

# Drag Queen Names

Naming Practices among American Drag Queens from *RuPaul's Drag Race*

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ENG4790 – Master's Thesis in English,  
Secondary Teacher Training  
30 ECTS

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June 2022





## **Abstract**

This thesis presents a descriptive analysis of 180 drag queen names from the American franchise of the reality competition show *RuPaul's Drag Race* to identify naming practices among American drag queens. Drag queens are not bound by naming laws, which gives them the opportunity to use language beyond conventional names when creating a name for their drag persona. Based on the assumption that drag queens wish to create a memorable name and a name that says something about them, three main elements of drag queen names were investigated: How drag queen names compare to conventional names, how a drag queen name relates to a drag performer and which categories of connotational meanings can be found in the names. The analysis shows that the majority of drag queen names have a similar structure to conventional names and most name elements found in drag queen names are conventional name elements. However, drag queens frequently incorporate unconventional name elements and use naming strategies, like unconventional spelling, that are more frequently found in commercial names than in conventional names. Drag queens tend to choose names of personal significance and with connotations to features or characteristics they wish to project in their performances.

## **Acknowledgments**

The process of writing my master's thesis was, despite its challenges, an enjoyable experience thanks to the people supporting me this semester. First of all, a big thank you to my supervisor, Hildegunn Dirdal, for all the help, advice and time you have given to me and my 180 drag queens. I am grateful for having had a supervisor so dedicated to support my journey into the unknown territory of drag queen names. I hope I was less whiny than Scaredy Kat.

I would also like to thank Dr Beck Sinar at the University of York for helping me realize just how much fun linguistics really is during my semester at the Norwegian Study Centre.

Thank you to Hedda and Taran for all the laughter, conversations and coffee breaks to remind me that there is a world outside of my computer screen.

Thank you to Ellinor for always replying to my frustrated outbursts with words of encouragement. You know All Too Well the ups and downs of this process.

And lastly, thank you to Håkon for your patience, kind words and for pushing me through this semester. I truly appreciate it.

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# 1 Introduction

Trixie Mattel, the drag queen persona of Brian Firkus, once said that “[w]ith drag, it’s like, your name should be a. memorable and b. it should have to do with you” (Mattel 2016, at 0:48-0:54). Professional drag queens are performers whose livelihood depends on having an audience that is willing to pay for their performances. For that reason alone, Trixie Mattel’s assertion makes a fair claim: A memorable name is crucial to ensure that people remember the drag queen, while also giving people an idea about who they are as a performer.

Drag queen names are an area of study that is virtually untouched, but which is located in the intersection of conventional names, fictional names and commercial names. Drag performers have the freedom to create new names as part of establishing the identity of their drag character, and thus the opportunity to choose a name they believe represent their drag persona. This allows drag performers to use language beyond conventional names when choosing their drag name. Simultaneously, professional drag queens make a living from performing and selling merchandise. That makes drag queen names not just names of a drag character, but the names of a business.

In the field of onomastics, the study of names, there are opposing views on whether proper nouns have meaning. While some argue that names are strictly referential (Donnellan 1972; Kripke 1980), others argue that names also carry meaning, primarily through connotations (Jepsersen 1924; Nyström 2016). Supposing the latter view, choosing a name for a drag character potentially involves a conscious decision to pick a name which carry certain desired connotations. Because drag queen names are, in a sense, fictional names, their names do not have to adhere to laws regulating naming, which gives drag queens the opportunity to use unconventional names and name structures. However, as a subculture of its own, there are likely certain practices within the drag queen community that drag queens are expected to follow, including naming practices. Drag queen names then balance between community expectations and creative freedom. The multifaceted task of drag queen names raises the question of how drag queen names are formed. The main question in this thesis is:

*Which naming practices can be identified among American drag queens?*

The aim of this thesis is then to present naming practices among American drag queens from a linguistic perspective. The international success of the reality competition show *RuPaul’s Drag Race* provides excellent source data for such an analysis, and as the

American franchise of the show has the most seasons, and thus the most names, I have chosen to limit the analysis to American drag queens. However, because drag queen names as a separate area of study is new, I do not claim to present an exhaustive list of all their features, nor a “recipe” on how to create drag queen names. To limit the scope of my thesis, I will use Trixie’s assertion of memorability and having a name that says something about the performer to lead my supporting research questions. This resulted in the following questions:

1. *How are drag queen names similar to and different from conventional names?*
2. *How do the names relate to the drag performer?*
3. *Which categories of connotational meaning can be found in drag queen names?*

Chapter 2 and 3 will provide the theoretical background for my analysis and discussion: While chapter 2 primarily focuses on drag queens, chapter 3 focuses on names and conventional naming practice. In chapter 4, my material and method are presented. Chapter 5 presents the results of my analysis of drag queen names, and in chapter 6, I reach a conclusion and present potential areas for further research.



## 2 Drag Queens

To understand the naming practices of American drag queens, a clear idea of what a drag queen is must be in place. This chapter will begin by looking at the meaning of drag and give an account of what a drag queen is (section 2.1). Then, a brief history of drag queens will be presented to contextualize the drag queen's place in society over the past centuries (section 2.2).

### 2.1 Drag

According to *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, the term *drag* comes from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It refers to the “petticoat or skirt used by actors when playing female parts” and derives “from the drag of the dress, as distinct from the non-dragginess of the trouser” (Partridge 1984, 338). Today, *drag* refers to the wear of a drag performer and to the type of entertainment a drag performer performs (*Merriam-Webster*).

Drag performers are typically grouped into two categories: drag queens and drag kings. In its prototypical form, drag revolves around dressing and performing as a character of the opposite sex. That means that a woman dressing in drag typically wears masculine clothing and is called a *drag king*, while a man performing in drag will typically dress in feminine clothing and is called a *drag queen*. This thesis focuses on the names of the latter. Drag is considered a part of queer culture, and drag queens constitute a gay subculture (Barrett, 2017). This in turn means that, in general, drag queens are gay men wearing wigs, make up and feminine clothing to perform as feminine characters. Because this thesis focuses on drag queens specifically, any mentions of *drag* or *doing drag* refers to drag queens and the act of performing as a (predominantly) feminine character.

The literature about drag sometimes includes more than just the type of performer that will be discussed in this thesis, which requires a clarification about what drag is, how the term has been used previously, and how I will use it in the remainder of the thesis. Baker (1994, 17), who writes about female impersonation, uses the term *drag* to describe men wearing feminine clothing. He bases his definition on Partridge (1984) and emphasizes that the term is closely linked to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community (henceforth the LGBTQ community) as a term used in gay slang. However, his use of the term *drag* is not necessarily equivalent to being a drag queen, as he distinguishes between drag queens and the pantomime dames from British pantomime, though referring to performers from both categories as drag artists (Baker 1994). While not discussing the exact distinction between

drag queens and pantomime dames, Baker (1994, 17-18) expresses that he prefers *drag queen* as the term to describe full-time drag artists.

Valentine (2007, 73) expands the meaning of the term by describing *drag* as a trope that has “come to dominate much of what is written under the rubric of transgender, a term to describe both cross-gender dressing but also, more broadly [...] the performativity and constructedness of gender itself.” He uses the term drag as a framing device to better understand “the edges of the inclusivity of transgender” (Valentine 2007, 74). Valentine (2007) finds that the boundaries between drag and transgender are sometimes blurred, much because of the challenge of clearly defining transgender and the transgender community.

Despite these blurred lines between transgender and drag, there are some distinctive factors to distinguish trans women and drag queens. Perhaps the most significant factor is related to the distinction between sex and gender. *Sex* is a matter of biology and refers to the binary categories *male* and *female*. *Gender* implies a cultural, rather than biological, distinction between men and women which refers to *masculine* and *feminine* attributes associated with the sexes, male and female respectively (Archer and Lloyd 2002, 17). Trans women are people whose sex was assigned male at birth, but who identify as women, while drag queens, in most cases, were assigned male at birth and identify as men. Being a drag queen is thus a performance, and not an attempt or desire to be a woman, while being trans is a matter of gender identity. However, drag queens are typically referred to by their drag name and with feminine pronouns while in drag, a practice I will follow in this thesis.

Another distinction is the notion that drag is a theatrical performance, while being transgender is not. This notion complicates the use of drag as a term under the transgender umbrella for transgender people who “reject the metaphor of literal performance to describe their selves” (Valentine 2007, 74). A drag queen portrays a feminine character as part of a performance, while a trans woman identifies as a woman.

Baker (1994, 18) suggests that the term *drag queen*, due to the combination of two words existing in gay slang, also entails gay sexual identity. This is not a given for transgender people. Transgender people can also identify with a gay sexual identity, in the sense of same-sex attraction, but being transgender does not entail gay sexual identity. However, here too the terminology varies. In Valentine’s (2017, 3) field work, he experienced that some people whose sex was assigned male at birth but who identified as women would rather refer to themselves as *gay* than transgender. This too blurs the lines between sexual identity and gender identity, but henceforth, I will use *gay* to mean ‘same-sex attraction’.

Barrett (2017, 4) does not offer a clear definition of a drag queen, but also comments that subcultural identity as a drag queen entails gay sexual identity, as well as male gender identity. It is worth mentioning that although this generally is true for drag queens, there are exceptions. In the American franchise of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, there have been several contestants who have disclosed their identity as trans women after competing on the show. In season 3, Monica Beverly Hillz became the first drag queen to come out as a transgender woman during a season of the show. Before her, season 2 contestant Kylie Sonique Love, who would later return to *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars* and become the first transgender winner, came out on the reunion episode of season 2. In later seasons, several openly trans women have competed, and in season 13, Gottmik competed as the first openly transgender man. In season 14, Maddy Morphosis became the first openly heterosexual cisgender (gender identity corresponding to biological sex) man to compete. Across all franchises of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, there have been people competing who do not identify as either man or woman (non-binary) and one contestant who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman.

However, even the exceptions from the prototypical drag queen can still be seen as drag queens because they are entertainers and performers who are recognizable as just that through the performance of a character with showy, elaborate clothes (Baker 1994, 17) and exaggerated looks (Baker 2017, 36). A precise definition is thus difficult to present, but in this thesis, *drag* is used to describe performances and the drag persona of the drag performers, and *drag queen names* are the names that the performers have chosen for their drag persona.

## **2.2 From Female Impersonators to Drag Queens**

The tradition of female impersonation dates back hundreds of years and can be found in cultures all over the world. In Japan, the classical dance-drama *kabuki* is thought to originate with a woman, O Kuni, in Kyoto. After her death, which is assumed to be around 1610, a version of *kabuki* that was performed by all-female troupes developed (Scott 1955). *Onna kabuki*, or women's *kabuki*, was associated with prostitution and immorality, and in the late 1620s, women were banned from performing *kabuki*. Consequently, all-male *kabuki* troupes formed, and men would play both male and female roles. The men playing female roles are known as *onnagata* (Baker 1994, 69). Similarly, women were banned from the stage in China during the Qing dynasty. *Dan roles*, or female roles, were then played by *nandan performers*, which are male performers portraying a female character (Wu 2013, 189).

Britain too saw all-male theater companies perform on stage until women were accepted as actresses in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Baker 1994, 82). Until then, men would play female roles in the theater. Baker (1994, 17) refers to actors who played female roles in the theater as *male actresses*, who “[...] project authentic female characters rather than male-designed fantasy types [...]” The emergence of women in the profession gradually changed the face of the male actress, who then became “the drag queen of low comedy” (Baker 1994, 82).

The drag queen did not perform to portray a realistic or authentic female role but dressed up in feminine clothing as a form of comedy (Baker 1994, 146). This emphasizes the exaggerated element of drag performances. The audience would be aware of the real gender of the performer, though sometimes the drag queen would look convincingly female, an ability which today is referred to as looking *fish* (Simmons 2014, 636). However, no matter how *fish* or overly feminine a drag queen looks, the real gender of the drag persona is not a secret to the audience. The play between the male identity of the performer and femininity of the drag queen-persona remains a part of drag performances and is actively used to create comedic effects (see examples in Barrett 2017).

