

Affective Economies of Activism: Reimagining Anti-LGBTQ Hate Crime

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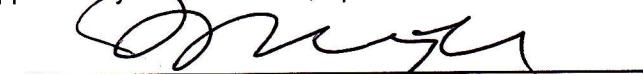
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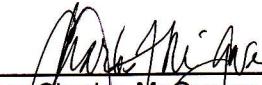
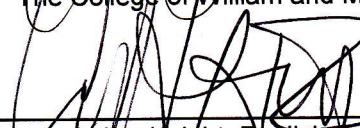
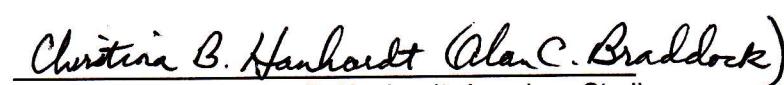
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ABSTRACT PAGE

“Affective Economies of Activism: Reimagining Anti-LGBTQ Hate Crime” is a critique of racism and misogyny within the contemporary LGBTQ movement. I argue that the mainstream LGBTQ movement’s narrow focus on street crimes against white gay men has resulted in a hyperreality that distracts us not only from the effects of the actual racialized violence that takes place, but also denies meaningful discussion of structural violence. This dissertation traces the origins of this exclusive and harmful discourse since the late 1960s with each chapter describing different forms of active resistance and possibilities for finding solutions today. I analyze publications gathered from special collections across the country; oral histories I conducted with activists in the South; documentary films; and queer online culture. My scholarship combines theory with everyday lived experience in order to bring social justice to the center of our field of vision. I do not only discuss and theorize about social justice, but also practice what I preach by engaging in archive activism and contributing to a grassroots LGBTQ history.

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This Ph.D. is dedicated to my best friend Osvald Peeti (1930-2014) who also
happened to be my grandfather.

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Chapter 1

Affective Economies of Anti-LGBTQ Hate Crime

Vision is always a question of the power to see — and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?
—Donna Haraway¹

The attack against Eugene Lovendusky on May 24th, 2013, marked him as the 9th victim in just one month in a series of violent acts against the LGBTQ community in New York City. The very particularly styled black-and-white photograph of Lovendusky, whose resemblance to Matthew Shepard cannot be overlooked, went viral (Figure 1). Since May 2013, there have been a disturbingly high number of homicides of trans women of color outside New York City, but none of those cases have gained noteworthy attention in popular media discourse. Currently, the white urban gay male is the transnationally iconic image of anti-LGBTQ violence that we have become accustomed to. Why are we more used to seeing a white gay man as the victim of hate crime than a trans woman of color? Statistics – although always hiding more than they reveal – show that trans women of color take the brunt of hate-based violence. Yet we do not see this reality reflected in mainstream narratives or in advocacy work. Popular discussion of anti-LGBTQ violence often begins and ends with the iconic image of Matthew Shepard and victims similar to him: white, gay, and male.

¹ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 195.



Figure 1. Eugene Lovendusky.

Source: David Badash, "LGBT Activist Becomes Victim Of Anti-Gay Violent Attack In NYC's Hell's Kitchen," *The New Civil Rights Movement*, May 25, 2013, accessed March 27, 2016, <http://www.thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/lgbt-activist-becomes-victim-of-anti-gay-violent-attack-in-nycs-hells-kitchen/news/2013/05/25/67502>.

The reasoning behind and effects of such images go far beyond these particular cases. In our understanding of and reaction to violence we are conditioned by what Pierre Bourdieu described as *habitus*: “the kind of practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation – what is called in sport a ‘feel’ for the game, that is, the art of *anticipating* the future of the game, which is inscribed in the present state of play.”² *Habitus* as the “feel for the game” in a particular social context helps to make “distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong [...] and so forth.”³ The key lies in the word “feel” that drives our decisions. The conditions of our *habitus* are based on feelings that do not allow us to question popular images of anti-LGBTQ violence or imagine a different world. Often the “feel for the game” does not even let us see “hate crime” as anything but “LGBTQ,” excluding violence motivated by racism, religious bias, or xenophobia. It is difficult if not nearly impossible to argue with feelings, especially our own, but also others.

In our contemporary political confessional culture, emotional response to stimuli takes priority and is not easily challenged or argued with. Sara Ahmed explains that in such affective economies, “emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments.”⁴ Explaining the nature of affective economies, Ahmed uses a Marxian understanding in which value increases through circulation using an M-C-M (money to commodity to money) formulation and

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 25.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴ Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text*, 79, Vol. 22, no. 2 (2004): 119.

where surplus value is added resulting in more M (money).⁵ In other words, Ahmed sees emotions as social, material, as well as psychic currency that circulates among and between subjects and objects rather than “residing positively within them,” and through this circulation increase their affective value.⁶ Although emotions do not reside in subjects or objects, they may be “a form of residence as an effect of a certain history, a history that may operate by concealing its own traces.”⁷ Affect becomes only seemingly attached to specific images of anti-LGBTQ violence that are not instilled with emotion but rather animate the emotion that is circulating around them.

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with affect or having a *feeling* in general, except when those feelings trigger actions that further social injustices. Affective economies are shaped by multitude of forces. This dissertation addresses some of the forces that shape not just our understanding of anti-LGBTQ hate crime but how we make sense of our emotional world. Through the example of Lovendusky and Shepard I will introduce some of the key issues that inform the chapters that follow. One of the overarching themes of this dissertation is social justice activism. Throughout my dissertation, I’m looking for queer possibilities to fracture the current state of affective economies that support ideologies, which exacerbate some of the deepest injustices in our world today. Since time, place, and identity are fluid concepts in contemporary technologically driven and mediated culture, social justice activism that is based on identity politics is often glocal: local and global in the same instant and cannot be

⁵ Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 120.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 119.

analyzed within traditional disciplinary frameworks. In the discussion and chapters that follow, I will lay out some of the diverse avenues where social justice activism occurs, analyze the moments that have been effective and critique the ones that have been destructive.

What I mean by destructive moments in LGBTQ activism are nationally celebrated commercialized mainstream advocacy platforms such as Human Rights Campaign and GLAAD that distract funds from grassroots movements and exclude issues relevant to the latter. My focus here is on the discursive development of mainstream LGBTQ movement's attitudes toward physical violence against the members of the community. As my discussion shows, the terms "LGBTQ movement" and "community" are at best problematic and at worst inapplicable when considering the diversity of gender non-conforming people today and erasures in the past. I will exercise caution and intent with those terms, and point out fallacies where they are not obvious.

Any kind of labeling is a political and messy endeavor yet absolutely necessary. I'm making a distinction as most queer scholars do between the disruptive, questioning, and unstable "queer" and the overused normative and limited "gay" that cannot stand for and describe the experience of the queer. At times, I use intentionally "LGBT" without the "Q" to refer to contexts that are more traditional or simply do not use this last letter. For example, mainstream LGBT advocacy that often does not have anything to do with "Q" that stands for queer. Also, most archives with a special collection on sexuality use "LGBT" instead of "LGBTQ." In order for a search to give any results on such online databases, one

needs to exclude the “Q.” I also use often “gay community” or “gay” as generic terms because such words were used during the 1970s and mid-1980s in the contexts that I cite.

This discussion on word choice might seem obvious, even banal. Yet since the focus of this dissertation is on emotional, taboo, and simply uncomfortable issues, the choice of words cannot be overrated. Identity politics that involves labels has been and continues to be a hotly contested topic in cultural studies, especially in gender and sexuality studies. I wish we’d live in a world where labels are for clothes and not for people (and the anti-capitalist in me would ideally not even have them on clothes). The reality is, as long as there are grave injustices in society that manifest in structural and physical violence, we cannot do without labels. Admittedly, those labels are often what we have recently started calling “trigger words” – words that are imbued with qualities and meaning that cause an intense emotional, sometimes physical reaction in the person because it reminds them of a past traumatic experience. If labels are trigger words, let them be.

Studies in psychology consistently show that putting feelings into words (affect labeling) and being able to experience a wide range of emotions (emodiversity) will make us not just mentally but also physically healthier. A study done at University of California, Los Angeles confirmed what most of us have felt for a long time: affect labeling similar to other forms of encoding “diminished the response of the amygdala and other limbic regions to negative emotional

images.⁸ In other words, paradoxically, when we have a word to point to a negative emotion, it allows us feel that emotion more intensely and at the same time helps us cope with it. Having a word that helps to demarcate an ambiguous feeling has been especially important to historically marginalized groups. It is impossible to estimate the importance of words for ambiguous yet visceral feelings such as “feminine mystique,” “the veil” and “double consciousness,” “lesbian,” “queer,” and even the recent seemingly glib millennial phenomenon of “cuffing season” – when during Fall and Winter people who are otherwise single feel the emotional urgency to find a serious romantic partner to stay indoors with and not feel lonely.

A more recent extensive study, “Emodiversity and the Emotional Ecosystem” included two large surveys (37,000 people) in France and Belgium, showed that even negative emotions have a positive correlation to our mental and physical health.⁹ The key lies in being emotionally diverse and able to experience many different kinds of emotions (Figure 2). To explain the workings of emodiversity, the researchers made a comparison to biodiversity, which,

increases resilience to negative events because a single predator cannot wipe out an entire ecosystem, emodiversity may prevent specific emotions – in particular detrimental ones such as acute stress, anger or sadness – from dominating the emotional ecosystem. For instance, the experience of prolonged sadness might lead to depression but the joint experience of sadness and anger – although unpleasant – might prevent individuals from completely withdrawing from their environment.¹⁰

⁸ Matthew D. Lieberman et al., “Putting feelings into words: Affect Labeling Disrupts Amygdala Activity in Response to Affective Stimuli,” *Psychological Science*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (2007): 421.

⁹ Jordi Quoidbach, “Emodiversity and the Emotional Ecosystem,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, Vol. 143, No. 6 (2014): 2057–2066.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2064.

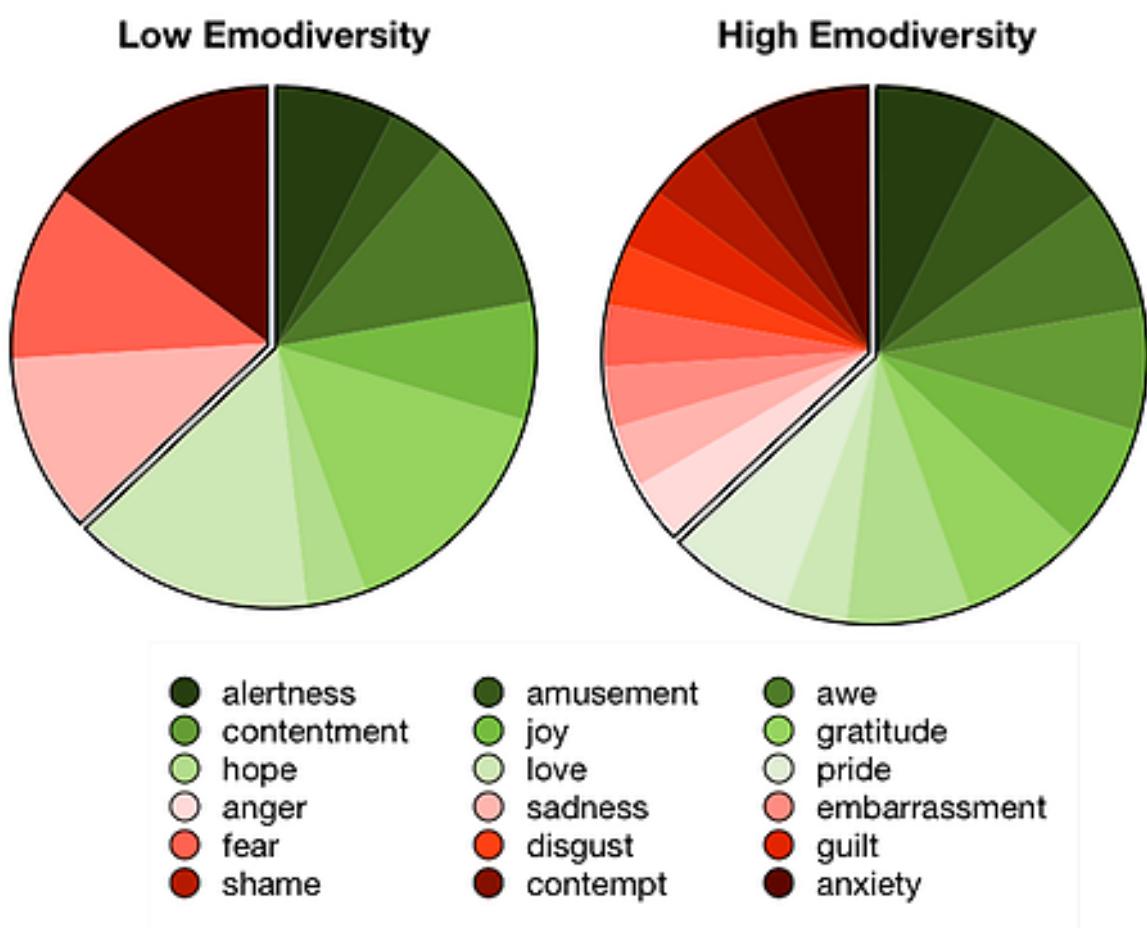


Figure 2. Schematic representation of low and high emodiversity.
Source: Jordi Quoidbach, "Emodiversity and the Emotional Ecosystem," *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, Vol. 143, No. 6 (2014): 2059.

The same applies to positive emotions: if we have a diverse set of positive emotions to choose from, we are less likely to adapt to a repeated exposure to positive emotional experience, and hence, have the ability to experience positive emotions longer.

