



Duncan of Jordanstone
College of Art & Design
University of Dundee

JENNIFER CAINE

Gentlemen Start Your Engines: Gendered Aesthetics and the Structural Misogyny of RuPaul's Drag Race.

May 2026

Fine Art

[DOI 10.15132/30000125](https://doi.org/10.15132/30000125)



Except where otherwise noted, the text in this dissertation is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

All images, figures, and other third-party materials included in this dissertation are the copyright of their respective rights holders, unless otherwise stated. Reuse of these materials may require separate permission.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the approach to gender equality in RuPaul's Drag Race [RPDR] and the broader implications that this has for drag as an artform through exploration of the Neoliberal values of reality television and the policing of the female presenting body. For the sake of producing a concise argument as well as relevance to the gender debate the sources used will be in reference to North America, the UK, and European franchises of RPDR. The female voice is lost in the realm of drag media and the slowly emerging representation of cisgender female competitors in the UK, Europe, and Canada has caused great controversy. This, coupled with the advancing global political shift towards the right, suggests that now is the right time to conduct this research on the policing of the female and female presenting body both in and out of drag.

Acknowledgements

In loving memory of The Vivienne, Cherry Valentine, Jiggly Caliente, Chi Chi Devayne, and Sahara Davenport. And dedicated to the queer women who fought and continue to fight for our freedom of expression.

With special thanks to Dr Helen Gorrill who provided guidance and knowledge crucial to the completion of this paper.

Contents page

Abstract	Page 3
Acknowledgments	Page 4
List of Figures	Page 7
Introduction	Page 9
1. The United States of America	Page 11
1.1 The Neoliberal Politics of RPDR	Page 12
1.2 Female Inclusion and Gendered Aesthetics	Page 17
1.3 Judging Panel	Page 25
2. The United Kingdom	Page 26
2.1 Victoria Scone	Page 28
2.2 Gendered Aesthetics	Page 30
2.3 Judging Panel	Page 33
3. International	Page 35
3.1 Pandora Nox	Page 36
3.2 Clover Bish	Page 38
3.3 Velma/ Johnny Jones	Page 40
3.4 Gendered Aesthetics	Page 42
3.5 Judging Panel	Page 45
Conclusion	Page 49
Reference List	Page 50
Appendix 1 Positionality statement	Page 56

Appendix 2	Literature review	Page 57
Appendix 3	Manila Luzon's full statement	Page 59
Appendix 4	Victoria Scone's full statement	Page 60
Appendix 5.	Johnny Jones	Page 61
Appendix 6.	examples of misogynistic comments made against Velma Jones	Page 62

List of figures

- Figure 1.1 Bar graph showing RPDR USA contestants by gender
(Image description: bar graph showing RPDR USA contestants by gender: trans male-1, cis male/ non-binary- 197, trans fem (pre transition)- 23, trans fem (post transition)- 8, cis fem- 0.)
- Figure 1.2 Still image of Peppermint from the RPDR season 9 finale
RuPaul's Drag Race (2017) *Peppermint*, VH1.
- Figure 1.3 Manila Luzon's unaired menstrual pad gown
Manila Luzon (2019) '*Curves and Swerves Runway*', Instagram
- Figure 1.4 Womanhouse, Menstruation Bathroom by Judy Chichago, 1972
Judy Chicago (1972) *Menstruation Bathroom*, Womanhouse
- Figure 2.1 Victoria Scone's promo image for Drag Race UK
BBC (2021) *Victoria Scone promo image for Drag Race UK Season 3*, BBC.
- Figure 2.2 Danny Beard's entrance look on RPDR
BBC (2022) *Danny Beard's entrance look for Drag Race UK Season 4*, BBC
- Figure 2.3 Ginny Lemon's promo image for RPDR
BBC (2021) *Ginny Lemon's promo image for Drag Race UK Season 2*, BBC
- Figure 2.4 Michelle Visage performing Vogue on BBC Strictly Come Dancing
BBC (2019) *Michelle Visage*, BBC Strictly Come Dancing
- Figure 3.1 Pandora Nox's crowning look
Pandora Nox (2023) *Crowning look from Drag Race Germany*, Instagram
- Figure 3.2 Pandora Nox's drag king alter ego 'Daddy Noxx'
Pandora Nox (2023) *Glitter Party Runway look*, Instagram

Figure 3.3 Graph showing RPDR international winners by gender

Image description: graph showing RPDR international winners by gender and presentation (cis fem- 1, trans fem pre-transition- 2, trans fem post transition- 7, male/ non-binary- 62)

Figure 3.4 Clover Bish's promo image for Drag Race España

Atresplayer (2023) *Clover Bish's promo image for Drag Race España Season 3*, Atresplayer

Figure 3.5 Velma Jones' promo image for Canada's Drag Race

WOW Presents (2025) *Velma Jones' promo image for Canada's Drag Race Season 6*, WOW Presents

Figure 3.6 La Big Bertha

La Big Bertha (2025) *Finale Look photoshoot for Drag Race France All Stars*, Instagram

Figure 3.7 Piche

WOW Presents (2025) *Piche's promo image for Drag Race France All Stars*, WOW Presents

Introduction

This dissertation explores the gender politics of RuPaul's Drag Race [RPDR] through geographically specified analysis, focusing on the USA, the UK, and international seasons, with a chapter on each. Misogyny is defined as 'dislike of, contempt, or ingrained prejudice against women.' (Oxford University Press, 2025). Under patriarchy this 'ingrained prejudice' and male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) are inherent to media. With an almost entirely male cast, viewing femininity through a gay perspective, the female experience is exaggerated without female input. Hatred of women breeds hatred of femininity itself, experienced particularly by drag queens. Though drag queens face misogynistic oppression they can perpetuate patriarchal beliefs as discussed in this dissertation. Defined by Bishop, et al (2014), 'femi-negativity' is used to analyse vilification of femininity across the gender spectrum (Bishop et al, 2014). This is overwhelmingly under researched with sources limited to gay, cisgender male perspectives and those who oppose the artform entirely. RPDR has a monopoly over drag media and perpetuates the belief that women cannot be drag queens, creating boundaries to the reception of my own artistic practice, which centres the female body in drag. This dissertation is an original contribution from a lesbian perspective with personal drag experience. The paper's methodology employs mixed methods comprised of quantitative analysis of gender diversity and qualitative research. While I have aimed to remain objective my personal biases may affect the conclusion reached. Based on guidance from *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice* (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, p. 51-

68) I have included a positionality statement¹. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 discuss USA, UK, and international franchises respectively focusing on female contestants, gendered aesthetics, and judging panel.

¹ Appendix 1

The USA

This paper begins its research with the flagship franchise of RPDR, the USA, exploring gendered aesthetics, female inclusion, and politics. 224 contestants have appeared in the USA with hundreds more on the 16 international variants (The Loop (TV))². This creates a hypercompetitive environment, seeming to 'foreground authenticity and individuality, but it does so through a constructed lens that shapes its contestants into characters' (Pickett, 2024). The myth of meritocracy disregards factors which intersect to determine contestants' potential (Davis, 1981): gender, race, and class do not prevent success but can create serious disadvantages; this chapter discusses the impact of gender. RPDR has an almost complete monopoly over drag media and is often the public's only point of reference for drag. When the show fails to include women and normalises transmisogynist rhetoric this becomes problematic. Other available drag media fits the competition reality genre, the problems of which are discussed in this chapter.

² Figures are accurate as of 2025; this figure does not include the recently announced cast of Season 18.

The Neoliberal politics of RPDR

The modern drag industry relies on a system of individualism akin to Neoliberalism³ and capitalism, following the 'neoliberal turn' in the reality tv model (Kavka, 2018). In competition reality some contestants have an inherent advantage as their position in the social hierarchy impacts their ability to appeal to the widest audience. Reality competition shows exist as a microcosm perpetuating and upholding social divisions. The show effectively functions as a 'neoliberal workspace' (Pickett, 2024) where contestants are encouraged to "sell themselves" through personal branding challenges (e.g 'Mac Viva-Glam Challenge', 2009). RPDR's style of Liberalism aligns with Betty Friedan's belief in Bourgeois careerism (Friedan, 1963), Friedan's cultural ignorance was criticised by Bell Hooks in, *Ain't I a Woman*: highlighting Friedan's focus on the middle/ upper class white women who 'had willingly embraced the notion that it was better to be a housewife than to be a worker.' (Hooks, 1981, p 145-148) and the lack of acknowledgment of socio-economic factors preventing women from entering the workplace. Like Friedan, RuPaul fails to acknowledge the need for equity on the grounds of gender, race, and class (Davis, 1981). In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan argues that women's disenfranchisement is detrimental to society (Friedan, 1963) and limits prosperity for the individual and the

³ Neoliberalism is a governmental style which favours free-market capitalism and the freedom of the individual with limitations on government intervention and the rejection of a 'welfare state'; when applied to RuPaul's Drag Race this manifests itself in the emphasis placed on personal branding, expensive costuming, competition for success, and economic barriers.

macrocosm; this applies to the disenfranchisement of women on RPDR as their exclusion imposes limitations upon the artform. Correspondingly, Mary Wollstonecraft's key criticism of Liberal thought is its failure to recognise women as complete and rational beings of the same importance as men (Wollstonecraft, 1792). In this way RPDR perpetuates an unjust and restricted Liberal society in which women cannot access equal liberty or success.