In the USA, there was an increase in female impersonators after the first world war. Baker (1994) points to the unemployment of many servicemen who had participated in concert parties or otherwise entertained their fellow servicemen during the war as one of the reasons for this. The popularity of female impersonation would fluctuate in the following decades, and particularly the drag queen went underground due to anti-gay policies and the persecution of gay men (Baker 1994; Encarnación 2021). Still, drag queens kept performing in gay venues (Baker 1994), which is where drag queens are typically found still today.

Drag has been a gay subcultural phenomenon, whilst also being a subculture, that has come into the mainstream, much thanks to the Emmy-winning reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The rise of social media has allowed drag queens to extend their reach from gay bars to virtually anyone who shows interest online. The popularity of *RuPaul's Drag Race* has given the drag queens who have competed on the show, so-called *RuGirls*, status as celebrities. The most popular *RuGirls* have millions of followers on social media, and typically contestants will go on international tours shortly after their season has aired.

*RuPaul's Drag Race* has played a significant role in bringing drag into the mainstream. Although catering to the queer community, the show and its ripple effects have likely introduced many people outside of the LGBTQ community to drag: RuPaul was a guest host on the late-night show *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* (2021); The saying “and I oop” (Masters 2015, at 4:31-4:32) went viral on social media after Jasmine Masters from season 7 of

*RuPaul's Drag Race* posted a video to YouTube (Ritschel 2019); And Gottmik and Symone from season 13 walked in Rihanna's Fenty fashion show (Henderson 2021), to mention some examples. Many of the drag queens seen in the media do come from the show, which emphasizes the cultural significance of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Still, despite having introduced many viewers to drag for the first time, and thus come to shape the face of drag in the mainstream, it is important to recognize that the drag queen community is larger than just the show. Lady Bunny, Divine, Conchita Wurst, Pablio Vittar, and RuPaul herself are all examples of drag queens who have been able to have successful careers without having been on the show. Not all of these drag queens are household names, but they have (had) careers extending beyond just the LGBTQ community. Still, it would be strange to ignore the impact *RuPaul's Drag Race* has, which is one of the reasons why the show and its contestants make for an interesting subject to study.

Barrett (2017, 1) describes subcultures as hierarchical and explains that “[d]rag queen subculture, for example, includes a number of distinct (sub-)subcultures, such as *glam queens* (who project a sophisticated, upper-class image), *trash queens* or *clown queens* (who perform comic routines and dress in outrageous, exaggerated costumes), and *street queens* (who work primarily in prostitution and dress accordingly).” These labels then describe a type of performance or activity a drag queen does. The drag queens in Barrett's (1994; 2017) studies are all *glam queens* who try to look elegant and realistically feminine. Barrett (2017) observed that signs of masculinity, particularly visual signs like beard stubbles and broad shoulders, were negatively viewed whilst in drag, but projecting feminine traits whilst out of drag, like wearing makeup, was also looked down on.

### **2.3 Drag Queen Discourse**

Although drag queen names are a new area of study, other aspects of drag queens have been studied before. Due to the nature of drag, the study of drag queens and their language is closely linked to the themes of gender and sexuality. Drag queen discourse is not an extensively researched area of study, but some research is available.

One of the most prominent researchers in this area is Rusty Barrett (1994; 2017) who studied the language of African American Drag Queens in Texas during the 1990s, admittedly a relatively small section of the drag community. Other research includes Simmons (2014) who has written about speech codes among American drag queens from *RuPaul's Drag Race* and Mann (2011) who has looked at the blurred gendered and racial identities of drag queens

in the southeastern USA. Additionally, Moore (2013, 21) has written about *linguistic drag*, a term to describe “the use of language to perform the central sleight-of-hand of the drag performer, enfolding transformation and transgression in the gendered restrictive confines of grammar.”

A central finding from Barrett’s (1994; 2017) studies is that African American drag queens use *white women’s speech* in their performances mixed with other stylistic choices which index their identity as gay men and drag queens (Barrett 2017). White women’s speech is associated with feminine behavior, while mixing it with other speech styles display critical attitudes toward whiteness (Barrett 2017, 53-4). When a drag queen shifts between different styles, “the linguistic variables associated with different aspects of identity may co-occur, creating a voice simultaneously associated with several identity categories” (Barrett 2017, 40).

Different linguistic signs, like the white women’s speech, are utilized by drag performers to index aspects of identity.

A linguistic index is usually a structure (e.g. sentential voice, emphatic stress, diminutive affix) that is used variably from one situation to another and becomes conventionally associated with particular situational dimensions such that when that structure is used, the form invokes those situational dimensions. (Ochs 1996, 411).

Indexical meaning is context specific (Barrett 2017, 11). Within the setting of drag performances with African American drag queens, using the white woman’s speech conveys aspects of gender, class and race. While the use of white women’s speech itself is less relevant to the analysis of drag queen names, drag queens’ use of language that is (stereo)typically associated with women is relevant. Out of the nine main characteristics of women’s language identified by Lakoff (2004), Barrett (2017) finds that African American drag queens use the first six:

1. Women have a large stock of words related to their specific interests, generally relegated to them as “woman’s work”: magenta, shirr, dart (in sewing), and so on. If men use these words at all, it tends to be tongue-in-cheek.
2. “Empty” adjectives like *divine*, *charming*, *cute*...
3. Question intonation where we might expect declaratives: for instance tag questions (“It’s so hot, isn’t it?”) and rising intonation in statement contexts (“What’s your name, dear?” “Mary Smith?”).

4. The use of hedges of various kinds. Women's speech seems in general to contain more instances of "well," "y'know," "kinda," and so forth: words that convey the sense that the speaker is uncertain about what he (or she) is saying, or cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement.
5. Related to this is the use of the intensive "so." Again, this is more frequent in women's than men's language.
6. Hypercorrect grammar: women are not supposed to talk rough (Lakoff 2004, 78-80).

Using the above language features associated with women's language is a way for drag queens to index femininity. Drag queens are typically hypergendered, or hyperfeminine, in their expression of signs to index gender, meaning that they exaggerate (linguistic) features associated with women (Barrett 2017, 13-4). Some, particularly feminist authors (Frye 1983; White 1980), claim that doing drag is misogynistic. While not denying this, Barrett (1994) argues that the position that drag is just misogynistic fails to acknowledge the political complexity of drag performances by African American drag queens, for example, as a commentary on racial injustice.

### 3 Names and Naming

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other word would smell as sweet” (Shakespeare 1735, 25). Shakespeare’s question touches upon something that has been much discussed in the field of onomastics: Do names have meaning? This chapter presents the theoretical background of names and naming practices, which the following analysis of drag names will be based on. The first section (3.1) of this chapter will focus on conventional names, with a special focus on American names, theory on name meaning, as well as the relationship between names and identity, in order to compare American drag queen names to American conventional names. The lack of previous studies on drag queen names has required me look to other areas of research that are similar to drag queen names. Thus, in section 3.2, I will report on studies of fictional names to find support for the narrative function of drag queen names, and theory on commercial names because of the drag queen names’ role as a brand. Lastly, a brief account of drag queen names is given in section 3.3.

#### 3.1 Conventional Names, Name Meaning and Identity

Different cultures around the world have different naming practices: Prior to the British colonization of New Zealand, the Māori typically had one name (Lawson 2016, 182); in China and Hungary, the surname is placed before the given name (Lawson 2016); and in Iceland, names usually consist of a given name followed by a patronym (Hanks and Parkin 2016, 215). The English-speaking world, as well as most of Europe and other countries, follows the binomial system of personal naming, which means that names of people consist of at least one given name and a surname, typically in that order (Hanks and Parkin, 2016). This section will focus on the binomial system, and particularly American naming practices, as this remains most relevant in the comparison between American drag queen names and American conventional names.

Leibring (2016, 199-200) defines *given name* as “[...] the name (or those names) bestowed on an individual person, in most instances a very young child, with the purpose of individualizing this child; to separate him or her as a person from other people in the vicinity.” In the USA, a given name is followed by a surname “whose function it is to identify the individual as a member of a family within society” (Hanks and Parkin 2016, 214). In other words, the purpose of a name is to identify a specific individual and to identify which family that person belongs to. In the American context, the set order of given names before surnames



in the binomial system means that *given name* entails initial position while *surname* entails end position in the name.

However, in the coming discussion, the incorporation of unconventional name elements into drag queen names makes the above definitions of *given names* and *surnames* insufficient to describe the different parts of a drag queen name. Leibring's (2016, 199-200) definition emphasizes that given names are usually given to children, which is not the case for drag queens, who, as a rule, choose their own names. Furthermore, names such as *Vivacious* do not contain conventional name elements and lack a second name element to fill the position of a surname. While the name is used to identify a specific individual, a drag queen, the name does not comply with the binomial system. Additionally, there will be at least two sets of names involved in the discussion: the names of the drag queen characters and the real names of the drag performers. Comparing drag queen names and conventional names thus creates a demand for terminology to describe these sets of names.

To separate the name of the drag queen from the name of the drag performer (i.e. the person performing in drag), the former will be referred to as *drag (queen) names*, and the latter as *legal names*. The term *name element* is used to refer to any individual part of a name and *name* to refer to all the name elements of an individual as a unit. The distinction between *name* and *name elements* are also used by other researchers (e.g. Nyström 2016, 41). Accordingly, *Vivacious* is a drag queen name consisting of one name element, while the legal name of Vivacious is *Osmond Vacious*, which is a name consisting of two name elements.

Above, I have used the terms *conventional name* and *conventional name element*. These terms are inspired by Bertills (2003, 10) who uses the term *conventional* to “[...] refer to an established name, which is found in name lexicons [...]” *Conventional names element* refers to any individual part of a name that is recognized as personal names, and the names that are composed by conventional name elements are referred to as *conventional names*. A further discussion about these terms is presented in section 5.1.

Names in English-speaking countries are similar to each other, but some distinctive traits can be found. In the USA, names like Patience and Prudence stem from the English Puritans, who used spiritual values as names (Lawson 2016, 188). Other typical American names like Jeremiah, Caleb and Naomi have their origin in Hebrew scriptures (Lawson 2016, 188). Surnames too have provided many given names, especially after the American revolution, when boys were given the surnames of famous men, such as Washington and Madison, as a sign of honor (Lawson 2016, 188). Madison has, over time, become a name for girls instead, which is also the case for several other names that previously were used for

boys. Lawson (2016) accredits this shift from masculine to feminine name to the legal right of American parents to give their child any name, but also notes that a shift from female name to male name is rare because of sexism.

Immigration to the USA, from all over the world, has resulted in a culturally diverse population, which is also reflected in the pool of names in the USA. Immigrant parents who want their children to fit in tend to give their children names of native-born American adults they know (Lawson 2016, 188). Consequently, their children are given American names that were popular some time ago when the adults they are named after were born. However, the children and grandchildren of immigrant parents tend to look back to their roots when choosing names for their children (Lawson 2016, 188).

Lawson (2016) also points to distinctive naming patterns among Black Americans developing since the 1960s, resulting in names like Lakeisha and Dayquan. Other popular names among African Americans are Kwame, Ashanti, Jamal and Latifah, which are African and Islamic names (Lawson 2016, 188).

Overall, Americans prefer to give their children unique names. Statistics show that among newborn children in 2010, 8.4% of boys and 8.0% of girls were given names that were among the top ten most popular names the year they were born. This shows a decrease in the use of the most popular names compared to 1960 when 28.6% of boys and 16.5% of girls received one of the top ten most popular names of that year (Lawson 2016, 189).

