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An Exclusionary Revolution: Marginalization and Representation of Trans Women in Print Media (1969 – 1979)

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AN EXCLUSIONARY REVOLUTION: MARGINALIZATION AND
REPRESENTATION OF TRANS WOMEN IN PRINT MEDIA (1969 – 1979)

By

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Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the designation of Department Honors

Women's Studies Program

Department of History

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ABSTRACT

Stonewall, the act most associated with sparking gay liberation in 1969, was preceded by several events of queer insurrection. These events, which often featured trans people of color playing central roles, are not widely known. Similarly, Stonewall itself has been mythologized in order to be palatable within mainstream society, effectively whitewashing its history. This research utilized archival investigation and discourse analysis, as well as the concepts of symbolic annihilation and trans-misogyny, in order to examine certain publications' representations of trans women from 1969 – 1979. I found that mainstream publications such as the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times* continued their precedents of portraying transgender people in a skeptical, sensationalizing light and tended to focus on middle-class, heterosexual, white trans women celebrities. Some gay and lesbian publications, such as *The Advocate*, arguably mirrored this trend. Comparative analyses of Christine Jorgensen and Renée Richards with Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson reveals that, in both mainstream and some gay, lesbian, and feminist publications, representations of trans women were often quite similar throughout the period between 1969 – 1979. Jorgensen and Richards, who fit into the mold of acceptable transsexuality, often made headlines, though their identities were routinely questioned. In contrast, trans women of color Rivera and Johnson were largely barred from print media coverage. Both excluding marginalized trans women and writing about trans women in a hostile or sensationalistic way arguably leads to the dehumanization of trans people, or the invisibilization of voices from the historical record, which has contemporary consequences.

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In the late 1960s, the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village was not known for its glamor. Nestled between buildings, it was an unassuming, grungy bar under Mafia ownership. Yet, it drew a racially diverse crowd of gay men, lesbians, and transgender people who were looking for anything from affordable booze to a sense of community. Because of the illegality of cross-dressing and homosexuality at the time, Stonewall – and bars that attracted similar clientele – were subject to frequent police raids, though officers often accepted bribes in exchange for the freedom of arrestees. The officers would leave with their wallets freshly lined, and the frivolity often resumed the same evening.

Such a routine was disrupted on the balmy early morning of Saturday, June 28, 1969, when patrons fought back against a police raid.¹ Trans women of color – such as friends Sylvia Rivera, age 17, and Marsha P. Johnson, age 25 – played central roles during what subsequently became known as the Stonewall Riots. One of them served as a catalyst for the subsequent rebellion by throwing the first object – perhaps a bottle – at police officers, while Rivera shouted, “it’s the revolution!”^{2,3}

Over thirty years later, and shortly before her death from liver cancer in 2002, Rivera all but renounced this statement. In her estimation, a revolution had not occurred – at least not for the trans people who had been on the frontlines at Stonewall. According to Rivera, trans activists from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s believed the mainstream gay and lesbian organizations that promised, ““Oh, let us pass our bill, then we’ll come for you.”” But recompense never came, and trans issues – such as

¹ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, Calif.: Seal Press, 2008), 82-5.

²“Sylvia Rivera,” LGBT History Month, as found on UC Riverside’s LGBT Resource Center Website, http://out.ucr.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/sylvia_rivera.pdf (November 6, 2013).

³Tommi Avicolti Mecca, “ Marsha P. Johnson: New York City Legend,” in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation*, ed. Tommi Avicolti Mecca (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 2009), 261-2.

employment discrimination and violence – were consistently placed on the backburner. She bitterly lamented, “I’m angry with this fucking community. I wish sometimes that 1969 had never happened.”⁴

Rivera’s comment speaks to the widespread trans exclusion that occurred not only within the gay and lesbian movement, but also within the way queer history was narrativized. By overlooking the activism of transgender people in the mid-twentieth century, and in turn mythologizing Stonewall by largely neglecting the contributions of its actual participants, Stonewall reflected a precedent of diminishing transgender people’s roles – and in particular, the contributions of trans women of color – in order to construct an epic, shared, and assimilatory “gay” identity, movement, and history.⁵

The gay and lesbian liberation movement was thus often critical of the transgender people who had sparked its existence in the first place. Trans women faced rejection from many gay men and lesbians for supposedly adhering to outdated feminine archetypes. Rivera herself claimed that that “street queens were being drummed out of the gay movement” for their widespread reputations as negative “stereotypes” and caricatures of womanhood, despite their crucial resistance at Stonewall and ongoing participation in the gay rights movement.⁶ For example, activists for gay liberation were concerned about establishing their masculinity as a way to combat accusations of effeminacy, whereas many feminists and lesbians worked to destabilize notions of traditional gender roles for women. Thus, many felt that trans women undermined

⁴ Sylvia Rivera, “Queens in Exile, the Forgotten Ones,” in *Genderqueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*, eds. Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins (Alyson Books, New York: 2002), 80-3.

⁵ Frances Negron, “From Stonewall to the Puerto Rican Pride Parade: The Epic Role of Transvestites,” *Gay Community News*, June 1994, 22.

⁶ Stephan L. Cohen, *The Gay Liberation Youth Movement in New York: "An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail"* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 158.

equality efforts. For example, when trans women discussed the physical violence or discrimination they routinely faced, widespread hatred and fear of trans women was not considered a site for praxis and change. On the contrary, the victims themselves were blamed for not adhering to masculinity.⁷

The issues of trans women were therefore not prioritized and were arguably viewed as counterproductive to a gay rights movement that strove for mainstream visibility and support. This, however, did not mean that trans people were denied spaces in queer publications, which served to spread messages central to gay liberation in the 1970s.⁸ While some radical publications – such as *Gay Sunshine*, *Lesbian Tide*, and *Come Out!* – were often supportive and welcoming of trans people, others such as *The Advocate*, which was perhaps the most popular gay publication at the time, attempted to separate trans women from the gay and lesbian movement.⁹ Arguably susceptible to tactics that characterized the press surrounding America’s first transgender celebrity Christine Jorgensen in 1952, in which tactfully-placed quotation marks and sensationalistic headlines subtly and blatantly questioned the veracity of her identity, *The Advocate* and other various gay and lesbian publications appeared to adopt similar procedures in order to discredit the trans women that were covered.

While routinely questioned and discredited, trans people – and trans women in particular – remained profitable news fixtures from 1969-1979. However, the trans

⁷Cei Bell, “The Radicalqueens Trans-formation,” in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation*, ed. Tommi Avicoll Mecca (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 2009), 116. Cei Bell is a trans woman of color who worked for gay liberation during the 1970s. She founded RadicalQueens, which became a committee of the Gay Activists Alliance, and published *The Radical Queen*, an early trans magazine, which ran from 1973-1976.

⁸Mecca, “Gay Liberation Media,” in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation*, 295.

⁹Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Winchester, MA: Faber and Faber), 142, 214.

people covered were often very similar, as they were typically white, middle-class, heterosexual, trans women celebrities.¹⁰ Trans men were far less visible, leading many to conceptualize transsexuality as an occurrence that impacted only those who were designated male at birth.¹¹ Therefore, trans people were not all covered with equal attention, as the press focused on trans women.

Further, the coverage surrounding trans women was often limited to those with distinct characteristics. Christine Jorgensen and Renée Richards, an athlete whose decision to play women's tennis attracted an outpouring of media coverage in the mid-1970s, arguably remained media fixtures because of the tolerability and marketability of their identities: they were white, middle class, and relatively apolitical. In contrast, queer, low-income, activist trans women and sex workers of color Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were excluded from most mainstream attention, a trend that was apparently echoed within some gay publications such as *The Advocate* and *Body Politic*.¹² Their radical challenges not only to societal gender norms and expectations, but also within the burgeoning gay and lesbian struggle for equality, in which they fought to prioritize the lives of transgender people, were not palatable within a mainstreaming, assimilatory movement that has historically and presently been characterized by trans-misogyny and racism.¹³ As a result, the contributions of Rivera and Johnson, as well as other activist trans women, and trans women of color in particular, have frequently been overlooked.

¹⁰ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 277.

¹¹ Emily Skidmore, "Constructing the 'Good Transsexual': Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press," *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 296-7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 271.

¹³ Emi Koyama, "Whose feminism is it anyway? The unspoken racism of the trans inclusion debate," *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006), 698.

As aptly explained by Rivera decades later, “after all these years, the trans community is still at the back of the bus.”¹⁴

I. The Importance of Media to Trans Visibility

The significance of the media to how transgender and cisgender people understand transgender identities and issues cannot be overstated. Scholars argue that mainstream publications tend to portray transgender people as though they are dangerous deviants. This is a form of exploitative, sensationalistic coverage that focuses not on the everyday, humanizing experiences of transgender people, but on the profits that are earned from vexing audiences.¹⁵

Professor of journalism Edward Alwood analyzes media coverage directed toward gay men and lesbians in *Straight News*, though his points are exceedingly relevant with regard to the portrayals of transgender people. Alwood cites research dating to the 1940s that highlights the American press’s ability to influence its readers’ views and opinions, including its potential to “create and perpetuate prejudice,” despite myths about objectivity. Alwood poignantly concludes that it is unjust for journalists to invisibilize and demonize gay men and lesbians, a sentiment that did not go unnoticed by those participating in the gay liberation movement.¹⁶

As demonstrated by a November 1969 article that appeared in *The Advocate*, sexuality and drug abuse expert Dr. Joel Fort “accused the media of distorting sexuality and building mass hysteria over it,” which in turn enabled “misinformation, myths, and

¹⁴ Rivera, 80.

¹⁵ Gordene Olga MacKenzie, *Transgender Nation* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), 103, 107.