Although words often seem to limit a critical project, we need affect labeling to have emodiversity that helps us not only survive tragic events, but to move forward and thrive. The two studies together indicate, the more extensive vocabulary we have for varying degrees of positive *and* negative emotional states, the more emotionally diverse and healthy we are. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, which mostly focused on “atrocious photography,” Susan Sontag argued that we should “let the atrocious images haunt us. Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function.”¹¹ Similarly, we should allow even the negative affect surrounding ideas and labels to haunt us. As long as there are affective experiences that marginalize groups of people, we need labels, even when similarly to photographs depicting violence they cannot “possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer.”¹² Only then can we start to disrupt and dismantle the forces that created such oppressive conditions in the first place. We should let ourselves feel the world we live in because only when we start to critically think about those feelings can we begin to shift the harmful dynamic of the current affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence.

¹¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), 115.

¹² Ibid.

Although there has been considerable research on the topic over the past 20 years as street violence emerged as the lynchpin of mainstream LGBTQ politics, none of it has focused on the development of national imagery and affective aesthetics of victimhood. One of the first extensive studies to specifically focus on the topic of LGBT violence was *Violence Against Gays and Lesbians* (1991) by sociologist and theologian Gary David Comstock.¹³ Published at a time when very little was written on the topic, Comstock's aim was to "describe and understand anti-gay/lesbian violence, and by examining the conditions associated with such violence, to enhance our ability to predict its occurrence."¹⁴ Tracing incidents from the World War II up until the mid-1980s, Comstock argues that with newfound visibility violence against gays and lesbians increased and was socially acceptable although forbidden by the law. For background on the LGBT community Comstock relies on the now classic John D'Emilio's *The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (1983), but he also uses court records, media reports and personal interviews with gays and lesbians to establish his narrative.

Comstock is ultimately interested in the profile of the stereotypical perpetrator whom he concludes are adolescent "and not only predominately male and white, but just as likely, or even more likely to be middle class [...] good in their classes, popular, friendly and sociable."¹⁵ He saw the roots of street

¹³ Gary David Comstock, *Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). First a chaplain and a theologian, Comstock ends the book with Christian opposition to homosexuality and examines the Biblical passages that are used to justify homophobia yet he doesn't really provide anything to refute these claims.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵ Ibid., 106.

violence in social structures that reward the perpetrators with “normality” and deny victims equal rights under the law. Unable to participate fully in society implicitly condones street violence against “gays” and “lesbians.” Rightfully so, Comstock blames patriarchy and capitalism for the exclusion of marginalized groups from political life and social institutions such as the family.

Although the empirical data described by Comstock shows the perpetrators to be mostly white and middle-class, one of the most recent investigations into the phenomenon of anti-LGBTQ violence shows how the capitalist and patriarchal forces have distorted this image to justify gentrification and redevelopment driven by racism and classism. Historian Christina Hanhardt reveals how LGBT activists’ focus on crime and “safe space” shaped the cultural and political perception of blackness into the “antithesis of progress” and forced low-income people out of emerging “gay” neighborhoods in San Francisco and New York City:

In mooring a dominant understanding of sexual identity to place, the promotion and protection of gay neighborhoods have reinforced race and class stratification of postwar urban space. As I show, this has been enabled by the simultaneously flexible and fixed language of threat in which violence is imagined as the central risk – and thus the defining feature – of gay visibility: the key term of mainstream LGBT politics since the 1970s.¹⁶

Hanhardt’s meticulous research on LGBT activism and gay neighborhoods is vital to our understanding of how structural forces come into play when we talk about seemingly isolated cases of violence and demands for “safe space.”

¹⁶ Christina Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 9.

Similar to Hanhardt, I am interested in the structural forces that shape the politics of anti-LGBTQ violence. However, my focus is on the established affect of violence, the intricate dynamics of popular media discourse that shape it, and moments of activism that have against the grain of mainstream opinion. I consider the urban, but also look away from the city in order to understand how affective imagery of anti-LGBTQ violence emerges only when set against the idea of the rural. Part of my phenomenological approach towards this topic is to understand the tensions that cause some incidents of violence emerge as “local” and others as issues of national safety.

Because of how affective economies work, the past, the present, personal and impersonal combine and when we look at the photograph of Eugene Lovendusky we are consciously or unconsciously informed by the murder Matthew Shepard 15 years ago (Figure 3). Even if we are too “young” to remember, or for whatever reason our cultural background does not grant us with the explicit knowledge of the murder of Matthew Shepard, the conditions of our habitus work as a mnemonic device that helps us to remember the values of culture without delving into the details of specific cases. In a more direct way, we are also conditioned by the affect of people around us who remind us of certain pasts and not of others.



Figure 3. Matthew Shepard.

Source: Judy Shepard, *The Meaning of Matthew: My Son's Murder in Laramie, and a World Transformed* (New York, NY: Hudson Street Press, 2009).

Matthew Shepard's story – as retold by different media – is arguably one of the most well-known instances of anti-LGBTQ violence. Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney met Matthew Shepard at a bar in Laramie during the evening of October 6, 1998. According to a popular account, the two murderers pretended to be gay and lured Matthew Shepard to go with them. The three men got into McKinney's truck and left for a remote area east of Laramie. The beating started in the truck after McKinney apparently said, "We're not gay, and you just got jacked."¹⁷ Matthew Shepard was pistol-whipped, tortured, robbed and left tied to a fence. He was found the next morning by two cyclists, and transported to the hospital in Fort Collins where he died 5 days later.

What followed was extensive national and international media coverage of the case. The intense visuality and A-list level celebrity attention devoted to his story have encouraged to this day the creation of theater productions, films, books, poetry, music performances and beautiful acts of public protest.¹⁸ All this has neutralized a very complicated story and turned Shepard into a highly commodified symbol of anti-LGBTQ violence. As a student at the University of

¹⁷ Beth Loffreda, *Losing Matt Shepard: Life and Politics in the Aftermath of Anti-Gay Murder*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 9.

¹⁸ Books: Beth Loffreda, *Losing Matt Shepard: Life and Politics in the Aftermath of Anti-Gay Murder* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Judy Shepard, *The Meaning of Matthew: My Son's Murder in Laramie, and a World Transformed* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2009); Stephen Jimenez, *The Book of Matt: Hidden Truths About the Murder of Matthew Shepard* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2013). Poetry collections: *Blood & Tears: Poems for Matthew Shepard* (New York, NY: Painted Leaf Press, 1999); Lesléa Newman, *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard* (Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2012). Songs: "Scarecrow" (1999) by Melissa Etheridge; "Laramie" (2001) by Amy Ray; "American Triangle" (2001) by Elton John and Bernie Taupin. Stage plays: Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* (2000) and *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later* (2009). Films: Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* (2002), Roger Spottiswoode's *The Matthew Shepard Story* (2002), Tim Hunter's *Anatomy of a Hate Crime* (2001). Documentaries: Berverly Seckinger's *Laramie Inside Out* (2004), Michele Josue's *Matt Shepard Is a Friend of Mine* (2014). The story has also been the featured in episodes of television shows such as *Six Feet Under*, *The West Wing*, and *United States of Tara*.

Wyoming I witnessed Sir Elton John come down to Laramie, Wyoming, and give a 10-year anniversary benefit concert to commemorate Matthew Shepard. In other words, this attention has given the Matthew Shepard story one uncomplicated narrative and foreclosed the possibility of alternate interpretations or different question. The minute details of the case are no longer important for the murder functions above all as an abstraction. Certain symbolic pressure points of the case – the fence, the sky, deer, crucifixion – have become trigger words and are often picked up by the media mnemonic devices that sensationalize present day acts of violence. Most importantly, this is the case that, so to speak, has decided the currency of our current affective economies, and set the standards for proper ways of reacting to this particular kind of outburst of violence today. Shepard's story is the coming together of several forces and discourses that support the dominant ideological basis of our culture that places highest value on white male bodies.

I'm one of many who do not have an immediate experience with Shepard's murder as a new story in the late 1990s, but as said, the conditions of our culture have taught me about the incident. Growing up in Estonia, I did not know who Matthew Shepard was until the summer of 2007 when I was thinking of applying to the University of Wyoming's American Studies Program and first read about the murder. My initial thoughts were, "How gay do I look? Coming from Estonia, am I going to be beaten up or killed just because I might look different?" Just looking at images and reading articles about Matthew Shepard's murder unintentionally made me construct a very specific image of Laramie,

Wyoming. I would not have applied, had I not taken a class with Eric Sandeen while student at University of Tartu. Eric is the Director the American Studies Program at the University of Wyoming and was teaching in Estonia while on a Fulbright Fellowship. He provided human connection to an abstract idea of a place I had begun to envision.

Googling “Laramie, Wyoming,” made me part of a *public* that was brought together by the digital representation of tragedy. Michael Warner explains in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) that “publics” are “text-based” communities, constituted through attention, and importantly “make stranger relationality normative.”¹⁹ Philosopher Alphonso Lingis has argued that community becomes evident especially during moments of tragedy and loss: “Community forms when one exposes oneself to the naked one, the destitute one, the outcast, the dying one. One enters into community not by affirming oneself and one’s forces but by exposing oneself to expenditure at a loss, to sacrifice.”²⁰ The ties of a public as a community are strengthened even more by the unique qualities of hate crime that differentiate it from other kinds of senseless acts of violence. As a targeted act of violence against specific identities, hate crime instills fear in the entire community. “Stranger relationality” even more highlighted among LGBTQ readers of text who otherwise have no direct physical or mental relation to Laramie, Wyoming.

From the beginning there has been an incongruity between how people in Laramie and outsiders perceived what happened to Matthew Shepard and who

¹⁹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 76.

²⁰ Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 12.

was to blame. In other words, there has been an incoherency in logical typing. British anthropologist Gregory Bateson has written extensively about the different levels of learning and logical typing.²¹ He makes two main points:

1. The name is not the thing named but is of different logical type, higher than the thing named.
2. The class is of different logical type, higher than that of its members.

Bateson is building on the theories developed by Bertrand Russell on learning in mathematics.²² Bateson extends those theories to systems theory that helps us understand the various levels at which communication and information occur. More importantly, logical typing allows us to notice miscommunication and understand the reasons behind conflict. In the case of Matthew Shepard, national media talked about Laramie on the community level ("the community killed Matthew Shepard") and about life outside Laramie on the individual level ("I could never do something like this"). People in Laramie, however, responded on the individual level ("I did not do it") rather than on the community level. These different levels of representation create a complex set of contested memories. In such a context Laramie, Wyoming as a place has been seen as the perpetrator, and therefore, incapable of defining Matthew Shepard's death in ways that would

²¹ Gregory Bateson and Mary Catherine Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 2000), 209-210.

²² Bertrand Russell, "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types," *American Journal of Mathematics*, 30 (1908): 222–262; repr. in Bertrand Russell, *Logic and Knowledge* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956): 59–102.

count as legitimate on the national level. This made violence against Matthew Shepard a national and not a “local” issue.

We can also notice logical levels when we are looking at structural forms of violence. The level of an individual act of violence can only be used as a point of entry to gain an understanding of the interplay of structural factors, which have cased this outburst of violence to occur. On the next level, we can talk about the community’s relationship with the law, the police, heteronormative family institutions, and mainstream publics on local, national and global level. On the third level we can talk about the structural issues that we can barely describe with words – racism, classism, misogyny, ableism – but can detect in sometimes explicit but mostly in implicit micro-aggressive ways as we move through our day and experience built environment, news, entertainment, employment, and education.

The complex entangled levels of affect made me wary at first to write about Matthew Shepard. I was an outsider who read about the case 10 years later while living in Estonia. I was afraid of being insensitive and offending people to whom Matthew Shepard means a lot more the abstraction that most of us have become accustomed to. At the same time, being an outsider – international student from Estonia – made me want to know more about Laramie, Wyoming. The story of Matthew Shepard has turned out to be my point of entry into developing an understanding of forces that shape the logical levels of American culture and its taboos. The story extends across countries and continents. As a queer woman, anti-LGBTQ hate crime is personal to me, but it is so much more

complex than that. The tragedy of Shepard's murder has allowed me to critique and interrogate my own understanding and positioning in the world when it comes to my emotional-political-professional life. We are taught to trust our feelings, but when emotions are political (and they always are), we should constantly question feelings as our politics are based on ideologies of oppression. The fact that I feel oppressed or I'm concerned about safety, reveals the complex teachings of those oppressive ideologies that indirectly and sometimes also directly cause us to act in ways that perpetuates deeper historical injustices.

I'm not the only one in those feelings of fear when it comes to potential violence against me because of my queerness. A recent article on *The Toast* by a Jess White highlights the pervasiveness and problematic nature of this fear.²³ Originally from San Francisco, White is currently an MFA student in creative writing at the University of Wyoming. In her article, "Living in Laramie: After Matthew Shepard" she describes the weight that the murder has on her as an "actual lesbian" living in Laramie:

Matthew Shepard has talismanic significance for me, for us, and that extends to Laramie. Friends back home visibly startle when I tell them that I am living in Laramie. On the phone on the train in San Francisco, I mentioned returning to Laramie and an older gay man whipped around in his seat to stare at me. Laramie is the site of Matthew Shepard's murder, the place that reminded us that people would kill us for who we were. Laramie where the threat of violence we all face became real.²⁴

²³ Jess White, "Living in Laramie: After Matthew Shepard." *The Toast*, October 7, 2015, accessed 28 December, 2015, <http://the-toast.net/2015/10/07/living-in-laramie-after-matthew-shepard/#idc-container>.

²⁴ White, "Living in Laramie."

Although White feels threatened as part of a *public* that emerged in the aftermath of the murder, her life is in no more danger in Laramie than in the rest of the country. Crime rates in Laramie are more than twice below the national average. From 2001 to 2013 only 8 murders were reported within the city limits of Laramie.²⁵

White ends her article by reflecting on an encounter with a young lesbian who was visiting Laramie from Indiana and did not know anything about Matthew Shepard. Although most people in Laramie would be happy to hear that outsiders have other kinds of associations with the town beyond Shepard, White concludes that reconciliation will not happen unless we not forget Matthew Shepard.

