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Senior Seminar

9 December 2021

Emphasis on the T: the Disillusionment of Transgender Activists

Life for Pauli Murray had never been easy. Growing up within the height of Jim Crow as a black “pseudohermaphrodite”¹ created added struggles outside of typical racism. At a young age, Murray began to explore the boundaries of gender identity and expression, and she did this by referring to herself as a “little boy-girl.” She later changed her name from Pauline to Pauli in order to remain more androgynous. She continued this journey of gender self-expression within her writing, specifically in a short story of which the main character was “ambiguously sexed.”² Murray worked to move outside of strict labels and gender identity and often remained fluid within the spectrum. While Murray referred to herself sometimes as a trans man, she still used female pronouns when referring to herself, pushing the boundaries of identity. It is hard to say whether Murray used female pronouns in order to remain fluid, or whether societal pressures kept her from using other pronouns. It seems unlikely, however, that she would bend so easily to society's gender ideas as she was very outspoken about her beliefs and ideas, not typically cowering from society and its judgment. She was open about her relations with women, as well as her “boy self” named Pete in which she did not aim to hide.

Murray did not back down in the face of oppression. Whether it be discrimination based on gender or race, she stood her ground and made her beliefs known. For example, when traveling to North Carolina with her lover Adelene McBean to visit family, they ventured onto a

¹ This was the term used in the 1940s to refer to someone who was transgender. This term is not used today, but is referenced for the time period.

² Bronski, Michael. *A Queer History of the United States for Young People*. pg. 158.

segregated bus in which Black individuals were meant to sit in the back. The seats open for Murray and McBean were broken, however, leading the couple to choose working seats farther up the bus. They were reprimanded and asked to move to the back of the bus, yet they refused. This led to their arrest for violating the rules of segregation. This incident, as noted by Michael Bronski, occurred fifteen years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. Why do we never hear about Pauli when referring to Black resistance? Activism of any kind typically highlights and uplifts those resisting that are lighter skin, straight, and cis-gendered. It is likely that Murray's stand against segregation did not draw attention due to her gender-identity/perceived sexuality. Yet this is not the only aspect of Murray's life that has been overlooked.

Murray became active within legal work and politics, eventually obtaining three law degrees. Her third law degree was from Yale, making her the first African American to receive a law degree from there. Later in her career *State's Laws on Race and Color* in which she compiles all state laws regarding racial segregation. According to Justice Thurgood Marshall, this work "was the legal 'bible of the civil rights movements,' and was influential in helping him shape his arrangements for *Brown v. Board of Education*."³ Yet, when we study *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil rights movement, how often do we hear of Pauli Murray's influence? Much like the rest of years to come, gender nonconforming individuals become somewhat erased from popular rhetoric regarding these periods.

The Historiography surrounding gay and transgender history typically suggests that rebellions such as Stonewall were simply "gay" protests that sparked the gay power movement. Within LGBTQ+ rhetoric, transgender activists are highlighted as having small roles in the movement, specifically shutting out trans POC. When regarding protests such as Stonewall or

³ Bronski, Michael. *A Queer History of the United States for Young People*. pg. 161.

Cooper's Donuts, a lot of the narrative erases trans involvement and loses the original meaning of the protest. Within gay history, some historians erase or exclude trans narratives, while other historians critique this practice and aim to reinstate trans voices into the mix.

LGBTQ+historiography is the intertwining of these two general views on history, which creates a comprehensive look into LGBTQ+ activism as it offers insight into the attitudes regarding transgender and gender nonconforming individuals of this time. For example, when researching simply "gay" history, the involvement of trans activists throughout LGBTQ+ movements seem to be lost. In *Identity and the case for Gay Rights* by David A. J. Richards attempts to take a comparative approach to gender and sexuality, highlighting their intersections overtime. However, instead of highlighting the importance of gender identity within the LGBTQ+ community and the struggles of gender non-conforming individuals, Richards uses gender more of a comparison between the Gay Rights movement and the feminist movement of this time. Of course transgender individuals do not always classify themselves gay since gender expression does not equate to sexual orientation. Yet it would only make sense and be beneficial for the subject of gender, gay rights, body autonomy, and feminism to include transgender topics and history. This theme of trans exclusion from LGBTQ+ discourse stems from a larger web of only including what is considered "ideal" to the movement or scholarship. Joanne Meyerowitz discusses somewhat this idea in her book *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Meyerowitz discusses the changing attitudes and scholarship regarding transsexuality⁴ beginning in post World War II America and expanding to the 90s.

