The **18th** Annual
RESEARCH & CREATIVE INQUIRY DAY
Papers by English Students

Tennessee TECH

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Research & Creative Inquiry Day Papers by English Students

Volume 1

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Contents

Foreword

by Dr. Carl A. Pinkert

Interim Vice President for Research

On behalf of the *Tennessee Tech Research & Economic Development Team*

Graduate Student Paper

by Nicki Parish, M.A. in English Student, Professional and Technical Communication

Research Advisor: Dr. Kristin Pickering

Winner of Best Graduate Paper in English Award**

Undergraduate Student Papers

by Ashley Hale, B.A. in English Student, Theatre

Research Advisor: Dr. Kristen Deiter

by Hailey Reagan, B.A. in English Student, Literature

Research Advisor: Dr. Kristen Deiter

Winner of Best Undergraduate Paper in English Award**

Welcome to the 2023 Research and Creative Inquiry Day. This is the 18th annual RCI Day where students will once again have an opportunity to prepare and showcase their research and scholarship for a campus-wide audience. For many, this will be their first public academic presentation – truly a momentous culmination of all of their hard work and training. For many, this opportunity will set the stage for future presentations/interviews and continuing success.

During RCI Day, students will have the opportunity to hone their presentations in front of a supportive audience. Those of you who are audience participants should take the time to engage students on their projects. I am certain that their underlying preparation and spirited enthusiasm will shine brightly. Each presenter's passion may also ignite interests in others interested in seeking a rewarding mentoring relationship.

This year's RCI Day features posters and papers on topics across every field of study at Tech, as well as transdisciplinary efforts where collaborative teams from different colleges have come together to build novel and exciting projects. Behind each presentation, faculty mentors have exposed students to research and scholarship beyond the classroom – providing a solid foundation for innovation and discovery.

The experiences over the past year do not only introduce students to a faculty mentor's area of expertise; they further inspire active learning, stimulate creativity, build critical-thinking skills, while providing a well-earned sense of accomplishment. The importance of these factors cannot be underestimated in educating and preparing students for their post-Tech goals. Participation in such programs also provides students with an opportunity to test the waters in new areas across a host of disciplines. Through such opportunities, participation and hands-on experiences can readily shape a student's long-term perspectives.

As students have the chance to expand their knowledge-base during RCI Day, I challenge you to identify an area outside of your majors to learn something new today. As all of the exciting presentations highlight, you have many options in front of you at Tech. Soak up what may be totally new to you, and you might be pleasantly surprised as to what may actually impact your decision-making processes and subsequently influence your career trajectory.

It should also be noted that the Office of Research and Economic Development has grown over the last year, bringing on many new faces. Many staff members are also experiencing their first RCI Day. We've learned even more about hosting, the logistics in moving the event to the Memorial Gymnasium for the first time, and as many of you have recently witnessed -- how to best provide printing support for all poster presenters.

We most certainly need to acknowledge the Center for Career Development and their efforts in providing resumé-critiquing services. They also extended invitations to employers/recruiters looking to hire capable, confident, and well-educated Tech interns and graduates. RCI Day affords students with a tremendous opportunity to share a great story with potential employers.

Congratulations to all presenters, their co-workers and mentors who have worked diligently and with a zealous passion to prepare presentations that demonstrate the breadth of Tech's commitment to academic excellence. We look forward to the visibility that students will receive as RCI Day highlights exciting developments and breakthroughs.

Before closing, I want to thank everyone involved in RCI Day from logistical support to generating posters and presentations. We should all recognize and applaud the judges tasked with reviewing and scoring presentations. And lastly, I want to acknowledge the outstanding volunteers and the team within the Office of Research and Economic Development that worked conscientiously to make this Tennessee Tech tradition – even stronger in 2023.

And as Research and Creative Inquiry events get underway, WINGS UP!!

Dr. Carl A. Pinkert
Interim Vice President for Research
On behalf of the *Tennessee Tech Research & Economic Development Team*

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"We're Just Doing Drag":

How Social Media Affects User Perceptions of Drag Queens[1]

by Nicki Parish

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Introduction

Drag culture and the art of Drag have recently gained more visibility in popular culture. *RuPaul's Drag Race* is one of the most popular shows in queer entertainment with millions of fans and viewers. The contestants of the show have a huge social media presence and have created spaces for amateur drag queens, that is drag queens that have less experience and reach into the public eye, to gain work experience. Many contestants run LGBTQIA+ bars and own their own lines of makeup, clothes, accessories, and other things; one queen even owns a motel. Social media has certainly played a major part in these queens' progress, success, visibility, and ability to gain a following for not only themselves, but less-known drag queens whose work they might support. With more visibility for drag queens and queer spaces, however, the hate for them, fueled by misconceptions, also has a bigger presence, especially on social media platforms.

