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### **The Impact of Temporary Gender Embodiment on the Accuracy of Personality Judgment: Drag Performance as a Lens**

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The Impact of Temporary Gender Embodiment on the Accuracy of Personality Judgment: Drag

Performance as a Lens

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**Senior Honors Project**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements  
of the Westover Honors College**

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## Abstract

Accurately perceiving the personalities of others may allow a person to be more successful in social and professional settings. Past research has supported that drag performers who are extroverted tend to be more successful in their job (Hopkins, 2004). It also has been supported that extroverted people, who are also referred to by Vogt and Colvin as “interpersonally-oriented,” are better at accurately judging others’ personalities (2003). The influence of gender on perceiving abilities is addressed in this study; it observes whether or not drag performers more accurately perceive the personalities of others because of their interpersonal orientation. It has been found that women are better at accurately judging personality than men. The present study observed the role of gender-embodiment on personality judgment (Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, & Beisanz, 2010). Drag performers were recruited throughout the country, while the non-drag population were faculty members, staff members, and students at the University of Lynchburg. Both groups evaluated the personalities of four target people in interview-style videos. The accuracy of the two group’s judgments were compared using the Big Five personality assessment. It was hypothesized that the drag performers would have more accurate readings of the target personalities than the non-drag performers.

### Drag Performance and its Effects of Personality Judgment

Accurately judging the personalities of others is a skill that promotes success in social and professional settings. We judge personalities when selecting our friends, allies, and even when hiring potential job candidates. If the judgment is wrong, then there are consequences (Funder, 2012). For example, if a project partner is selected based on their perceived conscientiousness, and then fall short of expectations, this can be potentially harmful. Gender and characteristics such as personality traits may allow a person to better perceive others. Past studies have addressed different populations in terms of interpersonal perception, but drag performers have yet to be examined (Vogt & Colvin, 2003; Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, & Biesanz, 2011 ). Drag performers occupy a special place in the entertainment industry, as they defy the modern conventions of gender. Researchers can observe judgmental accuracy through the lens of drag to make a more rounded inference about interpersonal perception and to see whether or not these performers more accurately judge personality. It is important to observe this relationship to better understand how we could improve our accuracy of our judgments of others.

Characteristics of the observer have the ability to affect interpersonal perception. To gain insight on how exactly we can better perceive others, a variety of populations and contexts need to be employed in studies on interpersonal perception. If it is true that drag performers more accurately perceive personality, it may suggest that the embodiment of another gender or inherent personality traits play a role in personality perception. Multiple studies have observed the effect of observer characteristics on perception accuracy and have established that it is a worthy topic of further exploration (Ruben, Hill, & Hall, 2014; Vogt & Colvin, 2003; Horgan & Smith, 2006).

Aside from developing interpersonal perception literature, the present study will fill gaps in drag literature. Drag performance is understudied in general, although numerous sociological arguments have been made as to the existence and the implications of drag. However, only a few psychological studies have included drag queens, and even fewer have included drag kings. Drag kings might be defined as a “counterpart” to drag queens, but they ought to be thought of as anyone, regardless of gender, who embodies masculine characteristics for the sake of performance (Berbary & Johnson, 2017).

### **Drag as a Means of Therapy and Defying the Conventions of Gender**

On the surface, drag might seem as if it is purely for entertainment. In reality, the art of drag is the manipulation of identity. As affirmed by Berkowitz and Belgrave, the identity of one’s gender is entirely socially constructed (2010). Those who watch drag and rely on it as an entertainment source are aware of the performer’s true gender, and this is the very basis upon which drag operates (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010). The drag performer reverses the expectations of the audience by temporarily embodying another character that is categorized by the absurdities of gender. One queen from Roanoke, Virginia described her drag persona as her “protective barrier” (Hopkins, 2004). The main component of drag is to embody the gender of interest as closely as possible.

The role of identity formation in one’s life can greatly hinder or improve mental health and development. Becht and colleagues (2019) found that if an adolescent is identity-searching in a maladaptive fashion, they are more vulnerable to the development of depressive symptoms. Drag is a way to practice identity-formation in a healthy and safe environment. Identities can be layered; one identity can be used as a social role that is “acted out” (Simmel, Wolff, & Bendix, 1955). Drag performers use the space of stage, costumes, make-up, and a pseudonym to create

another layer of identity on top of the one they already possess (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010).

The layered identity allows them to embody the gendered persona, in which they are expected to adopt characteristics that belong to the social construct of that gender.

Identity is the most public form of the self. The “self” is developed by making autonomous decisions (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010). Drag performers construct their stage identities by making meaning out of gendered experiences and implementing their knowledge of the construct of gender into their work. Drag would not be possible without an understanding of the experience of being a certain gender (Berkowitz & Belgrave, 2010). The drag persona is not married to the actual gender of the performer; Berbarry and Johnson (2017) claim that drag, in and of itself, is just a performance of gender. Some performers are transgender and ultimately transition into the gender that they are performing as. For example, a drag king, who once embodied feminine characteristics out of drag now expresses themselves in a masculine way. This does not discount their theatrical performance (Berbarry & Johnson, 2017). This data was obtained through structured interviews with drag kings, who could then speak on their own gendered experience (Berbarry & Johnson).

Drag has also been a means of establishing a social circle (Knutson et al., 2018; Hopkins, 2004). The culture of drag is therapeutic; LGBTQIA+ members use drag to establish a sense of community support and mitigate mental health issues (Knutson, Koch, Sneed, & Lee, 2018).

Drag performers must earn social prestige in order to get gigs, and this might even help in dispelling their own social phobias because they are expected to be social (Hopkins, 2004).

When performers interact with others in the industry, they exercise their social abilities. They make many connections both with their audience members and others who are involved in drag.

Those connections are valuable because of the expression they can display in a drag space

without feeling unsafe or judged (Knutson et al., 2018). The connections with others allow them to perform at more venues and earn respect among other performers (Hopkins, 2004). Berbary and Johnson (2017) found that drag kings, specifically, have a strong sense of solidarity with one another. They experience the same type of prejudice and can relate to feeling ostracized by the drag community as a whole (Berbary & Johnson, 2017). Drag performers' sociability may inform their perception of others.

How might drag be related to personality perception? Drag performers are a unique population that allow researchers to gain insight into how identity formation, the social construct of gender, interpersonal orientation, and personality perception are related. Drag queens have rarely been included in experiments; it is far more common to see drag performers included in qualitative studies (Hopkins, 2004; Knutson, Koch, Sneed, & Lee, 2018). However, before assessing their abilities using empirical research, one must consider the science of perceiving personality.