Highlighting the evolution of medical and biological advancements/rhetoric, which slowly opened up the discussion of sex vs. gender within scientific and social spheres,

⁴ Transsexuality during this time period was a term used to describe someone identifying as a different gender to their assigned sex at birth. This term is now outdated and has since been replaced by words such as transgender.

Meyerowitz attempts to reengage the discussion of transexuality as simply a matter of self-expression that everyone participates in in their own way. Furthering medical advancements and social exposure created an environment/stereotype in which transgender individuals are depicted as deviants or freaks: “like everyone else, they articulated their senses of self with the language and cultural forms available to them. They were neither symbols, emblems detached from milieus, nor heroes or villains engaged in mythic battles to further or stifle progress. They were instead ordinary and extraordinary human beings who searched for workable solutions to pressing personal problems.”⁵ Meyerowitz seems to try to create a sense of normalcy for the community while also showing the struggles faced as they are overshadowed by the feminist and gay power movements, which transgender activists typically played a vital role. Historian Dr. Eric Cervini also notes the struggles of trans activism within his book *The Deviant’s War: The Homosexual vs. The United States of America* in which he briefly discusses trans involvement within gay movements. Cervini mainly discusses the role of Frank Kameny, a gay astronomer and prominent member of the Mattachine Society, within the gay movement. Cervini notes in his epilogue however, about the mistreatment of trans activists from these groups and the importance their role had within this movement, while still noting the significant work these popular gay activist groups have accomplished.

One aspect consistent throughout many historians regarding trans history is the idea that trans POC within the gay rights and trans rights movements (and continuing within society itself) have become further ostracized. For example, historian C. Riley Snorton argues there is another layer of “deviancy” placed on Black trans individuals which subsequently can be traced back to slavery and the Antebellum period. Snorton attempts to show the intersection between race and gender within colonial and modern America by first explaining the stripping of gender ideals

⁵ Meyerowitz, Joanne, *How Sex Changed*, pg. 13.

in order to perpetuate the slaveholder's ideology, and secondly showing the standard of the "ideal" trans man/woman as being lighter skin toned. This same theme seen within *Unlivable Lives* by Laurel Westbrook, in which she argues trans activism specifically highlights those with lighter skin tones. Snorton argues that gender identity for Black individuals places them as more "deviant" due to the intersection of their race and gender stereotyping. This idea forms, Norton argues, from Antebellum slavery as men and women were stripped of their masculinity and femininity. Alongside this, men and women utilized cross-dressing in order to escape slavery, which was then perpetuated as a harmful stereotype of black men and women being "gender deviants" well into modern day. Snorton stretches this idea throughout modern US history to show how Black trans men and women are further discriminated against in society, specifically showing their exclusion from popular trans rhetoric.

Throughout many of these texts, the persistent "ideal" within trans identity becomes a major point of discussion between both historians and sociologists. As previously mentioned, the book *Unlivable Lives* by Laurel Westbrook attempts to break down the way in which activist groups choose victims of crimes, portray victims of crimes, etc. in order to gain strides in their specific movement. This specifically highlights the historiographical trend seen within *Black on Both Sides* and other works of trans POC being ignored by activist groups in search of more ideal victims. Throughout this book, studies of trans violence and visibility of these crimes highlights how and why specific stories are covered over others in order to promote the movements. Specifically the book notes that trans POC are particularly ignored in order to promote the "ideal victim." This is similar to the discussion of representation within Snorton's work, in which he discusses the visibility of Christine Jorgensen, who was white, compared to other trans individuals just as deserving. This same idea can be shown outside of activism and within drag

culture. In the book *Drag Queen and Beauty Queens: Contesting Femininity in the World's Playground*, Laurie A. Green discusses the way in which Drag Queens resist through their art. The Miss'd America pageant is a spin-off of the original Miss America Pageant in which Drag Queens compete. Drag culture and transgender culture influence both pageants, leading to the "Show us your shoes" movement prompted by drag queen. This idea was introduced by the Miss America pageant after being prompted by Drag Queens in the crowd of a Miss America parade. The pageant then officially claimed this idea on their website, completely disregarding the Drag Queens involved. This further emphasizes this trend seen within works such as *Unlivable Lives* and other LGBTQ+ histories of gender non-conforming individuals being purposefully excluded because they do not match the "ideal."

