

RuPaul's Drag Race

intertextuality & hybrid queer space

candice d. roberts, phd
@popmediaprof



RPDR
herstory

2009

Season 1 on Logo
(The Lost Season)

Re-aired in 2013

2015

DragCon in LA
draws 13k fans

2017

RPDR moves to
VH1 for Season 9

DragCon NYC
debuts to 35k

DragCon LA
triples to 50k

1

take over the
mothertucking
world

RPDR as
Transmedia Franchise





text + object

**(Marwick, Gray,
& Annany)**





transmedia cultural object

“contexts, intertexts, and cultural patterns are co-determinants in meaning making” (Lemke, 2009)



non-fiction narrative world

Oullette (2015) and Hill (2016) - “fact-fiction” mix and the highly mediated participatory experience of reality television



2

you better work

methods



RPDR as ethnographic object

- textual analysis of TV episodes
- virtual ethnography
- interviews
 - DragCon
 - local queens
 - viewing parties

3

spilling the tea

findings & discussion





Semiotics & Performance





DragCon

- between 40-60% straight
- 63% under 30
- increasingly “family friendly”
- Meet n Greets

Scenes from Hell's Kitchen & Beyond



fans,
family,
frenemies

Viewing Parties

10+ bars in
Manhattan alone

- Community
- Identity
- Comedy

Local Queens

More
opportunities
for everyone

Critiques

Feuding storylines

Transphobia
controversy

“bachelorette
party at the gay
bar”

4

the after party

future directions





Semiotics: Shantay, You Stay



symbols



icons



artifacts



rituals

How are the semiotics of drag related to

- subcultural capital
- tribal capital

“

The show could never go mainstream because drag is the antithesis of the matrix.”

RuPaul, 2016



the politics of “gaystreaming” (Ng)

- gaystreaming and consumer culture theory
- normalization vs. outsiderhood
- transmedia narratives



Thank you so much.

Vi+1