I do not entirely disagree with White, but I suggest we go beyond remembering Shepard. In order to face the realities of violence today and acknowledge the violence in the past, we should, of course, remember, Matthew Shepard's murder, but more importantly, also move on. We should use this case an example of how the racist, misogynist, and classist culture reminds us of the valued significance of white male bodies and confirms the insignificance of others. As such, Shepard's case is a lesson in media cultures and how people who have control of capital can shape our perception of reality. It is easy to remember Shepard and forget everyone else. Our focus should move on to the images of recent victims of brutal hate crimes. To put it bluntly, we should have images of trans women of color dominate and define our affective economies.

²⁵ "Crime Rate in Laramie, Wyoming," *CityData.com*, accessed 20 March 2016, <http://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Laramie-Wyoming.html>.

National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs' (NCAVP) most recent report provides a devastating reality check when it comes to the experience of transgender people in America. Out of all the documented anti-LGBTQ homicide victims in 2014, 80% were people of color and 55% were transgender women whereas transgender survivors of color were 6.2 times more likely to experience police violence.²⁶ Trans identifying people are also four times more likely to live in poverty than the rest of the general population and the prevalence of HIV among trans women is nearly 50 times as high as for other adults.²⁷ Important to note, most reports do not even attempt to include acts of violence or comments on conditions outside the traditional organizational LGBT network. Statistics always hide more than they reveal and although dreadful, those numbers give us an illusion of having an understanding of or control over injustice and violence whereas in fact we do not. Statistics also cannot account for the systematic violence that is experienced by transgender people on a daily basis.

It is not easy to make sense of such affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence, and not be completely callous or engulfed by emotion. This current discussion may seem insensitive and cold, but my suggestions have nothing to do with the specific and terrible pain and violence inflicted on Shepard's body.

²⁶ National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, *Hate Violence Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV-Affected Communities* (New York: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, June 2015). Significantly, this report includes data only from organizations who are partners with NCAVP that is headquartered in New York City. Founded in 1995, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) brings together anti-violence programs in cities and regions across the United States. Although this report is by far not perfect, it's more thorough than the annual FBI report on hate crimes.

²⁷ Movement Advancement Project, *Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for Being LGBT in America*, 2015, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.lgbtmap.org/file/paying-an-unfair-price-full-report.pdf>; Center of Disease Control and Prevention, *HIV Among Transgender People*, 2013, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/gender/transgender/index.html>.

According to Bateson's theories on logical typing, this would be most primitive first level thinking. We are coaxed to first level of thinking because of feelings that fuel affective economies. Because Shepard's case defines current affective economies, there is no straightforward way based on one level of thinking to gain an understanding of this rather odd cultural phenomenon. In fact, it doesn't seem odd to us because of how we *feel*. And how could one argue with feelings? We really cannot argue about the validity of someone's pain or how they feel. If we leave racism, misogyny, and classism aside, there is no logical explanation as to why we should not be focusing on a demographic that is most likely the victim of not only street violence, but also state authorized structural violence.

In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Slavoj Žižek provides a useful framework for discussing violence on next logical levels as he recommends that we not look at violence directly, but instead cast "sideways glances."²⁸ According to Žižek, there are two kinds of violence: objective and subjective. Subjective violence – which dominates media discourse – is perpetrated by an agent who can be rendered accountable. Objective violence is inherent to the system comprising of institutions, politics and ideologies.²⁹ When we look at subjective violence directly, we cannot give a proper conceptual analysis because we are overtaken by empathy and terror. At the same time a distanced and "cold" analysis of violence would reproduce and participate in its horror, and would be an example of systematic objective violence.

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 3.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

My “sideways glance” toward affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence is found in the further important distinction that Žižek makes between *truth* and *truthfulness*.³⁰ Žižek explains that in order for an account to be *truthful*, the survivor of rape, for instance, is expected to explain events in a confused and inconsistent manner. A rape survivor that orders events in a completely coherent and methodological way is suspicious. *Truthfulness* is really a balanced combination of coherent and incoherent ways of reporting. Importantly, established consistency lies in this perceived inconsistency. The fact that we only see a certain amount of confusion and inconsistency as *truthful* when it comes to victims or survivors refers to a consistency of violence on the next logical level. In other words, *truthfulness* that predominantly is articulated in what Žižek sees as subjective violence, becomes an instrument of objective violence.

On the level of media representations *truthfulness* means particular aesthetics that implicitly make some cases more *truthful* than others. The current most *truthful* image of anti-LGBTQ violence is a black-and-white medium close-up image of a clean-cut white gay man. The defining image of Matthew Shepard in a gray sweater did not appear in news media until after his death. The image first chosen for publication by national and international media was of Matthew Shepard in his home kitchen. We see Shepard in front of kitchen cupboards, holding what appears to be a dishtowel in his hands.

The logic of figuration and context make the viewers intruders who have the opportunity to indulge freely in voyeurism and zoom in on Shepard without

³⁰ Žižek, *Violence*, 4.

being distracted or feel uncomfortable by his returned gaze. He is not looking into the camera or at us. Importantly, this is a snapshot in a domestic setting and considerably different from the black-and-white fine-tuned photograph we have settled on now. Photographer Lisette Model noticed something similar to Žižek's *truthfulness* in snapshots: "I am a passionate lover of the snapshot, because of all photographic images it comes closest to truth. The snapshot is a specific spiritual moment. It cannot be willed or desired to be achieved. It simply happens, to certain people and not to others."³¹ There is innocence in snapshots because they are private.³² In the case of Matthew Shepard this privacy evident in snapshots was paired with the privacy that the family demanded after his hospitalization.

The photo series that we have become most familiar with today consists of at least four poses, mostly published as black-and-white images. Shepard is pictured in a desolate environment; walking in the midst of abandoned buildings or standing next to a rusty window. The visual politics of Matthew Shepard are very much shaped by his mother, Judy Shepard, whose book jacket featured one of the photographs from the series and who chooses to display those four images during interviews or when visiting talk shows.

³¹ Žižek, *Violence*, 6.

³² Elisabeth Sussman, *Lisette Model* (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), 6.

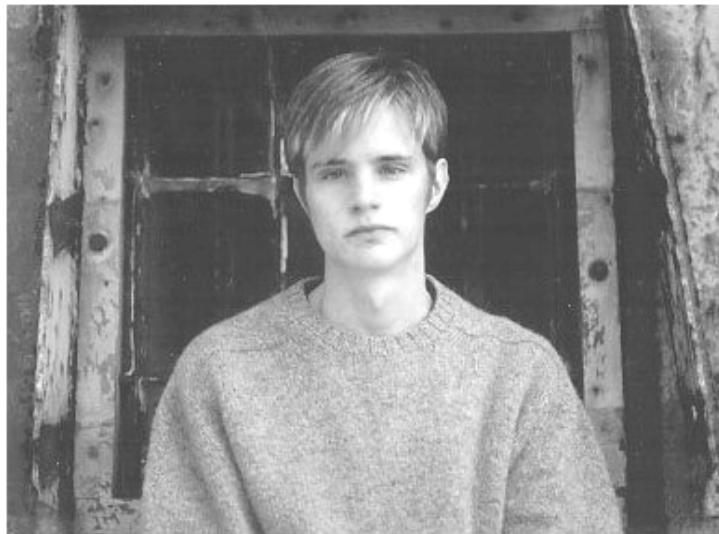


Figure 4. Matthew Shepard and Eugene Lovendusky.

Sources: Michele Josue, "Matt Shepard Is a Friend of Mine," *Kickstarter*, April 17, 2011, accessed January 5, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1253709612/matt-shepard-is-a-friend-of-mine>; Badash, "LGBT Activist Becomes Victim."

This photograph that solidified Matthew Shepard's status as the quintessential victim of anti-LGBTQ violence shares remarkable similarities with the image of Eugene Lovendusky that went viral in online news blogs in May 2013 (Figure 4). Lovendusky, the founder of the anti-violence activist group, *Queer Rising*, who was attacked on May 24th near Time Square when 9-10 men "started yelling 'faggot'" and punched him in the jaw.³³ *The New Civil Rights Movement* blog was first to publish the black-and-white medium close-up photograph that was later used as a poster for rallies. The two skinny, white, blond-haired gay men are strikingly similar in appearance. The words used to describe Matthew Shepard – "classy, stylish, and cultured" and with a "very clean shaven look" – can easily be applied to Lovendusky who is a skinny, white, blond-haired gay man.³⁴ Lovendusky looks like an older metronormative version of Matthew Shepard who has the support of his community and life experience to fight back.

The two images also share formal characteristics and have a similar logic of configuration. Both are medium close-up images with the camera angle placing us eye level with the men. These are professional photographs, not the out-of-focus selfies or snapshots we often see of victims of violence on online news blogs. The fact the images are black-and-white is not insignificant. There is an aura of some unexplained "original truth" in the black-and-white photograph,

³³ Margaret Hartman, "Gay-Rights Activist Latest Target of City's anti-LGBT Violence," *New York Magazine*, May 28, 2013, accessed on January 28, 2016,

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2013/05/gay-rights-activist-targeted-in-anti-lgbt-attack.html>.

³⁴ James Brooke, "After Beating of Gay Man, Town Looks at Its Attitudes," *The New York Times*, October 1, 1998.

as Roland Barthes has argued.³⁵ Barthes saw the photograph as violent in this perceived honesty, “not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed.”³⁶ Photographs use this “force” to make a lasting impact on people as they allow statements that make no sense in *real* life to become indisputable for remembered life.³⁷ In this context, the use and circulation of specifically styled photographs helps to make certain images of anti-LGBTQ violence *truthful* and others *untruthful* in our popular imagination.

As this discussion shows affective economies are part of ideology that combines the past and the present, and makes it difficult for us to separate the two. This quality of affective economies employs what Elizabeth Freeman in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010) has described as the “temporal drag.”³⁸ Freeman builds on the work of Judith Butler and considers “drag” as a temporal crossing rather than one of gender, which involves an “excess . . . of the signifier ‘history’ rather than of ‘woman’ or ‘man.’”³⁹ She counters Butler’s idea that performances are copies without an original, and argues that “...to reduce all embodied performances to the status of copies without originals is to ignore the interesting threat that the genuine *past*-ness of the past – its opacity and intelligibility, its stonewalling in the face of our most

³⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 81.

³⁶ Ibid., 91.

³⁷ Sarah McKim Webster Goodwin, and Elisabeth Bronfen (eds.), *Death and Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 330.

³⁸ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 62.

³⁹ Ibid., 63.

cherished theoretical paradigms – sometimes makes to the political present.”⁴⁰

Freeman first developed the idea of “temporal drag” in an earlier essay, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations” but develops it further in her book as “a kind of historicist *jouissance*, a friction of dead bodies upon live ones, obsolete constructions upon emergent ones.”⁴¹ That is where one of the most significant aspects of “temporal drag” is revealed: it is an earlier narrative told through a more recent one while both *times* – the more distant past and the less distant past – remain *present* and visible.

Relying on an image that evokes past affect that is also present, the story of Eugene Lovendusky was told through that of Matthew Shepard. The image of Lovendusky is the *future* in relation to the image of Shepard and reveals another important aspect of “temporal drag.” Although every photograph is bound up with our ability to remember what happened after that moment captured in a photograph (we know that Matthew Shepard is going to die), “temporal drag” brings to light the possible futures that never actually took place. In our popular imagination, Matthew Shepard could be Eugene Lovendusky if he had not died in 1998. The anterior future that the past bequeaths to the present is highlighted in the photograph as a medium, and is *queered* by “temporal drag.”

These performances of anachronisms rely on abstractions and photographs are one of the most effective means of establishing them. Abstractions perpetuate an established *truthfulness* of anti-LGBTQ violence that leaves publics little choice but to adhere to same old ideological patterns of perception

⁴⁰ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 63.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History*, 31.4 (2000): 727–44; Freeman, *Time Binds*, 66.

that rely on affect that perpetuates injustices. Affect is most effectively evoked by photographs that are the most common means – besides the written word – of distributing information during a time of increasing media convergence on the Internet.

Such performances of present through past reveal the particular ideological expectations and tastes of *publics* when it comes to images of violence in media, and victims. Although media scholar Chris Townsend has argued that the pleasure we take in each other's pain is even more pronounced in contemporary media where “the stereotyped, otherwise, characterless, ‘other’ is routinely (or one might say ritually) dismembered as entertainment,” we cannot really say that we are faced with “dismemberment” per se when looking at the cases of Lovendusky and Shepard.⁴²

The violence inflicted on Shepard’s body was so brutal that it resulted in death. Yet we do not have an image of Matthew Shepard on the fence where he was left or in the Poudre Valley Hospital, or on the autopsy table – at least not any images that would have been published in any of the local or national newspapers, or shown by any of the television channels covering the incident.⁴³ Physical pain that is the result of violence has been theorized as something

⁴² Chris Townsend, *Art and Death* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 9.

⁴³ The lack of images of Matthew Shepard after the attack can be explained by theories developed by Philippe Ariés in *The Hour of Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Geoffrey Gorer in *Death, Grief and Mourning* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965). The authors argue that we have universal incapability of representing death, which is intensified by contemporary fear of death and the dead body.

uniquely undetectable and unsharable.⁴⁴ Yet we do know that Matthew Shepard's violent attack and later his death were somehow communicated.

This shows that contemporary publics do not want a simple image of death as truth, but a particular kind of dramatic *truthfulness*. American publics enjoy violence but are uncomfortable with the outcome: the corpse, which according to Julia Kristeva is the ultimate universal source of abjection.⁴⁵ There are specific techniques that mainstream media use to mitigate the presence of the corpse and enable us to satisfy our fascination with violence in a less of an uncanny way that an explicit image of death would provide. Therefore, instead of the severely injured body of Matthew Shepard after the attack, media used very specific images of Matthew Shepard before the attack that shaped the current *truthful* image of anti-LGBTQ violence. Such media images send a message that the picture of a white gay male is somehow more persuasive and sympathetic than the violated image would be because the former represents a certain kind of ruined wholesomeness that speaks more to the dominant perceptions of the kind of LGBTQ people the majority of viewers are accustomed to seeing.

This dissertation seeks puncture this false wholesomeness. I look out moments of activism and actions that disrupt what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the “abstract machine of faciality.”⁴⁶ Faciality that belongs to the orders of “significance and subjectification” is a planet-wide technocapitalist assemblage,

⁴⁴ Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) is one of the most elegant articulations on the limits of understanding the physical pain of others.

