University of Nevada, Reno

Limitlessness of Queer Performance:
On-stage Performances and the Construction of Off-stage Identities

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ABSTRACT

Most recent research regarding non-normative and alternative identities in the context of performance has alluded to the various social effects of these performances such as forming communities, demonstrating the possibility for living outside normative ideas of existing, and spatial transformation. However, little research has focused on understanding how such performances influence performers' on and offstage identities. We understand the individual benefits gained from performing actions that maintain gender and racial norms, but we do not understand much regarding the effects of performances by individuals who deviate from such norms, especially once they have left the performance site. By interviewing vogue performers who perform at "Ballroom events", I aimed to uncover the bi-directional relationship between performers' radical on-stage performances and their off-stage everyday identities. Given that non-queer, white individuals largely maintain the status quo within our society, it is important to understand how the articulation and formation of queer identity through performances allow for the construction of alternative identities for marginalized peoples unable to be deemed normal in today's society.

My findings show that vogue performance can elicit transformations in performers off-stage identities through a repetitive engagement with both Ballroom as a space and vogue as a performance. Because my respondents connected the Ballroom space with their ability to construct authentic on-stage vogue performances, they were able to maintain characteristics of their on-stage performances, which include a construction of non-normative racial, gendered, and sexuality characteristics, within their

everyday life. Such transformations included an increased view of self-worth, changes in gendered self-presentation, and community engagement.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all those involved within the Ballroom community past, present, and future. To those of you with whom I have met throughout my journey, thank you for showing me a world of beauty, compassion and art. May your performances and energies live on forever. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my younger sister Jourden, thank you for your continued existence in my life, I love you bub.

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LIST OF VOGUE TERMINOLOGY

Term	Definition
Battle	A performance that issues a vogue challenge to another voguer
BQs in Drag	Gay males who do drag but are not transgender
Butch Queens (BQs)	males who identify as homosexual, regardless of how masculine/ feminine presenting they are
Cat-walk	Upright Vogue Femme across the floor.
Chants	Clever rhymes and raps used by the commentator and audience/ houses
Chop	To disqualify a contestant walking for thir 10s
Come (for)	To challenge
Cunt(y)	Super feminine energy
Dip	In vogueing, a ground-level stunt, also going in for the dip.
Duck-walk	Crouching, foot-sliding, and scooting movement, requiring balance on the balls of the feet. Dancing in a squatted position.
Femme Queens (FQs)	Male-to-female trans individuals at varying stages of gender reassignment; from the time they start taking female hormones, they are no longer BQs.
Father/Mother	A house leader (regardless of gender).
Grand March	The opening ceremonies. Houses and voguers performing at the beginning of a Ball
Hand Performance	Illusions, precision, or flamboyant interpretation executed through arms and hand movements.

House	A socially cohesive group of individuals within the Ballroom Scene, a type of chosen family structure
New Way	The vogueing styles starting in the 90's. Includes Arms Control, with body contortions.
Old Way	The vogueing styles before the 80's, focus on lines and posing
Open To All (OTA)	Does not designate gender or sexuality lines of competition, anyone is allowed to walk the category.
Pop, Dip and Spin	The name of the first iteration of vogue performance.
Reading	The art of slinging insults at someone
Snatch	To win.
Virgin	Someone who is walking a category for the first time.
Vogueing Femme	A dance style that takes the femme queen technique and exaggerates it even further: pronounced hip movement, cha-cha-based footwork. Performance can be either soft and cunty to dramatics.
Walk	To enter a category/ compete

INTRODUCTION

In some interdisciplinary academic work and in most non-professional settings, the term ‘performance’ has been used to describe a type of activity that is constructed by artists, whether they be actors, dancers, or even musicians. These forms of performances often express a story or character via pre-existing texts or writing (Manning 2020). In social science research, however, the term ‘performance’ more often refers to social interactions based on cultural scripts, which everyday social actors use to navigate and construct their identities. Although this research has provided important insights into how people interact, there are still gaps in the current research regarding reflexive self-articulating performances – that is, performances that both construct new identities onstage as well as influence offstage identities. To further understand these self-reflexive performances and their relationship to individual identity construction, I look at the art of vogue performance and the construction of the Ballroom community (not to be confused with classical ballroom dancing, which typically involves paired dancing and is often performed at special occasions such as weddings or, more recently, widely televised dancing competitions). Vogue performance and Ballroom more broadly involve performances that encapsulate both community-building among queer people and a using of space to fashion a new queer identity, all while resisting normative classifications of gender, sexuality, and race. While most current research on Ballroom culture has focused on such gendered categorization and community-building, few studies have looked at the relationship between performers’ onstage performances and offstage identities. By interviewing members of the Ballroom scene on the west coast, this study will investigate

this under-researched area of performance and queer studies by asking questions that relate to how queer identity influences vogue performance and vice versa. What impact does a performer's performance have on their offstage identities? How does this bi-directional relationship between performance and identity vary by the race and gender of the performer?

In the discussions to follow, I start by giving a historical context of Ballroom and vogue performance in particular. From there, I discuss both theoretical claims and empirical research about how different types of performances can be enacted to construct one's identity in relation or even opposition to the values and ideas of a community. I also articulate the need for marginalized individuals to form communities that allow them to fashion new ways of constructing positive self-image while contending with the pressures from dominant social groups to conform to heteronormative and white norms. Third, I review research that discusses how the construction of a specific queer space then allows for the re-creation of alternative ways of being through ritualized spaces and performances. Fourth, I discuss how racial and gendered performance can be deployed strategically by performers to engage in social and political resistance through their use of specific gestures and symbols. Through this conversation, I arrive at the art of vogue performance and the construction of Ballroom, which together illustrate the theoretical dimensions of performance described above, including community-building, social resistance, and the cultivation of a space that allows for alternative identities to be formed. I then describe the methodology I have chosen to address these questions about vogue performance and both onstage and offstage identity formation. From there I discuss the findings from my research in three sections, which include: 1) understanding

how my participants connect Ballroom as a space to vogue as a performance; 2) how my participants constructed their on-stage identities in relation to Ballroom; and 3) how individuals' off-stage identities transformed after engaging in vogue performance. I then discuss the implications of my findings, which detail how a fuller understanding of vogue can elicit off-stage identity transformations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Ballroom Scene, known more simply as Ballroom, is a dual-purpose community group that is comprised of usually black and brown queer individuals. Ballroom contains two levels to the community, the first being the Balls, which are performance competitions where you must 'sell' your performance to a panel of judges in various dance and 'realness' categories (Bailey 2013). The second level of Ballroom consists of 'houses', which are groups of social networks, usually named after luxury fashion designers like Balenciaga and Balmain. These houses are comprised of queer individuals who view their Houses as not only a family but also as a team to compete with in these Balls. Houses are also headed by a house mother or father who assumes the role of leader for the House, taking on responsibilities of preparing for the ball as well as maintaining house meetings and recruiting and approving new family members (Bailey 2011). In his ethnography of the Ballroom scene in Detroit, Michigan, in the early 2000s, Bailey (2013) describes Balls as ritualized spaces that consist of specific elements, including both physical items like a judges' table and a stage as well as performances. These performances include the LSS (Legends, Statements, and Stars) and a Grand March. According to Bailey, it is the performance labor of individuals that makes a given

space authentically Ballroom. This focus on performance, means Ballroom events can occur anywhere, including small bars, large park arenas, and even actual ballrooms. Here Bailey (2013:144) argues that for "Ballroom members, balls are akin to rituals in that these events concretize and affirm values that strengthen and protect this vulnerable community." In these ritual-like events, members draw upon reaffirm histories of African dance, queer performance, and the construction of new alternative identities, all carried out in a new and positive present, concepts which I will discuss in detail later.

Ballroom and Drag

There has been an interesting debate surrounding Ballroom and its origins. Some researchers suggest that the first conception of Ballroom started with earlier drag performances in Hamilton Lodge located within Harlem in 1869 (Chauncey 1994). These drag performance events continued into the Harlem renaissance with things like the "Faggot Ball". In the 1920s, Black trans women and drag queens became disillusioned and frustrated with the drag community for their racist and restrictive culture within these drag balls. This racial divide set back these black queer performers in almost every underground queer space when compared to their white counterparts and led to the creation of separate balls and a community which formed the start of Ballroom (Buckner n.d). Others have argued that the conception of modern Ballroom started in the early 1970s from black queer communities in large cities on the east coast like New York, where queer people of color would perform in their own drag balls, again because of the racial tension that existed within the queer community. These drag balls were noted to

have used elements of African Dance and fashion to launch what became modern day Ballroom (Bailey 2013; Jackson 2002).

Although different accounts locate the origins of Ballroom in different places, all of them highlight the racial tensions that existed within the performing queer community. The 1968 documentary, *The Queen*, depicts these issues in an underground drag pageant called "Miss All-American Camp Beauty Pageant". This pageant was one of the first national underground drag pageants that existed to showcase drag queens, trans women, and female impersonators. What is important to note about this documentary is how it sets up the scene for relations between drag queens and those in the Ballroom community. The end of the film shows this best when the drag performer running the pageant, named Flawless Sabrina, crowned Miss Crystal Labejia as the second runner up to the competition. Labejia was the only black queen competing for the competition and when she was not crowned the winner, she called out the institution for racism and exclusion. This led Labejia to leave the stage before the winner was announced, creating a verbal altercation. Labejia claimed that despite both the judges and the other competitors knowing that she was the best and even stating so, she had lost due to the color of her skin and the fact that Flawless Sabrina wanted one of her close friends, the contestant from Philadelphia, to win instead. In the documentary, Flawless openly says, "It's in bad taste and you are showing your color," to which Crystal states, "I have a right to show my color, darling" (Simon 1968). This exchange highlights the frustration that Labejia felt from the racist judgments she received because of the color of her skin and prompted her to start her own underground drag pageants in the years that followed as well as one of the first publicly known houses, the House of Labejia.

This break between mainstream underground drag and Ballroom drag formed a new community, which was later further developed by other black and brown queer individuals who evolved both vogue as a performance and institutionalized Ballroom as its own entity apart from drag. This is what created the space for Willi Ninja to champion several dance styles of performance which have become unique to Ballroom, such as Old Way, which later made way for New Way and eventually Vogue Femme, all performance styles that I will discuss in greater depth later. Today's landscape is a bit different, with individuals from both communities engaging in drag shows and walking drag categories in Ballroom, much like trans femme queen Aja Labejia, who has competed on three televised competitions: season 9 of RuPaul's *Drag Race*, season 3 of *All-Stars*, and the vogue competition show *Legendary*. Today drag and Ballroom intersect more freely when it comes to television and the media, for example with Labejia. However, this was not always the case and, in fact, the division between the two was born out of the racial issues described above.

Ballroom and the HIV/AIDS Crisis

It is almost impossible to start talking about the 1980s and the Ballroom community without having a conversation about the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This vicious disease took the lives of millions of people and still affects those of countless others, and both queer and black communities are no exception. Queer men to this day have the highest rates of infection within the United States. Research has also shown how black communities were caught in a cycle of vulnerability to HIV due to both social stigma and lack of education about the virus. For instance, one study reported that black adolescents

were more inclined to disregard or not engage with conversations surrounding HIV (Swenson et. al. 2010). Within this study, these young men answered only 50% of questions concerning effective condom usage and HIV testing correctly, which shows a strong need to properly educate these sexually active teenagers on the risks of HIV and prevention methods. In this way, the Ballroom community, dually marginalized on account of its intersecting identities, was especially impacted by HIV (Mays, Cochran, and Zamudio 2004).

Forced to face the reality of this situation and come together to combat a virus or face the possibility of death, the wider Ballroom community itself played a very active role in the prevention of and education about HIV both during the epidemic of the 80s and today. In contrast with studies that only looked at race or gender and sexual identities individually, Kubicek et al.'s (2013:17) study of African American men who have sex with men and who also participate in ballroom culture found that they have a resilience against HIV due to the ability their community has in "building strengths-based interventions, using concepts of resiliency including shamelessness, social creativity, social support and volunteerism." These findings suggest that despite the disproportionately higher risk of death faced by black and queer communities, the intersection of these identities found within the Ballroom community gave its members resources that helped them mitigate some of that risk. Interventions by the community included not only drives and community outreach booths at Ballroom functions but also the support network of Ballroom's house culture itself, in which 'found families' of individuals who perform (and sometimes live) together provided support for their members' social, emotional, and physical health.

Effectively addressing the HIV epidemic did not operate in isolation from outside forces, however, and public figures also played an important role in this regard. Madonna's incorporation of vogue as a performance into her song 'Vogue' in the 1990s helped to bring global attention to both the community that was affected most and bring this artform to the mass public. Her addition of members of Ballroom to her tour and mass production of the word/performance brought attention to their existence and continued strife. This will be further discussed in the section titled 'Ballroom and Mainstream Pop Culture.' Thus, by educating and connecting queer people together and through providing de-stigmatizing alternative identities with respect to gender and sexuality, members of Ballroom were able to help keep themselves relatively protected from the HIV/AIDs epidemic and homelessness.

Bailey (2009) further reinforces this idea of how the strength of a community can combat a virus that so disproportionately affected them through what he calls "performance labor". Bailey (2009) defines performance labor as the manifestation of empowering alternative identities on stage that allow a positive reconstruction of stigmatized images associated with being both queer and black. Bailey (2009:257) states how intervention at this performance level is not only used to help in "reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS, but also attempting to cultivate the necessary systems and structures (within Ballroom) that redress the violence done to Black queers."

This community intervention was particularly impactful since it occurred at a time when the U.S. government and most social services overwhelmingly ignored both the community and the virus (Bailey 2014; Kubicek et al. 2013). Ballroom filled this gap by using Balls as a place not only to educate individuals on the virus and safer sex practices

but also as a space for resistance, both against the HIV/AIDS virus and the white heteronormative confines of the world around the community. In the process, Ballroom evolved into the space with which most members today are familiar: a place for social acceptance and performance where marginalized individuals reconstruct negative identities that are imposed on them and find pleasure in existing when society wants them dead.

Ballroom and Vogue Performance

At each Ball, there are various performance-based categories, each with their own separate performance criteria for competing, including gender restrictions, fashion requirements, and dances. Fashion categories embody gendered performances where individuals 'sell' their hyper-gendered fashion performances to 'pass' as the real thing, as though they had just walked off the street in whatever garment they were wearing (Bailey 2013, 2014). The specific category of interest to my thesis is called vogue. Vogue as a performance involves various inspired dance moves, which include African gumboot, a dance where the body is meant to take up a lot of physical space (Bailey 2014) and where one constructs one's body into specific poses, usually styled after runway fashion models. This dance also exhibits a combination of various masculine and feminine gendered performances. In the 2016 documentary about Ballroom and vogue performance, "Kiki", a House father, discusses with his house how the performance is about what you make and sell (Jordenö 2016). He states that "the one thing that changes society's norms of masculine and feminine is the fact that in Ballroom, we can be whatever we want to be… I can choose to be masculine or feminine. I can choose to get up in them and choose to be

like this" (Jordenö 2016). Vogue performance as a performance category in Ballroom is an onstage performance that is aimed at representing opposing identity performances within the larger stage performance. This fashions a new identity which resists norms and combats social stigma while still existing as a singular performance onstage.

Vogue is specifically important to Ballroom because of both the history of its construction and the evolution of the performance over time, which has allowed for not only the continuation of such a transformative dance, but also the incorporation of evolving expressions of gender. Historically speaking, voguing originated out of the beginnings of the Ballroom scene in the 70s and has since been edited, reformed, and metamorphosed into various iterations of vogue performance categories. All voguing styles incorporate not only arms, hands, and legs in their dance performances, but also use model-like poses in achieving their performance goals. Here I want to note the three forms of vogue that have emerged since the origination of the dance form. These performances are called Old Way, New Way, and Vogue Femme. All three variations of voguing must include specific elements in their performance to be considered an acceptable performance. These elements include hands and arm control, duckwalk, dips and spins, catwalk, and floor performance. Hands and arm control include the quick yet precise movements and flourishing of the performer's arms and hands. This all happens while the performers are either engaging in their catwalk, duckwalking, standing or even lying on the floor. Catwalk and duckwalk both engage in movement across the floor, although the duckwalk is done crouched down in an almost seated position while the catwalk is done standing while slightly crouched. Dips and spins consist of a spin or twirling and twisting motion that ends with the individual performer spiraling themselves

toward the ground. And finally, floor performance is any type of movement while on the floor, usually lying down (Jackson 2002). This entire dance is performed to two sets of four counts with a crash on the eighth and final beat, which is usually where most performers hit their dips. While all performances utilize these elements, they each embody different specifics of gender and bodily movements.

