

Winter 2-8-2019

# Gia Gunn: A Story of Learning, Doing and Relearning Gender

Katrina Thulin  
thulink@uw.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/gender\\_studies](https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/gender_studies)



Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Thulin, Katrina, "Gia Gunn: A Story of Learning, Doing and Relearning Gender" (2019). *Gender & Sexuality Studies Student Work Collection*. 32.

[https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/gender\\_studies/32](https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/gender_studies/32)

This Undergraduate Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at UW Tacoma Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gender & Sexuality Studies Student Work Collection by an authorized administrator of UW Tacoma Digital Commons.



# GIA GUNN

A Story of Learning, Doing and Relearning Gender

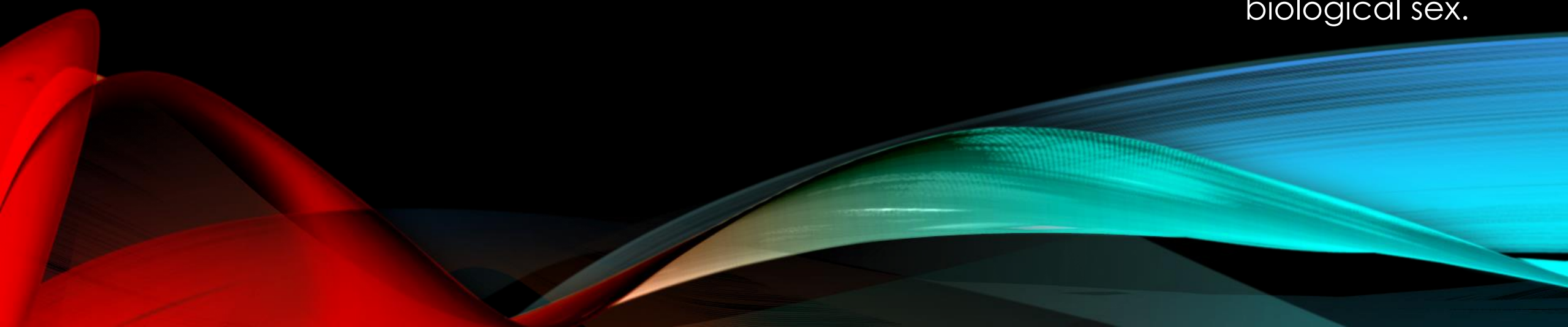
# HOW DO WE LEARN GENDER?

- We learn gender a multitude of ways; from parents, peers, mass media, and other sources.
- Starting from a young age we are gendered, Emily Kane states in her piece “No Way My Boys Are Going to be Like That!” that “Parents begin gendering their children from their very first awareness of those children, whether in pregnancy or while awaiting adoption.” (Kane, 177) And it’s true, how many gender reveals have you witnessed personally or online? How many “pink or blue?” or “tiaras or trucks?” parties are all over Pinterest?
- Children are gendered from the moment we can evaluate their sex organs but what if their biology doesn’t match up to their minds? What if they are transgender?

# TRANSGENDER CHILDREN LEARNING GENDER

Joan Spade writes in *The Kaleidoscope of Gender* “Try as we might, it is very difficult to find gender-neutral clothing for children. These expectations, and the way we treat young children, reinforce idealized gender constructions of dominance and subordination.” (Spade, 161). All parents are guilty of it, we buy the hair bows for our daughters and the blue overalls for our sons. Gender neutral clothing is impossible to find and even harder to utilize when under scrutiny from other parents.

These things become even more challenging if your child doesn't identify as their biological sex.





“TRANS CHILDREN ARE NO MORE STEREOTYPICAL THAN ANY OTHER CHILDREN.”

“Every time I see any depiction of trans kids on TV I count the seconds until the trans girl pulls out a doll or the trans boy kicks a football. But guess what. I know scores of trans girls who had zero interest in dolls or dresses. I know trans boys who collect dolls.” (Growing Up Transgender)

# HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO GIA?

- Gia Gunn was not a transgender child. In fact, Gia identified as proud Asian man until March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2108 when she officially announced she was transitioning genders.
- Gia originally rose to fame after appearing on Season 6 of RuPaul's Drag Race where she was known for being competitive, fishy (meaning hyperfeminine while in drag), and an instigator of drama.