RuPaul himself is exceptional at capitalist self-marketing. In conversation with Joan Rivers, Ru explains that he started drag as a 'gimmick' for his band Wee Wee Pole:

I was in a rock and roll band... and one of the gimmicks we would do... was to get in drag or we'd have a barbeque on stage, we'd do whatever it takes just, gimmicks you know. So I got into what was called "genderfuck" drag, which is sort of a reaction to the Reagan 80's ... People were like, "bitch, you're fierce" ... And as years went on and rent needed to be paid, I thought you know maybe I'll do that [drag]. (Charles, 2024)

The journey from "genderfuck", to "black hooker" (Rivers, 2024), to Ru's recognisable "Glamazon" drag (Rivers, 2024), mirrors social attitudes to artistic queer femininity: Ru recognises that, to succeed, her aesthetic must be palatable to straight white audiences. LA Times describes Ru as having '[adopted] a new philosophy: "Give. These. Bitches. What. They. Want.". And what "they" wanted...was over-the-top glamour, not the punk-inflected drag he'd been doing.' (Blake, 2020). Ru's aesthetic principals fluctuate to capitalise on socio-political trends; it is therefore not his primary concern to make art for art's sake but for economic benefit. Ru in this way is comparable to the most valuable male artists, i.e Damien Hirst criticised for 'the commercialization of his art and his reliance

on a team of assistants' (King, 2024) rather than originality and personal endeavour. Ru judges, then, contestants' monetary potential. When women's work is undervalued globally, they cannot succeed in this environment. It isn't surprising for an artform to diminish female contributions: *Women Can't Paint* assess 5,000 paintings sold globally (Gorrill, 2018) concluding that 'for every £1 a male artist earns for his work, a woman earns a mere 10p.' (Sieghart, 2022). In interview with Mary Ann Sieghart for BBC Radio 4's 'Recalculating Art' Gorrill described the disparity as "the most shocking gender value gap... in any industry at all." (Gorrill, 2022). The drag celebrated on RPDR serves as a reminder that performers who aren't white men with money must work ten times harder, just as women in art are undervalued at a ratio of 1:10 (Gorrill, 2018).

Mainstream drag appeals to straight women rather than the queer audience (Rivers, 2024) this audience then become the authority drag. Ru alienates an authentic queer audience in this way, appeasing 'his core audience: not urban gay men, but "smart, 13-year-old suburban girls."' causing RPDR to lean into exaggerated, recognisable femininity intended to mock patriarchal standards. However, reading this with Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author* in mind, this camp exaggeration of 'Woman' can equally uphold patriarchy when the irony is not clear to the viewer (Barthes, 1967). The line between criticism and conformity to the binary is blurred. Similarly to the modern art world, drag must appeal to the heterosexual male demographic to gain commercial success. In the 2018 Guardian article, *Are female artists worth collecting? Tate doesn't seem to think so*, Gorrill highlights the lack of gender equity in the Tate collection:

Tate fails to mention gender or equality in its collection policy, seeking only to collect works of art of outstanding quality as well as works of distinctive aesthetic

character or importance... it can be reasonably assumed the museum perceives that great works of art are mostly created by men. (Gorrill, 2018)

The attitude of Tate is exactly mirrored by RPDR: in defense of the show's casting practices Ru stated that production only screen for "Charisma, Uniqueness, Nerve, and Talent"⁴⁵ (Charles, 2018) (Crowley,2018). Suggesting that RPDR, much like Tate, believes that female contributions to the artform are weaker than men's. The gender binary is ingrained into the straight audience causing them to criticise performers who defy it. RPDR has never included a drag king as a contestant⁶ and actively discourages masculinity⁷. A glamorous aesthetic is marketable; however, the drag king is something more subversive. Season 5 contestant Alaska was criticised for appearing in masculine presenting drag: the judges asked why she appeared "out-of-drag" with Alaska responding, "I am in drag Ru" ('*Draggle Rock*', 2013). This implies that drag can only be a man dressed as a woman; a pattern exacerbated throughout the early 2010s seasons⁸, coming to a head with Season 7. Season 7 saw a shift in the ideals of RPDR's aesthetics with a broader discussion about what drag can be. Most notable is Kennedy Davenport's impersonation of Little Richard in the '*Snatch Game*'⁹ challenge: the first instance of a male character and the focus of the episode's storyline. Initially met with criticism, she won the episode opening a new avenue of gender expression ('*Snatch Game- Season7*',

⁴ The four qualities RPDR forefronts as necessary to win.

⁵ Original source is a since deleted post on X, formerly Twitter

⁶ Velma/ Johnny Jones is the first performer to be cast that has both a drag king and drag queen alter ego; however, they were primarily cast as Velma the queen.

⁷ This has begun to change in recent years, but its legacy is still apparent.

⁸ Examples of the pattern include Milk's treatment for wearing a faux beard and later appearing in male presenting drag on the runway on season 6; Michelle Visage calling Adore Delano's unpadded body 'hog-body' on season 6 and Violet Chacki's unpadded body 'boy-body' on season 7.

⁹ A celebrity impersonation improv challenge in the style of Match Game

2015). This has an immediate effect on RPDR with Thorgy Thor performing as Michael Jackson the year after (*'Supermodel Snatch Game- Season 8'*, 2016) and many more male characters being successfully portrayed.

Female inclusion and gendered aesthetics

This section discusses the USA's issues with transmisogyny and casual sexism. Gendered language on RPDR is condemned by transgender and cisgender women alike: in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows* the misogyny and transphobia of RPDR is criticised. The collection's introductory paper, 'RuPaul's Ambivalent Appropriation of Pop Culture', written by Jim Daems, dissects language used,

While this catchphrase [Charisma, Uniqueness, Nerve, and Talent- acronym CUNT] ... does destabilise gender binaries, it has been seen as misogynistic. Others have noted that the video 'She Mail' announcement to the contestants... can also be read as misogynistic and transphobic. (Daems, 2014, p.2-3)

; other repeated catchphrases such as “gentlemen start your engines and may the best woman win”¹⁰ (RuPaul's Drag Race, 2009) create a culture normalising offensive gendered language and binary ideas. Drag's foundation is gender deconstruction, yet patriarchal ideals can slip into this “fluid” space. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler reviews drag:

¹⁰ This announcement, and the “She Mail” video segment have since been altered due to public criticism from transgender drag performers, i.e Carmen Carrera.

drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of true gender identity (Butler, 1999, p.174)

, suggesting “true” gender identity does not exist within drag’s funambulist atmosphere. Advocating against the imposition of binary on drag as it defies expectations of performer’s own gender and the gender being performed.