A look into LGBTQ+ movements and their treatment of their trans brothers and sisters prompts the question, why do the already marginalized gay community seek to further oppress trans individuals within their movements, organizations, etc.? After all, trans activists received the most harassment from police within this group, so why continue to add to their struggle? There are some instances where it stems from blatant transphobia, such as gay and lesbian activists referring to Sylvia Rivera as a "man in a dress."⁶ In other instances, feminist lesbian groups attempting to redefine gender roles and stereotypes discriminated against trans men specifically: "Fearing that butch lesbian were becoming "heterosexual" trans men who were conferred heterosexual privilege upon transitioning, these feminists viewed trans men as traitors who had literally become the enemy."⁷ Instead of allowing individuals to decide what gender stereotypes they adopted and which ones they reject on a personal level, feminist lesbians saw trans men as conforming to the patriarchy in order to receive male privilege.

⁶ Eric Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual v. The United States*, 381.

⁷ McCammon, Holly J., Verta Taylor, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohner, *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, pg. 450.

Beyond the blatant transphobia of some, other societal factors played into their exclusion and discrimination from gay organizations, events, and activism. Why do trans activists receive little to no recognition for their strides for equality? This stems from the common theme in trans history of “acceptable” visibility. One those activists that fit the mold of what society deems acceptable shall be uplifted by gay movements. Gender non-conforming individuals typically did not conform to society the way in which gay organizations would like. Organizations such as the GAA did not claim the work of trans activists typically, regarding them as outsiders to the movement. In other instances, these organizations would actually claim the work of trans activists as their own. Even when violence against trans men and women is used to promote equal rights, only certain victims would be “awarded” attention: “The pressure from both activists and the larger social problems marketplace to focus only on “ideal” victims resulted in the two most famous victims, compared to all of the victims during this period, being relatively lighter skinned, younger, labeled female at birth, and dead.”⁸ Typically groups only highlighted trans victims who were lighter skin toned, women, and from a better socioeconomic class. Those who do not conform nor meet the standard of “ideal” would not be included in gay activism. As gay activists groups fight for equality, trans rights fall to the backburner due to their “second-class” status within the movement. Some activists believed trans rights were important, but that gay rights must be achieved first. This is similar to other movements such as the feminist movement, in which white feminism was promoted first over Black feminism, and the Civil Rights movement, where Black men’s rights were uplifted before Black women. The idea of gay *and* trans rights was seen as too radical to truly prompt change, both within society and legislature.

⁸ Westbrook, Laurel. 2021. *Unlivable Lives: Violence and Identity in Transgender Activism*, pg. 43

However, not all activists within these movements promoted trans exclusion, but rather wanted to fight alongside these trailblazers. Protests such as Stonewall, Cooper's donuts etc. exemplify this as gay and lesbian men and women joined in on the fight after trans and gender nonconforming individuals were being harassed. Transgender activists worked alongside gay and lesbian activists within the gay power movement to achieve both gay and trans rights, but gay organizations generally disregard their work or claim it as their own. While there was some blatant transphobia within these movements, it is mainly the popular gay organizations and gay bar owners that exclude and discriminate against trans men and women the most, outside of legal doctrine.

The Stonewall Riots in Greenwich New York has become one of the most notorious events within LGBTQ+ movement. Being widely accredited as the "spark" for the gay rights revolution, Stonewall is typically depicted as simply a "gay" rebellion. However, when examining the actual events of the night, it is clear to see that trans men and women were at the forefront of this rebellion, similar to that in the Compton Cafeteria Riots. Alongside this, transgender POC were again left out of the discourse following this event by gay organizations. This further emphasizes the idea expressed throughout transgender studies that excluding gender non-conforming individuals and specifically POC would make the gay rights movement more palatable to society as a whole. When viewing sources on the policing of gay bars, it is important to note the increasing need for *visible* gender non-conforming traits in order to be arrested for deviancy. For example, the case *One Eleven Wines & Liquors v. Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control* exemplifies the requirements needed in order to be considered breaking the law in regards to homosexuality, gender-deviancy, etc. In this case One Eleven Wines and Liquors attempts to refute the claims that they broke the law for knowingly serving

liquor to gender non-conforming individuals, homosexuals, etc. and that while in operation also allowed “lewd” activity to ensue. The laws stated in Rules 4 and 5 regarding liquor licenses specifically highlights “female impersonators” as banned from any bar with said liquor license. If this is the case, then it probable that within legal doctrine regarding the policing of gay bars, that the majority of police harrasment was purposefully felt by drag queens and other gender non-conforming individuals:

“Though in our culture homosexuals are indeed unfortunates, their status does not make them criminals or outlaws... so long as their public behavior violates no legal proscriptions they have the undoubted right to congregate in public. And so long as their public behavior conforms with currently acceptable standards of decency and morality, they may, at least in the present context, be viewed as having the equal right to congregate within licensed establishments.”⁹

This quote from *One Eleven Wines & Liquors v. Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control* exhibits that within the policing of gay bars, gender non-conforming individuals are directly discriminated against. It shows that homosexual individuals will only be spotted based on “lewd” behavior, while drag queens and transgender men and woman would be spotted and harrassed based on simply being. This idea also shows that the main point of these “gay” protests, which was a direct response to trans discrimination, is lost.

When regarding Stonewall with this idea in mind, alongside witness testimony, it shows that transgender men and women, specifically of color, were truly at the forefront of the rebellion, since their targeted harassment by police is what prompted patrons to fight back. Scholars such as Ardel Haefele-Thomas break down the night at Stonewall beginning with the police entering the bar and demanding “that all people in drag begin to strip off their clothes so that officers could count how many pieces of gender inappropriate clothing they were wearing.”

¹⁰ This continues with the notion that while homosexual actions were illegal, simply being

⁹ Marc Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History*, pg. 53.

¹⁰ Haefele-Thomas, Ardel, *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, pg. 146.

homosexual did not constitute as a crime. Individuals such as drag queens and others not considered the “norm” for their gender identity are specifically considered illegal due to simply their being/appearance. Yet, Stonewall is still regarded as a “gay” rebellion rather than including both gay and trans involvement, creating a unified effort:

“how many other days and nights did LGBTQ+ people stand up in both small and large ways against police brutality? Trans people of color were often at the forefront of these actions, but both mainstream culture and gay and lesbian culture often paint these momentous and courageous acts of defiance as white and cisgendered. Doing so further marginalized LGBTQ+ people of color, particularly trans people of color.”¹¹

While it is important to acknowledge the role of gay activists within these events, alongside the lasting impact to gay rights as a whole, it must include the full narrative regardless of gender expression.

Activists heavily participating within these popular gay organizations had strong opinions as it pertains to Stonewall. Many groups such as the Mattachine society did not claim the work of Stonewall, seeing this protest as a hindrance to gay rights. Following the events of Stonewall, the Mattachine society printed flyers in which they prompted individuals to “respect law and order.” This groups specifically called out trans men and women who rioted the nights of Stonewall, believing this chaos would place roadblocks for gay rights. In an interview regarding the events of Stonewall, Randy Wicker makes this statement:

“I mean, the last thing to me that I thought at the time they we’re setting back the gay liberation movement twenty years, because I mean all these TV shows and all this work that we had done to try to establish legitimacy of the gay movement that we were nice middle class people like everybody else and, you know, adjusted and all that.”¹²

Later within this interview, Randy discussed his previous opposition for how Stonewall went down. He did not believe this form of protesting would lead to positive results for the movement,

¹¹ Haefele-Thomas, Ardel, *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, pg. 136.

¹² Johnson, Marsha P. and Randy Wicker, “Season 2, Episode 1- Marsha P. Johnson and Randy Wicker,” Interviewed by Eric Marcus.

nor did he generally understand the plight of trans men and women at this time. During this period, Randy Wicker held a transphobic ideology surrounding gay rights, and did not necessarily agree with gender nonconforming individuals in general. He was a prominent member of the Mattachien Society, a conservative gay organization which typically excluded trans and gender nonconforming individuals from participating in. Randy Wicker's attitudes surrounding trans activism offers insight to the way in which these popular gay organizations viewed and discussed trans activism.

After forming a close bond with Marsha P. Johnson, Wicker saw the error in his ways and sought to change. He later discusses that at the time, he was angry by the trajectory of the movement and the way in which it was receiving attention, but years down the line he states "I was against it. Now I'm very happy Stonewall happened. I'm very happy the way things worked out."¹³ Randy, like many other members of these conservative gay organizations, viewed trans mens and women as disadvantage to the movement, leading to their disillusionment.