¹⁶ Edward Alwood, *Straight News: Gays, Lesbians, and the News Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 7, 328.

repression to flourish.”¹⁷ Scholars corroborate this assertion, arguing that the frequently sensationalized coverage of trans people is prejudicial, potentially influencing the general public to a greater extent than medical literature and other forms of written knowledge.^{18,19}

Julia Serano, a white transsexual activist and scholar, argues that patriarchal ideals of male supremacy – and a gender binary that positions women as lower than men – are primarily transmitted in our culture through the media. For example, Serano cites the media’s hyperfeminization of trans women, as well as its tendency to paint trans women within narrow archetypes and to crudely focus on genitals, as forms of “trans-misogyny,” or a hatred of trans women. Thus, the media coverage of gender nonconformity is reductive and dehumanizing, crudely portraying transgender people as mere body parts that are artificially created by surgeons.²⁰

However, despite the often unflattering coverage, news stories and autobiographies about transgender individuals created awareness amongst trans people. Trans women surveyed by researchers indicated that the media first exposed them to Christine Jorgensen, Renée Richards, and other transsexual people.²¹ For example, Jorgensen wrote in 1953 – two months after she achieved international stardom – that she had received “hundreds of appealing letters” from other trans people who her story had

¹⁷ “News Media Distort Sexuality, Fort Says,” *The Advocate* (Los Angeles, CA), Nov. 10, 1969, UNLV Special Collections.

¹⁸ Willow Arune, “Transgender Images in the Media,” 111 – 133, in *News and Sexuality: Media Portraits of Diversity*, eds. Laura Castañeda and Shannon B. Campbell (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2006), 122.

¹⁹ Richard Ekins and Dave King, “Gender Blending and the Media: Introduction” in *Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing*, eds. Richard Ekins and Dave King (Taylor & Francis e-Library ed. London: Routledge, 2002), 119.

²⁰ Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville, VA: Seal Press, 2007), 15-16.

²¹ Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin, *The Lives of Transgender People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 55.

resonated with.²² In addition, autobiographies also allowed other trans people indirect access to trans celebrities' self-told stories.²³ Mario Martino, a well-known trans man and founder of The Labyrinth Foundation Counseling Service for trans men, attested to the importance of Jorgensen's autobiography in his own 1977 autobiography *Emergence*.²⁴ Thus, autobiographies often make a transformative impact on the trans people who read them.²⁵ In short, the written word – such as press reports about, or autobiographies by, trans people– has historically been critical to the understanding of trans identities and issues, and this is perhaps especially notable for trans people themselves.

When analyzing post-Stonewall articles about transgender people who appeared in popular newspapers such as *The New York Times*, as well as gay and lesbian publications such as *The Advocate*, several themes emerge. First and foremost, to borrow sociologist Dave King's language, we can "make observations based on the material available" concerning topics surrounding trans coverage, but I, like King, cannot claim generalizability of the press coverage that I observed. However, King's observations of the press coverage surrounding trans people revealed several important ideas that I found applicable to my own research. For example, King observed the following: the term "sex-change" was used frequently and unapologetically as a noun, adjective, and verb (i.e., "Sex Changes Cost Britain 2,400 Each"²⁶); the 1970s gave rise to transsexuality as a

²² Christine Jorgensen, "The Story of My Life," part 5, *The American Weekly*, March 15, 1953, 15.

²³ Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin, *The Lives of Transgender People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 55.

²⁴ Mario Martino, *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1977), 162.

²⁵ Patricia Gherovici, *Please Select Your Gender: From the Invention of Hysteria to the Democratizing of Transgenderism* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 227.

²⁶ "SEVEN SO FAR: Sex Changes Cost Britain \$2,400 Each," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 21, 1970, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1989)*, A8.

more serious and scientific topic (i.e., “Surgeon Claims 95-98% Success Rate in Sex Change²⁷”); transsexuality was often linked to happenings and events, such as crime (i.e., “Transsexual’s Housing Jail Proper, Court Holds”²⁸); and that stories about trans celebrities regularly appear and appeared (i.e., “Christine: Explaining Transsexualism”²⁹).³⁰ In other words, headlines such as those parenthetically noted above often sensationalized trans people by referring to attention-grabbing terms such as “sex changes” and “transsexuals” without context, as opposed to humanizing their subjects by using chosen names.

In addition, quotation marks are and were often sinisterly placed to discredit and question the identities of trans people, hearkening back to the early 1950s, precedent-setting coverage of Christine Jorgensen.³¹ For example, in a 1975 article in *The Advocate*, “Warner Bros. Producing Gay Bank Robbery Film” detailed that a movie would be made about a 1972 headlining story involving a trans woman. According to the article, three gay men tried to rob a Brooklyn bank “to fund a sex-change operation for the transsexual ‘wife’ of one of them.” Thus, by placing the word “wife” in quotation marks, journalists undermined her identity as both a woman and life partner.³² As indicated above, then, some gay and lesbian publications were not always flattering with regard to articles about

²⁷ Ronald Kotulak, ““Surgeon Claims 95-98% Success Rate in Sex Change,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct. 17, 1973, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1990)*, A14.

²⁸ “Transsexual’s Housing in Jail Proper, Court Holds,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jul. 28, 1979, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1997)*, 30.

²⁹ Sally Quinn, “Christine: Explaining Transsexualism,” *The Washington Post*, Jul. 8, 1970, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1996)*, B1.

³⁰ Dave King, “Cross-Dressing, Sex-Changing and the Press,” 133-150, in *Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing*, eds. Richard Ekins and Dave King (Taylor & Francis e-Library ed. London: Routledge, 2002), 133-9, 150.

³¹ Arune, 130.

³² “Warner Bros. Producing Gay Bank Robbery Film,” *The Advocate*, Mar. 12 1975, p. 5, UNLV Special Collections.

trans identities. The use of strategically-placed quotations marks in this manner serves to delegitimize and question the veracity of trans identities.

However, in spite of the often unfavorable coverage of trans people, some articles also lead to the inspiration of trans readers and a more informed general public.³³ For example, a 1972 *Erickson Educational Foundation Newsletter*, published by the Erickson Educational Foundation for trans people, praised the headlining *New York Times* article “500 in the U.S. Change Sex in Six Years with Surgery,” hailing the newspaper for its “immeasurable contribution to EEF efforts to assist public understanding and help to human beings burdened with problems due to no fault of their own.” The article concluded by thanking the publication, thus demonstrating how publications often served to educate audiences about issues of gender and sexuality.³⁴

Publicized transitions were not universally popular with cisgender and transgender individuals, however. For example, in 1978, sociologist Edward Sagarin wrote that the mass media and its stories about transsexuality – and particularly its exploitation of “the story of Christine, the Cinderella of the transsexual movement” – meant that “once the word was coined,” a disease was subsequently “invented,” and “the condition came into existence.”³⁵ In other words, trans people were victims of their own suggestibility, goaded into transsexuality by the press. Somewhat similarly, Virginia Prince, an affluent, educated white trans woman credited for founding the first enduring organizations for trans people in the U.S., beginning in 1961,³⁶ wrote: “such publicity

³³ King, 133-9, 150.

³⁴ “N.Y. Times Rides Again!,” *Erickson Educational Foundation Newsletter*, Winter 1972, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives.

³⁵ Edward Sagarin, “Transsexualism: Legitimation, Amplification, and Exploitation of Deviance by Scientists and Mass Media,” in *Deviance and Mass Media*, ed. Charles Winick (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1978), 249, 259.

³⁶ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 46-7.

acts like a spring shower on dried ground, hundreds of new shoots spring up. It acts like a trigger mechanism to fire up another whole crop of so-called ‘transsexuals’ who fervently say, after reading or hearing about the surgery, ‘Why, that is what I am. Surgery is the answer to my problem.’” While critical of transitions, she personally attested to the power of the media, citing her own experience with the “lure of surgery” when she first read about Christine Jorgensen.³⁷ Thus, some critics – both within and outside of the transgender community – believed that media accounts of transitions coaxed vulnerable individuals into falsely identifying with transsexuality.

In spite of Sagarin and Prince’s sentiments, the significance of trans people having access to representations of lives and identities that were similar to their own was empowering for many. For example, Leslie Feinberg, trans activist and author, had “a special bond” with Christine Jorgensen in the 1950s, despite others’ views of Jorgensen as a freak.³⁸ Jorgensen – and stories like hers – were given a platform by the media, despite the press’ often unsavory representations of transgender identities. However, the stories circulated by mainstream publications – as well as some gay and lesbian publications, such as *The Advocate* – typically reported on privileged white celebrity trans women, such as Jorgensen and Renée Richards. In order to understand the messages that were marketed to heterosexual Americans, as well as those within the LGBTQ community, it is also important to study the presence – and lack thereof – of trans women activists of color, such as Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, within print media in order to analyze what was being said, or unsaid, about trans women who challenged

³⁷ Virginia Prince, “Transsexuals and Pseudotranssexuals,” in “Virginia Prince: Pioneer of Transgendering,” *Virginia Prince: Pioneer of Transgendering*, eds. Richard Ekins and Dave King (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Medical Press, 2005), 37.

³⁸ Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 4, 7. Note: “Ze” is Feinberg’s chosen personal pronoun.

white supremacy, capitalism, and compulsive heterosexuality. By including certain voices while shaming or excluding others, both mainstream and some gay and lesbian publications contributed to what historian of gender and sexuality historian Emily Skidmore refers to as the construction of a “good,” respectable – though still marginalized – transsexual.³⁹

II. Contextualizing Transgender Activism

While Stonewall has long been considered the spark that ignited “gay” liberation, it is important to challenge this notion by examining early forms of resistance that predated Stonewall, efforts in which low-income, transgender people of color played pivotal, though relatively overlooked, roles. For example, according to historian of gender and sexuality Susan Stryker, a May 1959 rebellion against police officers by a racially diverse crowd of trans and gay patrons erupted at Cooper’s Donuts in Los Angeles. Police often harassed the patrons of Cooper’s, needlessly stopping and questioning them. They would also demand to see identification, which was often a problem for trans people whose appearances sometimes did not align with the gender or name on their licenses. Such incongruities “often led to arrest on suspicion of prostitution, vagrancy, loitering or many other so-called ‘nuisance crimes.’” On one particular spring evening, the customers resisted, hurling donuts at officers and fighting back against the officers’ discriminatory practices.

