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# Anti-transgender discrimination and oppression in New York City and San Francisco during the Gay Liberation Movement, 1965-1975

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Anti-Transgender Discrimination and Oppression in New York City and San Francisco during  
the Gay Liberation Movement, 1965-1975

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An Honors Program Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Arts and Letters  
James Madison University

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by James David Brady

May 2015

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of History, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

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## Introduction

It is undeniable that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals encountered discrimination and oppression throughout America's history. Historians such as Marc Stein, John D' Emilio, Martin Meeker, Martin Duberman, and Margot Canaday, have produced scholarship that illustrates the discrimination and oppression these populations experienced at the hands of American society.<sup>1</sup> Though some scholarship on LGBTQ history exists, very few works of historical scholarship focusing specifically on transgender history exist. Scholars such as Susan Stryker, Betty Luther Hillman, Robert S. Hill, Jessi Gan, Joanne Meyerowitz, Susan Peña, members of the Untorelli Press, and members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California are pioneering scholars because they have published works focusing specifically on transgender history in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The field of transgender

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 1-248; John D' Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 1-286; Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1-320; Marc Duberman, *Stonewall*, (New York, New York: Penguin Group USA Inc., 1994), 1-368; Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009); 1-296.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (New York: Seal Press, 2008), 1-208; Betty Luther Hillman, "'The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in: Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972,'" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (January 2011): 153-81, accessed October 1, 2013, EBSCO Host; Robert S. Hill, "'As a Man I Exist; as a Woman I Live': Heterosexual Transvestism and the Contours of Gender and Sexuality in Postwar America," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007): 1-430, accessed November 10, 2013, <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/57615>; Jessi Gan, "'Still at the Back of the Bus': Sylvia Rivera's Struggle," *Centro Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 124-39, accessed September 2, 2013, EBSCO Host; Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1-400; Susan Peña, "Gender and Sexuality in Latina/o Miami: Documenting Latina Transsexual Activists," *Gender & History* 22, no. 3 (November 2010): 755-72, accessed October 1, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2010.01617.x>; Untorelli Press, *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, March 12, 2013, accessed

studies is growing thanks to these scholars. Scholars such as Kristin G. Esterberg and Alice Echols have produced scholarship that covers gender, the U.S. women's liberation movement, and the intersections between women's liberation and other activist movements.<sup>3</sup> Works such as those by Echols and Esterberg help scholars of transgender history contextualize the experiences of transgender people in the United States by helping these scholars understand activist movements and various views on gender equality. Esterberg illustrates aspects of transgender history by discussing how lesbian activists sometimes believed masculine-looking lesbians were detrimental to lesbians' public image. Echols illustrates aspects of transgender history by discussing the diverse views and strategies within the women's liberation movement. Because—as this project shows—women's liberationists' different strategies and views both helped and hindered transgender causes, Echols's work serves as a useful framework for an analysis of transgender history.

The field of transgender studies was arguably born when Sandy Stone published the “Posttranssexual Manifesto” in 1991, and the field started to truly grow when “the first nonmedical journal dedicated to transgender studies,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, was published in November 2014.<sup>4</sup> Works from the field of transgender studies help scholars

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October 2, 2014, <http://untorellipress.noblogs.org/post/2013/03/12/street-transvestite-action-revolutionaries-survival-revolt-and-queer-antagonist-struggle/>; Members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California, “MTF Transgender Activism in the Tenderloin and Beyond, 1966-1975,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 349-72, accessed October 3, 2013, Alternative Press Index.

<sup>3</sup> Kristin G. Esterberg, “From Accommodation to Liberation: A Social Movement Analysis of Lesbians in the Homophile Movement,” *Gender and Society* 8, no. 3 (September 1994): 424-443, accessed October 1, 2014, JSTOR; Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 1-416.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, “General Editors' Introduction,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 1-18, accessed February 21, 2015, Duke University Press Journals Online; “Announcing the Launch of Transgender Studies Quarterly,” Duke University Press Log, accessed February 21, 2015,

understand what the term “transgender” means. As the field of transgender studies began to take shape in the early 1990s because of Stone’s work, the word “transgender” emerged.<sup>5</sup> The word “transgender” emerged “as a broadly inclusive rubric for describing expressions of gender that vary from expected norms.”<sup>6</sup> Using this definition of the word “transgender,” this project aims to contribute to the field of transgender studies by analyzing the experiences of and the attitudes and treatment towards transgender people in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, when the gay liberation movement was taking place.<sup>7</sup>

Susan Stryker’s works focusing on transgender history in the United States play a significant role in this project. Stryker’s documentary, *Screaming Queens*, contributes to the field of transgender studies by showing several oral histories of transgender and gender non-conforming people who lived in San Francisco’s Tenderloin district during the 1960s and 1970s. Stryker organizes this documentary’s contents both chronologically and thematically to provide a historical narrative of transgender and gender non-conforming communities in the Tenderloin. Testimonies discussing recent years tend to appear at the end of the documentary, while testimonies discussing earlier years tend to appear at the beginning. Some parts of the documentary focus on specific themes. These include people’s experiences transitioning surgically and how Tenderloin residents lacking financial resources met their everyday needs.<sup>8</sup> Stryker’s book titled *Transgender History* also uses a chronological approach. However, this work focuses on the United States as a whole, rather than one specific city. In each section of this

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<http://dukeupress.typepad.com/dukeupresslog/2013/05/announcing-the-launch-of-transgender-studies-quarterly.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, “General Editors’ Introduction,” 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “Brief History of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement in the U.S.,” University of Kentucky, accessed February 21, 2015, [http://www.uky.edu/~lbarr2/gws250spring11\\_files/Page1186.htm](http://www.uky.edu/~lbarr2/gws250spring11_files/Page1186.htm).

<sup>8</sup> *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria*, directed by Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman (USA, 2005), DVD.

book, readers learn about the major events in transgender history and activism that took place. Such events include the publication of *The Transsexual Phenomenon* and the rise of identity politics.<sup>9</sup> These works by Stryker provide this project with many primary source materials that show the voices and first-hand experiences of transgender people. Because this project relies heavily on Stryker's work, this project can shed light on voices other than those of Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, and various cisgender gay and women's liberationists.

The first chapter of this project argues that transgender and gender non-conforming people in New York City and San Francisco were trapped in cycles of poverty, incarceration, and victimization because society disdained their transgression of the gender binary system and gender roles and expectations. The project focuses on New York City and San Francisco because Stryker's works, sources from the Untorelli Press, and sources from OutHistory.org provide many primary sources that can be used to study transgender and gender non-conforming people of these two cities. Furthermore, the focus on New York City and San Francisco enables this project to discuss two major U.S. cities that are located on different coasts. In general, transgender and gender non-conforming people who convinced others they were cisgender suffered the least from cycles of poverty, incarceration, and victimization. These transgender and gender non-conforming people were less likely to be arrested, harassed, beaten, killed, or denied stable employment opportunities. Appearing to fit into society's gender binary system and appearing to subscribe to society's gender roles and expectations were the keys to survival for many transgender and gender non-conforming people. Despite the hardships these people faced, some of the boldest and most courageous forms of activism and resistance were carried out by

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<sup>9</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, 1-208.



transgender and gender non-conforming people of New York City and San Francisco during the 1960s and 1970s.

The first half of this chapter relies almost entirely on oral testimonies of transgender and gender non-conforming people who lived in San Francisco's Tenderloin district during the 1960s and 1970s. All of these oral testimonies come from Susan Stryker's *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* because this documentary is the only source that contains extensive interviews with transgender and gender non-conforming people who lived and worked on the streets of San Francisco's Tenderloin district during the 1960s and 1970s. This section of the chapter includes many quotes from these interviews because these direct quotes are what best illustrate the interviewees' experiences. The second part of this chapter analyzes the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people in New York City. This part of the chapter mainly focuses on transgender activists Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson because primary and secondary sources discussing these women exist. Most primary sources on Rivera and Johnson used in this project come from the Untorelli Press's *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, which is a compilation of transcripts of Rivera and Johnson's interviews and speeches.<sup>10</sup> It also contains copies of pamphlets and articles written by Rivera and Johnson. Since few to no sources extensively cover the experiences of other transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers during the 1960s and 1970s, this part of the chapter attempts to illustrate the oppression and discrimination experienced by transgender and gender non-conforming people in New York City through the speeches, interviews, and pamphlets of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson.

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<sup>10</sup> Untorelli Press, *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, 1-60.

While the first chapter of this project focuses on the day-to-day experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people and the oppression and discrimination they encountered in society, the second chapter focuses on the marginalization, exclusion, discrimination, and oppression that gay liberation activists inflicted upon transgender people. This means the first chapter focuses on transgender and gender non-conforming people's experiences "outside" the gay liberation movement, or their experiences in the broader society, while the second chapter looks at the treatment transgender people encountered when interacting with activists from the gay liberation movement. This can also be referred to as transgender and gender non-conforming people's experiences "within" the gay liberation movement.

The second chapter of this project argues that much of the exclusion and oppression transgender people faced within the gay liberation movement seemed to be fueled by the belief that gender expression would play a key role in the gay liberation movement's success. Many gay liberation activists adopted "assimilationist" approaches to activism. This meant they encouraged sexual minorities to adopt manners of dress and behavior that were accepted by white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class people. Because many transgender people violated these norms of behavior and dress, many gay liberation activists believed inclusion of transgender people and causes would hinder the movement's success. Several lesbian feminists excluded transgender women from their organizations and treated transgender women disrespectfully because they believed "drag" reinforced oppressive stereotypes of womanhood and hindered the success of the women's liberation movement. Various lesbian feminists and other gay liberationists aligned with women's liberation seemed to view the appearances and actions of drag queens and transgender women as forms of oppression by men against women. These feminists did not seem to differentiate between "drag" and "transgender." Though they

objected primarily to drag performances rather than to transgender identity, feminist activists oppressed both transgender women and drag queens. The gay and women's liberationists' criticisms and maltreatment of transgender and gender non-conforming people reveal hypocrisy within the gay liberation activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Gay liberationists employing assimilationist strategies sought to end oppression, but they perpetuated oppression with their treatment towards transgender and gender non-conforming people. Many feminists sought to end America's oppressive gender system and hierarchy—but by criticizing the gender expression of various transgender women and drag queens, these feminists simply reinforced the idea that people born male must identify as men and present themselves in stereotypically masculine manners. Therefore, these feminists reinforced gender roles, gender expectations, and gender-based oppression.

The second chapter of this project uses a variety of editorials and news articles published in gay liberation organizations' publications, as well as editorials and news articles published in newspapers and magazines that catered to lesbian and gay readers. The discussions in these pieces illustrate the attitudes various activists held towards transgender identity and gender non-conformity. By analyzing the word choice and the arguments presented in these pieces, readers can infer the motivations for activists' treatment towards transgender and gender non-conforming people. This chapter heavily relies on one particular publication called *Come Out!* This is because many complete *Come Out!* editions are available in the *Come Out!* Archive of Outhistory.org.<sup>11</sup> *Come Out!* was published by the Gay Liberation Front, one of the militant gay liberation organizations formed after the Stonewall riots of 1969.<sup>12</sup> The GLF published this

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<sup>11</sup> "The *Come Out!* Archive," OutHistory, accessed October 1, 2013, <http://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/come-out-magazine-1969-1972/the-come-out-archive>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

magazine from 1969 to 1972.<sup>13</sup> Unlike many earlier publications of the gay liberation movement, *Come Out!* included pieces on both lesbian and gay issues, rather than just one of the two.<sup>14</sup> For this project, the seven available *Come Out!* issues were examined in order to discover how this publication discusses transgender people and issues. An analysis of all available *Come Out!* editions reveals a major difference between the *Come Out!* articles and the other articles discussed in this chapter: some *Come Out!* articles are written by transgender people and critically examine transgender issues, aiming to increase activists' understandings of transgender identity. However, these articles make up a very small percentage of the total articles featured in the *Come Out!* editions of the *Come Out!* Archive. Excerpts from the other publications covered in the chapter come from secondary sources. This chapter also includes an analysis of a video of one of Sylvia Rivera's speeches as a primary source. By analyzing Rivera's speech and the articles written by transgender people, this chapter aims to illustrate the maltreatment transgender and gender non-conforming people encountered when they joined gay liberation organizations. Analyses of articles written by gay and lesbian activists aim to show the attitudes these activists had towards transgender and gender non-conforming people, as well as the likely reasons for these attitudes.

