

‘THE NEXT DRAG SUPERSTAR’: EARNING AND MAINTAINING LEGITIMACY IN RUPAUL’S GLOBAL EMPIRE

Dr Violet Thompson

Cardiff University

ABSTRACT

Since its conception in 2009, the *Drag Race* franchise has grown exponentially. Now totalling fourteen global localisationsⁱ, not including its numerous ‘All Star’ spin-offs, it has emerged as a mainstay in both representing and defining contemporary drag culture. As this empire has continued to grow, consequently, debates regarding the role of the franchise in policing drag performance and artistry have emerged. In becoming an increasingly mainstream purveyor of drag culture, during a time in which drag performance finds itself under political attack and debate, the extent to which *Drag Race* legitimises, and by-extension, delegitimises performers, requires greater critique. Therefore, this article will assess the extent to which three drag performers, each of whom achieved notable success prior to competing in the *Drag Race* franchise, negotiated legitimacy throughout their appearances. These being, Baga Chipz, a British performer from *RuPaul’s Drag Race UK* Season 1, Art Simone, an Australian performer from *RuPaul’s Drag Race Down Under* Season 1, and Pangina Heals, a Thai performer from *RuPaul’s Drag Race UK vs. The World* Season 1. Through analysing the framing of previously successful drag performers within the confines of *Drag Race*, it is argued that the franchise operates to delegitimise drag which does not conform to its Americanized standards. Furthermore, performers, in spite of their successful careers outside of the competition, are framed as illegitimate or unsuccessful, until these standards are achieved. This has profound consequences for representations of drag performers within the mainstream and drag culture more broadly.

KEYWORDS

Drag, RuPaul’s Drag Race, Reality Television, Queer Media, Mainstreaming

CITATION

Violet Thompson, ‘The Next Drag Superstar’: Earning and Maintaining Legitimacy in RuPaul’s Global Empire’, *Intersectional Perspectives: Identity, Culture, and Society*, 4:5 (2025), pp. 116-159, <<https://doi.org/10.18573/ipics.148>>

ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION

8 April 2025

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.en>

To submit your article to our journal, and view related articles, please visit:
<https://ipics.cardiffuniversitypress.org>

Introduction

RuPaul's Drag Race, the reality-competition series in which drag performers compete for the title of the 'Next Drag Superstar', has experienced tremendous growth since its initial conception. Originally airing on the LGBTQ+ channel *Logo* in the United States, the series moved to VH1 ahead of its ninth season¹, before subsequently changing to MTV prior to its fifteenth.² Concurrently, this growth has seen the emergence of numerous spin-offs, both within the United States, and worldwide. Originating with *Drag Race Thailand* in 2018, the franchise has seen over a dozen localisations, including those in France, the Netherlands, The Philippines, and, most recentlyⁱⁱⁱ, Germany, Mexico, and Brazil.³ Far from its humble beginnings, the *Drag Race* franchise has since crowned over fifty 'Next Drag Superstars', and spans five continents. Central to this expansion is RuPaul himself – the executive producer of the franchise, and host of the US, UK, and Australian/New Zealand editions of the show. As the figurehead of the franchise, RuPaul has held a pivotal role in legitimising, and by extension, delegitimising drag performances within mainstream popular culture. The *Drag Race* brand has evolved through this global expansion, shifting from simply representing drag, to practices which Campana and Duffy argue are “re-signifying drag queen practices by providing a new/right ‘way of doing drag’...We see the show shift from introducing drag and embracing its role as a cult hit show, to adopting the role as the main purveyor of drag culture”.⁴

Subsequently, academic scholarship surrounding its content have similarly evolved. Prior to its gradual mainstreaming, studies considered its representations of race⁵, gender

¹ Nellie Andreeva, “‘RuPaul’s Drag Race’ Moves From Logo to VH1, More Viacom Show Shifts to Come?” [online], *Deadline*, 20 March 2017 <https://deadline.com/2017/03/rupauls-drag-race-moves-logo-vh1-viacom-series-shift-1202032976/> [accessed 5 November 2023].

² Selome Hailu, ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race Moves to MTV, Launches “Global All Stars” and Editions in Brazil, Germany, Mexico’ [online], *Variety*, 2022 <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/rupauls-drag-race-mtv-global-all-stars-1235457468/> [accessed 5 November 2023].

³ Lynette Rice, ‘Drag Race: New Editions Planned for Brazil, Germany and Mexico’ [online], *Deadline*, 2022 <https://deadline.com/2022/12/drag-race-new-editions-planned-for-brazil-germany-and-mexico-1235196207/> [accessed 5 November 2023].

⁴ Mario Campana and Katherine Duffy, ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race: Between Cultural Branding and Consumer Culture’, in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul’s Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), p. 118 <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.10>.

⁵ Long T. Bui and Sabrina Strings, “‘She Is Not Acting, She Is’: The Conflict Between Gender and Racial Realness on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*’, *Feminist Media Studies*, 14.5 (2014), 822–36 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2013.829861>; Joanna McIntyre and Damien W. Riggs, ‘North American Universalism in *RuPaul’s Drag Race*: Stereotypes, Linguicism, and the Construction of “Puerto Rican Queens”’, in *RuPaul’s Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 61–75 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_5; Eric Zhang,

performance⁶ and transgender identity⁷. However, this mainstreaming has seen increased attention regarding how the franchises popularity is impacting upon local drag communities. This shift has been particularly identified through a celebrification of drag culture⁸, the growth of neoliberalism within the franchise and fandom⁹, and its sanitization of drag performances¹⁰. It is incumbent on scholars to continue this examination, through analysing the franchise in a global context – this being a significantly underrepresented area of academic inquiry. This article will argue that an emerging consequence of the mainstreaming of these international localisations is

'Memoirs of a GAY! Sha: Race and Gender Performance on *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Studies in Costume and Performance*, 1.1 (2016), 59–75 <https://doi.org/10.1386/scp.1.1.59.1>.

⁶ Kameron C. Cavazos and Jorge, C. Gonzalez, 'Serving Fishy Realness: Representations of Gender Equity on *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 30.6 (2016), 659–69 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1231781>; Amy L. Darnell and Ahoo Tabatabai, 'The Werk That Remains: Drag and the Mining of the Idealized Female Form', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 91–101 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_7; Eir-Anne Edgar, 'Xtravaganza!: Drag Representation and Articulation in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Studies in Popular Culture*, 34.1 (2011), 133–46

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23416354>; Mary Marcel, 'Representing Gender, Race and Realness: The Television World of America's Next Drag Superstars', in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. by Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), pp. 13–30.

⁷ Alexis Brown, 'Being and Performance in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Critical Quarterly*, 60.4 (2018), 62–73 <https://doi.org/10.1111/crq.12439>; Laurie Norris, 'Of Fish and Feminists: Homonormative Misogyny and the Trans* Queen', in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. by Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), pp. 31–48; K Woodzick, '"Heather Has Transitioned": Transgender and Non-binary Contestants on *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gaggling?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 63–80 <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.8>.

⁸ Zeena Feldman and Jamie Hakim, 'From *Paris is Burning* to #dragrace: Social Media and the Celebrification of Drag Culture', *Celebrity Studies*, 11.4 (2020), 386–401 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765080>; Laura Friesen, 'Legend, Icon, Star: Cultural Production and Commodification in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gaggling?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 156–74 <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.12>; John Mercer and Charlie Sarson, 'Fifteen Seconds of Fame: *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Camp and "Memeability"', *Celebrity Studies*, 11.4 (2020), 479–92 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765102>.

⁹ Brendan Canavan, 'Post-postmodern Consumer Authenticity, Shantay You Stay or Sashay Away? A Netnography of *RuPaul's Drag Race* Fans', *Marketing Strategy*, 21.2 (2021), 251–76 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593120985144>; Ray LeBlanc, 'RuPaul's Franchise: Moving Toward a Political Economy of Drag Queening', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gaggling?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 131–55 <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.11>; Rachel O'Connell, '"Labouring in the Image": Celebrity, Femininity, and the Fully Commodified Self in the Drag of Willam Belli', *Celebrity Studies*, 11.4 (2020), 447–63 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765085>.

¹⁰ Niall Brennan, 'Contradictions Between the Subversive and the Mainstream: Drag Cultures and *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 29–43 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_3; Ash Kinney. d'Harcourt, '"Change the Motherfucking World!": The Possibilities and Limitations of Activism in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gaggling?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 27–44 <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.6>; Aaron J. Stone, 'How *Drag Race* Created a Monster: The Future of Drag and the Backward Temporality of *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gaggling?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 81–107 <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.9>.

their conformity to Americanised standards of drag. This is used as a means of both legitimising and delegitimising drag performers.

To achieve this, this article will draw upon a qualitative textual analysis of the first season of three international localisations of the *Drag Race* franchise. These being, *UK*, *Down Under* and, *UK vs. The World*. Significantly, each of these seasons act as the inaugural seasons for RuPaul-hosted international spin-offs, this allowing for a unique perspective regarding the production choices of the franchise, and how it opted to represent the drag cultures which these seasons purport to serve. Specifically, the treatment of three contestants, each representing one of these seasons, will be discussed as case-studies. These being, Baga Chipz, runner-up on UK season one¹¹, Art Simone, runner-up on DRDU season one¹², and Pangina Heals, contestant on UKvsTW season one.¹³ Chipz, Simone and Heals each achieved successes and notability in their respective drag communities prior to their appearances within the franchise, which will be discussed in each section of this article. Therefore, they are positioned here, not just as successful drag performers within the franchise, but visible within and as representing their respective cultures.

In building upon existing scholarship discussed thus far, it is necessary to assess how these themes are manifested within these global spin-offs. The contemporary status of representing drag in the mainstream is both complex and contentious. Drag remains the subject of politicisation and protest, including within the United Kingdom¹⁴ and United State.¹⁵ By assessing these seasons, and the case studies of Chipz, Simone and Heals, a better understanding of how drag is represented in these global, and local contexts, can be understood. Through assessing what is legitimised, and

¹¹ BBC, *Baga Chipz* [online], 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/rpdr-2019/baga-chipz> [accessed 5 November 2023].

¹² John Boone, "'RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under': Meet the Queens of Season 1' [online], *ET Online*, 2021 <https://www.etonline.com/rupauls-drag-race-down-under-season-1-cast-161780> [accessed 5 November 2023], para. 6.

¹³ BBC, *RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World: Meet The Queens* [online], 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/rupauls-drag-race-vs-the-world#panginaheals> [accessed 5 November 2023].

¹⁴ Maya Oppenheim, 'Police Called as Protestors Storm Children's Story Hour Hosted by Drag Queen at Local Library', *The Independent*, 27 July 2022 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/drag-queen-reading-library-protests-b2132299.html> [accessed 5 November 2023]; Harry Taylor, 'One Arrested amid Tate Britain Protest over Drag Queen Children's Event', *The Guardian*, 11 February 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/11/tate-britain-protest-drag-queen-childrens-storytelling-event-arrest> [accessed 5 November 2023].

¹⁵ Jonathan Allen, 'US Judge Throws Out Texas Ban on Drag Acts, Calls It Unconstitutional' [online], *Reuters*, 26 September 2023 <https://www.reuters.com/legal/us-judge-throws-out-texas-ban-drag-acts-calls-it-unconstitutional-2023-09-26/> [accessed 5 November 2023]; Adam Gabbatt, "'Subtle and Sinister': Republicans' Anti-Drag Crusade Seen as Assault on LGBTQ+ Rights', *The Guardian*, 19 September 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/19/us-states-attack-drag-shows-lgbtq-rights> [accessed 5 November 2023].

which drags remain delegitimised, the means in which both drag performance is represented and understood by mainstream audiences, can also be gained. Overall, this article will argue that this legitimacy is negotiated through an Americanised drag, in three specific ways. Chipz' negotiation of legitimacy with class, Simone's negotiation of legitimacy with notoriety, and Heals' negotiation of legitimacy with their Thai 'superstar' status. Through these contestants, it can be understood how the franchise both undermines contestants who fail to match Americanised drag within these cultural contexts, this maintaining the superiority of both RuPaul and the US series more broadly.