In addition, nonviolent resistance occurred in Philadelphia in April 1965 at Dewey’s. This lunch counter “had been popular since the 1940s with gays, lesbians, drag queens, and street prostitutes,” and numerous Dewey’s patrons were people of color. However, the lunch counter began to refuse serving customers in “nonconformist

³⁹Skidmore, 271, 295.

clothing,” leading to the customers organizing sit-ins and picket lines. Both Dewey’s and Cooper’s represent incidents that demonstrate “the overlap between gay and transgender activism in the working-class districts of major U.S. cities, in spite of tensions and prejudices within both groups,” alluding to early conflicts between gay-identifying and transgender individuals and foreshadowing conflicts that would become increasingly more significant in the following decade.

Lastly, the better known Compton’s Cafeteria Riot took place in August of 1966. Compton’s Cafeteria, located in San Francisco’s Tenderloin, “was buzzing with its usual late-night crowd of drag queens, hustlers, slummers, cruisers, runaway teens and down-and-out neighborhood regulars,” according to Stryker. When the management of the 24-hour cafeteria grew irritated at “a noisy young crowd of queens” who seemed to be leisurely “spending a lot of time without spending in a lot of money,” the police were called in order to oust them, a practice that had grown increasingly more common. When a police officer grabbed “one of the queens and tried to drag her away,” she “threw her coffee in his face... and a melee erupted: Plates, trays, cups and silverware flew” at the officers, who had to call in reinforcements. Fighting between the drag queens and officers billowed into the streets, and the ultimate results included a change in the “police treatment of transgender people.”⁴⁰ However, as demonstrated by post-Stonewall articles in *The Advocate*, which headlined “46 busted in Tenderloin sweep” in 1971 and “Street sweep nets 40” in 1974, police targeting of low-income, transgender, and people of color remained an ongoing problem.^{41,42}

⁴⁰ Susan Stryker, “Militant Foreshadowings,” in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation*, ed. Tommi Avicelli Mecca (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 2009), 3-8.

⁴¹ “46 busted in Tenderloin sweep,” *The Advocate*, Dec 8, 1971, Interlibrary Loan Services, 10.

⁴² “Street sweep nets 40,” *The Advocate*, May 1974, Interlibrary Loan Services, 39.

Thus, Stonewall hardly marks the beginning of queer activism and resistance, as protests and riots were becoming increasingly common. However, the Stonewall Riot was the largest and most consequential example of queer insurrection.⁴³ The struggle for gay liberation emerged from a backdrop that included WWII, the Cold War, McCarthyism, and civil rights struggles. When the 1960s came to a close, there was a core group of activists for gay liberation, and they were emboldened by several pre-Stonewall gains, such as the Supreme Court-affirmed right to publish gay and lesbian publications, such as *ONE* and *The Advocate*. While there were several accounts of pre-Stonewall activism, the Stonewall Riot has assumed a mythic position in queer history because it was an example of how transgender people and people of color forever altered the political landscape for those in the LGBTQ community. In the eyes of many of the people who had long been marginalized for their gender identities and who they loved, Stonewall came to symbolize resistance and emancipation.⁴⁴

However, Stonewall's history as a racially diverse rebellion led by trans women of color is contentious,⁴⁵ perhaps reflecting constructed inaccuracies. These inaccuracies have created a Stonewall story that has been mythologized, "cleansed," and "sterilized" by forsaking the legacies "of the 'real' Stonewallers" in order to claim the "'macho'... confrontation" for the benefit of "the modern 'straight-looking' American gay and lesbian movement," according to scholar Frances Negrón.⁴⁶ Similarly, Jessi Gan, a graduate student studying American Culture, argues that the characterization of

⁴³ Stryker, "Militant Foreshadowings," 3-8.

⁴⁴ John D'Emilio, *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 147.

⁴⁵ Dale Carpenter, "The Myth of a Transgender Stonewall," IGF Culture Watch RSS. <http://igfculturewatch.com/2002/03/07/the-myth-of-a-transgender-stonewall/> (accessed March 22, 2014).

⁴⁶ Frances Negrón, "From Stonewall to the Puerto Rican Pride Parade: The Epic Role of Transvestites," *Gay Community News*, June 1994.

Stonewall participants as gay men diffuses the critical roles that “poor gender-variant people of color” played. Further, in the same way that the exclusion of “transgender” under the term “gay” contributes to trans erasure, “the claim that ‘transgender people were at Stonewall too’” has omitted analyses “of difference and hierarchy within the term ‘transgender’” itself. This has contributed to Sylvia Rivera’s identity as a poor Latina sex worker being invisibilized as white, middle-class trans activists praise her “for becoming visible as transgender.”⁴⁷ Reflecting these sentiments, and by noting that Latina and African-American trans women were crucial to the uprising against police that lasted several days, Leslie Feinberg posed the following question: “was Stonewall a gay or a trans insurrection?”⁴⁸

Arguably, this question was one that grew increasingly relevant to activists as factions emerged within Gay Liberation Front, an activist group that formed shortly after the riots that transpired at Stonewall. According to Stryker, many disapproved of the movement’s prioritization of white men and its subjugation of low-income people, trans people, people of color, and women. Such criticisms prompted the emergence of the relatively conservative Gay Activists Alliance (GAA); the defection of many lesbians to the women’s rights movement due to sexism; and transgender people forming their own groups and organizations, as many felt unwelcome in the movement that they had helped to create in the first place. For example, in 1970, a white trans woman named Angela K. Douglas quit the GLF due to its transphobia, and she began the Transsexual Activist Organization (TAO), which was the first international trans organization. Understanding

⁴⁷Jessi Gan, “Still at the Back of the Bus: Sylvia Rivera’s Struggle,” *Centro Journal* 6 (1), Spring 2007, 127.

⁴⁸Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1998., 97.

the importance of representation, TAO published *Mirage* and *Moonshadow*, trans newsletters that were peppered with occultism, activist reports, and artwork.^{49,50}

Reflecting the abovementioned dissonance within the burgeoning gay liberation movement, *The Advocate* ran the following headline in 1970: “Gay Lib survives bitch fit.” The article detailed Douglas’ departure from gay activism “to devote his time and energies to a new group, the Transvestite-Transsexual Action Organization.” Misgendering Douglas and referring to her as the name she was designated at birth, the article referred to her dissents as a “bitch fit.” Thus, by deriding both Douglas’ identity and complaints of hostility toward trans people within the gay liberation movement, *The Advocate* expressed its adherence to trans-misogyny, which characterized much of the early movement for “gay lib.”⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson formed their own splinter group Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, a radical, pioneering organization for homeless trans people, that same year.⁵²

III. Tensions within the Queer Press

The message of gay liberation was disseminated through the publishing of print media, such as newspapers and newsletters, but this excluded many individuals who did not identify as gay white men.⁵³ According to Stryker, although Virginia Prince began publishing *Transvestia* in 1952, perhaps “the first overtly political transgender publication in U.S. history,” she sought to distance herself from the burgeoning queer

⁴⁹ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 86, 88.

⁵⁰ “New Magazine,” *The Advocate*, Jan 1974, Interlibrary Loan Services, 19. In a 1974 article in *The Advocate*, a short, inconspicuous piece described *Mirage* as a new “bi-monthly magazine for transsexuals and transvestites.” Douglas was correctly referred to by her chosen name and described the publication as, “along the lines of *Ms.* magazine, but a little flashier.”

⁵¹ “Gay Lib survives bitch fit only slightly shrunken – so far,” *The Advocate*, May 27-June 9, 1970, UNLV Special Collections, 1.

⁵² Riki Anne Wilchins, *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1997), 14.

⁵³ Mecca, “Gay Liberation Media,” in *Smashing the Church*, 295-8.

community; this publication, too, seemed to focus on white, middle-class trans people who were not interested in activism.⁵⁴ In addition, while some homophile organizations of the 1950s and early 1960s were not originally opposed to transgender people, trans issues tended to be regarded “as parallel rather than intersecting,” or side concerns, due in part to these organizations’ adherences to gender normativity as a necessary component of “public politics of respectability,” according to Stryker.⁵⁵ Further, while publications for gay men such as *ONE*⁵⁶ and the lesbian publication *Ladder*⁵⁷ did report on trans people, the early appearance of Christine Jorgensen within the mainstream media suggests that not all within the gay community were comfortable with her identity.

An example of trans-misogynistic disgust with Jorgensen is apparent in C. Todd White’s “Dale Jennings (1917-2000): ONE’s Outspoken Advocate.” Dale Jennings was a founder of ONE, Inc.’s core publication *ONE Magazine* in 1952, which was “the first successful magazine in the United States dedicated to equal rights for homosexuals.” In *ONE*’s second issue in 1953, Jennings derisively castigated Jorgensen, writing: “You’re not a woman ... those expensive scalpels only gave you the legal right to transvestitism.” He further argued that “homosexuals are not a third sex, personalities in the body of the wrong sex, biological confusions of nature... it [is] impossible to label them freaks and so unusual as to be called abnormal.” This is exceedingly significant, as it makes it apparent that *ONE* – America’s first thriving, pro-gay magazine – was arguably pillared on the hate and vilification that many mainstream publications were propagating about

⁵⁴ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 46-7, 54-7.

⁵⁵ Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” *Radical History Review* (2008), 150.

⁵⁶ “The Erickson Educational Foundation,” *ONE Letter*, June 1969, UNLV Special Collections, 10-11.