A lot of Professional and Technical Communication (PTC) research emphasizes the study of how people interact with each other using technology, and a subgenre of PTC is media studies, specifically social media. The research in this paper will tie directly to the investigation of how social media and its communities influence users' perceptions of drag and drag queens as well as how the heteronormative notions idealized in our society force queer communities to be silent. In the PTC field, there appears to be a gap in research related to studying drag queens, social media, and the ways they interact that I hope to fill. First, I will engage with previous

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[1] This paper is a condensed version of a more extensive research paper.

studies that focus on social media, how it has been related to helping or harming queer

communities, the perceptions of them, and social media interactions; then, I will move to my

study, that includes my theoretical framework, which examines the relationship between

perception and social media and how LGBTQIA+ voices get suppressed. I am using *Instagram,*

TikTok, and *YouTube* as the core platforms for my data. Finally, I will discuss my results and

what they mean for the relation between online platforms and reality as well as what they mean

for queer communities, specifically drag queens.

Background

The inspiration for this study comes directly from the Cookeville community, our

college's campus, and how administration and leaders recently handled an all-ages drag event

and drag protests. While Tennessee Tech University is a public university not associated with

any specific religion and formally "does not condone discrimination based on any identity," its

Southern, and relatively rural, location means a large portion of the student body belongs to one

of the denominations of Christianity, as is common in areas in the "Bible Belt." These religious

populations' presence (sometimes, not always) means a lack of queer-inclusive spaces on

campus because of a deficit in sensitivity to queer individuals' needs that Christianity can

sometimes foster. Additionally, outrage and hate from the greater Cookeville community

directed at drag queens and their events has come to a peak in January of 2023 with anti-

LGBTQIA+ protests and proposed legislation. Even entertaining the idea of anti-LGBTQIA+

legislation proves that Cookeville is clearly not a hospitable city for queer people, specifically

drag queens, and that portions of the Tennessee Tech campus within Cookeville reflects

ideologies similar to these protesters.

In Tech's case, queer spaces on campus are often invisible to the average student unless one seeks them out. Several student groups on Tennessee Tech's campus such as Lambda Gay-Straight Alliance, the Tech Players, and the Backdoor Playhouse have made efforts to create queer spaces on campus by hosting events that promote inclusion, such as an all-ages drag show hosted monthly. On August 20, 2022, however, they hosted one of these shows that received immense backlash from online communities, a lot of which aren't even associated with Tennessee Tech.

The drag show hosted in August of 2022 received hate from community and non-community members based on inaccurate accusations about the intentions of drag queens, their attire, music choice, and the audience, resulting in Lambda's and the Tech Players' suspension from hosting events on campus. Although the Backdoor Playhouse has continued to function, these student-led groups faced the consequences for hosting this event. This suspension was eventually proven to be unfair, not true, and lifted, but saying this online had massive consequences. The video that circulated, originally posted by Landon Starbuck, a self-proclaimed "warrior for children," showed the drag queen performing to "Take Me to Church" by Hozier and a clip of them dancing and doing an outfit reveal, something very common in drag performances. Starbuck's circulation of this video caused false notions of the performers' intentions to spread across online platforms due to the caption on her video. Her commentary on this post encourages her followers to agree with her about this incorrect perception about the nature of drag queens and this show, make baseless accusations, and ignorantly related queer identity and the performer's identity to that of pedophilia because they all lack context and only know what they have seen from Starbuck's post and opinions. The influence that social media

creators have on their followers' perceptions and opinions, specifically about drag queens, will be investigated further in this paper.

This is simply one instance of social media influencing viewers' interpretations of reality, specifically about the art of drag, in this case. Social media creators hold positions as leaders, role models, and public figures, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and followers value what they have to say. Many drag queens play roles as educational, political, and social advocates such as in instances of political rallies and efforts, or the popular growing event "drag queen story times," but when one ignorant social media user perpetuates a false notion on the purpose of drag, their advocational efforts disappear, and their narrative gets twisted by people who believe unbacked accusations.

Literature Review

Drag is a common discussion topic in pop culture, but not a thoroughly studied issue in scholarship, especially not as it is related to social media and outsider perceptions. The scholarship on the effects of social media on perception, however, is extensive. This literature review will engage with these two separate, but integral themes and elaborate on the ways they intersect.

Social media has become a part of modern life, and there's no indication that it will disappear any time soon. Social media has a great presence in many people's everyday lives, whether it be for short form entertainment, keeping up with family and friends, or a full-blown influencer career, but these platforms "…are also unleashing a myriad of complex psychological issues that have altered our collective sense of reality" (Thomas). Some of these issues include a skewed perception of reality based on others' opinions and what they share online.

Everyone has witnessed fake news or non-fact-based information being shared and believed by viewers. As people and social beings, we often want to believe each other and hold similar opinions to those we associate with to promote our own social acceptance. Oftentimes, "the way we perceive/evaluate potential information to share is a joint product of roughly three classes of factors: (1) the attributes of the information, (2) the perceiver's domain knowledge, and (3) the social relationships given" (Sohn 143). This emphasizes that our perception of information comes from social relationships and who portrays it, both of which social media relates to. This can also manifest in the ways users interact, confirm, and support content with things such as likes, comments, and shares.

Another study investigating how social media metrics affect first person perception indicates that "consumers use social media cues such as the number of likes that a post receives to shape their attitudes and intentions regarding the subject of that post, and this relationship is mediated by perceptions of social exclusion" (Vinuales). Does this mean we believe false information if it's received well by others, has a lot of shares, comments, and likes, or someone whose opinion we care about is the one sharing it? Maybe. Regardless, it means that social media can have a great effect on individuals' perceptions of different topics and information based on what content they consume.