Defining Cultural Drag

When discussing drag culture, it is both inappropriate and unrepresentative to attempt to define a particular country, or even cities drag aesthetics and performance style. British drag, much like American, Australian, or Thai drag, is richly diverse, hyperlocal, and must be viewed as a wide spectrum which one television franchise cannot possibly purport to wholly represent. Therefore, in discussing these examples, the drag performed by Chipz, Simone and Heals will be defined in relation to their geographic location and cultural background, but specifically in their own interpretations of these themes. This section will briefly define British and American drag within the context of this paper, to introduce the cultural nuances at work here. When considering 'British' drag performed by Baga Chipz, this refers to the London-based, largely working-class inspired drag which Chipz embodies. Defining herself as a "pub queen", Chipz states in their casting interview for *Drag Race UK* that her drag represents a "tart with a heart...not one of these gorgeous beautiful Kate Moss lookalikes drag queens. My style is more cabaret, old school, sequin frocks, Shirley Bassey, Danny La Rue, Lily Savage kind of drag. I'm common as muck, Baga Chipz from Walthamstow".¹⁶ In their guide to the history of British drag, Hall argues that queer working-class histories and drag are closely interlocked in the UK, with "British drag is rooted in working-class history: think Blackpool's Funny Girls revue, decades-old *X Factor* stars dusting off their gowns to perform in local pantomimes...Drag in the UK in particular has long been DIY and decidedly punk, and these scenes remain today".¹⁷ It is these understandings of the drag which Baga represents – hyperlocal to her London scene yet entrenched in the wider history of drag as working class within the UK, which is how British drag is understood throughout this article.

¹⁶ BBC, *Baga Chipz* [online], 2019, para. 1.

¹⁷ Jake Hall, 'The dA-Zed Guide to British Drag' [online], *Dazed Digital*, 2023 <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/60761/1/the-da-zed-guide-to-british-drag-jacob-bloomfield> [accessed 30 October 2024], p. 49.

Similarly, it is impossible to define an 'Americanised' drag. It would also be unwise to argue that a difference in understandings of class, while pronounced, is a sole or consistent difference between British and US drag. Therefore, rather than attempt to provide an understanding of 'American' drag, this article defines the 'Americanisation' of drag as a homogenisation – or the platforming of US drag as understood by the original iteration of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. This drag is defined by Sadler as representing a heightened form of 'polish', this meaning "experienced queens who are often from the pageant circuit and who showcase glamorous, well-tailored runways that conform to conventional standards of feminine beauty".¹⁸ Whereas personality remains an important factor in the judgement of contestants, this form of polished, pageant drag within the US series, can be interpreted as "artificially polite, emotionally distant, calculated, and rehearsed".¹⁹ Examples of successful contestants who embody this particular drag style or have received praise for this perceived 'polish' which is platformed and celebrated within the US series, include winners BeBe Zahara Benet, Tyra Sanchez, Chad Michaels, Bianca Del Rio, Violet Chachki, Trinity the Tuck, Jaida Essence Hall and Sasha Colby. Whereas exceptions to this do exist, and contestants can be seen to successfully challenge the polished, pageant drag which is most visible within the series – including winners Sharon Needles and Yvie Oddly, these examples are far fewer and uncommon by comparison. Therefore, rather than attempt to define US drag as unvaried, it will instead be understood in the context of *Drag Race*, and the drag it *chooses* to celebrate.

It should, however, be recognised that the Americanised drag perpetuated by the franchise is one also deeply informed by ballroom culture within the US, itself deeply connected to black and Latinx performers. However, institutional barriers to success, recognition and legibility exist within the franchise, despite these diverse histories. For example, Vesey argues that "opportunities for professional advancement are bestowed on white and light-skinned contestants at the expense of their dark-skinned counterparts, who often must win lip sync battles to stay on the show".²⁰ Ballroom and pageant culture, while informing the drag within the franchise, is negotiated and repackaged. Directed by RuPaul's own branding, "contestants often modify the subversive or commercially unpalatable aspects of their subcultural practices within conventional beauty standards", with these opportunities "rarely available to dark-skinned, large-bodied,

¹⁸ Landon Sadler, "'If You Can't Love Yourself, How in the Hell You Gonna Love Somebody Else?': Care and Neoliberalism on *Queer Eye*, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and *Pose*", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 55.4 (2022), 799–819 (p. 804) <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.13153>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Alyxandra Vesey, "'A Way to Sell Your Records': Pop Stardom and the Politics of Drag Professionalization on *RuPaul's Drag Race*", *Television and New Media*, 18.7 (2016), 589–604 (p. 591) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476416680889>.

transgendered, rural, or multilingual cast members”.²¹ The racialised aspects of the Americanised drag represented here are important, as it is not just US mainstream culture which defines the drag which is successful within the franchise, but the barriers of opportunity which are inherent to this culture itself.

The globalisation of Drag

The mainstreaming of drag described here is situated in a wider globalisation of drag, specifically that which is validated by the *Drag Race* franchise. As Edward and Farrier argue, “it does not take more than a glance around the globe to see drag’s shift, mainly (though by no means only) in Western contexts, from underground and counterculture to mainstream culture”.²² Whereas drag remains, as they argue, as “multiple and creative as the forms are original...it is an ever-changing scene”, and it is essential to consider drag outside of the realm of *Drag Race*, the focus of this article remains in the globalisation of its specifics and practices.²³ In their study of the influence of the franchise on New York City’s drag scenes, Westerling identified a complex, often paradoxical relationship.²⁴ Here, this new culture “is growing with new performers, this has also led to decreasing financial reward per engagement”, illustrating that this globalisation and mainstreaming does not translate to equal opportunity or success for performers.²⁵ Equally, the standards and aesthetics rewarded by *Drag Race* are influencing these local scenes, with performers replicating what is seen to be successful within this mainstream platform. Notably, it “creates and perpetuates a culture of aesthetic ‘feedback’ between the show and live performers, where drag queens often perform *for* social media and the casting directors of the television show, following norms set by former contestants...rather than building a deep interest in the artistic prospects of drag itself”.²⁶ This culture illustrates what is described as not just a mainstreaming of drag, but a mainstreaming and globalisation of *Drag Race* drag.

This understanding of the standards perpetuated by *Drag Race* cannot be solely understood in relation to aesthetic and performance influences, but also as part of a wider culture

²¹ Ibid.

²² Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier, ‘Drag: Applying Foundation and Setting the Scene’, in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers – Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 1, ed. by Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), pp. 1–17 (p. 6) <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082977.ch-001>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kalle Westerling, ‘Race for the Money: The Influence of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* on the Livelihood and Aesthetics of New York City’s Drag Culture’, in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers – Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 1, ed. by Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), pp. 33–44 <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082977.ch-003>.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 34.

²⁶ Ibid.

in which performers and audiences understand drag, and the ideologies which inform it. Stokoe defines "RuPaul's doctrine" as an "emphasis on creativity, fluidity and play", while simultaneously being "fundamentally unwilling to consider certain perspectives, such as the idea that misgendering people is unacceptable".²⁷ Additionally, O'Connell describes former US contestant Willam's career, as indicative of a transformation of the idea of drag success to "self-commodification, self-objectification, and abjection", with these ideologies, to varying degrees, presented as avenues for mainstream success.²⁸ For example, perhaps the most successful contestant in embodying these ideas of self-commodification, Trixie Mattel, who "returned to the show for *All Stars*...her performance improved in the ways that *RPDR* specifically values, showcasing that she began reflecting *RPDR*'s highly commodifiable, marketable version of queer culture".²⁹ Additionally, in their study of RuPaul's keynote addresses at the annual *Drag Con* conventions, Schottmiller identifies an evolution – whereby "RuPaul's consumerism loses its campy, political edge and becomes more similar to neoliberal capitalism as the *Drag Race* brand gains mainstream popularity".³⁰ This is complex, as through situating himself as a "guRu" or "Oprah-esque life-advice figure", this may view audiences to view and expect all performers to replicate these ideologies, and "may create opportunities for harm among audiences as much as they create opportunities for campy, queer subversion".³¹

In discussing the globalisation of drag through *Drag Race*, it is nevertheless important to recognise that this does not *necessarily* lead to homogenisation, but can reveal complex, uneven responses from local cultures. For example, Binnie argues against reductionist understandings of agency, acknowledging that a simplistic description of the globalisation of sexuality fails to acknowledge "cyberqueer spaces", which offer a "more nuanced discussion that treads a careful line between affirmation of the utopian possibilities of queer globalization and attention to the questions of material inequalities in terms of access to technology".³² Additionally, Povinelli and Chauncey argue for a subjectivity in understanding the effects of globalisation, describing the limitations of "the literature on globalization is its tendency to read social life off external social

²⁷ Kayte Stokoe, 'A Transfeminist Critique of Drag Discourses and Performance Styles in Three National Contexts (US, France and UK): From *RuPaul's Drag Race* to *Bar Wotever*', in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers – Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 1, ed. by Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), pp. 87–101 (pp. 91–92) <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082977.ch-007>.

²⁸ O'Connell, p. 449.

²⁹ Friesen, p.162.

³⁰ Ibid., p.214

³¹ Ibid., p.226-227

³² Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (London: Sage, 2004), p.145
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446218341>.

forms-flows, circuits, circulations of people, capital, and culture-without any model of subjective mediation".³³ Recognising these complexities – and subjectivities, Weber argues, is essential in navigating the current status of a queer international relations.³⁴ In this regard, "not only do a plethora of sexualized and sovereign national, regional, and international figurations and their stakes for IR and for queer studies come into focus", but the ways in which queer logics "confirm, contest, and extend understandings" of the means in which these "sexualized sovereign subjectivities" function too.³⁵ Whereas this article will consider the impact of the franchise in a hierarchical sense, these subjectivities and subsequent acts of contention will be returned to in the conclusion.

Baga Chipz: Class & Legitimacy

Baga Chipz is a British drag performer, who competed on the first season of *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*, ultimately finishing as the runner-up in the competition. Chipz' drag is heavily grounded in British working-class identity, describing herself as a "very British drag queen, very fish and chips, mushy peas' and a 'tart with a heart'".³⁶ Chipz' success prior to appearing in the competition requires some nuance here, as each of the performers discussed enjoyed successes in ways which are specific to their cultural and geographical contexts. Prior to their casting, Chipz earned notoriety in the London drag scene after winning the "2010 Drag Idol competition, which led to regular gigs at Heaven and G-A-Y".³⁷ This was subsequently followed by Chipz' casting in the reality-documentary series *Drag Queens of London*, in which she appeared as a main cast member.³⁸ Chipz' success being measured largely through appearance in London's drag cabaret competitions, is reflective of what Farrier describes as the the popularity of drag within "the [queer] community and the general public...competition in the UK is commercially driven with a community edge".³⁹ Whereas this cannot describe all drag within the UK, Baga's reputation being formed in these

³³ Elizabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey, 'Thinking Sexuality Transnationally: An Introduction', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 5.4 (1999), 439–49, (p.446) <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-5-4-439>.

³⁴ Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199795857.001.0001>.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

³⁶ Sam Damshenas, 'Baga Chipz Explains Why You "Can't Just Look Good" to Win Drag Race' [online], *Gay Times*, 2019 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/baga-chipz-explains-why-you-cant-just-look-good-to-win-drag-race/> [accessed 5 November 2023], para. 6.

³⁷ Paul Vale, 'Baga Chipz: "There Are Many Jealous Drag Queens. I Get a Lot of Stick"' [online], *The Stage*, 2019 <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/baga-chipz-there-are-many-jealous-drag-queens-i-get-a-lot-of-stick> [accessed 5 November 2023], para. 4.

³⁸ Nick Levine, 'Exclusive: Meet "Drag Queens of London" Star Baga Chipz' [online], *Attitude*, 2017 <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/film-tv/exclusive-meet-drag-queens-of-london-star-baga-chipz-279592/> [accessed 5 November 2023].

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.181

cabaret and community venues is indicative of the means in which success can be understood in this context, compared to in others – such as online and through pageantry.