### **Perceiving Personality**

To further explain the mechanism of interpersonal orientation, one must examine the cognitive processes involved. Funder (2012) delineated the act of perceiving an "other" with the Realistic Accuracy Model (RAM). Under this model, accuracy is defined as congruence between an individual's actual standing on a trait and an observer's rating of that trait for the individual (Blackman & Funder, 1998). For example, if the judge perceives the target as being extroverted, and that is true in reality, the judge accurately perceived the target. There is no real gold-standard of accuracy measure (Hall, Mast, & West, 2016). There are four steps that must take place under the RAM. First, the person being perceived (from this point on, will be referred to as a "target") must display behavior consistent with a certain trait. For example, a conscientious person will

not likely lose track of time. Second, the target must perform these actions in a context that is shared with the perceiver. Third, the behavior displayed by the target must be detected.

Therefore, the perceiver must be paying attention to the target. Lastly, that information that was detected needs to be utilized correctly in order to make a proper judgment about the target (Funder, 2012).

There are many factors that are a part of personality judgment and that may influence the accuracy of perception. Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, and Biesanz (2010) argued that in order to perceive someone accurately, one must possess knowledge about how traits may remain stable across a variety of situations. However, there can be outside influences that interfere with this process. For example, Hall, Mast, and West, who compiled a number of studies about interpersonal perception, argued that the perceived person's attractiveness can skew the perception of a person (2016). The perceiver may also perceive those belonging to different groups as disparate from themselves (i.e. gender/race); this can contribute to the perceiver's bias (Hall, Mast, & West, 2016). In other words, the perceiver may not relate as well to members of a different social group.

Funder argued that the amount of information provided can influence the accuracy of perception (2012). As a part of the RAM, the perceiver must have plenty of information about the person being perceived. Therefore, those who have known the target over a long period of time are more likely to make accurate judgments (Funder, 2012). The longer the exposure, the more opportunities to learn behavioral cues from that person and utilize the information correctly (Funder, 2012).

Social group membership can skew accurate personality perception (Hall, Mast, & West, 2016). For example, Ruben, Hill, and Hall found that lesbians were less accurate in their

judgments on other women's emotions, thoughts, and personality than straight women (2014).

When asked to predict what a target was thinking, feeling, and what their personality traits were, straight judges were more accurate in their judgments (Ruben et al., 2014). This was not previously hypothesized; it was predicted that lesbians were going to be more perceptive in these domains. The reasoning behind this hypothesis is that those in the LGBTQ+ community are often the victims of hate crimes and discrimination, therefore, they must be more hypervigilant of their environment. In turn, they would have to be more accurate in their perceptions of others for safety reasons (Ruben, Hall, & Hill, 2014). However, the authors found that the lesbian judges were more accurate in their judgment about the targets' sexual orientation. The reasoning might be that the lesbian participants are more motivated to observe that characteristic (Ruben, Hall, & Hill, 2014). This suggests that a person may be more accurate in their perceptions of others if the characteristics that they are observing are more important or relevant to them.

The motivation to judge personality based on likeness with oneself also affirms Vogt and Colvin's (2003) findings that sometimes, perceivers might use projection when judging others, or they more accurately judge those who are similar to themselves. The perceiver can see themselves in that person and then use information about their own behavior and traits to judge (Vogt & Colvin, 2003). However, these quick assumptions can mean that stereotypes are used to perceive personality. In this case, the perceiver is not actually observing behavior and instead relying upon preconceived ideas about the person, which can skew their perception of the target (Vogt & Colvin, 2003). Critcher and Dunning (2009) agreed that when determining the structure of another personality, a person will often look inward toward oneself and make assumptions about that personality based off of their own traits. Instead of focusing on what can interfere with interpersonal perception, other authors have focused on what characteristics a person can possess

that increase their accuracy in interpersonal perception or their own judgability (Vogt & Colvin, 2003; Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, & Biesanz, 2011).

Human, Biesanz, Parisotto, and Dunn (2012) focused on characteristics of the “target” being perceived rather than the perceiver. They found that those who tried to reveal their “best self” were more accurately perceived by others (Human et al., 2012). When participants were asked to positively present themselves, the other participants were able to capture their true personality (Human et al., 2012). “Positively presenting” oneself is actively trying to make a positive impression on others. There are ways that the observer themselves can become more accurate in their perception of others.

One characteristic that increases accuracy of judgment is interpersonal orientation. Those who are “interpersonally-oriented”, or more intentional about maintaining social relationships, are more accurate in their perceptions about other people (Vogt & Colvin, 2003). Chan, Rogers, Parisotto and Biesanz (2010) also referred to interpersonal orientation as “interpersonal sensitivity”. Those who are dedicated to interpersonal connections are more likely to spend time around others and reflect on their relationships with others (Vogt & Colvin, 2003). In accordance with the RAM, the perceiver must possess knowledge about potential cues in order to make inferences about behavior (Vogt & Colvin, 2003). In order to gain that knowledge, one must spend considerable time around others, analyzing their behavior. Being around others is a part of the *detection* process of the Realistic Accuracy Model, or the mere perception of another person (Funder, 2012). Some people may acquire this skill more easily than others because they must.

Drag performers are more interpersonally-oriented due to the nature of their jobs. Drag performers develop a network of people in their lives and they strengthen those connections so that they might have the opportunity to perform at more places and establish a community with

one another. This community allows them to express themselves in a safe place, and for some, it even helps for dispelling social phobias (Hopkins, 2004). Drag is also a platform for starting conversations with others that are open and educational (Berbary & Johnson, 2016). These conversations about the nature of gender and sexual orientation strengthen the connections that they make. In addition, drag queens/kings maintain social connection with one another because of the therapeutic benefits that result from it (Knutson, Koch, Sneed, & Lee, 2018).

Not only do drag queens develop or already possess a heightened social ability, but queens also temporarily embody women, who better perceive personality than other genders (Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, & Biesanz, 2011). Women are more able to discern normative differences in people, which means that they can accurately observe the differences of trait levels between people (Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, & Biesanz, 2011). This “normative” way of perceiving personality has also been referred to as a trait-centered approach, meaning the perceiver is supposed to recognize differences in traits across people (Hall, Mast, & West, 2016). Hall and Mast (2008) expanded upon these findings by assessing women and men’s accuracy in domains that were specific to either women or men. They sought to amend the fact that past studies had only assessed interpersonal sensitivity in domains that women were more motivated to be more successful in, such as emotion. The authors found that women were more accurate in tasks involving recalling information about an interaction partner. Even in male-specific domains, men’s accuracy never surpassed women’s (Hall & Mast, 2008).

Hall and Mast’s (2008) findings are incongruent with that of Horgan and Smith (2006), who found that each gender performed well when completing a task relevant to the stereotypical domain of their gender. For example, women had poor nonverbal judgment accuracy when they thought that the inventory that they were taking was meant to measure judgment skills of

interrogators in the military, which served as the stereotypical “masculine” domain (Horgan and Smith, 2006). This study relates to that of other studies that found that when people are motivated to observe characteristics that are relevant to them, they are more accurate. Perhaps, since drag performers are concerned with embodying the characteristics of the gender they are adopting, they might be inclined to adopt the motivations of that gender as well.