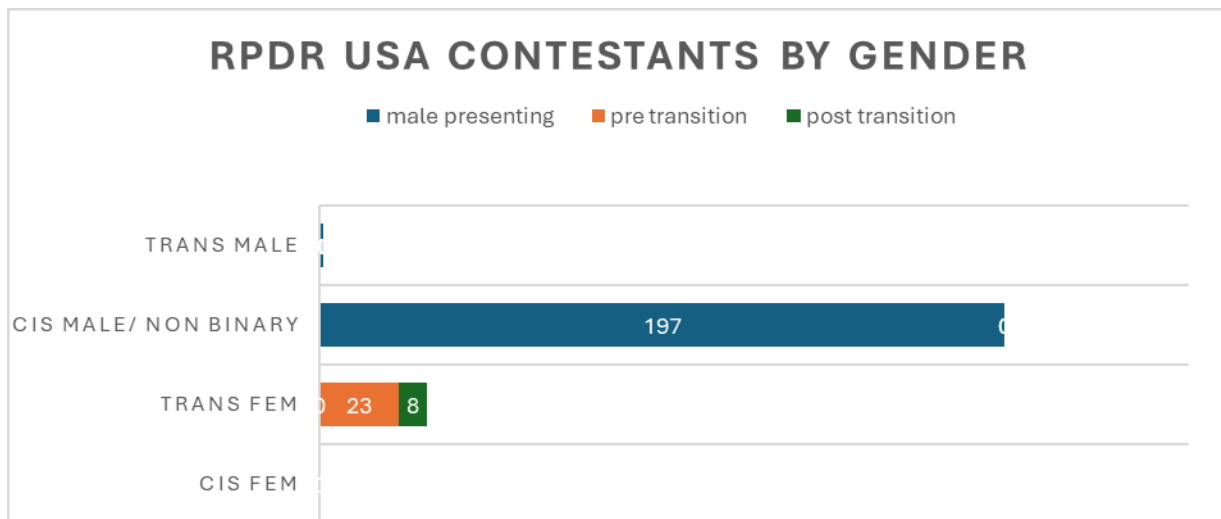


Figure 1.1 RPDR USA contestants by gender and presentation¹¹

With predominantly male presenting contestants and judges the female voice is entirely removed. There have been no cisgender female performers in the USA and most transgender women competed before socially or medically transitioning; they therefore presented as male at time of their casting and appearance. There is a total of 228¹² competitors on the US franchise of RPDR: 31/228 (13.6%) competitors are female and

¹¹ Image description: bar graph showing RPDR USA contestants by gender: trans male-1, cis male/ non-binary- 197, trans fem (pre transition)- 23, trans fem (post transition)- 8, cis fem- 0.

¹² There have been 224 individual competitors, this figure is counting those who appeared on two seasons twice: Shangela, Cynthia Lee Fontaine, Vanessa Vanjie Mateo. This figure does not account for the cast of Season 18, announced in December 2025 and competing in January 2026.

only 8/31 competed when publicly identifying as women. Only 25% of the women on RPDR were identified as such when on the show and a total 3.5% of all competitors were recognised as female at time of filming¹³. These figures indicate that drag itself has no gender issue as performers exist as women and drag queens in the real world; it is RPDR that fails to include women.

This research draws a distinction between transgender and cisgender women to expose the differing treatment of both groups and highlighting the intersection between transphobia and misogyny faced by trans queens. The history of trans women's involvement in RPDR USA is steeped in controversy. Despite trans women being crucial to drag's history RuPaul was initially against their inclusion. He argues that after medically transitioning a trans woman should no longer be able to be classed as a drag queen: as 'drag queen' and 'trans woman' are very different identities (Charles, 2018). While this is true it is not acceptable to exclude trans women from the artform of drag for their gender. The distinction made by Season 5 contestant Monica Beverly Hillz is that "trans is who I am; drag is what I do" (*Reunited!*, 2013) reinforcing the boundary between personal gender identity and artistic gender performance.

¹³ Figures are as accurate as possible and based on information that has been publicly shared by contestants at time of writing.



Figure 1.2 Peppermint, still from RPDR season 9 finale

The first openly female¹⁴ competitor was Season 9's Peppermint who had socially transitioned but had not undergone gender affirming surgeries; in Ru's opinion, 'she was identifying as a woman, but she hadn't really transitioned' (Charles, 2018). RuPaul stated that Peppermint 'probably' wouldn't have been allowed to compete if she had undergone medical transition (Charles, 2018):

You can identify as a woman and say you're transitioning, but it changes once you start changing your body... it changes the whole concept of what we're doing. We've had some girls who've had some injections in the face and maybe a little bit in the butt here and there, but they haven't transitioned. (Charles, 2018)

¹⁴ While some competitors had previously come out as transgender women while on the show, e.g. Sonique and Monica Beverly Hillz, Peppermint was the first to enter the competition already out as trans.

This introduces biological determinism¹⁵ to drag. Many male/ non-binary contestants have undergone surgeries to enhance their feminine appearance in drag; for trans women to be penalised simply for being women is female disenfranchisement. This transmedicalist¹⁶ view upholds the belief that a woman's identity and function revolve around her body and biology as explored by Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.35-84.). Ru believes drag loses its "danger" (Charles, 2018) when no longer applied to the male body; this discredits the oppression that women face because of their femininity or lack thereof. Peppermint responded to these comments in interview with Billboard magazine, "Unfortunately it won't be the first or last time we will hear a woman can't do something a man can. I'm out to change that." (Peppermint, 2018), highlighting RPDR's misogyny. Ru has since apologised and began to include transgender women more openly but the acceptance of transgender women and not cisgender women is dangerous. RPDR is complicit in perpetuating the belief that trans women are more comparable to gay men than to their cisgender female counterparts. With the inclusion of contestants Gottmik, a trans man, (season 13) and Maddy

¹⁵ Biological determinism is the belief that a person's biology determines their roles or positions within society. In this context afab women and those who undergo hormonal/ surgical gender affirming care are denied participation due to their biology.

¹⁶ Transmedicalism is the ideology which believes transgender people must undergo hormonal and surgical procedures in order to truly "become" a "real" man or woman. It is a binary ideology rooted in biological determinism.

Morphosis, a heterosexual cisgender man, (season 14), cisgender women are the only identity ostracised from the main franchise.



Figure 1.3 Manila Luzon's menstrual pad dress

Despite RPDR's politically conscious image, female specific issues are discounted. In 2019 (*Jersey Justice*, 2019) Manila Luzon was advised against wearing an outfit referencing menstruation. Described as being "in bad taste" (Luzon, 2019) Luzon shared an image of the intended look on Instagram¹⁷ with the caption

It's empowering to teach young women about their bodies, encourage them to celebrate them and to question people who tell them not to. (Luzon, 2019).

¹⁷ Appendix 3

Luzon stated on *Give it to me straight* that the look intended to show support to her young female fans and normalise menstruation on a public platform. She notes that “production is run by men” who are uncomfortable with menstruation despite the frequent “dick jokes, ass jokes” etc (Luzon, 2025). Production’s reaction denotes discomfort towards female biology, reinforcing women as the ‘Other’ (De Beauvoir, 1949). This is prevalent throughout all patriarchal institutions: in *Womanhouse* (1972) by the Feminist Art Program, Judy Chicago’s ‘Menstruation Bathroom’ challenges the cultural erasure of female biology through explicitly depicting the uncomfortable realities faced by women. For young women it seems ‘puberty [is] the moment of shame when signs of womanhood appear and must be hidden behind a locked bathroom door’ (Broude, Garrard and Brodsky, 1996, pp. 55–61) with minimal progress between Chicago’s 1972 artwork, and Luzon’s in 2019. Under patriarchy female biology is the unseen, taboo ‘Other’ (De Beauvoir, 1949) which must remain outside of “polite society”. This will be expanded into Chapter 3.

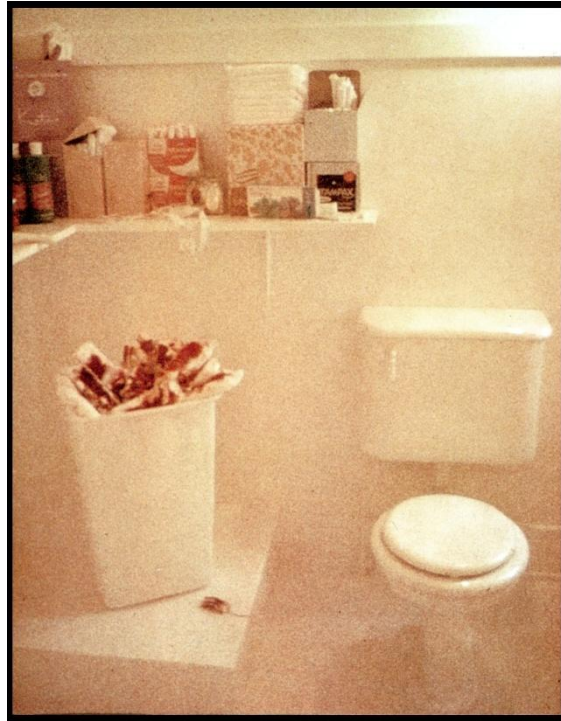


Figure 1.4 Womanhouse, Menstruation Bathroom by Judy Chicago, 1972

Judging panel

The lack of diverse casting limits the female voice to the judging panel. On the USA, UK, and Down Under franchises the cisgender female voice is represented solely by panellist Michelle Visage, who is discussed in chapter 2. The original USA panel leaned into the early 2000's reality television influences on the format (Rivers, 2024)¹⁸. The main influence being America's Next Top Model, a ruthless competition show that criticises and commodifies women's bodies. Season 1's panel consists of RuPaul, Merle Ginsberg¹⁹ and Santino Rice²⁰. The distinct lack of queer voices on the panel is a defining aspect of the show's early life and these fashion focused judges set a precedent that aesthetic and brand are paramount. Now more diverse, RuPaul remains the only drag queen on the panel²¹ cementing his monopoly over the artform.