Therefore, Chipz entered *Drag Race* with a significant reputation in comparison to many of those whom she competed against. Importantly, however, this success is reflective of the nuances of British, and London's drag culture. This is important given Chipz' self-described working-class attitude to drag performance, stating that she's "working-class, I'm from a rough council estate....We didn't have a pot to piss in when I was a kid, so my act and my character is rough as arseholes".⁴⁰ Chipz' aesthetics and attitudes, in conjunction with the working-class elements of their drag, are at odds with the heavily glamorized, pageant drag culture of the United States which is celebrated in the franchise, allowing for Chipz' legitimacy to be challenged within the confines of *Drag Race*.⁴¹

Baga's working-class background, and the means in which it is articulated, requires some attention – due to the nuanced ways in which class is understood differently not just between the UK and US, but within different local regions altogether. Class, specifically performances of upper class, is coded within the US series through the concept of 'polish'. This is defined as contestants who "are often from the pageant circuit and who showcase glamorous, well-tailored runways that conform to conventional standards of feminine beauty".⁴² Whereas contestants may not come from upper-class backgrounds, and may well represent working-class identities, it is the performance of high-glamour which maintains a construction of class which is different to the UK. Class through Baga, conversely, is arguably defined through behaviour and personality. Describing themselves as "rough as arseholes", Chipz draws a clear distinction between this polish and their own drag, without directly associating this with aesthetics. However, it remains important to recognise the relationship between class and financial status, as described by Chipz, and as evidenced within the franchise. Chipz associates their drag character as reflecting their family not having "a pot to piss in", whereas polish, albeit not exclusively, is understood in the franchise through well-tailored runways which requires financial investment. Therefore, while class is understood differently in

⁴⁰ Paul Flynn, 'Drag Race's Baga Chipz: "I Wouldn't Say I'm Classy but I'm More Professional Now"' [online], *Grazia Daily*, 2019 <https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/tv-and-film/ru-paul-drag-race-baga-chipz/> [accessed 5 November 2023], para. 10

⁴¹ Lanre Bakare, 'RuPaul's Drag Race UK Promises to Be "Grittier" than US Version', *The Guardian*, 3 October 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/oct/03/rupauls-drag-race-uk-promises-to-be-grittier-than-us-version> [accessed 5 November 2023].

⁴² Sadler, p. 804.

these contexts – Baga's working-class identity and attitudes comes into contrast with the ways in which the franchise understands polished, upper-class drag.

This conflict is broadly evident throughout the first season of *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*. Contestants are seen to perform drag, and British cultural identity, through an Americanised lens, which, while parodic, nevertheless promotes stereotypes regarding poshness and the upper-classes as correct and 'the norm'. Numerous challenges, including the 'Posh on a Penny' design challenge, as well as a runway dedicated to dressing as Queen Elizabeth II, reinforce this.⁴³ This conflict is indicative of an argument made by Tom Rasmussen, a British non-binary performer, prior to the series airing, contending that "A lot of the UK's very best drag can be found in basement bars where it rejects notions of assimilation into oppressive capitalistic structures...the polish which a show like *RuPaul's Drag Race* venerates is at odds with a lot of contemporary drag, as well as UK drag's basis in working-class, regional culture".⁴⁴ Despite parodying these very structures, by prescribing their normativity, the franchise restricts the boundaries in which contestants can perform. I will now turn to three episodes in which this argument manifests in regard to Chipz' performance, and their subsequent treatment.

Thirsty Werk, sees the contestants tasked with creating and advertising their own brand of bottled water.⁴⁵ RuPaul, in introducing this challenge, reaffirms the consumerism at the heart of the franchise, proclaiming that "to make the big money, the UK's first *Drag Race* superstar needs to have the skills to sell anything!".⁴⁶ The cultural identity of Chipz' drag is at odds with this – as described by Rasmussen – and should resist these structures. In participating in the challenge, Chipz performs her cultural identity through marketing a 'Chippy Tea Water', this playfully referring to both her name, and the Northern English slang for a fish and chip dinner. Here, Chipz is able to subvert the challenge to a degree, by maintaining their own sense of cultural identity. However, the judging panel, consisting of Michelle Visage, an American and regular judge in the franchise, and Cheryl, a guest judge and former member of British-Irish band Girls Aloud, are seen to have

⁴³ *Posh on a Penny*, *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* [online], Series 1, Episode 3, BBC Three, 17 October 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07pqpg3/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-3> [accessed 22 February 2023]; *The Royal Queens*, *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* [online], Series 1, Episode 1, BBC Three, 3 October 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07l5qvv/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-1> [accessed 20 February 2023].

⁴⁴ Amrou Al-Kadhi, 'The UK Drag Scene is Too Diverse for RuPaul to Turn into a Race for Ratings', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2019 [online], para. 6 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/06/the-uk-drag-scene-is-too-diverse-for-rupaul-to-turn-into-a-race-for-ratings> [accessed 5 November 2023].

⁴⁵ *Thirsty Werk*, *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* [online], Series 1, Episode 6, BBC Three, 7 November 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07rr1js/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-6> [accessed 1 March 2023].

⁴⁶ Ibid.

differing responses to Chipz. Whereas Cole understands Chipz' perspective, herself hailing from the North of England, Visage does not – and subsequently, challenges Chipz' legitimacy. This conversation is as follows;

VISAGE: I'm really not sure about the water concept, what you were selling, I think we had more fun watching you put stuff in your mouth, you know?

CHIPZ: I think I was just trying to sell, like, fish and chips in a bottle that just fills you up.

VISAGE: Look, hear from the other judges. Maybe it's just me.

CHERYL: I think it's just you. It was actually smart that you kept it on brand. If I was going to buy that water, I would know that was associated to you. Michelle?

VISAGE: Well, her name's not 'Battered Sausage', is it? It's Baga Chipz.

- *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*, S01E06, 'Thirsty Werk'

In this exchange, Cole, also having both a British and Northern English perspective, defends and legitimises Chipz' advertisement, understanding its working-class and geographical influences. However, Visage, and by extension, the franchise, delegitimises Chipz for not performing British cultural identity in a means which is understandable for American audiences. This is a profound consequence of the mainstreaming of drag performance through *Drag Race*, as an Americanisation of not just drag, but in informing the construction of cultural identity, serves to delegitimise Chipz. This reaffirms findings made by Rivers, in their study of the impact of *Drag Race* on local drag communities within The Netherlands. They contend the franchise does "influence and shape trends within globalizing notions of drag performance through its success and widespread recognition".⁴⁷ Through delegitimising and challenging Chipz for their portrayal of working class and British identities, as they do not conform to an Americanised expectation of what this means, this influence extends beyond drag to shaping cultural identity. As the *Drag Race* franchise continues to expand, greater attention is required as to how this influence may continue to extend, itself informed by a culturally imperialist American position.

⁴⁷ Joshua William Rivers, 'Twerk It & Werk It: The Impact of *RuPaul's Drag Race* on Local Underground Drag Scenes', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gaggling?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 11-26, (pp. 24), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.5>.

The second of these episodes is the season final, which sees Chipz compete against The Vivienne and Divina De Campo to win the season overall.⁴⁸ Despite reaching the finale, Chipz does so with the weakest track record of the final contestants. A regular feature of these finale episodes involves the contestants arguing to the judging panel as to why they should win the season over their competitors. This is reflective of what was identified previously as the competitive, pageant US drag which informs the franchise. However, within this conversation, Chipz undermines this traditional aspect of the finale, instead, illustrating an act of resistance towards this, and reifying the community-led influences of their drag. As described by Hall in an article for *Xtra* – an online queer magazine, British drag is “firmly rooted in community spirit”⁴⁹, this perhaps best illustrated by the “caustic wit and working-class brilliance of Lily Savage”.⁵⁰ The extent to which Chipz’ own working-class drag identity is informed by this rich history, I argue, is evidenced within her argument, in which she states the following;

CHIPZ: Ugh, god. I think these two deserve it way more than me. They’re amazing, and they’re just brilliant....And I’m just happy I’m top three. Like, that is the best ever. I’ve got a medal. I’m at the Olympics of drag, and I’m honoured. So, anything that happens from now, I’ve already won.

- *RuPaul’s Drag Race UK*, S01E08, ‘Grand Finale’

However, whereas this statement can be seen as a challenge to the competitive influences of the season, and a platforming of a working-class, community drag which is reflective of the British drag context, Chipz is framed negatively following this. Michelle Visage is, again, seen to delegitimise Chipz’ perspective, arguing that their attitude signifies a lack of confidence – as opposed to an endorsement of non-competitiveness. This claim is subsequently strongly rebutted by Graham Norton, the Irish presence on the judging panel. Their conversation, during the deliberation portion of the episode, is as follows;

VISAGE: I am so deeply proud of her, but I know she needs to work on her self-confidence, because she couldn’t answer why she should win over her friends, because I don’t think she thinks she is good enough, and that is a concern for me.

⁴⁸ *Grand Finale, RuPaul’s Drag Race UK* [online], Series 1, Episode 8, BBC Three, 21 November 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07sxczl/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-8> [accessed 5 March 2023].

⁴⁹ Jake Hall, ‘The dA-Zed Guide to British Drag’, para. 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para 20

NORTON: Can I just say, as someone who lives here, I think that question to three British drag queens was very hard.

Alan Carr nods in agreement

NORTON: I think American drag queens have thought about it, and they are able to tell you, without you thinking, "Shut..What?! Who died and made you drag superstar?!". So, I got that Baga did that.

- *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*, S01E08, 'Grand Finale'

Norton's challenge to Visage highlights cultural differences between British and American drag performers, and by extension, differences between *Drag Race UK* and *Drag Race US*. Chipz' working-class perspective is sympathised with, particularly regarding the extent to which community and a disdain for competition is closely associated with British drag culture. Amrou Al-Kadhi, a British Muslim drag performer, argued for the importance of this prior to the seasons airing. They contended, "in the wider community 'we all support each other and help each other'... 'we need community and safety between queer people, not competition so that straight people can have a good time watching us be bitchy'".⁵¹ However, Visage is positioned as a figure of authority within the franchise, given the construction of both Americanised drag and the US series as superior to their British counterparts. Their challenge to Chipz', following what may be perceived as both a sincere and emotive exchange with Chipz herself, is reflective of the pervasiveness of an Americanised drag. Despite resistance by Norton, Baga is delegitimised here, for failing to engage with the *culture* of the competition, as well as its norms and regulations. Following this, Chipz is subsequently eliminated in third place. This reflecting their track record in the competition, but also, reinforcing Visage's position – that Chipz must wholly conform to the expectations of the franchise.

However, an episode where Chipz successfully performs and communicates a working-class character and identity can be found in *Downton Draggy*, the second episode of the season.⁵² Within this challenge, the contestants are tasked with acting in a parody of the ITV costume drama *Downton Abbey*, this in itself is indicative of what was previously described as the framing of British

⁵¹ Hugh Montgomery, 'Is RuPaul's Drag Race Good for Drag?' [online], *BBC Culture*, 2 October 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20191002-is-rupauls-drag-race-a-good-thing-for-drag> [accessed 6 November 2023], para. 22.

⁵² *Downton Draggy*, *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* [online], Series 1, Episode 2, BBC Three, 10 October 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07p7kqs/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-2> [accessed 21 February 2023].

culture and society through a highly stereotyped, 'posh', Americanised lens. Within the challenge, Chipz portrays a scullery maid, heavily drawing on negative working-class stereotypes, including a broad, over-the-top cockney accent, and a typically 'ugly' makeup. Ultimately, Chipz is successful in their performance, winning the challenge, and receiving widespread praise from the judging panel. However, Chipz' performance here differs from the means by which she communicates working-class identities in other challenges. Here, instead of showing autonomy and discussing their own experiences, as illustrated in 'Thirsty Werk', Chipz performs working-class identities as dictated through a scripted piece, crafted around Americanised stereotypes. Chipz earns legitimacy here, not by performing drag which is informed by their lived experiences, but rather, through ridiculing it.

Downton Draggy positions Chipz in a role which allows for their working-class identity to be easily translated to mass, and specifically, US audiences. The accuracy of their portrayal, particularly in comparison to their own drag identity, is unimportant here. Rather, this challenge grants Chipz an opportunity to earn legitimacy, at the expense of acknowledging the complexities and nuances of their working-class background. It is also important to acknowledge the importance of this within the context of scholarship surrounding the changing nature of the *Drag Race* audience. As described by Crookston, "What was once a cult show marketed primarily to gay men, *Drag Race* has drawn both praise and criticism for its ability to market itself to broader, straighter, and increasingly younger fans".⁵³ Chipz' legitimacy in relation to this evolution cannot be understated. *Thirsty Werk* illustrates how, through Cheryl as a stand-in for queer, working-class British audiences, Chipz can be understood by these demographics. However, *Downton Draggy* is indicative of both a desire and need to appeal to wider audiences – particularly those found within the US – and translate the nuances of cultural identity in ways which are easily understood and recognised.