The objective of this project is to contribute new perspectives to existing scholarship on LGBTQ history in the United States. The first chapter of this project contributes analyses of first-hand accounts of the obstacles transgender and gender non-conforming people faced in San Francisco and New York City during the 1960s and 1970s. This chapter's approach is different from that of works by scholars such as Susan Stryker, Betty Luther Hillman, and the members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California because it compares and contrasts

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people in two different cities and it searches for themes seen in both locations.<sup>15</sup> By discussing two different cities in the first chapter, and examining oppression carried out by activists in the second chapter, this project contributes to existing understandings of the gay liberation movement. The first chapter contributes the idea that transgender and gender non-conforming people in two different major cities experienced very similar struggles. This project's second chapter contributes the idea that gay liberationists were oftentimes both the oppressed and the oppressors. Because one of the main arguments of this project's second chapter is that a hypocrisy existed in the gay liberation movement, and this hypocrisy victimized transgender and gender non-conforming people, this project's second chapter differs from works by Marc Stein, John D' Emilio, Martin Meeker, Martin Duberman, and Margot Canaday.<sup>16</sup> This is because these scholars' works do not present the hypocrisy in gay liberation activists' strategies as their main argument. These works do, however, offer detailed analyses of the oppression and discrimination lesbians and gay men experienced in the United States—and how lesbians and gay men reacted to this injustice.

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<sup>15</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*, 1-208; Hillman, "'The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in: Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972,'" 153-81; Members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California, "MTF Transgender Activism in the Tenderloin and Beyond, 1966-1975," 349-72.

<sup>16</sup> Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 1-248; D' Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 1-286; Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, 1-320; Duberman, *Stonewall*, 1-368; Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, 1-296.

## Chapter One: The Streets of San Francisco and New York City

As of now, Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman's 2005 documentary *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* is the only readily available source that contains extensive filmed interviews with transgender and gender non-conforming people who lived and worked on the streets of San Francisco's Tenderloin district during the 1960s and 1970s. Because so much can be learned from people's oral testimonies, this chapter heavily relies on the interviews featured in *Screaming Queens*. Much like the transgender and gender non-conforming people of New York City, the transgender and gender non-conforming people of San Francisco were trapped in cycles of poverty, incarceration, and victimization because society disapproved of their transgression of the gender binary system and gender roles and expectations. Based on the *Screaming Queens* interviewees' oral testimonies, it is clear that, in general, transgender and gender non-conforming people who convinced others they were cisgender suffered the least from hopeless cycles. These transgender and gender non-conforming people were less likely to be victimized. Appearing to fit into society's gender binary system and appearing to subscribe to society's gender roles and expectations were the keys to survival for many transgender and gender non-conforming people. Despite the hardships these people faced, some of the boldest and most courageous forms of activism and resistance were carried out by transgender and gender non-conforming people during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

According to several of its inhabitants, the Tenderloin district of San Francisco during the late 1960s and early 1970s was the "gay ghetto" and a truly "good time."<sup>18</sup> Bars, nightclubs, restaurants, motels, and salons lined the streets of this lively urban corridor. While the San Francisco police aimed to rid the rest of the city of prostitution and drug use, several visitors to

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<sup>17</sup> *Screaming Queens*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

the Tenderloin district engaged in illegal activities without much fear of law enforcement. This was because police officers frequently collected pay-offs from business owners who wished to disobey the law in the Tenderloin district. Though the law prohibited people from wearing clothing typically worn by members of the opposite sex, drag queen performances and drag balls took place almost nightly at various Tenderloin nightspots—usually because the club owners bribed the police in some way. For many transgender and gender non-conforming people, participation in these drag shows or drag balls was the only safe opportunity to express their gender identity in a manner the police would never approve of on the streets.<sup>19</sup>

Because of the somewhat lax law enforcement and the willingness of some businesses to accept patrons regardless of their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, the Tenderloin district was home to numerous transgender and gender non-conforming people. These “queens,” as they were called, did not fit perfectly into American society’s gender binary system nor its heterosexist, homophobic, and transphobic definition of “respectable” people. In general, the queens were anatomically male but identified as women. The police were less likely to arrest these people for female impersonation or solicitation in the Tenderloin district than they were in any other part of San Francisco. Many of the queens were disowned by their families, so they lived in packs on the streets of the Tenderloin, usually cramming themselves into rooms at motels that were willing to accept them. Since almost no employer was willing to hire a transgender or gender non-conforming person, the queens generally had two job options: performing at nightclubs or prostitution. Most had to choose the latter, since being a performer required a very high level of beauty and talent.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Examinations of interviews with transgender women who lived in the Tenderloin district during the 1960s and 1970s reveal many truths about life as a transgender or gender-nonconforming person in the “gay slums” of San Francisco during the 1960s and 1970s. Though law enforcement in the Tenderloin was significantly less strict than it was elsewhere, police officers in the Tenderloin still targeted and harassed transgender and gender non-conforming people. The queens faced the possibility of arrest and jail time whenever they appeared in public in the Tenderloin. The queens also faced tremendous employment discrimination and high chances of being the victims of violent crimes. However, those whose features enabled them to convince others they were cisgender females were less likely to be victims of violence. Those who managed to earn income as performers were also significantly less likely to be victims because most dangers tended to present themselves on the streets, where the prostitutes did their work. Despite being poor, confined to one section of the city, jailed, raped, harassed, and beaten, these residents of the Tenderloin district carried out one of the most courageous acts of resistance during the homophile and gay liberation movements: leading the Compton’s Cafeteria Riots of 1966.<sup>21</sup> The actions and experiences of the “queens” of the Tenderloin show that many transgender and gender non-conforming people of the 1960s and 1970s dealt with harsh realities and courageously fought for fair and equitable treatment.<sup>22</sup>

When the former Tenderloin residents of Stryker’s *Screaming Queens* speak about their lives in the Tenderloin district during the late 1960s and early 1970s, three common themes emerge: police harassment, the struggles of finding stable employment, and street violence.

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<sup>21</sup> The term “homophile movement” generally refers to the gay and lesbian activism that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. The gay liberation movement occurred during the 1970s, as well as during the late 1960s. “The Stage,” Cornell University, accessed February 27, 2015, [http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/HRC/exhibition/stage/stage\\_3.html](http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/HRC/exhibition/stage/stage_3.html).

<sup>22</sup> *Screaming Queens*.



These were the main obstacles transgender and gender-nonconforming people faced as they carried on with their day-to-day lives. Due to laws against cross-dressing, police raided bars, nightclubs, restaurants, and other establishments simply because transgender and gender non-conforming people congregated there. Whenever transgender and gender non-conforming people appeared in public, they faced chances of arrest. During arrest and incarceration, law enforcement officials degraded and humiliated transgender and gender non-conforming people. These officers carried out acts many people today would agree are unconstitutional and unethical. However, the police were not the only enemies. Several of the women in *Screaming Queens* mention that transgender and gender-nonconforming people were attacked and killed by civilians. Several crimes occurred on the streets of the Tenderloin, and walking these streets as a prostitute certainly involved risks of danger. Unfortunately, many transgender and gender non-conforming people did not have employment prospects outside the field of prostitution because they faced tremendous amounts of employment discrimination. Those who managed to earn income as drag performers in nightclubs were less likely to face the dangers many transgender and gender non-conforming prostitutes faced. When analyzing the oral testimonies of the former Tenderloin residents featured in *Screaming Queens*, it is clear that a transphobic and homophobic society deprived transgender and gender non-conforming people in the Tenderloin of their right to live as fully-fledged citizens. American society did this by subjecting transgender and gender non-conforming people to high levels of violence, arrest and police harassment, and employment discrimination.<sup>23</sup>

According to *Screaming Queens* interviewee and former Tenderloin resident Suzan Cooke, “the police would give the people who were of indeterminate gender the message that

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

they belonged pretty much in the Tenderloin, which at the time was kind of a gay ghetto, a very slummy gay ghetto.”<sup>24</sup> However, even if these people of “indeterminate gender” remained in the Tenderloin, they still faced police harassment. Interviews with transgender and gender non-conforming former residents of the Tenderloin reveal that police harassment occurred frequently in the Tenderloin. Most arrests of transgender and gender-nonconforming people were prompted by laws against cross-dressing, so people who convinced officers they were cisgender were less likely to be harassed and arrested by police officers. Interviews with former Tenderloin residents in *Screaming Queens* reveal that a primary goal of the police department was to keep sexual and gender minorities away from the general public. This is likely why “people who were of indeterminate gender” received the “message that they pretty much belonged in the Tenderloin,” a low-income district that was full of crime. Even in this district, police harassment existed. Therefore, most transgender and gender-nonconforming people in the Tenderloin never seemed to be safe from the police.<sup>25</sup>

The *Screaming Queens* stories about police harassment show a trend: those who convinced others they were cisgender were less likely to be arrested or harassed by police. There are two main reasons why “looking” cisgender played this role. First, the police arrested transgender and gender non-conforming people for “female impersonation.” People who wore women’s clothes and appeared to be anatomically female were unlikely to be arrested for “female impersonation.” Second, many transgender and gender non-conforming people who could not land stable jobs because of their inability to convince others they were cisgender—or because of their inability to reach cisgender-centric standards of beauty—worked as prostitutes. Prostitutes were more likely to be arrested and harassed by police than were non-prostitutes

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

because prostitutes did their work in public and were oftentimes homeless. Spending so much time on the streets increased the chances of these people being seen by police officers.<sup>26</sup>

In *Screaming Queens*, an interviewee named Tamara reveals her personal experiences with police officers in the Tenderloin. Analyses of her words show that transgender and gender non-conforming people truly faced arrest at any time—regardless of what they were doing. Simply appearing in public and not having a physical appearance deemed “respectable” by the police led to arrest for many people. Tamara’s recollection of her experiences with police officers shows that officers were disrespectful and abusive towards transgender and gender non-conforming people during arrests:

Basically, we went there [to Compton’s Cafeteria] to gossip about what we did, and to let people know that we were alive and we survived the night. We got harassed quite a bit by the police in Compton’s. A lot of times they would just come in and pick us up, if we were eating, for no reason, and put us in jail for female impersonation. I had one policeman that hated me with a passion, and every time he’d see me, he’d say “get in the paddy wagon,” and I’d say “I just got my hamburger,” and he’d say, “eat it Monday, when you get out.”<sup>27</sup>

Many of the women interviewed by Stryker in *Screaming Queens* claim Compton’s Cafeteria in the Tenderloin district was one of the few public places they could congregate in. Compton’s was open at all hours, until the Compton’s Cafeteria riots occurred, and the management did not bar transgender and gender non-conforming people from entering. Therefore, many “street queens” spent time at Compton’s after working as prostitutes all night. It was a social outlet for them, since many bars, nightclubs, and other restaurants prohibited them from entering. As Tamara’s statement reveals, police officers raided Compton’s and arrested patrons for “female impersonation.” Tamara’s statement shows that Compton’s was both a safe haven and a danger zone for many Tenderloin residents. Patrons of Compton’s were safe from the street violence

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

they could face when working as prostitutes, and they were in a place where they could gossip and relax with their friends. However, they were also in a public place where the police could easily see them, and the testimonies from *Screaming Queens* show that just being seen by a police officer meant arrest and possible incarceration for transgender and gender-nonconforming people.<sup>28</sup>

Tamara's story about her interactions with an individual police officer reveals that people arrested for female impersonation were oftentimes simply sitting, standing, walking, eating, or carrying out any other mundane and harmless task. It is likely that the officer arresting Tamara enjoyed arresting her and depriving her of her freedom. Saying "eat it Monday, when you get out," is disrespectful and exemplifies the lack of care the officer feels towards Tamara. Also, the officer's statement shows that he knows Tamara will be released from custody fairly soon. Because Tamara will be released "Monday," it is clear that female impersonation was not considered a serious crime, but it was still a crime. A practical police officer would ignore Tamara's violation of "female impersonation" laws, since Tamara's actions did not harm anybody. She was merely ordering a hamburger at the time of her arrest. The fact that the officer arrested Tamara and treated her disrespectfully despite the pettiness of her "offense" shows that the officer probably had personal biases against transgender and gender non-conforming people. The officer did not arrest her to protect and serve the community; he used the law as an excuse to oppress transgender and gender non-conforming people.<sup>29</sup>

When analyzing the statements of women interviewed for *Screaming Queens*, the bias and hateful attitudes police officers held emerge as common themes. The stories these women share suggest that police officers used "female impersonation" and cross-dressing laws as

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

excuses to degrade transgender and gender non-conforming people and deprive these people of their freedom to live as they please. A statement from a former Tenderloin resident named Amanda St. James shows that police officers seemed to be motivated by their desires to intimidate and harass transgender and gender non-conforming people:

They'd drive us all around North Beach, and all around the Tenderloin, before they'd even take us to jail. Then they'd strip us, when they got us in the drunk tank, you know, they'd search for drugs. And it was a little embarrassing being in full drag. You were isolated on a tier with other transsexuals. You had no contact with any of the other prisoners on the outside. We were in lock-down most of the time. And it wasn't that I had done anything wrong; it was for female impersonation. I wasn't bothering anybody. But I was dressing as a woman, the way I feel, and so they put me in jail, shaved my head—or I refused to let them shave my head and they put me in the hole, in lock-up. One girl was in there sixty days, in the hole, because she wouldn't let them cut her hair. That's how important it was to us back then. You know, it was like they were trying to humiliate us, that we weren't human beings so they should humiliate us.<sup>30</sup>

If the police officers truly wished to protect the public and uphold the law, they would have tried to detain suspects of crimes in quick and efficient ways. Parading people around the city is unnecessary—this does nothing more than humiliate the people under arrest. Because the officers drove transgender and gender non-conforming people “all around North Beach, and all around the Tenderloin, before they'd even take us to jail,” it is clear that the officers wanted to make the experience of being arrested for female impersonation as degrading as possible. Officers put extra effort into the process of detaining transgender and gender non-conforming people just to degrade and oppress them. St. James's words about her hair show how little law enforcement officials cared about the well-being and comfort of transgender and gender non-conforming people. When she says “That's how important it was to us back then,” she suggests that for many people, long hair is what helped them feel more comfortable in their bodies. Hair was a major part of their identity. Shaving someone's hair off does nearly nothing to increase

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

public safety or safety within a jail. It simply humiliates people, and could make some people feel tremendously uncomfortable and depressed. The fact that people detained for female impersonation offenses were oftentimes in solitary confinement also shows that law enforcement officials made the experience of being arrested for female impersonation more degrading than the experience of being arrested for a different offense. St. James's words show that people detained for female impersonation felt isolated and dehumanized because they received even less respect than did other inmates and arrestees.