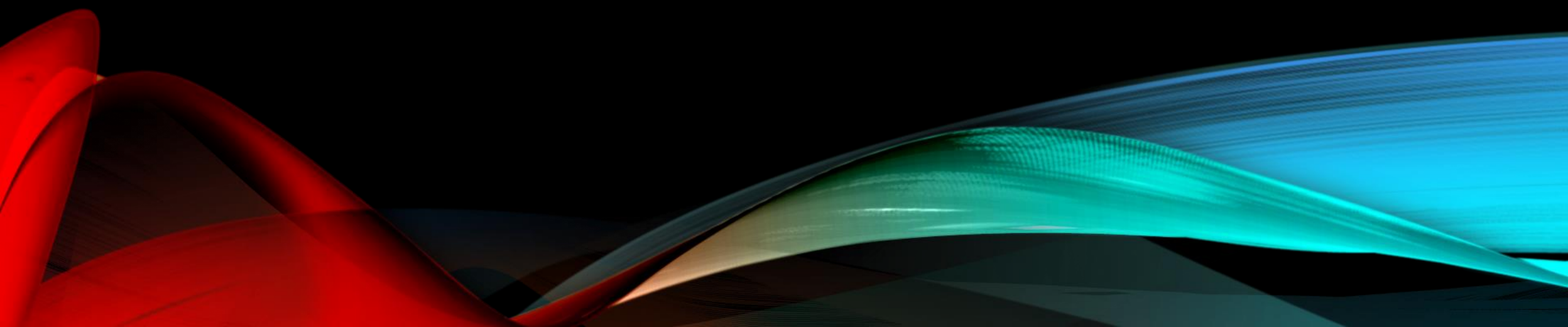


# DRAG QUEEN VERSUS TRANSGENDER WOMAN: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

“Put simply, “transgender” refers to a personal gender identity and an authentic, lasting sense of self. In contrast, “drag” is a temporary and deliberate performance of gender.” (McIntyre)

Drag Queens are (usually) men who dress up as and perform as women.

Transgender women are women who were born in a biologically male body.



# GIA GUNN ON DRAG RACE **AGAIN**

- After her transition began Gia Gunn was asked to appear on RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars Season 4. This was a monumental moment as RuPaul had stated previously that "bio queens" (cisgender women who perform in drag) would "probably not" be allowed to compete on his reality show. (Feldman).
- Gia made several comments while on the show that showed she was having a hard time with being a transwoman and a drag queen simultaneously.
- Gunn was critiqued by other drag queens turned transwomen who stated that trying to rebuild your personhood in a new gender was hard enough without being constantly watched through a camera lens. One went so far as to comment that she believed Gunn hadn't quite found herself as a woman because of the competition.



# IN HER OWN WORDS

Gunn stated in an interview prior to being asked onto Drag Race for the second time that “Drag is an art form,” she adds. “It has nothing to do with your gender identity or your sexual orientation.” (Gunn from Schiller)

While appearing on the show Gunn stated several times that she was conflicted about doing drag any longer as she was now a transwoman and that there didn't seem to be a place for her within the community any longer.

After appearing on the show Gunn stated “Drag sometimes raises these questions that are confusing because somehow, when I'm in drag, I feel less than a woman, right?” she notes. “Nobody wants to feel less than what they are. So, for awhile there, it was very confusing. I actually contemplated quitting drag, not wanting to do anything with drag anymore and just kind of living my day-to-day life, just as a woman. Maybe getting a job at Starbucks, and just kinda hanging up the lashes and, you know, being very that girl.” (Gunn from Sander).



# HARDSHIPS FOR TRANS QUEENS

All drag queens started out as men. They learned gender through the lens of masculinity and then trained themselves to see it through the lens of femininity while in drag. For many this became the gateway to them finding their true selves but that doesn't make it easier for them. Relearning gender as women was more complicated for them because they having been enacting a caricature of womanhood for years before making the transition. Now they have to navigate the world in a completely new body and personality as an adult.



# EXPRESSION TAKEN TOO FAR?

In the piece "My Life as a Man" Elizabeth Gilbert talks about how, while she was in drag as a man she had to restrict what emotions she was allowed to express. Many drag queens have stated that drag is an outlet for them and allows them to express sides of themselves they otherwise wouldn't be allowed to show. This, according to some, maybe the reason transwomen who start as drag queen have such a hard time learning the feminine gender, because they don't understand how to temper their emotional expressions properly.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR GIA GUNN?

- Gia is on a journey. She is working towards becoming the woman she has always wanted to be and is taking steps each day to learn her new gender and do it her way.
- She has, since the filming of all stars four, completed her physical transition and is officially living as a woman.
- She has become an internet hot topic between being perceived as the villain of the new Drag Race season and for being the first transgender queen allowed to compete on the show.
- She is a role model for all people showing that just because you think you know gender doesn't mean you can't relearn it all.



NOT SUCCEEDING AT  
DOING GENDER IS  
NORMAL.

Spade and Valentine (164)

“

NOT SUCCEEDING AT DOING GENDER IS NORMAL.

”

Spade and Valentine (164).

Maybe, like Gia, we are all still learning gender each day and learning to identify ourselves in better ways. I just hope we can all feel as comfortable doing it as Gia does.