A topic of discussion in onomastics is whether names have meaning or if they just have reference (Nyström 2016). Scholars like Kripke (1980) and Donnellan (1972) holds the position that names are strictly referential, which is to say that in all ways but to refer to something or someone, names are meaningless. Opposing views are found among scholar like Jespersen (1924) and Nyström (2016). An important factor in the discussion is what one understands as meaning. Nyström (2016, 40) suggests that rather than considering what a name *is*, one should consider what a name *does*: “To use a name means to start a process in the brain, a process which in turn activates our memories, fantasy, linguistic abilities, emotions, and many other things.”

Nyström (2016) presents different interpretations of name meaning. One is the denotational meaning of names, which interprets names as strictly referential. Additionally, names can have connotational meaning (Nyström 2016). More than just to refer to a person, the connotational meaning of names considers the memories and feelings that are awakened by hearing a name a part of the name meaning. The connotational meaning of names can be collective, meaning that the connotation is shared by a group of people, or personal.

Furthermore, Nyström (2016, 41-4) discusses the connection between lexical and proprial meaning (i.e. the meaning of proper names). He uses the example of *Björn* in Swedish, which is homonymous with the Swedish word for *bear* 'björn.' Even though the name *Björn* does not mean *bear*, it has "a living connection to the appellative *björn* 'bear' in the lexicon, and with that an associative meaning 'björn' is available and also possible to be expressed in other languages" (Nyström 2016, 42). He argues that its translatability into English (*Bear*) demonstrates that names are not completely meaningless.

In addition to lexical and proprial meaning, names can have presuppositional meaning. The three main types of presuppositional meanings are categorical meaning, associative meaning, and emotive meaning (Nyström 2016, 47-51). Categorical meaning is based on the idea that objects and other phenomenon can be categorized into basic-level concepts. In terms of names, categorical meaning is the ability to categorize names into basic-level categories when hearing it (47-8). This could be by categorizing names into male and female names, given names and surnames, names of cities, names of companies and so on. Associative meaning, which above is described as connotational meaning (Nyström seems to use the terms interchangeably), involves having connotations to a name. What one thinks of when hearing a name can vary from individual to individual and community to community. For example, while some associate the name *Elizabeth* with the Queen of the United Kingdom, others might think of their mother named Elisabeth. The last of the presuppositional meanings is emotive meaning, which is closely linked to the connotative meaning of names. Any connotations with positive or negative emotive value have emotive meaning. Nyström (2016, 49-51) uses the example of *Adolf* as a name that for most people has negative connotations, and thus negative emotive meaning.

Another question related to names and meaning is whether names express identity. To name members of a community is a necessity to identify individuals. Names are typically given to very young children who are unable to influence the choice of name (Leibring 2016, 199-200). Aldrin (2016) says that, consequently, naming is about assigning identity, but asks whether names can impact the formation or perception of identity. Here too the idea of what identity is becomes important for the discussion. Identity can be viewed from different perspectives. An inside-perspective relates to the existential question of who a person is, while the outside-perspective is related to how other people look upon a person and distinguish that person from others. These two perspectives may overlap, but are not always the same (Aldrin 2016, 183). In terms of names, that means that "the name-giver, name-carrier and name-user may hold different views of identities connected to a certain name"

(Aldrin 2016, 383). The different perceptions held by the different actors of which identity or identities are connected to a name depend on which connotations the different actors have to that name. Additionally, identity can be used to describe what separates a person from others as a unique individual, but also those features that a person has in common with others and makes them part of a certain group (Aldrin 2016).

There is evidence that a connection between names and personal identity can be made. Particularly among children, names are important for their self-identity and to their perception of the continuity of their existence from the past and into the future (Dion 1983, 249). There are also links between self-esteem and how a person views their name: People with low self-esteem tend to dislike their name, while people with high self-esteem tend to like it (Joubert 1993). However, as Aldrin (2016, 386) comments: “correlation does not prove causation. These studies do not answer whether names actually influence or merely mirror identity.”

There are several other ways names can express identity. Surnames can express social identity as a member of a particular family (Aldrin 2016, 387). Nicknames can express membership to a group in which the nickname is used. Aldrin (2016, 387) suggests that because “the use of nicknames vary according to contexts, these names may be more suitable than official names for exploring the flexible nature of identity [...]” Given names too can express social identity, for example by naming a child after a relative (Finch 2008, 719). As mentioned previously, Americans tend to look to their cultural ancestry when naming their children, which is a way of expressing cultural identity. Changing ones given name is quite rare in most cultures, but it does occur. Alford (1988: 158) views a name change as an attempt to reject an unwanted identity. Changing surname is far more common, for example in marriage (Aldrin 2016, 389).

### **3.2 Names in Literature and Commercial Names**

At first glance, there might not seem to be an obvious connection between names in fiction and drag queen names, but I suggest there is. Bertills (2003, 41) describes the names of characters in children’s literature as an element of the construction of the identity of a character. In many ways, drag queen names do the same thing. Drag queens perform as a character that is, at least partly, removed from the actual identity of the performer. This can be considered a form of storytelling, in which the name of the drag queen will contribute to the construction of the identity of the drag persona.

In literature, the first descriptions of a character are the most important to the reader's perception of a character (Bertills 2003, 52). Additionally, names in literature can be used to characterize characters in the story (Bertills 2003, 41; Falck-Kjällquist 2016, 330). Bertills (2003) points to the nature and status of the character as particularly influential aspects on the name formation, but also to the semantic content and name form as aspects that can provide information about the character. However, it is possible that the interpretations of literary names go further than what the author intends (Smith 2016, 306). Bertills (2003) also suggests a link between name formation and genre: Generally, literary names share the same form and function as conventional names, but names in fantasy literature often contain invented elements that differ from conventional names, while a character that is intended to figure as a realistic character will often have realistic names (Bertills 2003; Moe 2019, 6).

Commercial names differ from both literary and conventional names. *Commercial names* are “names whose function is to steer the choices of consumers and investors and whose use has economic objectives” (Sjöblom 2016, 453). While drag queen names might not be seen as a commercial name in the same sense as big corporations, their names still play a role in attracting an audience on social media, on posters and so on, with the aim of earning money from it. It is of course possible, and likely, that drag performers do not perform with the main objective of earning money, but rather because they enjoy performing. Still, for drag queens who wish to live off of their craft, the economic objective plays a considerable role.

The need for commercial names come as a result of advertising. When companies and their products were advertised, people needed information about what the product was and how to set it apart from similar products by other manufacturers. The solution was to give products and businesses names. Commercial names play an important role in consumers' choices because a name “symbolizes the identity of the company or the product,” and “people tend to buy products which have personality [...]” (Sjöblom 2016, 456). Misspelling and other deviations from standard language are sometime used in commercial names to attract attention. Brand names are usually short and easy to pronounce to be easy to remember, and sometimes include puns or play on words (Sjöblom 2016).

### **3.3 Drag Queen Names**

Drag queen names, similarly to names in literature, are more than just a name to refer to a specific person. They are part of the narration in the drag performance and the characterization of the drag persona. Drag queen names are unlike conventional names in the

sense that the drag queens themselves choose their own names. Conventionally, a given name is given before the person who is being named is able to influence the decision. For conventional names, the name is something the person learns to identify with. For drag queens, the name of their drag persona is something they decide, which gives the opportunity to choose a name that they think will represent their drag.

While the names of characters in literature are supplemented by other descriptions of the characters and their behavior (Bertills 2003), drag queens are, for the most part, experienced in a club or on TV. Unlike characters in books, there are typically no additional descriptions of drag queens to add to the identity expressed by the name, but rather an identity conveyed through a performance. However, like names in literature, the drag name and performance are perceived by the audience, who might have different interpretations and connotations than intended (Smith 2016). Even if a drag queen with a name that is a pun proclaims to be a comedy queen due to having a funny name, the queen will not be perceived to be a comedy queen by the audience if the audience does not find that drag queen funny.

Drag queens sometimes have name elements similar to surnames. This is a feature which stems from queer ballroom culture, also known as house culture. A significant feature of ballroom culture are *houses*, which are family-like structures who compete in *balls* (Arnold and Bailey 2009). The houses are led by a ‘mother’ or ‘father’ who “provide support for their children to compete in balls as well as to survive in society as marginalized members of their communities of origin” (Arnold and Bailey 2009, 174). *Children*, in this case, are not biological children, but the members of the house which the mother or father is responsible for. Houses have names, and these family structures with house names functioning as a type of surname can be found among drag queens, although not all drag queens belong to a house.

## **4 Method and Material**

The main objective of this thesis is to identify naming practices among American drag queens. I have used qualitative methods because the study of drag queen names is virtually uncharted territory, and my analysis is therefore bound to have an exploratory nature. Each name has been carefully examined to identify similarities and differences between names, and thus create categories based on the results of the analysis. I have taken inspiration from Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2020) and used a cyclical approach in which I continuously analyzed, categorized and evaluated my categories, because new categories appeared as similarities and differences between names were discovered. The drag queen names have also been checked against data bases of American names, with the aims of finding similarities and differences between drag names and conventional names, and I have looked for information about the drag queens with the aim of finding out how their names relate to the drag performers.

This chapter will first comment on the identification of the drag queen names to be included in the sample and the other material used to analyze them (section 4.1), before explaining the procedure of the analysis (section 4.2).

### **4.1 Material**

To answer the main question of which naming practices can be identified among American drag queens, a sufficient number of drag queen names is required for the analysis. In the case of American drag queen names, getting a representative sample poses several challenges. Previous studies by Barrett (1994; 2017) and Mann (2011) on the linguistic features used by drag queens have been based on observations of just a few drag performers in specific areas of the USA. One of the risks of qualitative methods is to draw conclusions from a small sample size which might not apply to other situations outside the one represented in the sample. Yates (2003, 224) describes using the results from a small sample as generalizations for other situations as “potential over-reading.” To minimize the risk of over-reading, a representative sample is needed.

Collecting names through observations, like previous studies, in various locations in the USA to ensure geographical representation in the sample was not a realistic option for the current thesis within the available time frame. There are not many alternatives to observations, as there are no compiled lists over all American drag performers in the USA. Although many drag queens are present on social media, finding the drag queens without already knowing their name is a challenge, and ensuring a geographically spread sample

would be difficult. Therefore, the names of the contestants on *RuPaul's Drag Race* provides a more representative sample than what I would have accomplished by collecting names through observations. The question is how representative of the American drag community, and thus the naming practices in the community, the contestants on the show are.

The show has received criticism for not being diverse enough, and only including the parts of drag that are palatable to a mainstream audience (Crystal 2022; Montgomery 2019; Parslow 2021). Additionally, because *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a reality show, the contestants are likely to have been carefully chosen to create entertaining TV. A potential consequence is that the desire to cast certain personality types to create drama and conflicts is stronger than the wish to cast a diverse cast in terms of drag styles.

Another complication is that not all drag queens from the show are American. Courtney Act is an example of a drag queen who is originally Australian, but who competed on the American show. I have chosen to include the names of the contestants who are not originally American, because even though they originally come from a different country, all of them reside(d) in the USA, which makes them part of the American drag queen community.

Although personality type is likely to play a role in the casting, the drag queens on a season of the show typically come from different drag backgrounds and geographical locations to create interesting dynamics. With 180 drag queens in total spread out over 14 seasons of the American franchise, the show makes for a sample size small enough to analyze each individual name in detail, but big enough to be a relatively representative sample, considering the limitations described above. Not all types of drag will be equally represented, and big cities with big drag communities, like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, are going to have more representation than smaller towns. Still, I would maintain that the show offers better representation than what could realistically have been obtained otherwise.

While drag names have not been studied separately before, *RuPaul's Drag Race* has been studied repeatedly. As the popularity of the show has grown, and eventually established the show as a culturally significant phenomenon, various studies have been conducted related to the show (see Canavan 2021; Heller 2020; Mercer and Sarson 2020; Moore 2013; Simmons 2014). The academic interest in the show further supports it as a well-recognized source. In addition, most drag queens on the show pursue drag as a career and are well-recognized drag artists. The level of professionalism that is required to participate on the show means that the queens have dedicated a lot of time into developing their drag persona, and presumably also into finding a fitting name. For these reasons, the drag queen names of



the contestants on *RuPaul's Drag Race* make a good sample to answer which naming practices can be identified among American Drag Queens.