### **Need for Closure and Stereotyping**

Another aspect of social cognition warrants attention. This phenomenon is known as the Need for Closure (NFC), or the intolerance of ambiguous situations and the desire of firm answers (Kruglanski, 1989; Kossowska, Dragon, & Bukowski, 2014). Those higher in NFC achieve cognitive closure by making categorical judgments using mental shortcuts (Kruglanski et al., 2009). NFC can lead to the resistance to persuasion that discounts one’s own thoughts or hypotheses and the unwillingness to tolerate the discomfort facing uncertainty (Kossowska & Bar-Tal, 2013). In addition to observing the accuracy of personality judgments made by drag and non-drag folk, it would be interesting to observe whether the two groups differ in their Need for Closure.

As a result of a high-NFC individual relying on quick assumptions, that individual may also engage in stereotyped behaviors, as they lead to a greater liking toward one’s own group and not an out-group (Golec & Frederico, 2004). For example, if one’s in-group holds a negative stereotype toward a different group, then the individuals in the in-group who are high in NFC are more likely to endorse the negative stereotype. However, this relationship is more nuanced than it appears. In order to act upon that Need for Closure to stereotype others, one must possess the ability to undergo such cognitive processes (Kossowska et al., 2014). The Ability to Achieve Closure (AAC), as defined by Kossowska and colleagues, is the effectiveness with which an

individual may employ schemas to make judgments (2014). Those who have a high AAC are able to properly apply said schemas, and are therefore more likely to use stereotypes when they are high in NFC (Kossowska et al., 2014). If an individual is low in the AAC, they are less likely to make one-sided, assumptive statements because they do not engage in that cognitive process anyhow.

The present study encompassed multiple social cognition concepts to contribute to the understanding of person-perception, such as NFC. Would the person who is embodying another identity (in this case, a gender) come to possess the same abilities that the other identity has? Would someone who temporarily embodies as a woman be able to perceive normative differences in personality on the level that women are able to? Is the NFC related to drag performance? These are the questions that the present study is addressing. The purpose of this study was to fill gaps in drag literature as well as interpersonal perception literature. I compared drag performers' perceptions of targets with those of non-drag performers using self-other ratings. Funder and Colvin supported the fact that self-other agreement is a valid way of assessing personality perception accuracy (1997). The use of NFC in the present study is exploratory, to see if personal qualities (drag versus non-drag) play a role in an individual's NFC. If the two groups differ in their NFC, then one can make an inference about the relationship between preparedness to stereotype others and whether or not a person does drag.

Participants in the present study were asked to judge normative differences in personality. I hypothesized that the drag performers, particularly queens, will be more accurate in their personality judgments of the target people than non-drag performers. I also hypothesized that women would be more accurate than men in their ratings. Drag performers may be more interpersonally-oriented, and thus work harder to maintain interpersonal relationships. For this

reason, they might be more accurate in their judgments of other people (Vogt & Colvin, 2003; Hopkins, 2004). The second piece of evidence for this argument is the relationship between gender and accuracy of personality judgment. Past studies have corroborated the fact that women are more accurate in their judgments of others' personalities (Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, & Biesanz, 2010; Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000). As Need for Closure is an exploratory aspect of this study, there was no hypothesis as to what group would be higher in NFC. The independent variables were whether the participant was a drag performer or not and gender. The dependent variables were personality judgment accuracy and Need for Closure.

## Method

### Participants

There were two populations that served as our participants: drag performers ( $N = 3$ ) and non-drag performers ( $N = 27$ ). Drag performers were recruited via social media and email and ranged from 28 years of age to 38 years of age ( $M = 31.67$ ). Non-drag participants ranged from 18 to 65 years of age ( $M = 30.44$ ). Any drag performer from the country was allowed to participate, and most identified as men. All participants had a mean age of 29.4 with a standard deviation of 12.55. Participants were 79.3% caucasian ( $N = 23$ ), 3.4% African-American ( $N = 1$ ), 3.4% African ( $N = 1$ ), 6.9% Latinx ( $N = 2$ ), 3.4% Arab ( $N = 1$ ), and 3.4% Asian Pacific Islander ( $N = 1$ ). The participants were made up of 20.7% men ( $N = 6$ ), 75.9% women ( $N = 22$ ), and 3.4% nonbinary individuals ( $N = 1$ ). The nonbinary participant's data had to be omitted due to the lack of statistical power. The non-drag population was represented by faculty and students at the University of Lynchburg. All faculty, staff, and students at the University were recruited through an email and put in a participation pool if interested. The participants did not receive any financial compensation.

## Materials

**Targets.** The four “Targets” were the stimuli used in this study. They were white women who were undergraduate theatre students from the University of Lynchburg. They were recruited via email. Targets were asked to wear plain clothing (no brands/patterns) and minimal/natural makeup for an interview-style video. Targets answered the same 25 getting-to-know-you questions. The 25 questions were asked in a different order each time a new Target was being filmed (Interview Questions to be found in Appendix A). The Targets were to answer the questions about their own true personality and not that of any other character. They were filmed using an iPhone/ microphone and the video was uploaded to Google Drive.

**Personality assessment.** In order to assess accuracy of trait perception, I measured self-other agreement using the Big Five Inventory (Appendix B). The BFI ( $\alpha = .83$ ) is composed of 44 items that assess a person’s standing on five traits: Openness ( $\alpha = .75$ ), Conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .77$ ), Extroversion ( $\alpha = .85$ ), Agreeableness ( $\alpha = .74$ ), and Neuroticism ( $\alpha = .79$ ). There were 16 reverse-scored items. Ultimately, there were five separate scores for each trait on one response. Prior to being interviewed, Targets filled out a BFI about their own personality. The interview questions that they were asked were composed of at least five items from all five dimensions of the Big Five.

**Need for Closure.** The Need for Closure Scale, as developed by Kruglanski and colleagues, will be used to assess NFC (2013). The scale is composed of 45 items, and asks respondents to rate items such as “I’d rather know bad news than stay in a state of uncertainty” on a scale from 1 - Strongly disagree, to 6 - Strongly agree. The scale assesses five dimensions: Order, Predictability, Decisiveness, Ambiguity, and Closed-Mindedness and has a Cronbach’s alpha of .84 (full scale can be found in Appendix C).

## **Procedure**

Participation took approximately 45 minutes to an hour. After filling out a demographic form and an informed consent form, participants watched the four videos of the Targets and filled out a blank BFI for every video. Participants were to fill out the inventory based on the personality of the Target. They were allowed to fill out the inventory during the video and after watching. The participants were not able to see the scoring instructions, so the scoring was done by the researcher. After watching the videos of the Targets, participants indicated if they knew the Target personally, if they were acquainted with them but not on a personal level, or if they did not know the Target personally. If any of the participants knew a Target personally, their data for that particular Target was omitted.