The exclusion of trans individuals can be seen from not only both the narrative and historical memory of "gay rebellions," but also the response of transgender activists. For example, Sylvia Rivera, a prominent transgender activists and participant of the Stonewall Riots, attempted to assist within the gay liberation front similarly to other trans activists of this time. Yet, her involvement and participation was not appreciated, and sometimes not even acknowledged, by organizations such as the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA). In Dr. Eric Cervini's epilogue he specifically highlights Transgender activists such as Rivera and their relations to these organizations. For example, the GAA, or the Gay Activists Alliance, only offered and promoted this "alliance" between gay and lesbian activists, completely disregarding the work

¹³ Johnson, Marsha P. and Randy Wicker, "Season 2, Episode 1- Marsha P. Johnson and Randy Wicker," Interviewed by Eric Marcus.

that Rivera and many other's put in for Gay freedom. Cervini notes that on multiple occasions, Rivera was referred to by lesbian activists in the GAA as a "man in a dress." Not only does this deny Rivera her gender identity she was fighting for, but shows a complete lack of respect for the work she was doing for them and their part of the movement.¹⁴ This frustration felt by Rivera and other activists involved in gay organizations would lead many to form their own sects of activism. For Rivera, this meant pairing with friend and fellow activist Marsha P. Johnson in order to form Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries, or STAR. This group aimed to aid young queer and trans youth who found themselves homeless and cut off from their families for their gender identity/sexuality. This group helped house, feed and build family and community for these young people while also aiding queer activists in jail.

Even within events such as the Gay Pride parade, which promoted itself under the guise of inclusivity, disregarded Rivera as a prominent figure for the movement. At the Gay Pride March of 1973, Rivera was kept from speaking because of her identity as a trans female. In the video, you can see the organizers of the event discussing with themselves and the crowd about whether they should allow Sylvia to speak. Specifically, when asking the crowd their opinion, the speaker refers to Rivera and her associates as "these people," seeming to separate themselves from Rivera in order to place her outside the movement. When Sylvia is finally allowed to speak, she is coldly welcomed on stage by the LGBTQ+ crowd with boos and taunts, and as she passionately yells at the crowd to "quiet down," she begins to address the treatment of her and other "Queens" by these groups. Rivera points out that despite all the hate and backlash she was getting, she and other Transgender activists were the ones putting their lives and security on the line in order to fight for *all* Gay Power. Rivera highlights the importance to help their Gay brothers and sisters who are sitting in jail by saying, "they don't write men. They don't write

¹⁴ Eric Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual v. The United States*, 381.

women. They write STAR, because we're trying to do something for them.”¹⁵ She calls out the mistreatment of her fellow activists left in jail, stating that no one is fighting for them but other Transgender men and women: “I’m not even in the back of the bus. My community is being pulled by a rope around our neck by the bumper of the damn bus... gay liberation but transgender nothing!”¹⁶ This separation of the “Queens Liberation Front” from other gay liberation movements is a direct response to transgender exclusion, harassment, and erasure. Had gay activists groups included trans members, this split would not be so harsh or divided. Lesbian and gay groups isolated trans members, ultimately forcing them outside the movement to fend for themselves despite reaping the benefits from their continued resistance.

When discussing gay rights and transgender history, the Stonewall rebellion, taking place in Greenwich, New York, typically begins the discussion of resistance. However, before Stonewall, the Compton Cafeteria Riots erupted within a small diner in San Francisco. This ensued after police officers harassed and attempted to arrest patrons in the cafeteria dressed in drag. The rebellion, sparked by someone throwing coffee at the police, can be considered the beginning of trans resistance against police harassment. The discussion surrounding this riot, and many others similar, is dictated strongly with specifically gay rhetoric despite the participation being largely transgender individuals, drag queens, and other “gender deviants.” For example, Raymond Broshears, an activist present at the night of the riot, gives an account of the night, highlighting specifically the harassment and participation of trans individuals: “When the police grabbed the arm of one of the transvestites, he threw his cup of coffee in the cop’s face...”¹⁷ The Compton Cafeteria Riots, like many LGBTQ+ rebellions during this time, was sparked by police

¹⁵ Sylvia Rivera, “1973 Gay Pride March and Rally” 13:23-18:39.

¹⁶ Haefele-Thomas, Ardel, *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, pg. 149.