I have chosen to use the most current drag name of the contestants to respect any name changes. The first season originally aired in 2009, and there are some drag queens who have changed their drag name since appearing on the show. That means that some of the names I have used in my analysis are not identical to how they are presented on the show. Wikipedia has articles about each season with lists of all the contestants, and 138 of the 180 drag queens have their own Wikipedia article. As Wikipedia is open for contributors to edit, names can be updated if they change. Therefore, I have used the names as they are given in individual Wikipedia articles, because these provide the most recent names. For the 42 drag queens who do not have individual articles, I used the names as they were given in the list of all the contestants on the show (Wikipedia). The full list of names can be found in the appendix.

Anyone can contribute to Wikipedia articles, which means that the information in the articles can be wrong. To cross-check that the names from Wikipedia were correct, I also watched the first episode (or episodes when not all the contestants were introduced in the same episode) to compare the names on Wikipedia to how they were presented on the show. If the names were different, I consulted the drag queens' social media profiles to confirm that the name change was correct, and not a mistake added by contributors to the Wikipedia-articles.

To answer my question about similarities and differences between drag queen names and conventional names, I needed to use registers of conventional names to confirm which name elements were conventional and which were not. I used two different registers. The first is a register of given names based on Social Security card applications. Social Security gives the following data qualifications:

1. Names are restricted to cases where the year of birth, sex, and state of birth are on record, and where the given name is at least 2 characters long.
2. National name data is restricted to births in the 50 States and District of Columbia. We also provide popular names for births in U. S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands). The data on births in U. S. territories are not included in our national data.
3. Name data are tabulated from the "First Name" field of the Social Security Card Application. Hyphens and spaces are removed, thus Julie-Anne, Julie Anne, and Julieanne will be counted as a single entry.

4. Name data are not edited. For example, the sex associated with a name may be incorrect. Entries such as "Unknown" and "Baby" are not removed from the lists.
5. Different spellings of similar names are not combined. For example, the names Caitlin, Caitlyn, Kaitlin, Kaitlyn, Kaitlynn, Katelyn, and Katelynn are considered separate names and each has its own rank.
6. When two different names are tied with the same frequency for a given year of birth, we break the tie by assigning rank in alphabetical order.
7. Some names are applied to both males and females (for example, Micah). Our rankings are done by sex, so that a name such as Micah will have a different rank for males as compared to females. When you seek the popularity of a specific name (see "Popularity of a Name"), you can specify the sex. If you do not specify the sex, we provide rankings for the more popular name-sex combination.
8. To safeguard privacy, we exclude from our tabulated lists of names those that would indicate, or would allow the ability to determine, names with fewer than 5 occurrences in any geographic area. If a name has less than 5 occurrences for a year of birth in any state, the sum of the state counts for that year will be less than the national count. (Social Security)

This register was chosen because it includes real names that are in use today, and which have been used in the past. Although names given to fewer than five people in a year do not show up in the register, the data provides valuable insight into which given names are used today by which gender. The register was accessible in two variants. The simple one is an online search for the top 1000 most popular baby names for boys and girls per year from 1900 and later. Any name that was not among the top 1000 baby names in any year does not show here. The other variant was to download the data as separate files with lists of all names given to five or more people, sorted by year. The earliest records were from 1880, but I used the lists from 1900 to 2020 so to have the same span of years for both search methods. For each year, a list of all the names is provided arranged according to gender, popularity and in alphabetical order if more than one name was used the same number of times.

The second register I used was the "Frequently Occurring Surnames from the 2010 Census" (United States Census Bureau). The register consists of 162,253 surnames occurring more than 100 times from the 2010 decennial census. Here too I risk not finding actual surnames if they are used by fewer than 100 people, but at least I can be certain that the surnames found there are actually used by Americans today.

To answer the second question regarding the relation between the drag performer and their drag queen name, the drag queens' own explanations to why they had chosen their names were collected. This was necessary to better understand the reasoning behind the choice of name, and thus also the connotations to the name. The meaning of the name is central to understand the naming practices and why the drag queens choose the names they do. This information was primarily collected through promotional videos posted on YouTube ahead of a new season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, in which the drag queens introduce themselves. For some seasons, these videos are not available through the show's official YouTube-channel but they have been re-uploaded on other unofficial channels. In the cases where no such videos were found, Hotspots Magazine's exit interviews with the eliminated contestants were used to find their explanations.

Additionally, the legal names of the drag performers were collected to compare their legal name to their drag names. These were found in various places: In the first seasons of the show, the contestants reveal their legal name on the show, but from season four, they only introduce themselves with their drag queen names. Therefore, I have also used Wikipedia to collect the legal names of the drag performers. For the drag queens who did not have a separate Wikipedia article, I have tried to find their legal names through their social medias, Internet Movie Database (IMDb) and Drag Race Wiki. The latter is a Wiki based around the show where fans can contribute with information about the contestants. However, some names were difficult to find, or I could only find a given name. Some of the drag queens may not want their legal name publicly known for privacy reason, which is why the legal names are not included in the appendix. It is also possible that some names are not actually their legal name, but stage names out of drag. Still, I was able to collect (at least parts of) the legal name of 178 of 180 drag queens. I was unable to find the legal names of Maddie Morphosis and Angeria Paris VanMicheals. My final question did not require any additional material.

## **4.2 Analysis**

This subsection presents the process of analyzing the data material. My main research question will be answered through investigating my three supporting research questions. Below I describe how I processed the data to answer each of the supporting questions.

#### 4.2.1 *Comparing Drag Queen Names and Conventional Names*

To find similarities and differences between drag queen names and conventional names, I used the registers from Social Security and U.S. Census Bureau to find out which name elements in the drag queen names are also conventional name elements. In addition, I was interested in which gender was associated with the name. Therefore, I started out by searching for each name element from the drag queen names in Social Security's top 1000 list of baby names. If the name had been among the top 1000 names in any year after 1900, I considered the name conventional. If a name was in the top 1000 lists for both boys and girls, the results for the gender among which the name is most popular appeared. However, it is possible to specify which gender top 1000 list I wanted to search in, and because I was also interested in finding out if names were popular with both boys and girls, I searched for each name element in the top 1000 lists of both genders. The names that occurred on both the male and female top 1000 list approximately at the same time or have been popular for both males and females for roughly the same number of years were classified as ambiguous.

Next, I searched for the names that were not among the top 1000 most popular names in the full lists of names used at least five times in a year. Here too I noted which names were predominantly feminine names, predominantly masculine and ambiguous. I also noted down names that did occur in the register, but fewer than 20 times in any year after 1900. These are classified as *rare given names*, because the few occurrences makes it difficult to assert as feminine, masculine or ambiguous.

The U.S. Census Bureau's register of surnames was used to check which name elements are conventional surnames. The names that were neither conventional given names, nor conventional surnames were then analyzed further to describe their nature.

I also counted the number of name elements in each name to compare the name structures of drag queen names to that of conventional names. Name elements containing a hyphen and name elements that consisted of multi-word units, such as *with 2 Ts*, were counted as single elements. See section 5.1 for the full discussion about the categorization. Finally, the structure of drag queen names were compared and contrasted to the structure of conventional names.

#### 4.2.2 *The Relation between Drag Performer and Drag Queen Name*

First, I collected the legal names of the drag performers to be able to tell if any of the drag queens incorporated elements of their legal names into their drag queen names. Not all names are publicly known, and some contestant may go by a stage name in public even when out of

drag, which means that it is possible that there are examples of incorporation of legal names that were not detected. However, while some cases may be lost, it is still possible to identify whether it is done, and if so, how legal names are incorporated.

Second, the contestants' own explanations of their names from the promotional YouTube videos and interviews after the drag queens' elimination were collected. Their own explanations allow for a more nuanced description of the relation between the drag performer and their drag names than a purely interpretative description. The promotional videos vary in length but are typically no longer than 4 minutes. The explanation of their names only make up a short segment of the video, which means that there could be longer stories or more reasons than what is presented in the videos, but knowing that they have limited time to explain their names, I assume that they have chosen to present the most important reasons. Based on the drag queens' own descriptions, categories were formed and the names categorized accordingly.

#### *4.2.3 Categories of Connotational Meaning*

Creating categories of connotational meaning was a cyclical process, inspired by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2020). The first step was to label the name names before the drag queen's own explanations of their names were collected. The reason this was done before the collection of the explanations was to see if my connotations to the names were compatible with the drag queens' intended meaning. Dörnyei (2007, 41) points to the researcher's role as a weakness in qualitative studies, because the interpretation of the data can be influenced by the researcher's own biases and beliefs. Especially connotations can vary greatly from person to person, meaning that my interpretations may be mine only. At the same time, my connotations to the names potentially represents connotations shared with other audience members. Having watched all seasons of the show prior to writing this thesis means that I am already familiar with other aspects of the drag performers than just their names. Yet, by labeling the names with connotations before hearing the queens' own explanations offers the opportunity to discover potential connotations that were unintended. In the second cycle, I took into consideration the drag queen's own explanations, and labeled all names over again. The labels were clustered according to themes to create categories. The categories were adjusted as the analysis of the labels went on, as new connotational categories appeared.

## 5 Results

The analysis reveals that the majority of the drag queen names have a similar structure to conventional names and contains at least one element that is a given name or a surname. However, drag queens can, and often do, incorporate unconventional name elements in their names. These unconventional elements have implications for the terminology used to describe name elements, as well as for the interpretations of what a name element is. While I have already presented terminology in chapter 2 and 3 and explained my method and analysis in chapter 4, I will discuss and explain my choices based on the data I collected in section 5.1. Section 5.2 presents the similarities and differences between drag queen names and conventional names, while section 5.3 presents various ways the drag queen names relate to the drag performers. Lastly, section 5.4 presents categories of connotational meaning found in the analysis of the drag queen names.

### 5.1 Discussing Terminology

In order to present the similarities and differences between conventional names and drag queen names, I first need to explain some of the challenges in the analysis, which had an impact on the choice of terminology. While most drag queen names have a similar structure to conventional names and contain at least one conventional given name or conventional surname, the differences between conventional names and drag queen names creates a need for different terms to refer to the elements in drag queen names to those in conventional names.

Conventional names consist of a given name, a surname, and potentially one or more middle names (Hanks and Parkin, 2016). It is relatively easy to set these three elements apart for American conventional names, because the convention in the USA is to place the given name before the surname, and any middle names are placed between the given name and the surname. This means that *given name* entails an initial position, *middle name* entails a middle position, and *surname* entails an end position. However, this distinction is not always as clear when it comes to drag queen names. Using the registers of given names and surnames to define which name elements are considered conventional has implications for the meaning of *given name* and *surname* in my analysis, because the terms no longer describe the position of the name elements in a name, but types of name elements that are used a minimum number of times in a certain position in conventional names.

In my analysis, I have chosen to describe parts of drag queen names that appear in the registers as *conventional given names* and *conventional surnames* (depending on which register they appear in) regardless of the position they hold in the drag names. That means that *conventional given names* and *conventional surnames* describe which position a name element usually holds in conventional names, but not which position it holds in the drag name. For example, the drag queen name *Latrice Royale* consists of two conventional given names, as *Latrice* and *Royale* were given to at least five people in one year, but neither are conventional surnames.

The analysis shows that the structure of drag queen names is often similar to, or follows, the structure of conventional names in that they typically consist of more than one name element. Because *conventional given names* and *conventional surnames* describe a type of name rather than a position, alternative descriptors are necessary to describe the positions in drag queen names. I refer to each individual part of a name as a *name element* and the position of the name element as *first element*, *middle element* or *last element*, depending on whether it is first, in between two elements or last. *Nicole Paige Brooks*, for example, is composed of three elements, where *Nicole* is the first element, *Paige* is the middle element and *Brooks* is the last element. That means that first elements, middle elements and last elements in drag queen names resemble given names, middle names and surnames in conventional names respectively.

