

SUNY Purchase College

Tip Your Queens

An Immersive Study Of COVID 19's Impact On Drag Queens

Joseph Restaino

Senior Capstone

Professor Rossman

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Joseph Restaino

Senior Capstone

Professor Rossman

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<https://youtu.be/XipP83IC9ik>

Abstract

This is a short documentary giving more detail on the personal experiences of drag queens on how the pandemic has affected them. Focusing on the income of the queens a focused aspect was how many queens couldn't support themselves just alone on tips. This is why I made the film, many individuals working in this field haven't had an outlet to discuss these struggles.

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Remember life when COVID restrictions were not a thought? Being able to go out and see friends; while having a chance to enjoy live productions in a public setting without any regulation? For many, this is just one aspect of the many struggles of the pandemic, but for many individuals, this has completely changed their careers and impacted their income. Focusing on drag performances it is noticeable that there has been an economic impact on them due to the virus. Drag Queens have been affected immensely due to the pandemic, causing many changes to their careers that creates stress on a source of income.

In March of 2020 COVID-19 just started and many businesses were shutting down across the country. While numbers began to rise, fewer and fewer people had work. Mainly due to the danger of the virus and the infection rate being so high, many businesses had to shut down or move remotely. Many workers in the Drag Industry had no in person gigs. This forced them to utilize an online platform to keep their businesses afloat. But this left many career paths questioning what the next steps are in supporting themselves and affording daily life. With all the

changes in regulation regarding the venues where Queens work, it is no wonder that many have lost employment, meaning lost income. This completely skyrocketed the unemployment rates within many countries especially the United States “ In the United States alone, more than 30 million adults have filed for unemployment benefits, suggesting a national rate rivaled only by that of the Great Depression”(Rugabor,2020) this being a time of uncertainty for many who have suffered a job loss.

Individuals in the drag community have faced loss of employment from the pandemic, many have created online shows as a way to keep practicing their drag, but many have had to find new ways to create income. Realizing it is common amongst my new peers that they have felt the same way I have had similar struggles due to the pandemic. As mentioned in this article “many people lost their jobs because the coronavirus Company cut and fired employees because they have nothing to pay. Not everyone can work in conditions of mass self-isolation. Someone is asked to go on unpaid leave - it is also a loss of earnings. Finding a new job can not be easy, especially if the profession involves contact with people” (SYLWAN, page 118). Which I find very relevant to the reality of any Drag Queens due to the nature of live performance and collecting tips which is a huge part of the income of many queens. Followed by the shutdown many Queens found themselves unsure of how they will be making ends meet with bills, being dependent on government assistance, but in some cases ones that aren't able to be qualified are left with no options.

With such big changes in everyday life many Drag Queens searched for new outlets to stay working, performing, and most importantly getting tipped. Similar to the process of many businesses turning remote, drag follows the same to be converted to a virtual platform. On interviewing Katana and Laurie Lou they both mentioned the use of online platforms as a new

way to stay performing and source of income. Mentioning how many drag queens would link through Cash App, or Venmo is the only way to keep the names relevant in the tipping pool. But seeing these efforts sometimes did not always work and queens found themselves still not being able to support themselves without extra help. In an article titled “Is Covid crushing queer culture?” The author Michael Musto reflects on the changes in nightlife in the impact it is been having on queer culture. Elaborating on a video call performances do not feel the same they mention “when Covid hit in the bar is shut down, drive performers started to stream shows that you couldn’t interact within old ways” (Musto, line 73) is put in consideration the missing interaction between the crowd and the performers were many of them would receive tips which was a main source of income.

Covid’s wide-ranging severe effects on global economics is one of the very first things to be seen. These impacts could be noticed and seen throughout the world, since this pandemic has reached a global scale the numbers increase of how many countries it may impact. Further research into the impact of the pandemic on the stock market shows a strong negative impact discussed in the article “regarding the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on the global financial markets, Baker et al 2020 stated that the US stock market has reacted more forcefully to the current pandemic than any other pandemic in US history” (Basel, line 22). Hence the increasing numbers of unemployment throughout the United States in the fall of the stock market and the economy. This has an effect on almost all fields of work, from jobs giving hours to their employees, as well being able to support them during the closure of their jobs. This lasting impact will be seen for years to follow whenever the pandemic comes to an end, even after Capacity is more in restrictions are lifted. The job market has been very limited, making it hard to find small jobs to keep me afloat. For someone like myself, it’s hard to understand how this

pandemic could cause such stress on our economy, a great video made by Harvard Business Review explaining the crisis. They explain in detail how there are different types of recessions within the economy and there are certain ways to turn it around “ primarily innovations on the medical side vaccines treatments and capacity innovations are needed to save lives in the end economic damage caused by social distancing on the economic side of vigorous and efficient policy response we will need to create policy innovations like in the US the \$2 trillion stimulus bill was just a start“ which is going to be ways that we can create a curve on the recession like being able to give support to performance artist like drag queens and other professions that are struggling.

With the fall of the economy, many businesses are struggling as well as professions as we've seen through the struggle of drag queens. There are different ways that they can be supported given to individuals whose income has been hurt and the start is to have policies created to give relief. After evaluating how Covid has affected drag queens it is prominent that there's been a lack of support for performers and especially drag queens. With improvements being made by the day policies being implemented to help is the most important step to be taken. As well as providing unemployment benefits to individuals that are able to be qualified due to the status in this country as well as profession.

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