Additionally, it should be recognised that Chipz' whiteness is important in understanding the construction of aspects of their delegitimization. As prior literature has described, an imbalance in the treatment of white and non-white performers exists in the franchise – whereby expecting "Black and brown drag queens to perform race stereotypically, not only enforces and fixes race on those who are the most oppressed by white supremacy", but, subsequently, allows for

⁵³ Cameron Crookston, 'Introduction: Why Are We All Gaggling? Unpacking the Cultural Impact of *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gaggling?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), p. 4 <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.4>.

“appropriation and invisibilization of racial and colonial complicities”.⁵⁴ Baga’s narrative within this season reveals the complexities of racialised drag. As a white British performer, Baga embodies aspects of this hierarchy, however, I argue that these are closely associated with their working-class identities, and the way the franchise views not just Britishness, but working-class Britishness. Bonnett describes this as “a socio-economic achievement of the working class that is mired in racism. In the twentieth century the social formation that has enabled, and been enabled by, the symbolic constitution of white identity has combined social reformism (even, sometimes, class militancy) and racism”.⁵⁵ Baga’s ability to gain legitimisation for their performance in *Downton Dragg* is just as indicative of a reinforcement of American stereotypes, as it is of the ways in which their identity as a white working-class Briton is perceived. The importance of race within the construction of drag, therefore, remains consistent, in spite of Baga’s delegitimization elsewhere.

Art Simone: Notoriety & Legitimacy

Art Simone is an Australian drag performer, who placed as a runner-up in the first season of *RuPaul’s Drag Down Under*. Simone entered the competition as a successful figure within the Australian drag community, and with prior connections to World of Wonder, the production company behind *Drag Race*. Simone’s success is, in many ways, similar to that of Chipz, given her reputation among queer venues and competitions. For example, Simone had previously presented her own series on the WOW streaming service, *WOW Presents Plus -Highway to Heel*.⁵⁶ Additionally, she had cultivated a significant following through numerous drag competition victories, including being the “current reigning ‘Queen of Australia’ and ‘Drag Performer of the Year’”.⁵⁷ Therefore, these hyperlocal conceptions of success can be seen as translating into different cultural contexts, albeit with differences in the drag styles and communities present.

However, outside of queer venues, Simone has garnered mainstream attention in Australia. This positions Chipz differently to Simone, as whereas the former enjoyed successes largely indicative of their hyperlocal drag scene and its nuances, Simone’s notability is also reflective of the current mainstreaming of drag. For example, they appeared as a guest in the Australian

⁵⁴ Nishant Upadhyay, “‘Can You Get More American than Native American?’: Drag and Settler Colonialism in *RuPaul’s Drag Race*”, *Cultural Studies*, 33.3 (2019), p. 486, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2019.1584907>.

⁵⁵ Bonnett, Alastair, ‘How the British Working Class Became White: The Symbolic (Re)formation of Racialized Capitalism’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 11.3 (1998), p.336, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6443.00066>.

⁵⁶ *World of Wonder, Highway to Heel* [online], 2019 <https://www.wowpresentsplus.com/highway-to-heel> [accessed 8 November 2023].

⁵⁷ James Alastair, ‘Drag Race Down Under’s Art Simone “Gobsmacked” by Shock Elimination’ [online], *Attitude Magazine*, 2021 <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/film-tv/drag-race-down-unders-art-simone-gobsmacked-by-shock-elimination-302875/> [accessed 8 November 2023], para 3.

localisation of *The Bachelor* (2019), with Simone earning praise in *Elle Australia* – an article reviewing the episode stating that “Last night was a little reminder that we all need an Art Simone-esque cheerleader in our lives”.⁵⁸ Furthermore, their casting announcement referenced their reputation, as she’d “travelled to Los Angeles and New York, representing Australia in the world’s largest drag convention, RuPaul’s DragCon”.⁵⁹ Simone’s form of success can be understood as representing a shift towards the drag ‘celebrity’, which Feldman and Hakim argue is enabled through “professionalised, commercialised forms of social media”, meaning “drag queens are increasingly becoming willing agents of the hegemonic power that was previously denied them”.⁶⁰ Simone’s place in the public consciousness, in embodying the professionalised drag queen, is reflective of this understanding of success.

The framing of Simone as a professionalised, polished drag performer is reflective of the impacts of the franchise in different contexts, including Australia. In their study of these impacts in Perth, Alexander argues that “Social media and pop culture visibility are leading to the accelerated transmission of drag culture”.⁶¹ However, in a criticism of this influence, “Older queens have had to adapt to a younger vision...I have to keep bettering myself as the show goes on because drag is just getting bigger”.⁶² Simone, while a Melbourne-based performer, can nevertheless be discussed in this context. In an interview during the seasons airing, Simone described her drag evolution as “I pivoted and essentially turned into a comedy queen which looks good — which is very rare!”.⁶³ In this section, I will discuss Simone’s narrative throughout the season – as a professionalised, notable queen, and the complexities regarding her legitimisation, which operates against a backdrop of sensitive cultural and racial politics.

In the second episode of the season, in which the contestants are tasked with impersonating celebrities in the ‘Snatch Game’, Simone is placed in the bottom two of the

⁵⁸ Lorna Gray, ‘The Most Important Conversation in This Season’s *Bachelor* Isn’t About Abbie’ [online], *Elle Australia*, 2019 <https://www.elle.com.au/culture/the-bachelor-chelsie-ex-boyfriend-21210> [accessed 8 November 2023], para 17.

⁵⁹ Jessica Chandra, ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race Down Under Reveals Its Fabulous Cast of Queens’ [online], *Nine.com.au*, 2021, p. 446 <https://www.nine.com.au/entertainment/latest/ruPauls-drag-race-down-under-cast-queens-announced/6493cc32-12f6-459b-9ed8-9eab00ed6927> [accessed 8 November 2023], para 9.

⁶⁰ Feldman and Hakim, p.398

⁶¹ Claire Alexander, ‘What Can Drag Do for Me? The Multifaceted Influences of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* on the Perth Drag Scene’, in *RuPaul’s Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 265 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_17.

⁶² See Veronica Jean Jones, local Perth queen, cited in Alexander, 2017, p.265, cited in Alexander, p.265.

⁶³ Eden Faithfull, ‘Art Simone Discusses Being Eliminated from *Drag Race* After Her Bindi Irwin Impersonation’ [online], *Nine.com.au*, 2021 <https://www.nine.com.au/entertainment/latest/ruPauls-drag-race-down-under-art-simone-elimination-interview/c9ae7770-8d14-48fa-8459-9f537d2a1ee8> [accessed 8 November 2023], para 7.

episode for their portrayal of Bindi Irwin, before ultimately being eliminated, in a lip-sync performance against Coco Jumbo.⁶⁴ This elimination is framed as shocking, to both the other contestants, and the audience. Simone's notoriety and successes are previously established and understood by both of these groups – largely through the acknowledgement of their perceived polish. Given the aesthetics privileged by the franchise – “younger, thinner, and more fashionable...raised by – and packed for – reality television”, the elimination of Simone can also be perceived as uncharacteristic of its preferred contestants.⁶⁵ However, I argue, it can also be understood as a reinforcement of the authority of US drag, and of RuPaul within these international contexts, enhancing the power the franchise holds in legitimising a performers career, despite past successes such as Simone's. This is acknowledged by Simone in their elimination interview, in which they challenge a producer who attempts to comfort their distress:

SIMONE: I'm very disappointed that I've let down all my friends and family at home, and I failed, completely. I've got thousands of fans that are expecting a certain level from me, and I clearly didn't deliver it.

Simone cries.

SIMONE: And I'm the strongest one here.

PRODUCER (Off-camera): But you were here...

SIMONE: That means *nothing*. I will never be able to live this down, ever.

- *RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under*, S01E02, 'Snatch Game'

Simone's response that simply being in the competition means “nothing” without success, succinctly argues, that this is exposure is meaningless, in comparison to doing *well*, and subsequently being legitimised by RuPaul. Furthermore, in directly referring to the expectations of her performance pre-season, as well as their established fan base, Simone illustrates an understanding regarding the power of the franchise not only in defining a contestant's reputation, but in defining attitudes and aesthetics within the wider drag community. This is indicative of what is described by Westerling earlier in this article, in that

⁶⁴ *Snatch Game, RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World* [online], Series 1, Episode 4, BBC Three, 22 February 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0014t2v/rupauls-drag-race-uk-vs-the-world-series-1-episode-4> [accessed 9 April 2023].

⁶⁵ Julia Yudelman, 'The "RuPaulitics" of Subjectification in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 27 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_2.

the franchise “creates and perpetuates a culture of aesthetic ‘feedback’ between the show and live performers...following norms set by the former contestants on the show”.⁶⁶ Simone, in conjunction with her accomplishments and reputation, are diminished and delegitimised here, with their failure to translate their ‘real-world’ successes into the competition made clear. In an interview post-elimination, Simone reiterates this – highlighting their mindset prior to entering the competition. This being, “Walking into *Drag Race*, it was like “this is it; this is the industry standard as the top thing that you can do as a drag performer”.⁶⁷

However, Simone ultimately returns to the competition in the fourth episode, *Rucycled*.⁶⁸ Contestants returning to the competition is not unheard of within the franchise – rather, this has become a common trend, particularly within US seasons, in which contestants typically compete to re-earn their position. However, Simone returns without explanation, surprising the contestants during the announcement of the episodes challenge, with RuPaul simply describing their return as a “second chance”. Therefore, while Simone’s drag is legitimised by the franchise here, through recognising their prior popularity and potential as a contestant, it is also indicative of the means-by-which this legitimisation is tied to the prescribed hierarchy of an Americanised drag. The franchise is viewed to have “influenced drag culture through a privileging of professionalised drag Queens; a heightened expectation of the performance of thin bodies and almost perfect, yet still campy, gender imitations”.⁶⁹ Simone’s re-introduction and re-legitimation within this episode is reflective of this privileging, and the means in which this is perhaps most consequential in allowing for their ‘second chance’. The franchise, and by extension, RuPaul, legitimises Simone, not through her talents and performance – but through what she is seen to represent. This being, not only a professionalised and previously-successful, but thin and feminine drag.

However, another aspect of Simone’s identity is important in understanding her legitimisation here, this being their whiteness. The franchise has long been the subject of both academic inquiry and fierce audience debate regarding its privileging of white contestants. In

⁶⁶ Westerling, p.34

⁶⁷ Michael Cook, ‘Art Simone’s “Down Under” Return – “There’s No Rule Book for Drag Race”’ [online], *Instinct Magazine*, 2021 <https://instinctmagazine.com/art-simones-down-under-return-theres-no-rule-book-for-drag-race/> [accessed 9 November 2023], para 6.

⁶⁸ *Rucycled*, *RuPaul’s Drag Race Down Under* [online], Series 1, Episode 4, BBC Three, 22 May 2021 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p09hbjbj/rupauls-drag-race-down-under-series-1-episode-4> [accessed 10 May 2023].

⁶⁹ Fenton Litwiller, ‘Normative Drag Culture and the Making of Precarity’, *Leisure Studies*, 39.4 (2020), p. 609 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2020.1800798>.

their study of what they describe as its 'white ruling class femininity', Hodes and Sandoval argue that "the spectacular commodification of white feminine beauty standards renders the transformative potential of these alternative modes of being inert".⁷⁰ These concepts are relevant to Simone, as, the other two contestants eliminated prior to Simone's return, Coco Jumbo and Jojo Zaho, these being the only queens of colour within the season, are not given the opportunity to return to the competition or compete for a position. Simone's legitimisation, I argue, is carried out through a maintaining of the privileging of white beauty standards – driven by the "largely white cis-gendered gay male and white cis-gendered young female fan-base [who] continue to consume and defend these stereotypes".⁷¹ The legitimisation of white performers within the franchise, at the expense of queens of colour, is also illustrative of a shift within the franchise towards a professionalization of drag performance. As described by Vesey, "Drag Race has individuals vie for cash prizes, endorsed gifts, and the promise of professional achievement. In so doing, it nurtures light-skinned competitors' pop star potential at the expense of their non-white peers."⁷² Parallels can be drawn here with Simone, which illustrates the pervasiveness of an Americanised drag. It is not simply glamorous aesthetics which are privileged here in order to legitimise Simone, but their whiteness – this at the expense of Zaho and Jumbo.