**Scoring.** The higher the self-other agreement, the more accurate the personality judgment. If the participant's response on an individual item was within one rating of the Target's, then that individual item was correct (for example, if a target answered a 5 for an item and the participant answered a 4, it was counted as correct). Then, the total percentage correct on a single BFI was treated as a score. For each participant, the four inventory scores for the four different targets were averaged together for a total participant accuracy score. The means of overall accuracy from non-drag participants were compared to that of the drag participants.

In order to score the Need For Closure inventory, numerous items were first reverse-scored. Afterward, a collection of items were summed together to create a lie score. If the participants' lie scores were over a certain threshold, their data were omitted. Then, the rest of the items were summed to create a Need for Closure Score.

## **Results**

It was hypothesized that drag performers would more accurately judge others' personalities. An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine the difference between drag performers and non-drag performers in terms of personality. Although drag ( $n = 3$ ) participants were more accurate ( $M = .67, SD = .04$ ) than non-drag ( $n = 24$ ) participants ( $M = .64, SD = .04$ ), no significant difference between the two groups was found,  $t(25) = -.95, p = .35$ . This indicates that drag performers and non-drag performers did not perform differently in terms of accuracy (see Figure 1). Therefore, the main hypothesis was unsupported.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine the difference between men and women in terms of personality judgement accuracy. A statistically significant difference did not exist  $t(25) = -.24, p = .82$ , though women ( $M = .65, SD = .04$ ) did have a higher mean accuracy score than men ( $M = .65, SD = .04$ ). This indicates that men and women were not different in their accuracy of judgments (see Figure 2).

### **Secondary Tests**

Secondary tests were run in order to observe other variables that were not originally included in the hypotheses. The difference in accuracy between those who are acquainted with a target and those who are not was also examined by running four separate independent sample t-tests with each target. For Target A, there was no significant difference in accuracy between those who were acquainted with the target and those who were not ( $t(26) = -.90, p = .38$ ), as was the case with Target B ( $t(26) = -.47, p = .64$ ), Target C ( $t(28) = -1.6, p = .12$ ), and Target D ( $t(27) = .27, p = .83$ ). This means that even after being acquainted with the targets, participants were not able to better judge their personalities.

In addition to the primary analyses, small-subjects analyses were conducted. Three drag participants were gender, race, and closely age-matched with three non-drag participants. Their accuracy on all four targets was compared (see Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5).

Need for Closure. An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine the difference between drag performers and non-drag performers in terms of their Need for Closure. A significant difference did not exist,  $t(27) = -.24$ ,  $p = .81$ . Although drag performers had a higher average Need for Closure score ( $M = 157.67$ ,  $SD = 13.32$ ) than non-drag performers ( $M = 153.85$ ,  $SD = 5.27$ ), the results indicate drag performers do not differ significantly from non-drag performers in terms of Need for Closure (see Figure 6).

Another independent-sample t-test was run to determine whether women and men differed in NFC. Again, there was no significant difference between the two groups,  $t(27) = -.35$ ,  $p = .73$ . Men and women were alike in their NFC (see Figure 7).

### **Discussion**

The present research observed whether or not drag performers more accurately perceived the personalities of others. The results indicated that there was no difference between drag and non-drag individuals in terms of personality perception accuracy. This implies that embodying a gender temporarily will not necessarily allow a person to possess the characteristics associated with that gender. Few, if any, studies exist in addressing this topic. However, the results are inconsistent with Chan and colleagues' findings that state that women have a heightened ability to judge personality (2011). In addition, the results are also inconsistent with the findings that affirm that more interpersonally-oriented individuals are able to better perceive personality (Vogt & Colvin, 2003).

Another finding related to personality perception warrants attention. There was no

difference in accuracy between those who were acquainted with the Target versus those who had not met the target. This means that even after being exposed to the Target through prior interaction(s), this does elevate the ability to make accurate judgments about their personality. There were not enough data points to examine if actually knowing someone personally had any effect on accuracy. This finding is inconsistent with that of Funder (2012), whose evidence supported the fact that the more interactions with a person, the more accurate one's judgments are about them. That is because there is more practice retrieving their behavioral cues and synthesizing that information to make inferences about their personality when exposed to the person multiple times (Funder, 2012). However, it is possible that an acquaintance is not enough to properly practice retrieving those behavioral cues.

Previous findings could also provide alternate explanations as to why drag performers were not more accurate. The drag performers in this study were not asked how long they have been performing drag, which might dictate how much time they have spent "practicing" embodying a gender. Some performers may have been practicing drag for longer than others. Even when they rehearse drag, they might not have interpersonal sensitivity in mind. Perhaps drag performers did not undergo the same socialization process that women do and spend a short amount of time embodying women. Therefore, they might not be as motivated to be sensitive in perceiving others (Ruben, Hall, & Hall, 2014).

Need for Closure was also observed in this study as an exploratory measure. I sought to see if there were differences between the groups in terms of NFC. The perceiver's NFC may dictate how they make judgments about others; if the perceiver assuages any sort of uncertainty or ambiguity, they might make quick assumptions or use mental shortcuts. Since drag performers did not differ from drag performers in terms of NFC, neither group was more likely to engage in

stereotyping behavior. In studies to come, the groups should be assessed on whether or not they have the Ability to Achieve Closure, as this can dictate whether or not the participant makes assumptions based on their Need for Closure (Kossowska & Bar-Tal, 2013).

There were several strengths of the present study. First and foremost, a new method of observing the psychological effects of gender was used: drag performance. In previous studies, the psychological benefits of drag have been addressed, however, none had assessed the performers' abilities in person-perception (Knutson et al., 2018). The second strength was that there were questions to account for whether or not the participant knew any of the Targets personally. If a participant was acquainted or even personal friends with one of the Targets, this would skew the results since they would more accurately rate their personality due to prior exposure. Participants' responses for individual targets were omitted if they knew the Target personally.

For future research, there are limitations that need to be addressed. The biggest limitation is that there were so few people in the drag population. It is highly unlikely that there would be statistical significance due to the lack of power. One of the issues with the survey set-up itself is that the order of the videos were not randomized. Therefore, all participants saw Target A through D in succession every time. This has the potential to introduce order effects, where participants could have been rushing at the end of the survey and not giving their most accurate answers. It would also be preferable to perform this study in-person, where the drag participants can actually dress in full-drag before they judge others' personalities. It is possible that the drag participants were not fully embodying the stereotypical image of women, as they were able to complete the study in whatever clothes they wish. Another limitation of this study is that sexual orientation was not asked for on the demographic form. Ruben, Hall, and Hill (2014) found that

lesbians were more accurate in their judgments of characteristics that might have been more relevant to themselves, such as sexual orientation. This relationship was not observed in the present study.