⁴⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

⁴⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

that devours difference and reproduces it ‘in its own image.’”⁴⁷ It’s an apparatus of meaning making and subject making, which relies on mystifications. Deleuze and Guattari describe the “assemblage” of faciality as a sensation:

You will be pinned to the white wall and stuffed in the black hole. This machine is called the faciality machine because it is the social production of the face, because it performs the facialisation of the entire body and all its surroundings and objects, and the landscapification of all worlds and milieus.⁴⁸

In other words, for Deluze and Guattari the face is one of the registers that extends and encompasses the entire body and through which the society regulates, polices, and routinizes human behavior. This social production of a face relies on what they call “White Man,” whose first incarnation was claimed in the birth (or more precisely death) of Jesus. Richard Dyer illustrates how the privileging of heterosexual whiteness, starting with the pictorial whitening of sacred figures from the Middle East and Northern Africa continued unabated in cinema and advertising.⁴⁹ Indeed, this grid of facialization has now become paradigmatic in mass digital media that values certain kind of faces/bodies, and devalues others.

Faciality can and should be dismantled but it is dangerous because its other side is infinitely unknown, a heterotopia. Heterotopia similar to the word queer is perhaps best described in terms of what it is not: non-place, the in-between, the absence of hierarchy, the disorder, the ungoverned, the reflexive

⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 167.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁹ Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 17.

retention of being and non-being. Foucault writes that heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they:

secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter and tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance...that less apparent syntax which causes words and things to ‘hold together.’⁵⁰

Entering heterotopia and deterritorializing the body means we disrupt facialization’s ever-swelling grid of organized choices, which are antagonistic to the body and its potentials. Choices that inform the readable plane(s) of the face are what theorist Camilla Griggers calls, “multiplicitous proliferation. Is she white or colored? Straight or Lesbian? Sane or Mad? The face will tell. [...] Does the individual face conform to socially intelligible limits? Are its deviations intelligible? Does it pass?”⁵¹ This plane of “choices” converge in order to create the unity of a passable or un-passable faces and bodies. Deterritorializing can mean taking up more “air” so to speak with the queer faces/bodies on the Internet or in a three dimensional space.

The chapters that follow seek to deterritorialize and disrupt facialization on several logical levels. Chapter two, “Reading Against the Grain of Mainstream: Archive Activism and New Histories of Violence,” provides a genealogy of how we ended up with this very narrow image that only allows a very particular

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias,” *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46-49. Original Publication: Conférence au Cercle d’études architecturales, 14 mars 1967, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://foucault.info/doc/documents/heterotopia/foucault-heterotopia-en-html>.

⁵¹ Camilla Griggers, *Becoming-Woman (Theory of Bounds)* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 4.

segment of the LGBTQ spectrum to be seen as valuable members of the nation, deserving of recognition and protection under the law. I use the framework of archive activism to guide my analysis of some of the most pivotal moments over the past five decades on the pages of *The Advocate*. *The Advocate*, published since 1967, is the longest surviving national LGBTQ publication to date that over the years became to provide a mainstream site of reference what “gay” is. I’m here concerned with the content of news coverage but also with phenomenology: the experience of reader that is informed by the unique relationships between pages, words, and images.

Chapter three, “Reading Time and Place: Creative Queer Resistance in The South,” focuses on oral histories with people who are least visible in contemporary national and LGBTQ media landscape. To this aim, I interviewed activists associated with the social justice non-profit, Southerners on New Ground (SONG). Unlike bicoastally based mainstream LGBTQ advocacy platforms, SONG challenges homonormative and metronormative narratives by connecting queer issues with livability in rural places, race, disability, immigration, food, and economic justice.

Chapter four, “Reading the Silver Screen: Documentary Activism and Queer Truths,” is a discussion of filmic representations of anti-LGBTQ hate crime with a focus on documentaries that challenge mainstream urban male bias. This chapter includes a close reading of *Southern Comfort* (2001), a documentary by Kate David that follows the final year in the life of Robert Eads: a trans man dying of ovarian cancer in rural Georgia.

Chapter five, “Reading Aesthetically: Digital Activism and Presentation of Queer Self,” connects activism, technology, and explores the problematic aesthetics of online news culture when it comes to anti-LGBTQ violence. I discuss the potential of queer online expression and self-representation in providing a place of resistance to mainstream racist, classist, and misogynist media. I focus on queer selfies, which in their call for celebration of an aesthetic that the assemblage of facialization regards un-passable disrupt faciality. I also trace the visual history of this queer strive for self-representation back to late 19th century when the development of photographic technology opened up new avenues for creative gender expressions.

My conclusion, “Reading Globally: Homonationalism and Queer Solutions,” takes the conversation outside the United States with a discussion of homonormativity and homonationalism.⁵² Examples from Russia and the Middle East show how the mainstreaming of LGBTQ movement over the course of five decades – as discussed in the preceding chapters – is shaping the country’s foreign policy today.

Affective Economies of Activism: Reimagining Anti-LGBTQ Hate Crime brings together queer theory, oral histories, media, communication-, film-, digital-,

⁵² Homonormativity is defined by Lisa Duggan in *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2004): “A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (50). Homonationalism is articulated by Jasbir Puar in “Rethinking Homonationalism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, No. Special Issue 02 (2013): as the framework for international politics by which the “acceptance” and ‘tolerance’ for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated” (336).

and community studies. Such differing areas of inquiry have forced me to embrace the idea of “bad activism.” Inspired by Roxane Gay’s identification as a “bad feminist,” I see bad activist practices as messy social justice endeavors that in their beautiful imperfection become perfect moments of dissent.⁵³ My hope is that the diverse avenues for social justice activism discussed in the pages that follow will provide opportunities for the reader to identify their own version of bad activism.

⁵³ Roxane Gay discusses the idea of “bad feminist” in *Bad Feminist: Essays* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014): “I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I’m not trying to be an example. I am not trying to be perfect. I am not trying to say I have all the answers. I am not trying to say I’m right. I am just trying — trying to support what I believe in, trying to do some good in this world, trying to make some noise with my writing while also being myself” (xi).

Chapter 2

Reading Against the Grain of Mainstream: Archive Activism, *The Advocate*, and the Aesthetics of Victimhood

It seems to me that the whole point of doing historical work is to situate it along the seam of its becoming-historical, which is a way to keep it in touch with that which eludes it.

—Christopher Nealon¹

In *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (2009), Ann Stoler provides critique of the archives as an ideological state apparatus through the example of 19th century Netherlands Indies' presence at the archives. She digs into the archives as an anthropologist and brings the reader the empirical realities of the Dutch to challenge the ideological-political space of the archive that is presumed to be neutral, stable, and truthful. Stoler shows that "archives are not simply accounts of actions or records of what people thought happened. They are "records of uncertainty and doubt in how people imagined they could and might make the rubrics of rule correspond to a changing imperial world."² Just because a certain document happens to be in an archive does not make it *official* evidence. On the contrary, Stoler shows archival material is a testament to "confused assessments, parenthetic doubts about what might count as evidence, the records of eyewitnesses with dubious credentials, dismissed rumors laced with pertinent truths, contradictory testimonies called

¹ Elizabeth Freeman, ed., "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 13. No. 2-3 (2007): 189.

² Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 4.

upon and quickly discarded.³ We see fiction and fact collide in historic documents and seemingly uncontested memories change and shift as new futures bring different pasts to light.

As a queer scholar, I too criticize the hegemonic status of the written document and its physical presence in archives as evidence of experiences considered worthy enough to take up institutional space. What archives contain and what documents are available online is reflective of power processes and an important aspect of research to consider since scholars are always limited by time and funds. Even what is found in Box 1 in a collection can speak to ideology already in place since we only have time to look through a limited number of boxes that often lack comprehensive research guides.⁴

Although Stoler's book has nothing to do with queers and media in the late 20th century, her work is important to my project not only because of her critique of power structures but also how she talks about the "feel of documents" that brings "affective knowledge" at the "core of political rationality."⁵ In this chapter, I will analyze the "affective knowledge" of anti-LGBTQ violence on the pages of *The Advocate*, the longest published national LGBTQ publication to date. In addition to content, I will consider the physicality and "feel" of the publication in shaping mainstream LGBT culture perceptions of violence, victims, and perpetrators. Ultimately, I contend that "gay" liberation narratives of pain and

³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 23.

⁴ For instance, *The Advocate* in its complete physical form since 1967 is only available in the magazine's headquarters in Los Angeles.

⁵ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 98.

suffering are stories of horror of different kind than what mainstream LGBT movement and popular opinion have agreed upon.

LGBTQ experiences have been famously under-or misrepresented within mainstream historical narratives. Elizabeth Freeman observes that because of that we have often been figured as “having no past: no childhood, no origin or precedent in nature, no family traditions or legends, and, crucially, no history as a distinct people.”⁶ Such lack of a common history has sparked a sense of urgency and desire for archival work and history among queer theorists and historians that according to Freedman has “manifested in valuable archival work.” In the always questioning “tradition” of queer theory, this archival labor of love has challenged traditional sense of time, and what counts as history and evidence.

Desire for archival work and history has also resulted in some seemingly queer but in reality rarely contested homonormative “gay” narratives. The traditional archive even in its inclusion of the “gays” does not necessarily go to great lengths to include “lesbians” “trans” or “queer.” Having LGBTQ related objects and publications is on one level a move toward diversifying the archive and challenging normativity. Yet the fact that we have materials only focusing on issues and events celebrated by mainstream “gays” perpetuates a narrow and normative idea of non-normative sexualities.⁷ What I mean by this is that by including issues from mainstream publications such as *The Advocate* means diversifying the archive in a very “traditional” kind of way. It’s similar to having a

⁶ Elizabeth Freeman, “Introduction to Queer Temporalities,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 13. No. 2-3 (2007): 162.

⁷ Since the 1960s progressive policy narratives such as marriage equality movement have been seldom challenged in mainstream (LGBT) culture.

white effeminate desexualized gay man on primetime television to count as a representation of the entire LGBTQ community.⁸ Power processes and the knowledge they produce are productive and will multiply in all areas of the culture, including LGBTQ collections at archives.

Freeman argues that ideally queer historians should let eroticism into the notion of historical thought and strive toward a historiographical method that would admit the “flesh.”⁹ Queer archive activism has been one of the practices that aims to bring us an understanding of history as it has been written on and felt with the body. The term “queer archive activism” was first used by scholar, filmmaker and AIDS activist, Alexandra Juhasz in 2004 to discuss her experimental videotape *Video Remains* (50min., 2004).¹⁰ In an article a few years later published in a collection for the *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*, Juhasz explains queer archive activism as the “practical and theoretical possibility that might be of good use for people who might be, like me, deeply concerned with the connection between *nostalgia*, *video* and *AIDS*.¹¹ Emerging from the visual culture of AIDS activism, the meaning of the concept has expanded over the

⁸ Heteronormative and homonormative media perpetuate a sense of false consciousness when it comes to LGBTQ culture by recycling the sexual affective pasts that include stereotypical images of LGBTQ life. Sometimes the two – heteronormative and homonormative media – overlap, for instance, TV shows aimed towards the hetero mainstream publics such as *Modern Family* (ABC 2009). Even when such images appear in the midst of criticism from queer writers and activists this does little to undermine the cultural superiority of “gay” over “queer,” “trans,” or “lesbian.”

⁹ Freeman, “Introduction to Queer Temporalities,” 164.

¹⁰ Ted Kerr, “I Made My Mourning Productive, Collective, and Interactive Through Video Production,” *The Visual AIDS Blog*, February 5, 2013, accessed 20 March 2016, <https://www.visualaids.org/blog/detail/i-made-my-mourning-productive-collective-and-interactive-through-video-prod>.

¹¹ Alexandra Juhasz, “Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism,” in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies: Special Issue: Art Works, Part 1*, eds., Richard Meyer and David Román, Vol. 12, No. 2, (2006): 319-328.

years to include the different aspects of creating archives that challenge traditional modes of preserving and disseminating historical records.

In *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), Ann Cvetkovich writes about the “affective power” of archive activism at the Lesbian Herstory Archives.¹² She sees the practices and methods employed at the LHS vital to preserving and producing “not just knowledge but feeling.”¹³ Cvetkovich argues that queer history “demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism – all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of traditional archive.”¹⁴ Ephemera that are usually not part of public research archives are essential in capturing and communicating emotions that are part of LGBT lives. Items such as meeting minutes, buttons, posters, flyers, are a huge part of more grassroots archives such as the Lesbian Herstory Archives. The Lesbian Herstory Archives encourages submissions from ordinary people and have a policy to accept everything that a lesbian sees as pertinent to their experience.¹⁵ Their approach is based on the idea that “affects – associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy and trauma – make a document significant.”¹⁶ As such, Cvetkovich’s “archive of feelings” is, of course, material but also fiercely immaterial and ephemeral.

¹² Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹³ Ibid., 241.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 243.

¹⁶ Ibid., 243-44.

Cvetkovich insists that activist archives of feelings must address “the painful loss of history” and past that is “impossible to forget, and resistant to consciousness.”¹⁷ On the one hand, no one would dare to challenge the importance of remembering traumatic experiences and pasts brought about by major human caused catastrophes such as World War I or the Holocaust. On the other hand, the gravity and how to properly remember the still ongoing AIDS epidemic – often metaphorically referred to as war and the holocaust – is still a contested topic. There are also histories of queer pain that has never or perhaps only barely made it to our field of vision to have the privilege to even be contested. Sadly, often the urgency to never forget traumatic histories begins and ends with mainstream LGBT narrative tendencies to focus on the pain and suffering of a select few and have that count as a representation of the entire spectrum of experiences.

Activist and scholar, Alana Kumbier discusses the lack that is always present in archives and how “documentation projects respond to the problem of missing archival records by drawing attention to their absence and developing alternative documentary strategies and forms.”¹⁸ As several other queer scholars, she draws attention to “the historic exclusion and under-documentation of queer cultures in archival collections.”¹⁹ To remedy the current state of collections, Kumbier relies on a creative archival practice, which she calls, “archiving from

¹⁷ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 244.