Old Way, the origin of all styles of voguing, focuses its performance on posing and body pops more than the other two. New Way, which evolved out of Old Way, hones its energy into body contortions and flexibility of the performer's physical body. The final performance style of vogue is Vogue Femme, which includes a set of more feminine body movements like limp wrists and a more seductive and sexy style of dance. It is also important to note here that the femme queens (i.e., trans women of color) were the ones who originated this form of dance. While the previous performances focused more on a masculine presentation of self, vogue femme came into existence to highlight the feminine nature of a body and the embodiment of hyper-sexual empowerment of one's identity (Jackson 2002). One might even interpret this development as a reaction to the previous pendulum swing away from femininity to masculinity. This original pendulum swing occurred in the mid-70s, during which many black and brown gay men did not want to express their queerness or celebrate their blackness within the confines of femininity. Willi Ninja, one of the fathers and originators of the Ballroom scene explains to *The Washington Post* in 1991 how "In the '60s it was just basically drag queens, but in the 70s, a lot of the boys were like, 'I don't wanna do this, I don't wanna be in high heels, this is not my thing, but I want to get an award too'" (Brown 1991). Consequently, at this point, ballroom started its evolution from pageantry and performance categories of 'face'

and ‘runway’, which all had catered towards the feminine embodiment of gender in fashion and modeling as well as physical looks, to a more masculine dance style of embodied performance, which became known as Old Way.

In this way, the incorporation of new dance performance categories, like Old Way and New Way, shifted vogue performance categories away from hyperfeminine presentation to a subtly more masculine movement. Voguing became seen and performed in what Jackson calls a “largely masculinized ritual tradition” (Jackson 2002:26). We also need to note how Jackson reports that there were many notable femme queens within the scene whose categories of performance became relegated to fashion and specific costume adornments, where voguing categories have more prominence regarding body movement (Jackson 2002). This then ushered in the vogue performance category of Vogue Femme, which once again steered the conversation of a continuously evolving style of transformative performance to be more inclusive of the society in which they had cultivated themselves. It is because of how malleable and inclusive this type of dance performance has become that it then also becomes a perfect site for social inquiry. More specifically, if the community is so robust and diverse that it forces changes within the structure of accepted Ballroom performances, to what extent then do the distinctly different performances have an impact on individual performers’ identities both on-stage and off-stage? These transformations of performance styles are too important and integral to the existence of modern Ballroom and voguing in general to ignore.

Ballroom and Mainstream Pop Culture

Vogue as a performance and artform has since existed not only in the underground culture of its origins within Harlem and later Manhattan but has even broken into mainstream culture. In the early 90s, vogue performance was incorporated into popular mainstream thanks to Madonna's song and music video "Vogue". After creating the song, Madonna searched New York and found seven vogue performers to not only choreograph the music video for also but also be her back-up dancers for her subsequent 'Blonde Ambition Tour'. This launched vogue as a performance style that became not only a cultural reference point for gayness but also a commodified platform upon which Madonna herself could stand.

The 2016 documentary "Strike a Pose" details the story of six of the seven dancers who took part in the elevation of voguing to the global mainstage, including their stories about engaging with Madonna over the course of their time spent together (Gould 2016). The documentary highlights how the beginnings of this partnership created the possibility for a new horizon of acceptance and integration of queer culture and life into the norm of society, but things seemed to turn sour once the tour commenced and eventually concluded. Since this documentary centered on the lives of the dancers and their voices years after they concluded the Blond Ambition Tour, it provides us with a unique viewpoint into how the backup dancers felt and were treated behind the scenes.

These negative aspects surrounding vogue and Madonna were also reflected in the release of "Truth or Dare", another documentary-style movie that followed Madonna and her backup dancers throughout the tour, exposing the true lives and nature of the individuals who traveled the world with the pop icon. The difference between these two

films is that “Truth or Dare” was a documentary focused on Madonna and the things that she wanted to show and the image she wanted to construct for her fans. One example of this difference involves an onscreen ‘gay kiss’ between two gay men of color. This kiss caused a lot of controversy and undue stress to the individuals videotaped and their families for things like a forced outing of their sexuality. In “Strike a Pose”, we find out that those individuals who were filmed kissing had urged and asked Madonna not to include it in the documentary, but she refused, stating that it was good for everyone even if a few people got ‘outed’. Using their stories, identities, and artform of vogue, Madonna championed gay rights by showcasing their talents and culture to the rest of the world, while also exploiting the lives and stories of those whom she championed. Three dancers eventually filed a lawsuit against Madonna for the forced outing and exploitation of their lives during this process (Gould 2016).

Two more pointed academic conversations have stemmed from this situation concerning vogue performance, cultural co-option, and queer visibility. Firstly, Chatzipapatheodoridis (2017) articulates how the cultural reproduction of vogue has reinforced notions of the ‘camp tradition’, which is deeply embedded in American pop culture. This camp tradition, which involves an exaggeration of aesthetics or styles used to combat politics of identity, entails the conscious deployment of gender-bending and specific articulations of gender as well as race to help individuals tell stories regarding current social and political experiences. To this end, Chatzipapatheodoridis (2017) argues that the maintenance of a masculine/feminine gender bending within the continued performance of Madonna’s version of vogue in the mainstream has impacted the queer community in a positive way. However, it is imperative to look at the impact Madonna

has had on not only the production of mainstream vogue performance but also its impact on the Ballroom community, the originators of this performance. Here we must acknowledge how Madonna's incorporation of vogue into her wheelhouse undoubtedly brought the performance style into the mainstream and helped raise the visibility and acceptance of queerness to a global scale. Chatzipapatheodoridis (2017:12) then introduces a critical lens of Madonna's vogue video by asking, "within the current context of the global sharing of culture, does one have to be an insider in order to speak about or identify with a culture and its lifestyle?", while also suggesting/supporting the notion that gatekeeping such a positive reproduction of queer identity would only prevent the possibility of expanding an authentic queer performance to larger queer audiences.

One thing Chatizpapatheodoridis might have missed however, is that the performance that Madonna was broadcasting on the global stage might not have been truly authentic, ignoring the history and culture that define those dance movements and authentically mark them as voguing rather than just choreography. Here is where the second voice in our conversation can be brought in regarding vogue and the mainstream. With vogue as a performance reaching a larger more global audience, we must look at the 'authenticity' of the said performance in its rearticulations in performance. As vogue was created to help lift and support oppressed minorities, existing outside of simply being choreography, once it started to reach the mainstream it did more harm than good, diverting the performance away from its original goals and intentions.

Turning to the impact the mainstream spotlight had on the ballroom community post-Madonna, as well as looking at the lives of the dancers who were negatively impacted, we can start to understand the effect Madonna had on a dance performance and

community. Far from their involvement in Madonna's tour creating positive change in their lives, three of the dancers have since contracted HIV, with one of them eventually succumbing to the illness and the others falling out of the spotlight, left, and forgotten all as a result of Madonna's forced outing of the dancer's sexuality (Gould 2016). From this standpoint there are multiple factors that challenge the notion that Madonna adopting 'Vogue" as a song was a 'win' for the queer community. Not only were the lives of the backup dancers exploited, but vogue also started to detach from its original meaning as a dance. This issue is compounded by the fact that it takes place within the context of a long history of exploitation of the survival techniques used by black and brown queer people (hooks 1992).[1] Weighing the extent to which reproducing black aesthetics in mainstream culture is beneficial to the community, hooks (1992) argues that the outcome is more damaging than empowering. In Tim Clawson's documentary, "Madonna: Truth or Dare", Madonna uses her backup dancers' race and sexual orientation to portray herself as a defender of the cause, by visibly showing the backstage life of the performers while on tour (Clawson 1991). In this sense, Madonna's song, music video, subsequent tour, and even documentary co-opt black aesthetics and queer performativity in order to highlight her own work. By doing this, Madonna has been able to put herself in a "position of outsider that enables her to colonize and appropriate black experience for her own opportunistic ends even as she attempts to mask her acts of racist aggression as

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[1] This author consciously chose to not capitalize her name as a way to keep the reader's attention on her work as opposed to herself, and here as the author of this paper I have consciously chosen to respect those wishes.

affirmation" (hooks 1992:159). This colonization takes place within a broader racial context in which 'white womanhood', in this case the 'blonde bombshell', is continuously constructed against the racialized myth of the 'other' who needs a savior (hooks 1992).

Though they take different positions, it is very possible that both Chatzipapatheodoridis and hooks are correct. On one hand, elevating vogue performance to the global stage, as Madonna did, allowed for a larger impact and visibility for the queer community that is so integral to their politics of resistance (Chatzipapatheodoridis 2017; Ellison 2019). On the other hand, taking such a richly empowering black and brown queer performance and using its image to serve herself and her own image as an ally eventually damaged the individuals from whom Madonna originally sought out to uplift.

Vogue and Space

As shown above, both the academic literature and media sources alike have confirmed that the Ballroom scene and vogue performance have been around for quite some time. Ballroom as a community, however, may not have diffused throughout the world as evenly as vogue as a performance. What is important to note is how there exists a disproportionate focus on Ballroom on the East Coast and, when looking at popular media references, more specifically concerning Ballroom houses and individuals in New York (Livingston 1990). In this way, most current in-depth ethnographies and visual medias have left out the rest of the United States and in some cases the rest of the world. This gives rise to the question: what is vogue performance like outside of New York and

the East Coast? My research is catered more towards a West Coast location, which has its differences from Ballroom in other parts of the U.S. While there is little academic research looking at the Bay area and the West Coast more broadly, there are still vogue events and Balls taking place there.

Carlos Cabrera-Lomelí (2022) recently wrote a news article on the growing Bay area Ballroom community and what it looks like as an up-and-coming vogue scene. The article discusses “Oakland To All” (or OTA), which is the leading Ballroom scene in Oakland voguing and has been around since 2017. “Oakland to All” is the collective name that the voguers in the Bay area use to refer to their Balls. The three individuals who started this scene - Ashlee Banks, Shireen Rahimi, and Guerrilla Davis - have said that their vision for this scene in the Bay Area is “to provide a safe space” for members of the community (Cabrera-Lomeli 2022). In the interview, Davis states how balls create a form of escape for some of the most marginalized identities: “For trans femme people who exist in the world and get stares and catcalled, balls are one of the few spaces that you can exist without all the bullshit” (Cabrera-Lomeli 2022). While the Bay area has a much smaller Ballroom scene than other cities like New York, that does not stop individuals living there from hosting their own events, all of which are ritualized much in the way Bailey (2014) described performance labor.

One interesting facet here is how OTA events’ gender system is different than that of more traditional East Coast balls. Bailey states that this gender system is a complex combination of gender and sexuality identities that are fixed into various categories of performance (Bailey 2014). By contrast, the East Coast has had a more rigid set of categories and competition rules for Ballroom members to follow. For example, trans

women, also known as femme queens in Ballroom, would only be able to compete against other femme queens, and likewise for butch queens (gay men) and butch queens up in drags (drag queens). The traditional East Coast gender system is split into five and sometimes more of these categories, which are different from performance categories like runway or vogue performance. In the Bay Area, however, OTA is simply open to all; there is no gender or sexuality category for performers to specifically walk. This allows all virgin vogue performers (those who are performing vogue for the first time), to compete together regardless of their identities. The same applies to runway or even face categories.

Another aspect regarding the Bay Area Ballroom scene is its resilience to bring together queer individuals within a given city both to address various social issues affecting the community and to spread health education. The same article written by Cabrera-Lomeli discusses how one of the more recent OTA events, entitled the *Amerikkka is Burning Ball*, was put together to help raise awareness and address the conversation of police brutality and the murder of George Floyd. This smaller yet newly powerful Bay Area Ballroom scene has also engaged in various social outreach programs and partnered with mutual aid programs to help support trans femme women in need such as through providing clothing and housing (Cabrera-Lomeli 2022). The West Coast is rich in culture as well as stories that have not been as highlighted as those on the East Coast and Midwest. Its genderless competitive voguing scene, in particular, opens a new landscape for more research into its impact both on the surrounding communities and on individuals as well.

While accounting for the history of Ballroom, I must also acknowledge the racial landscape that affects the Ballroom community, especially on the West Coast. As Ballroom was created for black and brown queer people, the demographics of the area must also be acknowledged. The Bay Area, specifically Oakland, is historically known as being a racially segregated space, both historically and today. Rothstein (2017) notes how Oakland became the hub for black migration during the world wars as military contractors and warehouses were looking for cheap labor. This not only marked an increase in the population of African Americans there but also a widening economic gap between them and the white landowners of the area, leading to heavy gentrification and racial segregation.

As with other locations where Ballroom emerged, the West Coast landscape has also been affected by queer erasure as well. Mattson (2014) writes on how gentrification aided in one of the largest downfalls of gay spaces outside of queer strongholds in San Francisco. Polk Street, an up-and-coming new gay street located in San Francisco, had around a dozen gay bars often existing right next to straight bars in the early 90s. Much of the gay nightlife that existed on Polk Street, however, was gone by 2004, making way for more "cosmopolitan heterosexual night life" (Mattson 2014:5). Gay culture in San Francisco, as discussed by Mattson, has as rich a history of queer life as it does efforts that were made to try to silence it. Many gay spaces in the mid and late 90s became victim to the cultural idea of 'metrosexualism' (which denotes a heterosexual man who has all the physical and stylistic choices of a gay man but is in fact heterosexual). This cultural phenomenon aided in the "heteronormative placemaking" (or watering down) of gay culture so that it would be more appealing to the heteronormativity that was taking

place in gay spaces during this time (Mattson 2014:10). At the same time, gentrification was making small queer spaces even smaller and less visible while making gay bars and gay neighborhoods more heterosexually friendly.

Now looking towards Ballroom, a space where both race, gender, and sexuality intersect, we can consider if the same type of negative effects have impacted the West Coast Ballroom scene. One may assume that since there exist extreme pressures of erasure on the black and gay populations in the Bay Area, the same would be said for Ballroom in that same area, but that does not seem to be the case. In both news articles and Instagram posts, voguers in this scene call the Bay an “up-and-coming” scene, or a “smaller kiki” scene that has demonstrated resilience against such forces. During the onslaught of new barriers brought on by COVID, Cabrera-Lomeli (2022) reported that Balls started happening outside in public spaces that not only helped protect against the pandemic but also provided an avenue for maintaining a safe space for queer self-expression and community building, accessible to members of all ages, even in the face of the historical erasure of such marginalized identities in the past. Efforts like this are powerful ways to strengthen social movements and solidify community solidarity when combating social erasure (Ellison 2019), which I will address in greater detail later.

The discussion above shows that while there is a decreasing black population in the Bay Area and a social co-opting of gay spaces in San Francisco, that does not mean that the Ballroom community is affected in the same way or at least to the same extent. As previously stated by both Bailey (2009) and Kubicek (2013), Ballroom’s resilience can be attributed to the type of social resistance and mobilizing of similarly marginalized individuals that occurred within the community. Vogue’s history as a performance style

and Ballroom as a community that emerged out of the extreme pressures of racism, homophobia, and transphobia have provided alternative avenues for individuals to find ways to combat the marginalization of their identities (Bailey 2014; Kubicek et al. 2013).

