

For more than three years, I have researched drag culture in central Kansas as an undergraduate student at Kansas State University. The time I have researched drag culture, both drag kings and drag queens, has allowed me to grow as a student and academic. I graduate in May, but I will continue researching this community as a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at K-State in the fall.

The project submitted with this application was completed as a final for Ethnographic Methods. The topic is transformations in drag culture in central Kansas. Three transformations, in particular, are addressed within the ethnography. Not only are the transformations of the gender identities and presentations of the seven drag queens featured in the ethnography, but the transformations of spaces and queer communities within rural areas are also analyzed. I decided to focus on these three components, for this particular project, after much discussion with Dr. Jessica Falcone, the professor of the course. We discussed how to narrow the topics I brainstormed into a project that met the qualifications of the assignment and would provide an academic-level writing sample. Speaking more broadly, I decided to focus on drag culture due to the passion and insight I already had for the community. By the time I took Ethnographic Methods, I had already researched this community for more than a year and a half. I went through the Institutional Review Board at K-State and received approval to conduct research with human subjects with Dr. Falcone as the principal investigator on the protocol.

Once the topic was chosen, the research began. All of the research I had done up to that point was participant observation, photography, and journalistic reporting. I had not actually conducted any academic research. The simplest way to explain my research strategy was to go from broad to specific. I began by Google searching the phrases drag queens, drag kings, female impersonators, and male impersonators. These four phrases were how all of those who assist with this research self-identify their drag identities. Google is a vast black hole of both useful and useless references and recommendations that are challenging to sift through. I knew I had to spend time exploring K-State Libraries.

Before I began my library research, I reviewed notes I had taken during class periods with librarians who explained how to utilize different resources available through K-State Libraries. Once I began my library research, I searched the four, above-mentioned phrases in a variety of library research tools beginning with ProQuest Research Library. I searched all databases under this database. I used the advanced search function and searched with and without quotation marks around those phrases and others to make the results as specific as possible. A requirement for the assignment was to use a certain number of academic, peer-reviewed sources. My research technique was further specified to only include abstracts, academic, peer-reviewed articles, theses, dissertations, and book reviews published in academic journals.

I then utilized the “subjects” categories on the right side of the screen on the K-State Libraries homepage once I realized how under researched drag culture is in the United States within academic spaces. I remembered being taught that K-State librarians categorized databases specific to particular departments and/or research areas. I reviewed what databases were categorized under the subjects of American ethnic studies, anthropology, sociology, and women’s studies. All of these subjects helped me further discover additional databases. I mirrored my search technique in the ProQuest Research Library database within EBSCO Host. I then searched K-State Libraries catalogues for the books frequently referenced to see if they were available.

About half of the articles generated within these multiple databases produced direct PDF documents to the entire article I wanted. I saved the PDF, printed it off to have a hard copy to annotate, and reference later. The other half of the articles I had to access through InterLibrary Loan, powered by the “Get It” function. This was the first, but not the last, time I utilized the benefits of InterLibrary Loan. I requested scanned PDFs of dozens of academic articles. I also requested printed, tangible versions of entire academic journals and other academic books K-State Libraries did not have. There was a circumstance when I did not understand how to request all issues of an entire volume of the *Journal of Homosexuality*. I utilized the “Ask a Librarian” instant messenger chat function. That particular librarian did not understand what I asked but suggested emailing the InterLibrary Loan librarian directly. Within hours of sending an email, on a weekend I might add, the InterLibrary Loan librarian answered all of the questions I had about filling out the form to request the entire volume. She thought two steps ahead of me and requested to borrow the entire volume before I could fill out the form. I was also given further explanation about how the “Get It” function works, which allowed me to better utilize research searching techniques in both more broad and specific ways to access direct and indirect research related to this topic. As I began reading the articles, book reviews, and books, I looked at the internal citations and references section, went back to K-State Libraries, and searched for those additional articles and books related to and useful for this research topic. The process continues as I continue to look at other aspects of drag culture in central Kansas not addressed within this particular research assignment.

Throughout my entire process during this particular research project, other related research projects since, and the work I will do on a graduate level, I have learned and will continue to learn how to utilize many of the features, functions, and resources available to me through K-State Libraries. I have looked through a variety of resource related to interdisciplinary academic fields to find and access research related to drag culture. K-State Libraries is one of the most beneficial resources to students and faculty in pursuit of their academic and research endeavors.