Future research should observe the effects of Target characteristics on personality judgment. For the purpose of the present study, all Targets were white women. This was meant to control for any discrepancies in how participants may perceive the Targets. However, it would be worthwhile to explore whether or not categories such as gender, race, or even attractiveness of the Target would contribute to how they are seen. Past research has suggested that those factors may contribute to how accurately a personality is judged (Hall, Mast, & West, 2016). In addition, transgender participants should be included to observe how switching the expression of one's gender would influence the ability to accurately perceive others.

Although this study set out to observe the drag population specifically, there were not enough drag participants to draw any conclusions about personality judgement. Therefore, there is still a possibility that drag has the power to increase personality judgment, but there has not been ample evidence to corroborate nor refute this claim. Future studies should include more drag performers to increase its statistical power and examine the relationship more accurately.

Though there was no difference in accuracy between drag performers and non-drag performers, this topic is worth expanding upon in the future. It is important to observe the nature of gender expression and how one may be able to manipulate their own psychological abilities. Gender, as it is socially constructed, can contribute to the way we are socialized into behaving a certain way or the way we see others. It is also possible that gender does not have an influence in our abilities. Many factors should be taken into consideration if the study were to be completed again. There should be an option to select how long a drag performer has been practicing drag,

the inclusion of transgender individuals, and the option to report one's sexual orientation on the demographic survey. This study will increase the visibility of drag in the science community and contribute to a more rounded understanding of personality perception.



Figure 1. Personality Judgment Accuracy as a function of whether or not one is a drag performer.

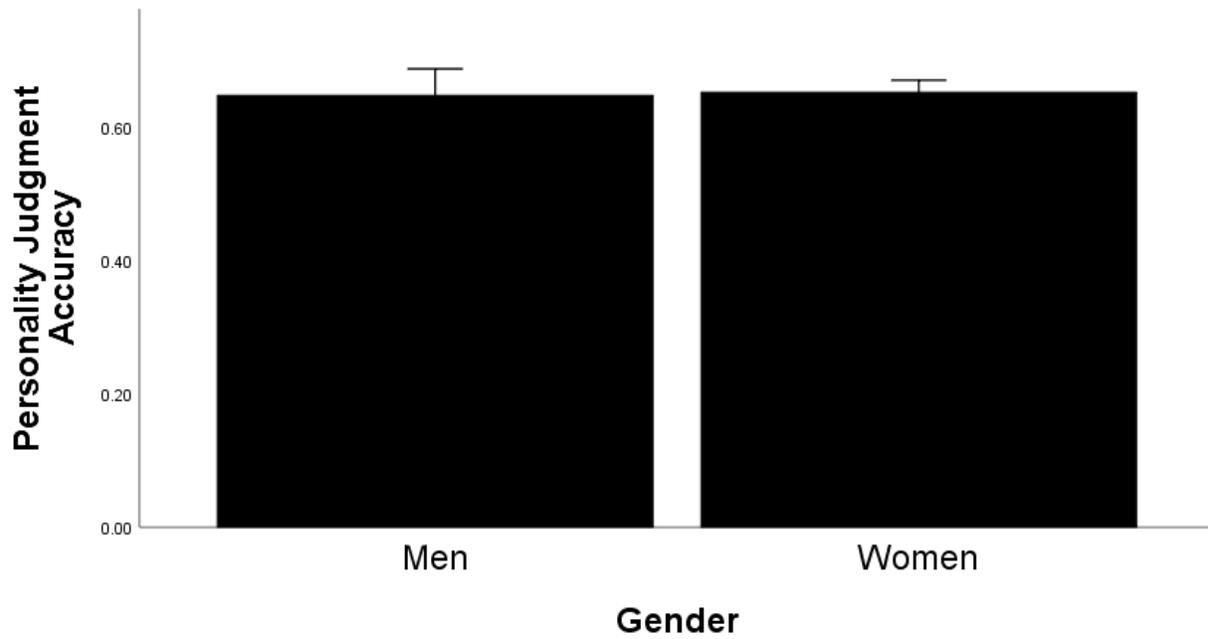


Figure 2. Personality Judgment Accuracy as a function of gender.

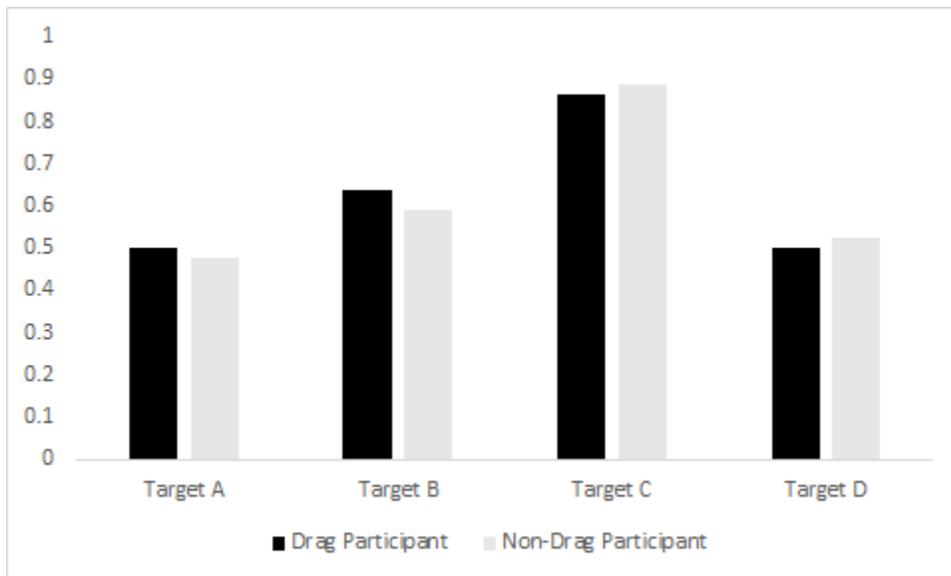


Figure 3. Drag and Non-Drag Participant's Personality Judgment Accuracy compared across the four Targets.