¹⁸ America's Next Top Model and Project Runway were key reference points for early production.

¹⁹ Ginsburg is a heterosexual, cisgender woman who worked as a fashion editor.

²⁰ Rice is heterosexual cisgender man who competed on Project Runway and judged the 2006 Miss Universe Pageant.

²¹ The current rotating panel of the USA franchise includes comedian Ross Matthews, Queer Eye's Carson Kresley, trans activist T.S Maddison, choreographer Jamal Sims, stylist Law Roach, and Michelle Visage.

The United Kingdom

Neoliberalism and misogyny permeate all franchises. The UK cast the first but only cisgender woman characteristic of tokenism, not diversity. Emerging “inclusion” within the art world is about satisfying quotas rather than cultivating equity: in *Women Can't Paint* an anonymous artist is quoted ‘Since the 1990s, one trend I have observed is the reaction in museums to a politically correct sphere of female and other minority work.’ (Gorrill, 2020). In interview with *You and Me Podcast* Scottish drag queen Cherry West shared an interview question for RPDR, “What drag do you not like?” (West, 2025). West criticises applicants who state they love all drag, “That’s not going to get you on tv” (West, 2025); perfectly illustrating the impact of competitive settings on drag. Contestants are platformed with dramatic capacity in mind—the intended outcome being conflicting styles and values that divide the artform into competing factions rather than a collaborative artistic movement. Drag has inadequate visibility outside of competitive, capitalist driven television that skews its representation as authentic art is lost to the cut-throat, binary visions of television producers. Many UK performers have a complex relationship with RPDR; while celebrating its success they are negatively impacted by its politics as the American brand of hyper-capitalism taints the values of UK drag. Prior to RPDR many queens created their own costumes; with better access, i.e. Drag Race France’s La Grande Dame wearing custom Jean Paul Gaultier on the mainstage, (*RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs The World*, 2022) performers can elevate their looks. However, this creates a culture of exclusivity where many can’t afford to participate. RPDR’s politics align with

Betty Friedan²², who believes an individual's success is proportional to their personal effort with little acknowledgment of the intersection of race and economic factors; RuPaul expresses similar sentiments, often vehemently criticised as tone-deaf. The most notable example of this is the treatment of Joe Black on Drag Race UK Season 2 with RuPaul noticeably losing his temper, "Don't waste my time, I don't want to see any fucking H&M!" (*The RuRuvision Song Contest*, 2021). Prior to RPDR Joe Black was one of the most prominent drag performers in the UK but his aesthetic and means prevented him from translating this success to the format. Theoretically this would impact potential female and minority competitors as the UK has a very apparent gender pay gap, aligned with issues surrounding race and class (Young Women's Trust, 2023).

²² As discussed in chapter 1.

Victoria Scone



Figure 2.1: Victoria Scone's promo image for RPDR UK

As the first cis-female contestant²³ Victoria Scone platformed conversations that were previously depreciated or ignored entirely. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the structure of RPDR centres gendered language and binary rhetoric; however, differences in cast and production company lessen their impact. Victoria returned for Canada's Drag Race vs the World, broadcast in the UK on the BBC, and, on this platform, criticised the use of the term "fishy". Scone notes that the term, which has been the centre of much controversy, is banned on the BBC (Scone, 2022)²⁴: Originating in the Harlem ballroom scene, "fishy" is used to describe a transgender woman who could "pass" for a cisgender woman. There is debate over its specific origin as to whether it is referencing the genitalia of someone assigned female at birth, or the term "catfishing". On Canada's Drag Race vs

²³ When they competed Victoria was introduced as a cisgender woman, but they now publicly identify as non-binary; for the purposes of this research, I will be looking at the treatment they received when identified as a cisgender woman.

²⁴ Full post found in Appendix 4

the world (*'Snatch Summit'*, 2022) Scone criticised the casual misogyny behind fellow competitor Stephanie Prince's use of the term (Duncan, 2022). RPDR UK contestant Bimini publicised similar views on their Instagram in 2025 and was met with much criticism; they issued a statement

[fishy] plays into something reductive and harmful. It narrows femininity down to biology... when in reality, femininity (and drag!) is expansive, limitless, and not about passing or ticking boxes. // having respect for women also means questioning the harmful, misogynistic language we've normalised. Language evolves and so should we. (Bimini, 2025)

Many male fans perpetuate the myth of female hysteria (Breuer and Freud, 1895), believing Scone and Bimini's comments to be an overreaction, rather than unpacking the etymology of queer slang and its impact on women. The legacy of derogatory sexist terminology is intrinsically linked to the insults and slurs directed towards gay men. Gay men are oppressed in their relation to femininity as misogyny breeds femi-negativity (Bishop et al, 2014). For example, the notion of the fishwife, or, historically, the fish-fag is a key example of this phenomenon. Defined loosely as 'a woman who sells fish' (Cobham Brewer, 1898) the fish-fag is a brash, foul-mouthed, outspoken and fierce woman who acts independently of her husband. Initially used as a compliment in Scotland the term has evolved etymologically to become an insult against traits deemed "unladylike". The most commonly recognised gay slur directly stems from this notion of undesirable womanhood: 'The term 'faggot' originated in late 16th-century English as an insult directed at women, particularly older women' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023) and has since shifted to an insult against gay men due to femi-negativity (Bishop et al, 2014). Gay

male viewers' attitudes are an apparent example of the divisive politics of the oppressive class: aligning with Simone De Beauvoir's belief that the oppressive class create further divisions among minorities to form a hierarchy in which minorities "punch down", i.e White suffragists treatment of Black women (Davis, 1981) and in this case gay men's treatment of women.

Gendered Aesthetics

The issues surrounding gendered aesthetics aren't as apparent in the UK. UK drag is more ambiguous and less "polished" than RuPaul's 'Glamazon' aesthetic contributing to a more diverse cast in terms of expression but not gender equity. As such, Ru's ideals do not fit the existing UK drag culture.



Figure 2.3. Ginny Lemon's promo image for RPDR

On season 2, nonbinary performer Ginny Lemon was encouraged by Ru to explore a more feminine "sexy" mode of presentation, moving away from their high camp "nana" style (*'Who wore it best?'*, 2021). This can be read as encouraging versatility; however, it implies that drag mimicking a sexualized version of womanhood is preferable. Standards pushed to "look like a woman" have been criticised by feminist viewers recognising the policing of the female presenting form as an extension of the policing of women. As in

Ferdinand De Saussure's theory of the Sign, Signifier, and Signified, "drag queen" and "woman" as concepts can become difficult to separate. Drag queens, in the traditional sense, take the physical form (Signifier) of women and represent the concepts of femininity and womanhood (Signified); this combined reasonably makes the drag queen the Sign for woman. Therefore, criticism of drag queens becomes akin to criticism of women as they are representative of the same Sign (De Saussure, 1916). This is politically relevant in the UK and USA with trans bathroom bans increasing the policing of gendered aesthetics and prompting the question "what can a woman look like?". Criticised by Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey and Green MP Carla Denyer for lack of clarity or reliable plans for enforcement (Brooks and Walker, 2025) the ban "[makes] service providers the enforcers. Without training, it means their staff will be sent out to use their imagination as vigilante toilet police" as stated by Christine Burns (Brooks and Walker, 2025) the service provider then becomes the authority on who looks "woman enough" a dangerous and reductive approach to gendered aesthetics in the real world.

Season 3's Danny Beard, the first and currently the only bearded queen in the UK or USA, won their season signalling a possible shift toward a more fluid approach to gender but this is not conclusive proof of progress.