Following their return, Simone ultimately reaches the finale episode, despite never winning a challenge throughout their time in the competition. Despite praise for their aesthetics, Simone's prior reputation remains a point of discussion, in comparison to their performances. This mirrors Simone's comments during their first elimination, regarding expectations, both from audiences, and the production behind the franchise. Despite arguing in an interview prior to the finale's airing that track records within the competition are irrelevant, stating "people need to realise that *Drag Race* is not a points system and it never has been a points system, ever",⁷³ Simone's narrative within the season illustrates the pervasiveness of these expectations. And, subsequently, the complex means in which the franchise recognises these – in granting Simone opportunities and legitimising her, while subsequently exerting its own authority. In a conversation with Karen from Finance, a similarly well-known performer prior to the competition,

⁷⁰ Caroline Hodes and Jorge Sandoval, 'RuPaul's Drag Race: A Study in the Commodification of White Ruling-Class Femininity and the Etiolation of Drag', *Studies in Costume and Performance*, 3.2 (2018), p. 158 https://doi.org/10.1386/scp.3.2.149_1.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 156

⁷² Vesey, p. 593

⁷³ Sam Damshenas, 'Exclusive: Art Simone Dispels Wild Theories About Her Drag Race Down Under Return' [online], *Gay Times*, 2021 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/exclusive-art-simone-dispels-wild-theories-about-her-drag-race-down-under-return/> [accessed 9 November 2023], para 21.

in which they discuss Karen's negative judging critiques in comparison to their reputation, this is reiterated. Their conversation is as follows;

KAREN: I think it was, the expectation is here...

Karen raises her hand

KAREN:and what was delivered was here.

Karen lowers her hand

SIMONE: Yeah, that's their continued critique for you, whereas a lot of these queens are coming here with clean slates as fresh faces.

Simone gestures at Elektra Shock

SIMONE: You know, they don't need to live up to an expectation that the judges already have of them.

- *RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under*, S01E06, 'Family Resemblance'

This framing of Simone, in the context of maintaining expectations and performing to a certain perceived 'level' of drag performance, is complicated. Simone is ultimately legitimised through reaching the finale of the season in spite of their performances, and prior elimination, this legitimising her reputation. Yet, this continued comparison of Simone's performance to their reputation delegitimises her and maintains a hierarchical structure in which RuPaul remains superior. This conversation is also held in the context of the racialisation of drag within the franchise, and the means in which this influences Simone's treatment. Simone is characterised as a performer who can never wholly reach these expectations – yet continues to be legitimised within the season, in part, due to these glamorous, white-coded aesthetics. Simone's narrative throughout the season illustrates the complexities of legitimisation within the franchise. Through both simultaneously being represented as a legitimised, authentic representation of contemporary, RuPaul-approved Australian drag, while comparisons are drawn, both by her framing and Simone herself, to her pre-season reputation, Simone occupies a middle ground in which she is both celebrated and derided. Simone's narrative is indicative of "a narrow definition and a narrow set of expectations" of drag, in which "a stylized drag performance becomes

articulated as talent and a claim to fame.”⁷⁴ While Simone earns legitimacy through these narrow definitions, through a continued reinforcement of the authority of the franchise, and of RuPaul, her notoriety and successes ultimately remain questioned.

Pangina Heals: Superstardom & Legitimacy

Pangina Heals is a Thai drag performer, who placed sixth in the first season of *RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World*. This being, an international 'All Stars' season which featured “iconic queens from different franchises and cultures competing in an international arena, showcasing their country's finest drag”.⁷⁵ Within the Thai drag community, Heals is a well-known and respected figure, in-part, due to their ownership of the 'House of Heals' drag bar in Bangkok. The bar, which “caters specifically towards drag artists and the fans who love to watch them”, and “Pangina says, was born out of necessity. ‘Venues that want the pink dollar often do not put drag on a pedestal’”.⁷⁶ Heals' role as a leader within the Thai drag community is reflective of how their success is measured in this cultural context, in comparison to Chipz or Simone. As argued by Sopitarchasak in their study of the experiences of Thai drag queens, despite the “general perception that Thailand is an LGBTQI-friendly country, studies have found that sexual minorities in Thailand are prone to being victims of discrimination, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse”.⁷⁷ Additionally, in interviewing Thai performers, they “related the discrimination and abuse to spaces where they happened, pointing out that drag queens have limited space to express themselves”.⁷⁸ Whereas these findings are not limited to Thailand, they are revealing of the important role that Heals plays, and how providing a visible and leadership role encourages a nuanced understanding of success within the Thai context.

However, Heals' inclusion within this cast is particularly striking, as unlike Chipz and Simone, Heals had also previously achieved international success and notoriety within the *Drag Race* fandom, due to her role as a host and main judge on *Drag Race Thailand* (2018-). In competing

⁷⁴ Kai Kohlsdorf, 'Policing the Proper Queer Subject: RuPaul's Drag Race in the Neoliberal "Post" Moment', in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. by Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), pp. 67-87, (p. 70).

⁷⁵ Sam Damshenas, 'Meet the 9 Fierce Queens Competing on *RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World*' [online], *Gay Times*, 2022 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/meet-the-9-fierce-queens-competing-on-rupauls-drag-race-uk-vs-the-world/> [accessed 7 November 2023] para. 5

⁷⁶ Chris Malone Mendez, 'The Art and Artistry of Pangina Heals' [online], *Forbes*, 2 July 2021 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cmalone/2021/07/02/the-art-and-artistry-of-pangina-heals> [accessed 7 November 2019] para 2 and 20.

⁷⁷ Sakol Sopitarchasak, 'What It Means to Be a Drag Queen in Thailand: A Qualitative Study', *Asia Pacific Social Science Review*, 23.1 (2023), p.3, <https://doi.org/10.59588/2350-8329.1482>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.12

within UKvs.TW, Heals became the first judge to “cross the line and compete”.⁷⁹ Therefore, the dynamics regarding how Heals is framed and legitimised within this season provide a unique case study. This being, in understanding how an individual who holds the same role as RuPaul within their own franchise, and country more broadly, is subsequently received, translated, and framed by RuPaul, and the franchise’s largely Western audience.

In understanding the framing of Heals, it is important to acknowledge the hierarchical framing of RuPaul. Collie and Commene define this as the ‘Ultimate Queen’, whereby RuPaul, “places herself as the Ultimate Queen in the context of the show and in the history of LGBTQ+ struggles...by placing RPDR as a significant part of the recent history.”⁸⁰ This has the overall effect of ensuring that, although “the queens on RPDR achieve different levels of success and exposure through their appearance...the real winner will always be RuPaul’s drag empire.”⁸¹ Heals’ status as a judge, and, arguably, RuPaul’s equal within a Thai context, is fundamentally irrelevant, as rather, she is framed by the same means as other contestants within the franchise. These being, the “maintenance of fame and success is continually negotiated by and through templates. These templates are set by RuPaul within the context of community culture, celebrity, and pop stardom, and are measured by success, as well as the challenges presented by queens, as key milestones”.⁸² This section will discuss Heals’ framing within the season, and the means in which RuPaul’s ‘Ultimate Queen’ status is maintained, in stark opposition to Heals.

Within the first episode, *Global Glamazons*, Heals’ inclusion is framed as shocking by their fellow competitors.⁸³ However, despite their initial praise of Heals, as a legendary figure, the contestants are seen to cast doubt on her abilities, referencing their non-competitive role in the Thai series, ensuring she is immediately framed as an outsider by comparison. This introduction, followed by an immediate placing of Heals’ status within the hierarchy of the competition, is indicative of Hermes and Kardolus’ analysis of the pervasiveness of reality television tropes within the franchise. They argue that “*Drag Race* is reality television. Its format decrees there need to be winners and losers from one episode to another, training us for exclusivity and competition rather

⁷⁹ Gary Grimes, ‘Pangina Heals Says One Thing Won’t Change After *Drag Race UK vs The World*: “I’ll Still Be a B***h”’ [online], *PinkNews*, 2022 <https://www.thepinknews.com/2022/02/01/drag-race-thailand-pangina-heals-uk-vs-the-world/> [accessed 7 November 2023], para. 1.

⁸⁰ Hazel Collie and Gemma Commene, “‘Assume the Position: Two Queens Stand Before Me’: RuPaul as Ultimate Queen”, *Celebrity Studies*, 11.4 (2020), p. 408, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765081>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.413

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.408

⁸³ *Global Glamazons, RuPaul’s Drag Race UK vs. The World* [online], Series 1, Episode 1, BBC Three, 1 February 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m00143x2/rupauls-drag-race-uk-vs-the-world-series-1-episode-1> [accessed 22 March 2023].

than inclusion and community".⁸⁴ This conversation, shortly after Heals' initial meeting with their fellow competitors, reinforces these tropes, and positions Heals as 'other' within the season;

JACKÉ: Does it make you nervous that we've competed and you have not?

HEALS: Because you guys have the edge?

JIMBO: We've got the edge, girl.

HEALS: Is that because you have experience?

JIMBO: We've got experience.

HYDRANGEA: You've just got to sit there and look pretty, right?

HEALS (Confessional): As a co-host, I'm used to judging other people. But right now, I am going to be judged by the legendary RuPaul, so obviously it's a huge pressure and it's not up to me anymore.

1. *RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World*, S01E01, 'Global Glamazons'

Heals continues to be underestimated throughout the episode and is framed in a means which is typical of the 'underdog' reality television trope. She is framed to the audience as somewhat out of her depth, with a confessional segment, in which Heals speaks directly to the cameras, she states "I think it's going to take time for me to become confident and comfortable, because I've never done this before. All the other girls have". However, this framing is subverted, again following a typical underdog trope, whereby Heals wins the episode's challenge. This reveals the complexities of Heals' legitimisation within the hierarchy of the competition. Her status as an outsider is reinforced throughout – with Cheryl Hole, a British performer, referencing that "you haven't even competed on a season, so I just want to say, you are phenomenal". While Heals is legitimised as a performer, this is enacted through the confines of reality television, and the hierarchical structures of the franchise, whereby she is framed as an underdog, this somewhat reducing her role as the Thai equivalent of RuPaul. This delegitimization of Heals' status in the South East Asian drag community, in order to grant this 'underdog' narrative is indicative of what Friesen describes as the consequences of the pervasiveness of reality television tropes within the franchise. This being, "the way the show frames its heroes, villains, winners, and losers, along with their narrative journeys, is a product of the interweaving of racist, classist, commodification-driven

⁸⁴ Hermes, Joke, and Michael Kardolus, 'The RuPaul Paradox: Freedom and Stricture in a Competition Reality TV Show', *Javnost – The Public*, 28.1 (2021), p. 13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2021.1924541>

inequalities built into the competition's values and structures".⁸⁵ Heals' trajectory exemplifies this, as illustrated within the following analysis.

The second part of Heals' narrative within the season occurs concurrently with her legitimisation within this episode, this being their delegitimization in comparison to RuPaul, and the superiority of American drag. This reinforces RuPaul's status as the 'Ultimate Queen' by comparison. While Heals is competing within this season, and should be framed as such, the extent to which she is clearly positioned as lesser-than in comparison to RuPaul is striking, given their own Thai role as RuPaul's equal. Upon entering the competition, Heals remarks in a confessional that "As a co-host, I'm used to judging other people. But right now, I am going to be judged by the legendary RuPaul, so obviously it's a huge pressure and it's not up to me anymore".⁸⁶ This immediate framing of RuPaul as 'legendary', reaffirms the hierarchical structures of the franchise, and subsequently, delegitimises Heals' past successes and authority. The extent to which RuPaul embodies Americanised drag, whereas Heals is framed as signifying Thai, exoticized identities, is significant here, due to the extent to which the mainstreaming of *Drag Race* has exacerbated these differences. In their study of the political economy of drag queens, LeBlanc argues that "RuPaul's franchise is a capitalist force that may homogenize perceptions of drag queening and solidify a class hierarchy".⁸⁷ Heals' framing here as lesser-than ensures this hierarchy is maintained, with RuPaul, and American drag more broadly, identified as 'legendary' in comparison to Heals' arguably equal achievements.