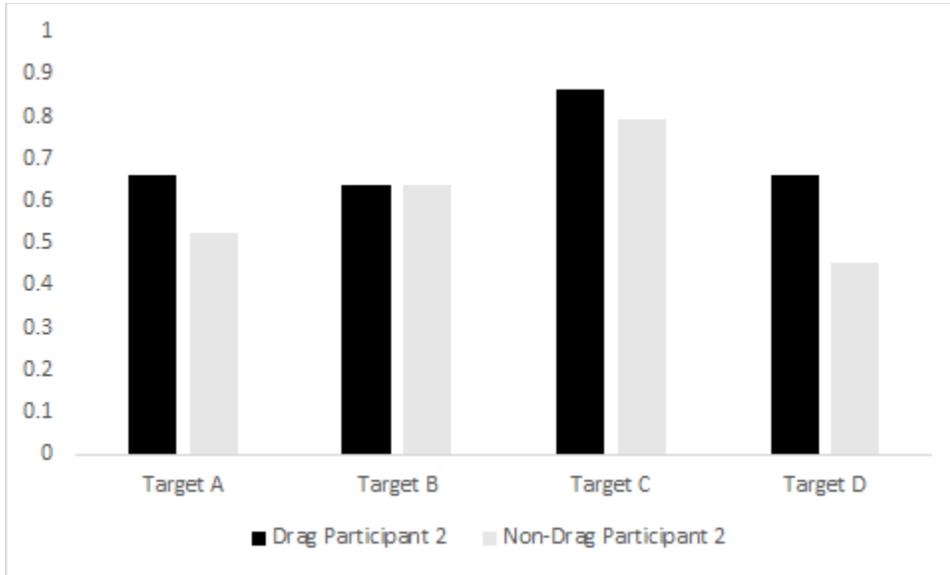


Figure 4. Drag and Non-Drag Participant’s (second pair) Personality Judgment Accuracy compared across the four Targets.

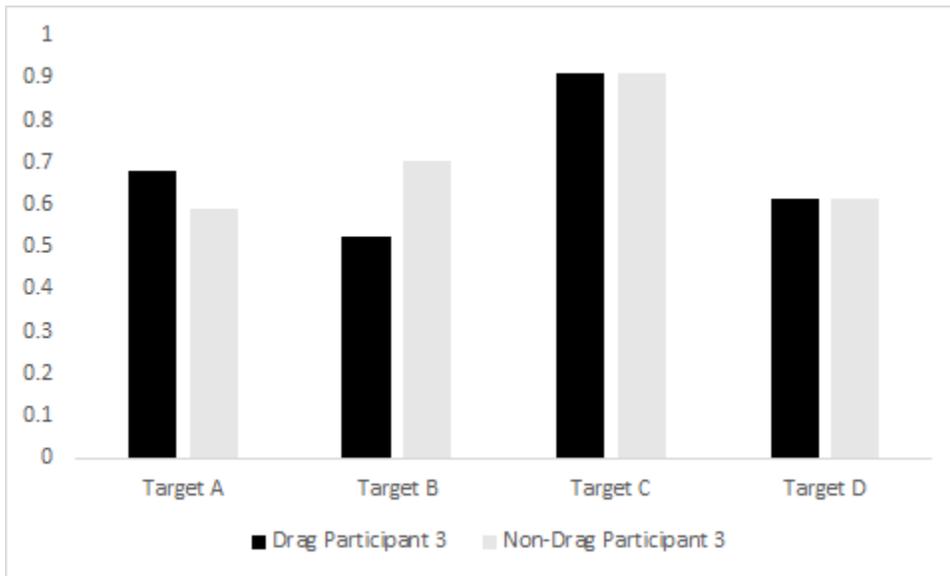


Figure 5. Drag and Non-Drag Participant’s (third pair) Personality Judgment Accuracy compared across the four Targets.

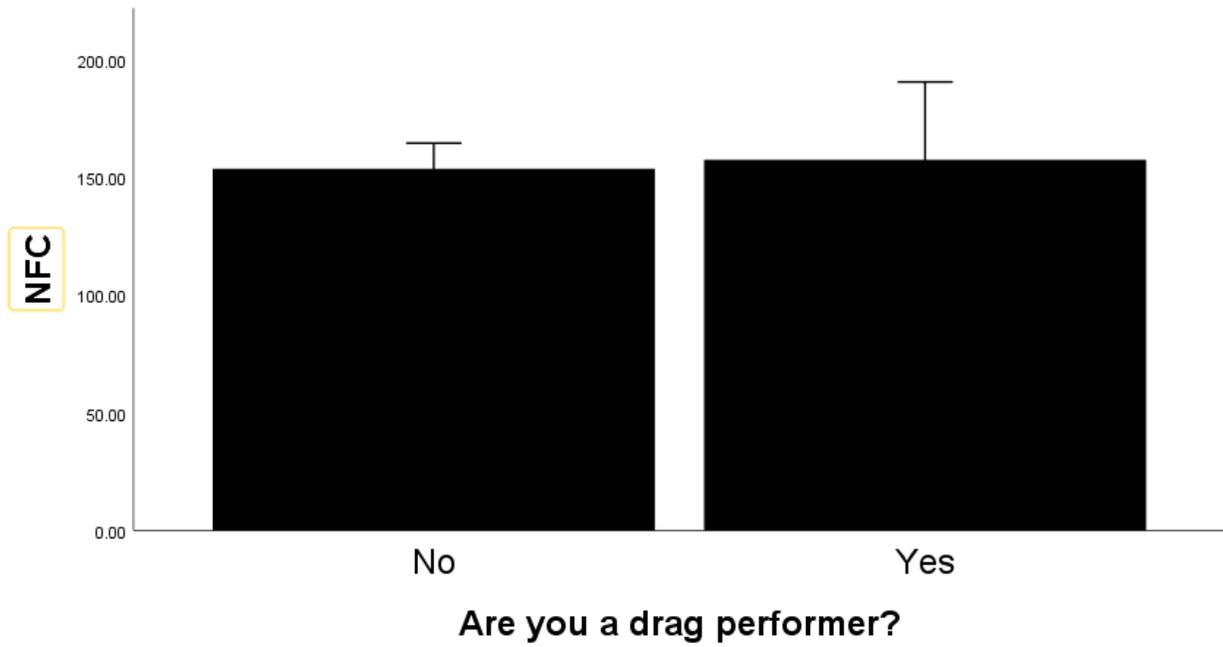


Figure 6. Need for Closure as a function of whether one is a drag performer or not.