⁵⁷ Gene Damon and Lee Stuart, “Transvestism in Women,” *Ladder*, February 1959, GLBT Historical Society, 11-13.

Jorgensen. Jennings actively worked to exclude transgender people from gay liberation, and to normalize homosexuality, by denouncing Jorgensen and those like her as “freaks.”⁵⁸ This is particularly ironic given the fact that a wealthy trans man named Reed Erickson – philanthropist and founder of the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF) – made ONE and its activities possible by financially backing the struggling organization almost every year from 1964-1983.⁵⁹ Regardless, the tense relationship between ONE and Jorgensen was not permanent, as evidenced by her later participation in conferences sponsored by the organization.⁶⁰

In analyzing *The Advocate*, it becomes clear that this publication also struggled with tensions regarding its articles about those who did not identify as gay men. Although articles concerning trans issues were published, with several supporting trans people or offering advice,⁶¹ it is clear that some trans people did not feel adequately represented. In a 1970 article, Saundras Smith of San Francisco wrote to *The Advocate*, praising the publication as “an excellent medium to reach all people – both straight and gay.”

However, Smith continued to criticize the coverage, noting the “lacking or the casting

⁵⁸ C. Todd White, “Dale Jennings (1917-2000): ONE’s Outspoken Advocate,” in *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, ed. Vern L. Bullough (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002), 83, 89.

⁵⁹ Aaron Devor, “Reed Erickson (1912-1992): How One Transsexed Man Supported ONE,” in *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, ed. Vern L. Bullough (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002), 383, 386.

⁶⁰ Vern Bullough, “Christine Jorgensen (1926-1989),” in *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, ed. Vern L. Bullough (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002), 370. According to Bullough, Jorgensen later “participated in conferences sponsored by ONE,” where she was always sure to draw an often-admiring and supportive audience. Though she later intentionally forsook the limelight, she constantly made an effort to give back to her community and “helped out... others in whatever way she could.” Despite Jorgensen’s notoriety and celebrity status, however, her chapter within *Before Stonewall* is situated within a section titled “Other Voices,” along with activists including Virginia Prince, José Sarria, and Reed Erickson, perhaps implying Jorgensen’s difference and secondary status in a present context. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were not profiled.

⁶¹ Mark Thompson, “Mirror, Mirror: What I See Is Not What I Think Is Me. TRANSEXUALS LOOKING FOR AN HONEST REFLECTION,” *The Advocate*, Oct 6, 1976, p. 14, UNLV Special Collections.

aside of the gay boys who live and dress as women, many of whom live very useful lives. We, also, are standing up to be counted in the Fight for Freedom.” Smith concluded by urging “[t]earoom queens, male prostitutes, drag queens, and many more” to “unite.”⁶²

In addition, an article that appeared in *The Advocate* in 1971 centered on the fact that “transvestites have emerged as a possible major complication” with their criticism of a bill that would outlaw “discrimination in the hiring of homosexuals by city agencies.” The bill had not included protections for trans people, which provoked deep backlash Lee Brewster, a drag queen who was “speaking for the transvestite.” Brewster angrily denounced the gay liberation movement for “‘offering [drag queens] up’ as a political sacrificial lamb.” Brewster also expressed “that it had been the transvestites and queens who had turned on New York police at the Stonewall Club in June 1969;” that they gave gay men and lesbians “the most precious gift of all... *pride*” and the “Gay Liberation Movement;” and that being denied equal rights by heterosexuals was “to be expected, but intolerable by our own community.” Brewster resolved to “not stand mute to help [gay men] prove [their] machismo” while trans women were being cast aside. However, the author of the article also added his own observations: “No one wants to admit it publicly, but many... see the transvestites as a needless embarrassment and are afraid that any instance on specifically including them under the umbrella of the beleaguered bill may be all that it takes to kill it.”⁶³ Thus, trans people were often viewed as shameful weak links in the gay liberation struggle, despite their ongoing participation in gay liberation activist movements.

⁶² Saundras Smith, “Transvestite asks, ‘Don’t exclude us,’” *The Advocate*, May 27-June 9, 1970, UNLV Special Collections, 20.

⁶³ Guy Charles, “Won’t be sacrificial lamb, drags vow,” *The Advocate*, Dec 1971, 12, Interlibrary Loan Services.

Thus, a united, collaborative movement between gay men, lesbians, and trans people was not the most palatable option for some. In 1974, one reader expressed his concern that *The Advocate* was “repeatedly” covering an issue that he felt was “totally irrelevant; this area concerns transsexuality.” His argument? Trans people “are interested only in straight sexual relationships and are psychologically unable to function in gay relationships.” He concluded by asking, “why fill a good paper, whose function is to report gay news, with a topic which... seems about as straight as you can get?”⁶⁴ Similarly, a 1976 article in *Body Politic* claimed that “[w]omen’s and gay liberationists have long been suspicious of transsexualism as an expression of... guilt about homosexuality,” hinting at the widespread dissatisfaction with transgender people’s inclusion within the queer community.⁶⁵ These articles not only erased the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual trans people, but they also directly questioned why trans people should be considered a part of a movement that they helped to found.

Further, as argued by trans man Karl Ericson in the *Ladder*, there was also a “wall being erected between transsexuals and lesbians” as early as 1970.⁶⁶ This foreshadowed 1973 as the year that Stryker explicitly refers to as “a low point in U.S. transgender political history” due to continued discrimination in housing and employment, violence, stigma within society and the gay community, pathologization, “[l]ong-standing antitransgender prejudices,”⁶⁷ and the addition of “transsexuality” to the DSM – the same

⁶⁴ Dion Jameson, “Transsexuals not gay,” *The Advocate*, Oct 9, 1974, UNLV Special Collections, 36.

⁶⁵ Barry Adam, “Transvestites and Transsexuals: Mixed Views,” *Body Politic*, Aug 1976, *LGBT Life Database*, 8.

⁶⁶ Karl Ericson, “The Transsexual Experience,” *The Ladder*, Apr/May 1970, 25-27, Interlibrary Loan Services.

⁶⁷ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 101.

year “homosexuality” was removed.⁶⁸ Thus, by reaching out to the gay community via the written word, Smith, Brewster, and Ericson clearly recognized the importance of gay and lesbian publications in contributing to a trans-exclusionary gay culture, despite the fact that trans people were also contributing to and fighting for equality. Thus, the attitudes that the gay liberation movement should cater only to gay men, as argued by some gay men and lesbians, erroneously reflected the mythic version of Stonewall as a riot that was by and for class-privileged, cisgender, gay white men.

In addition, the coverage of trans people in the gay and lesbian press was sometimes very similar to aforementioned articles that appeared in mainstream publications. This perhaps highlights the susceptibility of some gay and lesbian publications to mainstream journalism tactics with regard to how trans people were covered, as well as the belief held by some that feminine trans women gave the gay liberation movement a bad reputation.⁶⁹ For example, articles in *The Advocate* and *Body Politic* blared headlines that included “transsexuals” or “transvestites,” as opposed to names of the trans people discussed; used incorrect pronouns; gratuitously included the term “sex change;” and referred to trans people by their designated birth names. As discussed previously, these qualities serve to sensationalize – as opposed to humanize – trans identities for profit. Consider, for example, the following articles: “Transsexual acquitted” headlined an article about a trans woman’s arrest for the “impersonation of a female in a public space;”⁷⁰ “‘Father’ of 4 – their mother – regains custody” questioned a trans man’s identity with quotation marks, used “she” pronouns, and discussed his “sex

⁶⁸Arune, 115. Controversially, the “condition” is still referred to as “gender identity disorder” in the DSM.

⁶⁹Michael Kasino, "Pay It No Mind - The Life and Times of Marsha P. Johnson," Redux Pictures, 2012.

⁷⁰“Transsexual Acquitted,” *The Advocate*, June 9-22, 1971, Interlibrary Loan Services, 11.

change;”⁷¹ “Man/woman changes more than his/her mind” discussed the transition of Swedish woman Marianne Hersegard with a transphobic title;⁷² “All ‘Zulma’ wants is to be a lady, but he dies a boy on Tijuana dump”⁷³ was an article and accompanying book review about a racist “first-person story of a remarkable young Mexican transsexual,” complete with questioning quotations and exotifying accounts of her “high Indian cheekbones;”⁷⁴ and lastly, *Body Politic*’s “Transsexuals killed; demo hits police action” detailed massive protests of more than 200 transsexuals, lesbians, and gay men in Denver against the police murders of two trans women in a span of nine months: “Tony ‘Irene’ DeSoto,” who “was shot through the heart” and “Eugene ‘Tracy’ Levy, a Black transsexual,” who “was killed by another Vice Squad officer.”⁷⁵ This latter article not only introduced the topic of police brutality and murder insensitively with its dehumanizing headline, but also presumably placed the victims’ chosen names in undermining quotation marks.⁷⁶

In addition, several articles about trans people featured in *The Advocate* tended to fit Skidmore’s definition of a “good,” or respectable, white trans woman, paralleling mainstream press coverage. For example, an article in the *Advocate* featured a review of well-known white trans woman Jan Morris’s autobiography *Conundrum*. The article noted that Morris had “lived successfully and productively as a writer and a journalist,”

⁷¹ “‘Father’ of 4 – their mother – regains custody,” *The Advocate*, December 19, 1973, UNLV Special Collections, 13.

⁷² “Man/woman changes more than his/her mind,” *The Advocate*, Apr 10, 1974, UNLV Special Collections, 26.

⁷³ Roland Biboiet, “All ‘Zulma’ wants is to be a lady, but he dies a boy on Tijuana dump,” *The Advocate*, July 31, 1974, Interlibrary Loan Services, 28.

⁷⁴ J. Moriarty, “Knowing the real ‘Zulma’ was a personal challenge,” *The Advocate*, July 31, 1974, Interlibrary Loan Services, 28.