The general trend seen in the police-related stories shared by women from *Screaming Queens* is as follows: law enforcement officials were tremendously biased against people who were not cisgender. They considered it criminal to have a gender identity or form of gender expression that fell outside of a rigid gender binary system. The words of Suzan Cooke, who was arrested for "obstructing the sidewalk," show that officers labeled transgender and gender non-conforming people as sub-human and deserving of disrespect and oppression:

The first night I got in San Francisco, I was taken and arrested for one of those famous crimes, "obstructing the sidewalk," which was my introduction to the infamous TAC squad, which was a roving band of thug cops which patrolled the various and sundry neighborhoods in San Francisco, and generally made life unpleasant for people who didn't particularly fit their definition of what a decent human being was. And I was one of these people who looked so in-between that the police were provoked by my being.<sup>31</sup>

Cooke's statement, "I was one of these people who looked so in-between that the police were provoked by my being," reveals a truth about everyday life for transgender and gender non-conforming people in San Francisco during the 1960s and 1970s: their mere presence led to detainment by police. Law enforcement officials seemed to want to rid the city of people they did not consider "decent human" beings—people who were not cisgender. Therefore, in the words of Cooke, they "patrolled the various and sundry neighborhoods" in order to harass

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

transgender and gender non-conforming people. Victims of such police discrimination did not necessarily do anything that harmed other individuals or society as a whole—they were simply carrying out mundane, everyday tasks. An unnamed interviewee featured in *Screaming Queens* even mentioned that she “went to the grocery store once and got thrown into jail for being a female impersonator.” In the eyes of law enforcement officials, mundane tasks such as going to the grocery store were criminal if they were carried out by people whose physical appearances did not seem “congruent” with the sex they were assigned at birth.<sup>32</sup>

Though police officers in San Francisco were a major threat to the freedom and well-being of transgender and gender non-conforming people, they were certainly not the only threat. Civilians in the Tenderloin district committed some of the most violent crimes against transgender and gender non-conforming people. Every interviewee in Stryker’s documentary references the street violence transgender and gender non-conforming people faced when they simply appeared in public in the Tenderloin. The high number of crimes committed against transgender and gender non-conforming people prompted individuals to take several safety precautions when going about their day-to-day lives.<sup>33</sup> Tenderloin residents who worked as prostitutes truly faced dangers out on the streets. The following quote stated by Tamara illustrated several of the challenges and fears transgender and gender non-conforming prostitutes of the Tenderloin faced:

You'd hear about murders, or you'd know somebody. But still, the next night, you didn't care. You had to make your money. I think going with a trick, the first five minutes with them is the scariest. Because you don't know if you're going to go to jail, or if somebody is going to pull a knife or a gun on you. That's why a lot of the girls were taking drugs so they could work the streets. We always had to load our handbags up. I'd drink a pint, or half-pint of southern comfort, and put the empty bottle in my bag. When people got out of line, we'd crack it over their head. And if that didn't put them down, then we took off

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

our shoe-high heels. Because if they were going to mess with us, we weren't going to let people hurt us. And especially these girls that had their faces pumped up with silicone, if you touched their face, and tried to hurt their face, they'll kill you.<sup>34</sup>

The phrase “But still, the next night, you didn’t care. You had to make your money” shows how employment discrimination and violence oftentimes went hand-in-hand. Because of the high number of stories violence, transgender and gender non-conforming prostitutes feared working on the streets. It is not entirely clear how “taking drugs” would have protected a prostitute from violence while working in the Tenderloin. Perhaps this means that prostitutes kept drugs in their purses so they could bargain with attackers. This could also mean that prostitutes purchased drugs in order to form alliances with drug dealers who also worked in the Tenderloin. Another possible interpretation of Tamara’s words regarding drugs could be that prostitutes abused drugs because they felt hopeless leading lives full of danger. The safety precautions Tamara describes also show how afraid people were of danger. Hiding a bottle in a bag and preparing to use the bottle as a weapon takes time, preparation, effort, and bravery. The fact that people bothered to hide bottles in their bags and prepare to use them as weapons shows that safety really was a major concern. When Tamara mentions “girls that had their faces pumped up with silicone,” she illustrates an intersection between violence and economic survival. Silicone helped several transgender prostitutes achieve a physical appearance deemed feminine and beautiful by customers. Such a physical appearance helped them ensure they would continue having customers and money. Being seen as physically attractive and feminine also helped several transgender and gender non-conforming people earn money as nightclub and bar entertainers. Tamara shows that some transgender and gender non-conforming people truly relied on their attractive faces and silicone injections. Without these assets, it would be even harder for these

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



transgender and gender non-conforming people to support themselves. That is why “if you touched their face, and tried to hurt their face, they'll kill you.” Furthermore, it is likely that paying for silicone was tremendously difficult for the transgender and gender non-conforming people who worked as prostitutes, given the precariousness of the job. Therefore, silicone injections were probably prized possessions of those who managed to get them.<sup>35</sup>

The quotes of transgender and gender non-conforming former residents of the Tenderloin district show that transgender and gender non-conforming people living in the Tenderloin during the late 1960s and early 1970s feared for their safety for two main reasons: anti-transgender hate crimes and the Tenderloin’s general violence. Felicia from *Screaming Queens* said, “It was dangerous, dressing up like a girl, and still having men's parts there. It was dangerous for all of us. Some girls were getting beaten up for being men. Some girls have been killed for being men.”<sup>36</sup> This quote shows that transgender and gender non-conforming people feared being victimized based on their identity. Though *Screaming Queens* interviewees say the police essentially confined transgender and gender non-conforming people to the Tenderloin by not harassing them as much there, and the interviewees also mention that the Tenderloin was unofficially San Francisco’s district for gender and sexual minorities, transgender and gender non-conforming people had reason to fear oppression based on their identities.

Illustrating the fact that the Tenderloin had high levels of crime in general, and the transgender and gender non-conforming residents faced threats unrelated to their identities, Amanda from *Screaming Queens* said, “You had to be either able to kick ass, or get your ass kicked. If somebody was on your turf you'd just lay them out and keep walking, and keep your

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

eye on your back. That's how it was in the Tenderloin. You had to be that way.<sup>37</sup> This quote alludes to the drug dealing, prostitution, and other illegal activities that took place in the Tenderloin district. Amanda's discussion of "turf" reflects the violent competition among prostitutes and drug dealers on the streets of the Tenderloin. By saying people had to either "kick ass" or get their "ass kicked," Amanda assumes that violence was almost inevitable in the Tenderloin district—and it was especially inevitable in the lives of people who roamed the streets earning money illegally. People who were not willing and able to mark their territory using physical force were simply vulnerable to the physical force of others. The desperate need to mark territory and earn money there likely stemmed from the fact that transgender and gender non-conforming people had tremendous amounts of difficulty gaining employment, leaving prostitution as the only option for many.

An examination of the words of *Screaming Queens* interviewees reveals that employment discrimination was a real problem for transgender and gender non-conforming people in San Francisco during the 1960s and 1970s. It was nearly impossible for transgender and gender non-conforming people to obtain legal employment because employers did not want to hire transgender or gender non-conforming employees. An unnamed interviewee featured in *Screaming Queens* illustrated the obstacles faced by transgender and gender non-conforming people when seeking work. This quote makes it clear why so many people simply turned to prostitution:

I went out and tried to get a job, in men's clothing. "You're too effeminate," "you're a faggot," "you're a sissy," "you're this, you're that." So I said, "Well groovy." So I put on the clothes that I usually wear, which is girl's clothes. I went out and tried to get a job as a woman. This doesn't work. You get a job, you work for a day or two, a week, a month, or whatever it boils down, and somebody comes along that recognizes you, who prefers to be a hooker and a tramp, turns around and turns your name in to the boss and says, like,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

"so-and-so is such-and-such," and that's the end of that job. So finally you reach a point where you get disgusted with the whole damn bit and what you do is you turn around and you go out on the street. And you find out you can make a hundred bucks a night and you say "to hell with it." Why should I be legitimate? Why should I be respectable? Why should I be anything?<sup>38</sup>

The events mentioned and the word choices in this quote illustrate how many people in the 1960s and 1970s subscribed to what can be called "respectability politics."<sup>39</sup> Respectability politics served as a main reason why so many transgender and gender non-conforming people could not find stable and legal jobs in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Because the speaker ends the speech by saying "Why should I be legitimate? Why should I be respectable? Why should I be anything?" it is clear that the speaker has been forced to accept a sad truth about gender expression in the United States at this time: only people who are cisgender and subscribe to gender norms and expectations are treated as respectable people, people who are worthy of holding stable jobs and participating fully in public life. It appears that the speaker associates "legitimacy" and "respectability" with being cisgender because the speaker had to put on the guise of a cisgender person in order to stand a chance at being treated with respect in the work world. The benefits of being cisgender in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s are truly apparent when the speaker mentions the struggles to find employment as "an effeminate" man. The speaker encountered hostility when seeking a job as a man who transgresses the expectations of men at the time. When employers and other individuals in the work force noted the speaker's gender non-conformity, they called the speaker offensive names and denied the speaker employment opportunities. When the speaker had the gender expression of a woman, and people believed the speaker was a cisgender female, the speaker was offered employment. However, the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Frederick C. Harris, "The Rise of Respectability Politics," *Dissent* 61, no. 1 (2014): 33-37, accessed March 3, 2015, EBSCOhost.

speaker only managed to keep jobs as long as the employers and coworkers believed the speaker was a cisgender female.

This discrimination is very likely related to the discrimination lesbians and gay men faced when searching for jobs during the 1960s and 1970s. The employers might have been unwilling to hire the speaker when the speaker was dressed in men's clothes because of their bias against gay men. Regardless of the reasons for such discrimination, the speaker still left the job search with the following lesson learned: gender and sexual minorities were not considered respectable people, therefore they were not deemed worthy of "respectable" employment. It is clear that the speaker does not consider prostitution "respectable" employment because the speaker brings up the rhetorical question "Why should I be respectable?" after admitting to working as a prostitute. Though the speaker appears to claim prostitution is not the type of work "respectable" and "legitimate" people do, the speaker does appear to feel somewhat liberated as a prostitute. By saying "to hell with it" and then asking a series of rhetorical questions, the speaker seems to admit the quest for legal and stable employment is too taxing and not worth the struggle. The job search and the brutalities of the working world have left the speaker hopeless and emotionally drained. When the speaker finally had the chance to wear women's clothes and make money, the speaker felt relieved and began to question why anybody from a gender or sexual minority group would tolerate the transphobic and homophobic practices of "respectable" and "legitimate" working environments.