Figure 2.2 Danny Beard's entrance look on RPDR

Judging Panel



Figure 2.4: Michelle Visage on BBC Strictly Come Dancing, performing Vogue

Adequate judging representation is lacking in the UK. The panel comprising of Ru, Michelle Visage and comedians Alan Carr and Graham Norton; Alan and Graham having no experience in drag and Ru lacking British cultural knowledge— a critique Visage avoids as a part-time UK resident. Michelle Visage could be described as a drag queen in her own right but her identity as a cisgender woman leads fans to discredit her opinion. This attitude of many gay male fans disregards women’s history within drag and Ballroom culture²⁵; her name ‘Visage’ coming from her time competing in the Ballroom “face”

²⁵ The Ballroom culture of Harlem was an underground scene predominantly comprised of Black and Latin American queer people. Its origins trace back tot the 19th century drag balls held by William Dorsey Swan, an emancipated slave largely credited as the first American drag queen.

category (Visage, 2015). Ru and Michelle's friendship manifests itself in banter, with Visage being silenced or called a "man" for her drag-like appearance (*'RuPaul Roast'*, 2013). Within the context of a friendship this is not inherently negative; however, contextually it allows for a culture of misogyny. Visage consistently being on the receiving end of casually sexist jokes is problematic; she is the Other as the only cisgender woman, and prior to the addition of T.S Maddison in the USA, the only woman. Judges with no experience in drag face moderate criticism compared to Visage, the only difference between them is gender and sexuality—gay men seemingly get a pass to judge drag while Visage must prove herself. Women are held to a much higher standard than men, aligning with the gender pay gap statistics provided prior (Gorrill, 2022). This issue is apparent globally; most international judging panels are limited to one female voice discussed in depth in chapter 3.

Visage makes history as the first female host of any RPDR franchise globally, taking over from RuPaul as the host of *Drag Race Down Under* as of November 2024 (*Drag Race Down Under Season 4*, 2024); however, past contestants joined the panel reasserting that Visage could not provide judgement from the perspective of a drag queen, as a cisgender woman.

International

This chapter discusses the remaining cisgender female contestants, in order of appearance: Pandora Nox (Drag Race Germany, 2023), Clover Bish (Drag Race España, 2023), and Velma/ Johnny Jones (Canada's Drag Race, 2025)²⁶. Followed by discussion of gendered aesthetics across Europe: European drag closely aligns to UK drag where gender is less binary and there is a unique openness to gender presentation. Outside of the UK and Europe, Canada is the only other franchise to feature a cisgender female contestant—critically they are the only recognised drag king to ever be cast. It is, however, important to note that RuPaul's presence is limited to USA, UK, and Down Under (Oceania)²⁷. This chapter explores the gender makeup of international judging and the consistent lack of queer female representation. Ru's absence has a marked impact, though Neoliberalism and misogyny remain.

²⁶ The only competitor to compete as both a drag queen and a drag king simultaneously.

²⁷ Although as of the most recent season of RPDR Down Under Ru has resigned as host and Michelle Visage is now the main judge.

Pandora Nox



Figure 3.1 Pandora Nox's crowning look



Figure 3.2 Pandora in male presenting drag as 'Daddy Nox'

As a rule, franchises outside of the three hosted by RuPaul and Michelle Visage²⁸ seem to have a more open attitude to the gendered aesthetics of drag; on RPDR Germany, Pandora competed in multiple challenges and runways as her drag king alter ego 'Daddy Nox' with no criticism from the panel or fellow queens. Similarly, there is a rich catalogue of bearded queens in the European franchises, who will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter, which would emphasise that it is not the medium of drag that polices gender expression, but RuPaul and his ideals. Of the seventy-two winners across all franchises of RPDR, only nine identify as a woman or trans-femme²⁹. Only one is a cis-gender woman, Pandora Nox of Drag Race Germany. This is proof that when women are included, they can succeed, yet they are so rarely given the opportunity to, aligning with Friedan and Wollstonecraft's arguments for the enfranchisement of women (Friedan, 1963) (Wollstonecraft, 1792). In the contemporary art world, a study conducted by the

²⁸ USA, UK, Down Under.

²⁹ Trans-femme or transfeminine is an umbrella term for individuals who have transitioned to align more closely to femininity but do not associate with the binary concept of woman, most commonly but not always they are AMAB people who do not align with masculine ideals and aesthetics.

National Museum of Women in the Arts found that '[o]nly 29% of the winners of the Turner Prize...have been women' (National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2022) despite the majority of Fine Art graduates being female (National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2022). The percentage of women to compete on and win PRDR is significantly lower than this highlighting the severity of the gender gap in drag as a specific art form; yet there is no attempt to improve this disparity in any form of art.

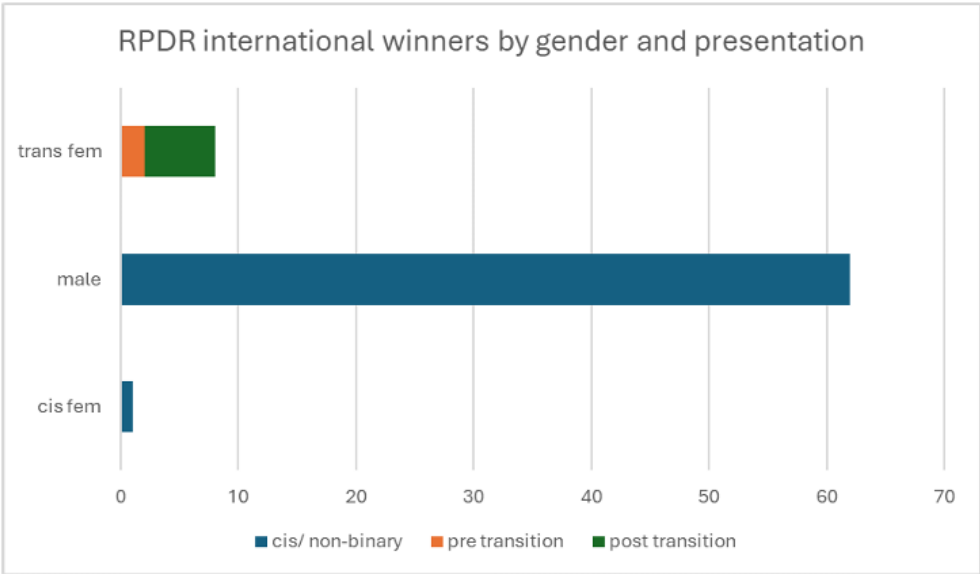


Figure 3.3: graph showing RPDR international winner by gender and presentation³⁰³¹

³⁰ Image description: graph showing RPDR international winners by gender and presentation (cis fem- 1, trans fem pre-transition- 2, trans fem post transition- 7, male/ non-binary- 62)

³¹ Not including the winners of Drag Race UK Season 7 or Drag Race España Season 5 as they had not yet concluded at time of researching.

Clover Bish



Figure 3.4 Clover Bish

The criticism against Clover Bish on Drag Race España was based on class not gender. Clover's runway presentations lacked "polish" in comparison to her peers with larger budgets. She was vehemently criticised for this, signifying the impact of intersectional characteristics on competitive success and is an example of the intersection of gender, race and class (Davis, 1981). As the only cisgender woman of colour Clover notably did not make it to the final whereas her white cis-female counterparts did³². The base of examples is too limited to truly judge if this treatment is the exception or the rule; however,

³² Pandora Nox won, Victoria Scone withdrew from her original season due to injury but made the final of Canada's Drag Race vs the World. As Velma's season has not concluded at time of writing this statement cannot fully consider a broader sample size.

racism and classism are noted issues within all RPDR franchises and global society (Hooks, 1981) suggesting that the same issues would befall other WOC³³.

³³ Women of Colour

Velma/ Johnny Jones



Figure 3.5 Velma Jones's promo image for Canada's Drag Race season 5

The most recent cisgender woman cast is Velma Jones making history as the first drag queen and drag king, with their alter ego Johnny Jones³⁴. Jones is primarily competing as their queen character thus reinforcing the necessity for performers to have a foundational relationship to “female impersonation”. Although contestants often experiment with male presenting drag, none have been recognised as a king. Jones was announced on the 20th of October 2025, competing from the 20th of November 2025; therefore, practical data is limited at time of writing. It is uncertain how prevalent Jones' drag king persona will be; however, this marks a hopeful change to the casting format.

