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Gan, Jessi
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"Still at the back of the bus": Sylvia Rivera's struggle

Jessi Gan

ABSTRACT

Recent U.S. transgender politics has increasingly invoked the history of Sylvia Rivera, the Puerto Rican/Venezuelan transgender activist who fought at the 1969 Stonewall riots. Although her life narrative helped transgender movements demand accountability from gay political institutions, the movements, working within a liberal multicultural logic of recognition, sometimes elided the multiple axes of her intersectional situatedness. Drawing upon an extended sketch of the contours of Rivera's life, I argue that her contextual political praxis, informed by her life experiences, both resisted and provisionally endorsed those uses. For example, she strategically deployed identity categories while simultaneously resisting reductive definition. My essay argues that Rivera, animated by ethics of accountability to her "children" and of inclusive love, remained committed to an expansive view of the project of social justice. [Keywords: Sylvia Rivera, Stonewall, street queen, gay, transgender history, community]

I.

In New York City, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project is named in her honor, as is Sylvia Rivera Way in the West Village.[1] The history of Rivera, the Puerto Rican and Venezuelan drag queen and transgender activist who lived between 1951 and 2002, is rarely mentioned in Latin@ Studies. But since the mid-1990s, she has become increasingly invoked in transgender politics. In part, this is because Rivera was a combatant at the 1969 Stonewall Inn riots in New York, which in dominant accounts of U.S. history are said to have ignited the contemporary lesbian and gay rights movement. Because the post-1969 movement allegedly used more visible and militant tactics than its assimilationist predecessor, the homophile movement, Stonewall bridges the two periods in progressive narratives of gay history in which lesbians and gays, previously forced to occupy the private "closet," move toward a trajectory of "coming out" into the public sphere.[2] In the same way that Rosa Parks and the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, became a symbol of black struggle against segregation, gays claimed Stonewall as a symbol of progress, pride, and resistance. "Today," wrote gay historian Martin Duberman, "the word resonates with images of insurgency and self-realization and occupies a central place in the iconography of modern gay awareness."[3] From the Stonewall Democrats and the Stonewall Chorale to June pride marches, the mythology of Stonewall has become integral to how many gay communities see themselves.[4]

Yet, though the iconography of Stonewall enabled middle-class white gays and lesbians to view themselves as resistant and transgressive, Stonewall narratives, in depicting the agents of the riots as "gay," elided the central role of poor gender-variant people of color in that night's acts of resistance against New York City police.[5] It was not until historian Duberman interviewed Rivera for a 1993 book called *Stonewall* that her role in the riots became widely known. She had left gay activism in 1973 and then been forgotten, sidelined in dominant accounts of queer politics.[6] Duberman's telling of Rivera's story, however, enabled transgender activists to write themselves into the heart of U.S. gay history and queer resistance as, during the 1990s, transgender activism itself took a more militant turn and transgender people fought more visibly to be included in gay institutions.[7] They could argue that since they had paid their dues at Stonewall, the names of "gay" organizations should be "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender."[8] With historical authority, they could contend that the largest U.S. gay rights group, Human Rights Campaign, should include transgender people in its mission statement, an argument to which it finally acquiesced in 2001 after years of lobbying.[9]

But just as "gay" had excluded "transgender" in the Stonewall imaginary, the claim that "transgender people were at Stonewall too" enacted its own omissions of difference and hierarchy within the term "transgender." Rivera was poor and Latina, while some transgender activists making political claims on the basis of her history were white and middle-class. She was being praised for becoming visible as transgender while her racial and class visibility were being

ethnic/national identity that is then readable by the larger society," she wrote. "The imposed necessity for 'strategic essentialism,' reducing identity categories to the most readily decipherable marker around which to mobilize, serves as a double-edged sword, cutting at hegemonic culture as it reinscribes nation/gender/race myths."[10] The myth that all gay people were equally oppressed and equally resistant at Stonewall was replaced by a new myth after Rivera's historical "coming out," that all transgender people were *most* oppressed and *most* resistant at Stonewall (and still are today). This myth could be circulated and consumed when, in the service of a liberal multicultural logic of recognition,[11] Rivera's complexly situated subjectivity as a working-class Puerto Rican/Venezuelan drag queen became reduced to that of "transgender Stonewall combatant."[12]