⁷⁵ “Transsexuals killed; demo hits police action,” *Body Politic*, May 1978, *LGBT Life Database*, 9.

⁷⁶ It is important, however, to again note that these articles potentially educated both trans and cis readers of gay and lesbian publications. In addition, headlines that included the word “transsexual” were much easier for me to locate for research purposes, indicating that I benefited from them.

and thus had class privilege, before transitioning. In addition, Morris' autobiography situated her outside of the realm of activism. According to author Christopher Nobel, "Many will find parts of this book offensive," including feminists, "transvestites, because of inaccurate, or at least incomplete, depictions of their own distinctive lifestyle," and "[g]ays, due to some implicit anti-gay references."⁷⁷ In other words, Morris arguably distanced herself from homosexuality, feminism, and cross-dressing (the latter of which was associated with trans women of color and was regarded as a less veracious identity), engaging in the "performance of the scripts of white womanhood" that legitimized her identity in the eyes of the press.⁷⁸

Similarly, a December 1974 article featured the headline, "Transsexual sues to get job." It detailed the plight of white trans woman Paula Grossman, who had been fired from her job as a middle school music teacher "three years ago after her sex-change surgery." Within the article, Grossman – a presumably middle-class woman who was able to earn a living as a pianist following her discriminatory firing – actively separated herself from lesbianism, despite the fact that she was still living with her wife of 25 years. Establishing herself as heterosexual, Grossman argued that "[a]ny sexual attraction to a woman would be, by my standards, improper."⁷⁹ Thus, as demonstrated above, when trans women were covered in both mainstream and gay and lesbian publications such as *The Advocate*, they often reinforced white supremacy, heterosexism, and classism, thus aligning themselves within the sphere of acceptable transsexuality.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Christopher Nobel, "For too long, his life was a *Conundrum*," *The Advocate*, Aug 28, 1974, UNLV Special Collections, 29.

⁷⁸ Skidmore, 295.

⁷⁹ "Transsexual sues to get job," *The Advocate*, Dec 18, 1974, UNLV Special Collections, 16.

⁸⁰ Skidmore, 295.

Unlike mainstream publications, which tended to highlight articles about transsexuality, when trans people and issues did receive coverage in *The Advocate*, many articles were small and unassuming, tucked away in the lower corners of pages. For example, the June 1972 article “Aid for Transsexual,” which discussed counseling, employment, and legal services available through EEF,⁸¹ and the 1975 article “Transsexuals: State Clothing Ruling,” which detailed that “[a] state hearing officer has decided that pre-operative transsexuals may now work in female attire as state employees” in California, were inconspicuously placed in the pages of *The Advocate*.⁸² This issue of placement – which arguably demonstrates a publication’s priorities – did not go unnoticed.

In an August 1976 letter-to-the-editor, lesbian “Country Jane” wrote the following critique: “I know you’re trying to do us gals a favor by mentioning us once in a while..., but why do you always put women in the *lower* portions of your covers?”⁸³ Expressing reader concerns about overrepresentation of non-gay men, one man wrote, “What is happening to our good old *Advocate*? Originally this was a great magazine for *men*... why the sudden rush to run so many foolish articles on dykes?” He further lamented that lesbians could not possibly make up a wide readership and that the lesbians he had personally “had to deal with have been one big pain in the ass.” He concluded by expressing his desire to see the “magazine for men run by men” return.⁸⁴

⁸¹“Aid for Transsexual,” *The Advocate*, June 7, 1972, UNLV Special Collections, 16.

⁸²“Transsexuals: State Clothing Ruling,” *The Advocate*, February 26, 1975, UNLV Special Collections, 10.

⁸³ Country Jane, “Insulted,” *The Advocate*, August 11, 1976, UNLV Special Collections, 16.

⁸⁴ Barry Bernstein, “Men Only?” *The Advocate*, September 8, 1976, UNLV Special Collections, 23.

Another male reader wrote his distaste that “too many women” were being featured in the magazine, questioning, “who cares about them anyway?” He continued to write that it was “all the men who are really making this movement go.”⁸⁵ It is thus clear that, well into the mid-1970s, gay liberation, as argued by scholars and as demonstrated in the popular publication *The Advocate*, was not an entirely inclusive movement. This is perhaps best articulated in an article commemorating “Gay Pride” in 1975, as journalist David Brill wrote, “Gay no longer means just white... gay men. It means women, blacks, and third world gay people.” This lesbian-friendly, color-blind assertion in itself is an arguably far-fetched statement; as analyzed previously, women, low-income people, and people of color were increasingly rendered invisible in a mainstreaming movement. What is especially significant, however, is that trans people were not included at all in Brill’s definition of a far-reaching gay community, despite the fact that they had been on the front lines creating it.

As demonstrated above, this dismissive treatment was arguably preceded by the trend of mythologizing Stonewall and revising histories of pre-Stonewall resistance. For example, in a 1972 centerfold of San Francisco’s first Gay Pride Parade, Susan Stryker found an account of the 1966 riot at Compton’s Cafeteria that read: “Gays rose up angry at the constant police harassment of the drag-queens... It had to be the first ever recorded violence by Gays against police anywhere.” This reveals “an early revisionist account of gay liberation history,” in which trans women were not only marginalized but portrayed as damsels in need of rescue by gay men.⁸⁶ This preceded the abovementioned mainstreaming of the gay liberation movement, which involved the ‘sanitation’ of

⁸⁵ B. Comodore, “Too Many Women,” *The Advocate*, September 22, 1976, UNLV Special Collections, 22.

⁸⁶ Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” 152.

Stonewall through the sidelining of trans women and people of color. This trend was arguably apparent throughout the pages of certain gay and lesbian publications, such as *The Advocate* and *Body Politic*, which often paralleled incredulous, sensationalizing, and whitewashed coverage in mainstream publications.

Inarguably, symbolic annihilation, in which the media does not represent or trivializes the experiences of certain groups, characterizes and has characterized the coverage of trans women of color within the mainstream media.⁸⁷ However, this has also been a theme that typifies some gay and lesbian publications, such as *The Advocate* and *Body Politic*. Ironically, a June 1973 article in *The Advocate* made the following assertions: “nothing is quite as detrimental to any cause than to be ignored by the media;” that “[d]enial of access to the media is an effective form of oppression;” and that media attacks were preferable over being ignored, as the existences of marginalized people was at least acknowledged. However, by limitedly focusing on trans people who were palatable within mainstream media – such as Christine Jorgensen and Renée Richards as opposed to Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson – certain queer publications arguably perpetuated the invisibilization that they themselves desired to avoid.

IV. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson

Sylvia Rivera was born Ray Rivera Mendoza in the Bronx in 1951 to low-income parents of Mexican, Venezuelan, and Puerto Rican descent. When she was only three years old, her mother committed suicide by ingesting poison and unsuccessfully tried to coax Rivera into drinking it as well. Although her grandmother Viejita took her in, she disapproved of her grandchild’s effeminacy and reputation for having sex with men for

⁸⁷ Gordon MacKenzie and Mary Marcel, “Media Coverage of the Murder of U.S. Transwomen of Color,” in *Local Violence, Global Media: Feminist Analyses of Gendered Representations*, eds. Lisa M. Cuklanz and Sujata Moorti (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 84-5.

money at the age of ten. When Rivera tried to kill herself before she was a teenager, her Viejita had her committed to a mental hospital in New York City, which considered Rivera's presumed homosexuality and femininity to be mental disorders.⁸⁸

Rivera ran away from the hospital and found community with "street people" at the age of eleven, including Marsha P. Johnson, a black transgender drag queen who was five or six years older than Rivera. Johnson became Rivera's mentor and best friend, and the community of drag queens that she found a home with took care of each other in a decade characterized by frequent police roundups of trans women and sex workers. On the night of the Stonewall Riots, a teenaged Rivera had been reluctantly persuaded by her friend to stop into the Inn for a drink. When police officers raided the bar, she later explained that she "was just not in the mood... We were not taking any more of this shit. It was time [to fight]." ⁸⁹

Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson are known for their crucial participation in Stonewall and are prominently situated within "transgender history and lore," according to journalist and scholar Deborah Rudacille.⁹⁰ There is debate as to who, between Rivera and Johnson, threw the first object at police officers, in turn igniting the Stonewall Riots.^{91,92} Further, as a result of "their experiences in the early militant gay liberation organizing and protests," Rivera and Johnson began STAR – the Street Transvestite

⁸⁸ Layli Phillips and Shomari Olugbala, "Sylvia Rivera: Fighting in Her Heels: Stonewall, Civil Rights, and Liberation," in *The Human Tradition in the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Susan M. Glisson (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc: Oxford, 2006), 309, 321-2.

⁸⁹ Phillips and Shomari Olugbala, 323-4.

⁹⁰ Deborah Rudacille, *The Riddle of Gender: Science, Activism, and Transgender Rights* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005), 154.

⁹¹ "Sylvia Rivera," LGBT History Month, as found on UC Riverside's LGBT Resource Center Website, http://out.ucr.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/sylvia_rivera.pdf (November 6, 2013).

⁹² Tommi Aviccolli Mecca, "Marsha P. Johnson: New York City Legend," in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation*, ed. Tommi Aviccolli Mecca (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 2009), 261-2.