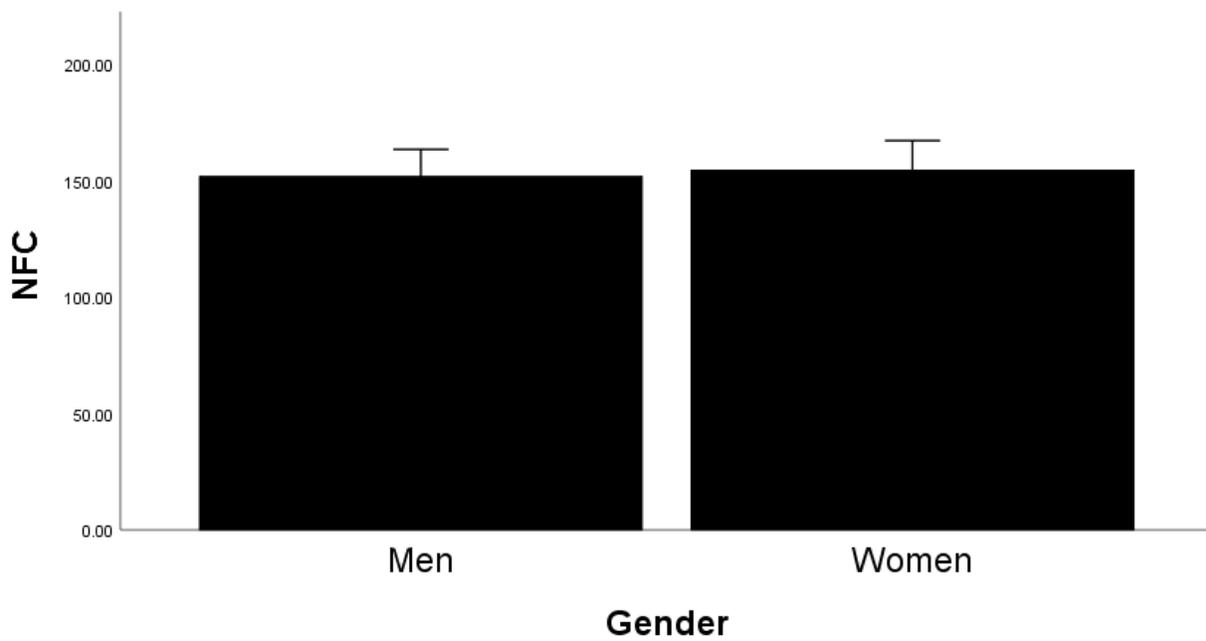


Figure 7. Need for Closure as a function of gender.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions for Targets

1. Do you have a favorite ethnic food?
2. Would you say you are an energetic person?
3. If you had to describe your mood state that you are most often in, what would it be?
4. Do you feel comfortable giving a stranger money?
5. Are you comfortable at parties?
6. Are you a task-oriented person?
7. Would you think that going to an art museum is fun?
8. Are you good at confrontation?
9. What would your reaction be to someone stealing something from you?
10. If a close friend has not texted you back in 24 hours, how do you react?
11. Do you always wear your seatbelt?
12. How do you deal with criticism?
13. What do you do when things don't go your way?
14. In what ways do you express your creativity?
15. Do you say "sorry" a lot?
16. Do you easily have conversations with strangers?

17. Do you keep an agenda for keeping track of events/things to do?
18. What would you do if a stranger stared at you in public?
19. Do you enjoy ice breakers?
20. When you are a group project of any kind, what role do you usually play/do people want you to play?
21. What is the emoji that you use most?
22. How often do you try new restaurants?
23. When people don't like you, how do you react?
24. What percent of your life is work and what percent is play?
25. Something comes up at work and interferes with your weekend plans. How do you react?
26. Do you leave a social event feeling energized?

Appendix B

**The Big Five Inventory (BFI)**

Which person are you evaluating? (Circle one)      A      B      C      D

Rate **their** personality.

Disagree strongly  
 Disagree a little  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree a little  
 Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5

Target \_\_\_\_\_ is...

- \_\_\_\_ 1. Is talkative
- \_\_\_\_ 2. Tends to find fault with others
- \_\_\_\_ 3. Does a thorough job
- \_\_\_\_ 4. Is depressed, blue
- \_\_\_\_ 5. Is original, comes up with new ideas
- \_\_\_\_ 6. Is reserved
- \_\_\_\_ 7. Is helpful and unselfish with others
- \_\_\_\_ 8. Can be somewhat careless
- \_\_\_\_ 9. Is relaxed, handles stress well
- \_\_\_\_ 10. Is curious about many different things

- \_\_\_ 11. Is full of energy
- \_\_\_ 12. Starts quarrels with others
- \_\_\_ 13. Is a reliable worker
- \_\_\_ 14. Can be tense
- \_\_\_ 15. Is ingenious, a deep thinker
- \_\_\_ 16. Generates a lot of enthusiasm
- \_\_\_ 17. Has a forgiving nature
- \_\_\_ 18. Tends to be disorganized
- \_\_\_ 19. Worries a lot
- \_\_\_ 20. Has an active imagination
- \_\_\_ 21. Tends to be quiet
- \_\_\_ 22. Is generally trusting
- \_\_\_ 23. Tends to be lazy
- \_\_\_ 24. Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
- \_\_\_ 25. Is inventive
- \_\_\_ 26. Has an assertive personality
- \_\_\_ 27. Can be cold and aloof
- \_\_\_ 28. Perseveres until the task is finished
- \_\_\_ 29. Can be moody
- \_\_\_ 30. Values artistic, aesthetic experiences
- \_\_\_ 31. Is sometimes shy, inhibited
- \_\_\_ 32. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
- \_\_\_ 33. Does things efficiently
- \_\_\_ 34. Remains calm in tense situations
- \_\_\_ 35. Prefers work that is routine
- \_\_\_ 36. Is outgoing, sociable
- \_\_\_ 37. Is sometimes rude to others
- \_\_\_ 38. Makes plans and follows through with them
- \_\_\_ 39. Gets nervous easily
- \_\_\_ 40. Likes to reflect, play with ideas
- \_\_\_ 41. Has few artistic interests
- \_\_\_ 42. Likes to cooperate with others
- \_\_\_ 43. Is easily distracted
- \_\_\_ 44. Is sophisticated in art, music

### Scoring

1

BFI scale scoring (“R” denotes reverse-scored items):

Extraversion: 1, 6R, 11, 16, 21R, 26, 31R, 36

Agreeableness: 2R, 7, 12R, 17, 22, 27R, 32, 37R, 42

Conscientiousness: 3, 8R, 13, 18R, 23R, 28, 33, 38,

43R Neuroticism: 4, 9R, 14, 19, 24R, 29, 34R, 39

Openness: 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35R, 40, 41R, 44

#### Appendix C

### Need for Closure Scale (NFC)

#### "Attitude, Belief and Experience Survey"

INSTRUCTIONS: Read each of the following statements and decide how much you agree with each according to **your beliefs and experiences**. Please respond according to the following scale.

1.....strongly disagree

2....moderately disagree

3.....slightly disagree

4.....slightly agree

---

<sup>1</sup> Participants were unable to see scoring.

5.....moderately agree

6.....strongly agree

1. I think that having clear rules and order at work is essential for success.
2. Even after I've made up my mind about something, I am always eager to consider a different opinion.
3. I don't like situations that are uncertain.
4. I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.
5. I like to have friends who are unpredictable.
6. I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.
7. I enjoy the uncertainty of going into a new situation without knowing what might happen.
8. When dining out, I like to go to places where I have been before so that I know what to expect.
9. I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life.
10. I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.
11. I hate to change my plans at the last minute.
12. I would describe myself as indecisive.
13. When I go shopping, I have difficulty deciding exactly what it is I want.
14. When faced with a problem I usually see the one best solution very quickly
15. When I am confused about an important issue, I feel very upset.
16. I tend to put off making important decisions until the last possible moment.
17. I usually make important decisions quickly and confidently.
18. I have never been late for an appointment or work.