Although the structure of drag queen names often resembles the binomial system of conventional names, some name elements in drag queen names are neither conventional given names nor conventional surnames. This raises the question of what a name element is. Unlike the relatively clear-cut borders between given names, middle names and surnames in conventional names, the incorporation of unconventional name elements, such as noun phrases, in drag queen names makes it more challenging to determine where a name element begins and ends. The question is whether multi-word units should be seen as single name element or if each word in the unit should be considered a separate name element.

There are seven multi-word units in my data. Five of these are noun phrases with a determiner as a pre-modifier to a noun: *The Princess*, *The Drag Queen*, *The Tuck*, *The Vixen* and *The Snack*. Because the determiner precedes common nouns (though used as a proper noun) in these instances, it should be interpreted as a part of the same element. If each word in the noun phrase were considered separate name elements, it should be possible to replace *The* with a conventional given name or combine it with any conventional surname to create new names, just like new conventional names are formed by combining a given name with a

surname. That means that *Alexis Mateo* and *The Princess* could be rearranged to create two new names: *Alexis Princess* and *The Mateo*. However, I claim that *The* is still perceived as a determiner, even in combination with a proper noun, and gives a separate kind of meaning than simply the combination of two names. *The Mateo* would distinguish a specific individual named *Mateo* from other individuals carrying the same name. This shows a close relation between the determiner and the noun it determines. The same relation is not found in *Alexis Princess* because the name elements are perceived as having a conventional name structure. Therefore, I have chosen to interpret each noun phrase as one name element. Equally so, I interpret the connection between *Drag* and *Queen* in *The Drag Queen* as so strong that they cannot be considered separate name elements, because replacing *Drag* or *Queen* with another name element changes its meaning.

The remaining two multi-word units are *with 2 Ts* and *Del Rio*. The former is the last element in the drag queen name *Elliott with 2 Ts*. It is a prepositional phrase that functions as a post-modifier to *Elliott*. I have chosen to interpret the prepositional phrase as one name element because I find it unlikely that any individual part of the phrase is intended as a name by itself. *Del Rio* presents a similar situation. In Spanish, the phrase translates to *off/from the river*, so that the full name *Bianca Del Rio* possibly means *Bianca off/from the river*. *Del Rio* can also be a location, and a surname, but either way, it represents a unit that I have counted as a single element.

For the reasons given above, I have categorized the multi-word phrases as single elements. All other elements consist of one or more letters or numbers written together with a space on either side, except from two name elements, which contain a hyphen. The two exceptions are *D-Lite* and *Miyake-Mugler*, but both of them have been considered to be one name element.

There were several other name elements that were the root of various challenges. Several drag queen names contain titles: *Miss*, *Miz*, *Mrs.*, *St.* and *Madame*. These titles are not conventional names, but they are used together with conventional names to address people. The question was whether to count them as separate name elements or if they are part of the following element, like the determiners discussed above. Titles can be used instead of names, for example in a situation where someone needs to address an individual, but they do not know the name of that individual. This suggest that the titles can stand alone and can be considered a separate name element. Additionally, titles are often used together with the surname of a person. Several of the names in the sample indeed consist of a title and just one additional name element. Therefore, it seemed most appropriate to consider the additional



name element as resembling a surname, so the titles have been categorized as a first element, and the last name elements have been categorized as last elements.

*St.* presents a slightly different case than the other titles. Sainthood is normally granted after a person has perished, so addressing someone as just *Saint* instead of using their name would be less likely than *Madame* or *Miss*. Additionally, *St. Clair* is the name of a street, which creates a tight bond between the two elements. Still, *St.* and *Clair* have been interpreted as two separate name elements for two main reasons: The first is that *Saint* is a conventional masculine name, and although the spelling *St.* is different from that of the name, its placement in the particular drag queen name in which it occurs, between two other conventional names (*Blair* and *Clair*), means that *St.* can be perceived as a name on its own. The second reason is that the combination of *St.* and *Clair* can be considered a play on words rather than a fixed unit. Both name elements are conventional names, but in combination with each other, they create the name of a street.

## 5.2 Comparing Drag Queen Names and Conventional Names

One of the similarities between drag queen names and conventional names is the structure of the names. Table 1 shows how many name elements the drag queen names consist of. The drag queen names in the sample consist of one to four elements. The majority of the drag queen names consists of two name elements (68.3%), which resembles the binomial structure of a given name combined with a surname. Drag queen names with three elements is the second most common structure (18.9%), and these too resemble conventional name structures, where the second element resembles a middle name. Conventional names allow for more than one middle name, and there is one name (0.6%) in the data set that consists of four name elements, where the second and third element resemble two middle names. There are no names with more than four name elements in the data set. The structures with two or more elements make up 87,8% of all names, which suggest that most drag queen names follow a conventional pattern.

Table 1 Number of elements in drag queen names

	One element	Two elements	Three elements	Four elements	<b>Total</b>
Number of names	22	123	34	1	<b>180</b>
Percent of total	12.2%	68.3%	18.9%	0.6%	<b>100%</b>

Yet, there are names in the sample which do not follow the binomial structure of conventional names: 12.2% of the drag queen names consist of one name element. This suggests that drag queens are less bound to the conventions of naming, which gives them some more creative freedom. The reason for choosing a short name is potentially linked with the purpose of drag queen names. Like conventional names, drag queen names are used to identify a specific individual. However, because drag queens are performers, their names are also their brand. Therefore, it is an advantage to have a name that not only identifies a specific drag queen but a name that people remember. Drag queens are entertainers and depend on having a fan base to come to their shows. They want people to talk about them, to be able to find them on social media and to recognize their name, because staying relevant is crucial to get booked for shows, sell merchandise and have an income. Extensively long names may be more difficult to remember. In terms of branding, shorter names are an advantage (Sjöblom 2016). That is a possible reason why 99.4% of the drag queen names consist of three or fewer elements and 80.5% have names of two or fewer name elements. Another way to be noticed is by deviating from conventional grammar and spelling. Among the drag queens, there are several such examples, such as *Roxxy Andrews* (instead of Roxy), *Kornbread "The Snack"* *Jeté* (instead of *corn bread*) and *Jasmine Kennedie* (instead of Kennedy), to mention a few.

Table 2 shows which types of name elements are found in the different positions in drag queen names. Names of one element are considered to be first elements, names with two elements are considered to have a first element and a last element, while names of three or four elements have a first element, middle element(s) and a last element. The category of *conventional names* has been divided into more specific categories: *feminine given name*, *masculine given name*, *ambiguous given name* and *rare given name*. The latter category is names that are found in the Social Security register of given names but are given to fewer than 20 people per year in all years after 1900. In the USA, surnames can sometimes be used as given names (Lawson 2016, 188). Consequently, quite a few names were found in both registers used in the analysis. For first and middle elements that are both conventional given names and conventional surnames, I have assumed that the name element is intended as a conventional given name, because in conventional names, given names holds the first position. If the name elements in the first position is listed only as a conventional surname, it has been classified as such. For name elements in the last position, the opposite is the case: Name elements that are both conventional given names and conventional surnames have

Table 2 Drag queen name elements by type of name element and element position

	First element	Middle element	2nd middle element	Last element
Feminine given name	102	9	-	4
Masculine given name	19	5	-	-
Ambiguous given name	18	5	-	2
Rare given name	9	2	1	4
Surname	2	2	-	113
Other	30	12	-	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>158</b>

been classified as surnames, while those that are just conventional or rare given names have been classified accordingly. In the case of *Jade Jolie*, both the first and the last element are conventional given names and conventional surnames, but *Jade* has been classified as a conventional feminine given name and *Jolie* has been classified as a conventional surname. Names in all positions that are neither conventional given names nor conventional surnames are classified as *other*.

The analysis shows that the majority of name elements in all positions are either conventional given names or conventional surnames. This shows that drag queens typically favor conventional names when creating their drag name, which means that most of the name elements can be found in conventional names too: Out of the first elements, 82.2% are conventional given names.

102 (56.7%) of the first elements are conventional feminine given names. This is not surprising: Although drag performers have the opportunity to choose unconventional names, drag queens predominantly portray a feminine persona. An additional 18 name elements (10%) are ambiguous, meaning that they are frequently used by both men and women, and 19 name elements (10.6%) are masculine given names. Still, 30 of the name elements in the first position are not conventional names, which makes up 16.7% of the names in this position. That makes *other* the second largest category in this position. The name elements in this category will be discussed in greater detail below. An overview of which name elements have been placed in which category can be seen in the appendix.

There are 35 drag queens in my data who have names with a middle element, of which one has a name with two middle elements. The only name element in the second middle element position is *Kat*, which is classified as a rare given name. Of the 35 other middle names, 66% are conventional given names, but *other* makes up the biggest category with

37.7%. Compared to the first element position, the ratio of feminine given names to masculine given names is drastically reduced. The number of ambiguous given names compared to masculine given names is fairly even among first elements and middle elements.

Of the drag queen names with two or more elements, the majority have a conventional surname as the last element: 113 of the 158 name elements in the last element position are conventional surnames, which makes up 71.5% of the last elements. An additional four names are conventional feminine given names, two are ambiguous names and four are rare given names. There are no names categorized as masculine names in the last-element position, which can be explained by the fact that surnames are sometimes taken as masculine given names. Because I have chosen to categorize name elements that are both conventional given names and conventional surnames as surnames when they occur in the last-element position, all the names that are also masculine given names in the last position (27 name elements) fall into this category. This also applies to 15 feminine given names, 5 ambiguous given names and 25 rare given names. This shows that drag queens tend to choose conventional surnames as the last element in their names, which makes their names look more like conventional names. Still, *other* makes up the second largest category in the last position, with 35 name elements (22.2%).

Across all element positions, there are a total of 374 name elements. Out of these, 77 are categorized as *other*, which means that 20.6% of the name elements found in the sample are unconventional name elements. There is great variation in which unconventional elements are used in the drag queen names. Some have already been discussed: there are seven cases of multi-word units in the drag queen names, which have all been classified as unconventional name elements. One of these is *The Princess*. *Princess* by itself does in fact exist as a conventional feminine given name, but not in combination with the determiner. Titles have also been discussed previously. All the titles have been categorized as unconventional names, with the exception of *St*. 18 of the drag names consist of only unconventional name elements, and half of these names consist of just one name element.

Several other word classes are also found in the *other* category. There are 16 name elements that are nouns, such as *Detox*, *Closet* and *Morphosis*. Another six nouns can be included if misspelled words are counted: *Kalorie* (calorie), *Kornbread* (corn bread), *Chachki* (misspelling of the Yiddish word for doodad), *ExclamationPoint* (exclamation point), *Jujubee* (jujube) and *Von'Du* (fondue). Another two names, *Laganja* and *Icunt*, contain a noun (ganja and cunt) and *Thunderfuck* is part of the drag queen name *Alaska Thunderfuck 5000*, which in turn is a play on the name of a strain of marijuana called *Alaskan Thunder Fuck*. Other word

classes represented are prepositions (*Beyond*), adverbs (*Oddly*) and adjectives (*Vivacious*, *Caliente*, *Silky* and others).

Some of the unconventional name elements are part of names that are a play on words. One example is *Alaska Thunderfuck 5000*, which has already been mentioned. Other examples include *Heidi N Closet* (hiding in the closet), where *N* and *Closet* are unconventional names; *Detox Icunt* (detoxicant; detox I can't), where both name elements are unconventional names; and *BenDeLaCreme* (crème de la crème), which incorporates the real name of the drag performer, Ben, in the saying *crème de la crème*. There are also several names that are a play on words that do not contain unconventional elements, such as *Farrah Moan*, which is a play on the word *pheromone*. In total, there are 30 names which play on words, of which 27 contain at least one conventional name element. While it is difficult to say to what extent conventional names contain play on words, it is certainly a common feature in drag queen names.