¹⁸ Alana Kumbier, *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014), 124.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the ground up.”²⁰ This “collaborative, participatory archiving practice” involves archivists working with members of the communities and cultures they hope to document, “instead of creating projects or building collections on their behalf.”²¹ By “archiving from the ground up” we can shift the established power dynamics between the archivist and the archived subjects, which allows for the inclusion and organization of materials in ways that is empathic to the peculiarities of under-and misrepresented histories.

Today even institutional archives have become more lax when it comes to the organizing practices and decisions about material deemed important enough to take up space. Grassroots archives such as the Lesbian Herstory Archive have become more institutionalized while still maintaining a more queer and creative archival approach to their materials. Although tensions in terms of differences between collections have lessened between institutional public research archives and formerly grassroots ones, as queer scholars we should never stop challenging what counts as national LGBTQ history, and always question not just *how* but *where* it’s told.

We need to consider the multitude of forces at play when it comes to archival knowledge, especially when it’s considered or camouflaged as “queer.” We have separate archives marked as “the other” whatever that might be (“lesbian,” “leather” or “black”). The accessibility of such major formerly grassroots LGBTQ archives is limited. Mostly bicoastal archives with hard to come by travel grants allow materials to be available only to a limited number of

²⁰ Kumbier, *Ephemeral Material*, 125.

²¹ Ibid.

patrons. The largest repository of LGBTQ related materials in the world, ONE Lesbian and Gay Archives in Los Angeles have a few select materials available online, but that is not the same kind of “archive of feeling” that one would experience with touch, smell, and sound while in physical proximity with the documents. The seemingly mundane considerations of archival accessibility and organization seem distant from the mostly theoretical queer writing. However, true “archive of feelings” that counts for the flesh cannot be imagined without critiquing every aspect of knowledge making that shapes power process.

Needless to say, what counts as “national ‘gay’ history” is still predominately (and not shockingly) white and male. Not to say that there are no other documents but piles and piles of images and stories about white urban gay men, but simply mainstream archives are a reflection and catalyst of a culture in which it emerged. Therefore, in order to do queer historiography in institutional archives while looking at mainstream documents one has to be a “textual poacher.” We cannot be limited to the ways of the early “poacher” who consumes but does not produce as theorized by Michel de Certeau.²² Queer “textual poacher” is similar to the pop culture readers described by Henry Jenkins who engage in active text consumption in order to produce new texts to be consumed.²³ Through active text consumption, queer “textual poachers” read along and then against the national “gay” historical narrative to challenge traditional forms of history and knowledge making.

²² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 165.

²³ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992).

This means digging into some of the “cultural treasures” of mainstream LGBT movement. In “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin talks about the revolutionary potential of seeing horror in past “cultural treasures” as an important part of historiography that challenges traditional form of history and knowledge making:

Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it is transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.²⁴

“Traditional practice” of history does not see barbarism in a “cultural treasure” because it only considers history in the form of isolated events without past, present, or future. The “horror” of the “cultural treasure” is excluded from uncontested national histories. A practice of dissent, historical materialism reads “cultural treasures” against the grain and explores the pain and suffering that is not part of the historicist story.

As a queer historical materialist, my aim is to “poach” texts and notice the horror in the “cultural treasure” that is the mainstream model of anti-LGBT violence. I will trace the emergence of the powerful image of the victim within mainstream LGBT movement by “poaching” *The Advocate* from the late 1960s

²⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 257-58.

when “homosexuals” started to define and publicly criticize targeted acts of violence towards until present day when sexual orientation and gender identity are recognized under the federal hate crime law.

Journalist Tracy Baim argues, “much of the pre-1980s American press just simply miss the story about an important segment of society” with “some important exceptions – mostly bad ones.”²⁵ As Baim notes, the rare occasions when national media happened to cover homosexuality resulted in further marginalization of the community. For instance, *Time* magazine’s cover story from January 21, 1966, “The Homosexual in America” was as a harmful mainstream representation that relied on every stereotype possible.²⁶ *Time* followed up with several stories three years later, which were as terrible as their first attempt.²⁷

Media scholar Michael Schudson argues that newspapers are less conversational than other forms of media, or “even anti-conversational.”²⁸ Schudson borrows Mikhail Bakhtin term “ventriloquating” to explain the ritual model of communication inherent in print news media: “they speak ‘for’ and ‘to’ some community of opinion.”²⁹ This characteristic gives an immense authority to news media in shaping public opinion with limited opportunities for opposing points of view to be heard. LGBT activists realized early on that media coverage had a powerful influence on national perception of the community and played a

²⁵ Tracy Baim, *Gay Press, Gay Power: The Growth of LGBT Newspapers in America* (Chicago: Prairie Avenue Productions and Windy City Media Group, 2012), 15.

²⁶ Christopher Cory, “The Homosexual in America,” *Time*, Vol. 87, No. 3., January 21, 1966.

²⁷ Christopher Cory, “Homosexuality: Coming to Terms,” *Time*, Vol. 94, No. 17, October 24, 1969; “The Homosexual: Newly Visible, Newly Understood,” *Time*, Vol. 94, No. 18, October 31, 1969; “A Discussion: Are Homosexuals Sick?,” *Time* 94, No. 18, October 31, 1969.

²⁸ Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 51.

²⁹ Ibid., 42.

major role in creating safe environment in the streets and at workplace. Already in the late 1950s, activists slowly started to organize to monitor national media coverage and criticize unfair press. The 1960s tactics included writing letters to major publications such as *The New York Times*, *Life*, and *Time*, and organizing sit-ins in their offices. In addition to print news, media monitoring also included television and radio.

The first issue of the then called *The Los Angeles Advocate* was published in September 1967 (Figure 5). This was two years and 22 issues before the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, an event existing in our popular imagination as the start and catalyst of the entire “gay” liberation movement. *The Los Angeles Advocate* was the collaborative work of Dick Michaels (the pseudonym for Richard Mitch) and his lover Bill Rand (the pseudonym for Bill Rau). Michaels and Rand were PRIDE (Personal in Defense and Education) activists and had previous experience in publishing while working on the *PRIDE Newsletter*.³⁰ Initially, *The Los Angeles Advocate* was illegally mimeographed in the basement of ABC offices where Bill Rand worked and then distributed in gay bars for 25 cents.³¹ The cover of the first issue captures some of the common themes that were prevalent in the late 1960s LGBT news scene.

³⁰ Baim, *Gay Press, Gay Power*, 92.

³¹ Rodger Streitmatter, “The Advocate: Setting the Standard for the Gay Liberation Press” in Larry Gross and James D. Woods, eds., *The Columbia Reader on Lesbians and Gay Men in Media, Society, and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 451.

Although in *Witness to Revolution: ‘The Advocate’ Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967-1999* (New York: Alyson Books, 1999), Chris Bull claims it was in the basement of the CBS’s Los Angeles affiliate (xv).

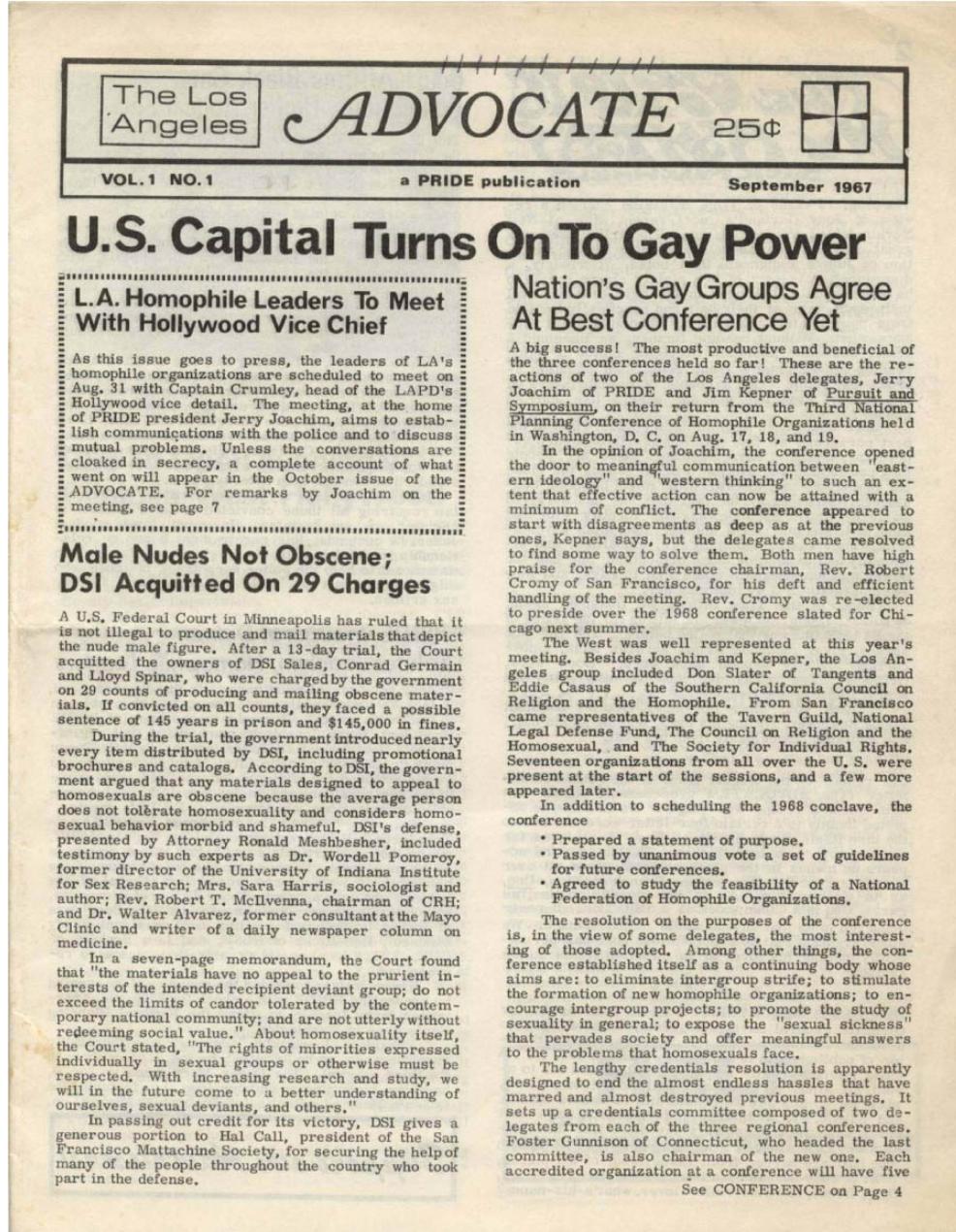


Figure 5. First issue of *The Los Angeles Advocate*.

Source: *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1968, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

This included news on meetings of gay advocacy groups across the nation, interactions with law enforcement, and discussion of gay male sexuality.

The Los Angeles Advocate started out as a regional newspaper among several others that emerged as part of the LGBT publishing boom in the 1960s. This increase in the number of publications was part of a desperate attempt to draw attention to the brutality of recent police raids on gay bars. Dick Michaels was himself a victim of a bar raid and arrest in Los Angeles in 1966. He later admitted, “there probably wouldn’t be any *Advocate* if it were not for that one tap on the back.”³² Michaels’ personal experience made violence at the hands of the police one of the most covered issues in the early days of the newspaper. Gay rights advocate and a long-time contributor to the magazine, Jim Kepner recalled: “Dick’s intention was to get the police off our backs and get rid of discrimination. So he hit hard on the police.”³³ The 1969 Los Angeles City Council election showed the strength of “gay” voting bloc when the anti-gay incumbent Councilman Paul Lamport was defeated by Jack Norman who was a police critic and against harsh treatment of the LGBTQ community.

The Los Angeles Advocate stands out as the first commercial “gay” publication that did not include fiction but only focused on news, editorials, and columns, which established it as the first serious LGBT publication.³⁴ The magazine got money from advertisers and from circulation revenue, not

³² Streitmatter, “*The Advocate*: Setting the Standard,” 453.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ John D’Emilio discusses the relationships between contemporary “gay” identity and capitalism in his foundational essay, “Capitalism and Gay Identity” in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharan Thompson, eds, *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

"subsidies from a membership organization" as did *ONE Magazine*, *The Ladder*, and *The Mattachine Review*.³⁵ Classified ads section featuring gay bars and mail-order companies distributing homoerotic media was the most important source of revenue for the magazine. It was not easy to get mainstream companies to advertise in a magazine that had its target audience a group that up until 1974 was officially considered mentally ill.³⁶

Jim Kepner argued, however, that Michaels' profit making interests were secondary to serving the "movement."³⁷ Michaels believed that having a "pro-gay" newspaper would not just benefit the community but society as a whole.³⁸ *The Los Angeles Advocate* was rather humble in its first editorial stating that "it is not a magazine" and "in no way competitor of the many and fine magazines punished by homosexual organizations" but a colleague to the latter and its main aim is to provide "legal steps, social news, developments in various organizations—anything the homosexual needs to know or wants to know."³⁹ Although perhaps modest on the pages of their early issues, years later, Martin Block, one of the founding editors of *ONE Magazine*, recalled how Dick Michaels "wanted to create the *New York Times* of gay press."⁴⁰ It was clear that Michaels had ambitious plans with his "not a magazine," which to a remarkable degree he was able to realize.

³⁵ Streitmatter, "The Advocate: Setting the Standard," 451.

³⁶ In 1974 The American Psychiatric Association finally removed homosexuality as a mental disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders (DSM-II).

³⁷ Streitmatter, "The Advocate: Setting the Standard," 452.

³⁸ Chris Bull, *Witness to Revolution*, xvi.

³⁹ Dick Michaels, "Editorial," *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1967, 2.

⁴⁰ Streitmatter, "The Advocate: Setting the Standard," 452.