Action Revolutionaries – in 1970 in response to “the need to organize homeless trans street youth,” according to Feinberg. Rivera and Johnson, who were also homeless, “had to hustle on the streets for substance and shelter,” thus inspiring the short-lived STAR home for homeless trans youth of color.⁹³

Arguably because of their identities as trans women of color, combined with their radical activism and low income statuses, Johnson and Rivera appear to have been largely ignored by the mainstream press. Similarly, the abovementioned 1966 San Francisco Compton’s Cafeteria Riot – in which poor white trans women and trans women of color who did sex work took to the streets to protest police harassment – was covered by no popular newspapers in San Francisco, where the event occurred. Consequently, although this event preceded Stonewall by three years, and jumpstarted “the new movement for human rights,” it “has been all forgotten,” according to Stryker.⁹⁴ The lack of coverage of low-income trans women of color perhaps demonstrates racism, classism, and trans misogyny that existed not only in the mainstream press, but also amongst Rivera and Johnson’s fellow activists, who often treated Johnson and Rivera with dehumanizing cruelty.⁹⁵

According to historian of gender and sexuality Martin Duberman, members of the GAA were “frightened” of Rivera and believed that she was troublesome; she was regularly met with racism and transphobia, with fellow activists “shunning her darker skin or sniggering at her passionate, fractured English” when they were not “deploring

⁹³Leslie Fienberg, “Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries,” *Workers World* » *Workers World*. <http://www.workers.org/2006/us/lavender-red-73/> (accessed October 16, 2013).

⁹⁴*Screaming Queens*, Directed by Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker, San Francisco, CA: Frameline, 2005.

⁹⁵Michael Kasino, "Pay It No Mind - The Life and Times of Marsha P. Johnson," Redux Pictures, 2012.

her rude anarchism as inimical to order or denouncing her sashaying as offensive to womanhood.”⁹⁶ Frequently facing arrest and engaging in drug dealing and sex work, Rivera was hardly popular with middle-class gay men and lesbians who lived in a world that was “inaccessible to people like Sylvia Rivera” and Marsha P. Johnson, as argued by Rudaclille.⁹⁷

Thus, the two women were hardly “poster-children” for the gay or transgender movements, as they “were not respectable queers” due to the fact that they were poor trans women of color who survived as sex workers. Their politics – radical and confrontational, focusing on those who were most oppressed – also did not align with “a gay movement turning its focus onto integration into capitalist society,” according to Ehn Nothing.⁹⁸ In this context, it makes sense not only that Rivera and Johnson would be excluded from mainstream coverage, which, as discussed previously, focused on relatively apolitical white trans women, but also from the pages of publications such as *The Advocate*.

The coverage that Rivera did receive from a mainstream newspaper was a 1973 *New York Times* article. The article “10 Gay Activists Are Seized in City Hall” referred to Sylvia Rivera with masculine pronouns and detailed that five men and five women of the GAA were arrested for loudly protesting a City Council meeting. Under a subsection of the article labeled “Threats Are Revealed,” Sylvia Rivera was described as a twenty-two year old “male dressed in a woman’s pants suit” who was detained “on disorderly

⁹⁶ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Dutton, 1993)*, 235-6.

⁹⁷ Rudaclille, 157.

⁹⁸ Ehn Nothing, “Introduction: Queens Against Society,” in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, Untorelli Press, 3-11.

conduct charges,” and her address was published.⁹⁹ This was nothing new, as mainstream coverage had long covered bar raids, publishing both addresses and names of those who were arrested and presumably outing them.¹⁰⁰ Thus, as indicated above, *The New York Times* undoubtedly regarded Rivera as a “threat” to gender and sexuality norms.

The Advocate, too, neglected to publish stories featuring Rivera, only referencing her occasionally, while apparently ignoring Johnson entirely.¹⁰¹ A 1971 article “GLF center becomes third world,” without discussing Rivera and Johnson, referenced their organization STAR and a fight that broke out between STAR members and “several women on the Work Collective that ran the [Gay Community Center]” in Greenwich Village;¹⁰² another article detailed that Rivera and two others had been found “guilty of harassment” for pushing and shoving a police detective during a December 14th “incident at the Suffolk County district attorney’s office in... Long Island,” in which the group of activists “charged that they were beaten in an unprovoked attack by police;”¹⁰³ another article referred to the “sequined jump-suited Rivera” as “Ray ‘Sylvia’ Rivera” while using masculine pronouns and describing “a confused, bitter wrangle over... the rights of transvestites;” a final article, wherein Rivera’s identity was questioned with quotation marks again, was a letter-to-the-editor and rebuttal, with a reader clarifying his point of

⁹⁹ Edward Ranzal, “10 Gay Activists Are Seized in City Hall,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, May 1, 1973.

¹⁰⁰ Mecca, “Gay Liberation Media,” 295.

¹⁰¹ I utilized the *LGBT Life* database to maximize my searches for Rivera and Johnson and yielded only a few results for Rivera.

¹⁰² Edith Dobell, “GLF center becomes third world,” *The Advocate*, July 7-20, 1971, UNLV Special Collections, 4.

¹⁰³ “3 convicted in Long Island incident,” *The Advocate*, June 7, 1972, Interlibrary Loan Services, 14.

view on his fight with “Ray ‘Sylvia’ Rivera,” in which he expressed hope that he would never have to be on all fours following a fight with “any man or ‘[w]oman.””¹⁰⁴

A common thread between all of these articles is that in each one, Rivera – and perhaps Johnson, though she does not appear to have garnered media attention – is entangled within a scuffle. In other words, Rivera did not shy away from confrontation and quarrel when her beliefs were at stake. According to reporter and artist Erik Peterson, Rivera was often “abused by the male power base she fought for:” she was “repeatedly used to front possibly dangerous demonstrations, and then shunted aside by assimilationist ‘leaders’ when the press appeared.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, Rivera’s identity and behavior contradicted the actions that befit ‘acceptable’ trans identities and norms of femininity, and she was in turn marginalized by fellow activists within her movement, including lesbians in GLF who did not feel comfortable referring to Rivera as “she.” Rivera’s comrades being uncomfortable using her chosen pronouns preceded an event in 1973 “that would take Rivera out of the movement for the next two decades,” according to Shepard.¹⁰⁶

During the 1973 commemoration of Stonewall in New York, “Marsha and Sylvia rushed onto the stage and grabbed the mic” in order to encourage the audience “to march past the city’s detention center” in order to support trans sex workers “who had been

¹⁰⁴ Walter Parsons Doran, “Not quite that way, John,” *The Advocate*, Sept. 12, 1973, UNLV Special Collections, 37.

¹⁰⁵ Erik Peterson, “Walking in Sylvia’s Pumps,” *Windy City Times*, Oct. 2, 2013, *LGBT LIFE* database, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin Shepard, “Sylvia and Sylvia’s Children: A Battle for Queer Public Spaces,” in *That’s Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, ed. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (New rev. and expanded ed. Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press :, 2008), 98-100.

arrested the night before on 42nd Street.”¹⁰⁷ The organization Lesbian Feminist Liberation, with Jean O’Leary at the helm, was incensed that drag queens were performing and passed out flyers that voiced their opposition to trans women, who they referred to as “female impersonators.” In her experience with wrestling for the microphone, and getting hit with it, Rivera lamented that the middle-class audience did not care about the arrests and discriminations faced by trans people. She expressed having “to battle my way up on stage and literally get beaten up and punched around by people I thought were my comrades,” articulating the extent of her marginalization within her own community.¹⁰⁸ However, some lesbians accepted and respected her, something that Marsha P. Johnson attested to.¹⁰⁹ In a 1972 interview that appeared in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, Johnson wrote that she felt “oppressed by our gay brothers,” whereas gay sisters – such as members of the Daughters of Bilitis – were often “warm.”¹¹⁰ However, “the angry denunciation of Sylvia by GAA’s Jean O’Leary ... for ‘parodying’ womanhood was more typical of how movement women responded,” according to Duberman.¹¹¹

Angela K. Douglas, the previously-mentioned founder of the Transsexual Action Organization (TAO), came to the defense of Rivera in an article for *The Advocate* called, “Transsexuals, transvestites ‘getting it together.’” Douglas, a white trans woman, denounced the “attacks on transsexualism and transvestism made by lesbian feminist

¹⁰⁷Tommi Aviccolli Mecca, “Marsha P. Johnson: New York City Legend,” in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation*, ed. Tommi Aviccolli Mecca (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 2009), 261-2.

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin Shepard, “From Community Organization to Direct Services: The Street Trans Action Revolutionaries to Sylvia Rivera,” *Journal of Social Service Research*, Oct. 11, 2012, 99.

¹⁰⁹Duberman, 236.

¹¹⁰“Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary,” in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, eds. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: Douglas Book Corporation, 1972), 114.

¹¹¹Duberman, 236.

leaders, such as Jean O' Leary.” She continued to note that Rivera and Johnson’s STAR was “the most militant of all” trans groups that had formed, writing that they attempted “to join a picket line in support of Communist Angela Davis” at one point. In addressing the mistreatment and silencing of trans people within the gay movement, Douglas wrote that “[g]ays have conveniently forgotten that most of the people involved in” the Stonewall Riots “were transsexuals and transvestites,” making it an injustice that many organizers of Pride events were now attempting to prevent trans people from participating. Douglas powerfully concluded her article with the following remark: “it is encouraging to find so many transsexuals and transvestites willing to tear down the crosses which were used to burn and crucify Joan of Arc and Christine Jorgensen, among countless others, and beat their oppressors over the head with them.”¹¹² In other words, trans people were beginning to organize and rebel against their secondary statuses within the gay liberation movement.

It is notable that Douglas, perhaps because of her race, reinforcement of white supremacy,¹¹³ and less ‘radical’ politics was given a platform in which she could write about trans issues in *The Advocate*, as this was a privilege that Rivera and Johnson presumably did not receive. In addition, within TAO’s publications *Moonshadow* and *Mirage*, information about STAR, Sylvia Rivera, and dissatisfaction with the gay movement and lesbian feminists pervaded the newsletters. In an August 1973 publication

¹¹²Angela K. Douglas, “Transsexuals, transvestites ‘getting it together,’” *The Advocate*, Nov 7, 1973, UNLV Special Collections, 14.