Some recovery projects lubricated by Rivera's memory—in their simultaneous forgetting of the white supremacist and capitalist logics that had constructed her raced and classed otherness—served to unify transgender politics along a gendered axis.[13] The elisions enabled transgender activist Leslie Feinberg, in hir[14] book *Trans Liberation*, to invoke a broad coalition of people united solely by a political desire to take gender "beyond pink or blue."[15] This pluralistic approach celebrated Rivera's struggle as one "face" in a sea of "trans movement" faces.[16] The anthology *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*, similarly, called for a "gender movement" that would ensure "full equality for all Americans regardless of gender."[17] The inclusion of Rivera's life story in the largely white *GenderQueer* lent a multicultural "diversity" and historical authenticity to the young, racially unmarked coalitional identity, "genderqueer," that had emerged out of middle-class college settings.[18] But the elision of intersectionality in the name of coalitional myth-making served to reinscribe other myths. The myth of equal transgender oppression left capitalism and white supremacy unchallenged, often foreclosing coalitional alignments unmoored from gender analysis, while enabling transgender people to avoid considering their complicity in the maintenance of simultaneous and interlocking systems of oppression.[19]

It is clear that Rivera's history and memory have been put to a variety of political uses, and not just by others. In the years before her death Rivera consciously used her symbolic power as a Stonewall veteran to raise public awareness of anti-transgender oppression, according to observers.[20] But the contours of her life and her personal statements, I will argue, reveal a figure at once complexly situated and fluid, whose inclusive political affinities resist attempts to reduce her to appropriated symbol. Her life illustrates the limits of dominant theories of queer visibility, while her political commitments challenge us to continually bypass statically reductive visions of identity and community. Rivera is, moreover, profoundly important in a Latin@, transgender, and queer historiography where histories of transgender people of color are few and far between. In the following pages, I reconstruct her life and the context of the Stonewall riot by drawing upon interviews, speeches, essays, and newspapers. With competing claims over Rivera's historical significance

II.

Born male, Sylvia Rivera showed early signs of femininity, as well as sexual precociousness. She started wearing makeup to school in the fourth grade, and would try on her grandmother's clothes when she wasn't home. By age seven, Rivera had already had sex with her 14-year-old male cousin; by age ten she was having sex with her fifth-grade teacher, a married man.[22] That year, she began turning tricks on the streets with her uncle because "[w]e didn't have much money and I wanted things my grandmother couldn't buy."[23] In addition to being poor, Rivera's home life was emotionally precarious. Her birth father José Rivera had disappeared, then neglected to send child support. Her mother's second husband, a drug dealer, showed disinterest in the children. When Sylvia was three years old, her mother committed suicide by ingesting rat poison, and attempted to kill Sylvia along with her, but did not succeed. Rivera's Venezuelan grandmother, Viejita,[24] who was a pieceworker in a factory, was left to raise the children by herself. She called Rivera a "troublemaker," beat her frequently, and told her she did not really want her.[25] According to Rivera, one reason for her grandmother's pique was that she had wanted a "white child." Prejudiced against darker-skinned people, she carried a grudge against Sylvia because Sylvia's father was a dark-skinned Puerto Rican. "I guess in her own strict way my grandmother loved me," Rivera related, but "I basically grew up without love."[26]

Viejita fretted about Rivera's femininity and blooming sexuality. As a preteen, Sylvia shaved her eyebrows, wore mascara, eyeliner, and tight pants, and had sex with boys and men. "My grandmother used to come home and it smelled like a French whorehouse, but that didn't stop me," Rivera said. "I got many ass-whippings from her."[27] The neighbors, evincing heterosexist beliefs, had teased Viejita about Rivera's expressed femininity, warning that she would become a despicable street-hustling *maricón*. Viejita took those criticisms, combined with her own homophobia, to heart. When Rivera came home one night with hickeys on her neck, Viejita beat her, screaming, "Next thing I know you'll be hanging out with the rest of the *maricones* on 42nd Street!"[28] Later, when a neighbor reported sighting Rivera on 42nd Street, Viejita threatened her more vehemently. Rivera attempted suicide and spent two months in a hospital. Viejita, believing Rivera was going to die, tried to remove a cross hanging from around her neck, but Rivera would not let go of it.[29] Recalling her childhood, Rivera expressed frustration with a community that labeled her a gay maricón while foreclosing other sexual and social options. "As I've grown up, I've realized that I do have a certain attraction to men. But I believe that growing up the way I did, I was basically pushed into this role. In Spanish cultures, if you're effeminate, you're automatically a fag; you're a gay boy. I mean, you start off as a young child and you don't have an option—especially back then. You were either a fag or a dyke. There was no in-between."[30]