The largest and oldest out of the 300 LGBT publications today, *The Advocate* is a magazine that has been seen as a space where role models were created.⁴¹ As Chris Bull argues in the introduction of a collection of articles from the magazine, *The Advocate* is “the story of contemporary America” and how “the institutions of family, church, government, business, and marriage have reacted to gay demands for justice and equality.”⁴² Over the years, *The Advocate* has provided a mainstream site of reference what “gay” means in America and what and who is relevant in LGBT and mainstream culture. The role of the magazine in creating American national perception of the homosexual citizen cannot be overestimated.

Along with marriage equality, anti-LGBTQ hate crime has emerged as the lynchpin of mainstream LGBT advocacy today. The pages of *The Advocate* reveal how anti-violence discourse developed in popular imagination through interaction between organizations, activists, lawmakers, and heteronormative mainstream media. *The Advocate*’s popularity and prominent national status already by the mid-1970s made the magazine an important force that helped to define what anti-LGBTQ violence means and shape publics’ perception about victims.

The first time *The Los Angeles Advocate* reported on anti-LGBTQ violence on its front page was in April 1969 (Figure 6).⁴³ The headline in red read, “Death at the Dover” and continues, “Witnesses Say Vice Cops Beat Man to Death.” The incident is remarkable enough to be blasted in red. At that time, the publication

⁴¹ Streitmatter, “The Advocate: Setting the Standard,” 452.

⁴² Bull, *Witness to Revolution*, xvi.

⁴³ Jim Kepner, “Death at the Dover,” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 3, No. 4, April 1969.

didn't use color except for the occasional green to emphasize part of the title: "Advocate." The incident happened after midnight on March 9th 1969 at the Dover Hotel, a popular place for gay patrons at the time. The vice police arrived at the scene to pick up a man up standing at the corner of the hotel. They handcuffed him and begun beating and stomping on the victim until they all got to an unmarked car and drove away. The victim who was registered at the hotel under the name J. McCann died at Central Receiving Hospital an hour later.

Eyewitnesses reported hearing McCann call for help and attempted to get the police at a nearby parking lot to intervene but to no avail. The magazine's speculation on this fatal evening gets messy with references to "bennies" (Benzedrine pills) found in some of the eyewitnesses' rooms that supposedly planted there by the police as a payback and scare tactic. Despite obvious indications of foul play, the McCann case reached a quick conclusion. The May 1969 issue announced: "Beating Death of Handcuffed Man Ruled 'Excusable Homicide.'"⁴⁴

A year later *The Los Angeles Advocate* followed up on the death of McCann who was now identified as Howard Efland (Figure 7).⁴⁵ The title of the article by Jim Kepner reads, "Gays Remember Dover Death with Rally, March." The cover includes a photo of Revered Troy Perry leading "120 marchers to L.A. Police headquarters." The photograph shows Revered Perry in the middle of a

⁴⁴ Dick Michaels, "Beating Death of Handcuffed Man Ruled 'Excusable Homicide,'" *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 3, No. 5, May 1969.

⁴⁵ Jim Kepner, "Gays Remember Dover Death with Rally, March," *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 4, No. 5, May 1970.

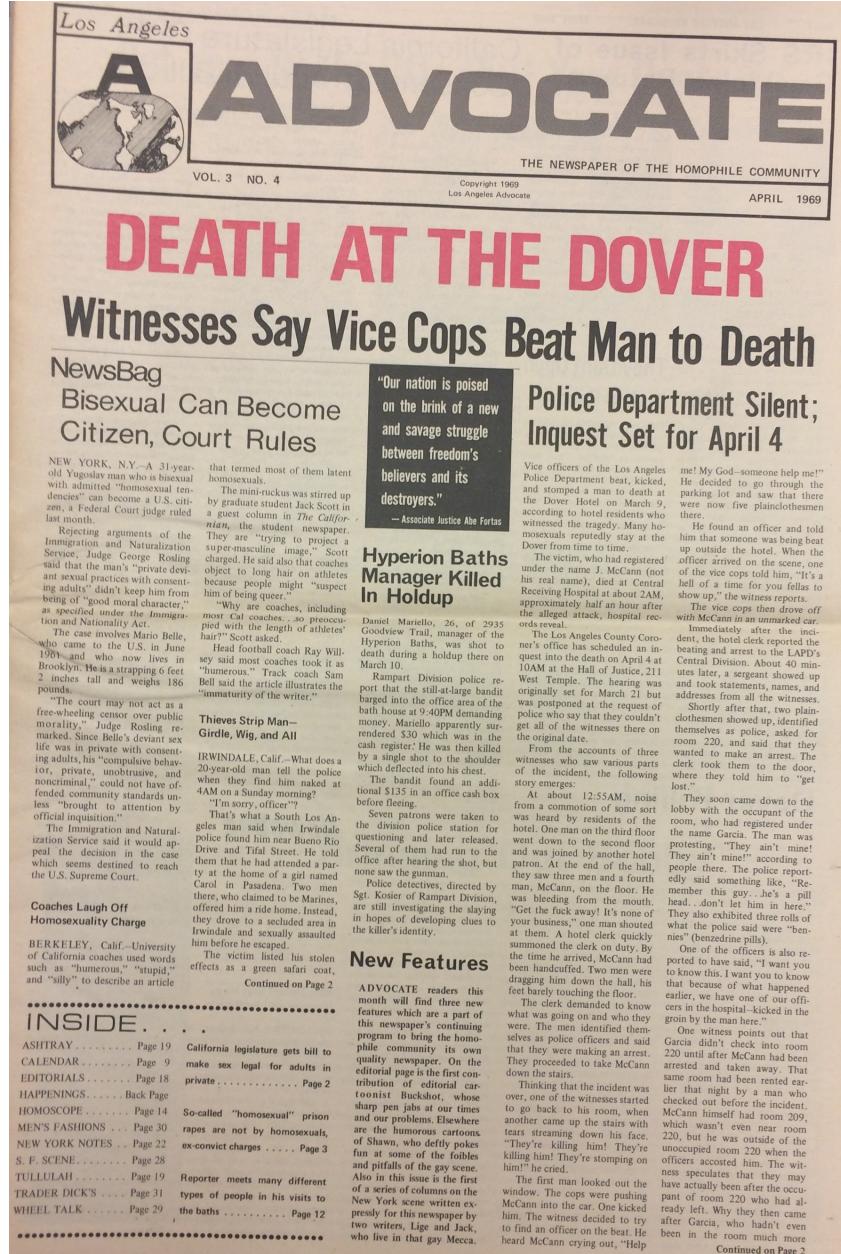


Figure 6. First cover story on anti-LGBTQ violence in *The Los Angeles Advocate*.

Source: Jim Kepner, "Death at the Dover," *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 3, No. 4, April 1969, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

ADVOCATE TO GO BIWEEKLY

Los Angeles



ADVOCATE

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE HOMOPHILE COMMUNITY

VOL. 4 NO. 5

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Advocate Publications, Inc.

APRIL 29 - MAY 12, 1970

Two-week schedule to begin in May, publishers reveal

Readers demand it! The editors dread it! But it's going to happen anyway. The ADVOCATE is going to publish every two weeks starting in May.

This is the first major move since this newspaper—the first newspaper to offer a full range of news and features especially geared to America's homosexual citizens—went to full tabloid size in January 1969.

"It is also the most dramatic step we've taken," explained editor Dick Michaels announcing the move. "All our schedules must now be condensed into half the time we've had under our monthly timetable. We have to take the full cooperation of all our staff members, contributors, and advertisers to bring it off smoothly."

"Nevertheless," Michaels added, "we feel that it is an essential move. Gays are on the march from coast to coast; new organizations are popping up everywhere there is a lot of activity in the courts and elsewhere. Homosexuals want—and need—to know about all these developments and the ADVOCATE will be able to do a better job telling about them every two weeks."

"Then too," he said, "homosexuals are coming out of their closets all over the country. The homosexual 'culture' is blossoming out into a rich, open culture on its own terms. We like to feel that the ADVOCATE has played a major role in these developments during the past two and a half years, and we want to do so."

Unbroken Line

The current issue—#32 in an unbroken line that started in September 1967—came off the press on the last day of March. The next issue, #33, will be published on April 28.

After that, the ADVOCATE will be on its two-week schedule. Issues will be dated two weeks advance, rather than the current month in advance.

Subscriptions, of course, will expire earlier than subscribers anticipated when they signed up. A 12-issue subscription will no longer be spread out over a full year. Subscribers who renew their subscription will get renewal notices much earlier than they expect, depending on how many issues are left on their subscriptions.

New subscription rates have been posted (see column, this issue). Readers will be able to subscribe for 13 issues (six months) or 26 issues (full year), either second-class or first-class mail.

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Raid victim impaled on fence

by LEON LOUIS MARTELLO

The young man, described as a homosexual who leaped or fell from the second floor of a New York police station has once again galvanized New York City's gay community—just as the Stonewall Raid did last year.

The young man was impaled on a metal fence outside the station and it took the combined efforts of the Fire Department and a surgical team to remove the fence from his body. At first reports, he was still in critical condition.

The tragedy topped several eventful days that started with the Gay Activists Alliance picketing the New York City Hall protest job discrimination, harassment of homosexuals, and recent raids and arrests at bars and night clubs. They were met by force by New York's finest and forcibly prevented from entering City Hall.

Barricades were set up, police manned the steps, and there was lots of shouting and pushing. Finally, three delegates were given permission to meet with the Mayor's Office. Commissioner Lindsey was in Buffalo.

Gay activists carried signs such as "Police on Gay Spree While City Gov. Gays and Anti-Gay Project the Public... Forget Our Private..." Other signs said "Representation Not Oppression," "Equality for Homosexuals," "Gay Is Good," and "End Job Discrimination Against Homosexuals."

The press and photographers were there snapping away, taking notes, with stories appearing in the *New York Post*, *Woman's Wear Daily*, *Long Island Press*, and a front-page photo-story in the Spanish paper *El Diario*. News coverage appeared on many stations, including WINS, WINS, WBAI, and WABC-TV.

Make Demands

When three representatives were given permission to enter City Hall, they found a closed door from the inside. Plainclothesmen stopped President Jim Owles, Arthur Evans, and Joseph Stevens from entering. Then they were permitted to make demands. "Get out!" Prior to this Evans shouted, "It seems that City Hall is only closed to homosexuals today."

Mr. Donton requested that no photos be taken and asked

Continued on Page 2

TWO TRAGEDIES

L.A. vice cops kill another Gay; youth falls from N.Y.C. jail

MEMORIAL MARCH



ADVOCATE PHOTO

MEMORIAL MARCH. After a rally behind the Dover Hotel, where J. McGinn was killed by Los Angeles vice officers on Mar. 8, 1969, Rev. Troy Perry leads 120 marchers to L.A. police headquarters.

Gays remember Dover death with rally, march

by JIM KEPNER

A year ago, Howard Elfrand reportedly died at the Dover Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. McGinn, a short时间 after, plainclothes officers entered the hotel, seized Elfrand, and beat him to death in front of many witnesses.

Members of the United States Mission who witnessed the killing alerted other homosexual groups, and two dozen homosexuals later walked to Dover's Police Station shamelessly wearing the cause.

To commemorate this senseless and brutal killing, the U. S. Mission, with other homosexual activists, issued a call for a Religious Freedom of Homosexuals Service on the anniversary of Elfrand's death.

On Saturday, 120 persons gathered in the parking lot behind the Dover—members of MCC, Ambis, Gay Lib, and regulars in the Dover-Wal-

dorf-Harold's area.

Robert Humphries, U. S. Mission director, opened with a description of his work. Mission members support themselves and their cause by passing collections and distributing religious tracts which advocate church acceptance of homosexuals.

He said that a collection at the service would be used to defray expenses and to set up a memorial for Elfrand.

Morris Kight of GLF said the group did not gather for recruitment that homosexuals must understand that to do that is the effort to do an horrendous act.

"We emphasize non-violence... we must not turn this into a hate gathering, but we must arm ourselves, not with weapons or guns, but with righteousness and with morality. We must go away saying that this man shall

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Dallas D.A. to appeal sodomy ruling; Buchanan writes ADVOCATE readers from his cell

A.F. man fights discharge, reveals name of Sgt. X in suit against government

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Figure 7. Follow up on the first cover story on anti-LGBTQ violence.
 Source: Jim Kepner, "Gays Remember Dover Death with Rally, March," *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 4, No. 5, May 1970, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

group of 12 people led by a woman carrying a large funeral flower arrangement. The story describes how the marchers gave a letter to Police Chief Davis that asked for an “end to pointless sex arrests” and more dialogue between the police and “homosexual spokesmen.”⁴⁶

Getting arrested during a raid could escalate into some serious charges. Until 1975 oral and anal sex were felonies in California. The first could get you 15 years in prison and the latter a life sentence.⁴⁷ However, like McCann, most homosexuals were arrested under “lewd conduct.” The Mentally Disordered Sex Offender Act was not part of the Penal Code, but in several sections of the Welfare and Institutions Code, starting with section 6601.⁴⁸ In short, MDSO meant that a Superior Court judge could find a person charged with sexual offense as “a ‘mentally disordered sex offender’ and transfer him to the ‘custody’ of the State Department of Mental Hygiene for an indeterminate period.”⁴⁹ A person could be held under custody for years under this ambiguous charge.

To maintain the privacy of the victims and save their families from shame, no images were included in those early reports, which makes the descriptions of the victims even more interesting. The paper provides a brief yet telling profile of J. McCann as it follows the story over the course of a year. A regular patron at the Dover, he was a married man who worked as a nurse. According to the paper McCann was a small and a quiet man: 5 feet 5 inches tall and 145 pounds.

⁴⁶ Jim Kepner, “Dover,” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 4, No. 5, April 29 – May 12, 1970, 3.

⁴⁷ Lillian Faderman, Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 81.

⁴⁸ Ed Jackson, “What is the MDSO Law?” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 4, No. 5, April 29 – May 12, 1970, 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

People who knew him described him as “timid,” and “friendly but who didn’t easily talk to others.”⁵⁰ They also thought he was about 28 years old, but the *Advocate* confirmed that the man presumed to be McCann was actually 37 years old. The article a year later on the march led by Rev. Troy Perry refers to McCann as a “small, terrified man” who “had been beaten mercilessly while screaming for help.”⁵¹ We get the impression that McCann was a small, youthful-looking, quiet man.