Other unconventional elements are *Jiggly*, which is the name of a fictional character (Jiggly Puff); *Balenciaga*, which is the name of a brand; *N*, *X*, and *M.*, which do not show up in any of the registers used because the registers only include names consisting of at least two letters; and names that do not fit into any other group. For the most part these names appear to be invented names, like *Dida*, *VanMichaels*, *DeVayne* and *Linaysha*. Additionally, one of the unconventional names is a number: *5000*.

The last group of unconventional names consists of names that, to varying degrees, do include conventional names, but which do not show in the registers used. *Shangela Laquifa Wadley*, for example, is a real name taken from a real person, but neither of the first two name elements occur in the registers used. *Kardashian*, and the misspelling *Karbdashian*, has become a famous surname after the Kardashian family became famous through the reality show *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, but the name does not occur in either register. *Yuhua* is also categorized as an unconventional name, but is in fact the legal given name of the drag performer. Other names in this group include foreign names (*Petrovna*, *Zamolodchikova*) and names that incorporate the legal name of the drag performers (such as *Thorgy*, incorporating the legal middle name *Thor*, and *Gottmik*, related to the legal surname *Gottlieb*).

### 5.3 The Relation between Drag Performer and Drag Name

The question about the relation between the drag performer and the drag queen is closely linked to the claim presented in the introduction that drag names should say something about the drag performer. There are several different ways in which the drag queens do this.

One of the most obvious way to represent themselves in the drag name is to incorporate their legal name in the drag queen name. The drag queens who incorporate their names in the drag names do it mainly in three different ways: The first is to take one or more name elements from their legal names and use it/them as a drag name unchanged. The second way is to incorporate a name element (or name elements) from their legal name, for example through translation, feminization or compounding. The third way is by choosing names with at least one shared initial letter.

Of those who use unchanged name elements from their legal names, six use both their given name and their surname: *Willam Belli*, *Chad Michaels*, *Derrick Barry*, *Alexis Mateo*, *Kelly Mantle* and *Charlie Hides*. The latter three have given names that have been categorized as ambiguous given names, which might play a role in their decision to keep their legal name as their drag name. Another four drag queens use their legal given name as the first element in their drag name: *Dax ExclamationPoint*, *Max*, *Yuhua Hamasaki* and *Elliot with 2 Ts*, while *Thorgy Thor* uses her legal middle name as the last element of her drag name (and a variation of it as the first element). Four drag queens use their legal surnames. Three of them use it as the last element in their drag name, while one uses it as the first element: *Joslyn Fox*. *Joslyn* is also a conventional given name, and thus works well as a drag queen name.

There are an additional ten names of contestants that have identical name elements in their legal names and in their drag names, but who present a special case: Transgender women. Based on the collected data, it appears that there are ten drag queens who have adopted their drag names as their legal names after coming out as transgender. Changing one's given name is uncommon, but sometimes occurs to distance oneself from a part of one's identity (Alford 1988). Coming out as transgender would be an example of a situation where people might want to change their given name to distance themselves from a part of their identity, or perhaps rather to better reflect their identity. It is, however, possible that they have not adopted their drag name as their official legal name, but as a name they use in public (especially commercially and in interaction with fans and the media) both in drag and out of drag.

The second way some drag queens incorporate their legal names is by modifying their name in some way and use the modified version as part of their drag name. There is a total of

16 drag queens in my sample who do this. Three of them use a nickname based on their legal given name as the first element in their drag names: *Sasha Velour* (*Sasha* is a Russian nickname for *Alexander*), *Joey Jay* (Joseph) and *Dusty Ray Bottoms* (Dustin). The latter also includes elements from his surname *Rayburn*. Six more drag queens use parts of their legal name in their drag name, for example *Jorgeous*, whose legal given name is *Jorge*, and two drag queens have changed the spelling (and pronunciation) of their names: *Shea Couleé*, where *Shea* is a variant of her legal middle name *Kyei*, and *Jaymes Mansfield*, whose legal given name is James. The latter has taken inspiration from the name of the American actor *Jayne Mansfield*. One drag queen has translated her legal middle name *Flores* from Spanish into English and used it as the last element of her drag name: *Nina Flowers*. The remaining four drag queens have feminized their legal names: *Victor* becomes *Victoria*, *Alex Michaels* becomes *Alexis Michelle*, *Brock* becomes *Brooke* and *Ross* becomes *Rosé*. The latter might not be a conventional name, but because the Social Security given name register does not include any special letters, such as *é*, the name came back as *Rose* in the register.

The third way in which the drag queens incorporate parts of their legal names is through their initials. There are 34 drag queen names that share at least one initial letter with one of the name elements in their legal name. Some of these cases could be coincidences, but *Kandy Muse* has explained that she chose to spell *Kandy* with the letter *K* because her legal name is *Kevin*. Potentially, this is the case for several other names of the 34 that share an initial letter with the legal name of the performer, but it cannot be guaranteed.

In addition to incorporating their legal names into their drag names, there are several other ways in which the drag queens choose names that represents something about the drag performer. One of the most important categories are names used as last elements by members of a drag family. 29 of the drag queens explicitly express that the last element of their name comes from their drag family, or their ‘house.’ These family last elements serve a similar function as conventional surnames and express that the drag queen has a relation to a certain drag family. Another two drag queens express that they too have taken the last name element of their names from other drag performers, but where it is not clear if they are considered members of the same drag family, or if they took the names simply because they look up the the drag queens they took them from. It is possible that even more drag queens have names from their drag families, but did not mention it in their explanation of where their names came from.

Several queens have chosen names that represent something about where they come from or their heritage: *Sahara Davenport*, *Denali Fox* and *Manila Luzon*, to mention some,

have chosen names of places to represent their ethnic and cultural background. Sahara Davenport is black, and chose *Sahara* as a reference to the Sahara desert to represent her African heritage; *Denali* is North America's highest mountain, and located in Alaska where Denali Fox grew up; and *Manila Luzon* has taken her name from the capital of the Philippines, Manila, and the island on which Manila is located, Luzon, to represent her Filipino heritage.

Others have chosen names that are foods or drinks with cultural connotations, such as *Soju*, *Jujubee* and *Kim Chi*. Some chose names related to their birthdays, such as *April Carrión* and *June Jambalaya*, who have used their month of birth as their first elements, and *Aquaria* and *Raja Gemini*, whose names are taken from their zodiac signs. Two drag queens have taken their names from previous pets, *Bosco* and *Shannel*, and two other drag queen have taken names related to person health issues: *Daya Betty*, who is diabetic, and *Willow Pill*, who has explained that she has to take several pills each day because of her health issues.

The largest category appearing in the analysis is that of female figures. 78 of the drag queens in the sample explain that they have taken inspiration for their name from female figures. These female figures can be put into three groups, which express different relations between the performer and their name. The first group is that of friends, family and acquaintances. The female figures in this group are real women who the performers know personally, so taking their names indicates a personal relationship, a wish to honor them or to carry on certain characteristics of that person. There are 21 name elements taken from or inspired by female friends, family and acquaintances. The second group of female figures is celebrities. This group also consist of real people, but not people the drag performers have a personal relationship with. However, taking names from the female figures in this group is a display of admiration or wish to obtain certain qualities the female figures possess. There are 38 name elements taken from or inspired by female celebrities. The last group is fictional characters. These are not real people, but figures from films, books, TV, etc. That means that not all are human figures either. There are 26 name elements taken from or inspired by fictional females.

Additionally, there are some names taken from male figures: *Gia Gunn* has taken the last element of her name from Tim Gunn, who is well known for his role in the world of fashion; *Naomi Smalls* has taken the last element of her name from the rapper Biggie Smalls; *Mayhem Miller* has taken the first element of her name from a tattoo on musician Tommy Lee's abdomen; and *Robbie Turner* has taken her name from a book character.



When the drag queens explain where their names come from, their answers vary, but most have either a personal story behind it, either because their names contain pieces of who they are outside of drag (birthday, health, legal name, heritage etc.), or because their names are taken from or inspired by something or someone they look up to or are inspired by, or for some other reason. However, these factors are not always clear to an audience who is not familiar with the drag queen. For example, *Eureka O'Hara* has taken the first element of her drag name from her biological mother. That will not be as obvious to an audience as for example where *Trinity Kardashian Bonet* has taken her name from. The transparency of the names vary, which means that although the drag name has some relation to the drag performer, this relation might not be clear to the audience.

#### **5.4 Categories of connotational meaning**

There are various categories of connotational meaning found in the drag queen names. A name and individual name elements can have more than one connotation, and thus fit in several of the categories that were identified. However, because connotations to names can be individual, the intended meaning of the names are not always perceived by the audience. Similar to literary names, the audience can also interpret the names further than what the drag performers intended. Sometimes, such as in the case of drag queens who have taken their names from women they know personally (see 5.2), the connotations a drag queen has to the name are not even accessible to the general audience.

Due to the nature of drag, as a performance so closely linked to the concepts of sexuality and gender, it may not come as a surprise that gender (section 5.4.1) and sexuality (section 5.4.2) are found as categories of connotational meaning. Additionally, the categories fashion, glamour and luxury (section 5.4.3), nightlife (section 5.4.4) and drag (section 5.4.5) have been identified.

##### *5.4.1 Gender*

While gender is part of the categorical meaning of names (Nyström 2016), it can also be part of the connotational meaning. *Nina*, for instance, is easily recognizable as a conventional feminine given name, demonstrating categorical meaning. The same cannot be said for *Mattel* (from Trixie Mattel), which is the name of the toy company that produces Barbie. Yet, *Mattel* has connotations of playfulness, youth and femininity. In this case, *Mattel* is not categorized as a feminine name, but has connotations of femininity. While the examples of *Nina* and

*Mattel* demonstrate a difference between categorical and connotational meaning, both will be discussed as connotational meaning, because I argue that the intention of both names are the same: To allude to femininity. With the exception of the transgender women in my sample, none of the drag performers are women, so the purpose of choosing a feminine given name is not to convince the audience that the performers are women, but to give them connotations of femininity to establish their drag persona as a feminine character.

Using conventional feminine given names is the most direct and transparent way to give the drag name connotations to femininity. However, the name elements taken from the different types of feminine figures (see 5.3) may also have indirect connotations of femininity. *Naomi Smalls*, for example, has taken the first name element from the 90s supermodel Naomi Campbell. *Naomi*, granted that the audience is familiar with Naomi Campbell, thus has connotations to fashion and supermodels, which have been seen as stereotypical feminine interests. Naomi Smalls is a fashionable drag queen and is well-known in the drag community for her fashion sense. This suggests that more than just femininity, *Naomi* has connotations to specific aspects of femininity. Other names with similar connotations are discussed further in 5.4.2.

Some drag queens have taken their names from women they know personally. The reasons for doing so varies: It can be to honor a friend or family member, or because the person they took the name element from has some quality that the drag queen wants to project, for example beauty. The issue with names and name elements from friends, family and acquaintances is that to most people, the connotations the drag queen has to the name element is exclusive to a limited group of people who know both the drag queen and the person they took the name from. This does not prevent the drag queens from expressing the desired qualities, such as beauty, visually or through their performance, but the name plays a smaller role in projecting and supporting any connotations the drag queen has to the name. Alternatively, the audience may apply their own connotations to the interpretation of the name. In the case of Tyra Sanchez, *Tyra* is taken from a relative. However, Tyra Sanchez (before quitting drag) usually presented herself visually as a fashion-forward drag queen. The name together with the experience of seeing her perform gave connotations to the famous model Tyra Banks. This was further supported by the fact that Tyra Sanchez had a slender, model-like physique, and that both Tyra Sanchez and Tyra Banks are black. This suggests that while the name can give connotations to suggest what someone can expect from a drag queen's performance, such as in the case of Naomi Smalls, the performance of drag queen can also alter the connotations to a name, like in the case of Tyra Sanchez.