In sum, vogue as a performance has been the center point of a community that was formed to help members evade the harms of an aggressive hetero-cis world. The Ballroom community functions as a queer space that queer individuals have used not only to come together for protection against outside social pressures but also as a space for self-expression and to help maintain ways of constructing and reconstructing positive articulations of their marginalized identities. Ballroom and the art of vogue performance came to exist as byproducts of the extreme pressures placed on black and brown queer people with regard to blending into mainstream society as well as the need for self-expression. In this space, Ballroom participants use performance as a model for social cohesion, to avoid stigma, and to construct and articulate alternative identities for themselves. The specific mechanisms that make up the actual stage performance of Ballroom known as vogue are manifestations of this struggle for the autonomy of queer bodies. In this study, I explore if it is possible for such unique kinds of performances, catering specifically to vogue, to influence how individuals see themselves, both reflecting queer identities and shaping them onstage and offstage. I begin this exploration by examining classical theorists and their contributions to understanding performances so as to generate possible explanations for this unique type of social phenomena.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Classical Theoretical Considerations

Classical sociological theorist Erving Goffman (1957) was one of the first sociologists to discuss performance in relation to social cohesion and identity construction. Goffman discusses something called "impression management", which he argues individuals deploy when engaging in social interactions, whether with social institutions, social groups, or individuals. What Goffman brings to the table is a way to investigate the choices and behaviors an individual makes, often based on internalized pre-established social norms. Goffman explains this process through the analogies of the front-stage and back-stage. The front-stage is the site of performance that has been socially constructed based on social cues. It is the space in which the individual performer interacts with a specific audience. In contrast, the back-stage is where the performer can have a temporary reprieve where they can "be themselves" and not have to actively be in a state of performance for their respective audiences. At the same time, the back-stage is also the place where individuals prepare their social performance for the front-stage. It is in the back-stage where individuals negotiate between their inner self and the norms of social life in constructing their performance for the front-stage.

Impression management is an important part of maintaining the social order though enacting the routine performances of a society. In this sense, performances are situated between an individual's conscious decisions to construct themselves as an individual while also constructing a performance that is deemed socially acceptable. Once the individual negotiates between these two considerations and decides on an acceptable performance, this performance then has the potential to become a process that

repeats itself multiple times during an individual's many daily interactions. In this way, individuals' performances can collectively become constructed as social norms through their repetitive nature, which then set the stage for future social performances.

Goffman continues this line of thinking in his work on how marginalized individuals avoid stigmatized identities through the process of impression management. Goffman (1963:233) explains the concept of "stigma" in terms of the relationship between an "attribute" of an individual and a perceived "stereotype" of said individuals' characteristics. This means that perceived social and or physical traits ascribed to an individual, like that of womanhood, must adhere to the socially accepted stereotypes attributed to womanhood within a given society. If an individual does not uphold the attributed characteristics of a specific identity, they then become stigmatized, or unwanted, within that group. In doing so, Goffman (1963:234) argues how "normals" in each society then can view stigmatized individuals as not quite human. In differentiating normal and non-normal attributes, society constructs hierarchies within social groups based upon physical and social characteristics, including gender, race, physical ability, and sexuality. Goffman (1963) continues by arguing how stigmatized individuals can start to feel shame once they perceive their stigmatization, which leads them to seek out ways to avoid these stigmatized parts of their identity. He argues that there are only two ways of avoiding such socialized stigma: either by retreating into communities of similarly stigmatized identities or by trying to act as 'normal' and assimilating into a non-stigmatized identity.

Despite its important contributions, Goffman's assessment of stigma is not without its issues. Criticizing Goffman for suggesting that a stigmatized individual's

main recourse is simply to avoid hostility, Orne (2013) points out that individuals can, in contrast, use their interactions with others proactively to educate and transform their stereotypical point of view. By "taking the bullet" and answering personal and invasive questions about the stigmatized identity, stigmatized individuals can therefore breakdown stereotypes, whether for themselves as individuals or as part of a larger political agenda (Orne 2013:247). Secondly, he criticizes Goffman for assuming homogeneity in stigmatized identities. While it is true that Goffman discusses homosexuality and race within his theorizing on stigma, he nevertheless treats many of their experiences as equivalent. In contrast, Orne argues that beneath the modern queer umbrella, various labels and identities have been fashioned to fine-tune this management and further deflect stigma by associating less stigmatized identities with themselves. Orne points to one of his interviewees who, when questioned about their sexual identity, deflected their stigmatization by identifying as gay, although they actually identified as bisexual. The individual in this situation opted for publicly identifying with the former over the latter since they perceived being gay would be less stigmatized than being bisexual (Orne 2013:244).

Another critical point Orne makes pertains to Goffman's emphasis on "sympathetic others" that allow stigmatized individuals to feel a sense of acceptance within the larger social sphere. Orne found that this is not always the case, as sympathetic people and safe spaces are not always available. Since there is so much diversity within the queer community, Orne states that even in queer spaces, individuals of intersectional identities can feel that they are in the line of fire on account of how skin color can play a stigmatizing role into these social interactions (Orne 2013:248). Is it possible to take this

line of thinking even further and apply it to how queer performance informs individual identity construction in opposition to such negative social interactions and spaces? Is it possible to further divert stigma both by their actions in dealing with stigma and in how they perform their stigmatized identities? These are a few questions that Orne's research leaves out that I wish to further investigate.

With respect to Goffman's theory of front-stage performances and how such front-stage performances are based on the expectations of social norms and strategies used to avoid, deflect, or mitigate stigma, Orne's (2013) insights suggest that such strategies may be more difficult for those whose social identities do not align as readily with these norms. For such stigmatized people, their front-stage performances will likely be even more oppositional to who they really are back-stage. In contrast, for people who fit society's normative categories (e.g., male, heterosexual, white), the front-stage demands, to some degree, performances that are already catered to them. Applying Goffman's theory of dramaturgy to everyday behaviors involving performances of gender, sexuality, and race helps reveal how the challenges stigmatized people face in performing on the front-stage may not be as homogeneous as Goffman assumed.

Feminist philosopher Judith Butler takes such a position in her analysis of gayness as an identity. Butler (2017[1991]:166-178) likens the construction of a gay identity as essentially a type of drag performance of heterosexuality. More specifically, she argues that gayness as an identity is something you must perform, something you must "do", and in doing so, one shows a difference from heterosexuality. Looking at gayness as inherently a drag performance, we can see how gender performance and expectations are used to enact as well as challenge gender roles and norms. Butler contends that there is

no "proper" gender because all representations of gender thus far have only been imitations of which there exists no true original. Extending the discussion to sexual orientation, Butler (2017[1991]) argues that heterosexuality does not precede homosexuality, meaning that it is not the "original" sexuality. Instead "the parodic or imaginative effect of gay identities works neither to copy nor emulate heterosexuality, but rather, to expose heterosexuality as an incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization" (Butler 2017[1991]:724).

Heterosexuality thus derives its normativity and tacit acceptability in mainstream society not from some inherently "natural" state but, rather, from its ongoing repeated performance in daily social life. As Butler (2017[1991]:724) states,

> the parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original, but it shows that heterosexuality only constitutes itself as the original through a convincing act of repetition.

If an individual does not perform according to heterosexual norms, which include gendered and sexual performances, they may face negative sanctioning, for instance through violence or ostracization from society. In this way, social performances matter not only for integration into society but also the construction and maintenance of key social identities such as gender and sexuality.

Butler's research on gayness as a drag performance reveals how the front-stage performances can be more complicated than Goffman assumed. Both heterosexuality and

gayness involve performances. The difference is that only one of them is widely expected and rewarded while the other challenges these expectations. Whereas Goffman suggests performances are where people conform to societal expectations and norms, Butler's research focuses, in contrast, on how some performances can be transgressive.

Contemporary Developments

Performance and Identity

Contemporary research on racial/ethnic, gender, and sexuality norms has gone even further in highlighting specific ways in which performances and identity are interrelated. As with gender and sexual orientation, racial identities are also often reinforced through repetitious performances (Johnson 2003). What people expect these racial performances to look like occurs through a process known as racialization. Racialization, according to Vasquez (2010), occurs when racial/ethnic classifications are imposed upon others based on phenotypical characteristics. These classifications, especially on the basis of skin tone and color, are then often accompanied by racially/ethnically-specific social expectations, which are used to dictate where people are allowed or expected to go and what they are allowed or expected to do (Pfeifle 2014).

However, the amount of freedom individuals have to perform can sometimes be shaped by their "flexible ethnicity" (Vasquez 2010). Flexible ethnicity is defined as "an ability to deftly and effectively navigate different racial terrains and be considered an 'insider' in more than one racial or ethnic group" (Vasquez 2010:59). In Vasquez' study, Hispanic and Latino people who came from mixed racial parentage and had lighter skin tones were racially ambiguous, allowing them added flexibility in performing race in

ways that could position them closer or further away from a white American identity. For instance, Vasquez (2010) describes the example of a light-skinned Mexican American man living in California who is typically racialized as white. Although admitting to being Americanized, he firmly identifies both as a non-white American and Mexican. While living an "American" lifestyle, he also embraces many aspects of his Mexican heritage, such as displaying a Mexican blanket and the patron saint *la Virgen de Guadalupe* in his low-rider car. He is, in Vasquez' (2010:60) words, "'in' mainstream culture, yet he is not 'of' mainstream culture." Vasquez' research thus shows how people who do not neatly fit preexisting racialized categories play an active role in performing their racial/ethnic identities, sometimes in accordance with racialized expectations, sometimes in contrast to them. Vasquez' emphasis on racialization shows the demands placed on people to act according to how they are racially/ethnically classified as well as how they racially/ethnically classify themselves.

Messner (2004) furthers this discussion by showing how routine performances of gender and sexuality also relate to identity. In an autobiographical account, Messner (2004) notes how he became infatuated with another boy on a basketball team, and how he felt the need to do something about it. While Messner did not consciously understand his full feelings at this point in his life, he decided to act on the emotion the way masculine athletes would act and decided that he was going to hate this other boy. As a result, he started behaving in an increasingly aggressive manner on the court, as he understood sports as a masculine activity that called for masculine acts, even, at one point, elbowing the boy while playing to show his superior athletic ability. Here Messner (2005:4) shows how, "as young athletes, heterosexuality and masculinity was not

something we 'were', but something we were doing." He clarifies that "although each of us was 'doing heterosexuality', neither of us were actually having sex with women" (Messner 2005:4). Here, Messner's performance of gender and sexuality reflected societal norms that he felt he "should" adhere to in order to avoid punishment even though they neither conformed with his sexual identity nor demanded a change in it (e.g., in terms of "having sex").

In his earlier research regarding the gender socialization of children, Messner (2000) applies this idea of performing gender in a similar way. Messner describes a scene of two different teams: the Sea Monsters, which was made up of five to six-year-old boys, and another team, the Barbie Girls, who were of the same age group but were all girls. In one particular interaction between the two teams, Messner observes that when the Barbie Girls went to showcase their team's float, the boys of the Sea Monsters started screaming and shouting, "NO BARBIES!" The parents of the children repeated this performance, confirming that this type of behavior was acceptable and normal. This highlighted how the children were being socialized to construct differences between boys and girls. Messner (2000:769) interprets the behavior of the boys through the performance of gender: "they aggressively confront—first through loud verbal chanting, eventually through bodily invasions—the girls' ritual space of emphasized femininity, apparently with the intention of disrupting its upsetting influence." In this instance, the boys not only performed gender in ways that constituted the different social roles of their respective genders but were also simultaneously constructing their own gender identities through the othering of the opposing team. This performance was further reaffirmed by the parents.

Messner’s (2000:780) account of this interaction also highlights the hierarchical nature of gendered performance:

> In the Barbie Girls versus Sea Monsters moment, the performance of gendered boundaries and the construction of boys' and girls' groups as categorically different occurred in the context of a situation systematically structured by sex segregation, sparked by the imposing presence of a shared cultural symbol that is saturated with gendered meanings.

The specific gendered performance, enacted by the boys on the Sea Monsters within the confines of athletics, allowed them to start yelling at the girls simply for having a team name “Barbie”. Here the girls constructed an empowering group identity around Barbie while the boys felt the need to aggressively denounce such a symbol within the sport. In this way, in addition to playing a role in identity construction, the performance of gender also reflected and allowed for the hierarchical socialization of children’s gender.

This research recalls the discussion of Goffman and how performing in conformity to societal expectations is likely easier for majority or dominant groups because they already fit a lot of the normative categories of performance. Performing identity for minorities and marginalized groups, however, is more complex. Unlike majority/dominant groups, those with marginalized identities do not have the same freedom to negotiate a front-stage performance that is also at least somewhat authentic to their back-stage selves. However, because minorities *do* operate in the same everyday

worlds as everyone else, it is important for them to be able to express who they are in some way. While this certainly occurs in the back-stage, some find ways of constructing performance *in* the front-stage that actively challenge normative front-stage expectations regarding race, gender, and sexuality.

Applying this insight to the topic of Ballroom, where race, gender, and sexual orientation intersect, one might similarly expect that queer performers, who do not fit society's heterosexual, white norms, will also be likely to perform in ways that sometimes align with, sometimes deviate from, and sometimes actively challenge what society expects of them. In order to decipher how individuals non-conform to heterosexual and white norms while still constructing meaningful identities for themselves, we must first understand the role of performativity in forming a normalized space for enacting such non-conforming identities.

Shifting a Nonconforming Back-Stage to the Front-Stage

Safe spaces function as back-stages for minorities and marginalized groups to be their true, authentic selves. As discussed above, society caters many of its normalized performances of identity to people who are cis-gendered, white, and heterosexual, which often leaves little front-stage space for individuals with opposing identities. Back-stages can provide an alternative location for such individuals to express themselves, allowing them to enjoy social and emotional benefits while avoiding the negative sanctioning that might typically be imposed on such behavior.

Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey's (1999) research, for instance, looks at how society has left black people on the outskirts of social life. They show that there are

significant social and emotional health benefits when black Americans are able to derive social cohesion from membership in black groups and organizations. In their research, they first found that black individuals cope with stigmatization based on how they perceive the act of prejudice. If it is perceived as invalid prejudice, in the sense of being seen as a pervasive and deliberate act of prejudice, it creates negative sentiment towards the dominant group as well as helps affirm the individual's connection to minority groups. If it is perceived as valid prejudice, in which they recognize an action as prejudicial but either as unintentional or not consciously intentional towards them, it directly and negatively affects the individual's well-being (Branscombe et al. 1999:142).

Branscombe et al.'s (1999) study shows how coping with prejudice relates to social group membership in two ways. First, the level of one's involvement in black groups and organizations dictates if people experience low self-esteem on account of racial prejudices. This is because individuals may seek affirmations of their social identities through racial solidarity within these groups. Second, the strength of an individual's integration within the oppressed group may also be tied to an individual's hostility towards the pressuring groups (Branscombe et al. 1999). If the prejudice is seen as invalid and lasting over time, this increases hostility towards the outgroup, which in turn increases the chance that the individual will integrate more strongly into these smaller minority groups. Individual well-being then hinges on how well-integrated the individual is to the minority group. Branscombe et al.'s (1999) research shows that in a racialized white society, where blackness is deemed as "other", the black community plays an important role in alleviating the stresses and pressures imposed on members of the community by the dominant social groups.

Though focused on race, this pattern readily applies to other marginalized social groupings as well, such as gender, national origin, age, or sexual orientation. The queer community, especially, mirrors this need for community building, as they have been a marginalized group operating within the confines of the heteropatriarchy. For these minorities, especially since their self-identities often conflict with the norms imposed upon them from mainstream society or dominant groups, such groups/organizations provide spaces in which they can perform in ways that are authentic to them. Exploring such a space for the queer community, in the form of Ballroom events, is the topic of this thesis.