Although reporting on violence and harassment, *The Los Angeles Advocate* was often humorous in its description “homosexuals” as handsome young men and the police as the polar opposite. A front page story, “My Wife Woke up Screaming ‘Don’t Kick him Again’” from October 1970, reports on another attack by the vice police and describes the victim in “late 20’s or early 30’s, well-built, attractive” and the “two plainclothes vice officers” as “one short and heavy, one taller, neither attractive.”⁵² Describing the victims as “well-built” and using empty adjectives such as “attractive” or “handsome” and “unattractive” to refer to the police seems strange in the context of current news culture and the seemingly more “neutral” ways of reporting we are accustomed to. However, according to Rodger Streitmatter, “gay self-respect” was a primary concern for the Editor in Chief, Dick Michaels who “knew the gays were guilt-ridden” and “had to get rid of that.”⁵³ Since positive representations of LGBT people didn’t

⁵⁰ Michaels, “Beating Death of Handcuffed Man,” 5.

⁵¹ Jim Kepner, “Gays Remember Dover Death,” 3.

⁵² “My Wife Woke up Screaming ‘Don’t Kick him Again,’” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 4 No. 18, Oct. 28-Nov. 10 1970.

⁵³ Streitmatter, “The Advocate: Setting the Standard,” 454.

exist in mainstream media, every opportunity was used to portray “gay” and “homosexual” as something desirable.

The witness who was quoted in the headline called *The Los Angeles Advocate* the next day to report on the incident. Calling a news outlet may seem like an odd route to take, but the other options would have meant revealing the identity of the man who was mostly likely brought in on “homosexual charge.” *The Los Angeles Advocate* was able to reach Lt. John Hanks, officer in charge of Ramparts Area Vice Unit who confirmed that an arrest was made and a man was “booked on a charge of prostitution.”⁵⁴ The officer noted, “if a suspect objects, the officers use just the minimum amount of force necessary to subdue him.” As usual with cases like these, the suspect remained unidentified and no further information about the arrest was provided.

Describing the victims as “well-built” and using empty adjectives such as “attractive” or “handsome” and “unattractive” to refer to the police seems strange in the context of current news culture and the seemingly more “neutral” ways of reporting we are accustomed to. However, since positive representations of LGBT people didn’t exist in mainstream media, every opportunity was used to portray “the gay” as something desirable. According to Rodger Streitmatter, “gay self-respect was a primary concern for Dick Michaels. He knew gays were guilt-ridden and we had to get rid of that.”⁵⁵ Dick Michaels “knew gay men had to get comfortable with themselves and their community” and consciously used the

⁵⁴ “My Wife Woke up Screaming ‘Don’t Kick him Again,’” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 4 No. 18, Oct. 28-Nov. 10 1970, 3.

⁵⁵ Streitmatter, “The Advocate: Setting the Standard,” 454.

pages of *The Advocate* to do so.⁵⁶ This also included using language and words that were specific to the community. For instance, “Groovy Guy” was the name of the annual competition to select the “grooviest,” meaning the handsomest, (white) gay man in Los Angeles.

The negative aspect of such portrayals is that while white men are described as young, attractive, and fit, people with intersectional identities did not receive the same treatment. The revisited “Dover killing” in the May 1970 issue is flanked by two other reports of violence by the police (Figure 7). On the right there is a story about a young man in New York City jumping from the second story window in the Sixth Precinct stationhouse onto a spike iron fence below. The 23-year-old Argentinian immigrant, Diego Vinales, was arrested during a major police raid at the Snake Pit Bar on March 8th among 167 other patrons.⁵⁷ Demonstrators conducted a “death vigil” outside of the hospital where he stayed and miraculously survived his injuries. This story from New York City also indicates a shift toward *The Los Angeles Advocate* becoming a national publication.

To the right of the “Dover killing” is an article about the shooting murder of 20-year old “Larry” Turner in Los Angeles (Figure 7).⁵⁸ While we could see the location of the incident as the reason to why the story of an immigrant was not as thoroughly covered as that of McCann’s, this logic does not apply to Turner who was murdered in Los Angeles. As usual police accounts of the event differ from

⁵⁶ Streitmatter, “*The Advocate*: Setting the Standard,” 454.

⁵⁷ David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 238-239.

⁵⁸ “Family Seeks Inquest in Man’s Death,” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 4 No. 5, April 29 – May 12, 1970, Cover.

the eyewitnesses. According to the police, Turner offered to perform “oral copulation” on the vice officers and pulled a .22-caliber pistol from the waist and fired before getting shot.⁵⁹ Witnesses, however, report that Turner was running from the officers when they shot “him” twice, and handcuffed “him” afterwards.

According to the police, Turner was wearing “a woman’s two piece dress-and-blouse outfit.”⁶⁰ Witnesses and the police who fired the fatal shots assumed that Turner was a woman. Yet Turner’s aunt expressed doubt in mistaking *him* for a woman as “he had just left his mother’s house wearing bell-bottom trousers and a mod-type shirt.” To complicate this account even further, the magazine refers to Turner as an “admitted homosexual and black.” Later reports confirm, however, that Laverne (Larry) Turner was one among several trans women of color killed that year by the LAPD for “resisting arrest.”⁶¹ The story shows a number of conflicting discourses conflating – the state, family, public, media – to dehumanize a victim who did not fit in with the mainstream idea of the homosexual and victim at the time.

It’s not only the words used in the reports on violence that make us imagine the victim as white, fit, and handsome. When we read texts we enter an affective ideological space. Ideology is at play in the magazine’s layout: the relationship between the part-objects, images, and trigger words. Only when looking at these stories of violence in the context of the entire newspaper are be

⁵⁹ “Family Seeks Inquest in Man’s Death.”

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “The Politics of Gender Self-Determination,” *Revolution by the Book: The AK Press*, July 26, 2011, accessed October 31, 2015, <http://www.revolutionbythebook.akpress.org/the-politics-of-gender-self-determination-more-interviews-with-captive-genders-contributors/>.

able we able to gain an understanding of affect that the dynamic experience of reading evokes.

First and foremost, it is the physical quality and format of the newspaper that helps to create a unique affective ideological space for the reader. In January 1969 *The Los Angeles Advocate* shifted to an 11x17 tabloid format to resist looking like an “establishment” publication and began to be sold in vending machines around the city.⁶² Looking like an “establishment” publication meant that the first page of the paper also functioned as the cover and included the first few paragraphs of leading stories. The new tabloid format had a cover separate from the first page and featured a large image with short snippets of article titles placed mostly above.

No less important source of affect are the overall aesthetics of the magazine: contained by the format and established by the types of font used, but above all, the arrangement of images. After almost a year of publishing, Michaels started to include scantily clad images of young men on the cover of the paper (Figure 8). It was a conscious choice to boost sales, expose more people to the serious content but also to embrace the sexual aspect of gay culture to a similar aim Michaels insisted on using subcultural slang words. In its unabashed celebration of the sexual aspect of gay culture, *The Advocate* was a sticking contrast to the publications of the more conservative homophile movement in the 1950s that were driven by the politics of respectability. There were publications even more explicit and included full frontal male nudity as part of their cover, such as *California Scene*, but they did not have as big of a circulation as

⁶² Streitmatter, “*The Advocate*: Setting the Standard,” 453.

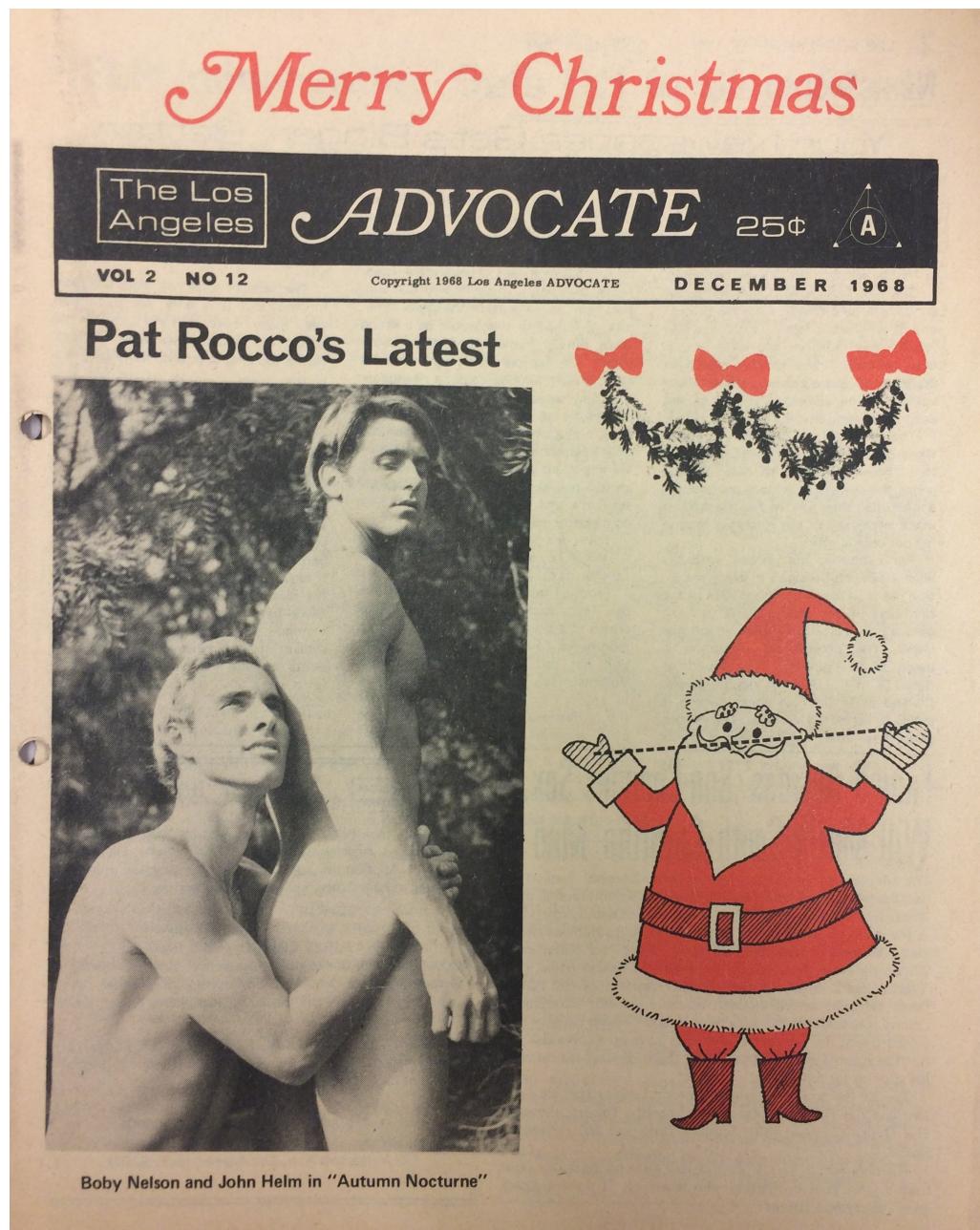


Figure 8. Example of erotic cover page, *The Los Angeles Advocate*.
Source: *The Los Angeles Advocate*, Vol. 2, No. 12, December 1968, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

The Los Angeles Advocate nor did they aspire to be the *New York Times* of gay press. Michaels' decision to include semi-nude pictures of men paid off, by the end of its second year the publication had reached the circulation of 23,000 and was distributed across the country.⁶³

The combination of the new tabloid format and the domineering erotic aesthetics meant that news stories about violence and harassment of the gay community were wrapped in images of half naked attractive white young men (Figure 9). In the context of the urban-rural phenomenon as we imagine anti-LGBTQ violence today, the pastoral theme running though the majority of those erotic covers cannot be unnoticed. Since there were no images of the victim and the readers could only rely on the empty adjectives for visualization, the first point of reference of what “attractive” and “gay” looks was the cover. This connection, of course, was lost when the victim was an “admitted homosexual and black” because the men on those erotic covers were all white.

The affective ideological space of reading as discussed here highlights the complex unity of perception. Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains human perception by describing the qualities of the stickiness of honey:

⁶³ Streitmatter, “*The Advocate*: Setting the Standard,” 453.

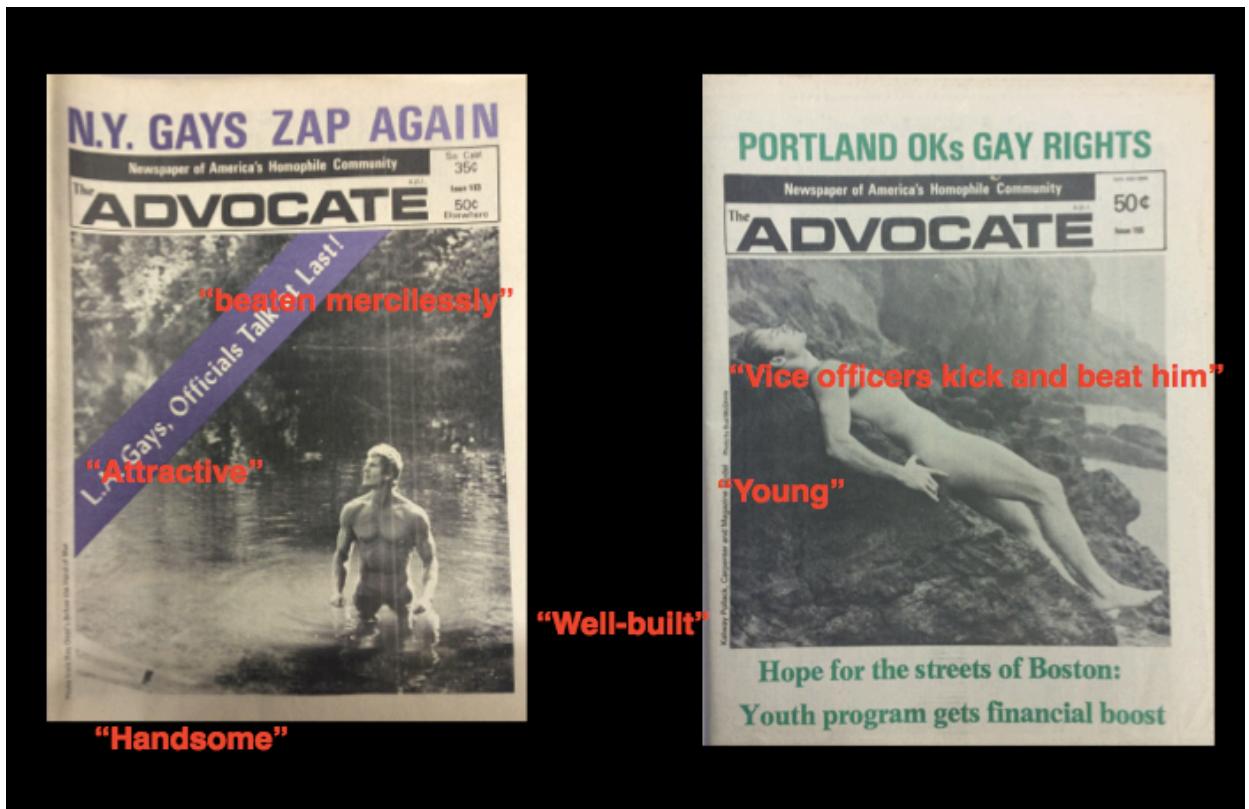


Figure 9. Unity of perception, a visualization.