Unhappy with her grandmother and the neighborhood, Rivera left home at age 10 to seek a new one on 42nd Street in Times Square.[31] That was where the drag queens and the boy hustlers performed sex work. Although literally homeless and estranged from her birth family, she was able to find a new site of community and kinship. She was excited to find so many drag queens, some of whom adopted her and helped

queens, most of them Latin@ and black, attended the celebration, which, Rivera said, felt "just like being reborn."[34]

But such life-affirming joys were rare; street life was hard. Some of the queens Rivera met at the drag balls downtown and in Harlem were affluent, but the street queens turned tricks because they had to. Prostitution was an economic necessity because many of them had left home or been kicked out as children, and because of transphobic, homophobic, and racist employment discrimination. "[I]t just wasn't feasible to be working if you wanted to wear your makeup and do your thing," as Rivera put it.[35] Most abused drugs and alcohol. "You must remember, everyone was doing drugs back then," she said. "Everybody was selling drugs, and everybody was buying drugs to take to other bars, like myself. I was no angel."[36] Near the bottom of the social hierarchy, the street queens risked violence at the hands of each other, their customers, and the police—and the threat of arrest and prison time always loomed.[37] "Back then we were beat up by the police, by everybody," recalled Rivera. "When drag queens were arrested, what degradation there was. [...] 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. I very nicely beat the shit out of a man."[38] In an environment full of dangers induced by poverty, drugs, and state violence, the presence of true friends could be lifesaving. Early in her life on the streets, Rivera met a black street queen named Marsha P. Johnson, who became her

best friend for the next decade. Like a big sister, Johnson looked out for her, taught her how to apply makeup, and gave her good advice, like "show a happy face all the time, not to give a fuck about nothing, not to let nothing stop you [...] Don't mess with anyone's lover; don't rip off anyone's dope or money."[39] When, because of a police crackdown on "vice," Sylvia ended up in prison at Rikers Island in the cellblock reserved for "gay crimes," she met a black queen friend named Bambi Lamour. In jail, the two developed a reputation for being "crazy, abnormal bitches"; according to Rivera, "Nobody ever fucked with us."[40]

On the night of June 27, 1969, Sylvia was only 17 years old. It was a hot and muggy evening, and she headed to the Stonewall Inn to go dancing. Stonewall was not a drag queen bar. In fact, it allowed few drag queens inside because the owners felt gender-nonconforming people would attract trouble from the police. Racism was central to the story of Stonewall; Rivera characterized the Stonewall Inn as "a white male bar for middle-class males to pick up young boys of different races."[41] But she had connections inside the bar, so she could get in. Then, all of a sudden, police were walking through, ordering the patrons to line up and present identification. There was a New York law requiring people to wear at least three pieces of clothing "appropriate" to their birth-assigned gender, and usually in these raids, only people dressed in clothes of a different gender, people without IDs, and employees of the bar would be arrested. Everyone else would be released.[42] Transgender and gender-variant people were separated from lesbians and gays, according to Rivera: "Routine was, 'Faggots over here, dykes over here, and freaks over there,' referring to my side of the community."[43] She elaborated, "The queens and the real butch dykes were the freaks."[44] But on this night, a confrontation occurred. Who initiated the confrontation has become politically important to transgender people who wish to establish historical authenticity within queer movements. One of historian Martin Duberman's interviewees said it was "a dyke dressed in men's clothing" who resisted as the police put hir into the paddy wagon.[45] Rivera told transgender activist Leslie Feinberg that "it was street gay people from the Village out front—homeless people who lived in the park in Sheridan Square outside the bar—and then drag queens behind them and everybody behind us."[46] She said to Latino Gay Men of New York that "street queens of that era" initiated the Stonewall riots by throwing pocket change at the police.[47] She seemed aware of her role in the historical narratives of Stonewall as she joked with the Latino Gay Men audience: "I have been given the credit for throwing the first Molotov cocktail by many historians but I always like to correct it; I threw the second one, I did not throw the first one!"[48]