¹¹³Susana Peña, “Gender and Sexuality in Latina/o Miami: Documenting Latina Transsexual Activists,” in *Historicizing Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Kevin P. Murphy (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 233-4. According to Peña, TAO relocated to Miami, Florida in 1972, and several Latinas – including Tara Carn, Kimberly Elliot, and Tisha Goudie – played paramount roles within the organization, “often serving in leadership positions, appearing in pictorials in the organization’s publications, and representing TAO in interviews with mainstream media.” However, Douglas used “racist language freely when harassed and provoked by blacks and Latinos” and seemed “to view Cubans and Latinas with both a desiring and despising gaze,” making her a problematic figure.

of *Moonshadow*, for example, the newsletter praised Rivera for her actions at the parade, in which she “denounced the Gay Liberation movement” and “spoke about the oppression of transsexuals” against the wishes of those who sought to sideline her.¹¹⁴

Douglas thus attested to the reality that trans women’s roles in liberation often went without credit. With respect to Rivera and Johnson, the latter of whom was photographed by Warhol in 1974,¹¹⁵ it is apparent that a mainstreaming gay liberation movement sought to diminish the roles they played in Stonewall and beyond. However, their refusal to accept silence – as evidenced by their continued activism – demonstrates a resilience that has contributed to their cementation and reestablished prominence within gay and transgender history.

V. Christine Jorgensen and Renée Richards

“Few Qualify for Sex Change Operation” blazed across the *Los Angeles Times* on February 26, 1979. The article centered on the plights of “thousands of sexually confused Americans,” less than ten percent of whom were able to complete the years-long processes of medical evaluations and tests before being cleared for “transforming surgery.” The article also noted the rampant suicides among those in the transsexual community, California’s Court of Appeals requiring Medi-Cal to cover transitions, and the ACLU’s representation of a trans woman who was denied Medi-Cal’s coverage for transitions. However, tucked almost nonchalantly within the first paragraph of the article was the following reference: countless Americans “have seriously considered following Christine Jorgensen’s example and are switching sexes.”

¹¹⁴ “Star,” *Moonshadow*, Transsexual Action Organization, Aug 1973, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives.

¹¹⁵ Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 131.

This article is important in a multitude of ways. First and foremost, it reflects that transgender people were fighting for representation and certain rights – as exemplified by the ACLU’s advocacy on behalf of a trans woman – in the legal sphere by the late 1970s. The article also represents the media’s ongoing fascination with transgender people as a means to generate profits: as previously mentioned, the headline “sex change operation” is certainly attention-grabbing. Lastly, the almost casual mention of “Christine Jorgensen” within the article’s first sentence, without elaborating much further, demonstrates Jorgensen’s enduring presence in the media nearly thirty years later in the same newspapers that covered her return from Denmark – where she transitioned – in 1952.¹¹⁶

However, while Jorgensen remained a media fixture until her death in 1989, her star power had diminished by the late 1960s, and she was semiretired by the 1970s. However, as indicated above, she continued to be a public presence, as her charm delighted audiences.¹¹⁷ According to Communication scholar David Serlin, Jorgensen had little desire to engage in radical activism and did not want “to push the cultural envelope beyond her belief that” individuals should transition “under the right conditions... to make themselves feel more whole.” As a result, in decades characterized “by the civil rights and women’s and gay liberation movements,” Jorgensen was “less interesting.”¹¹⁸

Although Jorgensen arguably triggered transgender activism, she was a “moderate,” according to historian of gender and sexuality Joanne Meyerowitz, and

¹¹⁶ Paul Jacobs, “Few Qualify for Sex Change Operation,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), February 6, 1979.

¹¹⁷ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 204, 281.

¹¹⁸ David Serlin, *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 198-9.

“distanced herself from the women’s movement.” Though she spoke on behalf of gay rights in the latter portion of the 1970s, her rise to fame and maintenance of her celebrity was arguably because her presence was not consciously political and was – in spite of sensationalist headlines – meticulously conservative.¹¹⁹ As previously mentioned, Jorgensen’s rise to fame was propelled largely because of her “embodiment of the norms of white womanhood,” such as “domesticity... heterosexuality,” and “middle-class respectability,” according to Skidmore.¹²⁰

For example, when Jorgensen released her autobiography in 1967 (it sold nearly 450,000 copies),¹²¹ she wrote about her initial disgust and repulsion to homosexuality.¹²² Also, in a 1970 interview in the *Washington Post*, Jorgensen discussed her belief that no “woman should be allowed to have more than two children,” as well her opinion that women’s liberation would be a mistake “if poppa stays home with the kids while momma earns the living,” for “[i]f we liberate that far we will lose the art of being a woman.”¹²³ Thus, Jorgensen often expressed views that were antithetical to the ideas of certain activist movements at the time, such as feminism.

While her name in *The Advocate* was apparently not an uncommon occurrence, judging by several articles she appeared in, she spoke candidly with the newspaper in a lengthy 1978 interview, a privilege that Rivera and Johnson were apparently not privy to. In the article, she expressed that gay activists should not “be way-out and weird,” because “the movement doesn’t need it” and is actually hindered by radicals. It is perhaps this

¹¹⁹Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 20, 281.

¹²⁰Emily Skidmore, “Constructing the “Good Transsexual”: Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press,” *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 270, 271-5.

¹²¹Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 16.

¹²²Skidmore, 277.

¹²³Sally Quinn, “Christine: Explaining Transsexualism,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), July 8, 1970.

quote that best identifies why she was an excellent candidate to feature in both mainstream and gay and lesbian publications: she was not “disturbing the peace” and outwardly criticizing racist, sexist, and homophobic structures, unlike Rivera, Johnson, and other activists.¹²⁴ In other words, she represented conservative, assimilationist ideals, something that had allowed her to rise to fame in the first place. Therefore, well into the 1970s, Jorgensen remained a conservative figure. Her status quo-preserving opinions, combined with her middle-class origins, whiteness, and heterosexuality, thus helped to cement her celebrity status.¹²⁵ When asked about Renée Richards, highlighting the comparisons between the two women that were relatively common in press publications, Jorgensen replied, “I’ve never met her,” as “we don’t have a convention of transsexuals.”¹²⁶

Indeed, several articles – such as the *Los Angeles Times*’ 1979 article “Sex Change Surgery Value Questioned” – directly compared Jorgensen and Richards, highlighting that Jorgensen’s name was still well-known and that she was the one who supposedly popularized transitioning, while Richards represented “[t]he most recent case to receive publicity.” The article revealed that Johns Hopkins Hospital had stopped sexual reassignment surgeries due to data that supposedly indicated that “[t]ranssexuals who undergo sex-change operations do not necessarily live happier or more successful lives than those who do not,” also indicating that hospitals were the gatekeepers of transitions and the arbitrators of how trans people could alter their own bodies.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ David Galligan, “A Silver Jubilee (Of Sorts): Christine Jorgensen,” *The Advocate*, Dec. 27, 1978, 52.

¹²⁵ Skidmore, 270.

¹²⁶ Galligan, 52.

¹²⁷ Bill Stall, “Sex Change Surgery Value Questioned: Transsexuals Who Do Without It Can Also Adjust, Hopkins Study Finds,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 16, 1979, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1990)*, B20.

According to Renée Richards in her second autobiography *No Way Renée*, she “was one of the most famous people in the world” in 1976, with the paparazzi constantly trailing her every move. They were “hungry for any photo, the less flattering the better,” though she conceded that the mainstream press was sometimes better. Richards, as a result of her status as “an international phenomenon,” was featured in publications with high readerships, including *Sports Illustrated*, *People*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*. She also wrote about Christine Jorgensen in her autobiography, noting that she sought out the surgical expertise of Dr. Harry Benjamin, the infamous doctor who had worked with Jorgensen previously “and had coined the term ‘transsexual.’” Richards also noted that, prior to transitioning, she “got a look at what American culture had in store for a modern Lili Elbe,” referring to early press coverage of Christine Jorgensen. Frankly discussing her disappointment with Jorgensen’s coverage, she expressed that Jorgensen “had little to fall back on but her notoriety, and she succumbed to the temptation to exploit her fame” by working as a nightclub performer. Richards would “cringe” when she saw a swimsuit-clad Jorgensen spread in a magazine, and she recalled the terrible jokes that denounced Jorgensen’s name. Thus, Richards candidly insisted that the press coverage surrounding Jorgensen – and the consequent mocking of her identity – contributed to her stifling her identity as a trans woman for as long as she could.¹²⁸

As a white, Yale-educated trans woman, Richards was also privileged in comparison to contemporaries Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson. Reinforcing conservative values of American patriotism and individualism, and thus claiming space within the realm of acceptable transsexuality, she wrote that her “unusual pursuit of the

¹²⁸ Renée Richards, *No Way Renée: The Second Half of my Notorious Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 1, 15, 74-6.

American Dream” involves “us to make ourselves the most we can,” something that her “immigrant family embraced and realized.”¹²⁹ These outward expressions of American individualism perhaps contributed to her widespread appearance within mainstream newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

In addition, her name was frequently situated within *The Advocate*. The 1976 article “Transsexuals: Looking For an Honest Reflection,” which later received a letter-to-the-editor from the Erickson Educational Foundation in support of the “open-minded, thoughtful” content,¹³⁰ referred to Richards as once being “a prominent, male eye surgeon” who is now competing in women’s tennis and is surrounded by “a circus-like atmosphere of television cameras and international press.” The article continued to highlight a cruel headline that followed her defeat in a game: “A Tennis First: Transsexual Tears.”

As indicated above, then, Richards inspired harsh criticism from several writers. For example, “How Inalienable Are One’s Rights?” was an article that appeared in *The Washington Post* in 1976, and it implied that Richards was a self-centered “freak” for her desire to transition.¹³¹ Further, an article that appeared during the same year in the feminist news journal *Off Our Backs* referenced Renée Richards and concluded with a critical, transphobic question: “why don’t transsexuals work towards change in the definition of sex appropriate behavior,” as opposed to transitioning? This article thus demonstrated that many feminists were not allies of the transgender community, and it also illuminates the polarizing effect that Richards had while pursuing her right to play

¹²⁹Ibid., 5.

