of five items appearing in forty minutes of game play. FANS were too powerful, to the extent the punishments seemed insignificant for players. The TIP card was

not favored by players because it was a “minus-two” (a term used in card games to describe an effect that takes away two cards) cards-in-hand effect that also broke a rule, but many were more than ready to slide the card into other player’s waistband.

I tried different methods to solve these issues. For example, to solve the item problem, I added in extra items and fixing the ratio of the deck to include more item cards. Adding in three additional items while keeping the win condition at wearing five items seemed to work best as it significantly brought down the time to play a game. I amended the FAN cards to only provide one-half of SOLIDARITY value for the player and included more ways to lose fans in the punishment deck. In the narration, I had to come up with unique instances in real life in which one’s fandom would be lost. The TIP card was changed to “Draw 1 card, give 1 card from your hand to another player. Slide it into his waistband.” I included the bit about the waistband to imitate the way people usually tip drag performers. People will slide the dollar bill into the cleavage or bra strap of a Drag queen, but as the card may slip through a man’s shirt, I opted for the waistband. The waistband also seemed a more intimate area to touch as it requires underwear fabric to be touched. While this card broke a rule, players did not hesitate to use this version of the card because it did not lessen hand advantage as much as before.

The final tweaks to the game increased the dynamics between players and the game. I added a card that allowed players to trade three cards in their hands to another player for an item. This acted as a wild card that decreased time to play a game. In the punishment deck, I included a card that allowed players to give up an item to draw cards from the deck. To parallel real life events, this card reflects the ways hegemonic groups attempt to assimilate queer culture, in order to reinforce its own ideology in a way that seemingly benefits queer culture.

At this point, the wording used in the game did not reflect the spirit of the topic; the language of the game was not Campy enough. For one thing, “to act like a man” seemed too formal and broad. After what kind of man did I want players to model their behaviors? It was suggested by my committee members that I should change “man” to “dude” in all instances as the word “dude” connotes a type of language and behaviors players may imitate. From then on, players would be referred to as “Dudes” in the rules and in this report. Furthermore, until this point, items were represented by folded index cards with the written item on it. Purchasing the items changed the play dynamic. The most noticeable change was the organization of surface space for playing. This may have been a problem for playing in certain spaces. Having a feather boa and a sash occupying space on the table may be obnoxious for some. My solution to get the boa off the table was to create an incentive in the rules for players to want the boa; luckily I also needed a way to decide which dude would go first! The created rule read “All dude begin the game with one item; the dude with the boa goes first. FIGHT!” Not only did this rule fix the two stated problems, it also decreased play time because now players only need to collect four additional items. In addition, receiving a FASHION ITEM established a threshold into play space, allowing dudes to immediately begin their experience of living outside the gender binary.

Applying theoretical work to my design allowed me to define particular systems that served as frames to create the experience of transgressive joy in play space. Though, as the designer, I only have so much power in authoring the entire message of a game; the rest is up to the player. Play-testing allowed for me to see the ways players navigated play space using the framework of my game. In these sessions, I witnessed players interact with my creation to complete the authorship of an experience. I relied on these sessions to gauge the success of my design for players to experience moments of identity negotiation.



**Figure 6 TRANS-Gression Cover**

*Observing Players TURN IT OUT!*

“Turn it out!” is generally an exclamation used to describe giving an astonishing performance.

The first time a female subject joined the play circle during one of my play-tests for the game, she had trouble picking a “Dude name.” “I’m not sure,” she stated, sitting and thinking to herself, mumbling a little. “I’m not sure,” she repeated, and the other Dudes around the circle began taking part in helping her chose a name. “Neil!” “No, Buster!” “How about Stefen?” “Let’s try Charlo!” “That’s STUPID! Go with Butch!” Until, finally, the group settled on Bruce. I am not sure how to quite discuss this particular event, but, in contrast, when any of the other Dudes picked out a Drag name, they made sure that it was their own product. The other Dudes would even wait, “gagging in anticipation,” for the big reveal. “Gag” is used to describe an

intense feeling, often to the point of being unable to handle it. “Call me, ‘Anita Mann.’” “I’m ‘Robyn Banks!’” “‘Ophelia Dixxx’... is my name.”