Though the riot took place at a bar with a largely white, normatively gendered clientele, it was the street youth and gender-variant people nearby—many of them working-class and of color—who were on the front lines of the confrontation. Those who had most been targets of police harassment, those who were most socially and economically marginalized, fought most fiercely. Seymour Pine, the deputy inspector in charge of public morals at the New York Police Department, was the lead police officer on the scene. He recalled on a 1989 National Public Radio program: "One drag queen, as we put her in the car, opened the door on the other side and jumped out. At which time we had to chase that person and he was caught

everything else, with a drag queen straddling him. She was beating the hell out of him with her shoe."[50] Rivera described seeing one drag queen who got beat by the police "into a bloody pulp," and "a couple of dykes they took out and threw in a car."[51] In his historical re-examination of Stonewall, David Carter wrote that "it seems irrefutable that a highly disproportionate amount of the physical courage displayed during the riots came from the more effeminate men in the crowd" and from the street youth.[52] According to Rivera, "Many radical straight men and women" living in Greenwich Village also joined the riot.[53]

Few sources specifically denote race or ethnicity in describing the front line Stonewall combatants. However, Duberman believes it was mostly street people and drag queens who started the fighting.[54] Because many of the street queens Rivera described working with were black and Latin@, I assume that people of color played pivotal roles.[55] This view is supported by sources' occasionally racialized depictions of the riot's early moments. One recalled a "big, hunky, nice-looking Puerto Rican guy" throwing a milk carton at police near the beginning of the confrontation. According to another account, "a young Puerto Rican taunted the gays, asking why they put up with being shoved around by cops."[56] One of David Carter's interviewees said that Gino, a working-class Puerto Rican gay man, was so enraged at the sight of police mistreating a butch female that he yelled at officers to "let her go!" Others in the crowd chimed in; then Gino threw a heavy cobblestone onto the trunk of a police car, "scaring the shit" out of them.[57] It is also important to note that the Stonewall combatants' resistant acts drew inspiration from contemporaneous movements for racial justice. Uprisings against racist police brutality had accelerated during the late 1960s, and as the confrontation with police intensified that night at Stonewall, the crowd's chants of "Gay power!" and "We're the pink panthers!" referred to Black Power and the Black Panther Party.[58] Rivera confirmed, "I don't know how many other patrons in the bar were activists, but many of the people were involved in some struggle. I had been doing work in the civil rights movement, against the war in Vietnam, and for the women's movement."[59]

"Published news accounts, for mainstream as well as gay publications, generally elided the roles of gender-variant people and people of color at Stonewall, while subsuming them under the term 'gay.'"

Published news accounts, for mainstream as well as gay publications, generally elided the roles of gender-variant people and people of color at Stonewall, while subsuming them under the term "gay." For instance, the headline of a September 1969 article in the *Advocate* magazine, originally written for the *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, was "Police Raid on N.Y. Club Sets Off First Gay Riot."[60] This formulation—that the Stonewall uprising was a "gay riot"—consolidated gender-nonconforming people, poor people, and people of color under the identity category of "gay." But it could not explain why police targeted some "gay" people for harsher treatment. It also couldn't

'stoned, tacky queens'—precisely those elements in the gay world from whom they had long since dissociated themselves." Some of these gay people even praised the police for showing "restraint" with the combatants.[61] The body of the *Advocate* article followed the lead of its headline, describing the rioters as "homosexuals," "gay," and as "boys," while generally leaving their ethnicities unmarked.[62] But the racialized and gendered dynamics of the confrontation, and the classed and raced semiotics of the queens' otherness, occasionally break through nonetheless. At one point the article reads: "[A] cop grabbed a wild Puerto Rican queen and lifted his arm to bring a club down on 'her.' In his best Maria Montez voice, the queen challenged, 'How'd you like a big Spanish dick up your little Irish ass?'"