Minority communities provide back-stage spaces for members to enjoy the benefits of group membership while avoiding negative sanctions from outsiders. However, they are not exclusively back-stages, since, in some cases, they can provide spaces for minorities to operate safely on the front-stage as well. Indeed, many of these communities frequently occupy public or publicly accessible spaces. One might therefore think of some of these safe spaces as quasi-back-stages in the front-stage. For instance, gay men in the U.S. have long used bars as a place to socialize safely and avoid persecution and oppression by a society that operates by a dominant heteronormative ideology (Adams 2018). These spaces are not entirely in the back-stage as they are often open to heterosexual patrons as well, or at least do not impose strict boundaries excluding such patrons. Interviews with bartenders reveal how such spaces operate as a buffer against unwanted social interactions between queer identifying men and heterosexual guests. For example, one bartender at a hidden gay bar would serve regular patrons beverages in un-chilled glasses in order to warn them of newcomers who might pose a

threat (Adam 2018). In another example, the President of Northwestern University stressed the importance of safe spaces for individuals on college campuses for marginalized groups like the queer community, stating that “stigmatized identities [need] a space of pride and security in which to relax and not worry about being interrogated” (Shapiro 2016). Other research has similarly highlighted the importance of safe spaces for queer people who travel. In their research on queer tourists touring major U.S. cities during holiday seasons, Blichfeldt, Chor, and Milan (2013) found that some of their respondents described gay bars as a form of “sanctuary” where they could feel free and open with their sexuality. In this way, gay bars function as spaces in which gay people can confirm and validate their sexual identities in a front-stage setting.

Sometimes, the safe spaces that marginalized individuals occupy are more than just physical spaces. This means that these safe spaces are constructed through the act of performance itself. This allows for unique social performances of identities to flourish. These space-constructing performances often take the form of active social resistance. Ellison’s (2019) research on the “sanctuaries movement” of the 1950s and 60s in L.A demonstrates this. This social movement sought to reform policies regarding policing in favor of equal treatment for queer people. Their demonstrations took place in public, showing how the visibility of their performances alone could bring about change.

Ellison (2019) notes four distinct tactics used by gay and lesbian activists during this time. Of the four, one tactic in particular connects performance with the creation of safe spaces. This tactic involved the creation of identity-based community organizations that then actively established territory for queer people within the existing material and political landscape. Materially, this tactic involved activists physically occupying space

such that their public presence put pressure on the government to acknowledge their existence. Politically, these identity-based organizations allowed for well-connected supporters and queer activists to transfer vast amounts of information as quickly as possible, while also using those connections to rally more allies to their cause. By invading a space and assertively performing non-normative notions of gender and sexuality, activists were able to both mobilize as a form of social and political activism while also engaging in radical identity construction on a very visible front-stage. Here we see both the importance of safe spaces for minorities and marginalized groups to be their true, authentic selves and even how authentic performances informed by performers' back-stage identities can also create safe spaces themselves. These are spaces where marginalized minority groups can feel confident to express their non-conforming identities in the front-stage. Without such spaces, the pressure for them to hide their true identities may be too great.

Challenging Front-Stage Demands

Minority and marginalized groups do not only express their back-stage 'true' selves in front-stage spaces, but also sometimes challenge society's normative demands in their front-stage performances. This is done explicitly through actual stage performances that are used as a form of activism against oppressive or overly constraining societal norms. Muñoz (1997) uses the term "disidentification" to describe the counter-hegemonic act of resisting rigid, binary gender and sexuality norms. For example, Muñoz describes how the black drag queen Vaginal Davis engages in disidentification in the form of a critique of heteronormativity. In her performances, she

embodies contradictory identities by mimicking a militant caricature of a Black Panther rally while presenting as a drag version of Angela Davis, whose representation of black power contradicts that of the Black Panthers. As Muñoz (1997:84) explains, "Davis instead disidentifies with black power by selecting Angela and not the Panthers as a site for self-fashioning and political performance." Due to Vaginal Davis' queerness and existence as a drag queen, she had been excluded from fully gaining access to the heteronormative Black Panthers' militancy because the latter had a hegemonic grasp on what it meant to perform black activism. Such a masculine and radical movement provided little room for disenfranchised individuals with different marginalized identities to be represented. While the movement itself was meant to counter a racist society, it still itself exemplified notions of heteronormativity. In contrast, by embodying an identity of effeminacy and queerness while simultaneously performing the social scripts of the Black Panthers, Davis engages in a form of resistance against both racist and heteronormative norms and ideals.

While Muñoz' (1997) work reflects some of the core insights already provided by Goffman (1959) and Butler (2020) decades before, Muñoz (1997) situates performance within the context of an actual stage, much like plays or drag performances. As with Davis' example, other stage-based types of performance, including that of dance, can also take the form of resistance through performing various identities. In her study of a reggaeton dance competition in Puerto Rico, Riviera-Servera (2020) discusses how performative actions can refashion symbolic gestures of female subordination into a model for positive identity formation. As a combination of both African American and Latin American hip hop, which originated in Puerto Rico, reggaetón performances

typically involve an expression of ethnic, racial, and national identity through music and dance movements. The sexualized choreography that accompanies reggaetón music functions as a feminist mode of resistance to white, suburban, middle-class norms, in which female bodies are often portrayed in subjugated positions as objects, in which male dominance is favored to the exclusion of black music and aesthetics (Riviera-Servera 2020). For example, in the competition, the women's performance utilized body movements that at first seemed to symbolize subservience, as they moved their buttocks and hips around the groin area of their male counterparts. Yet as the competition went on, it was revealed that the women were the ones making all the choices on the dance floor as there were moments when the men had no idea the women were using them as dancing props (Riviera-Servera 2020:101-102). The announcer of the competition called this 'the new feminism', in which the females' reclamation of sexual power and autonomy through movements of their body allowed them to achieve their goal of encapsulating both black aesthetics through music and a black identity through dance.

Aside from its usefulness as a form of resistance politics, performance can also validate the identities of those in the audience. Disidentifying performances, according to Muñoz (2019), can fetishize spaces that allow onlookers to feel positively about parts of their identity that contradict social norms without having to challenge those norms themselves. For example, Kevin Aviance, a drag performer, uses their body not only to disidentify with gender norms but also as an amalgamation of gestures used to signal a desire for a world where all bodies and bodily performances are embraced (Muñoz 2009). Muñoz describes Aviance's performances as a mixture of singing, dancing, and engaging with the audience while wearing high heels and various extravagant outfits, although

notably without the use of wigs. Aviance’s choice for such feminization without fully trying to impersonate a female shows that they are more interested in “approximating the notion of femininity” rather than reproducing it (Muñoz 2009:76). In so doing, Aviance’s masculinity is not overshadowed or hidden within their performance of femininity, but instead works together with that femininity to defy anxieties patrons have about rigid notions of a gender binary. Because of Aviance’s performance, the audience can see the possibility and acceptability of multiple and contradictory identities existing within one body. While presenting such a non-normative construction of identity, the already gay space is further queered by defying gender norms. Here the space is almost transformed as a place to play with binary identity classifications. In this way, Aviance’s aesthetic choices in their performances become a symbol and blueprint for how to reconstruct normative ideas that surround identities.

While these performances clearly represent intersecting identities onstage, it is less certain whether and how these performances influence how performers see themselves offstage in their daily lives. This reflects Goffman’s (1959:17) theoretical claim that “at one extreme, one finds that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality.” Going further than Muñoz’s and Goffman’s theorizing, my project will examine how resistance politics play a role in this relationship between performance and both onstage and offstage identities, especially pertaining to issues of gender and sexuality. Considering that performers on the front-stage are also audience members of *other* performers’ performances, my project will also take into account the extent to

which this process is influenced by performers seeing other such performances within the broader Ballroom community.

Performance and Vogue

Ballroom and vogue performance stand as the connecting point between these ideas about performance and identity. On one hand, Balls provide a quasi-back-stage for performers to perform authentically on the front-stage. These events are not completely closed off to the public, and in some cases have even been televised (Jordenö 2016), yet they still function as a community for queer people to perform authentically, both on and offstage. This includes addressing social issues specific to the community, engaging in community outreach, and providing a means of expressing solidarity as a community. Vogue performances are intentionally crafted for performers to challenge normative standards when it comes to gender and sexuality. Bailey's (2013) work in particular has gone a long way in both uncovering the gendered system within the Ballroom scene as well as the types of ritualized black and gendered performances enacted by members of this community. Bailey's writings argue that the gendered, racial, and sexual performances in Ballroom, for instance when House members perform vogue or walk a realness category to be judged by a panel and the audience, are used by the performers not only to win competitions but also to articulate their various identities to others. Ballroom members who compete in vogue categories are judged on how effectively they perform specifically gendered, racial, and sexual performances and/or dances (Bailey 2013). While Bailey explicitly discusses the importance of how vogue performance sometimes challenges and sometimes reproduces these social scripts, he does not address

how exactly these performative acts impact individual identity. This is the gap I hope to bridge by uncovering how exactly vogue performances express authentic identities that also challenge mainstream norms within the individual performer.

Another aspect of vogue performance that we need to look at is how its racial historical background plays into the choices performers make within their performances. Vogue, when situated within the context of Balls, has the effect of transforming a space into an area where black individuals can construct and express their unique back-stage identities without the typical fear of how such expressions might threaten their lives and livelihoods. Bailey (2013:73) tells a story of how some House members would resort to stealing as a form of income and how the Houses themselves sometimes raise money and find housing for those members who are unable to do so themselves due to the constraints of living in a racist society. Voguing, which is the central foundation to Ballroom, thus provides a way for black queer people to maintain a life off the streets and an avenue through which to avoid poverty and violence from the outside world.

Within the context of the actual performance, Vogue itself gets a lot of its influence from black hip-hop aesthetic choices and modern house music. Both inspirations, in turn, have origins in black culture and styles of performance, and thus have particular resonance with queer black performers for whom “homophobia is embedded deeply in shifting notions of Black masculinity and performances thereof” (Bailey 2013:53). In other words, male black queer bodies have traditionally been strictly regulated to only show hypermasculine versions of the self. In contrast, vogue helps provide a new way in which gender can inhabit a black body via its use of hyperfeminine and hypersexual body movements. This brings to mind Riviera-Servera’s (2020) research

on how the performance of hypersexuality can be a mode with which black performers can challenge the restrictions placed on them by a white heteronormative world.

The world of Ballroom and vogue performance in recent years has opened more to the wider public, which includes a larger set of racialized and white individuals. As more people become exposed to and involved in vogue, this raises the question as to whether there is an impact on individual performances depending on whether today's vogue performers are black or not. Here I ask if the performance choices of these individuals, given Ballroom's rich racial history, may in turn affect their off-stage identities in different ways. Would black performers find more meaning than non-black performers by virtue of their intersectionality and the racial history of Ballroom? Likewise, would their performances have deeper meanings for them in their off-stage identities because they face additional marginalization on account of their race? Or is it possible that they get less out of it because Ballroom, which was once predominantly black, has since opened to other races and ethnicities?

Existing research on the social role of performance has shown its influences on individuals, not only internally, regarding the construction of one's identity (e.g., regarding gender, race, sexuality, and personal wellbeing) but also externally in terms of allowing them to be a part of socially cohesive groups and allowing for a space to engage on the front-stage using different expressions of identity. Through different forms of performance, like dance, poetry, song, and drag shows, social actors can challenge normative gender, race, and sexuality scripts, especially through enacting roles that contradict one another in mainstream society. This literature has largely focused on how performances enact identities, whether they be in accordance with mainstream norms or

to challenge them. However, if it is true that performance can be used to challenge norms, one must ask if it has tangible and reciprocal effects on identity? Given the inequalities these marginalized groups must still contend with in their day-to-day lives, do their transgressive vogue performances do anything positive for them besides just "enacting authentic identities"? Does it change how they live their day-to-day lives and how they see themselves? Thus, I arrive at my research interest, not only about how onstage vogue expresses performers' identities but also how vogue may reciprocally shape and influence performers' identities when they return to their offstage lives.

METHODS

My study aimed to examine the lived experiences of vogue performers by utilizing semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This qualitative methodology is better suited than closed-ended survey methods in exploring how the performances of individuals involved in the Ballroom and vogue community influence and are influenced by individual identities. In addition, this method also allowed for a deeper and richer understanding of the lived experiences of queer vogue performers through giving a 'voice' to their experiences (Hesse-Biber 2010). Given the centrality of vogue to my thesis, I also observed Ballroom events and vogue performances to supplement the interview data. Below, I describe the methodological process of data collection, including the characteristics and recruitment of participants, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data.

Participants and Recruitment

My recruitment efforts were targeted at participants who were over the age of 18 and who had performed voguing on the west coast of America, especially northern California, Nevada, the Bay Area and Portland, Oregon. Participants were those who, in their offstage lives, identified with any gender identity, including men, women, and non-binary individuals. Participants also varied by race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality so as to capture as much of the varied lived experiences of queer performers as possible, including their views on performance and individual identity.

Participants were selected from two specific locations of recruitment: social media (Instagram and Tik Tok) and through key informants within the community. I sought to generate a snowball sample of 15 people, starting with these initial participants. Recruitment included actively getting in touch with performers via social media, direct messaging, and attending Ballroom events where I had previously been able to meet performers and connect with them outside of these events. Participants were provided with a consent form prior to actual interviews (see Appendix A). This form detailed the amount of time required for the interviews (which lasted between 35 and 90 minutes), the voluntary nature of participation, how the data collected would be kept confidential, and basic information explaining that the interviews would be centered around identity, performance, and experiences within vogue.

Data Collection

Confidentiality was ensured by providing each participant with a pseudonym and removing or altering any identifying markers that would compromise their privacy. All interviews, with the permission of the participants, were be audio-recorded to ensure

accuracy when reporting responses. The location of these interviews was conducted at the discretion of the participants to safeguard their sense of privacy and safety. Most of the interviews, aside from two, were conducted in-person in a space that was discussed and decided upon by both the participants as well as myself. The remaining interviews were conducted via Zoom.

The questions that were used during this interview process were categorized into larger themes regarding performance, identity, and vogue (see Appendix B). The first category of questions, entitled “Thoughts on Vogue and Ballroom”, specifically focused on a participant’s own understanding of vogue. These questions were intended to allow participants’ later, more specific, thoughts on vogue performance to be situated within the context of their broader interpretations and assumptions of Ballroom and vogue.

The next group of questions, “Thoughts on Doing Vogue”, specifically related to what the performers thought about their bodies and performance styles while onstage. These questions helped identify participants’ unique, individual, stylistic performance choices and inspirations. Responses to these questions helped illuminate the various factors that may have influenced participants’ respective performance styles.

The third set of questions pertained to “Vogue and Identity”. These questions were aimed at understanding a participant’s individual identity in relation to how they saw themselves when performing vogue. Participants’ ideas, feelings, and reasons behind performing vogue helped illustrate connections between their offstage and onstage lives and identities.

At the very end of the interview, I asked the participants questions about their demographic background to better capture the diversity of performers and experiences.

Collecting this demographic information was intended to help contextualize the experiences of these individual performers and their performances while allowing for comparisons to larger and more diverse populations given how individuals may be impacted by marginalization based on attributes and identities associated with race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

Data Analysis

I used the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) tool Dedoose to analyze my data, following the "flexible coding" approach detailed by Deterding and Waters (2021). Deterding and Waters (2021) point to three stages for coding and analyzing contemporary qualitative data. Their approach recommends first separating the collected information into broader codes, and then using smaller, more specific codes within those broader codes. This approach differs from classical grounded theory, which states that the researcher needs to begin by creating the smaller and more specific codes first, before grouping those into broader codes (see Bowen 2006; Glaser and Strauss 2017). The benefit to flexible coding as opposed to traditional grounded theory is that it allows for a more theory-based, systematic analysis of the data collected.

More specifically, Deterding and Waters' (2020) three-step coding process involves indexing and memoing, followed by applying analytical codes, and finally, exploring coding validity, testing, and refining theory. The first stage of this process involves identifying the main idea or story of the information. During this process, broader themes in the data will be classified into index codes. This process helps the researcher retrieve the data more systematically. The second stage entails the application

of analytical codes. These analytical codes are derived in two ways, first from an initial reading of the data and, second, through “sensitizing concepts”. A sensitized concept refers to the background ideas or concepts that can be derived from existing research or theory, which help inform the overall research problem (Bowen 2006). The primary difference between this and the first stage of coding is that only specific and relevant parts of the interviews are eligible for analytical codes, referring to the codes that have already been taken from broad concepts to the more specific ones.