To assume all transgender and gender non-conforming people who gave up on securing "legitimate" employment and turned to the Tenderloin's streets had the same experiences trying to earn a living is an oversimplification. As the oral testimonies in *Screaming Queens* show, there was diversity among the transgender and gender non-conforming populations in the

Tenderloin. This diversity is especially apparent when analyzing how these people earned money in order to survive. In general, those who had the physical appearance of a cisgender female who fit society's definition of beauty had better employment prospects. These people performed as female impersonators in nightclubs, where they earned more money than did the prostitutes and faced fewer dangers than did the prostitutes. Those who did not perform at nightclubs usually had to work as prostitutes. Because police officers and violent criminals lurked the streets, prostitutes faced much more danger than did female impersonators when doing their work. In general, the main threat facing female impersonators each night was the possibility of a police raid. Because of laws against cross-dressing and female impersonation, performers were vulnerable to arrest and harassment in the event of a police raid at a club or bar.<sup>40</sup>

Though police raids occurred, the oral testimony of Aleisha in *Screaming Queens* shows that some Tenderloin nightspots were not vulnerable to police raids because the club owners paid police officers off. Aleisha's testimony also shows that being physically attractive saved transgender and gender non-conforming people from some problems, but certainly not all. Aleisha, who worked as a drag performer, said police officers were treated "very well" when they entered the club she worked at. People who worked at the club, including the performers, were taught to treat the officers with utmost respect. Therefore, it can be assumed that under-the-table deals between club owners and corrupt police officers sometimes helped ensure the safety of transgender and gender non-conforming people who performed at nightclubs. The following testimony of Aleisha's illustrates how transgender and gender non-conforming people seen as physically attractive did not necessarily endure the same hardships that other transgender and gender non-conforming Tenderloin residents dealt with. However, her testimony also shows that

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<sup>40</sup> *Screaming Queens*.

being attractive and working as a performer did not save her from all dangers faced by transgender and gender non-conforming people:

I had the freedom to be a big sissy on stage, yes, but I did not have the freedom to live my life outside, or off of stage. Had I not been born with the face, and I had great legs, and could sing a bit, you know, dance a bit. All of those attributes that were such an embarrassment when I was growing up, “You’re too pretty to be a boy,” the complexion, all of those things that I hated so as a child saved me. That’s exactly what saved me. Or I’m sure that, yeah, I’d have been selling my ass on Turk Street, saving those pennies, and looking for a john to take me through it.<sup>41</sup>

When Aleisha says “I did not have the freedom to live my life outside, or off of stage,” she acknowledges that transgender and gender-nonconforming people faced high levels of violence, harassment, oppression, and discrimination in public. Because she worked at a nightclub where the owners likely bribed police officers, Aleisha was safe from many of the Tenderloin’s dangers when working. When Aleisha describes her features that “saved” her, she shows that the standards of beauty female impersonators were expected to live up to mirrored the appearances of cisgender females who were deemed attractive. This aspect of her testimony creates a parallel between her testimony and that of the unnamed speaker who spoke about the struggles of finding employment. Transgender women who looked like cisgender women tended to face less hostility than did transgender women who did not look cisgender. This is demonstrated by the fact that both Aleisha and the unnamed speaker faced hostility when they presented themselves as men transgressing gender norms and expectations of the time. When Aleisha says “I’d have been selling my ass on Turk Street...,” it is clear she has noticed the trend in the employment prospects of transgender and gender non-conforming people during the 1960s and 1970s: those who were seen as attractive, or those who convinced others they were cisgender, were more

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

likely to be considered respectable. Those deemed more respectable encountered fewer obstacles and dangers when trying to earn a living or simply live their lives.<sup>42</sup>

The Compton's Cafeteria Riot of 1966 exemplifies the strength of the Tenderloin's transgender and gender non-conforming residents to fight injustice. According to the interviewees of *Screaming Queens*, several sexual and gender minorities—many of whom were homeless youths living in the Tenderloin—formed an activist organization called Vanguard with the intent of ending the violence, harassment, oppression, and discrimination sexual and gender minorities faced in their day-to-day lives. Vanguard members frequently congregated in Compton's Cafeteria at night, along with the transgender and gender non-conforming street workers. According to interviewees, the management and employees of Compton's Cafeteria disdained what they considered to be an overly militant attitude displayed by Vanguard members. The restaurant's managers and workers oftentimes called the police, claiming customers were behaving in rowdy manners. When the police showed up, the workers and managers almost always blamed the alleged rowdiness on Compton's transgender and gender non-conforming customers.<sup>43</sup>

As police raids at Compton's continued and more and more transgender and gender non-conforming people were arrested, anger among Tenderloin residents increased. Exact dates and details of the Compton's uprising are unclear because the event was not covered by mainstream media outlets and detailed police records of the event no longer exist. Information on the uprising comes from oral testimonies, such as those featured in *Screaming Queens*. According to the *Screaming Queens* interviewees, the riot started when a drag queen threw her coffee at the face of a police officer who tried to arrest her. Soon after, about 60 gender and sexual

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

minorities—most of whom were transgender or gender non-conforming—began to fight back, defending their right to congregate. The police called for back-up, and the rioting continued outside, resulting in many broken windows and cars. Several people were arrested, but many of those who participated were proud that they stood up for their rights. For so long, the police had harassed and arrested innocent transgender and gender non-conforming people and the managers and workers at Compton's enabled such injustice to occur by calling the police and blaming transgender and gender non-conforming people for being too rowdy. After the riot, Vanguard members and various transgender and gender non-conforming people picketed Compton's, and Compton's stopped accepting transgender and gender non-conforming patrons. Compton's also started closing its doors at midnight.<sup>44</sup>

Transgender and gender non-conforming people in New York City during the 1960s and 1970s faced many of the same obstacles as did those in San Francisco during the same time period—hopeless cycles of incarceration, poverty, and victimization. Information regarding the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people in New York City during the 1960s and 1970s can be found in oral testimonies, personal written accounts, and articles featured in gay liberation organizations' publications. Most information on the street queens of New York City comes from the accounts of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, two transgender women who led many battles for the equality and freedom of gender and sexual minorities. Rivera and Johnson founded and joined organizations, coordinated several acts of resistance, and found themselves in numerous feuds—with law enforcement, government, and gay and lesbian activists. When analyzing the accounts of Rivera and Johnson, it is clear that the street queens of New York City were deprived of their rights to live freely and safely because of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



police harassment, violence, and employment discrimination. It is evident that many street queens occupied New York City's streets, because Rivera and Johnson founded an organization called Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries in order to help fellow homeless transgender and gender non-conforming people.<sup>45</sup> New York City's street queens faced tremendous amounts of adversity, yet they were brave enough to lead rebellions and organize politically in order to fight injustice.

One of the biggest obstacles New York City's street queens faced was police harassment. By simply appearing in public, transgender and gender non-conforming people risked being arrested and placed in jail. When New York City police officers arrested transgender and gender non-conforming people, they usually charged them with prostitution, intent to engage in prostitution, or violating laws against cross-dressing. One quote from an interview with Sylvia Rivera reveals that police officers seemed motivated to oppress and discriminate against transgender and gender non-conforming people:

The early 60s was not a good time for drag queens, effeminate boys or boys that wore makeup like we did. Back then we were beat up by the police, by everybody. I didn't really come out as a drag queen until the late 60s. When drag queens were arrested, what degradation there was. I remember the first time I got arrested; I wasn't even in full drag. I was walking down the street and the cops just snatched me. We always felt that the police were the real enemy. We expected nothing better than to be treated like we were animals—and we were. We were stuck in a bullpen like a bunch of freaks. We were disrespected. A lot of us were beaten up and raped. When I ended up going to jail, to do 90 days, they tried to rape me.<sup>46</sup>

Like the testimonies of the Tenderloin residents, this testimony alludes to the humiliation involved with being arrested for not subscribing to society's gender norms and expectations.

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<sup>45</sup> Leslie Feinberg, "Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries," *Workers World*, last modified September 24, 2006, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.workers.org/2006/us/lavender-red-73/>.

<sup>46</sup> Sylvia Rivera, "'I'm Glad I was in the Stonewall Riot:' An Interview with Sylvia Rivera," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, by the Untorelli Press, 12-14, [http://untorellipress.noblogs.org/files/2013/03/STAR\\_Page\\_01.jpg](http://untorellipress.noblogs.org/files/2013/03/STAR_Page_01.jpg).

Rivera makes it clear that she found the experience of being arrested dehumanizing with her use of the phrase “what degradation there was.” In another parallel with the testimonies of the Tenderloin residents, Rivera was arrested for simply “walking down the street.” This means transgender and gender non-conforming people of the 1960s and 1970s were essentially deprived of their right to exist in public. It did not matter what they did in public; simply appearing in public was considered a crime. Because transgender and gender non-conforming people essentially did not have the right to live freely and safely in America during the 1960s and 1970s, Rivera states “we expected nothing better than to be treated like we were animals.” This quote also shows that incarcerated transgender and gender non-conforming people experienced hardships that were very similar to those experienced by incarcerated transgender and gender non-conforming people in the Tenderloin. In both New York and San Francisco, transgender and gender non-conforming people were isolated from the rest of the prisoner population. Rivera references this practice by saying “We were stuck in a bullpen like a bunch of freaks.”<sup>47</sup>

Both Rivera and her friend Marsha P. Johnson experienced several arrests and incarcerations.<sup>48</sup> Because the *Screaming Queens* interviewees and Rivera discuss arrests in their interviews, it appears that a cycle of incarceration impacted the lives of both New York City and San Francisco transgender and gender non-conforming people. In the following quote, Johnson shows how police not only snatched transgender and gender non-conforming people off the street to arrest them; they also entrapped transgender and gender non-conforming people in order to arrest and incarcerate them:

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Marsha P. Johnson, “Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary: An Interview with Marsha P. Johnson,” in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, 21-29.

They just come up and grab you. One transvestite they grabbed right out of her lover's arms, and took her down. The charges were solicitation. I was busted on direct prostitution. I picked up a detective – he was in a New Jersey car. I said, "Do you work for the police?" And he said no, and he propositioned me and told me he'd give me fifteen dollars, and then told me I was under arrest. So I had to do twenty days in jail.<sup>49</sup>

Based on this quote, it appears that police officers used "solicitation" charges in order to oppress transgender and gender non-conforming people—especially those who were poor and lived on the streets. Because the "transvestite" arrested was simply walking down the street and in "her lover's arms," it is unlikely the police had reason to believe she was engaging in solicitation. However, they arrested her anyway. All she did was appear in public. Since the oral testimonies of Rivera and Johnson mention prostitution and solicitation charges many times, it is likely that the police oftentimes assumed transgender and gender-nonconforming people were prostitutes. This assumption likely played a role in the arrests of transgender and gender non-conforming people who were simply trying to carry on with their day-to-day lives.

According to Johnson in another part of this interview, transgender and gender non-conforming people rarely succeeded in getting lawyers to represent them following their arrests. They also struggled to get out on bail. People with long records of prostitution had to pay higher fines to get out of jail on bail. For example, Johnson mentions in the interview that her last bail cost 1,000 dollars, and the law enforcement officials refused to lower it to 500 dollars. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a fine of 1,000 dollars was equivalent to a fine of about 6,000 or 7,000 dollars in 2014.<sup>50</sup> In the interview, Johnson mentions a customer, who turned out to be a police officer in disguise, offering her 15 dollars in exchange for sexual activity. With customers only paying roughly 15 dollars per sexual act, it is clear that Johnson's income was very precarious

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "CPI Inflation Calculator," Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed November 1, 2014, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

and paying the 1,000 fine would have been nearly impossible. Johnson does not mention whether or not she paid this fee. She does, however, mention that law enforcement officials made a deal with her before her trial. In this meeting, she agreed to plead guilty to prostitution so she could be released. By pleading guilty, she worsened her record and increased the bail price she would face if arrested for prostitution again. However, it is not entirely clear that Johnson pleaded guilty in order to be released because Johnson also mentions serving a 20-day jail sentence. She mentions that stories like this one are quite normal within the transgender and gender non-conforming community in New York City.<sup>51</sup>

When analyzing these stories that Johnson shares, it appears that poor transgender and gender non-conforming people were trapped in a hopeless cycle of poverty and incarceration. It is therefore clear that transgender and gender non-conforming people did not only face obstacles such as police harassment, street violence, and employment discrimination; they also faced hardships that were complex and cyclical. As Rivera's interview shows, many transgender and gender non-conforming people were sexually abused in jail and the guards did not always try to prevent the abuse. When Rivera served 90 days in jail for a drug-related charge, prisoners in her cell tried to rape her. Rivera shouted for the guards, but the guard who showed up simply said, "Enjoy yourselves, boys, have fun."<sup>52</sup>

While Johnson actually served time for prostitution, Rivera was lucky enough to only be charged with "loitering with the intention of prostitution." However, Rivera still had to deal with dehumanizing police practices that targeted and oppressed transgender and gender non-

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<sup>51</sup> Marsha P. Johnson, "Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary: An Interview with Marsha P. Johnson," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, 21-29.