During one session, we were play-testing in a room on campus that has glass doors and walls that face the common area and halls. Dudes were enjoying the performance-based cards—strutting their stuff, striking poses, dancing and sliding the cards into each other’s pants—even when a large group passed through the hall outside. Conversation was going well and the dudes were really getting into character, referring to each other by their Drag names. But as soon as another student walked in early for a meeting and proceeded to setup his laptop, the magic circle immediately faded. Conversation halted, nobody wanted to do any over-the-top dances or strutting, and, most notably, a dude played a TIP card and handed the player to another dude, when earlier every player did not hesitate to get out of the chair and make the transaction provocative. It was interesting when the dudes started whispering each other’s real names. After playing, they all reported that it was awkward having someone walk in on their game while they were acting and dressing so flamboyantly.

I would interpret this event as the formation of a particular type of bonding within play space that happens in the safety of the magic circle. Having the other party intrude on the room and become a third party observer able to hear and see everything going on immediately broke the safety of the space. Perhaps within the circle, a comradeship is formed to the extent that all the dudes are all involved in subverting the rules of gender, but once another comes in the room, they become aware of the gaze. Perhaps it was because all dudes in the game space willingly suspended their own identities, but the intruder’s presence reminded them of the normative rules that police gender behaviors. I’m afraid that this event may reflect that the exploration of gender I wanted players to experience in my game may be limited to the confines of the Magic Circle,

which, once breached, reflect a social taboo of flaunting such a transgression to gender rules. Yet this event simultaneously affirmed that within the game space, players felt free to explore gender and articulate their experiences with one another, reflecting the capacity for dialogue.

This led to the inception of the name of this game, *TRANS-Gression*, a reinterpretation of the word “transgression” that plays on the use of “trans” as a prefix for changing or non-conformist sex and gender identities—transgender, transsexual, trans-people. Drag is an instance of transgendered performativity and performance as it rearticulates the masculine and feminine icons onto one body. Not until seeing the performance of players in this game space immediately disrupted by the reminder of heteronormative values did I realize the sense of transgressive joy that players experienced in this play space.

Introducing the actual fashion items into the game, I noticed Dudes would all compliment each other when anybody obtained an item, even if the item was stolen from one of them. However, there came a time that all dudes had some kind of moment of feeling ridiculous for different reasons. It usually happened when a dude was wearing about three items and had to do some performance task. At this point, some kind of “break down” would occur that all dudes had to laugh off and make some kind of remark—either about how odd they felt or drawing attention to how they felt wearing the items—before continuing.



**Figure 7 Miss Mona Lot Strikes a Pose**

I was invited to play-test in one of my advisor's classes with a group of people who had not seen the game before. I had set all the items on a table but left the cards in their plastic bags for the purpose of seeing how the players set up the game. My advisor asked who would like to play the game, but be willing to sport some of the objects such as the feather boa, showing it off for everyone to see. Immediately, two guys raised their hands, a third guy soon followed and lastly a male-identified person also joined. One guy quickly became attached to the boa, immediately donning it before the game had even started. They easily shuffled and put all the decks in place, but did not distribute an initial hand of five cards to every player. I verified the rule sheet I had given them; it did indeed say to distribute five cards to each dude, this was just



looked over. I was a bit worried this would contribute to the time it took to play the game. They separated all the Life cards face down and hesitated to turn them over when they had to distribute them to every player. From this, I deduced that it would be more intuitive to print these cards double-sided to prevent this kind of confusion. The other interesting moment was when they were distributing the DRAG JOB cards instead of the JOB cards, but caught this before any gameplay started.

Their first turn consisted of drawing their first two cards and playing one of them. It took a while for them to gain a sizeable hand, and they were first only playing cards that gained fashion items. The other interesting interpretation of the rules I noticed was that when punished, the dudes deemed that a fashion item card could be given up from their hand instead of one that they were wearing. I had not intended this to happen, so I realized I had to reword these cards to properly articulate that I meant for players to remove an item they were wearing. Interestingly enough, dudes were more willing to TIP each other, even having to slide the cards into the other's waistband, than they were willing to perform. The cards that required performing were saved for discarding fadders or passing to other dudes. Finally, one dude stood up and strutted his stuff because he realized that FANS were valuable because they helped subverting punishments. This was the only performance based action that happened in this session.

In a play-test session with three women, they all began by changing their names. We met in a semi-private room that have windows on two adjacent sides. Upon reading the rules, the rule that made all female players pick a Dude name and act butch received laughs. They picked out their Dude names and only referred to one another by these names throughout the entirety of the game. It was clear that they understood the satirical elements of the game and reveled in the transgressive behaviors that I had encoded in the game. The boa, again, was the first item to be

claimed as Dudes began the game. It was interesting to note that none of them were really asking for help when they received punishments. The others felt that since they didn't have any to return the favor, it would not have been fair for them to ask. When the punishments that forced dudes to decide between giving up a fashion item or giving up one of their life cards, they'd always go for the life cards. When I asked them afterwards, I discovered that only one of them had SOLIDARITY cards to play. This was a first. I looked through the deck and saw most of the solidarity cards at the bottom of the deck. I realize that this is going to happen in games because shuffling a deck leaves the order that players receive cards up to chance.