The last stage in this process is about cementing concepts and ideas from the interview process. In this stage, the researcher cross-references coded information from the previous stage to analyze the patterns that were observed whether they be the broad or more specific concepts. This also allows the researcher who is coding to see if there has been a misclassification during the coding process. If a misclassification happens, the coding software makes it easy to revise said classification and correct the mistake, safeguarding validity concerns within the coding process.

Author Positionality and Bias

When conducting qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to understand that their lived experiences and social standing impact and influence the way they view and see the world. Standpoint theory addresses this concern by focusing on how the positionality of an individual may privilege individuals to perceive things associated with their experiences that other individuals cannot (Collins 1989). For example, as a white, gay, non-binary individual, I experienced both benefits and disadvantages when conducting my research. While my sexual orientation and gender

expression may have allowed me entry into the Ballroom community, my whiteness also signified something vastly different, especially within the confines of Ballroom. As stated previously, the Ballroom community was in part forged as a space for queer and gender nonconforming performers and peoples of color to escape the homophobia, transphobia, and racism that was ever-present in the queer community in the 1970s (Buckner n.d; Chauncey 1994). In locating myself within this space, it was imperative that I acknowledge the complex histories of marginalization this community has experienced. While being able to have access to this community did not automatically make me an insider, it placed me in the unique position to ask questions regarding the social aspects of vogue performance. My position within society allowed me to see certain things more clearly, while at the same time also obscuring others that might have been seen with more ease by other researchers of different positions.

While my queer and gender non-conforming experiences have allowed me a specific type of access to this community, other aspects of my identity may also have caused me to presume things about another individual's life. More plainly stated, because many of our conversations revolved around race, gender and sexuality, differences respondents perceived between the two of us could have impacted what or even how much they shared with me throughout the interview process. My positionality allowed me to see and connect with respondents in different ways that other respondents with different positions in life could. Because of this it's important to note how this could have impacted my recruiting, observation, and interview processes.

Resulting Sample

The original goal I started out with for this project was to ensure both gender and racial diversity throughout the sampling process for my research on queer performance. I had hoped to ensure the experiences of all individual performers involved reflected the overall diverse makeup of those engaging in vogue on the West Coast. While the study was initially designed to focus more on the experiences of voguers from the Bay Area more specifically, due to a compounding personal living situation and an initial informant allowing me access to the Kiki vogue scene up in Portland, I was able to expand my scope of research and incorporate another city on the West Coast. The resulting sample consisted of seven participants, four from the Bay Area and three from Portland, Oregon.

Participants were asked specific demographic questions pertaining to their race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. While a slight majority of my participants self-identified as Mexican American or Latino (four out of seven participants), three out of these four who identified as Mexican American or Latino were from the Bay Area. On the other hand, the participants from Portland were more racially diverse with all three of them identifying differently from one another. These participants identified as mixed Asian American (Chinese and Taiwanese), white, and mixed black respectively (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Sample Description (N=7)

Characteristics	N
Location	
Bay Area, CA	4
Portland OR	3

Gender Identity	
Cis-Male	3
Non-Binary/ Gender Queer	4
Sexual Orientation	
Homosexual	5
Pansexual	2
Racial Identity	
Mexican American	4
Latino	1
Black/ Afro Mixed	1
Chinese/ Taiwanese American	1
White/ Caucasian	1

My participants also varied by gender identity, with four participants identifying as non-binary and/or gender non-conforming and the rest self-identifying as cis-gendered males. Participants within the study also mainly identified as homosexual or gay for their sexual orientation, with five out of the seven participants identifying as such, while the remaining two participants identified as pansexual (refer to Table 2). Additionally, all my participants also identified with a relatively more playful and malleable gender identity when discussing their identities onstage by ascribing different gendered terms to their movements and characterization of their performances, without fully claiming a different gender identity within that onstage context.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics by Participant

Name	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Racial Identity
Creighton	Gender Queer	Pansexual	Chinese/ Taiwanese American
Jamie	Cis Man	Pansexual	Black/ Afro Mixed
Khai	Non-Binary	Homosexual	White
Bailey	Cis Man	Homosexual	Latino
Jace	Non-Binary	Homosexual	Mexican American
Lester	Non-Binary	Homosexual	Mexican
Mason	Cis Man	Homosexual	Mexican American

The racial characteristics of my sample may appear odd, given that both Bailey (2014) and Chauncey (1994) note how Ballroom is a space for black and brown individuals. This difference may be attributable to two possible reasons. The first pertains to the already existing queer demographic of the Ballroom scenes where I conducted my research. Both Ballroom scenes in Portland and the Bay area are much smaller than that of LA and the East Coast and are racially different. At the two functions I attended in L.A., individuals present were mostly black individuals of various gender identities and sexual orientations, but the same cannot be said for the other places on the West Coast where I recruited participants for the study. In fact, while attending vogue practice sessions and Kiki functions in Portland, the population was a lot more racially diverse with no clear racial majority in attendance.

The second possible reason was that even where there were more black and brown individuals attending events, such as in the Bay Area, they were less inclined to engage with me, suggesting that my position as a white and cis-passing individual may have given some potential participants pause in deciding to be involved in my research. At the Kiki Functions I attended in the Bay Area, black individuals present engaged with me less, especially when I was not accompanied by an already established voguer. This hesitance is also reflected by gender as well, with most of my participants identifying as either cis-males or gender non-conforming in some way, showing a different gendered landscape than previous research. The three feminine presenting individuals whom I asked to be a part of the study also did not respond to my inquiry regarding their participation, two of whom were from the Bay Area.

In contrast to this reluctance, since those who did participate in my study deviate from the original Ballroom racial and gender makeup, they could have been more prepared to 'take the bullet,' as Orne (2013) argued, when engaging with perceived outsiders such as myself. More specifically, it is possible that since most of my participants differed racially and some by gender from the original racial and gendered makeup of Ballroom, they may have felt more prepared to answer more personal questions about their stigmatized identity in order to educate others around certain topics regarding stigmatization (Orne 2013). Really what I want to shed light on is how the resulting demographic of my participants can show how my positionality can also influence those who wish to engage with me as a researcher.

Limitations of the Study

One weakness of this study is the limited sample size of my participants. Ideally, I would like to have more individuals in general to draw more concrete conclusions about individual experiences in relation to transformative queer performances like vogue. A lack of respondents from such a small closed off queer community unfortunately can lead to a weaker generalization about such performances. At the same time, focusing on a smaller sample size also came with some benefits, since it allowed me a deeper look into the lives of the study participants. Specifically, it afforded more opportunities for identifying and understanding nuances within each individual's experiences. A smaller sample size, in other words, can prove beneficial in that it helps the researcher paint a more specific and textured picture of social experiences through a deeper understanding of the individuals involved.

Gaining access to minority communities can prove to be challenging, and that has been the case for myself as a researcher engaging with the Ballroom community. While I was able to gain access to a range of individuals willing to share their experiences with me, this process was not without its difficulties. As a white individual, my race immediately signifies that I am an outsider to this space, which, as stated before, has traditionally been maintained and created for queer people of color. The outside relationships I developed with the individuals who became my first participants helped counter perceptions members of the community might otherwise have had about me being an intruder. This changed in situations where I did not have an individual contact within the Ballroom community, however, either next to me physically or who had referred me to another possible participant. It became more difficult for individuals to see me as trustworthy, as people stopped responding to emails or messages inquiring their participation in this research. For instance, only one black participant chose to engage with me outside of the physical Ballroom spaces, unlike the brown individuals whom I met, even though the Ballroom community is comprised of most Black individuals. However, my continued existence within Ballroom space, both formal and informal, was as a guest who was there to learn, participate, and support helped me to lessen this distrust. It is important to note how this could be due to my position as a white individual, as there exists a history of racism directed towards the individuals of Ballroom, which makes such individuals warier of outsiders until they prove themselves otherwise.

Online recruiting also posed additional challenges. My online social media presence is limited and the only Instagram account I have is for my own drag persona. While I never hid this or planned on hiding this aspect of myself from participants, it

became one of the first things individuals would have known about me while I recruited in online spaces like Instagram. This may also be a signifier to those who vogue to be warier of outsiders, as there exists tensions between the two groups, especially due to concerns of one group appropriating practices unique to the other group. For instance, one participant initially expressed reluctance to be interviewed, and first asked me about my relationship to and understanding of Ballroom and vogue before eventually agreeing to be a part of the study. Only after the initial 'pre-screening' by my participant and a discussion they had with their House did they share their experience with me, and I was allowed to add them to my participant list. It is important to note that while Ballroom incorporates drag and gender-play within its walls, there still exists tensions between this community and 'mainstream' drag queens and drag culture.

Another challenge that may have played a role in the smaller-than-ideal sample size was the amount of time needed to integrate into the Ballroom space *before* effective recruitment could take place. During this research project, a lot of time was devoted time towards field observation and participating within the community. This additional time spent proved useful as it helped the research dually, by both allowing the researcher a better, more respectful, transition into the community as well as a better understanding of the complex social culture and world that exists around vogue as a performance. This is especially important because it is possible for the researcher to face gatekeeping if they are perceived as posing a threat to the space. In addition, these communities on the West Coast are both more spread out and smaller than compared to other places in the U.S. with Ballroom. These benefits notwithstanding, both these factors ended up placing a

strain on the time needed to interview my participants and both code and analyze the data.

FINDINGS

Below, my findings are separated into three sub-sections. The first sub-section focuses on how individuals construct and understand Ballroom as a space. It is important to understand this background as my respondents tied it inextricably to the how they are able to construct their own individual identities while on-stage performing vogue. The second sub-section, in turn, focuses on how respondents construct their vogue performances on-stage. This section helps connect the notion that an authentic vogue performance cannot exist without the connection to Ballroom. These findings also help point us towards understanding how individuals can transform their off-stage identities. Finally, the last sub-section covers how individuals perceived themselves off-stage. In doing so I detail respondents perceived changes in their off-stage selves and the reasons they continue to vogue.

I would like to note, that due to my small sample size I was unable to discover any significant differences in responses based on both gender and racial lines. While this was one of the larger themes I was hoping to uncover in the grander scheme of my research I was able to highlight smaller differences where they presented themselves within the findings. Nevertheless, while my participants did not explicitly talk about race in the context of my larger themes of identity transformation, it is also true that many of our conversations were influenced by racialized experiences. Harkening back to the demographics of the West Coast, it also helps us paint a picture of what is happening

inside Ballroom spaces regarding race. Here we will be able to see how individuals who have access to and are engaging within Ballroom and vogue as a performance can be signaling a change from exclusively black and brown individuals to a broader queer umbrella. I will discuss them as they come up in individual responses below.

Connecting Space (Ballroom) and Performance (Vogue)

When discussing vogue as a performance, each of the seven respondents referenced how vogue is not just a performance or choreography to be learned but a community and safe space, that is closely connected to the historical roots of its creation. For the purpose of my research, it is crucial to understand how participants perceive the landscape in which they perform. This includes the performers' understanding of the space in which they perform and interact. In doing so the findings point directly towards *how* an individual performer is able to construct an authentic on-stage vogue performance.

When discussing how individuals are able to construct their on-stage identities and performances, they all noted how understanding that vogue exists within Ballroom has helped them make a more authentic vogue performance, no matter how slight the variations in their understandings of Ballroom. Six out of the seven respondents discussed how Ballroom is firstly a safe space, while five of the seven cited how ballroom is a community of individuals who exist to support each other in a variety of ways. Four of these respondents also described Ballroom as a historical event that is still being replicated and maintained today. The overlap of different responses show how the Ballroom community is a complex and multilayered social group that serves multiple

purposes. This is helpful in understanding how a single type of performance, vogue, can be so affecting in helping participants navigate and better understand their own identities. Below, I provide a more detailed account of some of these understandings of Ballroom and its relationship to constructing an authentic on-stage vogue identity.

Safe Space

Individuals of marginalized identities have a need for safe space or sanctuary both to avoid the oppression of their marginalization (Blichfeldt et al. 2013; Branscombe et al.'s 1999) as well as for the continuation of said queer space and life (Ellison 2019). The sentiments were echoed by my respondents when it came to Ballroom and vogue. Several of them discussed how vogue is only able to exist *because of* the safe space that Ballroom provides. One of my respondents, Jamie, a trained dancer who spent most of their life in both recreational and competitive dance environments, detailed how their off stage-identity, being pansexual and black, prevents them from feeling safe to be themselves in the outside world. In our discussion of Ballroom and vogue performance, they shared how their own identity required them to face harder truths about what they look like and what the expectations were of the 'perfect dancer' as well as a 'perfect child'. They pointed to how Ballroom helps alleviate those worries, by existing as a space for everyone to start constructing an identity that doesn't push them to the outskirts of 'normal' life. As Jamie put it, "Ballroom was created for people who didn't have any space for them in heteronormative life, [where] there was no space for them to feel safe or validated." Jamie shared how Ballroom creates a space for individuals to start to see themselves in a positive light, garnering more confidence in one's ability to exist as

themselves. This starts a process of not only self-reflection, which allows performers to construct these alternative, non-normative identities on-stage, inside Ballroom, but this also allows performers to fight back against the world that was not create for them by becoming these positive versions of themselves, in opposition to the outside world's version. Jamie continued, stating how "you created new roles, new ways to feel amazing, to get validation."

Similarly, Jace said, "Ballroom is a space for queer people of color. It is a space to express creativity, play with gender expression, a space to learn from others". Finally, Mason agreed by stating, "my personal meaning for Ballroom is, I think, first and foremost, like a safe space and community." Here we are able to see how respondents saw Ballroom as a safe space created for marginalized individuals who might not have otherwise been given the chance to express themselves. This is important because when individuals discussed constructing their on-stage identities and vogue performances, they note how there was a need for a safe space to try out new and different articulations of gendered self-expression, which I will return to when I discuss the construction of on-stage identities.

Community

Those who talked about Ballroom existing as a safe space also cited how it is equally a community of individuals, both inside and outside of Ballroom events. These thoughts were relayed to me by several of my respondents. The first, Lester, had been a dancer and performer for a few years before they engaged with vogue. Lester has vogued around the United States and was even named a Legend within the scene, both as a vogue

femme performer as well as for all their engagement within the community, on both the house level and an organizer for future Balls.

Lester discussed how “Ballroom for some, is a home. Ballroom is a community of queer individuals who may not have the same access points in life that they have in Ballroom.” Along the same lines as the notion of Ballroom as a safe space, Lester discussed how Ballroom has helped these individuals to form a community of support in the face of their daily persecutions. Lester’s responses also reveal an acknowledgment of the racial and transracial dimensions of Ballroom, stating how this support gives people the freedom “to discover themselves, mainly transforming from… black and brown individuals, to the LGBTQIA+ community as of now.” Lester explained how, while the Ballroom scene and likewise vogue as a performance was created for and by queer people of color (POC), it has since started to expand to a larger community of queer individuals of various racial backgrounds. While Lester identified as Mexican, they focused on how a group of marginalized queer people of color from multiple races/ethnicities have come together on the basis of performing vogue and supporting each other as they engage in performances on-stage at these functions.