As technology advances, the variety of ways in which it can silence and limit marginalized groups of people also grows. One of the most common methods that social media platforms have adopted to moderate content, that has disproportionately affected LGBTQIA+ communities, is artificial intelligence (AI) systems, but manmade and generated policies have also discriminated against queer individuals in online spaces. Social media platforms frequently use AI systems to censor and hide content that is deemed offensive based on key words and

topics that moderators have programed into the AI system. One recent study revealed that "these technologies are still far from being able to grasp context or to detect the intent or motivation of the speaker, failing to recognize specific usages of certain words as socially valuable content" (Oliva 702). This failure to recognize context caused an unintentional, but harmful labeling of drag queens' social media content as toxic. Oliva clarifies that "The use of 'mock impoliteness' has been identified by queer linguistic studies as a form of interaction that serves to prepare members of the LGBTQ community to cope with hostility. Automated analyses that disregard such a pro-social function might have significant repercussions on the queer community's ability to reclaim words…" (702-703). In other words, mock impoliteness refers to how drag communities are reclaiming harmful words or phrases as well as treating other community members with fake hostility to prepare them for real hostility they may face. Without the consideration of this context related to mock impoliteness, queer communities' content gets unfairly moderated and hidden, and in this study, in fact, the AI system used for testing deemed "a significant number of drag queen Twitter accounts…as more toxic than the accounts of Donald Trump and white nationalists" (Oliva 703). Its failure to recognize typically offensive words that were being reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community provides one example of the ways heteronormative society silences queer voices, unintentionally or not.

Additionally, social media platforms have created policies in the past that threaten the identities of LGBTQIA+ individuals, specifically drag queens. For example, in 2014, Facebook created a guideline in its terms of service that required profiles to correspond with legal identities, and in keeping with this policy, "Facebook had closed the accounts of a number of drag performers, provoking outrage, protests, and eventually an apology." In doing so, "…Facebook's policies reflected particular assumptions of identity and communication that

privileged some users over others, driving people who fall outside this scope to come up with hacks, tricks and workarounds to meet their needs" (Lingel 3). Most drag queens use stage names that are integral for their drag personas and identities, so this guideline put members of the drag community at a disadvantage for social media exposure and engagement on a platform where a lot of their audience interaction occurs. Additionally, Facebook created and enforced a policy that has legitimized a heteronormative identity as the "correct" one, thus pushing drag queens and other queer individuals with a fluid identity to the margins.

It is no secret that LGBTQIA+ people have faced discrimination on social media platforms, and in general, since their inception. Social media also, however, "plays a vital role for members of this community, simultaneously allowing self-promotion and community solidarity" (Lingel 2). Many LGBTQIA+ individuals rely on online platforms for their livelihood and career, but "more than 50% of LGBTQ individuals have been victims of homophobic or transphobic slurs… These individuals create content 'inspired and curated from their personal interests and daily activities' of a specific topic…specifically to raise their voice as an LGBTQ identified person" (Sabala 10). Despite their growing success as influencer figures, queer people, specifically members of the drag community, with an online presence face adversity in these environments and roles that heteronormative, cisgendered individuals are less likely to face.

While "Americans' perceptions of LGBTQ+ lifestyles are experiencing more positive shifts" (Frankel 1), there is still a "digital inhospitality" that manifests in queer online environments (Ramler 1). Tennessee Tech's own Dr. Mari Ramler coins the term "queer usability" to offer "an intervention strategy when technical communicators encounter digital inhospitality" (1). She defines queer usability as "the anticipation of marginalized communities and the application of this anticipation to user-centered design to create a digital space in which

marginalized populations are centered. In short, queer usability anticipates and centers marginalized users and their anticipated needs" (1). Additionally, Ramler emphasizes that "policy is always inherently laden with (often hetero-normative, white supremacist, and patriarchal) values and…that those who write policy make worlds" (12). Queer usability begins to provide a solution to these inhospitable environments that queer people encounter in online platforms. Social media content moderation systems and policymakers that control them should aim to create safer online communities for LGBTQIA+ people on their platforms and be conscious of the ways they are, often inadvertently, ignoring context, silencing queer voices, censoring their content, and upholding heteronormative ideals in our society.

These discussions and themes have several ramifications for queer communities and the ways others perceive them online. Based on the studies with social media metrics, we can see that if users are encouraging actions and promoting opinions that are harmful to LGBTQIA+ communities through likes and shares, a wider population is more likely to believe these perceptions to be credible. Drag queens make up a significant portion of the queer community, many of which rely on social media to promote their events, products, and other career choices, and if a wide online population is unsupportive of their endeavors, their livelihoods are at stake. For these reasons, it is so important, now more than ever, for social media platforms and those in their administration to be conscious of the ways they are moderating content and creating policies. Without proper consciousness of how these actions affect marginalized users, policymakers and platform users risk eradicating the safe online spaces that the queer community has worked hard to create.

The Study

  Rationale

  Before the deeper discussion of my study, I will define several key terms and specify their relevance. For the purposes of this study, "social media" refers to the "means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks" (Tufts University). In my study, the main social media platforms used for analysis are *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *YouTube*. It is important to define this term because the entire study relates to how influences and interactions from social media can alter people's interpretations of reality and suppress marginalized communities.