Heals' framing, I argue, is also illustrative of the imperial influence of *Drag Race*, in a means which is different to the impact of this on Chipz and Simone. Whereas the former contestants experience this imperialism through the expansion of RuPaul's empire, Heals' framing constitutes a reinforcement of American imperialism, as well as British, given her appearance on a BBC season. This nuance, I argue, is reflective of Said's discussion of Orientalism, whereby RuPaul, and by extension, the franchise, – as the imperial West, maintains authority over Heals as the exotic East.⁸⁸ The positioning of Heals within the *Drag Race* hierarchy is not simply representative of Thai drag and *Drag Race Thailand* as lesser-than its US counterpart. Rather, this is informed by an Orientalism – "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient".⁸⁹ RuPaul and Heals embody this theory throughout the season. This imperialism is clearly

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.165

⁸⁶ Global Glamazons, 2022

⁸⁷ LeBlanc, p.142

⁸⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978)

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.3.

evidenced through the framing of Chipz and Simone – each must conform to the dominance of the franchise or face some form of punishment or delegitimization. However, Heals' legitimisation being both earned and dependent on RuPaul's judgement, in spite of their reputation, can be understood as informed by this Orientalism, and as indicative of the racialisation of drag inherent to these case studies.

RuPaul's role as distinctively more active than other reality television hosts is also relevant here. As executive producer of the franchise, viewing "RuPaul in her various guises is entirely different from other reality television productions".⁹⁰ RuPaul is a distinctly active agent within the franchise, this working alongside this Orientalism and hierarchy, to construct, maintain and embolden their own superiority over Heals. Whereas it must not be lost that Heals opts to appear in this season, and this relationship requires greater nuance than a simplistic top-down binary, the means in which she is framed as a competitor in comparison to RuPaul maintains several complex hierarchies. Firstly, that between RuPaul and Heals. Secondly, between *Drag Race US* and *Thailand*. But thirdly, between the US as a Western presumed norm, and Thailand as an exotic East. Despite Heals' legitimisation through their victory in the first episode's challenge, and, subsequently performing well as the "front-runner" in the season for the first three episode, these hierarchies remain consistent – I argue, undercutting their successes and cultural representation.⁹¹

The conclusion of Heals' arc within the season occurs in the fourth episode, in which the contestants must play the 'Snatch Game', the aforementioned impersonation challenge.⁹² Heals is unsuccessful in the challenge, in which her portrayal of Mariah Carey is criticised, leading to their subsequent elimination by Blu Hydrangea.ⁱⁱⁱ Heals' elimination is portrayed as shocking, due to their front-runner status within the competition. However, the means in which Heals' elimination is framed firmly reinforces the hierarchy of the competition, reducing them to a competitor for whom, much like the other contestants, are at the whims of the franchise and its format. After Hydrangea reveals she has chosen to eliminate Heals, the contestants are each seen to have highly emotional reactions, with Heals seen to break down on the stage. Through this, and illustrating the extent to which Heals remains vulnerable to elimination, I argue this sequence serves to

⁹⁰ Brennan, p. 40.

⁹¹ Conor Clark, 'Pangina Heals Defends Blu Hydrangea from *Drag Race UK vs The World* Backlash: "I Am Not Angry"' [online], *Gay Times*, 2022 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/pangina-heals-defends-blu-hydrangea-from-drag-race-uk-vs-the-world-backlash-i-am-not-angry/> [accessed 8 November 2023], para 3.

⁹² Snatch Game, 2022

definitively delegitimise her from comparison to RuPaul. The conversation between RuPaul and Heals during their elimination is as follows;

RUPAUL: Pangina Heals, listen to me, you are – and will always be – a global phenomenon^{iv}.
Now, sashay away.

Heals sobs.

HEALS: I want to say sorry to all the Thai people that I did not go all the way. Thank you, thank you everyone.

HYDRANGEA: I love you, I'm so sorry.

HEALS: It's ok, it's ok.

HYDRANGEA: I love you with all my heart.

Heals continues to sob.

HEALS (In Thai): I'm sorry. I'm sorry, thank you.

Heals can be heard sobbing off-stage, before cutting to their lipstick message segment^v.

HEALS: I'm feeling devastated, and heartbroken. This is a shock to me, but Blu decided to choose me to go home, maybe because I'm a threat, but this is how it is. This is the game. I want to say thank you, everyone. And I love you Thailand.

2. RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World, S01E04, 'Snatch Game'

The emotional nature of Heals' departure further reduces and delegitimizes her within the franchise, ultimately illustrating the extent to which it operates as a reality television format, and not as a means of uplifting its competitors. This framing of Heals is, I argue, consequential of the extent to which the mainstreaming of *Drag Race* has affected its engagement with the very neoliberal, reality television formats it originally purported to subvert. As Friesen argues more broadly, "the show has moved from *reflecting* LGBTQ+ audiences through its casting and editing to *producing* a bastardized and heavily commodified version of drag culture."⁹³ Rather, what can now be identified within its production is a "a distinctly twenty-first century, capitalist copy of drag

⁹³ Friesen, p.159

culture, created in the images of RuPaul, reality television, and neoliberalism".⁹⁴ Within their elimination, Heals also specifically apologises to Thailand – viewing her performance as a potential let-down for not winning the competition. Their role, as discussed previously, is viewed as one of maternalism within the Thai drag community, this being fundamentally at odds with the neoliberalism described by Friesen. Heals, much like Chipz and Simone, ultimately falls victim to the authority of the franchise. Largely, as the framing of RuPaul and Americanised drag, each embodying neoliberalism, conflict not only with the potential of an additional 'Ultimate Queen' in Heals, but in the means in which she represents Thai drag more broadly.

Conclusions: Balancing Authenticity & Legitimacy

Legitimacy, and the ways it is earned and diminished within the *Drag Race* franchise, remains complex. While each contestant discussed earned legitimacy, ultimately, each either failed to maintain it, or, in earning legitimacy, potentially sacrificed an aspect of their drag or cultural identity. Baga Chipz' working class cultural perspective, for example, could only be legitimised when presented through a lens which is understandable to American audiences. Art Simone earned legitimacy, yet this can be linked to the pre-existing hierarchical structures of gender and drag performance, as well as race, which the franchise has been found to employ. Heals' legitimacy was earned, through a means which maintained the hierarchical structure which places RuPaul and American drag as superior, this ultimately leading to their downfall. These complexities, I argue, are informed by two central powers within the franchise. Firstly, the superiority of American drag and its assumed universality. Secondly, its reality television format - which requires winners and losers, and by extension, legitimisation and delegitimization. Where previous studies have acknowledged these factors as damaging to the franchise's radical potential, I argue that these take on increased consequence when assessing these localisations.

It is also striking to acknowledge the intertwined nature of legitimacy, as described in this article, and 'realness', a term from the ballroom community which heavily influences *Drag Race*. In their study of *Drag Race*'s construction of reality, Ward argues that the neoliberal practice of the show allows "for there to be the coexistence of abstract notions of equality and progression, while actually failing to represent any significant disruption to hegemonic hierarchies of identity".⁹⁵ This constructed notion of 'realness', which in comparison to its inspiration, "elides this political

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Jonathan Ward, 'Serving "Reality" Television "Realness": Reading *RuPaul's Drag Race* and Its Construction of Reality', *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal*, 17.1 (2020), p.35
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14775700.2020.1720407>.

potential in favour of a much more limited vision of queer life”, subsequently “legitimises certain specific queer identities, works to delegitimise others, rendering them invisible and/or inferior”.⁹⁶ The framing of Chipz, Simone and Heals, and the respective means in which they understand ‘realness’ in regard to framing their own cultural identities, can be seen as representative of a broader culture of constructed realness within the franchise. It is only the realness which, as Ward argues, is prescribed and constructed by the franchise, that “maintains the privileging of certain subjectivities, and it fails to contain an intersectionally liberationist queer politics”, which is permitted here.⁹⁷ Those which challenge these privileges – albeit perhaps more recognised as ‘real’ by the cultures they represent, such as Chipz’ working class perspectives, are subsequently delegitimised, maintaining these.

The choice to focus this study on contestants who represent the first seasons of their respective spin-offs was deliberate, and, I argue, reveals insights regarding the imperialism which is inherent to the franchise, and how this is conducted by production. Whereas the homogenisation of drag, which I argue is evidenced in these case studies more broadly, the delegitimation of these contestants can be understood more specifically as *gentrification*. This being, more specifically, to cast ‘authentic’ drag, or drag performers who are already visible in these respective geographic and cultural contexts, only to be gentrified in line with the aesthetic and cultural standards of *Drag Race*. Keegan identifies this gentrification within broader queer media, particularly in Hollywood cinema.⁹⁸ They argue, that similarly to “the rapidly gentrifying landscapes of New York City, Seattle, and San Francisco, these films are populated by white, bourgeois, straight, and cisgender bodies that then come to colonise the aesthetic space of the LGBTQ cinematic archive”.⁹⁹ In so doing, elements of queer history and culture are at best minimised and at worst erased altogether, with these films providing “little to no acknowledgement of whom or what these bodies have displaced. Queer and trans viewers of these films are left to imagine our histories through the disruptive innovations they offer us”.¹⁰⁰

This gentrification is evidenced through the means in which Chipz, Simone and Heals are delegitimised, and subsequently, have aspects of their identity erased in these seasons. Chipz’ working-class background is gentrified, through its dismissal unless performed in what is

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.24.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.36.

⁹⁸ Cáel M. Keegan, ‘History, Disrupted: The Aesthetic Gentrification of Queer and Trans Cinema’, *Social Alternatives*, 35.3 (2016), 50–56.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.52.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

prescribed as the 'correct' way. Simone is gentrified, through the erasure of their past successes, as through entering the *Drag Race* franchise, her histories are ultimately disregarded as meaningless without success in the competition. Finally, Heals is gentrified, through the erasure of her success and the particulars of Thai drag, as she is wholly subsumed by the competition through being so definitively and emotionally eliminated. The homogenisation of drag, therefore, while both useful and evidenced in these examples, can also be understood as gentrification – given the mainstream and more visible platform in which the franchise now finds itself. The gentrification evidenced here may, I argue, eventually 'price out' performers who do not conform to an Americanised pageant conception of drag, in much the same way that in many cities, "competition for commercial space... make it difficult for less affluent LGBT people and businesses targeted to the community to remain in the neighbourhoods".¹⁰¹ Whether the *Drag Race* franchise will gentrify beyond accessibility for performers more broadly remains an important point of analysis, as this mainstreaming continues.

The limitations imposed by RuPaul in granting contestants the ability to do this is striking. In acting as an American presence in the international spin-offs within the franchise, RuPaul represents a physical manifestation of US cultural imperialism, with reinforces both American drag, and American cultural perspectives, as the norm and legitimate. Each of the contestants analysed within this research experience a commonality – their legitimisation, and subsequent delegitimization, can be traced to the role of RuPaul as this imperialist figure. Either, through maintaining their own personal hierarchy, or, through maintaining the hierarchy of these cultural perspectives and American drag culture. While opportunities for subversion may present themselves, the case studies discussed in this research illustrate the difficulties which contestants can encounter in maintaining their own legitimacy and status within the franchise, and their own cultural contexts. Additionally, RuPaul continues to represent an assumed ubiquitousness of American drag culture, and the specific drag performances which the franchise maintains and preserves.

