DRAG KINGS AND BIO QUEENS

In January of this year, the *New York times* described this as the golden age of drag. Drag superstar RuPaul covered the magazine, while drag race was defined as “The most radical show on TV”. It may have taken over twenty years but drag has finally gone mainstream. However, whilst this is something to be celebrated, we here at xyz couldn’t help but wonder, in the interest of equal representation, where are the kings?

Over time, drag kings have become increasingly more popular, and have been recorded in the UK since the Victorian era (Necati,2018). Throughout the 1990’s, male impersonators or ‘breeches roles’ were incredibly popular. Women such as Vesta Tilley and Hetty King were hugely famous drag kings, famed for their music hall performances and loved by both women and men (Honan,2017). However today they are still relatively unknown to mainstream audiences. Although shows such as Drag Race have been crucial to the representation and inclusion of drag in mainstream culture, the show only shows a small slice of what’s out there (Jeanie,2018). Arguably, one reason for the lack of drag kings within pop culture, is the underrepresentation of women, both in front and behind the camera, ‘*When women assume male characteristics they deny the patriarchy what it sees as their traditional roles. For certain parts of society, that’s threatening’* (Phelps,2018).

Nevertheless, Kings persist to frequent the drag scene and are coming out of the shadows of their queen counterparts (Necati,2018).

A drag king is not the opposite of a drag queen, nor is it simply just a woman dressed as man. It includes those who may identify as ‘non-binary’ or ‘trans’. Although, one of the things the acts have in common, is their exploration of gender and challenging the current attitudes. *‘Gender is irrelevant, drag is art. King, queen or in-between, drag is performing confidence and owning a stage’* says Chiyo Gomes (2018), a drag performer and former finalist of the biggest drag king competition ‘Man up’ begun being invited to cabaret nights, after people saw their (gomes prefers gender-non conforming pronouns) images on social media.

Drag king culture is incredibly welcoming, established kings often cheer on and encourage new performers to take part. Allowing a younger wave of aspiring kings to join in.

There current growth and popularity could be down to the younger generations of women, who have seen the change in the traditional meaning of ‘gender’, along with the various feminist movements. Social attitudes are rapidly changing in the UK and us as a society are becoming more accepting (Stylist, 2016). This suggests that drag kings may become common, and the blurring lines of gender could mean they are simply known as drag performers, rather kings or queens. For the LGBT+ community, these could be positive steps towards total acceptance within society. However, in times where political division is immense there is still an awful lot to fight for (Salmon, 2018).

As stated at the start, drag has gone fully mainstream, yet kings are still widely unknown. Some believe that the Drag race could help the kings become just as popular. *“More people are venturing out to their local gay bars and catching drag shows and wanting to know more and more about drag. And while this is great for getting people to support their local drag, it's really starting to thrust drag into the social media mainstream”* says Donnamarie Carol (2018), a drag king.

A slightly newer addition to the drag scene, is the female drag queen; women performing as drag queens. Once known as a ‘Bio queen’, however in modern day this term can cause offence to some, as it implies that a woman is only a woman if born one. This type of performer has somewhat divided the community, yet the answer lies within the fact, that drag is much more than man wearing a dress but is questioning the norms of gender and stereotypes (Gander,2016). Gay nightlight is still very male dominated, with many bars having strict entry policies and men banging on-screen. If women are allowed in, they often report of being harassed or jeered at*. “My drag is just as valid as that of any queen who identifies as male”* states [Amber Cadaverous](https://www.instagram.com/ambercadaverous/) (2017), who is sick of the treatment female performers receive and how they are made to feel in the drag world. From this it can be argued that Today more than ever before, female – bodied performers are needed to disrupt gender ideals, sexuality, drag and queerness, and they should be allowed the space to do so. Whether this will happen or not only time will tell.

Finished version of my article.