<sup>52</sup> Sylvia Rivera, "Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, by the Untorelli Press, 40-55.

conforming people. Rivera was arrested for “loitering with the intention of prostitution” several times when she was simply standing on a street corner. Though it is true Rivera worked as a prostitute, the fact that she was accused of “loitering with the intention of prostitution” for simply appearing in public shows how transphobic many police officers were. The fact that someone is standing on a street corner is not sufficient enough as evidence to prove someone intends to engage in prostitution. Therefore, it appears that many police officers used “prostitution” accusations as a way to detain and oppress transgender and gender non-conforming people. In order to be accused of prostitution, one had to actually solicit money for sex or be entrapped. For this reason, Johnson served time for prostitution and had a more lengthy criminal history than did Rivera, who emphasizes precautions she took when working. In the following quote, Rivera describes the one time she came close to being arrested for prostitution, rather than just “loitering with the intent of prostitution:”

I did get into cars with undercover agents, not realizing until too late. I had one cop pull a gun out on me and say, “You’re gonna do me or I’m gonna take you in.” I’m like, “Fine, take me in, I don’t care.” Then I pop the door open to jump out of the car. He says, “If you get out of the car, I’ll shoot...” I say, “Aw, you’ll be doing the world a favor, one less queer in the world, one less junkie...one less ho!” And I got out very grandly, walked to the corner, and then ran like a bat out of hell.<sup>53</sup>

This passage serves as an example of how police officers sometimes took advantage of transgender and gender non-conforming prostitutes’ fears. Stories like this show that poor transgender and gender non-conforming people were truly at the mercy of New York City’s police. In general, these people did not have any job options other than prostitution. Therefore, when police cracked down on prostitution, they were cracking down on transgender and gender non-conforming people who were trapped in vicious cycles of poverty and incarceration.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

In addition to cycles, transgender and gender non-conforming people in New York City oftentimes found themselves being the victims of street crimes. In her interview, Johnson says “I’ve almost lost my life five times; I think I’m like a cat” when talking about the several times people tried to kill or physically harm her.<sup>54</sup> One time, when Johnson was trying to have sex with a man in the Bronx in order to earn money for her trip back to the city, she nearly lost her life. Upon discovering Johnson had male genitalia, the man pulled out a knife and forced her to have sex with him without pay. Another time, Johnson was about to have sex with a soldier for pay. She told the soldier she had male genitalia, but the soldier did not believe her. Upon noticing her genitalia, the soldier took out a gun and threatened to shoot her. Johnson also mentions in her interview that she was robbed by two men when she was soliciting sex. The two men tried to blindfold her, tie her up, put a “thing” around her neck, and toss her body out of the car. Another time, a customer simply took out his gun and then snatched Johnson’s purse while she was in a car with him.<sup>55</sup>

As the stories about the violence and police harassment Rivera and Johnson encountered show, there are many parallels between the experiences of the Tenderloin residents and the New York City residents. Another similarity is the employment discrimination. Johnson states in her interview “I know many transvestites that are working as women, but I want to see the day when transvestites can go in and say, ‘My name is Mister So-and-So and I’d like a job as Miss So-and-So!’ I can get a job as Miss Something-or-Other, but I have to hide the fact that I’m a male.”<sup>56</sup> Based on this quote, it is clear that Johnson believes transgender and gender non-conforming

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<sup>54</sup> Marsha P. Johnson, “Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary: An Interview with Marsha P. Johnson,” in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, 21-29.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

people are only able to get jobs when the employers think they are cisgender. According to Johnson, transgender and gender non-conforming people must successfully convince others that they are cisgender people who conform to society's gender roles and expectations if they want to obtain and keep a job. Johnson also says "It's easier for a transsexual than a transvestite [to get a job]. If you are a transsexual it's much easier because you become more feminine, and you have a bust-line, and the hair falls off your face and off your legs, and the muscles fall out of your arms. But I think it will be quite a while before a natural transvestite will be able to get a job, unless she's a young transvestite with no hair on her face and very feminine looking."<sup>57</sup> This part of the quote elaborates on the idea mentioned in the first part, and it partially explains why so many transgender and gender non-conforming people turned to prostitution out of desperation. The physical features Johnson lists, such as having a bust line and not having body hair, are extremely uncommon among people born with male genitalia, especially those who have already hit puberty. Since many transgender and gender non-conforming people in New York City were poor, it is highly unlikely many transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers had the money to obtain these features surgically if they wanted to convince others they were cisgender.

In one of Rivera's speeches, Rivera states "everybody thinks that we want to be out on them street corners. No we do not. We don't want to be out there sucking dick and getting fucked up the ass. But that's the only alternative that we have to survive because the laws do not give us the right to go and get a job the way we feel comfortable. I do not want to go to work looking like a man when I know I am not a man. I have been this way since before I left home and I have been on my own since the age of ten."<sup>58</sup> When Rivera says, "I do not want to go to work looking

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Sylvia Rivera, "Bitch on Wheels: A Speech by Sylvia Rivera, June 2001," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, 32-39.

like a man when I know I am not a man. I have been this way since before I left home and I have been on my own since the age of ten,” she shows that society is telling her to deny her identity if she wants to leave the world of prostitution and still earn money. In the same speech, Rivera mentions a “division” between those “who were not from the same side of the tracks we were.”<sup>59</sup> In this section, she refers to the people who earned enough money as entertainers and therefore led comfortable lives, never having to turn to prostitution. This “division” was also mentioned by *Screaming Queens* interviewees. Some Tenderloin residents had the looks to secure work in the entertainment industry, while the rest of the residents faced the brutalities of working the streets. Therefore, it was hard for people from such different walks of life to always relate to each other and support each other.

Despite being stuck in hopeless cycles, Rivera and Johnson put tremendous amounts of effort into political activism. Rivera was present at the Stonewall Riots of 1969, and many claim she was one of the first people to start fighting the police.<sup>60</sup> Together, Rivera and Johnson founded and ran Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, also known as S.T.A.R., which was an organization that aimed to lift homeless transgender and gender non-conforming youths out of poverty. Rivera and Johnson found shelter for the people their organization helped and created a communal living system. They also organized fundraisers so they could raise money to get people out of jail when necessary and continue providing support to the people of S.T.A.R.<sup>61</sup>

The transgender and gender non-conforming people living in San Francisco and New York City during the 1960s and 1970s shared many of the same obstacles: police harassment,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Sylvia Rivera, “‘I’m Glad I was in the Stonewall Riot:’ An Interview with Sylvia Rivera,” in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, 12-14.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



street violence, and employment discrimination. These obstacles kept these people in hopeless cycles of poverty and incarceration. They also prevented these people from being fully-fledged citizens who could carry on with their day-to-day lives with freedom and safety. Despite facing challenges in their everyday lives, several transgender and gender non-conforming people carried out some of the most courageous acts of resistance and engaged in some of the most significant activist efforts of the gay liberation era—the Stonewall Riots, the Compton’s Cafeteria Riots, and the founding of activist organizations. Unfortunately, transgender and gender non-conforming people were oftentimes unwelcome at gay liberation organizations’ meetings and events, and their efforts were often undermined by gay liberation activists. Society as a whole put transgender and gender non-conforming people in hopeless cycles, and the gay liberation and women’s liberation activists kept the marginalization, oppression, and discrimination of transgender and gender non-conforming people alive.

## **Chapter Two: Oppression within the Gay Liberation Movement**

When Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson participated in gay liberation activism, they were far from welcome. Though gay liberation activists intended to fight oppression and discrimination, these activists engaged in oppressive and discriminatory acts—and transgender and gender non-conforming people were the victims. Transgender and gender non-conforming people had experienced problems that were similar to those experienced by lesbians and gay men, such as police harassment and entrapment, street violence, and employment discrimination. However, rather than viewing this as a source for activist solidarity, many gay liberationists excluded transgender and gender non-conforming people from their organizations. They also oftentimes refused to include transgender rights on their agendas. Much of the exclusion and oppression transgender people faced within the gay liberation movement seemed to be fueled by the belief that gender expression would play a key role in the gay liberation movement's success, as many gay liberation activists adopted "assimilationist" approaches to activism. This meant they encouraged lesbians and gay men to adopt manners of dress and behavior that were accepted by white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class people. Because many transgender people—especially those who lived and worked on the streets—violated these norms of behavior and dress, many gay liberation activists believed inclusion of transgender people and causes would hinder the movement's success. Several lesbian feminists excluded transgender women from their organizations and treated transgender women disrespectfully because they believed "drag" reinforced oppressive stereotypes of womanhood and hindered the success of the women's liberation movement. These lesbian feminists, like most people at the time, did not seem to understand the difference between "drag" and "transgender." Though the lesbian feminists seemed to have more of a problem with drag performances than with transgender

identity, lesbian feminists oppressed both transgender women and drag queens. Transgender and gender non-conforming people faced numerous obstacles in the wider society, and the gay liberation activists added to this oppression and discrimination.

Evidence of the oppression and discrimination felt by transgender and gender non-conforming people within the gay liberation movement can be seen in Sylvia Rivera's 1973 speech at the Liberation Day Rally in New York City. Lesbian feminists attempted to block her from reaching the stage because they did not want a "drag queen" to be part of the event, but Rivera managed to grab the microphone and address the audience. In this speech, Rivera essentially accuses the gay liberation movement of being transphobic, racist, and classist. She claims the movement ignores the needs of poor transgender and gender non-conforming people who deal with hopeless cycles of poverty and incarceration. Rivera described gay liberation and women's liberation activists' assimilationist strategies, which marginalized, oppressed, and discriminated against people who deviated from far from society's definition of a "respectable" person:<sup>62</sup>

Y'all better quiet down. I've been trying to get up here all day, for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail! They're writing me every motherfuckin' week and ask for your help, and you all don't do a god damn thing for them. Have you ever been beaten up and raped in jail? Now think about it. They've been beaten up and raped, after they had to spend much of their money in jail to get their self home and try to get their sex change. The women have tried to fight for their sex changes, or to become women of the women's liberation. And they write STAR, not the women's group. They do not write women. They do not write men. They write STAR, because we're trying to do something for them. I have been to jail. I have been raped and beaten many times, by men, heterosexual men that do not belong in the homosexual shelter. But do you do anything for them? No! You all tell me, go and hide my tail between my legs. I will no longer put up with this shit. I have been beaten. I have had my nose broken. I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation, and you all treat me this way? What the fuck's wrong with you all? Think about that! I do not believe in a revolution, but you all do. I believe in the gay power. I believe in us getting our rights or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights. That's all I wanted to say to your

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<sup>62</sup> Duberman, *Stonewall*, 213-89.

people. If you all want to know about the people that are in jail - and do not forget Bambi l'Amour, Andorra Marks, Kenny Messner, and the other gay people that are in jail - come and see the people at STAR House on 12th Street, on 640 East 12th Street between B and C, apartment 14. The people who are trying to do something for all of us and not men and women that belong to a white, middle-class, white club. And that's what y'all belong to. REVOLUTION NOW! Give me a G! Give me an A! Give me a Y! Give me a P! Give me an O! Give me a W! Give me an E! Give me an R! GAY POWER! Louder! GAY POWER!<sup>63</sup>

When Rivera speaks of the “gay brothers” and “gay sisters” in jail, she is likely referring to poor, homeless transgender and gender non-conforming people. This is because she discusses these inmates’ struggles to “get their sex change.” Rivera’s word choices throughout this speech paint pictures of gay and women’s liberationists as selfish people who ignore their needy and suffering “brothers and sisters,” and the exhaustion in her voice reflects the struggles transgender and gender non-conforming people endured when seeking the support of gay and women’s liberationists. The video of this speech shows Rivera shouting much of her speech despite the fact that she is losing her breath. At the beginning of her speech, the crowds boo her and shout at her, trying to discourage her. However, Rivera grabs their attention with her bold, accusatory statement “I’ve been trying to get up here all day, for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail! They’re writing me every motherfuckin’ week and ask for your help, and you all don’t do a god damn thing for them.” The crowds remain fairly silent for the rest of the speech, listening to Rivera’s raw emotion. To show the privilege gay and women’s liberationists experience, and to show that destitute transgender and gender non-conforming people need help, Rivera describes violent and miserable situations, such as being raped, beaten, and incarcerated. She reminds the audience that the victims of these atrocities are the audience’s “brothers” and “sisters” to make

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<sup>63</sup> Lux Iskra, “Sylvia Rivera- Y'all better quiet down (1973),” YouTube Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QiiGzZCEtQ> (accessed November 12, 2014); Sylvia Rivera, “Y’all Better Quiet Down” in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, by the Untorelli Press, 30-31, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://untorellipress.noblogs.org/files/2011/12/STAR.pdf>.

the audience feel responsible for helping these people. To make the audience feel guilty, she follows these descriptions with rhetorical questions, such as “Have you ever been beaten up and raped in jail?” and “Do you do anything for them?” By saying “they write STAR, not the women’s group,” Rivera shows that many women’s organizations are being of little to no help to transgender women. With her phrase “a white, middle-class, white club” she accuses the gay liberationists of only caring about and catering to a specific population. Rivera’s description of her personal losses that were results of her dedication to gay liberation—her job, apartment, freedom while incarcerated—show that Rivera is suffering for people who refuse to help her. Her call to action at the end, when she encouraged to audience to shout “gay power,” serves as a beacon of hope in the speech. Uniting the audience in a cheer encourages the audience to remember that they are fighting for justice together and must work together. At this point in the speech, the audience is attentive, and most people participate in the cheer with Rivera. The audience’s mood is drastically different than what it was at the beginning of Rivera’s speech.