Whether these norms can be meaningfully challenged requires a fresh scholarly assessment of the global picture of *Drag Race*, in which the pervasiveness of legitimisation through an Americanised drag can best be understood. I argue that through removing RuPaul, this can best

¹⁰¹ Petra L. Doan and Harrison Higgins, 'The Demise of Queer Space? Resurgent Gentrification and the Assimilation of LGBT Neighborhoods', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 31.1 (2011), p.6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X10391266>.

be assessed. For example, the Canadian¹⁰² Mexican¹⁰³ and French¹⁰⁴ localisations do not feature RuPaul as host, and are each hosted by alumni of the franchise. I suggest future research into these, and other non-Ru hosted series, to address the scale of the impact of an Americanised drag, and, additionally, if a removal of RuPaul's presence as an embodiment of this, allows for a more diverse and nuanced drag amongst their competitors. Furthermore, the increasingly global nature of the 'All Stars' formats require further evaluation, in directly comparing the framing of international contestants and their respective drag cultures, within the broader hierarchies of the franchise.¹⁰⁵

Overall, this research has argued that, despite the *Drag Race* franchise's continued evolution and expansion, in numerous and significant ways, it can still be found to promote a narrow, Americanised conception of legitimate drag culture, performance and identity. I argue that meaningful steps are still required in order for the franchise to become, if not wholly representative of local drag cultures and their perspectives, legitimising of those which subvert the normative, white, upper-class coded nature of its drag. The framing of Chipz, Simone and Heals each point to potential future opportunities for greater legitimisation of these performances, however, this is largely dependent on the successful subversion of the hierarchies which are ever-present within the franchise. Through their appearances, each contestant found means in which to present and celebrate their cultural perspectives, however, these were either ultimately subverted by the production of the franchise or carried out within the narrow confines of an American cultural imperialism. True legitimisation of their drag cultures, I argue, requires these barriers to be removed, this perhaps being problematic due to RuPaul's positionality and superiority within the franchise.

Significantly, however, these arguments do not dismiss the agency of local drag performers and their scenes. Whereas literature has demonstrated the pervasiveness of the *Drag Race*

¹⁰² Joey Nolfi, 'Brooke Lynn Hytes Makes History as Permanent Canada's Drag Race Judge' [online], *Entertainment Weekly*, 2019 <https://ew.com/tv/2019/09/26/canadas-drag-race-brooke-lynn-hytes-judge/> [accessed 10 November 2023].

¹⁰³ Joey Nolfi, 'Drag Race Queens Valentina, Lolita Banana to Host Drag Race Mexico' [online], *Entertainment Weekly*, 2023 <https://ew.com/tv/drag-race-mexico-hosts-valentina-lolita-banana/> [accessed 10 November 2023].

¹⁰⁴ Joey Nolfi, 'Drag Race France Crowns Season 12 Alum Nicky Doll as Its Host' [online], *Entertainment Weekly*, 2022 <https://ew.com/tv/nicky-doll-drag-race-france-host/> [accessed 10 November 2023].

¹⁰⁵ Sam Damshenas, 'Canada vs. The World Announced as Latest International Drag Race Season' [online], *Gay Times*, 2022 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/canada-vs-the-world-announced-as-latest-international-drag-race-season/> [accessed 10 November 2023]; Andrew J. Stillman, 'RuPaul Just Announced a Global All Stars Series of Drag Race' [online], *Out*, 13 December 2022 <https://www.out.com/television/2022/12/13/rupaul-just-announced-global-all-stars-season-drag-race> [accessed 10 November 2023].

franchise, including in Westerling's study, these findings are not universal. As outlined in discussing theories of queer globalisation, to apply concepts of blanket homogenisation is misguided – and the agency and creativity of these local performers must be celebrated. For example, in discussing the London drag scene, while acknowledging the influence of the programme, Parslo argues that “it is possible to uncover the complex hierarchies and institutions that regulate drag and, most importantly, *start to find ways to resist them*”.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, in studying ‘Twerk It & Werk It’, a drag event in Utrecht, Rivers argues that performers “draw on and reject *RPDR*’s norms as said norms codify ‘proper’ drag styles, drag bodies, and drag cultures”, in doing so, “engage with, reinterpret, embrace, and eschew *RPDR*”.¹⁰⁷ These examples, therefore, reveal that whereas a homogenisation and hierarchy of drag may be evidenced within the franchise, and replicated by some – its audiences are not wholly passive, and opportunities remain for the drag community to continue as a site of mainstream resistance. The rejection of aspects of Baga Chipz’ working class experiences, for example, does not always translate into a class transformation within drag communities themselves.

It remains important, however, to acknowledge that *Drag Race*, in spite of the representational flaws discussed here and within wider scholarship, remains a valuable pedagogical tool, increasingly so given its position within mainstream popular culture. At a time in which drag, as well as queer rights, remain under intensified political attack and scrutiny, *Drag Race* provides an invitation into a world, albeit with limited scope, in which drag performance can be represented and celebrated, with its participants stories at the core of its narratives. The pedagogical potential of the franchise, I argue, is essential in providing an avenue for the legitimisation of local drag cultures and identities, as well as those which subvert the assumed universal nature of Americanised drag. In platforming and educating audiences on the complexities of drag culture, as opposed to presenting a narrow view of what it can constitute, the franchise has a constructive opportunity and, I argue, responsibility, to preserve these perspectives, as well as uplift them. The cultural perspectives of figures like Baga Chipz, Art Simone, and Pangina Heals, all require a greater and more authentic representation within the franchise, in a means which challenges the norms which it has long imposed. However, whether or not authentic, pedagogical representation can be balanced alongside RuPaul’s presence remains

¹⁰⁶ Joe Parslow, ‘Dragging the Mainstream: RuPaul’s Drag Race and Moving Drag Practices Between the USA and the UK’, in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers – Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 1, ed. by Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), p. 28
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082977.ch-002>.

¹⁰⁷ Rivers, p.13

to be seen. And, given the ever-expanding nature of *Drag Race*, endures as the most important question of its future.

Works Cited

Al-Kadhi, Amrou, 'The UK Drag Scene is Too Diverse for RuPaul to Turn into a Race for Ratings', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/06/the-uk-drag-scene-is-too-diverse-for-rupaul-to-turn-into-a-race-for-ratings> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Alexander, Claire, 'What Can Drag Do for Me? The Multifaceted Influences of *RuPaul's Drag Race* on the Perth Drag Scene', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 245–69

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_17

Allen, Jonathan, 'US Judge Throws Out Texas Ban on Drag Acts, Calls It Unconstitutional' [online], *Reuters*, 26 September 2023 <https://www.reuters.com/legal/us-judge-throws-out-texas-ban-drag-acts-calls-it-unconstitutional-2023-09-26/> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Andreeva, Nellie, '“RuPaul's Drag Race” Moves From Logo to VH1, More Viacom Show Shifts to Come?' [online], *Deadline*, 20 March 2017 <https://deadline.com/2017/03/rupauls-drag-race-moves-logo-vh1-viacom-series-shift-1202032976/> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Bakare, Lanre, 'RuPaul's Drag Race UK Promises to Be “Grittier” than US Version', *The Guardian*, 3 October 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/oct/03/rupauls-drag-race-uk-promises-to-be-grittier-than-us-version> [accessed 5 November 2023]

BBC, *Baga Chipz* [online], 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/rpdr-2019/baga-chipz> [accessed 5 November 2023]

BBC, *RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World: Meet The Queens* [online], 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/rupauls-drag-race-vs-the-world#panginaheals> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Binnie, Jon, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (London: Sage, 2004).

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446218341>

Bonnett, Alastair, 'How the British Working Class Became White: The Symbolic (Re)formation of Racialized Capitalism', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 11.3 (1998), 316–40.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6443.00066>

Boone, John, "'RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under': Meet the Queens of Season 1' [online], *ET Online*, 2021 <https://www.etonline.com/rupauls-drag-race-down-under-season-1-cast-161780> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Brennan, Niall, 'Contradictions Between the Subversive and the Mainstream: Drag Cultures and *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 29–43.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_3

Brown, Alexis, 'Being and Performance in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Critical Quarterly*, 60.4 (2018), 62–73.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/criq.12439>

Bui, Long T., and Sabrina Strings, "'She Is Not Acting, She Is": The Conflict Between Gender and Racial Realness on *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Feminist Media Studies*, 14.5 (2014), 822–36.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2013.829861>

Campana, Mario, and Katherine Duffy, 'RuPaul's Drag Race: Between Cultural Branding and Consumer Culture', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 108–30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.10>

Canavan, Brendan, 'Post-postmodern Consumer Authenticity, Shantay You Stay or Sashay Away? A Netnography of *RuPaul's Drag Race* Fans', *Marketing Strategy*, 21.2 (2021), 251–76.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593120985144>

González, Jorge C., and Kameron C. Cavazos, 'Serving Fishy Realness: Representations of Gender Equity on *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 30.6 (2016), 659–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1231781>

Chandra, Jessica 'RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under Reveals Its Fabulous Cast of Queens' [online], *Nine.com.au*, 2021 <https://www.nine.com.au/entertainment/latest/rupauls-drag-race-down-under-cast-queens-announced/6493cc32-12f6-459b-9ed8-9eab00ed6927> [accessed 8 November 2023]

Clark, Conor, 'Pangina Heals Defends Blu Hydrangea from *Drag Race UK* vs *The World* Backlash: "I Am Not Angry"' [online], *Gay Times*, 2022 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/pangina-heals-defends-blu-hydrangea-from-drag-race-uk-vs-the-world-backlash-i-am-not-angry/> [accessed 8 November 2023]

Collie, Hazel, and Gemma Commane, "Assume the Position: Two Queens Stand Before Me": RuPaul as Ultimate Queen', *Celebrity Studies*, 11.4 (2020), 402–16.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765081>

Cook, Michael, 'Art Simone's "Down Under" Return – "There's No Rule Book for *Drag Race*"' [online], *Instinct Magazine*, 2021 <https://instinctmagazine.com/art-simones-down-under-return-theres-no-rule-book-for-drag-race/> [accessed 9 November 2023]

Crookston, Cameron, 'Introduction: Why Are We All Gagging? Unpacking the Cultural Impact of *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.4>

Damshenas, Sam, 'Baga Chipz Explains Why You "Can't Just Look Good" to Win *Drag Race*' [online], *Gay Times*, 2019 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/baga-chipz-explains-why-you-cant-just-look-good-to-win-drag-race/> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Damshenas, Sam, 'Exclusive: Art Simone Dispels Wild Theories About Her *Drag Race Down Under* Return' [online], *Gay Times*, 2021 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/exclusive-art-simone-dispels-wild-theories-about-her-drag-race-down-under-return/> [accessed 9 November 2023]

Damshenas, Sam, 'Canada vs. *The World* Announced as Latest International *Drag Race* Season' [online], *Gay Times*, 2022 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/canada-vs-the-world-announced-as-latest-international-drag-race-season/> [accessed 10 November 2023]

Damshenas, Sam, 'Meet the 9 Fierce Queens Competing on *RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World*' [online], *Gay Times*, 2022 <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/meet-the-9-fierce-queens-competing-on-rupauls-drag-race-uk-vs-the-world/> [accessed 7 November 2023]

Darnell, Amy, L., and Ahoo Tabatabai, 'The Werk That Remains: Drag and the Mining of the Idealized Female Form', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 91–101. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_7

d'Harcourt, Ash Kinney, "Change the Motherfucking World!": The Possibilities and Limitations of Activism in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.6>

Doan, Petra L., and Higgins Harrison 'The Demise of Queer Space? Resurgent Gentrification and the Assimilation of LGBT Neighborhoods', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 31.1 (2011), 6–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X10391266>

Downton Draggy, RuPaul's Drag Race UK [online], Series 1, Episode 2, *BBC Three*, 10 October 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07p7kqs/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-2> [accessed 21 February 2023]

Edgar, Eir-Anne, 'Xtravaganza!: Drag Representation and Articulation in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Studies in Popular Culture*, 34.1 (2011), 133–46 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23416354>

Edward, Mark, and Stephen Farrier, 'Drag: Applying Foundation and Setting the Scene', in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers – Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 1, ed. by Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), pp. 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082977.ch-001>

Faithfull, Eden, 'Art Simone Discusses Being Eliminated from *Drag Race* After Her Bindi Irwin Impersonation' [online], *Nine.com.au*, 2021 <https://www.nine.com.au/entertainment/latest/rupauls-drag-race-down-under-art-simone-elimination-interview/c9ae7770-8d14-48fa-8459-9f537d2a1ee8> [accessed 8 November 2023]

Family Resemblance, RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under [online], Series 1, Episode 6, *BBC Three*, 5 June 2021 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p09jkk2w/rupauls-drag-race-down-under-series-1-episode-6> [accessed 10 May 2023]

Farrier, Stephen, 'International Influences and Drag: Just a Case of Tucking or Binding?', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 8.2 (2017), 171–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2017.1317657>

Feldman, Zeena, and Jamie Hakim, 'From *Paris is Burning* to #dragrace: Social Media and the Celebrification of Drag Culture', *Celebrity Studies*, 11.4 (2020), 386–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765080>