¹⁷ Raymond Broshears qtd. in “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth.” pg.11

singling out gender non-conforming individuals due to the more obvious nature of their “deviancy.” This, coupled with the added weight of “deviancy” placed on specifically transgender POC, directly exhibits the heightened struggle transgender men and women dealt with during this period. However, historians Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crago still seem to somewhat attribute this as a “gay” rebellion. The use of the word gay here does not offer much or any inclusion to gender non-conforming individuals whose discrimination was the direct cause for this event: “Tranvestism, transsexualism, homosexuality are separate entities.”¹⁸ When classifying these events as simply “gay,” it removes trans individuals from the narrative and redistributes the credit from the original groups.

Not only does the Compton Cafeteria Riots not generate trans rhetoric within the popular narrative, it also does not maintain similar societal attention to that of the Stonewall riots. Both events were backed by trans involvement and promoted gay rights, yet Compton is not widely studied or commemorated. This area, as highlighted by Armstrong and Crago, was in a lower socioeconomic bracket and widely populated by “prostitutes and transgender individuals.” This location, therefore, would not be widely patronized by homophile activists who were typically “white, middle-class, gender-normative older men with more resources...”¹⁹ There is speculation of “conservative gay” involvement, but there is little to no evidence supporting this. The lacking narrative of this mostly trans riot can be seen as a window into the attitudes of homophile activists. For example, Bill Beardemphel, a San Francisco activist, categorized the Stonewall riots in a 1997 interview as “a pointless outburst of a frustrated movement that ‘couldn’t get anywhere.’”²⁰ Alongside this, activist groups such as the GAA did not associate

¹⁸ Marc Stein, *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History*, pg. 53.

¹⁹ Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Susan M. Crago, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth.” pg. 11

²⁰ Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Susan M. Crago, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth.” pg. 11

themselves with these riots and the actions of trans individuals, specifically denying help to trans individuals following the events at the Stonewall Inn.²¹ “Homophile activists, however, were ambivalent about the behavior of Compton’s patrons because it threatened homophile accomodation with the police.”²² This continued theme of “ideal” reappears as the Compton Cafeteria Riots fails to fit the desired mold to gain inclusion within LGBTQ+ historical memory.

Alongside Stonewall, other “spur of the moment” protests such as the one at Cooper’s Donuts, compared to that of organized groups, offers further evidence of trans exclusion. In May of 1959, police entered Cooper’s Donuts to inspect the patrons of the establishment, and anyone expressing a differing gender from their ID was arrested. However, they didn’t go quietly: “Once out of the patrol car, the group resisted...ran out of Cooper’s and started throwing doughnuts, cups of coffee, and garbage at the officer’s...”²³ This protest consisted of gay, lesbian, transgender individuals, and more, being diverse on many fronts. However, had this been an organized gay activist group, “gender deviants” would not be included. For example, the Mattachine Society carried out many protests, pickets, etc. in order to promote and defend gay rights. This group's ideas about the execution of these protests, however, led to blatant trans exclusion. The main strategy for these organized efforts was to present the common theme of the “ideal” activist to society. Those participating in these protests were expected to be gender conforming in order to be perceived as “respectable” and therefore easier to be seen as acceptable: “If you go online and study the photograph from these organized protests, you will see that the participants are wearing ‘gender appropriate’ clothing, and the majority are white.”²⁴ Many gay and lesbian activists viewed transgender participants as a “hinderance” to gay

²¹ Eric Cervini, *The Deviant’s War: The Homosexual v. The United States*, 381.

²² Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Susan M. Cage, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth.” pg. 11

²³ Haefele-Thomas, Ardel, *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, pg. 140.

²⁴ Haefele-Thomas, Ardel, *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, pg. 148.

progress, and therefore intentionally sought to exclude them. The two types of activism seen throughout the gay rights movement were both essential for progress. The organized protesting was important to call attention to these issues in a “respectable” manner, while the improvised protests such as Stonewall showed the seriousness of the situation and could be used to call for immediate change. However, since groups such as the Mattachine Society and the GAA sought to purposefully excuse trans activists, it created a negative divide that not only undermined trans involvement, but undermined the cause of trans rights as a whole. By cutting these men and women off from the movement, it showed to the cis-world that trans individuals do not and should not have a place in society.