¹³⁰Thompson, 14.

¹³¹Ellen Goodman, “How Inalienable Are One’s Rights?” *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, August 31, 1976.

women's tennis.¹³² In addition to Richards provoking debate as to whether or not it was "fair" for her to compete with other women,¹³³ trans-misogynistic feminists struggled with perceived threats to women's spaces.¹³⁴

Gloria Steinem published an article that detailed "Renee Richards forc[ing] transsexualism into the public mind" in *Ms.* in February 1977 and, after expressing that feminists should feel uncomfortable with transsexuality, concluded with the transphobic question, "if the shoe doesn't fit, must we change the foot?"¹³⁵ In addition, Olivia records, a women-for-women's music industry collective, hired Sandy Stone, a trans woman. This triggered a campaign amongst several feminists to oust Stone. For example, *Pearl Diver* published a 1977 article titled, "A Man is a Man," and it detailed that lesbian feminists "must be careful to recognize the wolf in sheep's clothing" in its reference to Stone.¹³⁶ Feminist Robin Morgan, in a racist and transphobic narrative, compared transsexuality to blackface the same year.¹³⁷

In 1978, a year in which gay and lesbian Pride officials in New York attempted to ban trans people from annual celebrations due to the mainstream media's supposedly image-threatening focus on drag queens,¹³⁸ Virginia Prince's *Transvestia* published the article "Looking Toward Transvestite Liberation." The article addressed the "angry protestations in the feminist and other liberation movements across the country" with

¹³² Alice Henry and Vicki Leonard, "Transsexual Tennis," *Off Our Backs: A Women's Newsjournal*, Oct.31, 1976.

¹³³ Charles Leroux, "The identity (XY) crisis," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 30, 1976, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1989)*, B1.

¹³⁴ According to Stryker's *Transgender History*, It is important to note that not all second wave feminists were hostile toward transgender people, such as *Lesbian Tide's* Jeanne Cordova (109).

¹³⁵ Gloria Steinem, "If the shoe doesn't fit, change the foot," in *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1983), 209-210.

¹³⁶ "A Man is a Man," *Pearl Diver*, May 1977, Interlibrary Loan Services, 19.

¹³⁷ Robin Morgan, *Going too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977), 180-1.

¹³⁸ Kasino, 2012.

respect to “male transvestites, drag queens, and female impersonators.”¹³⁹ That same year, in 1978, feminist scholar Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* “elevated transphobia to a metaphysical level” with her assertion that transsexuality was “a ‘necrophilic invasion’ of vital women’s space.” Finally, in 1979, Daly’s doctoral student Janice G. Raymond “consolidated the many strands of antitransgender discourse circulating within the feminist community” with her publication of *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, according to Stryker.¹⁴⁰ Referencing white, famous trans women Christine Jorgensen, Jan Morris, and Renée Richards, Raymond, a radical feminist and lesbian, began her narrative with the following obscene, objectifying quote: “It takes castrated balls to play women’s tennis.”¹⁴¹ Showcasing Raymond’s appeal, *Sojourner*, a newspaper that focused on feminism, supportively reviewed *The Transsexual Empire* without critiquing its toxicity.¹⁴²

Thus, Richards’ appearance in the media unintentionally contributed to a subsequent firestorm surrounding trans issues within the latter portion of the 1970s. Trans women, including Christine Jorgensen and Renée Richards, faced backlash and hatred for their identities. For example, *The Advocate* referred to Jorgensen as a “he-she” in a 1969 article, undoubtedly using language that was not uncommon in mainstream publications.¹⁴³ This suggests that all trans women – even those with the most privilege – might better be thought of as occupying spaces on a spectrum of tolerability. In other words, Jorgensen and Richards’ whiteness and heterosexuality made them attractive

¹³⁹Sheila Sullivan, “Looking Toward Transvestite Liberation,” *Transvestia*, 1978, GLBT Historical Society, 41.

¹⁴⁰ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 105.

¹⁴¹Janice G. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire* (London: Women's Press, 1980), xiii-xi.

¹⁴² Pat Harrison, “A Much-Needed Approach,” *Sojourner*, May 1979, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, 19.

¹⁴³ “Reeling ‘Round with Barry Daly – ‘drags’ in old Austria,” *The Advocate*, Dec 1969, UNLV Special Collections, 23.

media subjects to sensationalize, or “tolerable transsexuals,” while still stigmatizing them. However, despite the negative publicity they often faced, their names were known and propagated because they fit within narrow prescriptions of acceptability. On the contrary, as demonstrated above, Rivera and Johnson challenged white supremacy, homophobia, and capitalism. Thus, they were increasingly marginalized in a movement that they helped to build.

VI. Contemporary Conclusions

Print media has long been critical to shaping views concerning transgender people, even amongst trans people themselves. Activism that predates and includes the Stonewall Riots indicates that trans people, and poor trans women of color in particular, were critical to the resistance efforts that jumpstarted gay liberation. However, as scholars have indicated above, these accounts have faced erasure by the mainstreaming of the gay and lesbian movement, as well as by the mythologizing and whitewashing of Stonewall. Such erasure is evident both in mainstream and gay and lesbian publications from 1969 – 1979, which often disseminated narratives of “good transsexuals,” such as Christine Jorgensen and Renée Richards. Meanwhile, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were rarely covered, presumably because of their marginalized identities and radical politics.

In today’s media, insults and innuendo commonly plague coverage of trans people. It is thus necessary for editors and producers to work to eliminate prejudices reminiscent of decades past.¹⁴⁴ The significance of hateful, ignorant, or unrepresentative press coverage cannot be stated enough. According to Wilchins, and in direct response to Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire*, “[i]deas have effects,” such as the perpetuation of

¹⁴⁴Arune, 130.

violence against trans people, as demonstrated by the likely murder of Marsha P. Johnson.¹⁴⁵ Days after a 1992 interview and Pride March, in which Johnson explained that “there's no reason to celebrate” at Pride events “as long as gay people don't have their rights all across America,”¹⁴⁶ her body was found floating in the Hudson River. A flimsy investigation – which “consisted of two phone calls” – ruled Johnson’s death to be a suicide, despite “reports that Marsha had been harassed near the piers earlier that evening.”¹⁴⁷ Her funeral was attended by hundreds as people came to pay their respects to “St. Marsha.”¹⁴⁸

Upon Sylvia Rivera’s death from liver cancer in 2002, Rivera – like Jorgensen before her¹⁴⁹ – received an obituary in *The New York Times*. The article detailed Rivera’s central role to “the birth of the modern gay liberation movement,” discussing her participation at Stonewall and her founding of the short-lived STAR House with Marsha P. Johnson. In addition, the obituary mentioned Rivera’s scuffled with leaders of the gay movement “who favored a more conventional public front,” as well as her anger when the GAA eliminated civil rights protections for trans people from its agenda during the early 1970s, speaking to the sidelining and erasure of trans issues. The article continued to mention her later drug addiction; her homelessness in the 1990s; her founding of Transy House, where she met her partner, Julia Murray; and that she “was given a place of honor in the march” during the 25th commemoration of the Stonewall Riots in 1994. Speaking to her marginalization in a 1995 interview with *The New York Times*, Rivera

¹⁴⁵Wilchins, 61-2.

¹⁴⁶ Kasino, 2012.

¹⁴⁷Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, 131.

¹⁴⁸ Mecca, “Marsha P. Johnson,” 261-2.

¹⁴⁹John T. McQuiston, "Christine Jorgensen, 62, Is Dead; Was First to Have a Sex Change," *The New York Times*, May 4, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/04/obituaries/christine-jorgensen-62-is-dead-was-first-to-have-a-sex-change.html> (accessed March 27, 2014).

expressed that “[t]he movement had put me on the shelf, but they took me down and dusted me off” before placing her “back on the shelf” after honoring her in 1994.¹⁵⁰

Marsha P. Johnson, too, recently appeared in the mainstream media. According to the *New York Daily News*, Johnson’s case was reopened in 2012 after lobbying by transgender activists, including Mariah Lopez. Lopez highlighted the importance of Johnson’s activism, saying that her contribution to Stonewall was “‘globally significant.’”¹⁵¹ In analyzing this recent coverage of Rivera and Johnson, it is clear that – despite subjugation within the gay liberation movement – they have remained within collective memory and are perhaps now being recognized for their central roles in queer history and the activism they engaged in despite their routine exclusion. The importance of this cannot be overstated. According to Miss Major, a trans woman of color who participated in the Stonewall Riots, in a 2013 article within *The Advocate*, “Many who took part in the Stonewall Rebellion died way before their time, like my sisters Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson... The ongoing whitewashing of those days of struggle put a blemish on the memory of those trans women of color and those still living.”¹⁵² As demonstrated above, there has undeniably been a great deal of reclaiming by scholars and activists in order to reposition the Stonewall narrative to more accurately reflect its participants and to situate transgender history within the mainstream historical record. It is critical that this work continues.

¹⁵⁰David W. Dunlap, "Sylvia Rivera, 50, Figure in Birth of the Gay Liberation Movement," *The New York Times*, Feb 20, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/20/nyregion/sylvia-rivera-50-figure-in-birth-of-the-gay-liberation-movement.html> (accessed March 27, 2014).

¹⁵¹Shayna Jacobs, "EXCLUSIVE: DA reopens unsolved 1992 case involving the 'saint of gay life,'" *New York Daily News*, Dec 16, 2012, <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/da-reopens-unsolved-1992-case-involving-saint-gay-life-article-1.1221742> (accessed March 27, 2014).

¹⁵²Sunnivie Brydum, “Does the Stonewall Commemorative Plaque Erase Trans People’s Role in Riots?” *The Advocate*, Oct 24, 2013, [Advocate.com](http://www.advocate.com).

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