Flynn, Paul, '*Drag Race's* Baga Chipz: "I Wouldn't Say I'm Classy but I'm More Professional Now"' [online], *Grazia Daily*, 2019 <https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/tv-and-film/ru-paul-drag-race-baga-chipz/> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Friesen, Laura, 'Legend, Icon, Star: Cultural Production and Commodification in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 156–74. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.12>

Gabbatt, Adam, "'Subtle and Sinister': Republicans' Anti-Drag Crusade Seen as Assault on LGBTQ+ Rights', *The Guardian*, 19 September 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/19/us-states-attack-drag-shows-lgbtq-rights> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Global Glamazons, RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World [online], Series 1, Episode 1, *BBC Three*, 1 February 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m00143x2/rupauls-drag-race-uk-vs-the-world-series-1-episode-1> [accessed 22 March 2023]

Grand Finale, RuPaul's Drag Race UK [online], Series 1, Episode 8, *BBC Three*, 21 November 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07sxczl/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-8> [accessed 5 March 2023]

Gray, Lorna, 'The Most Important Conversation in This Season's *Bachelor* Isn't About Abbie' [online], *Elle Australia*, 2019 <https://www.elle.com.au/culture/the-bachelor-chelsie-ex-boyfriend-21210> [accessed 8 November 2023]

Grimes, Gary, 'Pangina Heals Says One Thing Won't Change After *Drag Race UK vs The World*: "I'll Still Be a B***h"' [online], *PinkNews*, 2022 <https://www.thepinknews.com/2022/02/01/drag-race-thailand-pangina-heals-uk-vs-the-world/> [accessed 7 November 2023]

Hailu, Selome, '*RuPaul's Drag Race* Moves to MTV, Launches "Global All Stars" and Editions in Brazil, Germany, Mexico' [online], *Variety*, 2022 <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/rupauls-drag-race-mtv-global-all-stars-1235457468/> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Hall, Jake, 'The dA-Zed Guide to British Drag' [online], *Dazed Digital*, 2023 <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/60761/1/the-da-zed-guide-to-british-drag-jacob-bloomfield> [accessed 30 October 2024]

Hermes, Joke, and Michael Kardolus, 'The RuPaul Paradox: Freedom and Stricture in a Competition Reality TV Show', *Javnost – The Public*, 28.1 (2021), 36–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2021.1924541>

Hodes, Caroline, and Jorge Sandoval, 'RuPaul's Drag Race: A Study in the Commodification of White Ruling-Class Femininity and the Etiolation of Drag', *Studies in Costume and Performance*, 3.2 (2018), 149–66. https://doi.org/10.1386/scp.3.2.149_1

James, Alastair, 'Drag Race Down Under's Art Simone "Gobsmacked" by Shock Elimination' [online], *Attitude Magazine*, 2021 <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/film-tv/drag-race-down-unders-art-simone-gobsmacked-by-shock-elimination-302875/> [accessed 8 November 2023]

Keegan, C  el M., 'History, Disrupted: The Aesthetic Gentrification of Queer and Trans Cinema', *Social Alternatives*, 35.3 (2016), 50–56

Kohlsdorf, Kai, 'Policing the Proper Queer Subject: RuPaul's Drag Race in the Neoliberal "Post" Moment', in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. by Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), pp. 67–87

LeBlanc, Ray, 'RuPaul's Franchise: Moving Toward a Political Economy of Drag Queening', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 131–55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.11>

Levine, Nick, 'Exclusive: Meet "Drag Queens of London" Star Baga Chipz' [online], *Attitude*, 2017 <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/film-tv/exclusive-meet-drag-queens-of-london-star-baga-chipz-279592/> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Litwiller, Fenton, 'Normative Drag Culture and the Making of Precarity', *Leisure Studies*, 39.4 (2020), 600–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2020.1800798>

Malone Mendez, Chris., 'The Art and Artistry of Pangina Heals' [online], *Forbes*, 2 July 2021 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cmalone/2021/07/02/the-art-and-artistry-of-pangina-heals> [accessed 7 November 2019]

Marcel, Mary, 'Representing Gender, Race and Realness: The Television World of America's Next Drag Superstars', in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. by Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), pp. 13–30

McIntyre, Joanna, and Damien W. Riggs, 'North American Universalism in *RuPaul's Drag Race*: Stereotypes, Linguicism, and the Construction of "Puerto Rican Queens"', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 61–75. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_5

Mercer, John, and Charlie Sarson, 'Fifteen Seconds of Fame: *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Camp and "Memeability"', *Celebrity Studies*, 11.4 (2020), 479–92.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765102>

Montgomery, Hugh. 'Is *RuPaul's Drag Race* Good for Drag?' [online], *BBC Culture*, 2 October 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20191002-is-rupauls-drag-race-a-good-thing-for-drag> [accessed 6 November 2023]

Nolfi, Joey, 'Brooke Lynn Hytes Makes History as Permanent *Canada's Drag Race* Judge' [online], *Entertainment Weekly*, 2019 <https://ew.com/tv/2019/09/26/canadas-drag-race-brooke-lynn-hytes-judge/> [accessed 10 November 2023]

Nolfi, Joey, '*Drag Race France* Crowns Season 12 Alum Nicky Doll as Its Host' [online], *Entertainment Weekly*, 2022 <https://ew.com/tv/nicky-doll-drag-race-france-host/> [accessed 10 November 2023]

Nolfi, Joey, '*Drag Race* Queens Valentina, Lolita Banana to Host *Drag Race Mexico*' [online], *Entertainment Weekly*, 2023 <https://ew.com/tv/drag-race-mexico-hosts-valentina-lolita-banana/> [accessed 10 November 2023]

Norris, Laurie, 'Of Fish and Feminists: Homonormative Misogyny and the Trans* Queen', in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. by Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), pp. 31–48

O'Connell, Rachel, '"Labouring in the Image": Celebrity, Femininity, and the Fully Commodified Self in the Drag of Willam Belli', *Celebrity Studies*, 11.4 (2020), 447–63.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1765085>

Oppenheim, Maya, 'Police Called as Protestors Storm Children's Story Hour Hosted by Drag Queen at Local Library', *The Independent*, 27 July 2022 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/drag-queen-reading-library-protests-b2132299.html> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Parslow, Joe, 'Dragging the Mainstream: *RuPaul's Drag Race* and Moving Drag Practices Between the USA and the UK', in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers – Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 1, ed. by Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), pp. 19–31.

<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082977.ch-002>

Povinelli, Elizabeth A., and George, Chauncey, 'Thinking Sexuality Transnationally: An Introduction', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 5.4 (1999), 439–49.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-5-4-439>

Posh on a Penny, RuPaul's Drag Race UK [online], Series 1, Episode 3, *BBC Three*, 17 October 2019

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07pqpq3/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-3>

[accessed 22 February 2023]

Rice, Lynette, 'Drag Race: New Editions Planned for Brazil, Germany and Mexico' [online], *Deadline*, 2022 <https://deadline.com/2022/12/drag-race-new-editions-planned-for-brazil-germany-and-mexico-1235196207/> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Rivers, Joshua. W, 'Twerk It & Werk It: The Impact of *RuPaul's Drag Race* on Local Underground Drag Scenes', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 11–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.5>

Rucycled, RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under [online], Series 1, Episode 4, *BBC Three*, 22 May 2021

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p09hbjbj/rupauls-drag-race-down-under-series-1-episode-4> [accessed 10 May 2023]

Sadler, Landon, "'If You Can't Love Yourself, How in the Hell You Gonna Love Somebody Else?': Care and Neoliberalism on *Queer Eye*, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and *Pose*", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 55.4 (2022), 799–819. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.13153>

Said, Edward W., *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978)

Schottmiller, Carl, "'This Is a Movement!': How *RuPaul* Markets Drag through DragCon Keynote Addresses', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 212–31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.15>

Snatch Game, RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under [online], Series 1, Episode 2, *BBC Three*, 8 May 2021 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p09fxy5s/rupauls-drag-race-down-under-series-1-episode-2> [accessed 10 May 2023]

Snatch Game, RuPaul's Drag Race UK vs. The World [online], Series 1, Episode 4, *BBC Three*, 22 February 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0014t2v/rupauls-drag-race-uk-vs-the-world-series-1-episode-4> [accessed 9 April 2023]

Sopitarchasak, Sakol, 'What It Means to Be a Drag Queen in Thailand: A Qualitative Study', *Asia Pacific Social Science Review*, 23.1 (2023), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.59588/2350-8329.1482>

Stillman, Andrew J., 'RuPaul Just Announced a Global *All Stars* Series of *Drag Race*' [online], *Out*, 13 December 2022 <https://www.out.com/television/2022/12/13/rupaul-just-announced-global-all-stars-season-drag-race> [accessed 10 November 2023]

Stokoe, Kayte, 'A Transfeminist Critique of Drag Discourses and Performance Styles in Three National Contexts (US, France and UK): From *RuPaul's Drag Race* to *Bar Wotever*', in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers – Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 1, ed. by Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), pp. 87–101. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082977.ch-007>

Stone, Aaron. J., 'How *Drag Race* Created a Monster: The Future of Drag and the Backward Temporality of *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula*', in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gagging?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 81–107. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.9>

Taylor, Harry, 'One Arrested amid Tate Britain Protest over Drag Queen Children's Event', *The Guardian*, 11 February 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/11/tate-britain-protest-drag-queen-childrens-storytelling-event-arrest> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Thirsty Werk, RuPaul's Drag Race UK [online], Series 1, Episode 6, *BBC Three*, 7 November 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07rr1js/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-6> [accessed 1 March 2023]

The Royal Queens, RuPaul's Drag Race UK [online], Series 1, Episode 1, *BBC Three*, 3 October 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p07l5qv/rupauls-drag-race-uk-series-1-episode-1> [accessed 20 February 2023]

Upadhyay, Nishant, "Can You Get More American than Native American?": Drag and Settler Colonialism in *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *Cultural Studies*, 33.3 (2019), 480–501.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2019.1584907>

Vale, Paul, 'Baga Chipz: "There Are Many Jealous Drag Queens. I Get a Lot of Stick"' [online], *The Stage*, 2019 <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/baga-chipz-there-are-many-jealous-drag-queens-i-get-a-lot-of-stick> [accessed 5 November 2023]

Vesey, Alyxandra, "A Way to Sell Your Records": Pop Stardom and the Politics of Drag Professionalization on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *Television and New Media*, 18.7 (2016), 589–604.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476416680889>

Ward, Jonathan, 'Serving "Reality" Television "Realness": Reading *RuPaul's Drag Race* and Its Construction of Reality', *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal*, 17.1 (2020), 23–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14775700.2020.1720407>

Weber, Cynthia, *Queer International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199795857.001.0001>

Westerling, Kalle, 'Race for the Money: The Influence of *RuPaul's Drag Race* on the Livelihood and Aesthetics of New York City's Drag Culture', in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers – Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 1, ed. by Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2020), pp. 33–44. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082977.ch-003>

Woodzick, K, "Heather Has Transitioned": Transgender and Non-binary Contestants on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, in *The Cultural Impact of RuPaul's Drag Race: Why Are We All Gaggling?*, ed. by Cameron Crookston (Bristol: Intellect, 2021), pp. 63–80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xw2c1.8>

World of Wonder, *Highway to Heel* [online], 2019 <https://www.wowpresentsplus.com/highway-to-heel> [accessed 8 November 2023]

Yudelman, Julia, 'The "RuPaulitics" of Subjectification in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Drag Culture*, ed. by Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 15–28. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50618-0_2

Zhang, Eric, 'Memoirs of a GAY! Sha: Race and Gender Performance on *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Studies in Costume and Performance*, 1.1 (2016), 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1386/scp.1.1.59_1

ⁱ At the time of writing (Nov 2023).

ⁱⁱ At the time of writing (Nov 2023).

ⁱⁱⁱ Within the *vs. The World* seasons, contestants eliminate each other, with the winners of each challenge competing in a lip-sync performance to determine which queen gains the power to eliminate a ‘bottom’ queen.

^{iv} This is RuPaul’s generic elimination line within *UK vs. The World*.

^v The eliminated contestants typically write a message in lipstick to the eliminated contestants, accompanied by a brief departure interview to camera.