Many other examples of the marginalization and oppression of transgender and gender non-conforming people within the gay liberation movement can be found in copies of the periodical *Come Out!*, which was published by the Gay Liberation Front. This publication released several issues during the late 1960s and early 1970s, mostly covering topics related to justice for lesbians and gay men. What makes this publication unique is the fact that it includes some pieces that discuss issues directly relevant to transgender and gender non-conforming people’s lives. Though this publication definitely did a better job than did most other gay liberation publications in terms of including pieces on transgender identities, it is important to note that out of eight roughly 24-page issues, only about ten short articles acknowledge the transgender community, and only two of these ten appear to possess the purpose of informing

readers on issues facing transgender people. Though it only dedicated a minimal amount of space within its pages to articles on transgender rights and experiences, the pieces included illustrate the treatment transgender people endured.

In the first *Come Out!* issue, a writer shares a first-hand account of life working in gay liberation activism as a gender non-conforming person. When analyzing this account, it is apparent that transgender people experienced marginalization both within and outside the gay liberation movement. This writer self-identifies as a “drag butch.” Based on this writer’s ways of self-identification throughout the article, the writer is most likely an anatomical female who presents as and identifies as a man. The writer appreciates the Gay Liberation Front’s willingness to accept the volunteer assistance of transgender people, but criticizes its lack of complete respect for transgender people. The writer details an experience attending a Gay Liberation Front meeting with some of the organization’s leaders. This experience is an example of the marginalization transgender people felt in the Gay Liberation Front:

Then a leading GLF political theorist routinely says of the two good people not present, “They’re old line homosexuals.” Not, “They’re in GLF and they do good work and their heads are into costume/transvestism/drag or whatever you want to call it.” Three people nod in common understanding – a stereotype has been added to the GLF lexicon...<sup>64</sup>

The writer does not explain in detail the conversation taking place before the speaker stated the words above. Instead, the writer simply mentions that GLF leaders were discussing their “dreams of the beautiful lifestyles they wanted for themselves.” It is therefore unclear what prompted the speaker to mention “old line homosexuals.” However, the instance is still an example of gay liberation activists reinforcing gender roles and shunning gender non-conformity. By labeling the absent members as “old line homosexuals,” the speaker appears to overlook the individuals’

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<sup>64</sup> Marty Stephen, “Bitch: Summer’s Not Forever,” *Come Out!*, November 14, 1969, accessed October 3, 2013, <http://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/come-out-magazine-1969-1972/the-come-out-archive>.

efforts and contributions as GLF members and exclude these individuals from the vision for the future's "beautiful lifestyles." The label distances the absent members from the speaker and shows that the speaker considers these absent members different from the other members—despite the fact that all GLF members worked for the same causes. Such language evidences possible hierarchy and stratification in the GLF. The members deemed gender-nonconforming are grouped together and labeled "old line homosexuals," and all other members are simply individuals working for the organization's cause.

The writer then explains the implications of this treatment. Because maltreatment towards transgender people within the gay liberation movement was so severe, the writer suggests a new liberation movement specifically focused on transgender rights may be needed. The writer also highlights the duality of transgender people's experiences. Oppression and discrimination came from gay and lesbian circles as well as the wider society. In the following quote, the writer asserts the second-class status of transgender and gender non-conforming people within a group that is already oppressed. The writer suggests that the gay liberationists are being bigoted in their unwillingness to help and support transgender and gender non-conforming people. As a result of this, transgender and gender non-conforming people may need to start their own independent civil rights movement, rather than attempt to be part of a movement that does not care about them, disdaining them as "old line homosexuals":

...You can damn well bet that as encounter groups evolve into life style and political action groups the term will progress from being a stereotype to a cliché to a shrug, which always precludes both potentiality and argument and requires a whole new civil rights organization to fight it – like maybe the Drag Queen and Drag Butch Anti-Defamation and Liberation League. Knowing that the Gay use of "old line homosexual" zaps your life style, defines you as having a rigid immutable mind and destroys your validity and worth as a person...you might yearn for the simpler "drag queen" which only meant cross-dressing and carrying on in public, but the "drag queen" label is a straight put down; Gay radicals try to eliminate straight thinking wherever they find it. Apparently the Aquarian Age and doing your own thing doesn't protect you from either your

liberators or your oppressors...should you feel like a third class member in a minority group of second class citizens, and if that homosexual foot on your neck hurts much more than the straight foot up your ass – tough luck, buddy, you just don't live right.<sup>65</sup>

In the first sentence of the quote, the writer suggests that as groups such as gay liberation groups grow, the oppressive terms used in the initial phase of activism will become commonplace.

Stating that new civil rights organizations might be needed to fight the rise of an offensive term used within the gay liberation movement shows the strong threat the writer perceives in the term.

Bolstering this argument, the writer claims that even the “Aquarian Age and doing your own thing” will not save people deemed gender-nonconforming from their “liberators or oppressors.”

The mentioning of the “Aquarian Age” is likely a reference to the New Age movement taking place around the 1970s. Participants in the New Age movement believed in the emergence of a new astrological age, the Age of Aquarius, and emphasized self-spirituality and autonomy.<sup>66</sup>

Given these New Age beliefs, one could expect a person of this time period to respect an individual whose gender identity diverged from society's expectations. The allusion to a need for rescue from “your liberators or oppressors” makes it explicit that the writer believes gay liberationists oppress people, just like society as a whole does. Saying that a transgender person is “a third class member in a minority group of second class citizens” reinforces the writer's main argument: society oppresses people, but the oppressed are also oppressing people. This description also aids readers in visualizing how severe anti-transgender discrimination and oppression can be. The writer illustrates this point again by speaking of a “homosexual foot on your neck” and a “straight foot up your ass.” This image suggests that both gay and straight

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> J. Gordon Melton, "Beyond Millennialism: The New Age Transformed" WayBack Machine Internet Archive, last updated January 2, 2001, accessed October 4, 2014, <http://web.archive.org/web/20060614001357/religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/newage.html/>.



people are harming transgender people, and occasionally the harm from gay liberationists is greater.

The writer concludes the article by admitting both GLF and *Come Out!* are noteworthy because they permit “drag types” to do “meaningful work” and will “compliment you for a good job.” However, the writer believes “being allowed to work is not enough. You will always meet some GLF head who will say ‘I’ve heard a lot about you’ and you will know in part exactly what he means.” With this conclusion, it is clear that acceptance of transgender people in the gay liberation movement is rare. The writer appreciates being allowed to work for GLF but wants to remind readers that GLF discriminates and oppresses despite its inclusion of “drag types.” By examining this article, readers learn that the Gay Liberation Front accepted the presence and work of this writer, but the writer still felt marginalized in the organization due to some Gay Liberation Front members’ attitudes towards people deemed gender-nonconforming.

In another *Come Out!* piece, a writer criticizes gay men and lesbians’ misconceptions of transgender people and argues that this misunderstanding contributes to oppression and discrimination. The writer states that “transvestism, unfortunately, is a practice frequently misunderstood by nearly everyone, including gay people, and this misunderstanding has bred much intolerance. The time has now come to change this.”<sup>67</sup> In this article, the writer states that transgender people lack the resources emerging for gay men and lesbians, such as effective political organizations, and that people, including gay men and lesbians, misunderstand transgender identities. According to the writer, misunderstanding leads to injustice and intolerance. Because this is only one of two articles in *Come Out!* that appear to possess the

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<sup>67</sup> Pat Maxwell, “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” *Come Out!*, September 1970, accessed October 3, 2013, <http://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/come-out-magazine-1969-1972/the-come-out-archive>.

primary purpose of educating readers on transgender rights issues and encouraging transgender activism, it evidences the marginalization existent in *Come Out!*. The publishers of *Come Out!* were presumably somewhat willing to acknowledge transgender perspectives. Therefore, they included two critical pieces detailing transgender experiences. However, the small percentage of space dedicated to transgender issues makes the marginalization of transgender people in GLF very apparent. Almost all articles focus on civil rights abuses, and these articles only mention gay people as victims despite the fact that transgender people also suffered from police brutality, employment discrimination, and violence. An examination of the article's content reveals the marginalization and intolerance transgender people faced inside and outside gay liberation movement efforts.

The writer also appears to believe that people who transgress society's gender norms and expectations are being the most revolutionary and liberated. If gay liberationists are aiming for a revolution that leads to liberation, they should support transgender and gender non-conforming people. "The Gay Liberation movement should affirm and not deny the transexual in us all," the writer states. "Queens are in the vanguard of the sexual revolution. Come out now and avoid the rush!" By saying "the transexual in us all," the writer alludes to the fluidity of gender, presumably insisting that gender cannot be understood as simply two categories. Rather, nobody fits perfectly into one gender category, and gay liberation activists must learn to accept this. Mentioning the "transexual in us all" and avoiding "the rush" suggests that the writer thinks transgender people are leading many liberationist efforts and will continue influencing the movement's fate. Therefore, the gay liberation movement should accept transgender people and treat them as equals.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

The fact that the Gay Liberation Front permitted transgender people to contribute to its cause and granted some space in *Come Out!* to discussion on transgender identities, rights, and experiences makes it far more generous than many other gay liberation movement groups of the 1960s and 1970s. Articles from other publications also illustrate the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people. However, these articles do so in a different way. While the *Come Out!* examples in this project are written from the perspectives of transgender and gender non-conforming people, or they straightforwardly voice support for transgender causes, the examples from other publications generally illustrate gay and women's liberationists' contempt towards transgender and gender non-conforming people.

An analysis of communications released by organizations and individuals involved in the gay liberation movement reveals two primary reasons for much of the treatment transgender people faced within the movement. One of these reasons is that several gay activists wished to achieve a positive public image for gays and lesbians in America, and they believed that by expressing gender in manners similar to those associated with heterosexuality, gays and lesbians could more easily reach this goal. Therefore, separating themselves from transgender people appeared advantageous to several activists. Some of the most blatant prescriptions to exclude transgender people in order to shape the movement's public image exist in the periodical *Vector*, published by the Society for Individual Rights.<sup>69</sup>

In 1968, a documentary detailing the behind-the-scenes life of drag queen entertainers and pageant contestants entitled *The Queen* premiered, much to the dismay of gay liberation activists who opposed its wide distribution across the United States. One Society for Individual

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<sup>69</sup> Hillman, "The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in': Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964–1972," 159-63.

Rights member complained in *Vector* about the film's possible impact on the public's perception of the gay community:<sup>70</sup>

This film does more harm than good in furthering an understanding between the straight and gay world... The fact that these are not actors playing roles, but rather people playing themselves only helps perpetuate the myth that all homosexuals are nelly drag queens....it isn't all feathers and wigs in the gay life.<sup>71</sup>

The derogatory word "nelly" has oftentimes been used to describe overly effeminate behavior exhibited by a gay man. By calling drag queens "nelly," the writer exhibits a strong dislike of gender non-conformity and a strong fear that "nelly drag queens" will tarnish the public's perception of gay men. Concerns about public perception, such as this one, fueled many activists' beliefs and actions.

Survey results published in *Vector* in 1968 that illustrate 170 Society for Individual Rights members' views on transgender identities also evidence members' disapproval of transgender involvement in gay liberation. The magazine did not explain why the survey took place, nor did it explain how the data was collected. However, the results and publication date suggest these motives and methodologies. When analyzing this survey, it is apparent that SIR members disapproved of transgender involvement in gay liberation, and they wanted to persuade other gay liberationists to feel the same way. *Vector* published this survey well after the Compton's Cafeteria Riots of 1966 took place in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, where many homeless transgender people lived. This riot was one of the earliest recorded transgender acts of resistance against police officers. Therefore, these survey results could be motivated by

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<sup>70</sup> Hillman, "The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in': Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964–1972," 153-55.