  I will also provide a description of the three social media platforms in this study which offer very different ways for how people consume content. *TikTok* is a platform that focuses primarily on videos ranging from 15 seconds to three minutes with video content ranging from informational to comedic and anything in between. *YouTube,* similar to *TikTok,* focuses on videos, but on *YouTube,* the content is usually longer and more extensive with an average video length of 11.7 minutes, though they can be much longer (Rappold). Each one provides unique results when it comes to what people share, who responds to it, and how it affects user perceptions.

  The primary rationale for this study is that the issues discussed are directly affecting our campus as of recently. Tennessee Tech University has a social media presence that, after the Backdoor Playhouse Drag Show, administration used to comment on the nature of the event that took place. In turn, Tech's posts and the statement they released about the drag show affected many social media users' perceptions of the event and the queer individuals involved, some of which were not based in reality. This conversation and investigation are essential to have in order

to promote the visibility of queer communities and ways that we, as students, administrators, teachers, campus community members, and citizens of the world, can make physical spaces and online spaces more inhabitable and hospitable for them.

Research Questions

My research questions for this study are the following:

- How does our heteronormative society force queer communities, in this case drag queens, to be silent in online social media platforms?

- How does social media affect users' perspectives and opinions about drag queens and the drag community?

Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical framework that will anchor this study is queer theory. The ideas of "being queer" and how these identities are viewed, constructed, and oppressed are ones that have been central societal debates for decades; Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* provides the groundwork of queer theory and explores the ways our society is a heteronormative construction that oppresses queer communities. Sedgwick argues that heterosexuality is the accepted norm for our society, and the world has been organized to favor heterosexual individuals as she writes, "The most obvious fact about the history of judicial formulations is that it codifies an excruciating system of double binds, systematically oppressing gay people, identities, and acts by undermining through contradictory constraints on discourse the grounds of their very being" (70). Here, she emphasizes how our society's laws promote ideals that protect cisgendered, straight individuals and heteronormative constructs while harming and oppressing queer people.

A second idea that Sedgwick presents is that queer sexuality cannot exist without being an effect of some other identity, as she says "…generally because erotic identity, of all things, is never to be circumscribed simply as itself, can never not be relational…" (81). These assumed relationships birth huge misconceptions when it comes to the intentions of queer art and culture and are frequently communicated through social media platforms. Online hate commenters often incorrectly relate LGBTQIA+ identity with pedophilia and grooming, which, in turn, influences the way their followers think about queer identity and, for the purposes of this study, drag queens. The backlash and the unjust assumptions that heterosexual, cisgender audiences, who have misconceptions about queer identities because of social media influence, attribute to drag queens online are prime examples of how society aims to silence queer communities.

The Data

There are three different pieces of data I analyzed for this research in the form of three different social media posts: a *TikTok* video and its comments, an *Instagram* post with a statement in the caption and its comments, and a *YouTube* video. Today, I will just be discussing the *TikTok* and the *YouTube* videos.

The *TikTok* video comes from user @thegoodliars and features two men in an in-the-field news style interview (Fig. 1). The interviewer, co-owner of the account, asks the other man, "What do you think is more dangerous for children, going to drag shows or guns?" To which he replies, "Drag shows, if you ask me. Kids can own guns legitimately, use them the right way, but drag shows are just horrible." To this, the interviewer follows up with, "But you think drag shows put them in more danger than a gun?" The man answers, "Well, it's going to change their lives, sure. I didn't go to them when I was, they weren't around when I was young. So yeah, I

don't believe in it." The interviewer concludes with, "But a drag show probably wouldn't kill somebody?" and the man agrees, despite his previous replies.

Fig. 1. @thegoodliars *TikTok* Interview Asking a Man,

"What's more dangerous, going to drag shows or GUNS?"

The *YouTube* video is by Trixie Mattel, arguably one of the most famous drag queens in the industry, reacting to a different *YouTube* video made by the channel Girl Defined, an alleged Christian *YouTube* channel for women (Fig. 2). In Girl Defined's original video, the owners of that channel discuss a drag event in Texas that received backlash, and the channel owners, Kristen and Bethany, ridicule drag queens as "a mockery of God's design for women." Trixie

Mattel, while in drag, responds and reacts to the comments they make in a campy way that pokes fun at many of the arguments in their video.

Fig. 2. Trixie Mattel's *YouTube* Video

Reacting to Girl Defined's Video Criticizing Drag Queens

Methods

Narrowing down the content I was going to discuss for this study was difficult. To begin, I had a large sample size that contained posts from almost every popular social media platform including *TikTok, Instagram, Twitter,* and *YouTube.* I wanted to have a broad range of media from different platforms that offered a variety of opinions on drag queens that either the creator or comments on the post displayed. I eventually sorted through all of them, and these were the

two I chose because they came from two different platforms and offered unique perspectives about drag in each.

For each piece of data from social media, I picked several pieces of content from each, either quotes from the original post or comments, that expressed a range of perceptions about drag queens and the creator's opinions. From there, I analyzed how the literature I've previously discussed ties into these samples and applied it in an attempt to answer my research questions. This application focuses on the queer theory discussed previously and how online perceptions of drag queens contribute to their marginalization and suppression back into the closet.