Though the more conservative gays may not have wished it, the national political climate did shift in the uprising's wake. Drawing from the energies of the Third World liberation, civil rights, and feminist movements, two gay political groups, Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activists Alliance, formed in the New York area.[63] Fresh from the empowering actions at Stonewall, Rivera started attending the groups' meetings with high hopes. "I thought that night in 1969 was going to be our unity for the rest of our lives," she told Martin Duberman.[64] But the appearance of political unity soon fractured as Rivera found herself shunned on the basis of her race, class, and gender expression. A founder of GAA, Arthur Bell, reported that "the general membership is frightened of Sylvia and thinks she's a troublemaker. They're frightened by street people." At GAA, wrote Duberman, "[i]f someone was not shunning her darker skin or sniggering at her passionate, fractured English, they were deploring her rude anarchism as inimical to order or denouncing her sashaying ways as offensive to womanhood." Despite feeling marginalized in the groups, Rivera had found purpose in the activism. She kept coming to meetings, where she would loudly speak her mind, and fervently engaged in all of their political actions. But some women in the groups had mixed feelings about her femininity. Events came to a head during the 1973 gay pride rally in Washington Square Park, when Jean O'Leary of GAA publicly denounced Rivera for "parodying" womanhood. Lesbian Feminist Liberation passed out flyers opposing the "female impersonators," seeking to keep queens off the stage.[65] "[B]eing that the women felt that we were offensive, the drag queens Tiffany and Billy were not allowed to perform," Rivera recalled. "I had to fight my way up on that stage and literally, people that I called my comrades in the movement, literally beat the shit out of me."[66] Rivera took the 1973 incident hard. She responded by attempting suicide and dropping out of the movement.[67] According to friend Bob Kohler, "Sylvia left the movement because after the first three or four years, she was denied a right to speak."[68]

Rivera was not only involved in GLF and GAA. Sometimes she marched with the Young Lords and the Black Panthers, and recalled a meeting with Huey Newton as transformative. She dreamed of enacting a very grounded kind of social change: creating a home for "the youngsters," the underage street queens who, like her, had begun working on the streets at age ten, and who not long afterward ended up dead. Rivera and her friend Marsha P. Johnson called their group "Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries." They found their refuge for the young street

STAR House would pray to the saints, particularly to Saint Barbara (reputed to be the patron saint of queer Latinos), before they went out hustling. And she began to cook elaborate dinners each night for "the children." But this situation was not to last. They were eventually evicted for nonpayment of rent. Before they left, they removed the refrigerator and destroyed the work they had done on the building. Rivera explained, "That's the type of people we are: You fuck us over, we fuck you over right back."[69]

III.

Some formulations of queer and transgender politics assert the signal importance of visibility. They celebrate the Stonewall riots as a turning point in which queer and trans people spoke up to straight society, then found freedom, kinship, and community in their ensuing political vocality. They advocate a similar personal trajectory for gay and trans people: at some point, one must opt to break silence, come out of the sexual/gender closet, or refuse to pass as normative, in order to challenge the hegemony of hetero and gender normativity.

The disjunction between this narrative and Rivera's experience illustrates its hidden assumptions of power and privilege. As a child, Rivera involuntarily became visible to neighbors and to her grandmother as a feminine Puerto Rican boy. Poverty and discrimination, rather than pure choice, pushed her into the sex trade. Her queer visibility resulted in estrangement and sexual/gendered surveillance from her birth family and from a homophobic community. Her classed, gendered, and raced visibility as a Puerto Rican street queen resulted in incarceration and unrelenting harassment by police. Though Rivera agitated politically at the Stonewall riots and in GAA and GLF meetings, the gay communities that had "come out" together were not supportive spaces, but stifling and unwelcoming. It was only in communities of poor street queens of color, it seemed, that she felt more at home. Rivera's life shows that queer/trans visibility is not a simple binary; multiple kinds of visibilities, differentially situated in relation to power, intersect and overlap in people's lives. The consequences and voluntariness of visibility are determined in part by social location, and by the systems of power that write gendered and racialized meanings onto bodies. The space "outside" the closet that one comes out to may fail to correspond to romanticized or reductive visions of identity and community.

"Poverty and discrimination, rather than pure choice, pushed her into the sex trade."