Bailey, a virgin in the Ballroom scene, was one of the first participants I had met when going to balls and Kiki functions in the Bay Area. After seeing him walk the virgin vogue femme category, we became friends and even battled each other at a Kiki Function in Oakland. When talking about the type of feeling he gets when performing and being within the space, he shared with me his experiences after his second time walking the vogue performance category and how his initial performance allowed him a connection to the community: “I thought it was, you know, just like dancing dips and everything, but it

definitely for me has become just like a community." Bailey continued by talking about the individuals he has met: "You're meeting so many amazing people, you're seeing everyone dancing, like it's really just everything." What Bailey describes is the community aspect that surrounds and support the performers while they vogue. This is where we start to see the connection between Ballroom as a community and a form of support through vogue performance. Audience members, who themselves are involved in Ballroom, validate and support these unique performances, which an individual performer feels and then carries with them long after the performance has ended. Jace described it perfectly:

> It's definitely a physical space when there is a Ball. But yeah, I think the community aspect of it transcends the physical space. It's kind of something you have all the time, especially with kind of like, the house system, the family system, that kind of exists within it, like you have those people at all times, outside of the Ball to reach out to have people check on you, help you out if you need it.

In this way, Jace revealed how the community provided by Ballroom extends beyond the strictly physical borders surrounding the Balls themselves. This type of support within the Ballroom community then allows individuals to continuously maintain, within themselves, the support of a community. This in turn allows them to continuously maintain and mold these unique types of identities contained within their performances. The connection between the community and performance here is support for a continued existence of vogue performance. Jamie talked about something very similar when discussing how vogue performance helps support those affected by society:

> You are seeing these generations of kids lose themselves in the streets either through drugs or prostitution because they're queer or they're abandoned and maybe kicked out. So that's how houses were started. 'Come into my home, come on baby. You can't sleep on the street.' 'Well, I don't have anywhere to live.' 'You can stay with me… but if you're gonna stay with me, you gotta quit this, you can't be on this. You can't be doing this.' So, you… literally workshop them into being someone who can protect themselves.

For Jamie, this community aspect was more than just about a safe space for expression and meeting likeminded individuals, but also for safety from death, which some face in the broader heteronormative cis-white world. Jamie also pointed out how this is not only a one-sided bargain, as once individuals are in houses, they must represent themselves and those within their community by voguing. Here we see how a community supporting each other from being marked for death exists because of a continued maintenance of individuals engaging with vogue as a performance within the Ballroom spaces.

I saw these sentiments reflected in one Ball I attended in Los Angeles (entitled the "April Fools Ball"), in which house members dressed in extravagant matching outfits and would encourage other members of their own houses to walk in various categories, vogue performance included. The performer I was with that evening, one of my respondents, Jace, asked that I refrain from joining them while they were around their House table with the other members of the house because I was: 1) not in the house; and 2) not matching the dress code the house members had all required each other to wear, which was comprised of flesh tone colors. Mason even discusses this when telling me about the changes he experienced from being a "007" (a performer without a house) to joining a mainstream house in the scene: "All of your outfits need to be approved by the leadership before the ball, right? So, like, obviously you're held to a certain standard to present

yourself." This example helps to contextualize how all aspects of Ballroom and vogue are intertwined, from how support and acceptance into the community is given to how the space is maintained and the community expands, all of which is held together via individuals performing vogue.

Historical Phenomenon

While respondents differed on how they contextualize the space of Ballroom, all agreed that Ballroom is a historical phenomenon that needs to be recognized as such, especially with regard to race. When asked about Ballroom, Creighton, who identifies as Chinese/Taiwanese American and who therefore falls outside of Ballrooms founding racial demographics, talked about how Ballroom and vogue, beyond just providing a community and opportunity for self-expression, are both tied to their deep racial histories:

> Ballroom is a community and a space for queer BIPOC expression and experimentation. I think that's like, what I typically say… So … the history is, you know, founded in New York, and I want to say, the 60s and 70s by queer, you know, black and brown people for black and Latinx people, and specifically, like, black trans people. So, you know, really, for me, it's about honoring that legacy. And recognizing that I am like a guest in the space but also like a participant as well. And for a long time, I was very not sure how I belonged in that space. But, you know, I've … found a good balance of honoring me and honoring the community and I feel I really feel like I'm here on my own terms.

Even though Creighton understood Ballroom to be a community and a place for expression, they also acknowledged the work that had been done before them for individuals outside of the community to be what it is today. Throughout our conversation,

Creighton shared with me how their racialized identity as a Chinese/Taiwanese American effectively barred them from being fully understood in both their gender presentation and racial identities. For instance, according to Creighton, Asian men are viewed as the most effeminate types of men and are often pressured to present their femininity in ways viewed as 'appropriate' to being Asian. This created an internal barrier and struggle for Creighton to come to terms with their experience as a non-binary and Chinese/Taiwanese individual. They worried about where their own identity would be able to exist within these gendered stereotypes. While at the same time, being able to vogue on-stage allowed them to connect to the experiences of racial stereotyping and racism which members of the Ballroom community have faced and rearticulate in their own terms. It is here how we can see that a history of stigmatization, from which Ballroom was erected to help individuals escape, allowed for Creighton to have a more authentic connection to the Ballroom space, which in turn has also helped forge their own performances and participation in it as well. This understanding of Ballrooms histories not only helped Creighton create their on-stage identity, which they view to be more authentic, but also further painted a landscape of how vogue as a performance is more deeply connected to the space and time it was created.

Another respondent, Khai, explained how, even though their racial identity does not align with Ballroom's history, by acknowledging the history of Ballroom, they can avoid causing more damage or participating in a cycle that contributes to the problems which brought about Ballroom in the first place: "Even though I am white, and I only found this space because of a friend, I want to support those who made this space for

people who don't have the same privileges I do in the outside world." Khai continued by sharing how their experience has changed over time:

> When I first started, I knew nothing, and I think that was a very bad thing, but the more I hung around, did my research, watched videos and got to know who people were, I understood that because this space was made for black and brown people of color, I want to make sure, if I continue to engage in this space, that I am not making a mockery of such beautiful art and culture. Because, well, if I was born back then, I'm sure I wouldn't need to find vogue or Ballroom to survive. Well, I might, but it's a lot less likely.

Here we see how history of Ballroom plays an important role for individuals when engaging with Ballroom spaces as well as how they navigate constructing their on-stage identities. Going beyond Branscombe et al.'s (1999) discussion about the benefits of social cohesion within black communities, my findings include individuals who identify along different racial lines. Both Creighton and Khai share how honoring the racial history allows them to exist and better participate within a space that has existed for such a long time.

Another respondent, Jamie, talked about Ballroom and its histories, separate from *just* racial histories, can create other ways for thinking about and constructing an authentic vogue performance. Jamie shared some anxieties concerning those who are authentically performing vogue and involved with the Ballroom community and what they fear for the future of vogue. He started by stating how, "every Ballroom scene in America or any other country is replicating or in our attempt to replicate or recreate the energy that created Ballroom on the East Coast in the 70s." He continued by comparing vogue to yoga:

> We are recreating and emulating energies and people and iconic figures and moments, and even languages that were created in a certain time on the east coast. It's important to clarify that it's similar to how yoga now is so big in suburban communities. However, it would be inappropriate to write anything of depth without acknowledging deeply the truth about where yoga comes from, and that's not talking about Eastern culture. If you're writing a deep paper on yoga, it's blasphemous. You know what I'm saying? It's important that you understand this because this confusion is one of the main fears that ballroom participants and creators have with it becoming mainstream now. And us now sharing it with communities across cultures that we don't have any connection or responsibility. We have no influence on them. Now, it's taking its own flight now, and there are many concerns with that.

Jamie was worried about how the push to make vogue mainstream is equally a push to strip it of the history and culture that accompanied the performance. For him it would be "blasphemous" to vogue without understanding those who created the performance style and who made names for themselves when they would have otherwise been cast out of normal society. Here we can refer back to the conversation between both bell hooks (1992) and Chatzipapatheodoridis (2017) regarding authentic performances and cultural diffusion. Because our respondents see vogue as more than just learning choreography but also recreating and emulating past historical performances and energies, those who engage with vogue without its historical connection are incapable of creating authentic on-stage performances. Only by understanding how the complex history of Ballroom is connected to vogue performance can we also start to understand more about what individuals experience with their capacity to construct their vogue performances on-stage.

Jamie's case shows how some performers only developed this understanding over time. Beginning by describing how his dance background allowed him to see at first the performance of vogue via instruction, Jamie pointed out how he also was immediately cognizant of how much deeper he would have to go to fully understand vogue:

> I found because I was a dancer and I saw it in class at a dance, which I already was going to, and the teacher is from the ballroom scene, so I was like, 'This is great!' And it took me a while of doing that [engaging in vogue and Ballroom] to, like, to meet them on a deeper level and then to, like, actually start pulling myself into the real spaces. The real ballroom spaces, so there's, like, this weird in-between of dancers who vogue in the actual ballroom, and you have to clarify that if you want to, like, really validate. That's a big thing.

From the start of the interview Jamie let me know how there are big things to understand in Ballroom and this is one of them. He continued with how "there's also, like, dancers now who have access to involving themselves in ballroom strictly because of their interest in voguing, not even any connection to anything else. Okay. Which is strange." Even in the beginning stages of his understandings of vogue as a performance, Jamie knew how important it was to comprehend the "deeper" knowledge of vogue as multifaceted and connected to Ballroom, which was different from a lot of his fellow dancers. His confusion regarding people wanting to learn vogue purely as a choreography also helps further emphasize how many vogue performers contend that vogue cannot exist without its connection to Ballroom and its history more broadly.

On-Stage Identities

When asking respondents about how they go about constructing their onstage identities, a majority of the responses shared how their vogue performances are not only individually unique but expressed and understood through others. In further understanding this type of connection between the performer and their audience, we can start by connecting, on one hand, how performers understand and participate with the Ballroom as a space to how individuals are able to create their own vogue performances, on the other.

Four out of the seven respondents discussed how their vogue performance is firstly a performance of self-expression. Looking back to how respondents see Ballroom as a safe space, we are can see how individuals are able to express themselves freely, especially when constructing on-stage identities that have been deemed unworthy in the outside world. Five of the seven respondents also noted how vogue is a performance used to garner a form of support from their community. Once again, we see how vogue as a performance is so tightly connected to how individuals understand the space of Ballroom. If it was not for vogue as a performance, there would not be a group coming together around it, and if there was no community continuously helping each other vogue, the performance would not continue to exist as authentic. This link between vogue and Ballroom more broadly recalls earlier statements, such as how Jace refers to the space as "transcending physical space" and interprets it as a type of community that "kind of exists within", or how Jamie noted that support can exist by getting individuals off the streets and involving them into the community and teaching them the performance.

Three of these five respondents also discussed at length how these performances could be both a form of self-expression and a way to garner individual support. These

responses show us how vogue is a type of performance that pushes the bounds of identity construction for minorities and allows individuals to reconstruct their everyday normal lives as positive ones.

Self-Expression

Muñoz' (1997) theory of 'disidentification' suggested that voguers can rearticulate various contradictory and stigmatized identities within one body into more positive versions of themselves in their on-stage performances. In this discussion, Muñoz (1997) gave the example of Vaginal Davis, who empowered her own version of blackness through her subversive drag performances. In a similar fashion, my respondents discussed how their onstage performances became a vehicle through which they were able to express parts of their own identities that were deemed unacceptable in their off-stage lives.

One respondent, Bailey, talked about how being able to channel the feminine energy of vogue femme performance becomes a tool of empowerment for his identity on- and off-stage. Bailey, like some of my other respondents, discussed how constructing a vogue performance that engages with feminine movements and embodiment helps him understand themselves better both on-stage and off:

> I can be super femme. I can just, you know, do everything because I can't even do stuff like this at home or my mom would be, like, 'Stop what you're doing, that's inappropriate'. Everything. I mean, I work in a professional environment. People would look at me strange, but voguing, I can… I could just do this and people would be, like, 'Yes'. Like, 'do that do that more', you know?

Bailey, like a lot of queer individuals, was not allowed to show femininity within his family's home, which put a strain on his identity. Voguing for him, became a strong source of feminine self-empowerment where he could perform any amount of femininity he would like without being policed. Jace echoed this type of empowerment with their own story of embodying femininity within vogue. They stated how they "really love this, like, hyper feminine, just confident, quasi-arrogant kind of energy that vogue is". They continued by discussing this empowerment of which they were deprived when they were younger:

> As a queer person growing up and not feeling so comfortable expressing my feminine side and wanting to play with femininity, not being able to do that, because of society and these, like, preconceived ideas of how a boy or a girl should act. Being an adult and being able to live my truth and really, really embody everything that I wanted to do in the past.

Vogue performance has been a type of release for Jace that they did not feel they had at younger stages in their life. Mason's experience as a youth also influences the way in which he vogues. He told me why finding the community and performance was so important to him:

> You have your outside sources [of influence], whether that comes from, like, school or just people on the street, friends, other family members, aunts, uncles, cousins, you know, you're always told, especially when you're… you're obviously going to be gay, which I was. You're told that the feminine parts of you are unfavorable. 'They're not right. You shouldn't rock this way. You shouldn't want to. You shouldn't like this kind of music. You shouldn't like this color. You shouldn't like to play with these toys. You should talk a little bit more deeper. You should…' You know what I mean… But you're always told that these things that you identify with and that's the way that you love to express yourself because

> that's just genuinely who I am. You know, I can't help that. I don't want to be a butch or a jock. Doing whatever I don't know, masculine, quote unquote, masculine people.

Like Jace's conversation earlier regarding his ability to be self-expressive, Mason alluded to how joining this scene permitted him access to the femininity he was told he "shouldn't want" to have. Mason's experience echoes the other individuals who continued to learn different vogue movements in their homes until they found a Ballroom scene in which to fully invest themselves through authentically voguing. In this way, vogue has become the conduit for such self-expression, which another respondent Creighton, also cited when expressing their femininity while they vogue to certain music or beats. They said, "sometimes I'm voguing, you know, something very, like, giving the feminine illusion and then the music will hit something or the spirit, I always call it the spirit, will, like, speak to me in a certain way." They followed up with how this helps strengthen their own viewpoint of themselves when they are performing:

> It's, like, how dare you not look at me? Because I am, like, so yeah, I'm so effortless, effervescent. I am so attention grabbing, it's, like, you must have no taste because you don't… you can't understand greatness when it's in front of you.

Here, just like with Bailey, we can see how Creighton's incorporation of femininity within their performances at times became equally as empowering if not confidence-boosting for them. Since vogue incorporates a multitude of both masculine and feminine elements within its performances, it then becomes a type of practice performance for individuals to embody different degrees of each. Here I will harken back

to Jamie's discussion on "workshopping" individuals in order to make them safer in the outside world. Because there is a reciprocal relationship between Ballroom as a space and vogue as a performance, we can see how individuals engage in vogue performance by ascribing unwanted outside characteristics to their on-stage identities, are then able to express and 'workshop' these new versions in performance. If these new articulations of a performer's on-stage identity are supported, they are then maintained within the individual off-stage identity. It is almost as though voguing within these spaces allows for a hyper-practiced version of what performers want in their off-stage identities, which I will cover in more detail in the next sub-section on off-stage identity transformations. In doing so, they are then able to further push the boundaries of how they see themselves and how they continue to exist in this world. Lester gave a personal example of this through their own experiences in the scene:

> So, in this scene, I'm considered a butch queen. And Butch Queens can go in so many different ways. You're either, like, a little more on the masculine side, which may categorize you as a twister. I like to be a little more on the softer side. I am very influenced by femme queens, which are the trans women in our scene. Yeah, I try to incorporate who I am as a person, like how androgynous I am, and mix it into my movement to the point where sometimes people are confused.

Lester's own identity as a butch queen did not stop them from allowing the multiple sides of his identity to be expressed within his performances. Ascribing more feminine characteristics to their more masculine body allows for a juxtaposition of genders within one body, allowing them to express how they feel about their body on the inside. Here we see how Lester achieved their goal of constructing an on-stage identity through the

confusion and mixing of the gender binary. Vogue performance allows for just such a unique type of gendered self-expression within the safe confines of Ballroom.