³⁴ Appendix 5

In the '*Snatch Game*', Velma impersonates a male character and has appeared once in male presenting runway presentation³⁵(Canada's Drag Race Season 6, 2025): proving that drag kings suit the RPDR format and refuting the claims that kings would need their own show rather than integration. In an article for *Them*, this lack of inclusion is questioned, '[d]espite trying to diversify...over the past few years, RuPaul's Drag Race queens remain just that: queens' (Rodriguez, 2023). This article predates Jones' casting, but this issue still stands as Jones is not a stand-alone drag king. Drag king G-Clef adds that 'By showcasing only one type of drag, the franchise adds to the narrative and perception that drag kings are not as legitimate as drag queens' (Rodriguez, 2023) this additionally applies to the lack of cisgender female queens, as discussed in chapter 1. A real breakthrough is Velma's entrance look referencing menstruation, like Manila Luzon's un-aired runway; now that cisgender women feature their specific issues stop being taboo (Luzon, 2025). However, it is uncertain if this is indicative of RPDR globally or Canada alone. Moreover, Jones has been subject to many instances of sexist hate on social media³⁶, highlighting the withstanding legacy of RPDR's misogyny.

³⁵ As of 13.12.2025

³⁶ Examples of which are found in Appendix 6

Gendered Aesthetics

The competitive format invites criticism often taken to the extreme, driven by gendered aesthetics. The policing of the female body is central to global politics' shift towards stricter Conservatism; biological determinism and transmisogyny interconnect bringing into question what it means to be a woman. A woman is something state-owned (Atwood, 1985) and as she is defined by the government she is equally defined in all other aspects of life (De Beauvoir, 1949). Queer media is not exempt from this. Many TERFs³⁷ see drag as an insult to "real" women, introducing the neologism "woman-face", defined as

(Internet slang) Women's clothing or a female presentation adopted by men or people assigned male at birth, likened to blackface. (*Wikipedia, 2025*).

Femininity is culturally tied to biology and male servitude. The centring of men enforces "compulsory heterosexuality"³⁸(Rich, 1980) for queer women and it becomes expected for women to perform femininity "for" men. We expect queer men to be more feminine just as we expect queer women to be more masculine (Charles, 2018) and forget that the opposite can be true: there are male drag kings just as there are female drag queens. An example of queer reclamation of femininity is the Femme identity: defined as 'a form of

³⁷ Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists

³⁸ Compulsory heterosexuality or assumed heterosexuality is the phenomena by which heterosexuality is enforced as the accepted norm while homosexuality is the undesired Other.

femininity reclaimed by queer and culturally marginalized folks' (Hoskin, 2021) historically tied to feminine presenting lesbians and aligned more closely to drag queens than to heterosexual womanhood, 'the femme body is an anti(identity)body, a queer body in fem(me)inine drag' (Duggan and McHugh, 2008). That which is feminine is feared, particularly when in defiance of the masculine (De Beauvoir, 1949). *Feminizing Theory: Making Space for Femme Theory* similarly argues that 'society has not made cognitive space for the existence of femininity that is not aimed at men' (Hoskin, 2021, p 1-18). Many cisgender female queens who have no relation to the show experience backlash from RPDR fans, facing direct consequences of values projected by RuPaul. In these cases it is often assumed that all female drag queens are straight frustrating to many performers who are queer; this enforcement of compulsory or assumed heterosexuality applies more commonly to women than it does to men as the centring of men under patriarchy paints lesbianism as the most rebellious act (Rich, 1980) as well as asserting that cisgender heterosexual women have no right to reclaim their femininity through exploration of drag as drag is seen as tied to the gay male experience.



Figure 3.6 La Big Bertha's finale look for Drag Race France All Stars



Figure 3.7 Piche's promo for Drag Race France All Stars

These critics believe womanhood is disrespected by men's camp sensibilities; *Notes on Camp* (Sontag, 2018, p.1-2) examines the counter argument first printed in *The World in the Evening* that 'You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it, you're making fun out of it.' (Isherwood, 2012, p. 10). Drag queens experience femi-negativity and misogynistic beauty standards, an example of this gender policing is La Big Bertha. Bertha is a plus size bearded queen whose femininity and bodily shape has been so viciously judged that it affected her personal safety (Drag Race France All Stars, 2025). The fatphobic rhetoric fed to women is mirrored in the drag world: comparatively fellow bearded queen, Piche, faced far less aesthetic criticism seemingly due to her slim body type. In *Unshrinking: How to Face Fatphobia*, philosopher Kate Manne explores how oppressive body shaming affects people, particularly women 'in terms of not only our health but also our moral, sexual and intellectual status' (Manne, 2024, p78-99) which can be assumed to apply to aesthetic appeal in the case of Bertha. Heterosexual women are not the only group with a relationship to femininity and cannot be the only

ones to freely express it. Drag exists, and has always existed, beyond female impersonation but the legacy of RPDR perpetuates the idea that drag exists only as a man dressing as a woman; directly buying into a binary that the artform was always meant to defy. Applying Audre Lorde's theory that 'the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde, 1984), men alone cannot 'dismantle' prejudices against women through drag, oppressed genders must too be included if equality is to be achieved.

Judging Panel

RPDR USA and UK's judging panel has a monarchical feel, with Ru as the leader, bordering on dictatorial style control. Visage and the other rotating judges have the illusion of power yet Ru maintains singular authority over who wins and who loses each episode; in '*Glamazon by Colorevolution*' the winner of the challenge³⁹ expressed that they were in shock, to which Visage replied "So am I" (Visage, 2014) highlighting her lack of real control within the show and the differences between her and Ru's values ('*Glamazon by Colorevolution*', 2014). The repeated phrasing of "I have consulted with the judges, but the final decision is mine to make" (Charles) within the episode structure serves to emphasise Ru's position as the sole authority. Internationally, without the presence of RuPaul, this standard shifts.

The European judging panels have the same gender makeup as the USA and the UK. Drag Race Germany has drag queen Barbie Breakout as the main judge, American model

³⁹ Laganja Estranja

Dianne Brill, and activist Gianni Jovanovic as the other key judges⁴⁰. Drag Race España's main host is drag queen Supremme Deluxe with designer Ana Locking and film director duo Javier Ambrosi and Javier Calvo making up the panel. There are crucially no queer female voices on either panel. España differs to some degree as the jury vote democratically on which performer is saved, rather than the typical rule that the main drag queen host votes unanimously; this method is less Presidential/ monarchical than Ru's judicial style and breaks away from the implication that only another drag queen can judge the contestants. Canada's Drag Race is hosted by RPDR USA alum Brooke Lynn Heights (Season 11), and as of season 5⁴¹ features two cisgender female voices, Traci Melchor and Sarain Fox, giving a greater balance to the female voice as well as representing a more racially diverse panel which more accurately represents the racial makeup of the cast; however, Melchor is the only permanent female judge with Fox appearing on an intermittently rotating basis. This is more representative, but these voices are not diversified enough, and the female voice is still overruled by the male. Comparable to the art world in which The Art Investor's list of the 'richest art collectors in the world' is entirely male (Audrey, 2024) despite women, on average, spending '46% more than men on art and antiques in 2024' (Basel, 2025). Women's opinions on this artform are undervalued,

⁴⁰ Other European franchises follow the same trend but have been omitted due to word count constraints. Germany and Spain are the focus here as franchises with cisgender female contestants.

⁴¹ The judging panel for season 6 no longer includes Sarain Fox. Season 5 is used as a reference as season 6 is still airing at time of writing.

and their contributions ignored. While the panel have expertise in their fields, e.g. design, film, comedy, virtually none have a mandate to critique drag itself as a medium for art, other than the drag queen head judges and Michelle Visage.

RPDR Philippines seems to be the only real exception to the rule in terms of the gender makeup of their judging panel. While the panel still has a largely gay male majority, with two female judges, both transwomen, KaladKaren and the late Jiggly Caliente⁴², Drag Race Philippines provides a panel more accurately representative of the gender makeup of the cast as well as platforming more than one drag queen and queer female voice to the panel. However, the appointment of previous RPDR USA contestants to various international judging positions has been controversial. It emphasises the idea that drag queens hand-picked by RuPaul have greater authority due to their proximity to Ru herself. While some appointments have been received well due to experience and nationality⁴³ others have not been seen so positively. Valentina (season 9) was made host for RPDR Mexico's principal season with fans quick to point out her lack of fluency in Spanish at time of filming⁴⁴. Nicky Doll (season 12) hosts RPDR France despite leaving in 11th place on her original season. Similarly, RPDR Canada alum Rita Baga was appointed host of Drag Race Belgique despite her lack of cultural understanding due to French Canadian heritage. This strengthens RuPaul's monopoly over the world of drag and cements his ideals and aesthetics as status-quo being that international competitions are referential to the USA; an example of the phenomenon "Media Imperialism" (Ritzer,

⁴² Originally a contestant on RPDR USA Season 4 and the only drag queen beside the host on any international panel until her passing in 2025.