Political scientist Cathy Cohen has suggested that queer politics has failed to live up to its early promise of radically transforming society. Rather than upend systems of oppression, Cohen says, the queer agenda has sought assimilation and integration into the dominant institutions that perpetuate those systems. In clinging to a single-oppression model that divides the world into "straight" and "queer," and insists that straights oppress while queers are oppressed, queer politics has neglected to examine

politics is tethered to rigid, reductive identity categories that don't allow for the possibility of exclusions and marginalizations *within* the categories. Also dismissed is the possibility that the categories themselves might be tools of domination in need of destabilization and reconceptualization.[70]

Rivera's tense relations with mainstream gay and lesbian politics affirm Cohen's analysis.[71] In 1970 she worked hard on a campaign to pass a New York City gay rights bill that included protections for gender-variant people. A few years later, gay activists and politicians agreed in a backroom deal to raise its chances of passage by removing gender protections from the bill. "The deal was, 'You take them out, we'll pass the bill,'" Rivera bitterly recalled.[72] After dropping out of a movement that had begun "to really silence us,"[73] she spent some years homeless on Manhattan's West Side before being asked in 1994 to lead the 25th anniversary Stonewall march. Yet, the New York City Lesbian and Gay Community Center formally banned her from its premises after she vehemently demanded that they take care of homeless trans and queer youth.[74]

Mainstream gay politics' narrow, single-identity agenda situated Rivera on its margins, and viewed her and her memory as both manipulable and dispensible. By contrast, Rivera's own political affinities, while fiercely resisting cooptation, remained inclusive, mobile, and contextual. Her political practice, informed by a complexly situated life, built bridges between movements, prioritizing the project of justice above arbitrary political boundaries. Her personal identifications, similarly, eschewed categorization and resisted reductive definition. Press narratives pegged her as "gay," neighbors had called her a maricón, transgender and genderqueer activists narrated her as transgender and genderqueer, and Jean O'Leary asserted that she "parodied" womanhood. But she told Martin Duberman: "I came to the conclusion [...] that I don't want to be a woman. I just want to be me. I want to be Sylvia Rivera. I like pretending. I like to have the role. I like to dress up and pretend, and let the world think about what I am. Is he, or isn't he? That's what I enjoy."[75] Rivera elaborated: "People now want to call me a lesbian because I'm with [life partner] Julia [Murray], and I say, 'No, I'm just me. I'm not a lesbian.' I'm tired of being labeled. I don't even like the label transgender. [...] I just want to be who I am. [...] I'm living the way Sylvia wants to live. I'm not living in the straight world; I'm not living in the gay world; I'm just living in my own world with Julia and my friends."[76]

Juana María Rodríguez has written that political affinities based on identity categories have "become highly contested sites [...] based on more precise, yet still problematic, categories of identification and concomitant modes of definition. Identity politics' seeming desire to cling to explicative postures, unified subjecthood, or facile social identifications has often resulted in repression, self-censorship, and exclusionary practices that continue to trouble organizing efforts and work against the interests of full human rights, creative individual expression, and meaningful social transformation."[77] To some extent Rivera's history confirms this view. Her distance from a valued Puerto Rican/Venezuelan male subjectivity characterized by whiteness and hegemonic masculinity, resulted in much pain. Her distance from middle-class white gay maleness resulted in the condemnation of O'Leary, other feminists, and GAA and GLF members. Narratives of gay history that viewed Stonewall as a "gay" event prevented recognition of raced, classed

"*You* have acquired your liberation, your freedom, from that night. Myself, I've got shit, just like I had back then. But I still struggle, I still continue the struggle. I will struggle til the day I die and my main struggle right now is that my community will seek the rights that are justly ours."[79] "My community," Rivera clarified, the "our" that she was referring to, was the "transgender community"; she was sick of seeing transgender political needs continually sold "down the river" in favor of gays.[80] ("[A]fter all these years, the trans community is still at the back of the bus," she wrote.[81]) In this moment, identity labels usefully help Rivera describe her disgust with gay dominance and transgender marginality. She can verbally scold the segment of the lesbian and gay community that wants "[m]ainstreaming, normality, being normal" —to adopt children, to get married, to wear properly gendered clothes—and she can express her political distance from those assimilationist dreams.[82]

Yet, when Rivera says to Latino Gay Men of New York, "I am tired of seeing my children—I call everybody including yous [sic] in the room, you are all my children—I am tired of seeing homeless transgender children; young, gay, youth children," it becomes apparent that her visions of community are suffused with far more complexity and fluidity than a mere denunciation of certain people and a celebrating of others.[83] In that moment, Rivera's articulations of kinship, family, and community exceed models of kinship built upon heterosexual reproduction, and models of community that rely upon an identity politics that Rodríguez called "exclusionary" and "repressive." We begin to see in that sentence that her visions of kinship, family, and community are both inclusive and dynamic. Like her lifelong attempts at building "home," they are unpredictable, impatient but generous, provisional yet welcoming. They parallel the ways in which STAR House enacted a limber physical mobility, but a steadfast commitment to justice, as circumstance buffeted it. In encompassing her life partner Julia, young trans sex workers, Bambi Lamour, Marsha P. Johnson, and all those in Latino Gay Men of New York, they engage in what José Esteban Muñoz has called queer world-making.[84] Even though Rivera "grew up without love," attempts to circumscribe her personal and political positionings are challenged by her abiding ethic of love for all her children: young and old; gay, bisexual, and transgender; normatively gendered and gender variant; in the room and outside it.

