

# Drag Queen Culture in Brazil

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## Abstract

When we talk about Brazil, soccer, beautiful ladies, beaches, and Carnival come to mind. For many foreigners it is a place where everyone is welcome, no matter your financial status, religion, sexual orientation, or nationality. For some others, Brazil is a tropical paradise where homosexuals are free to express their sensuality and sexuality, a “Gay Paradise” some might say, in other words, Brazil is seen as an inclusive society (McLeod-Roberts, 2005). However, reality is different, and explicit signs of homosexuality has incited homophobia, especially now when you can see the latest pop star sensation, Pabllo Vittar. She might seem as just another girl with a talent. However, Pabllo is a Drag Queen, a subculture that has always been part of Brazilian culture, even if they never had a serious role in the media. That behavior is changing now, and this research will build a foundation for understanding the influence of Pabllo Vittar in shaping the next generation of Drag Queen inclusiveness in Brazil, a country with a strong influence of the government and religion over their population. Pabllo Vittar has become a symbol of resistance for those Brazilians intimidated by the growing influence of the conservative Christian groups, particularly those in the government. Vittar is shaping how Brazilians accept the influence of the LGBTQ community in the country’s culture by gaining space and visibility in the mainstream media recently.

## Background: Drag Queens in Brazil

Drag Queens are female impersonators, usually homosexual males who like to dress up in female clothing (not transsexuals), their main goal is to perform in front of a live audience, a typical performance involves dancing, singing, or lip-syncing to popular music. According to *A Natural History of the Drag Queen Phenomenon* by Michael Moncrieff, males who enter the Drag Queen culture are seeking to raise their social standing and participation in the LGBTQ community. Drag is often described as an art form created by an oppressed community and has a huge impact in the mainstream culture today because it doesn't matter if you are women or a man, have a beard or not, anyone can be a drag queen (Ford, 2015).

Drag culture has always been part of Brazil’s pop culture and influence on the media. With a humoristic touch, Brazilian Drag Queens are the main attractions at the nightlife in the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro’s comedy houses, nightclubs, or street performing. The late 1980’s and 1990’s marked an era of great Drag Queen influence in the Brazilian culture, and artists like Nanny People, Salette Campari, and Isabelita dos Patins were very popular, they had their time slot on Brazilian television, and appeared on part of late night, or Sunday afternoon shows where they were treated more as a joke than as performers. However, the lack of documentation makes it harder to recognize their influence on Brazilian culture at that time (Froio, 2017).

It is only recently that Drag Queens started to be the face of São Paulo’s pride parades, one of the largest in the world, attracting more than 3 million people. The gay club “The Week”, in São Paulo is the biggest in Latin America and it is very inclusive. São Paulo has a vibrant queer culture that has been emerging with time, especially now in the late 2000’s where we can see the latest pop sensation, Pabllo Vittar (Lopez, 2015).



Santos, B. (Photograph).(2017). *Pabllo Vittar* [digital image]. Retrieved from Folha Press

## Pabllo Vittar

Born a male, Pabllo Vittar is a 22-year-old singer, performer, and drag queen. According to The Guardian, she has become a symbol of resistance and rising influence of the LGBTQ minority in the Brazilian culture. Vittar is very popular with her mix of Brazilian musical styles influenced by mainstream pop.

Vittar thinks that to be a drag queen is a way to express her art and her feelings. Vittar drags differently than the famous RuPaul’s contestants, since she resembles a woman without caricaturing or mocking the female image, but still changes styles, and wigs constantly. Even though Vittar dresses and looks like a woman, she likes to emphasize that she is a gay boy and a drag queen, not a trans person. Vittar’s queerness challenges the homophobia that Brazil still faces and opens doors to the LGBTQ community in the entertainment industry again (Froio, 2017). Pabllo Vittar raises proudly the rainbow flag in honor of her sexuality and diversity.

## Social and Political Context

Even though Brazil is known globally for its huge gay pride parades, unfortunately, the country faces the highest levels of violence against the LGBTQ population. According to *Gay Group Bahia*, the number of murders against the LGBTQ community raised from 326 in 2014 to an alarming 445 in 2017 (Cowie, 2018). Brazil’s society has a very strictly defined gender role, highly influenced by religion, and machismo. The religious influence of Catholicism and Evangelical Christianity makes it hard for LGBTQ acceptance and it is one of the causes of anti-gay violence.

The political scene is taken over by evangelical lawmakers and they are starting to take away the rights given to the LGBTQ population. According to Javier Corrales, a political scientist at Amherst College during an interview to *The New York Times* commented that Brazilians are starting to be more tolerant, but there are still those who remain intolerant and opposed to LGBTQ rights and they will keep developing new strategies to block progress on issues such as corporal punishments, and “convert” gays to heterosexuality. This only entices homophobia even more, making Brazil a dangerous place not only to drag queens, but also to anyone in the LGBTQ community.

## Conclusion

Brazil is in love with Vittar, people has embraced her and her music; her personality and queerness bring visibility to more Latinx Drag Queens to enter the entertainment industry and challenge a regressive political scene. She is using her podium to challenge the homophobia that is deeply ingrained in Brazilian society, her music and performances celebrate sexuality and diversity, and tackle intolerance against the LGBTQ Community.



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