Support

Five of my respondents, when asked about their understandings of vogue as a performance, identified a feeling of personal support while on stage. This alludes to how performers see themselves on-stage as being intrinsically tied to the support they feel when they perform. Individual performers then are able to see if they have correctly deployed their on-stage identities and performance, deeming if they are worthy and valued for support. This helps us connect back to Goffman's (1957) work on identity management. Because the community aspect of Ballroom includes those on the judges table, as well as the audience and various house members, performers are able to accurately judge the articulations of their on-stage identities through the garnering of support. Respondents also discussed the various ways they felt their performances on-stage get this form of validation and support. Jace talked about how, when they vogue, they feel supported from all the individuals present, including those picked to judge them:

> At the balls, it's, exponentially more [supportive]…, especially during your 10s. That's where it kind of gets, like, you know, the judges are being critical and stuff, but even though they're there, it's all with love, it's always them wanting you to do better. It's, like, you didn't get your 10s now, but now you know, you'll have the fire to get your 10s next time.

Jace's experience of walking at a Ball illustrates that while there is a competitive aspect to their performances (getting your 10s) where individuals are evaluated by judges who

have the power to automatically disqualify individuals (getting chopped), the structure of vogue is set up in a way to constructively foster a better individual performance and their continued existence within the Ballroom space. Jace continued with their experience voguing at a ball where they also felt support from the audience:

> [M]y favorite thing ever is when people go in for the dip[2]. I have told this to my friends but, everyone [does this] communal down [while pointing their fingers]. Yeah, like, it's the whole room just goes together, going at once with your move [the dip] and like that. To be able to experience that, that first time to when I had walked and stuff like that. It's just a whole room in unity like that. That's what I love. And so, I definitely feel, you know, like, supported.

Both the Balls I attended in April and May included many people 'going in' for many dips, and I can attest to this form of audience support. Harkening back to why vogue performance and Ballroom are so interconnected lets us fully understand this type of support that Jace said was so present when they perform. Specifically relating to the 'going in for the dip', when audience members engage with Jace's performance in such a way, it validates their performances as well as signals that they are correctly employing a unique and authentic vogue performance. All parties then become integral in this interaction. The performer (voguer), the community of those around you (the audience), and those setup to evaluate you (the judges) exist together to create a performance that not only articulates support but also receives it.

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[2] "Going in for the dip" is an expression used when an audience member gets up and runs close to the stage where a performer is voguing and points to the voguer as they fall into their dip.

Not all the respondents gave as straightforward an assessment of the support they feel when they vogue, however. Jamie talked about the work that he had to put into both his performance and understanding of the space before he was able to reach out and accept this type of support. For instance, he recalled how while living in LA he turned down every house invitation request, saying, “I got a lot of requests and invitations very early on, and I knew I didn't know enough to join a house.” He notes how he worried about being connected enough to the space before he committed his time and performance capabilities to being in Ballroom. Jamie also stated how this type of support can also be a bit harsh and not for everyone:

> Honestly, I think some people don't, they can't, handle that edge. That feeling of not being there yet. It feels too insecure. It's too much like they know they're not there yet. And it's, like, hard and challenging… they [may not] feel proud of what they look like, and a lot of people just don't keep going past that. I don't think it necessarily pushes you harder to keep going. I think you just have to want it.

In this quote, Jamie suggested that those who make it and continue to vogue are the ones who reap the most benefits. Here we see how deploying an authentic vogue performance can be both difficult to understand as well as construct for new individuals. This is due in part because an authentic performance, according to my respondents, requires an understanding of both the community and its history, on top of perfecting a vastly complicated, improvised style of self-expressive dance. This understanding can become difficult for some new performers to grasp and can be very discouraging. When talking about being judged and showing your on-stage performance to the community, not everyone has what it takes to receive such critiques (like getting chopped) on one’s

identity as well as performance. Jamie compared this possibility of failing to get your 10s and improving on your vogue performance to an individual who is prevented from ejaculating, thus painting a picture of frustration and pressure that the performer must be able to push through in order to truly engage in an authentic performance. Ultimately, as Jamie observed, however, “some people just don’t.”

While these responses do not detract from the support most of the respondents felt from voguing, it does paint a fuller picture of how constructing an authentic on-stage vogue performance takes not only serious work but a lot of personal insight and knowledge about the space and individuals who created and maintain it. Khai shared with me how, after their first few times voguing, they experienced a different type of drive that came from this same pressure Jamie talked about. Khai stated, “Even though I got my 10s my first-time walking, I thought that meant I would get them next time, but that was not true.” When I asked further about how that made them feel about continuing to perform vogue, they replied, “I just wanted to be better, I wanted to, like, prove them wrong and at the same time prove myself right. Like, I can be the person who never gets chopped. So, I kept at it.” Khai looked at the judgement as only temporary and believed they already had what it took to “prove them wrong”. By continuing to vogue and work on their on-stage performances, they were still able to reap the benefits for engaging in the performance authentically. This type of support is not automatically granted to those who engage with these performances. Rather, as Jamie put it, they have to want to undergo the processes of practicing both the performance and being a part of Ballroom. The type of support gained from performing vogue and engaging in Ballroom may manifest in different ways according to the participants and their experiences, yet the support still

exists to validate and help rearticulate better versions of the performers on-stage performances.

Off-stage Identity Transformations

My findings regarding identity transformation are quite closely tied to how my respondents discussed their identities both before and after first becoming a part of vogue. Below, I focus on how individuals perceived their identities after walking a vogue performance category. Respondents' reasons for learning vogue and subsequently joining the Ballroom scene provides insight into how they viewed themselves and thought about what was lacking or what they wished to change about their off-stage, everyday identities.

My respondents discussed personal changes in their own selves after participating voguing. More specifically, my participants discussed how engaging with the performance over time helped with changing viewpoints about themselves that they might otherwise not have received if they had been involved in a different performance. Jace informed me that because they had both practiced voguing for so long and had continuously engaged with the Ballroom community, they were able to overcome past shame regarding their off-stage identity and found a more empowered sense of self. Jace told me how their on-stage identity, which embodies a more feminine energy, has allowed for a continued off-stage change in confidence and self-esteem:

> Embodying that, like competent, quasi-airy energy – that has been really, really helpful, I think, because, I mean, growing up, being gay, and feeling singled out all the time and feeling like there was something wrong with

> me, like I was less than other people, less than straight people. And growing up and even kind of carrying that with me throughout, like, my adolescence, my teenage years, even in my college years. It's still a struggle now. I mean, I think we all struggle with some self-esteem. Definitely. So having Vogue… That kind of pushes you to push that all to the side and be like, 'no, like, be confident. You have to.'… I think that is powerful. And it's something I've taken with me into my outside world.

Jace's connection to their onstage identity allowed them to carry various qualities embedded in their performance into their "outside world". This is where the intersection of understanding and participating within Ballroom as well as vogue allowed Jace to articulate changes within themselves to better represent who they are. The accumulation of performing within a safe space, while engaging with the community and with the knowledge of its history, allowed Jace to practice a curated performance of a unique on-stage identity, which in turn changed their self-image. Jace even continued with telling me how that same type of confidence translates in all situations, specifically citing that when a person understands vogue and is connected to it, they are then able to translate it throughout their lives:

> I think the confidence translates anywhere. Like you could be [a] musical theater performer, an actor, an actress, you could be a businessman and executive… I think having the confidence from vogue, it's helped me everywhere. Specifically, like… I don't feel nervous or, I guess, unsure. I don't second guess when it comes to, you know, dancing a little bit.

Here we see how Jace understood vogue performance as an energy of confidence that they can take elsewhere. Jace explained how the free-style movements of the performance are what gives performers like themselves the ability not only show who they are but gain that confidence. While there may be only five elements to voguing, each

of my respondents shared with me how the uniqueness and ‘story’ exist within the impromptu stylization of each individual category. Another participant, Creighton, discussed how these elements are the building blocks for the “language of vogue”. They used this metaphor to explain how one’s on-stage performance is something individuals use to express their experiences of their off-stage lives:

> I am both creating and using language at the same time. Where it's like, you know, like with our conversation now, we're using English that has a certain grammatical structure that was created from a combination of Latin and Germanic languages. It’s like that with vogue performance for me. You know, if my body can go there, then I'm able to use that to communicate something.

Using this metaphor of a language we can see how Creighton is able to convey various aspects about themselves; channeling their self-expression while voguing within the scene on-stage helps them become a better individual off-stage. They talked about having this conversation with the audience on stage as having a “therapeutic” moment, where they can reflect and start to make changes about themselves, because they are listening to themselves:

> And in a lot of ways, it communicates things back to me, you know, like I'm listening to myself, on [how to] better and become truer to myself then, like my internal dialogue might be able to uncover. So, it's like both, you know, I'm telling a story. I'm communicating to other people, but it's also in a way, like, therapeutic to me. I'm, like, feeling really connected to my body and I think we live in a society where it is very easy to become disconnected.

Creighton's response highlights the reciprocal nature of engaging in an authentic vogue performance in terms of how their on-stage identity is formed by both listening to the outside world as well as themselves. This then has a change in both their performances as well as their off-stage identity. This reciprocal relationship connects back to what Jace talked about by gaining confidence and even physical changes regarding their body:

> So certainly, my confidence, how I carry myself. I always feel like voguing is not something that you do, it becomes a part of you, you know… one thing that I've heard from a lot of people is that, like, they notice my posture is really good. And I think that has definitely been something that has come because of my vogue performance, because there's a certain way you have to carry your body when you walk… in which I position my body… It's definitely impacted aspects of my life that I don't even know if I could like being, you know. The way in which I express things to people I think it, like, has also changed the way that I speak, you know, even verbally.

During this discussion, Creighton also told me how, although they started their journey into Ballroom by incorporating vogue into their drag queen performances, they eventually stopped doing drag altogether. However, far from one replacing the other, Creighton described how their deeper understanding of the Ballroom community and vogue led to a unity between their former drag and current vogue selves, both on-stage and off-stage:

> Actually, [I] started doing drag first. And, you know, drag is another form of queer performance, I would say. And I was definitely very into dancing. So, I wanted to incorporate more of that into my drag at that time. So, yeah, I wanted to bring, like, more of a dance element into my drag. I don't really do drag anymore. I feel like that character has been absorbed into

> who I am displaying when I vogue. Yeah, and I actually use my drag name kinda like as my general [overall] nickname now... I was like, I don't need to be these two different characters… It's just me.

Once again, we see how Creighton's self-reflection and internal dialog while engaging with vogue helped them understand that the character they created for the drag persona was really just different aspects of themselves that they could incorporate into their identity, as opposed to only having access to them while on-stage.

Another respondent, Jamie, also talked about how engaging in vogue performance allowed him to access the more feminine side of himself, but talks about how this is done through the repetitive practice of voguing:

> It was like my practice. It was the practice of being feminine. After doing it so often in the dance style, I did start to see this, like, fierceness. I have more access to it in normal life. I really started to notice my, you know, like, being able to have that intensity. I started to, you know, channel it more easily. I'll tell you this: the confidence that comes with vogue, or ballroom, oh my god, it's a whole different story. I found that it wasn't applicable with dancing with, like, jazz funk, or you know the sassy heels? It wasn't applicable with my real life… It would only become useful when I was performing or doing a photoshoot or something. With this, like, high intensity version of it, where it's, like, full bow, bow, bow, shoot. 10. Yes, that's when you go out partying with your friends. It's kind of weird.

Jamie showed how this "fierceness" or "high intensity" that he performs on stage allowed him to have further confidence in his everyday life in ways that may not have been as easily afforded by his other dance styles. Here we are able to pull in the theoretical works of Judith Butler (1991) and 'performativity', in terms of how the repetitive nature of engaging in gendered performance then becomes an image or an identity that an individual starts to take on themselves. Here we see how Jamie acquired femininity into

their off-stage identity through a continuous engagement with vogue performance. Making the same point but from a different perspective, Jamie connected his performance presentation with how this constant practice gives individuals a safe rehearsed performance in a safe space to deploy in the real world:

> You can access that when you're walking the streets. Same thing for trans women. It's like: Look how well I can pass as a woman. Look how well I can, like, I've won their game and if I can get into Ballroom and get a house and they put me together and, again, maybe I save up, I get some titties, I started getting my hormones together. You know… someone teaches [you] how to paint [your] face the right way, that you start getting [it] together… then you're passable. That works in the real world [because it] becomes something that you can completely use when you're walking the streets for safety. Same thing with voguing.

Jamie related the practiced performance of vogue and its visual presentations to providing individuals with safety in the off-stage world outside of Ballroom by becoming "passable". This is a technique Jamie discussed as deployable because of a vast network of queer performers who have experienced similar situations. Jamie's response shows us how this repetitive performance and continued exposure to the space allows for the creation and enactment of different, less targeted identities in the outside world. Here performance becomes the catalyst for perfecting new identities that will be deployed in the outside world.

Another respondent, Lester, talked about changes they felt within themselves that are geared more towards helping others. They talked to me about how, after being involved within Ballroom and voguing for quite some time, they wanted to help maintain and continue to create Ballroom in Portland, Oregon. They told me about how hard it was

to even get a smaller Kiki scene going but how it made them understand their impact as an individual more:

> I feel like… understanding the legacy, understanding the big umbrella of Ballroom [and] what I bring into the scene… and through my experience here in Portland, I've been able to inspire others from around the world. It's, it feels like I now have a responsibility to keep inspiring people and to you know, there's a lot of people that see themselves within me and my movement and that's really touching because like I said, like, I mainly do this to build relationships and to have and making meaningful connections and those people who I haven't even met in person who have been touched by my movement, and I just hope that I can continue to inspire them to do what I'm doing.

Lester saw changes in themselves as becoming more of a leader and role-model within the community. Their experience with the performance and existing within the community helped them shape and understand themselves better, leading to their wish to help usher in changes for other individuals. Lester was the respondent whom I met at the Los Angles April Fool’s Ball, who told me to come up to the Pacific Northwest. Throughout my time with the scene in Portland, Lester was the one who helped me find the community as well as teach me how to better understand vogue as a performance and what it is historically. Lester is also the House parent of a local house in Portland, and the one running the weekly vogue session for those within that community. Here we can see how individual off-stage identity transformations can also exist in terms of further investing oneself within the community and giving back.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Vogue as an on-stage performance by itself is simply a dance. However, individuals who are involved in Ballroom who also vogue have created a performance that transcends simple body movements. Because vogue and Ballroom are so interconnected, performers can transform aspects about their own identities to reflect qualities and favorable characteristics of past voguers. In this study, I interviewed seven individuals who have vogued within the Ballroom setting and examined their experiences with this performance as well as their perceptions of their identities both before and after voguing. My findings showed that because these individuals connect their vogue performances with Ballroom, they are able to emulate performances and 'energies' of past individuals who have constructed a space that not only nurtures this performance but also allows for the constant deployment of these performances off-stage. Below I discuss the implications of these findings in greater detail.

In terms of understanding the space of Ballroom, the participants connected their understandings of vogue and Ballroom in three ways. First, they conceived of voguing and ballroom as a safe-space, which allows individual performers to experiment and play with both gendered and racialized performances outside of the heteronormative white and cis world. This safe-space likewise allows individuals to fully express their individual creativity and self-expression. Specifically, many of my respondents discussed vogue as a conversation or language. This language allowed them a release from the confines of a world where people are told to exist solely inside both the gendered binary and racialized stereotypes through a conversation using this "language" of performance on stage.

Second, the respondents also thought of vogue and Ballroom as a community. When individuals start to vogue, or enter the world of Ballroom, they become a part of a larger community of like-minded queer individuals. This community manifests itself both in more formal ways, through being a part of houses, as well as informal ways, through the support they feel when they perform on stage. At the same time, the audience itself is also a part of creating this common community "language" during the performance, since they both listen to and support individual performers as they tell their story on stage. Both individuals in the crowd and the judges on the panel help facilitate these various forms of support, which help individual performers make more authentic vogue performances. This in turn helps facilitate changes within both the performers' on-stage and off-stage identities. This process recalls Muñoz' (2019) 'disidentifying' performances, in that, disidentifying vogue performance fetishize spaces, transforming them into blueprints for individual audience members to rearticulate their own identities. Vogue not only creates this space for the audience but also influences the performer engaging in 'disidentifying' performances. Because the space of Ballroom is so connected to the performance, it becomes a lasting ritualized space that allows for the transformation of both the individual and the audience.