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NOTES

1 Sylvia Rivera Law Project, http://www.srlp.org; James Withers, "Remembering Sylvia Rivera: Though a Divisive Figure, Trans Activist and Stonewall Rioter Gets Honored with Street Sign," *New York Blade* (25 November 2005), http://www.newyorkblade.com/2005/11-25/news/localnews/rivera.cfm.

2 The contention that Stonewall singlehandedly turned the national gay and lesbian tide is refuted by Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker's film, *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*. *Screaming Queens* uses interviews and archival research to show that

violence because of their public gendered, racial, and class visibility.

3 Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993), xv.

4 See, for example, John D'Emilio, "Stonewall: Myth and Meaning," in *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 147.

5 I use "gender-variant" provisionally. Because "transgender" is a relatively recent term, there is no seamless transhistorical connection between people in the late 1960s who I am describing as "gender-variant," and those today who we might call "transgender." But this essay contends that in 1969, people whose expressed genders were distant from hegemonic norms were subject to greater discrimination than those closer to norms.

6 Duberman, 282; Benjamin Shepard, "Sylvia and Sylvia's Children: A Battle for a Queer Public Space," in *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, ed. Mattilda, aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2004), 101.

7 See Patrick Califia, *Sex Changes: Transgender Politics*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1997; 2003), 227.

8 See, for example, Andy Humm, "Transgender Rights," *Gotham Gazette* (July 2001), http://www.gothamgazette.com/article//20010701/3/183 and Michael Bronski, "Sylvia Rivera: 1951–2002," *Z Magazine* (April 2002), http://www.zmag.org/Zmag/articles/april02bronski.htm.

9 Southern Voice, "'T' Time at the Human Rights Campaign," *National Transgender Advocacy Coalition*, 29 March 2001, http://www.ntac.org/news/01/04/08southern.html.

10 Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 10–1.

11 Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

12 As I point out later, Rivera herself often strategically made use of this mobilization.

13 Not all recovery projects have done so. The Sylvia Rivera Law Project's mission statement importantly prioritizes those affected by "multiple vectors of state and institutional violence," and emphasizes participation in "a multi-issue movement for justice and self-determination of all people" in order to address root causes of violence. Also significant are the connections made by TransJustice, "Trans Day of Action for Social and Economic Justice" (2005), in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*, ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006), 228–9. I do not mean to suggest that the projects I scrutinize intentionally sought to elide vectors of power. Rather, I foreground my interpretations of their unintended effects in the hopes of helping to "reenvision a politics of solidarity that goes beyond multiculturalism." Andrea Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing," in *Color of Violence*, 73.

14 A gender-neutral pronoun.

15 Leslie Feinberg noted, "We are a movement of masculine females and feminine males, cross-dressers, transsexual men and women, intersexuals born on the anatomical sweep between female and male, gender-blenders, many other sex and gender-variant people, and our significant others." Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 5.

16 Ibid, 106.

17 Riki Wilchins, "Gender Rights are Human Rights," in *GenderQueer: Voices From Beyond the Sexual Binary*, ed. Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2002), 297.

18 See Wilchins, "Queering Bodies," in *GenderQueer*, 27. For the academic origins of

20 Benjamin Shepard, "History or Myth? Writing Stonewall," *Lambda Book Report* (August/September 2004), 14.

21 Patricia Hill Collins, "Defining Black Feminist Thought," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 246.

22 Duberman, 23; Sylvia Rivera, "Queens in Exile, the Forgotten Ones," in *GenderQueer*, 68–9.

23 Rivera, 69.

24 In my sources, Rivera only refers to her grandmother as "my grandmother." However, Martin Duberman in *Stonewall* refers to Rivera's grandmother as Viejita. I assume this is Rivera's usage because Duberman interviewed her extensively for the book. Therefore I have used Viejita as an alternate way to refer to Rivera's grandmother.