⁴³ E.g. Jiggly Caliente on Drag Race Philippines, and Brooke Lynn Heights as the host of Drag Race Canada

⁴⁴ Valentina has since ceased work on RPDR Mexico.

2012) a subcategory of cultural imperialism by which the USA dominate global media. Brooke Lynn and Nicky seem, however, to have differing ideals on gendered aesthetics and though their appointment does symbolically enforce Ru's monopoly (Ritzer, 2012) they do not enforce Ru's ideals through their own franchises.

Conclusion

This research has provided substantial evidence supporting the argument that RPDR is structurally misogynistic: exposing issues concerning the inclusion of cisgender women, the failure to adequately recognise transgender women as female, and the enforcement of a gender binary that favours men. The inclusion of cisgender women appears to be tokenistic rather than emerging gender equity. Due to word count constraints the paper has focused primarily on the issue of gender; however, the Neoliberal politics and biases of RPDR create many forms of oppression. The issues of race, class, and gender reassignment have been touched on to varying degrees, yet there is a vast discussion to be had surrounding the treatment of minorities. Much of the criticism on this subject is from a United States' perspective—this paper has provided a British perspective to the subject area. This dissertation has, therefore, highlighted a lacuna in knowledge which could be examined at MRes or PhD level, particularly in the current political climate.

Reference List

Audrey (2024) *11 Billionaires Who Are the Richest Art Collectors in the World, The Art Investor* -. Available at: <https://theartinvestor.co.uk/art-investor/11-billionaires-who-are-the-richest-art-collectors-in-the-world/> (Accessed: 14 December 2025).

Barthes, R. (1967) *The Death of the Author*. Fontana/Collins.

Basel, A. (2025) *The new power buyers: How women are rewriting the rules of art collecting* | *Art Basel, Art Basel*. Available at: <https://www.artbasel.com/stories/art-market-survey-of-global-collecting-2025-new-power-buyers-women> (Accessed: 14 December 2025).

BBC Radio 4 (2022) *BBC Radio 4 - Recalculating Art*, BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0019z2b> (Accessed: 11 April 2023).

Bishop, C. *et al.* (2014) 'The Association Between Gay Men's Stereotypic Beliefs About Drag Queens and Their Endorsement of Hypermasculinity', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 61(4), pp. 554–567. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.865464>.

Blake, M. (2020) 'Drag Race' host RuPaul has 'done everything.' Except Netflix, *Los Angeles Times*. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2020-01-02/rupaul-netflix-aj-and-the-queen-drag-race> (Accessed: 11 December 2025).

Breuer, J. and Freud, S. (1895) *Studies on hysteria*. Hogarth Press.

Broude, N., Garrard, M.D. and Brodsky, J.K. (1996) *The power of feminist art : the American movement of the 1970s, history and impact*. Harry N. Abrams, pp. 55–61.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

Chicago, J. (1972) *Menstruation Bathroom*.

Cobham Brewer, E. (1898) *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, archived.

Crowley, P. and Crowley, P. (2018) *RuPaul Responds to Backlash Following Hurtful Comments: 'You Are My Teachers'*, *Billboard*. Available at:

<https://www.billboard.com/culture/pride/rupaul-responds-backlash-hurtful-comments-8232231/>.

Daems, J. (2014) *The makeup of RuPaul's drag race: essays on the queen of reality shows*. Mcfarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, p.2-3.

Davis, A. (1981) *Women, Race & Class*. Random House.

De Beauvoir, S. (1949) *The Second Sex*. Oxford University Press.

De Saussure, F. (1916) *Course in General Linguistics*. Duckworth.

'*Draggle Rock*', (2013) RuPaul's Drag Race Season 5, Season 5 Episode 3 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. Logo tv, 11.02.2013 (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

Drag Race España Season 3, (2023). Atresplayer [Drag Race España], 16.04.2023

Drag Race France All Stars, (2025). France.tv [Drag Race France], 10.07.2025

Drag Race Germany, (2023). Paramount+ [Drag Race Germany], 05.09.2023

Duggan, L. and McHugh, K. (1996) 'A fem(me)inist manifesto', *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 8(2), pp. 153–159. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07407709608571236>.

Friedan, B. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1963.

'*Glamazon by Colorevolution*', (2014) RuPaul's Drag Race Season 6, Season 6 Episode 7 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. Logo tv, 07.04.2014 (Accessed: 18 October 2025)

Gørrill, H. (2018) *Are female artists worth collecting? Tate doesn't seem to think so | Helen Gørrill, The Guardian*. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/13/tate-female-artists-museum-diversity-acquisitions-art-collect> (Accessed: 8 December 2025).

Gørrill, H. (2020) *Women Can't Paint*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Hooks, B. (1981) *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Routledge, p.145-148.

Rhea Ashley Hoskin (2021) *Feminizing Theory*. Routledge.

Isherwood, C. (2013) *The world in the evening*. Farrar, Strous And Giroux, p. 10.

'*Jersey Justice*', (2019) RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars, Season 4 Episode 4 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. VH1, 04.01.2019 (Accessed: 18 October 2025)

Kavka, M. (2018) *Reality TV: its contents and discontents*, *Critical Quarterly*. Wiley-Blackwell. Available at:

https://www.academia.edu/114138864/Reality_TV_its_contents_and_discontents (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

King, E. (2024) *The King of Controversial Art: How Damien Hirst Shook the World of Contemporary Art* | *MyArtBroker* | Article, *MyArtBroker*. Available at:

<https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-damien-hirst/articles/the-king-of-controversial-art> (Accessed: 15 December 2025).

Lorde, A. (1984) *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. Penguin Books.

Luzon, M. (2019) 'Ru said my ORIGINAL Curves & Swerves Runway look was in "bad taste" and production told me to wear my ...' [Instagram], 07 January. Available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/BsUaPvenYcj/?hl=en> (Accessed: 18 October 2025)

'Mac-Viva Glam Challenge', (2009) RuPaul's Drag Race, Season 1 Episode 4 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. Logo tv, 23.02.2009 (Accessed 18 October 2025).

Maddy Morphosis (2025) *MANILA LUZON | Give It To Me Straight | Ep 58*, *YouTube*. Maddy Morphosis. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9ZmPtDaFQc> (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

Maggi Savin-Baden and Claire Howell Major (2013) *Qualitative Research*. Taylor & Francis, p. 51-68.

Manne, K. (2024) *Unshrinking*. Crown.

Melissa Rivers (2024) *In Bed With Joan Episode 8 RuPaul*, *YouTube*. Melissa Rivers. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPLBNr89oaY> (Accessed: 16 May 2025).

Mulvey, L. (1975) *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. London Afterall Books.

National Museum of Women in the Arts (2022) *Get the Facts About Women in the Arts, National Museum of Women in The Arts*. Available at: <https://nmwa.org/support/advocacy/get-facts/>.

'*New Wave Queens*', (2016) RuPaul's Drag Race Season 8, Season 8 Episode 4 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. Logo tv, 28.03.2016 (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

Oxford English Dictionary (2023) 'faggot, n. & adj. meanings, etymology and more', *Oed.com* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED//9131705415>.

Oxford University Press (2025) *Oxford Languages, Oxford Languages*. Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>.

Peppermint (2018) *Peppermint Responds to RuPaul's Apology Over Controversial Interview: Exclusive, Billboard*. Billboard. Available at: <https://www.billboard.com/culture/pride/peppermint-rupaul-apology-8233000/> (Accessed: 23 October 2025).

Pickett, C. (2024) *The Construction of Character and Authenticity on RuPaul's Drag Race*. University Honours Thesis. Available at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorstheses/1494/> (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

'*Reunited!*', (2013) RuPaul's Drag Race Season 5, Season 5 Episode 14 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. Logo tv, 06.05.2013 (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

Rich, A. (1980) 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Journal of Women's History*, 15(3), pp. 11–48.

Ritzer, G. (2012) *Media Imperialism, The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470670590>.

Rodriguez, M. (2023) *7 Drag Kings Explain Why They Should Finally Be Cast on 'RuPaul's Drag Race'*, *Them*. Conde Nast. Available at: <https://www.them.us/story/drag-kings-explain-why-they-should-be-cast-on-rupauls-drag-race> (Accessed: 14 December 2025).