Transgender individuals and gender non-conforming people were not just excluded from activism however. Even within gay social spheres, trans men and women were sometimes not allowed into certain bars due to their visibly expressive “gender deviancy.” Since police harassment was widely promoted by visible crimes of lewd behavior, gender deviancy etc. some bars such as Harold’s and Cooper’s, located next to Cooper’s Donuts, would not permit drag queens, transvestites, and others pushing the boundaries of anti-masquerading laws: “The two bars wanted people to dress in ‘gender normative’ clothing so they would not attract police attention.”²⁵ Some instances of this were due to blatant transphobia. However, this was mainly caused by fear of retaliation from police. Gay bars were a risk for any patron, regardless of gender expression, since many officers hid or went undercover in order to catch people in the midst of “lewd” or “immoral” activities. Gender non-conforming individuals cannot hide behind “acceptable” behavior the same way gay men and lesbians can. As long as gay individuals dress within gender norms and refrain from outwardly expressed “homosexual actions” then they had no reason to fear police harassment and could enjoy their night in peace. Trans men and women

²⁵ Haefele-Thomas, Ardel, *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, pg. 147.

could not simply “pass” as cis the same way other queer individuals could. This specifically painted a target on the backs of trans individuals and drew in unwanted attention from police into gay bars.

There are more ways to protest, however, than traditional marches or spur of the moment riots. Gender nonconforming individuals found ways to protest their exclusion in some positive and creative ways. For example, Ballroom culture becomes prominent within the LGBTQ+ community, specifically around the 80s, as transgender men and women, drag queens, and gay and lesbian men and women sought out alternate family ties. During this time many queer and trans kids found themselves homeless and cutoff from their families protection. Houses supplemented this for young queer kids as House mothers and fathers helped house, feed and protect those in their House, while also competing in Balls that celebrated queer culture within these categories. Violence, however, was prevalent to these young individuals, so these alternate family ties allowed them to create bonds to protect one another. They typically traveled together, and in some instances, had to physically fight to protect each other.²⁶ Dorian Corey, a prominent member of the Ballroom community, equated houses with “gay gangs.” This is directly related to the way in which house members protected each other inside the competitions and outside:

“Members of a house often respond collectively both in the performance competitions at balls and when fellow house members are confronted with violence. Thus, houses battle in the streets when necessary as well as in the popularized performance competitions on the runway.”²⁷

The competitions created a safe space to explore gender identity and sexuality, while the family bonds created within the House structures allowed for gender nonconforming individuals to protect and support one another.

²⁶ Bailey, Marlon M. “Gender/Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture,” pg. 366.

²⁷ Bailey, Marlon M. “Gender/Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture,” pg. 366.

Houses were not the only way in which gender non-conforming individuals resisted. The Miss'd America pageant was a way in which Drag Queens celebrated queer and drag culture by creating an inclusive pageant for Queens. This pageant became an essential way in which Drag Queens uplifted queer voices during the peak of the AIDS crisis, while also fighting against homophobia. The pageant worked to spread awareness while also raising money for organizations such as the SJAA, or the South Jersey Aids Alliance, who worked to care for individuals with HIV/AIDS.²⁸ Ballroom culture, Houses, and the Miss'd America pageant were just some ways in which queer and gender non-conforming individuals invested into their communities, which in turn provided motivation and community ties in order to fight for equality.

The main takeaway from this research is that throughout the LGBTQ+ movements, before, during, and after Stonewall, trans individuals continued to fight for both gay and trans rights regardless of discrimination. Gay organizations such as the GAA and the Mattachine Society, while also making important strides for gay rights themselves, purposefully excluded transgender and gender non-conforming individuals and took credit for their work in order to promote a brand of gay activism that was "acceptable." Activists such as Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson and so many others carried LGBTQ+ rights on their backs regardless of how they were treated, and today it is our responsibility to recognize their contribution to creating a more tolerant society for everyone. Their early work within the GAA, their involvement in Stonewall, and their organization STAR all helped contribute to the protection of gay and trans youth within the gay power movement. This work also helped create strides to end homophobia/transphobia today, and while there is still much more to accomplish, their contributions are evident. Today it becomes pertinent to reestablish these stories within LGBTQ+ history in order to offer

²⁸ Greene, Laurie, A. *Drag Queens and Beauty Queens: Contesting Femininity in the World's Playground*, pg. 44-47.

recognition to those who put their bodies and lives on the line for gay rights. However, while there have been many strides by these important trans figures, we must not forget the work there is still to be done. Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals are murdered at alarming rates today simply for their gender expression. This year is considered one of the deadliest years for trans individuals, specifically trans women of color. Let us remember those who came before us and seek to reintegrate their voices into the narratives of their own history, but let us also seek to uplift and protect the voices that are still threatened today.

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