25 Duberman, 21–2; Rivera, 68.

26 Rivera, 68.

27 Ibid., 69.

28 Duberman, 23.

29 Ibid., 66.

30 Rivera, 69.

31 Duberman, 24; Rivera, 70.

32 Rivera, 70.

33 Duberman, 66.

34 Ibid., 67.

35 Rivera, 70–1. Gender presentation and class were intertwined. The street queens had to hustle, and the affluent queens did not, partly because the street queens were more gender-nonconforming. See Rivera, 71, and David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 61.

36 "Sylvia Rivera Talk at LGMNY" (manuscript, June 2001), transcribed by Lauren Galarza and Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, 2. See also Rivera, 71; Duberman, 66, 70.

37 Rivera, 70–1; Duberman, 68–71; Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights*, 1945–1990: An Oral History (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 189–90.

38 Feinberg, 106.

39 Duberman, 68.

40 Ibid., 123–4.

41 Rivera, 78. She also notes, "Even back then we had our racist little clubs. There were the white gay bars and then there were the very few third world bars and drag queen bars." "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 2. Rivera's depiction of the Stonewall Inn's clientele as being mostly white, middle-class, male, and gender normative is partly corroborated and partly contested by David Carter's sources. Carter, 73–7.

42 Duberman, 192; Rivera, 77–8.

43 "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 3.

44 Rivera, 78. New York Police Department Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine has confirmed that in these raids, police singled out gender-variant people for extra harassment and physical "examination" in the bathroom. It's unclear what happened during this examination. David Carter, 140–1.

45 Duberman, 196. For more on this butch person, see Carter, 150–1.

46 Feinberg, 107.

47 "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 2.

http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/remembering_stonewall/.

50 Ibid.

51 Marcus, 192.

52 Carter, 192, 162–3. Carter concludes that combatants were most often young, poor or working-class, and gender-variant, and also notes the participation of middle-class college graduates. Carter, 163, 262.

53 "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 5.

54 Duberman, "Stonewall Place" (1989) in *About Time: Exploring the Gay Past*, ed. Duberman (1986; rev. and expanded ed., New York: Meridian, 1991), 425.

55 In a speech, Rivera named Marsha P. Johnson, an African-American, and fellow street queens as front-line combatants. "[The confrontation] was started by the street queens of that era, which I was part of, Marsha P. Johnson, and many others that are not here." "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 3–4. However, David Carter has asserted that "of those on the rebellion's front lines, most were Caucasian; few were Latino." Carter, 262.

56 Carter, 161.

57 Ibid., 152.

58 Ibid., 164–5; Duberman, *Stonewall*, 197, 203.

59 Rivera, 77. See also Feinberg, 107.

60 Dick Leitsch, "Police Raid on N.Y. Club Sets Off First Gay Riot" (September 1969), in *Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967–1999* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 1999), 11.

61 Duberman, *Stonewall*, 206.

62 Leitsch, 11–3.

63 Though inspired by racial justice movements, the groups generally excluded people of color. Duberman, *Stonewall*, 233–4.

64 Ibid., 246.

65 Ibid., 235–6, 238; Shepard, "Sylvia and Sylvia's Children," 99–100.

66 "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 8–9.

67 Duberman, *Stonewall*, 236; "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 9; Shepard, 100.

68 Shepard, "Sylvia and Sylvia's Children," 100.

69 Duberman, *Stonewall*, 251–5.

70 Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," 200–201, 203, 219–221, 223.

71 In her essay, Cohen is specifically addressing queer, rather than gay and lesbian, politics. However, both politics share similar logics.

72 "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 7; Shepard, "Sylvia and Sylvia's Children," 99.

73 "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 9.

74 Shepard, "Sylvia and Sylvia's Children," 101; "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 6; Bronski.

75 Duberman, *Stonewall*, 125.

76 Rivera, 77.

77 Rodríguez, 41.

78 Soundportraits.org, "Sylvia Rivera," http://www.soundportraits.org/in-print/magazine_articles/sylvia_rivera/, from 27 June 1999 *New York Times Magazine*.

79 "Sylvia Rivera Talk," 6.

80 Ibid., 7.

81 Rivera, 80.