Not all names with connotations to gender have connotations to femininity. There are 24 name elements that have been categorized as conventional masculine given names and 23 name elements that have been categorized as conventional ambiguous names. The masculine name elements can create expectations of a more masculine character to build a different narrative than the conventional feminine given names. These expectations are generally not met in terms of how the drag queens present themselves visually. This creates a juxtaposition between the expectations brought about by the connotations to the name and the visual presentation of the drag queens. This play on gender, balancing between the masculine name and the feminine presentation, can be seen as a way of breaking the fourth wall of the drag performance. By using a masculine given name, the drag queens let the audience in on the secret that they are not actually a woman, but a man who is visually presenting themselves as a feminine character. This is, of course, in reality not an actual secret, but the obvious lack of effort put into keeping ‘the secret’ creates an almost comedic effect. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of Bob The Drag Queen. *Bob* is a conventional masculine given name and combined with last element *The Drag Queen* there is little left to the imagination. Presenting themselves as feminine characters with masculine name can also be a commentary about the construct of gender by challenging the expectations caused by connotations to masculinity by presenting themselves as feminine characters. Ambiguous names too play on the binary perception of gender by having connotations to both masculinity and femininity. Ambiguous names encapsulate the concept of drag by indexing both femininity and masculinity, which is essentially what drag does: Drag queens are typically male-identifying performers who portray feminine characters.

#### 5.4.2 *Sexuality*

Drag queen names also have connotations to various aspects of sexuality. *Heidi N Closet* has connotations to gay sexual identity by playing on the concept of coming out of the closet, meaning to disclose one’s sexual (or gender) identity as something else than heterosexual (or cisgender). *Jacki Cox* on the other hand has connotations to sexual activity/behavior, as the name is a loose play on *jacking [off] cocks*, or to masturbate male genitalia. One other name, *Rebecca Classcock*, has clear connotations to male genitalia. This is an example of how the proprial meaning depend on the lexical meaning, in this case *cock*, of names. Although *cock* is just a part of the name, the lexical meaning is readily available when hearing the name *Glasscock*, particularly because drag queen names sometimes do have names with connotations of sexuality.

Other names with connotations to sexuality, sex and genitalia includes *Ongina* (constructed by the performer's legal middle name and the two last syllables in *vagina*), *Pandora Boxx* (*box* also being used to describe female genitalia), *Detox Icunt* (*cunt*), *Penny Tration* (a play on *penetration*) and *Dusty Ray Bottoms*. *To bottom*, used as a verb, means to be the receiving part during anal sex between two men. *Dusty Ray Bottoms* can thus be understood as a statement meaning that Dusty Ray is frequently being the receiving part in anal sex.

Having names with sexual connotations while performing as a feminine character can reinforce a sexualized and objectified image of women. The performances, including clothing and makeup can further reinforce this image, particularly because drag queen performers usually identify as men. Consequently, drag can be seen as an act of misogyny (Frye 1983; White 1980). While this aspect of drag should be recognized, it might be a too simplistic conclusion, or at least one which does not show the nuances of drag. Drag is big and exaggerated, which separates drag performers from women. While the drag characters the drag queens present is feminine, drag queens do not claim to be women. They quite literally perform gender and display various signs of feminine and masculine nature in their performances, including names or name elements that are ambiguous, combinations of female and masculine names, or names that are neither. The connotations to sexuality found in drag names (and their performances) might not be references to female sexuality or women as sexual objects, but function as codes for homosexuality; Connotations to penetration or female genitalia in the context of a gay male subculture may be understood as codes, or signs, of gay male sexual behavior. Additionally, drag allows men to express a type of feminine, but not female, sexiness which is not traditionally considered sexy in men.

#### 5.4.3 *Fashion, Glamour and Luxury*

Several names have connotations to fashion, glamour and luxury, which are stereotypical feminine interests and goals. This too is expressed through various names. As mentioned above, *Naomi Smalls* has connotations to fashion and supermodels, and more references to other feminine figures with similar connotations can be found among the drag queen names: *Kimora Blac* has taken her name from models Kimora Lee Simmons and Blac Chyna, *Trinity Kardashian Bonet* and *Kalorie Karbdashian Williams* have both taken their middle name elements from the Kardashian-sisters, and *Naysha Lopez* has taken the last name element from artist Jennifer Lopez. These celebrities and the lifestyle they portray in the media make them symbols of opulence. Other drag queen names incorporate common nouns with similar

connotations, such as *Miss Fame* and *The Princess*. Some drag queens also use the names of famous fashion designers and brands as name elements, like *Ariel Versace* (from *Donatella Versace*), *Jaidynn Diore Fierce* (alternative spelling of *Dior*), *Mariah Paris Balenciaga* (from *Balenciaga*) and *Liv Lux Miyake-Mugler* (from *Issey Miyake* and *Thierry Mugler*). The latter also use *Lux* as a middle element, which has obvious connotations to luxury. There are also four names with name elements which are the names of locations with connotations to fashion and/or luxury. The name elements with connotations to fashion are *Paris* and *Milan*. The cities Paris and Milan are known as fashion capitals, hence the connotations to fashion and luxury. There are two names with *Paris* in them: *Mariah Paris Balenciaga* and *Angeria Paris VanMicheals*. *Milan* is the name of a drag queen, whose name consist of only that name element. Additionally, *Monica Beverly Hillz* has taken her name form *Beverly Hills*, a city in California known for expensive properties, luxury shopping and being the home of many celebrities.

#### 5.4.4 Nightlife

Drag queens generally perform in gay bars, and several names have connotations to different aspects of nightlife and partying. Of these, five of them have connotations to drugs: *Sharon Needles* (a play on *sharing needles*), *Alaska Thunderfuck 5000* (*Alaskan Thunder Fuck* being a strain of marijuana), *Lagnaja Estranja* (*ganja* being a synonym to *marijuana*), *Acid Betty* (*acid* being slang for *LSD*) and *Crystal Methyd* (a play on *crystal meth*). *Willow Pill* can also be added to this group due to the last element of her name. She has explained that the name comes from her having to take medicine due to her health condition, but she also openly talks about taking mushrooms (Alter 2022). *Rosé* and *Soju* have taken their names from alcoholic beverages, which are also closely connected to nightlife. Lastly, many of the names, mainly those which have connotations to sexual activity, can be considered to have connotations to nightlife as well. Bars and clubs are potential arenas for finding a (sexual) partner. Particularly to members of the LGBTQ community, gay bars were, and still are, sanctuaries where they could meet partners in a safe space. While the sexual connotations to nightlife is not unique to the LGBTQ community, it might be stronger because, historically, gay bars were one of the few spaces where gay people could be open about their sexuality.

#### 5.4.5 Drag

Drag itself can be seen as a category of connotational meaning. The style of drag names and the meaning of them give them connotations to drag. Using unconventional name elements, such as determiners and titles, in combination with conventional name elements give the names connotations to drag, and index drag queen identity. This also goes for names that play on words, because they add a sense of humor to the name, or even provoke, which is typical of drag. Other elements, such as unconventional spelling of names or names that consist of only unconventional elements are also common in drag, and thus give connotations to drag. *Jaidynn Diore Fierce* is an example of a name that contains what Lakoff (2004) calls empty adjective, *fierce*, which is a feature of women's language also adopted by (African American) drag queens (Barrett 2017). Clear connotations to drag can also be seen in the name *Trinity the Tuck*, as *tucking* means to hide the crotch bulge to look more feminine. Lastly, last elements taken from drag houses/families place the drag queens into a certain drag family, but can also carry certain connotations to what (type of drag) the house is known for, if one is familiar with the various houses.

## 6 Conclusion

The main objective of this thesis was to identify naming practices. By answering the three secondary research questions, certain naming practices among drag queens were identified.

### 6.1 Naming Practices among American Drag Queens

Drag queen names are similar to conventional names in terms of structure. The vast majority of drag queen names consist of at least two name elements, which resembles the binomial system of naming used for conventional names. Additionally, drag queens tend to choose conventional given names, in particular feminine given names, and conventional surnames as name elements. Many drag queens belong to a drag family, where the last element of the name is shared with the other members of that family/house. These last elements thus function similarly to surnames in identifying the drag queen to her drag family. However, 12.2% of the drag queen names included in the analysis consist of just one name element, deviating from the structure of conventional names. It is also common to include various unconventional name elements, such as titles, determiners, or made-up name elements in the names, but mostly in combination with conventional name elements. Still, 10% of the names consist only of unconventional name elements, and half of these names consist of just one name element. Drag queen names also tend to misspell name elements and create names which play on words, which are features more often seen in commercial names than in conventional names.

The relation between drag names and drag performers varies, but drag queens tend to choose names that has some personal significance to them. One way drag names can relate to the performer is by incorporating elements of the performer's legal name into the drag name. Three strategies of incorporating legal names were identified: To take one or more name elements as they are and use it as their drag name, to take one or more name elements and modify them, and to choose one or more name elements with the same initial letter(s) as the name element(s) in their legal name. Others choose names relating to their heritage (locations, food with cultural connotations, etc.), their birthday (name of birth month, zodiac signs), personal stories (pet names from past pets, streets they have lived on, etc.) and health conditions. It is also common to take name elements from figures or people, including fictional figures, the drag queens know or look up to. This can be name elements taken from and shared with other members of their drag family to indicate drag-family ties or names taken from female figures. The latter group can be divided furth into female figures the drag

queens know from their personal lives, celebrities and fictional characters. Typically, the female figures the drag queens take their names from have some characteristics or features the drag queens wish for their drag persona to project.

The analysis produced five main categories of connotational meaning: gender; sexuality; fashion glamour and luxury; nightlife; and drag. These categories are not mutually exclusive, meaning that a name can be placed in more than one category, because names can have more than one connotation. More categories and sub-categories can likely be identified, but the five mentioned above represent the most prevalent categories of connotational meaning. The drag queens efficiently use the connotations of their names as a part of the narrative of their drag persona, for example by using names of celebrities and models to create the impression of opulence, beauty and (stereotypical) femininity, but also to deconstruct notions of gender by using masculine, ambiguous and unconventional name elements in various combinations. However, because connotations can be individual, the drag performers and the audience do not always share connotations of a name, for example, if a drag queen has taken her name from someone she knows personally, her connotations to the name might be different from the audience's connotations. Similarly, members of the audience might interpret the name to have a different origin and meaning than what the drag queen intended and seeing the drag queen perform can alter (or confirm) presumptions based on their drag name.

## **6.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

While this thesis has provided a descriptive analysis of American drag queen names, it cannot claim to have identified all existing practices and the concepts governing these practices. As a new area of study, there are many potential directions for future research.

Future research might want to investigate naming practices in other English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries and naming practices among (American) drag kings. Additionally, as more seasons of *RuPaul's Drag Race* air, more drag names can be analyzed to test the validity of the findings presented here, and as the drag community continues to grow, other means of collecting a representative sample might become more easily available. Alternatively, a qualitative analysis of drag queens who have not competed on the show could give insight into how representative the practices presented in this thesis are.



Lastly, future research may want to look into how race and class are represented in the drag queen names through connotations, or if there are patterns of name types according to types of drag.

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## Appendix

### Drag Queen Names from *RuPaul's Drag Race*

F=Feminine given name    M=Masculine given name    A=Ambiguous given name    R=Rare given name    S=Surname    O=Other

When there is a name typed in the “type” column before the letter code, the name represents the spelling variation found in the registers.