During the game, as the Dudes (women) posed and donned the fashion items, they drew attention to the windows. This seemed to enhance the level of their play in game, flaunting their items and over exaggerating their poses. Two of them who worked in that building both began listing people that may walk by—professors and staff—discussing how much they would like to see what reaction the said person would have to seeing this game play in progress. The conversation then veered toward who else would be interesting to see playing this game. This sense of transgressive behavior seemed to derive from living outside the norm of that which is generally expected both from gender roles and in roles in the work place. While I'm glad to see this experience of transgressive joy coming through in the game, I was hesitant to see it developing in a certain way. After this session, one of the women suggested that we go to a local bar and play the game later in the week with more people. I liked that people enjoyed playing the game, but I was having trouble dealing with the appropriation of this game from being a game of identity formation to becoming a game in which players purely take joy and gain excitement from the experience of transgressing gender boundaries and limit the experience to the confines of the magic circle.

Earlier, I discussed the *sinvergüenza* of drag, this is to say the way drag revels in its resistance to the established norm and policing forces of gender. I also discussed the way drag serves to signify the LGBTQ community. From these two points of reference, the spectacle of drag is then understood to be loud, and Campy. Butler's theory places emphasis on allowing gender performativity and gender performance to change the structures of gender. Butler's theory requires publicly displaying this gender negotiation for the message to be received, creating a spectacle. Finally, Sicart draws attention to the agency of players in play space. Where players decide to play is one of the choices players make that impact their method of message-making. Relating these theories back to the event in which women wanted to create a spectacle of their transgressive play, I see that this group of women seek to foster their play experience by allowing their method of message-making to be influenced not only by their interaction with the game in play space, but in a larger environment available to the public eye. This exhibition of their transgression takes pride *sinvergüenza* and intentionally situates itself as a resistance to normative behavior. The theories that fed my design in this case were all amplified in this process to exceed the game space and sought to be experienced through interaction outside the magic circle.

It is interesting that these women had this drive of exhibitionism in their transgression, wanting to further increase the size of the spectacle by situating themselves in a bar while the men in a previous session felt their play space was infringed upon as soon as someone else walked into the room. Returning to Sicart, the Dude playing my game will bring his own values into the magic circle, negotiating his identity within the game space. When women enter the magic circle, their articulation of the "Take on a Dude name and act butch" may be negotiated with their own identity and resolved in a satire of masculinity. Men, however, do not deal with

this initial rule, but are more impacted on their embodied experience in donning the outrageous items, associated with femininity. Gender exploration and expression outside the binaries is generally not an accepted practice, especially for men. Furthermore, having to slide cards into another Dude's waistband challenges players to overcome personal space issues associated with sexual identity.

Play space takes an important role in the players' experience of the game. As seen in the two play-testing sessions in which space became a visible factor, the environment became an agent that moderated the dialogue between the players and the game. Huizinga explains the role of space in play this way

Sacrament and mystery presuppose a hallowed spot. Formally speaking, there is no distinction whatever between marking out a space for a sacred purpose and marking it out for purposes of sheer play. The turf, the tennis-court, the chessboard and pavement-hopscotch cannot formally be distinguished from the temple or the magic circle. The striking similarity between sacrificial rites all over the earth shows that such customs must be rooted in a very fundamental, an aboriginal layer of the human mind.

(Huizinga, 20)

Huizinga articulates that play requires a dedicated space. The formalized space contributes itself to the play experience. This is not to say that the space must be dedicated solely for the purpose of play, though in some instances—such as the soccer field—it is, but that the act of play creates a ritualized space. This space then becomes safe for those who have suspended their reality and entered into the confines of this magic circle. Huizinga's theory of play then provides a frame in which to articulate the difference in these two play-testing sessions. In the session with all men,

the intruder served as Huizinga's "spoil-sport" who "shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others" (Huizinga, 11). This individual served as a policing presence that reminded the players in the magic circle of the heteronormative rules that govern the world outside the circle. This caused the ritualized play space to crumble. In the second instance with the female play-testers, they sought to flaunt their transgression and wanted to publicly oppose the heteronormative agenda. In this case, the spoil-sport's presence feeds their cause; his disgust for their behavior excites their exhibitionistic joy.