Analysis

The *TikTok* is from a creator that seems to be in support of drag queens because of his leading questions and tone of voice he uses to ask them. The content and what the interviewee says, however, that a drag show is more dangerous than a gun, proves to uphold the perception that drag is dangerous. Overall, though, I think the video is trying to promote a positive view of drag queens. After the man initially says a drag show is more dangerous, the interviewer asks, "but a drag show probably wouldn't kill anyone?" to which the interviewee replies, "no, it wouldn't kill anyone." Using a humorous tone of voice to ask this question, @thegoodliar is able to get the man he's interviewing to subvert his argument which points out the flaws in his logic and conveys it to the audience as faulty.

Comments on this *TikTok* range from agreeing that the man's argument is flawed to vaguely agreeing with the man that drag is dangerous. A majority of comments sense that the interviewer is poking fun at the man's argument and agree that it has faulty logic. Commenters use drag queen slang in the comments to tease the man, such as user @kydelani who comments "I went to a drag show once…I got slayed." Here, Delani, is using the word "slayed" which, in

drag lingo means greatly impressed or amused, but in layman's terms, means killed. This double meaning provides a clever, comedic comment on this man's harmful perception. Other users use fact to point out the flaws in reasoning such as user @theatreknox who says, "Drag Shows were around when he was young and long before that. Hello, has he never heard of Shakespeare." This comment refutes the toxic argument the man presents that attempts to obscure the history of drag and say that drag wasn't around when he was a kid. NuVogue (@theatreknox) uses factual information about Shakespeare to prove drag has been around for centuries and elevates a positive perception about drag. One comment, however, seems to discount both sides of the argument as the commenter writes, "Both why would you even give a child a gun and why would you take them to a drag show when there's a park" (retanvcvch). This doesn't totally support the man's perspective, but it doesn't really oppose it either. There are several other poorly written comments that demonstrate belief that the interviewee's opinion is the right one, proving that this *TikTok* reveals mixed perceptions of drag queens despite the creator himself supporting them.

The social media sample I chose that does have a positive perception of drag queens is Trixie Mattel's reaction video. Obviously, Trixie herself is a drag queen, so this was expected. Throughout the video, Trixie pauses and reacts to what Kristen and Bethany are saying, counters their accusations with factual information and personal experience as a drag queen, and criticizes the hypocrisy of straight people crossdressing for comedic purposes. Similar to the backlash to the Backdoor Playhouse Drag Show, Girl Defined discusses an incident in Texas where a queen performed for kids. Trixie mentions, "To say that all drag is appropriate for children is wrong. To say that all drag is inappropriate for children is wrong…Every drag show is different. Every drag performer is different" (5:23). She emphasizes that drag is not inherently inappropriate for

children and all performers have their preferences for who their audience is. Things heat up, however, as Girl Defined accuses drag queens of "preying on these young children" (9:53). Trixie immediately pauses and retaliates with "I'm gonna tell you something very fundamental. Nobody who does drag thinks about kids. We don't get in drag thinking 'I hope the kids in the audience like it. I hope the kids really turn up for me today. I hope the kids brought their tipping money.' The whole thing of gay people and children and grooming, like, wanting to [prey on] children is crazy" (9:27). Trixie works hard to deflect and disprove the false relation people have made between gay people and pedophilia. Additionally, Trixie illustrates that "It's funny when it's like Tyler Perry doing Madea, or Dana Carvey doing church lady, anything like that it's not drag and it's fine, but when it's in a queer space…suddenly it's like traumatic" (13:00). This blatant hypocrisy that Trixie draws attention to helps accentuate the positive perception of drag queens that she is trying to communicate by asking what the difference is between beloved television comedians doing drag and queer people whose career is drag. The answer: there isn't one, "we're just doing drag" (Mattel 16:47).

Another incorrect perception that Trixie works to combat in her video is that drag queens, and the queer community in general, have some kind of agenda. Multiple times in Girl Defined's video, they discuss the "evil and immorality of drag" and how there is a push for queer culture to be "mainstream." Trixie counters this in several different ways. First, she mentions that "they [Girl Defined] keep talking about how drag is being pushed in the mainstream. Mary, unless I fly into your house in drag and take your dead arm while you're sleeping and make you click download…nobody's pushing you to do anything. People are willfully enjoying this because they don't care what people like this have to say about it" (13:44). Here, she supports a positive attitude towards drag by emphasizing that people watch drag because they *enjoy* watching drag.

Additionally, Trixie refutes the notorious "gay agenda" that homophobic people often accuse the queer community of having and continues to craft a favorable image of drag queens just as what they are: performers trying to get their job done. This video helps to negate the negative perception many people have about drag queens because of what they've seen on social media platforms like Girl Defined's *YouTube* channel. Trixie Mattel uses her own experience and knowledge as a drag queen to create an authentically positive perception of drag queens online and a platform that is safe for queer voices.

Results and Discussion

These samples are two distinct examples of social media that exhibit varying perceptions about drag queens. The *TikTok* from @thegoodliar has mixed signals when it comes to perceptions of drag queens and giving a voice to queer communities online. Users can tell that the creator himself is critical of his interviewee's opinion, but, nonetheless, the man still expresses an opinion that many people agree with. This *TikTok* represents both sides of people's perspectives on drag. As far as giving a voice to queer individuals online, commenters do use fact to expose the flawed logic in the man's argument, and there is no indication of overt silencing of queer populations. Some comments are discriminatory against these populations, but the factual support far outweighs the hate despite the initial opinion the man expresses and some agreement that drag shows are more dangerous than guns.