<sup>71</sup> "Magda at the Movies," *Vector*, 1968, 22, quoted in "The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in': Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964–1972," Hillman, 153.

this event. This is not the only information that must be taken into consideration in order to truly understand the survey results. One cannot be sure that every individual involved in the Society for Individual Rights participated in this survey because *Vector* did not publish the respondents' names. Fewer than half of the members surveyed agreed that "anyone should be able to dress anyway he wished," while the majority agreed that drag is "detrimental to the homophile community." Also, the majority of respondents answered "no" to the question "Should drags be tolerated in the 'Tenderloin' and other public places?" and the majority answered "yes" to the question "Would heterosexuals accept the homophile more readily if there was less drag?" In addition to the results, the word choice of the survey questions reveals the organization's negative attitude towards gender non-conformity. The question "Would heterosexuals accept the homophile more readily if there was less drag?" is biased because it suggests drag negatively impacts the public's views. The answer choice saying drag is "detrimental to the homophile community" also ties drag to the outcome of gay liberation activism. Such wording suggests the publishers wished to sway people's opinions regarding drag. It can be assumed that several responses were affected by the word choice.<sup>72</sup>

The survey results published also included respondents' comments that exemplified their concerns about transgender people's impact on gay liberation goals. One Society for Individual Rights member argued, "Our public behavior is of supreme importance...the homosexual who dresses as a woman for the purpose of solicitation or to declare his femininity should be rejected by S.I.R." Though the survey's title suggests the survey focuses on drag, comments such as this one reflect conflation of drag and transgender identity. Another member stated, "While a small

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<sup>72</sup> "The Wearing of Drag," *Vector*, March 1967, 16-17, quoted in "The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in': Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972," Hillman, 164.

minority of S.I.R. members enjoy dressing in women's clothes, the majority . . . prefer to walk like men, talk like men, and dress like men,” arguing that the Society for Individual Rights should not be associated with the transgression of gender norms and expectations.<sup>73</sup>

Sources other than *Vector* also show that several gay liberation movement activists opposed acceptance of transgender people, fearing transgender people could tarnish the public perception of the gay community. However, these examples do so in different manners and do not all represent the same perspective, nor do they represent the same arguments. For example, a writer reported in *Gay Sunshine* that gay liberation activists accused him of “castrating gay men” and perpetuating society’s stereotypes about gay men by wearing makeup.<sup>74</sup> The treatment this writer endured shows that activists held strong beliefs against violating gender norms of the time, and these activists seemed to hold these beliefs because they thought gender non-conforming gay men would tarnish the reputations of all gay men.

The *San Francisco Free Press* also showed the dissatisfaction activists had with organizations’ oppression of people who violated gender norms and expectations when it published pictures of gay liberation activists burning their Society for Individual Rights membership cards. A message accompanied the images:

The Society for Individual Rights, also known as the Society for Idle Rap, is a goodgrey organization dedicated to total integration within the establishment and to the proposition that, with a little help from a haircut and a suit and tie, all men can look equal. Passing for straight is SIR's ideal, and 'Really? You don't look it' the highest compliment it can receive.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> "T.V. Guide," *Gay Sunshine*, 1971, quoted in “‘The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in:’ Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972,” Hillman, 168-171.

<sup>75</sup> Hillman, “‘The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in:’ Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972,” 170-71.

According to this message, SIR does not fulfill its promises as an organization that fights for justice and liberation. By calling SIR the “Society for Idle Rap” and saying SIR is “dedicated to the total integration” and to making “all men...look equal,” the protestors argue that SIR fights for the mere illusion of equality. While fighting for this illusion, the organization marginalizes and oppresses people who violate gender norms and expectations of the time.

These two articles from *Gay Sunshine* and the *San Francisco Free Press* illustrate the perspectives of people frustrated with organizations’ assimilationist strategies. The *Advocate* published an article showing the opposite view. This publication reported that gay liberation activists who protested the San Francisco Tavern Guild’s annual Beaux Arts drag ball in October 1969 “opposed the ball because it perpetuates the...stereotype of homosexuals. . . and harms the cause of gay freedom.”<sup>76</sup> According to the activists who opposed the ball, lesbians and gay men must dress and act in ways that are deemed in-line with society’s gender norms and expectations. The *Advocate* article does this from a different angle. Though the three articles from *Gay Sunshine*, the *San Francisco Free Press*, and the *Advocate* represent different arguments and perspectives, readers of each of these articles can infer the maltreatment transgender and gender non-conforming people encountered when interacting with gay liberationists. Had this maltreatment not occurred, it is unlikely activists would have organized protests and written articles expressing their discontent.

Many of the periodicals cited in this section of the project come from Hillman’s work. By analyzing gay liberation periodicals, Hillman demonstrates that gay liberationists held diverse views regarding drag and transgender identity. By comparing articles from Hillman’s work with

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<sup>76</sup> "Gay Militants Demonstrate for Rights at UC Berkeley," *The Advocate*, 1969, 3, quoted in “‘The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in:’ Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972,” Hillman, 169.

*Come Out!* articles and the *Screaming Queens* interviews, this project highlights a greater variety of voices from the 1960s and the 1970s. This comparison also enables this project to discuss the views of activists and the experiences of transgender people in two different metropolitan areas.

Assimilationist strategies were not the only likely motivations for the oppression, discrimination, and marginalization transgender and gender non-conforming people endured at the hands of gay liberationists. Liberationists' desires to support women's liberation also tended to motivate the oppression, discrimination, and marginalization of transgender and gender non-conforming people. Several lesbian activists aligned themselves with women's liberation. Though women's liberationists and gay liberationists did not always get along with each other—in fact there were many conflicts between activists who were gay men and activists who were women—the lesbian feminists who joined women's liberation groups surely created more intersections between the gay liberation and women's liberation movements. According to several gay liberationists, misogyny and sexism fueled problems that gay men, lesbians, and straight women endured in common.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, many gay liberationists appeared to deem women's liberationists strong possible allies to the gay liberation movement.

Since the early years of the homophile movement in the 1950s, gender equality concerns and fights for sexual minority rights went hand-in-hand and also at odds with each other. Women's liberationists were both supporters and opponents of equality for sexual minorities, and the same can be said about several gay liberationists and their views on women's liberation. Lesbians oftentimes joined organizations such as the Daughters of Bilitis because they felt marginalized in male-dominated gay liberation organizations. The Daughters of Bilitis was an organization intended to help lesbians meet other lesbians and socialize. This organization also

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<sup>77</sup> Margaret Cruikshank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (USA: Routledge, 1992) 150-1.



sometimes engaged in activist efforts in order to promote equality for lesbians and women in general.<sup>78</sup>

Comments made by Dorr Legg, director of ONE Institute, exemplify the treatment lesbians in gay liberation complained about. ONE Inc. created the first widely distributed gay publication in the United States, and the ONE Institute was the educational branch of ONE Inc.—a branch that held seminars and published a journal.<sup>79</sup> Legg suggested that the DOB was a narrow "in-group" that could not understand the more general problems facing rights for sexual minorities. He also suggested that lesbians, "by virtue of their own infrequent contact with the brutal realities" of gay male life, "were but a step ahead of heterosexuals in their comprehension of what the problems are." He asked, "was it, ever, that Lesbians have been so brain-washed by their favored social and legal status that they would resist to the hilt their brother-homosexuals' efforts for betterment?"<sup>80</sup> By calling lesbians a narrow "in-group" lacking "contact with the brutal realities" and "comprehension of what the problems are," Legg appears to believe lesbians are naïve, ignorant, and unqualified to lead liberationist efforts. When he mentions lesbians' "favored" status, he seems to be under the impression that lesbians experience more privilege than do gay men and are willing to betray their "brother-homosexuals." This privilege could be a result of lesbians' perceived abilities to fit in with society's gender norms and expectations. Because Legg held a high-ranking position at ONE Institute, it can be assumed his disapproval of lesbian involvement influenced the organization as a whole. It is useful to understand the conflicts between lesbian and gay activists when studying transgender history because these

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<sup>78</sup>Kristin G. Esterberg, "From Accommodation to Liberation: A Social Movement Analysis of Lesbians in the Homophile Movement," *Gender and Society* 8, no. 3 (September 1994): 430-38.

<sup>79</sup> "History," ONE Archives Foundation, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.onearchives.org/about/history/>.

<sup>80</sup> Esterberg, "From Accommodation to Liberation: A Social Movement Analysis of Lesbians in the Homophile Movement," 434.

conflicts suggest that the gay liberation movement oftentimes lacked unity. These conflicts show that gender and sexual minorities rarely teamed up to fight injustice together. Instead, they sometimes fought each other while trying to advance their causes. If the gay liberation movement possessed more inclusive goals and fewer conflicts, perhaps transgender people would not have been as marginalized.

In response to all the male gay liberationists who held sentiments similar to those of Legg, DOB president Shirley Willer criticized the gay liberation movement for neglecting issues affecting lesbians and asserted that the movement “needed to be as concerned about women’s civil rights as male homosexuals’ civil liberties.”<sup>81</sup> This mass marginalization is likely what prompted Willer to make this declaration. Though lesbian feminists wanted male gay liberationists to align themselves with women’s liberation, women’s liberationists were not always accepting of lesbians. Claiming heterosexual feminists ignored problems lesbians faced and excluded lesbians from the feminist movement, several lesbian feminists protested at the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York City on May 1, 1970. During their protest, these lesbian feminists passed out copies of “The Woman-Identified Woman,” a manifesto they wrote arguing that a commitment to lesbian liberation was “absolutely essential to the success and fulfilment of the women’s liberation movement.”<sup>82</sup> Like the Dorr Legg example, these conflicts illustrate a lack of unity in the activism of the 1960s and 1970s. If the activist movements were more inclusive, perhaps transgender people would not have faced so much oppression and discrimination in gay liberation organizations.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>82</sup> “The Woman-Identified Woman,” Duke University Libraries, accessed October 5, 2014, [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc\\_wlmms01011/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmms01011/); Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007), 173.

All of these examples of conflicts within the gay liberation movement illustrate more than just the difficulty humans may experience when attempting to organize. These examples show the complicated relationship gender and sexuality had throughout the gay liberation movement. Some activists fought for both gay and women's liberation, while others only supported one of the two. Despite these complications, liberationists wished to form alliances with activists from other movements in order to advance their causes. This is why many issues of the Gay Liberation Front's publication, *Come Out!* as well as other gay liberation organizations' publications, include articles on women's rights and experiences. Though several gay liberationists believed forming alliances with women's liberationists would strengthen their movement and lead to equality and justice for oppressed people, some women's liberation ideas in the gay liberation movement further harmed an already disenfranchised group: transgender and gender non-conforming people. Despite their claims to fight against gender-based discrimination and society's rigid gender expectations, several lesbian and women's liberationists oppressed and discriminated against transgender people for transgressing gender norms of the time. The treatment of several lesbian and women's liberationists towards transgender people reveals a truth about the late 1960s, early 1970s, and post-WWII America in general: gender roles and expectations were so powerful that even several feminists and gay liberationists unknowingly reinforced gender oppression. When analyzing the speeches and written works of women's liberationists aligned with gay liberation, it appears on the surface that these activists believed "drag" and being a transgender woman were both forms of oppression by men against women. These activists wanted to end degrading stereotypes of women, and they believed drag queens and transgender women validated such harmful stereotypes. However, by criticizing the gender expression of various transgender women and drag queens, these lesbian

and women's liberationists simply reinforced the idea that people born male must identify as men and present themselves in stereotypically masculine manners—and therefore these lesbian and women's liberationists reinforced the gender system in America that many feminists sought to end. Some written works and speeches show that transgender people other than transgender women experienced discrimination and oppression at the hands of women's liberationists, but the majority of those targeted by anti-transgender sentiment were people born male who identified as women.

Various articles from gay liberation publications illustrate several activists' desires to form alliances with women's liberationists. A piece in *Gay Sunshine* addresses the need to fight male supremacy and align with feminist causes. However, the writer states that gay liberationists who violate society's gender norms and expectations can hurt both gay and women's liberation.<sup>83</sup> Though many gay liberationists believed aligning with women's liberation activists would be advantageous, speeches and articles by some individuals involved in women's liberation suggest this attempted alliance contributed to transgender exclusion in gay liberation.