Observing play-testing and reviewing the responses from players made me aware of multiple complexities of designing and developing games. While I saw the potential for the game to serve as a vehicle to navigate difficult conversations about gender identity, I also understood the ways players would treat and alter the game. Overall, I noticed moments of gameplay that reflected the theories that influenced the design of the game. Players brief instances to evaluate and negotiate their own identities with the message I used the game to frame. While the game serves its purpose of allowing players to then experience another lens for articulating gender, I think there could be additions made that would serve to start the dialogue between players and then moderate it based on the reflection and articulation of gender within the safety of the magic circle.

## Post Mortem

### *Events That Went Well*

I chose the right medium for the purpose of the game I wanted to create. Towards the beginning of the project, I was wondering if a computer game would be a better option,

especially with all the complicated instances I initially wanted to include, but because of the level of interaction I wanted players to experience with one another, a table-top game was a better fit to the prescription. This medium lent itself to the players' negotiation of their own identity with the message I was trying to portray through the game as they were able to palpably experience what it was like to put on and wear the fashion items.

Keeping a journal about the design experience was definitely useful. I documented any ideas I had on the matter; even a couple quite ridiculous ideas that initially seemed outrageous but later led to the implementation of some mechanics. The MOBILIZE! card developed from the articulation of the relationship between Drag performers and fans. For any designer, I would suggest keeping a journal that details every idea you have pertaining to the game, any research you do, and your observations during play-testing. This not only helped me write the section on the TRANS-Gression and play-testing, but helped me make sense of the design process.

Iterative design worked well for the developmental process of this game for several reasons. Testing iterations of early design concepts really helped focus the scope and requirements of the game. These first concepts were too complicated for the intention of the project. These mechanics would have been developed for a more dedicated table-top gaming audience, but because the intention for this game, the mechanics had to be simple for people are not trained to table-top card game mechanics. I think the single most important decision made at this point was to throw out these designs. Because they were early conceptualizations prototyped quickly on index cards, it was not hard to start on fresh concepts, using these for references of what was well received while straying away from elements that did not work.

Once I had the concept nailed down, I still retained a creative dynamic over the project that allowed me to tweak the design in order to incorporate new ideas and test them to see if they added to the experience. The design of breaking a set of gender rules sparked a creative direction for the game. This concept led to the implementation of the mechanic used for players to experience solidarity with one another. The Drag theme was then set in direct opposition to the Dude Rules, showing the direction of my critique of gender in the flow of the game. Dudes begin with the Dude Rules intact and accepted, but are driven to become Drag queens, requiring them to develop a more fluid conceptualization of gender that exists outside what they are initially told to believe. As the game progresses, the Dudes lose their initial life—JOB, FAMILY and FRIEND—cards but gain the opportunity to gain other life cards—DRAG JOB, DRAG FAMILY, FAN.

Finding The Game Crafter was a blessing! Thank you Professor Dean O'Donnell for the recommendation! This site prints, publishes the game online for purchase, and ships the game. The Game Crafter provides templates for all material required to publish a game, including boxes, pegs and boards. These templates include suggested boundaries in which to place information on the card so nothing is at risk of getting cut. I printed a version of TRANS-Gression with the alpha art to test both the impact of the art in game space and see the quality of printing. The Game Crafter impressed me with the shipment and cards. I received the deck in eight days, printed professionally on glossy cards like those found in table-top card games. The Game Crafter provides several templates for cards of different sizes. This was the confirming factor to design the punishment cards larger than the wardrobe cards.

The timing for this project began just before the start of RuPaul's Drag Race Allstars and ended towards the end of the fifth season of RuPaul's Drag Race. I consider this important

because it provided a reference point to the development of previous competitors and framed the current trends in Drag. Finally, with all the discussion about these shows happening over Twitter, I was able to follow fans' dialogue with the competitors, reflecting the fandom that surrounds Drag.

### *Surprises in the Development Process*

I was not expecting to have to provide certain explanations in the rules or card effects because I assumed they were general knowledge. This changed when I handed off the game to players and observed how they interacted with the game. I realized I needed to be more specific in my wording. The first thing that surprised me in play-testing the game was that some male players would do masculine performances to satisfy the challenge of the card. When asked to pose, they would pump their muscles or position their hand on their chin to appear as if they were thinking. Their strutting resembled more cartoony versions of walks. I expected players to perform femininely when they played these cards, figuring that was assumed because of the Drag theme. I was wrong. If I could not make this work, I was not properly challenging players to conceive the ways gender is performed. It was not until that I explicitly stated in the cards that the performances had to be feminine that I was pleased with what I saw in play-testing.