Drag Queen Name	First Element	Type	Middle Element	Type	Last Element	Type
A'Keria Chanel Davenport	A'Keria	F	Chanel	F	Davenport	S
Acid Betty	Acid	O	-	.	Betty	S
Adore Delano	Adore	F	-	-	Delano	S
Aiden Zhane	Aiden	M	-	-	Zhane	F
Aja Labeija	Aja	F	-	-	Labeija	O
Akashia	Akashia	R	-	-	-	-
Alaska Thunderfuck 5000	Alaska	F	Thunderfuck	O	5000	O
Alexis Mateo	Alexis	A	-	-	Mateo	S
Alexis Michelle	Alexis	A	-	-	Michelle	S
Alisa Summers	Alisa	F	-	-	Summers	S
Alyssa Edwards	Alyssa	F	-	-	Edwards	S
Alyssa Hunter	Alyssa	F	-	-	Hunter	S
Angeria Paris VanMicheals	Angeria	O	Paris	A	VanMichaels	O
April Carrión	April	F	-	-	Carrión	S
Aquaria	Aquaria	F	-	-	-	-

Ariel Versace	Ariel	A	-	-	Versace	S
Asia O'Hara	Asia	F	-	-	O'Hara	S
BeBe Zahara Benet	BeBe	F	Zahara	F	Benet	S
BenDeLaCreme	BenDeLaCreme	O	-	-	-	-
Bianca Del Rio	Bianca	F	-	-	Del Rio	S
Blair St. Clair	Blair	F	St.	Saint, M	Clair	S
Bob the Drag Queen	Bob	M	-	.	The Drag Queen	O
Bosco	Bosco	M	-	-	-	-
Brita Filter	Brita	F	-	-	Filter	S
Brooke Lynn Hytes	Brooke	F	Lynn	A	Hytes	O
Carmen Carrera	Carmen	F	-	-	Carrera	S
Chad Michaels	Chad	M	-	-	Michaels	S
Charlie Hides	Charlie	A	-	-	Hides	O
Chi Chi Kat DeVayne	Chi	A	Chi/Kat	A/R	DeVayne	O
Coco Montrese	Coco	F	-	-	Montrese	R
Courtney Act	Courtney	F	-	-	Act	O
Crystal Methyd	Crystal	F	-	-	Methyd	S
Cynthia Lee Fontaine	Cynthia	F	Lee	M	Fontaine	S
Dahlia Sin	Dahlia	F	-	-	Sin	S
Dax ExclamationPoint	Dax	M	-	.	ExclamationPoint	O
Daya Betty	Daya	F	-	-	Betty	S
DeJa Skye	DeJa	F	-	-	Skye	S
Delta Work	Delta	F	-	-	Work	S
Denali Foxx	Denali	A	-	-	Foxx	S
Derrick Barry	Derrick	M	-	-	Barry	S
Detox Icunt	Detox	O	-	-	Icunt	O
DiDa Ritz	DiDa	O	-	-	Ritz	S
Dusty Ray Bottoms	Dusty	M	Ray	M	Bottoms	S



Elliott with 2 Ts	Elliott	A	-	-	with 2 Ts	O
Eureka O'Hara	Eureka	F	-	-	O'Hara	S
Farrah Moan	Farrah	F	-	-	Moan	S
Gia Gunn	Gia	F	-	-	Gunn	S
Gigi Goode	Gigi	F	-	-	Goode	S
Ginger Minj	Ginger	F	-	-	Minj	Minge, S
Gottmik	Gottmik	O	-	-	-	-
Heidi N Closet	Heidi	F	N	O	Closet	O
Honey Davenport	Honey	F	-	-	Davenport	S
Honey Mahogany	Honey	F	-	-	Mahogany	S
India Ferrah	India	F	-	-	Ferrah	Farrah, S
Ivy Winters	Ivy	F	-	-	Winters	S
Jackie Cox	Jackie	A	-	-	Cox	S
Jade Jolie	Jade	F	-	-	Jolie	S
Jade Sotomayor	Jade	F	-	-	Sotomayor	S
Jaida Essence Hall	Jaida	F	Essence	F	Hall	S
Jaidynn Diore Fierce	Jaidynn	Jaidyn, A	Diore	Dior, F	Fierce	S
Jan Sport	Jan	A	-	-	Sport	S
Jasmine Kennedie	Jasmine	F	-	-	Kennedie	Kennedy, S
Jasmine Masters	Jasmine	F	-	-	Masters	S
Jaymes Mansfield	Jaymes	M	-	-	Mansfield	S
Jessica Wild	Jessica	F	-	-	Wild	S
Jiggly Caliente	Jiggly	O	-	-	Caliente	O
Jinkx Monsoon	Jinkx	R	-	-	Monsoon	O
Joey Jay	Joey	M	-	-	Jay	S
Jorgeous	Jorgeous	O	-	-	-	-
Joslyn Fox	Joslyn	F	-	-	Fox	S
Jujubee	Jujubee	O	-	-	-	-

June Jambalaya	June	F	-	-	Jambalaya	O
Kahanna Montrese	Kahanna	R	-	-	Montrese	R
Kahmora Hall	Kahmora	Kamora, F	-	-	Hall	S
Kalorie Karbdashian Williams	Kalorie	O	Karbdashian	O	Williams	S
Kameron Michaels	Kameron	M	-	-	Michaels	S
Kandy Ho	Kandy	F	-	.	Ho	S
Kandy Muse	Kandy	F	-	-	Muse	S
Kelly Mantle	Kelly	A	-	-	Mantle	S
Kennedy Davenport	Kennedy	F	-	.	Davenport	S
Kenya Michaels	Kenya	F	-	-	Michaels	S
Kerri Colby	Kerri	F	-	-	Colby	S
Kim Chi	Kim	A	-	.	Chi	S
Kimora Blac	Kimora	F	-	-	Blac	S
Kornbread "The Snack" Jeté	Kornbread	O	The Snack	O	Jeté	R
Kylie Sonique Love	Kylie	F	Sonique	R	Love	S
Lady Camden	Lady	F	-	-	Camden	S
Laganja Estranja	Laganja	O	-	-	Estranja	O
Laila McQueen	Laila	F	-	.	McQueen	S
LaLa Ri	LaLa	F	-	-	Ri	S
Lashawn Beyond	Lashawn	M	-	-	Beyond	O
Latrice Royale	Latrice	F	-	-	Royale	A
Lineysha Sparx	Lineysha	O	-	-	Sparx	Sparks, S
Liv Lux Miyake-Mugler	Liv	F	Lux	A	Miyake-Mugler	S
Madame LaQueer	Madame	O	-	-	LaQueer	O
Maddy Morphosis	Maddy	Madie, F	-	-	Morphosis	O
Magnolia Crawford	Magnolia	F	-	-	Crawford	S
Manila Luzon	Manila	R	-	-	Luzon	S
Mariah Paris Balenciaga	Mariah	F	Paris	A	Balenciaga	O

Max	Max	M	-	.	-	-
Mayhem Miller	Mayhem	R	-	-	Miller	S
Mercedes Iman Diamond	Mercedes	F	Iman	F	Diamond	S
Milan	Milan	A	-	-	-	-
Milk	Milk	S	-	-	-	-
Mimi Imfurst	Mimi	F	-	-	Imfurst	O
Miss Darienne Lake	Miss	O	Darienne	F	Lake	S
Miss Fame	Miss	O	-	-	Fame	R
Miss Peppermint	Miss	O	-	-	Peppermint	O
Miz Cracker	Miz	O	.	-	Cracker	O
Mo Heart	Mo	Moe, M	-	-	Heart	S
Monét X Change	Monét	F	X	O	Change	S
Monica Beverly Hillz	Monica	F	Beverly	F	Hillz	Hills, S
Morgan McMichaels	Morgan	A	-	-	McMichaels	S
Mrs. Kasha Davis	Mrs.	O	Kasha	F	Davis	S
Mystique Summers Madison	Mystique	F	Summers	R	Madison	S
Naomi Smalls	Naomi	F	-	.	Smalls	S
Naysha Lopez	Naysha	R	-	.	Lopez	S
Nicky Doll	Nicky	M	-	-	Doll	S
Nicole Paige Brooks	Nicole	F	Paige	F	Brooks	S
Nina Bo'nina Brown	Nina	F	Bo'nina	S	Brown	S
Nina Flowers	Nina	F	-	-	Flowers	S
Nina West	Nina	F	-	-	West	S
Ongina	Ongina	O	-	-	-	-
Orion Story	Orion	M	-	-	Story	S
Pandora Boxx	Pandora	F	-	-	Boxx	S
Pearl Liaison	Pearl	F	-	.	Liaison	O
Penny Tration	Penny	F	-	-	Tration	O

Phi Phi O'Hara	Phi	M	Phi	M	O'Hara	S
Phoenix	Phoenix	A	-	-	-	-
Plastique Tiara	Plastique	O	-	-	Tiara	F
Ra'Jah Davenport O'Hara	Ra'Jah	M	Davenport	S	O'Hara	S
Raja Gemini	Raja	A	-	-	Gemini	A
Raven	Raven	F	-	-	-	-
Rebecca Glasscock	Rebecca	F	-	-	Glasscock	S
Robbie Turner	Robbie	A	-	.	Turner	S
Rock M. Sakura	Rock	M	M.	O	Sakura	F
Rosé	Rosé	F	-	-	-	-
Roxxy Andrews	Roxxy	F	-	-	Andrews	S
Sahara Davenport	Sahara	F	-	-	Davenport	S
Sasha Belle	Sasha	F	-	.	Belle	S
Sasha Velour	Sasha	F	-	-	Velour	O
Scarlet Envy	Scarlet	F	-	-	Envy	F
Serena ChaCha	Serena	F	-	-	ChaCha	S
Shangela Laquifa Wadley	Shangela	O	Laquifa	O	Wadley	S
Shannel	Shannel	F	-	-	-	-
Sharon Needles	Sharon	F	-	-	Needles	S
Shea Couleé	Shea	A	-	-	Couleé	O
Sherry Pie	Sherry	F	-	-	Pie	S
Shuga Cain	Shuga	S	-	-	Cain	S
Silky Nutmeg Ganache	Silky	O	Nutmeg	O	Ganache	O
Soju	Soju	O	-	-	-	-
Stacy Layne Matthews	Stacy	F	Layne	M	Matthews	S
Symone	Symone	F	-	-	-	-
Tamisha Iman	Tamisha	F	-	-	Iman	S
Tammie Brown	Tammie	F	-	-	Brown	S

Tatianna	Tatianna	F	-	-	-	-
Tempest DuJour	Tempest	F	-	.	DuJour	O
The Princess	The Princess	O	-	-	-	-
The Vixen	The Vixen	O	-	-	-	-
Thorgy Thor	Thorgy	O	-	.	Thor	S
Tina Burner	Tina	F	-	-	Burner	S
Trinity Kardashian Bonet	Trinity	F	Kardashian	O	Bonet	S
Trinity the Tuck	Trinity	F	-	-	the Tuck	O
Trixie Mattel	Trixie	F	-	.	Mattel	S
Tyra Sanchez	Tyra	F	-	-	Sanchez	S
Utica Queen	Utica	R	-	-	Queen	S
Valentina	Valentina	F	-	-	-	-
Vanessa Vanjie Mateo	Vanessa	F	Vanjie	O	Mateo	S
Venus D-Lite	Venus	F	-	-	D-Lite	Delight, S
Victoria "Porkchop" Parker	Victoria	F	Porkchop	O	Parker	S
Violet Chachki	Violet	F	-	.	Chachki	O
Vivacious	Vivacious	O	-	-	-	-
Vivienne Pinay	Vivienne	F	-	-	Pinay	O
Widow Von'Du	Widow	O	-	-	Von'du	O
Willam Belli	Willam	M	-	-	Belli	S
Willow Pill	Willow	F	-	-	Pill	S
Yara Sofia	Yara	F	-	-	Sofia	S
Yekaterina Petrovna Zamolodchikova	Yekaterina	R	Petrovna	O	Zamolodchikova	O
Yuhua Hamasaki	Yuhua	O	-	-	Hamasaki	S
Yvie Oddly	Yvie	R	-	-	Oddly	O