Trixie Mattel's video, however, offers a bright spot in this investigation as her channel makes efforts to create a safe space for queer people online and offers constructive perceptions of drag queens. Trixie's video does not force queer people into silence, but rather encourages them to speak up and be themselves. She is supportive of drag and drag queens, obviously, because that is her chosen career. By using fact and experience from her own career, Trixie

makes room for other queer voices in her online platforms. Her *YouTube* and other social media foster a positive perception of drag queens and their work and help negate some of the fictitious notions that people outside of the queer community may hold.

Conclusion

Drag garners both love and hatred from audiences across the globe, and people are learning more about it thanks to social media. Whether this social media is causing them to have a good perception of what drag queens do or a harmful, distorted perception is based largely on the media they are consuming. Social media seems to affect users' perceptions of drag queens based on the opinions and media they see and consume the most. This means, generally, if someone is following creators who have negative stances and perceptions about drag, they will agree with their opinions. The opposite is also true; if a creator is pro-drag and offers positive perceptions of drag queens, their followers and commenters are more likely to also promote positivity. One thing rings true: social media isn't going anywhere and certainly has an effect on how users see the world based on creators they follow and admire.

Additionally, overall, social media can play a role in silencing and harming LGBTQIA+ voices, but it can also refute false accusations and create a safe online community for them. It seems like I see something on social media daily that bashes the reputation of drag queens and queer communities with misleading ideas that were born out of hate and homophobia. As a society, we need to work to create safer, more hospitable online environments for queer people and stop forcing them back into the closet that they have always been required to reside in. Being conscious of what we post online and how it influences other people's perceptions is the first step. More queer education, acceptance, accountability for each other's actions, and knowledge

of how to build queer-inclusive spaces in our day-to-day lives is the only way forward out of the toxic heteronormativity that our society currently inhabits.

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Misogyny: the Tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*

by Ashley Hale

In *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet's relationship presents a patriarchal perspective as to why young love would end in tragedy. The characters' narrow views on women stem from the phallocentric society that they live in, and these limitations cause Juliet to become completely defined by men. Although Shakespeare presents Romeo and Juliet as star-crossed lovers whose relationship is bound to end in tragedy by some supernatural force, patriarchal influences ultimately control their fate by minimizing women's value and place in a relationship.

In *Romeo and Juliet,* male and female characters both express negative portrayals of women, which sets the scene for women's roles to be minimized for the rest of the play. The male view in particular is disrespectful towards women and places their value solely on sexual capability and beauty. In the beginning of the play*,* two of Shakespeare's characters, Sampson and Gregory, are discussing how they feel about women, which ultimately equates to them viewing women as sexual objects. Sampson even goes so far as to say,

'Tis true, and therefore women, being the

weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall. Therefore I

will push Montague's men from the wall and thrust

his maids to the wall. (Shakespeare 1.1.15-18)

Not only does Sampson refer to women as the weaker vessels, he also places a woman's worth in her virginity and sexual capabilities. These characters are not the only ones to think this way either, as Sampson reveals that they are "*ever* thrust to the wall." Additionally, when giving Romeo advice, Benvolio says to move on from a woman by "giving liberty unto thine eyes. /

Examine other beauties" (Shakespeare 1.1.235-36). Although it would appear as though Benvolio is complimenting women, he is undermining their mental and logical ability by focusing on surface-level aspects like beauty. The perspective set by these characters initiates the negative patriarchal view of women that is promoted by other characters throughout the rest of the play.

Like the male characters in the play, the female characters have a negative view of other women, which limits opportunities for young women like Juliet. Juliet's own mother says, "Well, think of marriage now. Younger than you / Here in Verona, ladies of esteem, / Are made already mothers" (Shakespeare 1.3.70-71). This means that Lady Capulet sees a woman's place as being a mother and a wife. Both of these roles are dependent on men, and Lady Capulet encourages her young daughter to submit as soon as she can. The Nurse has a similarly dismissive view on women as she aids Lady Capulet in pressuring Juliet into marriage. Both of Juliet's older female influences are telling her that she needs to be submissive and dependent upon men, which limits her opportunity to have an independent identity.

In addition to limiting Juliet, Lady Capulet and the Nurse also provide examples of how gender is a learned behavior, which is a large part of gender studies. According to *A Handbook to Literature,* gender studies are "interdisciplinary inquiries devoted to the general topic of gender, particular to the analysis of gender as something performed, practiced, negotiated, or constructed rather than inherent" ("Gender Studies"). Juliet is a young woman who has no inherent reliance on men or need of marriage, but her mother and nurse are teaching her the socially constructed way to behave as her gender. These women have grown accustomed to the patriarchal version of society and are pushing it onto the next generation.

