Brune, Emma: The Presentation of Hegemonic Masculinity in RuPaul's Drag Race

Abstract:

RuPaul's Drag Race aired in 2009 as a way to increase the presence profiles of drag queens who were dressing up seven days per week living off of tips. RuPaul was one of the few drag queens who had created a media presence for his drag persona, and he wanted his legacy to be a creation of that fame and recognition for other queens. Drag Race is currently in its eleventh season, and despite all of its success that it has gained, there has been an emergence of some backlash towards the show because the show was supposed to be a challenge to traditional hegemonic masculinity. Audiences and scholars feel as though it is failing to challenge those norms. According to writer Philip Ellis (2018), masculinity tends to be centered in the discourse on gender in the gay community (Ellis 2018). This can place emphasis on the opposition to masculinity that is supposedly displayed in RuPaul's Drag Race.

Hegemonic masculinity is exemplified in Drag Race and in drag outside of the show. Queen Jodie Harsh laments about the "painful feet, tight wigs and spiky eyelashes" that only real men can endure (Harsh 2018). There is a lot of competition between the queens since Drag Race is a show where one person gets eliminated and there is a winner at the end, and competition is seen as a predominantly masculine trait. While many of the outfits seen on Drag Race are elaborate and glamorous, the queens see them as practical since they can just pick out an outfit and put it on before doing their job (Harsh 2018). There is a certain amount of control that is exercised when men dare to deviate from societal norms and dress as a woman, and this control still tips the scale towards men and masculinity because they have the power to do this and be praised and win prizes for it, while there is no Drag Race for women dressing up as men.

RuPaul has shown transphobia in the past, commenting that trans women should not be allowed on Drag Race because it "changes the whole concept of what they're doing" (Nichols 2018). He also introduced the idea of "She-mail" to alert the queens on the show of an incoming message from him, a clear play on the derogatory term "she-male" used to describe trans women. In addition, there is a substantial racial problem that does not get acknowledged by RuPaul on the show (Daw 2018). Drag Race embraces a gender binary and has a difficult time "making sense of a world that isn't structured around male and female" (McKinnon 2018). Queens create comedy out of their ability to dress as ultra-feminine as possible and to create the illusion that they are a member of the other half of the gender binary. There is almost never a non-binary character or challenge, and if there is it is exaggerated to the point where it is sure to be taken as comedy. Hegemonic masculinity and a gender dichotomy have been present on the show for a long time, and there is still a long way that the show has to go to be as progressive as it appears on its surface to many of its viewers. Nice critical take on the show.

References: There is nothing wrong with these references but I'd have like to have seen more scholarly sources which would likely have added even more conceptual depth to your analysis.

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Appendix A:
Appendix B:

DragRacePresentation.pptx

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