RuPaul's Drag Race, (2009). Logo tv [RuPaul's Drag Race], 02.02.2009

'*RuPaul Roast*', (2013) RuPaul's Drag Race Season 5, Season 5 Episode 7 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. Logo tv, 11.03.2013 (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

Scone, V. VictoriaScone (2022) 'Y'all know fish is a banned word in the UK franchise of drag race right? Cast are categorically not allowed....' [X (formerly Twitter)], 03 December. Available at: [Victoria Scone BLACK TRANS LIVES STILL MATTER on X: "Y'all know fish is a banned word in the UK franchise of drag race right? Cast are categorically not allowed to say it. It was said in season 3 \(wasn't aired\). So much so that they changed Ru's OWN SONG in the finale of season 4 to 'flashy'. The BBC recognise this words meaning." / X](#) (Accessed: 23 October 2025).

Sieghart, M.A. (2022) '*Mind-blowing*': Why do men's paintings cost 10 times more than women's?, *the Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/aug/02/painting-gender-pay-gap-recalculating-art> (Accessed: 8 December 2025).

'*Snatch Game- Season 7*', (2015) RuPaul's Drag Race Season 7, Season 7 Episode 7 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. Logo tv, 13.04.2018 (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

'*Snatch Summit*' (2022), Canada's Drag Race vs The World, Season 1, Episode 2. BBC, 25 November)

'*Supermodel Snatch Game- Season 8*', (2016) RuPaul's Drag Race Season 8, Season 8 Episode 5 [RuPaul's Drag Race]. Logo tv, 04.04.2016 (Accessed: 18 October 2025)

The Loop (TV. "RuPaul's Drag Race." *RuPaul's Drag Race Wiki*, 2020, Available at: rupaulsdragrace.fandom.com/wiki/RuPaul%27s_Drag_Race. (Accessed: 15 November 2025)

'*The RuRuvison Song Contest*', (2021) RuPaul's Drag Race UK Season 2, Season 2 Episode 5 [RuPaul's Drag Race UK]. BBC, 11.02.2021 (Accessed: 18 October 2025)

Visage, M. (2015) *The Diva Rules*. Chronicle Books.

West. C, (2025), 'Cherry West: Youngest Drag Queen in Scotland' [Acast], 12 March. Available at: shows.acast.com/you-and-me-podcast/episodes (Accessed: 30 June 2025)

Wikipedia (2023) *List of Drag Race contestants*, Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Drag_Race_contestants.

Young Women's Trust (2023) *The income gap: The scale and causes of pay inequality for young women in the UK*, Young Women's Trust. Available at: https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/our-research/the-income-gap/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20415341704&gbraid=0AAAAADmbaaPoEhj6bU76VQt1_hBSX8Ozz&gclid=CjwKCAiA3fnJBhAgEiwAyqmY5RfGeSVqDn3ALbKK11EpjNXL4DN6e_-3LJSyt9OKfA8WDBcsmGA1TBoCWjcQAvD_BwE (Accessed: 15 December 2025).

Appendix 1

Positionality Statement

It is impossible to wholly irradicate personal bias from writing on this topic as a queer woman who formed her own gender identity through the idolisation of highly feminine drag queens primarily through RuPaul's Drag Race—only finding cisgender female drag queens at a later age. I grew up with the drag ideologies perpetuated through the gender and aesthetic biases of RPDR and only now am I fully unpacking the subliminal impact of this on my own perceived idea of what drag is. In many ways this early attitude of Drag Race towards women leaves me with a sense of injustice. This work does not intend to find a 'winner' between the varying franchises and representations of drag, it aims to create a discussion around the successes and shortcomings of the media as a whole, in terms of the discussion of drag in relation to gender. In many cases I use language which draws a distinction between transgender women and cisgender women, this in no way reflects my beliefs regarding the validity of a trans person's gender identity and is used solely to highlight the exclusion of cisgender women despite the inclusion of trans women in drag Race specifically. The paper will also draw distinction between transgender women before and after socially and/ or medically transitioning; this, again, is not indicative of my beliefs on the validity of a transgender person's identity who has not/ or does not wish to make a medical transition and is solely for the purpose of highlighting the believed/ assumed identity of a competitor at time of original broadcast. Trans women are women. Trans men are men. And nonbinary peoples' gender identities are real and valid. Although these are my personal beliefs they are not always reflected in the media and critics referenced in this dissertation.

Appendix 2

Literature review

As mentioned in the body of this dissertation, research on this subject is vastly limited. Most theory is from a gay male perspective and throughout the paper I have endeavoured to primarily include sources written by women.

'The Construction of Character and Authenticity on RuPaul's Drag Race', by Carli Pickett provides the basis for my research into the politics of reality television from the perspective of a BA Hons Film undergraduate thesis. This has expanded the academic background of my research through exploration of alternative schools of thought; however, this paper has its limitations. The source largely examines the treatment of queens on the basis of race, in particularly the way in which Latin American competitors become a monolith but Pickett largely disregards the issue of gender equity, stating that 'on the show, one of the most common categories that the queens get placed into... is ethnicity and culture' and alternatively discusses body type, i.e the 'big girl', as the other major mode of categorisation. This highlights the levels of oppression that minorities face, as I discuss in Chapter 1 yet as with most available research, it fails to explore the politics of gender.

The paper's sample size limits its relevance: despite being published in 2024 the paper focuses only on seasons of RPDR which were aired between 2014-2016. These years were pivotal in terms of gendered aesthetics and yet the paper does not consider the first openly female contestant (Peppermint). Nor the first female winner as it is also limited by a focus on the USA franchise only. An issue that I have rectified in this dissertation. Pickett analyses the impact of Michelle Visage as the only cisgender woman on the show and her impact on the enforcement of gender binaries; particularly in seasons 6 and 7 in relation to Milk and Violet Chatcki. Yet does not expand upon this effectively- a gap which I have aimed to fill with this paper's research.

Due to the overwhelming lack of specific research on the topic I have applied feminist, economic, and media theorists work to RuPaul's Drag Race, e.g. Betty Friedan, Bell Hooks, Angel Davis, etc. This provides a wider basis of female voices and examines the potential socio-political factors at play; however, much of this research base lacks a direct perspective on drag as an artform and explores the treatment of women in other areas. This lack of specificity affects the relevancy of sources, yet their application is successful in illustrating the link between women's treatment in society (and the contemporary arts) to RPDR's treatment of women. The paper can, therefore, critique RPDR as a microcosm that directly perpetuates the misogyny of the macrocosm.

Appendix 3

Manila Luzon's unaired menstrual pad runway



manilaluzon 353w

Ru said my ORIGINAL Curves & Swerves Runway look was in "bad taste" and production told me to wear my back up.

I was really looking forward to wearing this gown that I think celebrates a perfectly normal human experience! Many of my fans are young women who may feel pressured by society to be embarrassed by periods. It's empowering to teach young women about their bodies, encourage them to celebrate them AND to question people who tell them not to!

My goal with this look was to normalize menstruation by looking sick'ning even if I was on my period! Instead, i decided to wear the beautiful quilted dress you saw in the episode because it is not my show, it's Ru's. But

because of Ru, I have my very own platform to speak for myself and show you all my interpretation! ❤️ my Period Gown is by @theladyhyde

Appendix 4

Victoria Scone's Twitter post regarding use of the term 'fishy'



The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter post from Victoria Scone. The post is titled "BLACK TRANS LIVES STILL MATTER" and includes the text: "Y'all know fish is a banned word in the UK franchise of drag race right? Cast are categorically not allowed to say it. It was said in season 3 (wasn't aired). So much so that they changed Ru's OWN SONG in the finale of season 4 to 'flashy'. The BBC recognise this words meaning." The post has 13.8K likes and 252 replies. The user's profile picture shows a drag queen with blonde hair and a blue top. The Twitter logo is visible in the top right corner of the post.

 **Victoria Scone** **BLACK TRANS LIVES STILL MATTER** 
@VictoriaScone · [Follow](#)

Y'all know fish is a banned word in the UK franchise of drag race right? Cast are categorically not allowed to say it. It was said in season 3 (wasn't aired). So much so that they changed Ru's OWN SONG in the finale of season 4 to 'flashy'. The BBC recognise this words meaning.

4:25 AM · Dec 3, 2022 

 13.8K  Reply  Copy link

[Read 252 replies](#)

Appendix 5

Johnny Jones



Appendix 6

Examples of misogynistic comments left on Velma Jones' social media. Original TikTok video featuring Jones' performance from Canada's Drag Race season 6 episode 1 [aired November 2025]