This generational misogyny stems from the phallocentric society that they live in, where all positions of power are held by men. Charles Bressler defines *phallocentrism* as "the belief that identifies the phallus as the source of power in culture and literature, with its accompanying male-centered and male-dominated patriarchal assumptions" (144). In *Romeo and Juliet,* the two lovers' world is dominated by their feuding families. The feud "reinforces their identities as sons and daughters by allying them with their paternal household against another paternal household, thus polarizing all their social relations, particularly their marital choices" (Kahn 6). These two characters have been told by their fathers whom they can interact with for their entire lives. Since Romeo and Juliet are limited so much by their parents' feud, Shakespeare proves that the main sources of power in the play are Lord Capulet and Lord Montague.

In the scene about Romeo's first love interest, Rosaline, another figure of power in this play, is discussed. Romeo says, "Well in that hit you miss. She'll not be hit / With Cupid's arrow," which shows that Cupid is a figure that normally holds a position of power over women (Shakespeare 1.1.208-09). Shakespeare also includes a phallic symbol in Cupid's arrow. This symbol of male power is not able to penetrate Rosaline, which causes Romeo to be in a state of despair and Benvolio to think she is not worthy of his affections. Romeo also reveals that he attempts to control Rosaline even when he admits that he is "out of her favor where [he is] in love" (Shakespeare 1.1.173). Romeo is not willing to accept Rosaline's decisions, which takes the control out of her hands. Romeo proves in this scene that he contributes to the patriarchal view of women and their roles in relationships.

Romeo's affection for Rosaline does not last long, as he quickly moves on to Juliet; this fast transition furthers the implication that women are limited in their place in society and their roles in relationships, and causes Juliet to be the "Other." Bressler writes that the *Other* is a word

that Simone de Beauvoir used, which means "an object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the dominant male" (149). Romeo is immediately drawn to Juliet because of her beauty. Romeo ultimately shows that beauty is the only thing he cares about, as he knows nothing else about Juliet before he admits his love for her and even kisses her (Shakespeare 1.5.116-21). This action limits Juliet to being seen only as a beautiful object, which contributes to her being a representative of the "Other," since her character is defined by the dominant male.

Juliet's mother also denies Juliet any power to change her social position and change her role as the "Other" by deferring Juliet's choice of marriage partners to Lord Capulet. Mary Beth Rose argues that "the power of women to effect cultural change both by choosing socially unequal husbands and by arranging upwardly or downwardly mobile marriages for their children was widely acknowledged and feared in Renaissance England" (310). However, when Juliet denies that she would ever marry Paris, Lady Capulet "nevertheless specifically declines not only to take her daughter's part but to venture any opinion at all" (Rose 309). Although marrying Paris would have been an upwardly mobile marriage for the family, marrying Romeo would have provided social change not only in subsiding the feud, but also giving a woman the freedom to make her decision in marriage. However, Lady Capulet takes away any of the power that she or Juliet had by giving Lord Capulet the absolute authority in the matter. Both of Juliet's parents want her to be submissive to her father and her future husband.

Although her influences are telling her to submit, Juliet attempts to stand up to a patriarch: her father. Lord Capulet wants Juliet to marry Paris, even though Juliet has shown that she has no interest in him. When Juliet commits to a marriage with Romeo instead, she defies the power figure over her. As Carolyn E. Brown states, Juliet can be considered "a self-willed, courageous, intelligent young woman who initiates and controls action in her struggle to preserve

her integrity and autonomy in a world that is hostile to women" (333). However, the play still ends in tragedy and the death of both of the young lovers. Because the only female character who tries to stand up for herself against the phallocentric society fails, the play ultimately shows that patriarchal influences controlled Romeo and Juliet's relationship all along.

Romeo and Juliet ends in tragedy for the two lovers because of the oppression women faced during the time of this play. The patriarchal society in Romeo and Juliet has caused the young men and women of this play to learn the accepted way of behaving their gender. The character's misogynistic views on women cause Juliet to become the "Other," which she ultimately stands up to. Shakespeare writes Juliet as a rare female character who is willing to defy the patriarchy, but through her failure in doing so, he ultimately teaches the lesson that women are bound to be defined by men.

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Romeo's Love: Realistic or Delusion?

A Psychoanalytic Approach to *Romeo and Juliet*

by Hailey Reagan

The play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare has become one of the most notorious love stories. With a dramatic ending and a forbidden romance, the story seems like the ideal romance; however, once examined with a Freudian eye, the notorious romance unfurls. Sigmund Freud created the psychoanalytic approach to literature; Bressler defines the psychoanalytic approach to literature by stating, "Freud is one of the first to suggest that it is the unconscious, not the conscious, that governs a large part of our actions" (125). In other words, Freud believes that internal desires control external actions. In the case of Romeo, his internal romantic desires are exhibited through his external romantic actions. The psychoanalytic approach to literature can be used to exemplify the delusions Romeo experiences due to his unhealthy idea of love and the heartbreak that ensues due to it.

The conscious and unconscious minds govern a part of our actions, according to Bressler. However, the two are much more complex than such a brief description. "Unconscious thought, on the other hand, 'refers to cognitive and/ or affective task-relevant processes that take place outside conscious awareness'. The saying 'To sleep on it' characterizes this kind of processing and its merits…" (Ham and Bos 77). The two ideas of the conscious and unconscious affect Romeo's judgement on the ideal love drastically. Romeo's relationship standard shifts over the duration of Shakespeare's play due to his unconscious desires.