I had done a series of play-testing sessions before introducing the items into the game. I figured these would make some impact on the game, but was still surprised to see players' reactions to the different items. What I found even more interesting was the spectrum of responses players had for the different items. The boa usually intrigued people. During a poster presentation session, I decided to drape the boa over the poster and noticed people wanting to touch it. The tiara was another item that players wanted to possess in the game. The gloves and the sash were two fashion items that weren't favorable to have to put on. Perhaps it had to do



with the effort putting on and taking off the fishnet gloves that I chose. Maybe because the sash I used was rainbow, it may have been too much of a label. Seeing the reactions towards these two items, I figure that I would not change them. Creating the illusion of Drag is not a simple task, and the gloves may have been the hardest item to put on. Nobody said being fabulous was easy!

The role of the “spoil-sport” opened my eyes to new instances that I had not foreseen. I did not intend this game to be a public spectacle in which players are titillated through their display of transgression. In this instance, the game space then becomes a stage for players to flaunt the ways they are disobeying heteronormative order, sacrificing their own negotiation of their identity within the frame of the game. I did not expect players would want to use this game for exhibitionism. In contrast, when the individual walked in on a group of guys playing, their play space was ruined. This event displays that not all people playing this game will want to be watched. It also shows the potential for this game to create an intimate connection between players within the game space.

#### *Opportunities and Methods that Could Have Been Improved*

The first change I would have made would have been to submit a concept document to the Interactive Media and Game Development Steering Committee as a project proposal. This would have defined the path of the game earlier on in the creative process. Starting from this concept document instead of a project proposal would have allowed me to iterate upon the document, turning it into a design document. This document would have been a conceived goal of the game that directed my research and design process, while still being malleable to creative ideas that would add to the experience of the game.

To keep better record of my research, I would have been more adamant about typing up notes from the texts early on instead of sitting down to type up notes from several books. I would

have also included my thoughts on the text in my journaling of the development process. While the theory was still implemented into the game, I feel like keeping track of my own reflections after reading would have made writing the section of this paper reflecting the theory easier.

I would have started the art development earlier, pasting sketches of the artwork onto the index cards to see how rough art translates messages to players, then iterate upon the art. Thinking now, if I were to do the project on my own again, I would have picked one of two methods to produce the art. The first method would have been a more referenced and designed digital painting, drawing from actual pictures from the start. Collage would be the second method. Digitally compiling and manipulating images in Photoshop would have created a cohesive look throughout the game while representing the way Drag compiles gender icons to form a persona. Similar photos and references would have unified the art through the textures of the different collage pieces.

The final option, the one I now think I should have taken, would be to find another person to make the art. This would have allowed me to work on other aspects in the design process, though I would have still had to approve the art. While I had a vision of how I wanted the art to look, it would have probably been better to instruct one more trained in visual art on the concept of the game and provide the direction of the art, then work over the shoulder of the individual to see that the overall look of the art for the cards is cohesive.

During the final stages of development, my advisors and I learned of play-testing opportunities through the Psychology Department, but at this point, it was too late to go through this process. Had I known about this possibility, I would have definitely gone through this channel for play-testing purposes, gaining a wider pool and more rigorous play-testing.

During play-testing, I noticed players sometimes struggled to pick their Drag name. Perhaps I should have included a method that suggests ways for players to name their Drag characters. I had not included this reference because I wanted to give players the freedom to be expressive, but perhaps some direction on things to consider when picking your Drag name would be useful. Reviewing the seasons of RuPaul's Drag Race and reading Rupp and Taylor divulges methods used for naming Drag personas.

### Conclusion

Overall, the instances in play-testing reflect the capacity for this game to provide players a structure to navigate and deal with complex issues in a safe environment. Allowing the design of the game to be influenced by theories that each contributed to illuminating a particular topic allowed for the establishment of interesting mechanics in the game that provided the framework for players to then use to author their own experiences and negotiate their identities and values. Through the development process and production of the game, I understood the importance of allowing players to have a role in authoring their own experience within game spaces, especially dealing with difficult issues.

The synthesis of the theory occurred within the game, translating from establishing drag as a culturally significant practice and identity into a game space in which players could articulate more complex structures of gender through interacting with one another and the items of the game. The game also contains a capacity for creating a bond between players, allowing them to be in solidarity with one another as they avoid punishments.

TRANS-Gression is available for purchase on The Game Crafter.

Visit:

<http://thisboigamer.weebly.com/trans-gression-the-game.html>

for the link to purchase the game!

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