Finally, participants also looked at vogue and Ballroom as intrinsically connected to its historical roots and construction in the 70s and 80s. This allowed individuals to not only understand the labor that it took to carve out such a space during such a tumultuous time, but also connect with the stories and experiences of why individuals had to create this space and performance in the first place. Individuals also used this knowledge to emulate both performances and individuals from the past in order to achieve the type of

on-stage identities which are unique to and only accessible through Ballroom. To my respondents, these three tenets are what make vogue as a performance so unique in terms of its ability to help them with their identity transformations. Without acting as this kind of space, vogue would be just another type of dance style for individuals to learn choreography. Yet, as my findings have shown, authentic vogue performance is far more than just a dance style to those who perform it.

Looking at participant motivations to start voguing reveals what individuals feel is lacking within themselves and what they need to bring about positive personal change. Notwithstanding how some of my respondents first started voguing based on the aesthetic appeal of the performance style, most soon found value in how voguing allowed them a means to be themselves in ways that the outside world did not allow. This manifested itself in how some participants would maintain a form of hyper-femininity within their performance or even in terms of what they would wear. This type of support for this repeated performance, both on-stage voguing and off-stage within Ballroom, is what starts this type of unique identify transformation. Once again returning to Judith Butler's (1991) work on gendered performance, we can see how the repetitive nature of engaging in such performances makes and creates new ways not only for integrating into the Ballroom community but also for the construction and maintenance of new alternative off-stage identities. Participants noted how this helps increase both their individual confidence as well as their ability to avoid seeing themselves as othered because of their non-normative identities. Furthermore, by emulating past voguers, some of my respondents also found that vogue functioned as a sort of therapy that could help them

self-reflect, allowing them to better construct new identities for themselves. This is another reason why Ballroom and vogue are so historically connected.

Finally, the data also showed how these performances can also equip performers with important tools with which they can operate safely in the outside world, for instance by learning how to become 'passable' or developing the confidence to 'tell someone off' who might not like their off-stage performances. For others, their experience with vogue grants them the knowledge to help continue with ushering in the new generation of voguers. Understanding the unique position of Ballroom and vogue as a performance in these ways allows us to see these changes in performers' identities and understand how they are developed. This helps us connect back to Goffman's (1963) theorizing on impression management through a slightly different lens. Instead of marginalized individuals trying to form identities within the normal community to avoid stigma, vogue performers use Ballroom as a space to fashion new identities, both on-stage and off-stage, that are in direct opposition to those of the outside world. This does not mean however, that Goffman was completely missing the mark. While engaging within these performances, my respondents show that they still do go through a form of impression management, but more specifically within the confines and rules of the Ballroom space. This does allow them to fashion new identities on a larger scale, yet while they perform, they are still picking up cues from their audiences to help navigate and construct these authentic performances.

While I had planned to examine differences between gender and race, the small sample size did not provide me with enough interviews to make substantial claims about these differences. Some of my individuals who identified as Mexican American and

Latinx, did disproportionately mention their traditional family upbringings compared to respondents from other racial groups, but these statements about their background did not condition their responses to questions about voguing in noticeably different ways. Instead, all my respondents, regardless of race, alluded to the inability to express their deeper selves in various aspects throughout their life, like school or work, prior to voguing. This lack of difference may suggest that there now exists a more unified community understanding of what vogue and Ballroom is, but more research is needed to examine potential gender and race differences in greater detail and with larger sample sizes.

Despite these limitations and given the lack of research on queer performers, and vogue on the West Coast more specifically, this research still helps fill in some of that gap. Indeed, this is the first study, to my knowledge, that qualitatively examines the experiences of voguers on the West Coast and their perceived identities. In addition to the findings described above, this work also provides support for future studies on vogue performance and performers on the West Coast.

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APPENDIX A: Consent Form to Participant

Consent to Participant in Research
I am asking you to participate in a research study on the onstage and offstage lives of vogue performers. This study is being conducted by Christopher Castagnetti, Department of Sociology at the University of Nevada Reno, and the Faculty Advisor for this study is Dr. Jared Bok.

What the study is about
The purpose of this research is to explore how vogue performers negotiate their onstage identities and performances with their offstage lives.

What we will ask you to do
I will ask you to be a part of an interview process about your experiences voguing. This interview will take place at a location of your choosing and can last anywhere between 45 min to 90 min. In addition, one of the researchers will be taking notes on vogue performances between April and July. If you consent, notes pertaining to your performances will be linked to your interview.

Risks and discomforts
There are minimal risks for participating in the study. You will be asked to share personal experiences which, though unlikely, may bring up some discomfort for some people. You may also withdraw from the study with no penalty at any time to mitigate and avoid risk to you.

Benefits
Your contribution in this project will help others better understand the experiences of diverse performance as well as the relationship between performance and identity. Additionally, you will get the opportunity to express your thoughts, feelings, and opinions on a variety of topics during the interview.

Cost/Compensation for participation
There will be no cost or compensation for you participation (other than your time).

Audio/Video Recording
Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview recorded via audio recording. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

☐ I do not want to have this interview recorded.
☐ I am willing to have this interview recorded:

Signed: ____
Date: ____

Performance Notes
Please sign below if you are willing for notes taken about vogue performances between April and July to be linked to your interview responses. You may still participate in the interview portion of the study if you are not willing to have the researcher take notes on your performance.

☐ I do not want notes about vogue performances to be connected to my interview.
☐ I am willing for notes about vogue performances to be connected to my interview.

Signed: ____

Date: ____

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security
No personally identifying information will be collected from you at any time during the interview, ensuring your identity will not be matched to the information you provide. We anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet.

Taking part is voluntary
You may change your mind about participating at any point before, during, or after the interview and you may also skip any questions you would rather not answer. You may stop at any time, without penalty, even in the middle of the interview and should you change your mind once the interview has been completed, you may inform the researchers, who will delete all of the data collected from your interview. This whole process is voluntary, and you can withdraw at your discretion. Similarly, if you change your mind later about having notes on vogue performances be linked to your interview, you may also inform the researchers who will ensure the notes and the interview responses will not be linked.

If you have questions
The principal investigator of this study is Jared Bok, a professor of sociology at the University of Nevada Reno. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Jared Bok at jbok@unr.edu as well as Chris Castagnetti at ccastagnetti@unr.edu or (775) 934-3987. You may ask about your rights as a research subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints to the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (775) 327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o UNR Office of Human Research Protection, 205 Ross Hall / 331, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada 89557.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature____ Date________

Your Name (printed)____

Signature of person obtaining consent______________________________ Date________

Printed name of person obtaining consent_______________________________________

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for five years beyond the end of the study.

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

1. Thoughts on Vogue and Ballroom
    a. In your own words can you explain what Ballroom is?
    b. How did you first learn about Ballroom?
    c. What do you think of Ballroom here on the West Coast?
        i. Do you feel it is different on the West Coast compared to the rest of the U.S.?
    d. Do you feel supported by the Ballroom community either in general or during Ballroom events specifically?
        i. If yes:
            1. In what way do you feel most supported?
            2. Are there ways in which the community could be more supportive?
        ii. If no:
            1. In what way do you feel you are not supported?
2. Thoughts on Doing Vogue
    a. How long have you been doing vogue?
    b. Tell me about how you got started doing vogue/being a part of Ballroom?
        i. Was there anyone in particular who got you started?
        ii. Can you tell me about the first time you walked a category?
            1. How did you feel about it before and after?
    c. Can you describe to me your style of vogue performance (e.g., vogue fem, new way, old way)?
    d. Could you describe how you are thinking and feeling while you are performing?
        i. Do you feel different when you perform vogue compared to other performances (if any)?
            1. Can you describe that feeling?
        ii. Are there times during a performance when are you particularly aware of your body?
            1. How do you feel about the body movements (high fem, hyper masc) that exist within vogue?
    e. Do you perform anything else? (Other dances, acting, singing)
        i. Do these performances influence your vogue?
        ii. Does vogue influence these other performances?
    f. Do you feel supported by the community when you are voguing?
        i. If yes:
            1. In what way do you feel most supported?
            2. What about while you are being judged?
        ii. If no:
            1. In what way do you feel you are not supported?

3. Thoughts on Vogue and Identity
    a. In your own words can you explain what performing vogue means to you?
    b. Why do you vogue?
        i. What makes you keep going back to Ballroom /Why do you keep doing it?
    c. How do you decide what you will do in your vogue performances?
        i. Does the way you view yourself inform your vogue performances (i.e., what you choose to do while you are voguing)?
        ii. Has anyone else's vogue performance inspired something your own performance?
        iii. Do you ever feel any constraints in terms of what you can and cannot do in your performances? If so, what are they?
    d. Has anything about yourself changed since you started performing vogue?
        i. Your stage appearance
        ii. Your actual performances
        iii. How you see/think of yourself
        iv. Your life outside of vogue/Ballroom events
4. Demographics
    a. What is your gender identity?
    b. What is your racial or ethnic identity?
    c. How do you describe your sexuality?
    d. Is there any other aspect of yourself that you want me to know (e.g., about who you are or how you see yourself)?
5. Closing the interview
    a. Is there anything you would like to add that I did not cover?
    b. Can you think of anyone else who is a vogue performer and might be willing to be interviewed?

APPENDIX C: IRB Protocol

Protocol – Social Behavioral Educational Research and Record Research

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Background

As non-queer, white individuals maintain the status quo within our society, it is important to understand the articulation and formation of queer identity through performances. Performance can exist as a mode for individuals to engage in social resistance and alternative identity construction (Muñoz 1997, 2006, 2019). One example of this type of performance is called vogue, which takes place at events collectively known as Ballroom. Vogue performance was first introduced to the world as a means of challenging the heteronormative world via the implementation of hyper-gendered bodily movements. Vogue since has become a beacon for queer people of color to find visible constructions of non-normative identities that can be and often are celebrated. Vogue performance engages with and represents gendered and sexual characteristics that inherently challenge and contradict more traditional binary classifications of gender (Bailey 2011, 2013, 2014). While this literature has provided great insight into the importance of performance in creating and maintaining non-normative identities, it has not yet explored the relationship between what individuals choose to embody in their onstage performances and what they take with them when fashioning their own unique identities offstage. More to the point, there is a gap in the literature regarding how onstage performances might influence offstage identities. This project aims to uncover the bi-directional relationship between radical onstage performances and everyday offstage identities.

Study Aims/Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore how vogue performers negotiate their identities in their onstage performances and if/how these performances inform and shape their offstage identities and everyday lives. The research will involve both one-on-one interviews with participants who consent to be interviewed as well as observations of vogue performances (both in general and of performers who agree to be interviewed) at ballroom events on the west coast between April to July.

Study Population

The participant population for the interviews will be adult queer people of various racial, class, and gender backgrounds at or above the age of 18 who engage in vogue performance. To be eligible for the study, participants should have performed vogue before on the west coast. Observations will focus on the vogue performances during ballroom events as well as the reactions of the audience and interactions between performers and the audience (if any).

Vulnerable Populations

While the participants for this study do face higher than average rates of discrimination on account of their sexual orientation and, for people of color, race as well, vogue performances are typically held in locations that are not closed off to the outside public

nor are they intended to be private activities. Furthermore, since this study focuses on adults who freely choose to participate at these events, they will not be under any additional constraints that would coerce them to participate or impair their ability to provide their informed consent to participate.

Sample Size

The anticipated sample size for the interview portion of the study is approximately 15 people. Because of the study's interest in comparing different racial experiences of Ballroom, the goal will be to recruit these 15 participants from a range of racial backgrounds, including but not limited to black and white participants. The observation portion of the study will take place during actual vogue performances at scheduled ballroom events on the west coast. Currently there are three known events that will be taking place between April and July, although it is likely that more may be announced at a later date. If so, the researchers will seek to attend as many of these additional events as possible.

Recruitment Process

The recruitment process for the interviews will involve approaching individuals that researchers will meet or have already met at Balls on the west coast. The research will use a snowball sampling technique, in which initial participants who have already volunteered to participate will be asked if they are able to connect the researchers with other vogue performers in the area who might also be willing to participate. If there are insufficient responses, researchers may also communicate with vogue performers who maintain public profiles on social media, since these are individuals who are not trying to hide their status as vogue performers. The observation portion of the study requires no recruitment. However, those who agree to be interviewed will be asked for their consent for their performances to be included as part of this observation portion.

Screening Procedures

When first contacting potential respondents for the interviews, researchers will first verify that they have performed vogue on the west coast and that they are legally adults, 18 years of age or above.

Informed Consent Process

Consent forms will be made available to all potential interview participants to provide them with more information about the study and to facilitate their decision-making on whether or not to participate. Participants who decide to enroll in the study will be sent a copy of the consent document for their reference. The consent form includes a basic introduction to the topic of the project as well as the researchers' contact information for participants who have any questions about the research study. The form will also state that they have the right to withdraw from the study or refrain from answering any questions at any time during the process, and that all these provisions are put into place to safeguard their information and ensure confidentiality.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process for the interviews will be conducted via audio recording during the interviews. For observations of the vogue performances, field notes will be taken either via field diaries or audio memos that can be directly recorded on a phone. Observations will be of the vogue performances in general and of specific performers who agree to be interviewed.

Study Duration/ Study Timeline

The duration of interviews will range from about 45 to 90 minutes without follow-up interviews. Ballroom events, where the observation of vogue performances will take place, are generally one-evening, in-person events that are open to the public aside from a small entry fee. The study will approximately last from April until the end of July.

Study Locations

The locations for the interviews will be places selected by the participants themselves, which may include private or public settings. Due to the current limitations of and concerns regarding the pandemic, zoom meetings/calls will also be provided as an option for the interviews. If the data collection procedures end up on zoom, the interview will be conducted in a private room on the researcher's end of the call, without any interruptions or distractions for the sake of privacy and confidentiality. Observation of vogue performances will take place at actual scheduled ballroom event locations on the west coast. There are currently three scheduled between April and July: in Los Angeles, Oakland, and one more in May whose location has not yet been confirmed.

International Research

N/A

Participant Compensation

There will be no participant compensation for their interviews.

Risk to Participants

There are minimal risks for participating in the study. The interview participants will be asked to share personal experiences which may, in rare cases, bring up some discomfort depending on their personal experiences. However, participants will be reminded both in the consent form and at the start of the interview that they may withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Ballroom performances are sometimes video-recorded by other audience members and ballroom events are not closed to members of the broader public (except with regard to a small entrance fee and knowledge that such events are occurring in the first place). As such, notetaking on the vogue performances will be even less intrusive than the informal "data collection" of general members of the audience.

Benefits to Participants

Participation in this project may help others better understand the experiences of diverse gender presentation, how they intersect with racial backgrounds, and the dynamics of the relationship between performance and identity. Additionally, interview participants will have the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on a variety of

topics for which there typically is no regular forum or platform. With vogue being such a non-mainstream dance form, it is hard for such conversations to be highlighted, and these interviews will provide such an opportunity for these individuals.

Privacy of Participants

No personally identifying information will be collected throughout the process aside from that which is needed to contact the interview participants. Such contact information will be kept separate from actual interview data, ensuring their identities will not be matched to the information provided. Pseudonyms will be used in place of real or stage names of the respondents in the event that they are mentioned in the research, whether in terms of their interview responses or their performances.

Data Management and Confidentiality

The interview data and observational notes that are collected will be kept in on a password-protected computer (if they are electronic files) and information recorded on an audio recording device will be stored in a locked locker on the UNR campus. Only the researchers involved in the project will have access to the computer and locker.

Approach to Analysis

Interview responses will be analyzed via the method of "flexible coding". This is a coding process in which data collected from the interviews is first grouped into broader codes, within which smaller, more targeted codes will then be used to categorize and compare the data. This will help identify specific key groups and experiences expressed in the interviews and patterns between them. These data will be supplemented by notes taken during the observation portion of the study.

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