Rosaline and Romeo's relationship is tragically flawed, but despite its tragic flaws, Romeo convinces himself that their relationship is perfect, yet he is unhappy. This is the external romantic action that Romeo is projecting; however, internally, Romeo's id shows him images of

his perfect woman and images of his perfect relationship—Juliet. Harmon defines the id as being

"...in the unconscious and is a reservoir of impulses, working for the gratification of its impulses

(primarily sexual), through the pleasure principle" ("Freudian Criticism"). By not gaining the

gratification he desires from his relationship with Rosaline, Romeo's id begins taking control.

His id began taking control when Rosaline rejected his love for her, "To merit bliss by making

me despair. / She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow / Do I live dead, that I live to tell it now"

(Shakespeare 1.1.230-32). This heartbreak, derived from unrequited love, allows Romeo's id to

have liberty over Romeo's mind. The id can control ideas that Romeo's unconsciousness desires,

so with the heartbreak, transpires the idea of Juliet—a woman so perfect for Romeo that he

completely forgets about his Rosaline-attributed heartbreak. Juliet is just a figure that Romeo's id

has created to deal with this tragically flawed relationship with Rosaline. Romeo is beginning to

create this internal woman-oriented delusion to cope with his external heartbreak.

Romeo represses his true feelings about Rosaline and their unhealthy relationship, which

coincides with the delusions being created by his id. By not facing his true desires, Romeo

creates an atmosphere that is completely fictional. Repression is used as a coping mechanism.

According to Peters, repression is described as

> ...The most important of all the mechanisms. This defense consists in letting pass out of
>
> conscious, and preventing from re-entering consciousness, wishes for or thoughts of
>
> events which represent possible temptations for disapproved of and punishable instinctual
>
> demands. The repressed, though unconscious, continues to exert its influence, and the
>
> individual is often beset by anxiety to which no object can be attached. (Peters 7)

Romeo desires a strong relationship with Rosaline, and when she does not reciprocate the same

feelings of a strong relationship towards Romeo, Romeo's id creates the idea of a perfect

woman. These ideas were very prevalent, and powerful. Since the ideas were so strong, Romeo

started repressing them. The way that Romeo's subconscious represses this idea of Juliet, the

perfect woman, was through their forbidden love. Their love couldn't be, due to their familial

relationships. However, the ideas still prevailed through the repression:

> I have night's cloak to hide me from their eyes,
>
> And, but thou love me, let them find me here.
>
> My life were better ended by their hate
>
> Than death proroguèd, wanting of thy love. (Shakespeare 2.2.80-83)

Romeo's subconscious, controlled by the id, creates dreams throughout the night of meeting

Juliet. Dreams often reflect emphasized ideas that transpire throughout the day (Briggs 254).

With Romeo having these repressed ideas throughout the day, they started projecting their way

into Romeo's dreams. Juliet's existence is only prevalent through Romeo's subconscious desires

that transpire at night when he can truly be with her.

Through Romeo's repression of his external romantic actions, Romeo becomes stuck

between his subconscious desires and conscious desires. Romeo loves this idea of a perfect

woman that he created which is reflected in Juliet. In this way, Romeo is stuck in his

subconscious actions. However, Romeo is also repressing these subconscious actions by creating

the idea of feuding families, thus the couple can only meet at night. This makes Romeo cemented

in his conscious actions. This creates Romeo's state of pseudo-realism.

> Pseudorealistic stresses were divided into those which are delusional and those quasi-
>
> magnified. Persecutory paranoid ideation is especially representative of the delusional
>
> group. Although delusions are products of psychopathology, they themselves can also be

categorized as stresses. This is true because from the patient's point of reference they are

exterior and very real. (Bahra 1784)

Since Romeo is stuck in this pseudorealistic state, his interior actions are beginning to become

exterior. His line between reality, which is his conscious, is becoming blurred with his fantasy,

which is his subconscious. Not being able to differentiate between reality and fantasy leads to

Romeo's untimely death. Romeo's id created this scenario in which Romeo's perfect love died.

Romeo's blurred reality causes an emotional reaction to seeing the dead Juliet.

> Come, bitter conduct, come unsavory guide!
>
> Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
>
> The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark!
>
> Here's to my love. [*Drinking*.] O true apothecary,
>
> Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die. (Shakespeare 5.3.116-20)

Romeo commits suicide in reaction to seeing his dead fantasy; to Romeo, his dead fantasy was a

dead reality. His contorted idea of reality led to his ultimate demise. However, after Romeo

commits suicide, the idea of Juliet reappears. Shortly after Romeo commits suicide, the idea of

Juliet also disappears through suicide. This scene is the conclusion of the notorious love story; it

concludes Romeo's life and reunites him with his love. Romeo can finally obtain his perfect idea

of love in his afterlife.

In the notorious love story of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, there is a belief

of an ideal romance. However, when looked upon with a Freudian eye, Romeo's relationship

with romance can be seen as unhealthy. His unreciprocated love with Rosaline turns into an

abnormal affixation with a figment of Romeo's subconscious id that ultimately leads to his

demise. The delusions that Romeo experiences can be explained through the psychoanalytic

approach to literature. *Romeo and Juliet* is an infamous love story, but upon further analyzation of Romeo's psyche, the story turns into a much darker story of a man who cannot cope with his blurred ideas of reality, his subconscious internal ideas, and his conscious external actions.

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