In *Gay Sunshine*, another writer claims drag can reinforce harmful stereotypes of women, echoing the arguments of several other individuals who asserted drag is problematic for women's liberation:

When a woman presents herself as essentially frivolous and trivial...concerned with nothing except clothes and hair-style, make-up and other aspects of her appearance. . . she's playing out an oppressed role. . . . When a Drag Queen acts in the same way, she's acting out the same oppression.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> "Gay Lib: It's Alright, Ma (I'm only bleeding)," *Gay Sunshine*, 1971, 1, quoted in "'The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in:' Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972," Hillman, 176.

<sup>84</sup> "God Save the Queen," *Gay Sunshine*, 1970, 2, quoted in "'The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in:' Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972," Hillman, 172.

Though this article appears to link drag performances to the oppression faced by women, this article is not as disdainful of drag as are other critiques of drag queen performances and gender non-conformity. This article uses parallel language to discuss women who “play out” an oppressed role and drag queens who “play out” that same oppressed role. Therefore, the article suggests that people, regardless of their sex or gender, who wear makeup and present themselves as “frivolous and trivial” can be subject to oppression. Though the article implies that gender non-conformity reinforces oppressive stereotypes of women, and therefore this article echoes statements made by activists who loathed drag and other forms of gender non-conformity, this article is definitely less critical than several other articles examined in this chapter.

Many lesbians and feminists wanted to deconstruct the stereotypes of womanhood and change the societal expectations of women. The Miss America protest of 1968 exemplifies the types of expectations and stereotypes these women’s liberation activists wished to eradicate. On September 7, 1968, around 400 protesters gathered outside the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey.<sup>85</sup> They protested the “The Degrading Mindless-Boob-Girlie Symbol” and threw stereotypically feminine products in a trash can.<sup>86</sup> These products included copies of *Cosmopolitan* and *Playboy*, curlers, hairspray, high-heeled shoes, false eyelashes, makeup, corsets, bras, and girdles.<sup>87</sup> With these sentiments, it is no surprise that several women’s liberationists disliked the gender presentations of many transgender women and drag queens—

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<sup>85</sup> Nell Greenfield Boyce, "Pageant Protest Sparked Bra-Burning Myth," NPR, September 5, 2008, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94240375>.

<sup>86</sup> Robin Morgan, "No More Miss America," Redstockings, August 22, 1968, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://www.redstockings.org/index.php/miss-america-protest-1968>.

<sup>87</sup> Nell Greenfield Boyce, "Pageant Protest Sparked Bra-Burning Myth;" Bonnie J. Dow, "Feminism, Miss America, and Media Mythology," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2003): 127-60, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://www.public.asu.edu/~kleong/staffpage/course/missamericacommodificationfeminist.pdf>.

people who oftentimes used items such as wigs, makeup, and bras to conform their physical appearance to their internal sense of identity.

Another example of activists' concerns about the social and political implications of drag comes from Daughters of Bilitis co-founder Del Martin's 1970 statement, in which she asserts drag queen performances validate and support oppressive and socially-constructed gender roles rather than challenge them:

Goodbye to the Halloween Balls, the drag shows and parties. It was fun, while it lasted. But the humor has gone out of the game. The exaggeration of the switching (or swishing) of sex roles has become the norm in the public eye. . . . It is time to stop mimicking the heterosexual society we've been trying to escape.<sup>88</sup>

By saying “the switching (or swishing) of sex roles has become the norm in the public eye,” Martin is likely alluding to a concern that drag is gaining the attention of people outside the liberation movements. Martin is likely saying that drag queens embody many aspects of “the heterosexual society we've been trying to escape” because they exaggerate the characteristics of women oppressed by the said society. This statement expresses the belief that exaggerating sex roles validates sex roles and does not help eliminate them. Martin also sees drag as a reminder of heterosexuality, the alleged oppressor of those in both the lesbian and women's liberation movements. Lastly, Martin's use of the term “swishing” may exemplify her hatred of sexism in the gay liberation movement, since the term “swishing” can be interpreted to be a derogatory description of a gay man. This appears more plausible when Martin's objective in the statement, to criticize the gay community's sexism and failure to properly address women's issues, is considered.

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<sup>88</sup> "Del Martin—Columnist Resigns, Blames Male Chauvinism," *Vector*, 1970, 35-37, quoted in “‘The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in:’ Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972,” Hillman, 173.

In addition to Martin's statement, public statements and events at The West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference of 1973 illustrate the anti-transgender and anti-gender non-conforming attitudes of several people involved in both women's and gay liberation. Together, many critiques show a trend: feminists believed gender non-conformity hurt women's and gay liberation strategically and was a male form of oppression against women. These critiques do not differentiate drag from transgender identity. Evidence of this lack of differentiation comes from the fact that lesbian feminists opposed the singing performance of Beth Elliot, a transgender member of the Daughters of Bilitis, claiming Elliot was not a woman or a lesbian. It can be assumed that they thought Elliot was a drag queen, since they refused to believe she was a woman.<sup>89</sup> Because these lesbian feminists could not understand that Elliot was a transgender woman, it is apparent that these lesbian feminists did not understand the difference between transgender identities and "drag" carried out for entertainment.

At The West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference of 1973, Robin Morgan said, "We know what's at work when whites wear blackface; the same thing is at work when men wear drag" as she concluded a speech.<sup>90</sup> At this point in time, many could agree that blackface performances were oppressive and offensive to black people. By linking drag to these performances, Morgan expresses a strong belief in drag being harmful to women's liberation. In this speech, Morgan fails to explain what her definition of drag is. It is not clear whether or not she considers transgender women or gender non-confirming people drag queens. Because several lesbian feminists at this conference prevented Elliot from singing and denied Elliot's identity as a

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<sup>89</sup> Sylvia Rivera, "Sylvia Rivera's talk at LGMNY, June 2001," *Centro* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 116-23, accessed October 4, 2013, Alternative Press Index.

<sup>90</sup> Hillman, "'The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in:' Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972," 173.

woman, it is apparent that Morgan and the other activists do not understand the difference between transgender women and drag queens. Though many of these lesbian feminists wanted to deconstruct gender roles and stereotypes, they appeared to be unwilling to reconsider their definitions of the words “woman” and “lesbian.”

A similar incident occurred at the New York City Gay Pride Rally in 1973, where Jean O’ Leary of the Gay Activists’ Alliance denounced transgender rights activist Sylvia Rivera for “parodying womanhood.” By saying that Rivera is “parodying womanhood,” O’ Leary asserts that Rivera is perpetuating stereotypes of women that feminists want to end. This criticism of Rivera exemplifies O’ Leary’s vague understanding of transgender identity. Rivera self-identified as a woman and presented herself as female most of the time.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, Rivera’s appearance was not a “parody” or form of entertainment. Rather, it was her expression of her gender identity. O’ Leary appears to believe that Rivera, and other transgender women, mock women and validate women’s subjugated role in society through impersonation.

Following O’ Leary’s remarks, Lesbian Feminist Liberation members distributed flyers in an attempt to keep “female impersonators” off the stage.<sup>92</sup> The activists opposed Rivera’s involvement in the event and in gay liberation.<sup>93</sup> Because “the women felt that we were offensive, the drag queens Tiffany and Billy were not allowed to perform,” Rivera recalled in a 2001 speech. “I had to fight my way up on that stage and literally, people that I called my comrades in the movement, literally beat me.”<sup>94</sup> Of course, as the Rivera speech quoted earlier in

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<sup>91</sup> Sylvia Rivera, “Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones,” in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, by the Untorelli Press, 40-55.

<sup>92</sup> Sylvia Rivera, “Sylvia Rivera’s talk at LGMNY, June 2001,” 116-123.

<sup>93</sup> Sylvia Rivera, “Sylvia Rivera’s talk at LGMNY, June 2001,” 120.

<sup>94</sup> Sylvia Rivera, “Sylvia Rivera’s talk at LGMNY, June 2001,” 122.



this chapter shows, Rivera still managed to share on stage her dissatisfaction with the gay liberation movement's oppressive tactics.

Another criticism of identities falling under the transgender umbrella for their impact on women's liberation came from Karla Jay, a supporter of gay liberation and friend of transgender activists Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson. Jay accused Rivera and Johnson of "copying and flaunting some of the worst aspects of female oppression" and told them "you are not really women; you are biological men and can reclaim that privilege at any time. We are females forever."<sup>95</sup> When Jay mentions "privilege," she refers to the male privilege she thinks Johnson and Rivera would experience if they were not transgender. This quote shows that Jay thinks it is easy for people to deny their true gender identity and live life in a gender they are not comfortable identifying as. Like many other liberationists, Jay's notion of gender conflicts with that of transgender activists. Though Rivera and Johnson self-identify as women, Jay does not see them as being women entirely because of their anatomy. She confuses the terms "sex" and "gender." Because she, in a sense, considers Rivera and Johnson men who oppress women by imitating undesirable women's stereotypes, Jay's views mirror those of many other feminists, women who see drag as oppression of women by men and harmful to women's liberation.

When one notes the prejudices many activists held against transgender people because they deemed "drag" offensive, the exclusion and discrimination transgender people faced within the gay liberation movement becomes more apparent. Activists such as Morgan and O' Leary, advocating for both women's liberation and gay liberation, appeared to believe certain forms of gender-nonconformity simply reinforced socially-constructed gender roles that women's liberation activists and gay liberation activists wished to destroy. When gay liberation activists

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<sup>95</sup> Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 61.

such as Rankin and Benton made similar assertions, the transgender community indeed felt an impact. Sylvia Rivera left advocacy temporarily in 1973, after women's and gay liberationists made her fight for her opportunity to speak at the Christopher Street Liberation Day Rally because of her identity.<sup>96</sup> The lack of acceptance and visibility in the gay liberation movement for transgender people also discouraged her.<sup>97</sup>

The gay liberation movement was a complex civil rights effort. Though gay liberationists claimed they wanted to fight injustice, many of them engaged in acts of oppression and discrimination. The victims of these acts of oppression and discrimination were transgender and gender non-conforming people—people who truly needed the help of a civil rights movement. Though transgender and gender non-conforming people faced many brutalities in their day-to-day lives, gay liberationists excluded transgender and gender non-conforming people from their organizations and excluded transgender rights from their agendas. Given this maltreatment, it appears that transgender and gender non-conforming people might have been better off if they had started their own nationwide movement, a movement entirely separate from gay and women's liberation. Unfortunately, the legal, financial, and social obstacles facing so many transgender and gender non-conforming people made such an endeavor nearly impossible.

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<sup>96</sup> Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 340-2.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 343.

## Conclusion

It can be said that many transgender and gender non-conforming people living in San Francisco and New York City during the 1960s and 1970s were unsung heroes of the gay liberation era. Many of these people dealt with brutal realities in their everyday lives. They were oftentimes arrested and harassed by police officers for simply appearing in public. People on the streets beat, raped, and killed them. Homeless and unable to find jobs, many transgender and gender non-conforming people were forced to work the streets as prostitutes—a job that involved risks of being arrested, beaten, raped, and killed. Despite facing many obstacles in life, several transgender and gender non-conforming people built up the courage to engage in political activism during the gay liberation era. Unfortunately, many transgender and gender non-conforming people faced additional oppression, marginalization, and discrimination when interacting with gay liberationists.

Though this paper focuses on the hardships transgender and gender non-conforming people dealt with, it is important to note that transgender and gender non-conforming people in the 1960s and 1970s had happy moments in their lives as well. For example, many of the *Screaming Queens* interviewees mention enjoying themselves at drag balls and parties in the Tenderloin. Several of them also speak of the sense of community they felt when living with each other. Rivera and Johnson also discussed fun times spent with friends in New York City. Since the field of transgender history is just starting to gain attention, much more scholarship needs to be done in this field. Surely transgender and gender non-conforming people lived in areas outside the largest cities of the United States, but little to no sources exist to help researchers learn about transgender and gender non-conforming people who lived in other parts of the country during the gay liberation era. Perhaps the creation of more oral history resources,

such as Stryker's *Screaming Queens*, would help preserve the stories of transgender and gender non-conforming people in the United States during the twentieth century.

Also, many of the transgender and gender non-conforming people named within this paper can be considered outliers. This is because little to no sources exist to give researchers the viewpoints of transgender and gender non-conforming people who did not carry out unusual acts and become well-known within certain communities. Rivera and Johnson engaged in tremendous amounts of activism, which is why primary source material exists to help people understand the viewpoints of these activists. Almost all of the *Screaming Queens* interviewees were people who eventually managed to escape the Tenderloin and establish safe and comfortable lives for themselves elsewhere. Therefore, these interviewees were the outliers, the few who managed to beat the odds. Hopefully future research will be able to shed light on the experiences of those who did not rise above the rest, as well as those who did not live in the urban areas with high lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer populations.

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