19. I think it is fun to change my plans at the last moment.
20. My personal space is usually messy and disorganized.
21. In most social conflicts, I can easily see which side is right and which is wrong.
22. I have never known someone I did not like.
23. I tend to struggle with most decisions.
24. I believe orderliness and organization are among the most important characteristics of a good student.
25. When considering most conflict situations, I can usually see how both sides could be right.
26. I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.
27. I prefer to socialize with familiar friends because I know what to expect from them.
28. I think that I would learn best in a class that lacks clearly stated objectives and requirements.
29. When thinking about a problem, I consider as many different opinions on the issue as possible.
30. I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.
31. I like to know what people are thinking all the time.
32. I dislike it when a person's statement could mean many different things.
33. It's annoying to listen to someone who cannot seem to make up his or her mind.
34. I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.
35. I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.
36. I prefer interacting with people whose opinions are very different from my own.
37. I like to have a plan for everything and a place for everything.
38. I feel uncomfortable when someone's meaning or intention is unclear to me.
39. I believe that one should never engage in leisure activities.

40. When trying to solve a problem I often see so many possible options that it's confusing.
41. I always see many possible solutions to problems I face.
42. I'd rather know bad news than stay in a state of uncertainty.
43. I feel that there is no such thing as an honest mistake.
44. I do not usually consult many different options before forming my own view.
45. I dislike unpredictable situations.
46. I have never hurt another person's feelings.
47. I dislike the routine aspects of my work (studies).

**Directions for scoring NFC**

1. Reverse-score items 2, 5, 7, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 23, 25, 28, 29, 36, 40, 41, and 47.
2. Sum items 18, 22, 39, 43, and 46 to form a lie score.
3. Remove the subject if the lie score is greater than 15.
4. Sum all items except for the above listed lie items to calculate the need for closure score.
5. Use the top and bottom quartiles to determine high and low need for closure subjects.
6. If factors are required, use the following scoring system:
  - Order: 1, 6, 11, 20, 24, 28, 34, 35, 37, 47
  - Predictability: 5, 7, 8, 19, 26, 27, 30, 45
  - Decisiveness: 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 23, 40
  - Ambiguity: 3, 9, 15, 21, 31, 32, 33, 38, 42
  - Closed Mindedness: 2, 4, 10, 25, 29, 36, 41, 44

Appendix D

**Informed Consent Agreement**

**Please read this consent agreement (or listen carefully if it is being read to you) before you decide to participate in the research study. Please keep a copy for your records.**

**Project Title:** Drag Performance and its Effects on Social Perception\_\_\_\_\_

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research study is to examine whether or not the social demands of drag performance is related to more accurate social perception.

**Participation:** As a participant in this study, you will be asked to fill out this consent form. Then, you will watch four videos of people you will be evaluating. During and for one minute

after the video, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire based on the target's personality. Essentially, you will be judging their traits. After you have watched the videos and filled out the questionnaires, the study is complete.

**Time Required:** Your participation is expected to take approximately forty-five minutes to an hour.

**Voluntary Participation:** Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate and/or answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty. You also have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. If you want to withdraw from the study please tell the researcher or a member of the research team who is present during your participation.

**Potential Risks:** The potential risks associated with this study are possible psychological discomfort when watching the videos, as they might be of a person you know/have had experience with. You will also be answering questions about social situations, such as parties. This has the possibility of triggering social phobia. If you feel uncomfortable during the study for these reasons or any other reasons, please notify the researcher and you will be allowed to terminate your participation. On the form provided to you at the end of this study, the Health Center's information (University of Lynchburg campus) will be given to you. The Health Center can be used as a resource if discomfort persists. If you are not affiliated with the University of Lynchburg, then the numbers of counselors in the DC area and Roanoke area are attached as well.

**Potential Benefits:** The potential benefits associated with this study are contributing to the greater understanding of social perception. Also, drag literature is very limited, so it offers greater educational context on the subject as well as visibility of the drag community.

**Compensation:** You will not receive compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** Your individual privacy will be maintained throughout this study. In order to preserve the confidentiality of your responses, your answers will be kept in a password-protected file on Google drive. No data collection documents will have your name attached to it besides this consent form. The paper documents used in this study will be stored in a locked faculty office and will be kept for a minimum of three years.

**Whom to Contact with Questions:** If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact *Adele Weaver* at *weaver\_ae@lynchburg.edu*. You can also contact my faculty research sponsor, Dr. Virginia Cylke, at *cylke@lynchburg.edu*, who is the Principal Investigator (PI) for this project and is supervising my work on the study. The University of Lynchburg Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has

approved this project. This IRB currently does not stamp approval on the informed consent/assent documents; however, an approval number is assigned to approved studies – the approval number for this study is \_\_\_\_\_ [Note: you will fill this in once your study is approved]. You may contact the IRB Director, Dr. Alisha Walker Marciano, through the Office of the Associate Provost at the University of Lynchburg at 434.544.8367 or [irb-hs@lynchburg.edu](mailto:irb-hs@lynchburg.edu) with any questions or concerns related to this research study.

**Agreement:** I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation in this research study answered. By signing below I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study described above and verify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(The above signature represents an electronic signature)

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

#### Appendix E Debriefing Form

#### **Thank you!**

Thank you again for your participation in this study. Your participation will help fill the gaps in personality and drag performance research. During the study, you were asked to view a video of four people. These actors had already filled out a personality inventory: the same one that you also filled out. Once your participation in this study is complete, your responses will be checked for accuracy. This will reveal how accurate you were in your judgment of their personality. The inventory assesses five traits: openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extrovertedness, and neuroticism. Drag performers' responses will be compared to the responses of non-drag performers in terms of accuracy.

The fact that women are more accurate in their judgments about other people's personality has been supported by past research<sup>2</sup>. I address this in my study as well: do drag queens possess the same acuity of personality judgment simply because of their mere adoption of another gender?

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<sup>2</sup>Chan, M., Rogers, K. H., Parisotto, K. L., & Biesanz, J. C. (2011). Forming first impressions: The role of gender and normative accuracy in personality perception doi://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2010.11.001

For this purpose, some demographic information that you provided will be used in this study (i.e. gender and race).

As mentioned in the initial form that you signed, your name will not appear on any document besides the consent form and your identity will not be attached to any responses you give during this study. Responses will be kept confidential.

**University of Lynchburg Health Center:**

(434)544-8357

**Roanoke: Dr. Susan Mathews-Duvall, Breakforth Counseling and Consulting**

(540) 296-2617

**DC: Larissa Godfrey-Smith, Licensed Professional Counselor, MA**

(202) 301-4605