Source: Photo manipulation by author, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

This is the case with the quality of being-honeyed. Honey is a slow-moving liquid; while it undoubtedly has a certain consistency and allows itself to be grasped, it soon creeps slyly from the fingers and returns to where it started from. It comes apart as soon as it has been given a particular shape, and what is more, it reverses the roles, by grasping the hands of whoever would take hold of it.⁶⁴

Affect or what we come to understand through the experience of reading is ephemeral, nor this or there. Our knowledge is neither completely subjective nor objective. Text and ideology exists before the reader “grasps” it, but it also cannot exist without the reader. Our perception of the world exists between the / and the text.

May 10, 1972 is the first time the magazine uses a photograph of the victim and makes it a front-page story (Figure 10).⁶⁵ This close-up photograph of Jim Owles was taken by Randolph Dowling at a press conference. Owles is an attractive white young man with dark brown hair and a square jawline. His is looking straight into the camera with his head slightly tilting to the right to reveal the bruise on the right side of his face and cut under his left eye, “which required seven stiches.”⁶⁶ Owles is dressed in a dark colored button-down shirt that has the letters “GAA” on it for Gay Activist Alliance. He has medium length hair with bangs carelessly falling on his face similar to the era’s teen idol Bobby Sherman.

⁶⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. Oliver David (London and New York; Rutledge, 2008), 46. Recently sound studies has been using phenomenology and connecting Merleau-Ponty’s theories to affect studies (especially the work of Salome Voegelin).

⁶⁵ Guy Charles, “Bloody Fracas in N.Y.: Gays Savagely Beaten; Attackers Not Arrested,” *The Advocate*, Issue 85, May 10, 1972, Front Page.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

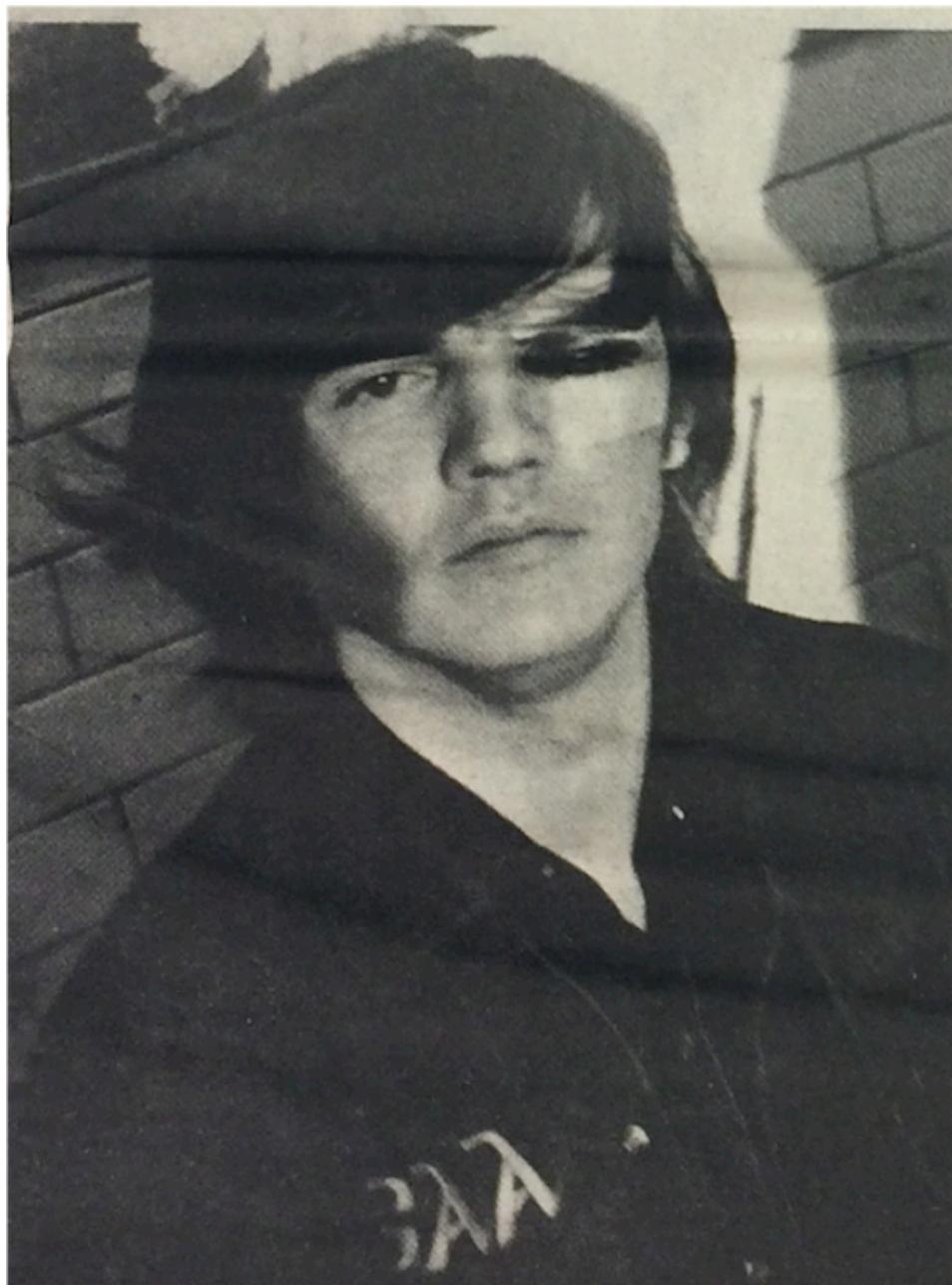


Figure 10. Jim Owles.

Source: Guy Charles, "Bloody Fracas in N.Y.: Gays Savagely Beaten; Attackers Not Arrested," *The Advocate*, Issue 85, May 10, 1972, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Owles was attacked on April 15th, 1972, at the 50th annual Inner Circle dinner for local politicians and business executives put together by “the past and present political writers.”⁶⁷ The high-profile event at the New York Hilton included series of performances and humorous skits some of which ridiculed homosexuality. The word got out to the members of the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) eight of whom appeared near the end of the second act and began walking through audience “handing out leaflets protesting press coverage of the movement.”⁶⁸ The protest escalated to physical violence after Jim Owles grabbed the backstage microphone and critiqued the journalists in the room. Owles was “jumped” and one of the eyewitnesses described how “six grown men stood over one of the Gays, kicking and punching him with the wives in the balcony must have sighed in relief, knowing that on Saturday night, at least *they* wouldn’t get it.”⁶⁹ The Inner Circle was a pretty terrible good ol’ boys club that did not even allow women on the main floor of the event until 1972.⁷⁰

The police arrived at the scene and started to escort the protesters out the room only to be stopped by Michael Maye. Maye was the president of the Uniformed Firefighters Association and former national Golden Gloves Heavyweight Champion.⁷¹ He was also known to the New York gay community

⁶⁷ Charles, “Bloody Fracas in N.Y.”

⁶⁸ Jane H. Lii, “Unlikely Supporter of Gay Rights Recalls Pivotal Night,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1996, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/11/03/nyregion/unlikely-supporter-of-gay-rights-recalls-pivotal-night.html>.

⁶⁹ Guy Charles, “Bloody Fracas in N.Y.”

⁷⁰ Shelley Strickler, “Inner Workings,” April 2010, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://www.innercircleshows.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/innercircle1.pdf>.

⁷¹ Douglas Martin, “Michael J. Maye, Scrappy Leader of Firefighters’ Union, Dies at 82,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2013, accessed March 20, 2016,

as the bouncer at one of the bars in Greenwich Village.⁷² According to eyewitness accounts, Maye, “took the Gay from the cop, begun punching him down, and then repeatedly stomped him in the genitals.”⁷³ The police did not arrest Maye or let any of the activists press charges at the scene.

Mainstream press refused to cover the incident up until Pete Hamill, a *New York Post* columnist broke the silence. The target of Maye’s attack happened to be Morty Manford. Manford was a well known activist, and the son of Jeanne Manford, an educator and founder of PFLAG. While a student in 1968, he helped to found Gay People at Columbia University, one of the nation’s first gay campus groups.⁷⁴ He had also been present at the Stonewall Inn in 1969 when the police raided the bar. Manford was seriously injured and sued Maye.

This story shows a shift in anti-LGBTQ violence discourse in the 1970s. The demands no longer concern protection from police violence but police protection against street violence. The activists criticized inaction on the part of the law enforcement, the legal system, and mainstream media. Although Maye denied the charges and was acquitted, the case prompted a public discussion about police inaction and drew attention to “violence against homosexuals and attempts to adopt a city wide gay-rights law.”⁷⁵ Maye later became a LGBT rights

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/26/nyregion/michael-j-maye-82-dies-scrappy-leader-of-fighters-union.html?_r=0.

⁷² Jane H. Lii, “Unlikely Supporter of Gay Rights.”

⁷³ Guy Charles, “Bloody Fracas in N.Y.”

⁷⁴ Bruce Lambert, “Morty Manford, 41, a Lawyer And Early Gay-Rights Advocate,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1992, accessed March 20, 2016,

<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/15/nyregion/morty-manford-41-a-lawyer-and-early-gay-rights-advocate.html>.

⁷⁵ Lambert, “Morty Manford, 41.”

supporter and made peace with Manford whom he “he frequently joined for coffee and pastry.”⁷⁶

The attack against GAA protestesters was the first story of “homosexual assault” to be covered by *The New York Times*. Other attacks in the same year followed: journalist Arthur Bell and a 22-year old Vietnam veteran, Luis Mercado – both covered by *The New York Times* as well.⁷⁷ It was remarkable at the time that each of these victims was willing to identify themselves especially Mercado who was not a public figure. The latter two stories didn’t make it on the front page of *The Advocate*. Bell who was almost 33 at the time did not exactly fit the idea of youthful victim that started to take shape. Mercado’s case was not that clean-cut: he had engaged in sex in the park with some of his four assailants. *The Advocate* had become more selective in choosing which incidents to cover. A direct act of street violence against a victim in the image of the ideal homosexual citizen that started to be noticed by the mainstream was more likely to invite empathy and push public in favor of “gay” rights laws.

Up until the late 1970s, *The Advocate* continued to combine topics that proved to sell – violence and sexy men – in a rather seamless fashion that seems odd to us today. Some changes occurred in 1974 when banker David Goodstein bought the magazine from Michaels for \$300,000 and added money to boost sells and further secure *The Advocate* as a national brand.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Jane H. Lii, “Unlikely Supporter of Gay Rights”

⁷⁷ Steven A. Rosen, “Police Harassment of Homosexual Women And Men In New York City 1960-1980,” *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, 12 (1980): 181.

⁷⁸ Baim, *Gay Press, Gay Power*, 92.

The mid-1970s marked a more pronounced shift in the magazine becoming a national gay publication as “Los Angeles” was dropped from the name and “Advocate” remained.

Although more conservative than Michaels, Goodstein was committed to continue the trend of including sexually explicit images as part of the magazine.

The front page became less bold in terms of nudity under Goodstein, but the images in the magazine remained true to Michaels' commitment to highlight the sexual aspects of gay culture. One of Goodstein's new features was "Touching Your Lifestyle" campaign starting in 1975 that replaced the previous, "Newspaper of the American Homophile Community" tagline (Figure 11). The new campaign included a full-page ad in the back of the magazine that often featured two naked muscular white men touching while one of them appears to be holding his erect penis.

Inside the magazine, nudity became even bolder and more directly juxtaposed with serious stories. Articles from the mid-1970s discussing venereal disease and rape in are accompanied with full frontal male nudity.⁷⁹ The two examples – sexual violence in prison and venereal disease – are also indicate of a shift toward lead stories that frame LGBT issues in more impersonal framework and demand a change in policy instead of focusing on a specific act of violence or individual struggle. The cover of the December 1975 "Special Turkey Issue: Five Ways to Celebrate Thanksgiving" includes a tagline "Who's Getting Murdered?"⁸⁰ Inside is a collaborative investigative report "Murder Victims: A Correlation with Sexual Orientation?" which as the title indicates discusses the correlation between sexual orientation and the likelihood of getting murdered.

⁷⁹ Randy Shilts, "Special Report: V.D.," No. 188, *The Advocate*, April 21 1976, 14-20; David Rothenberg, "Group Rip-Off: The Prison Rape" *The Advocate*, No. 189, 5 May 1976, 9-13.

⁸⁰ *The Advocate*, Issue No. 178, December 3, 1975, Cover.

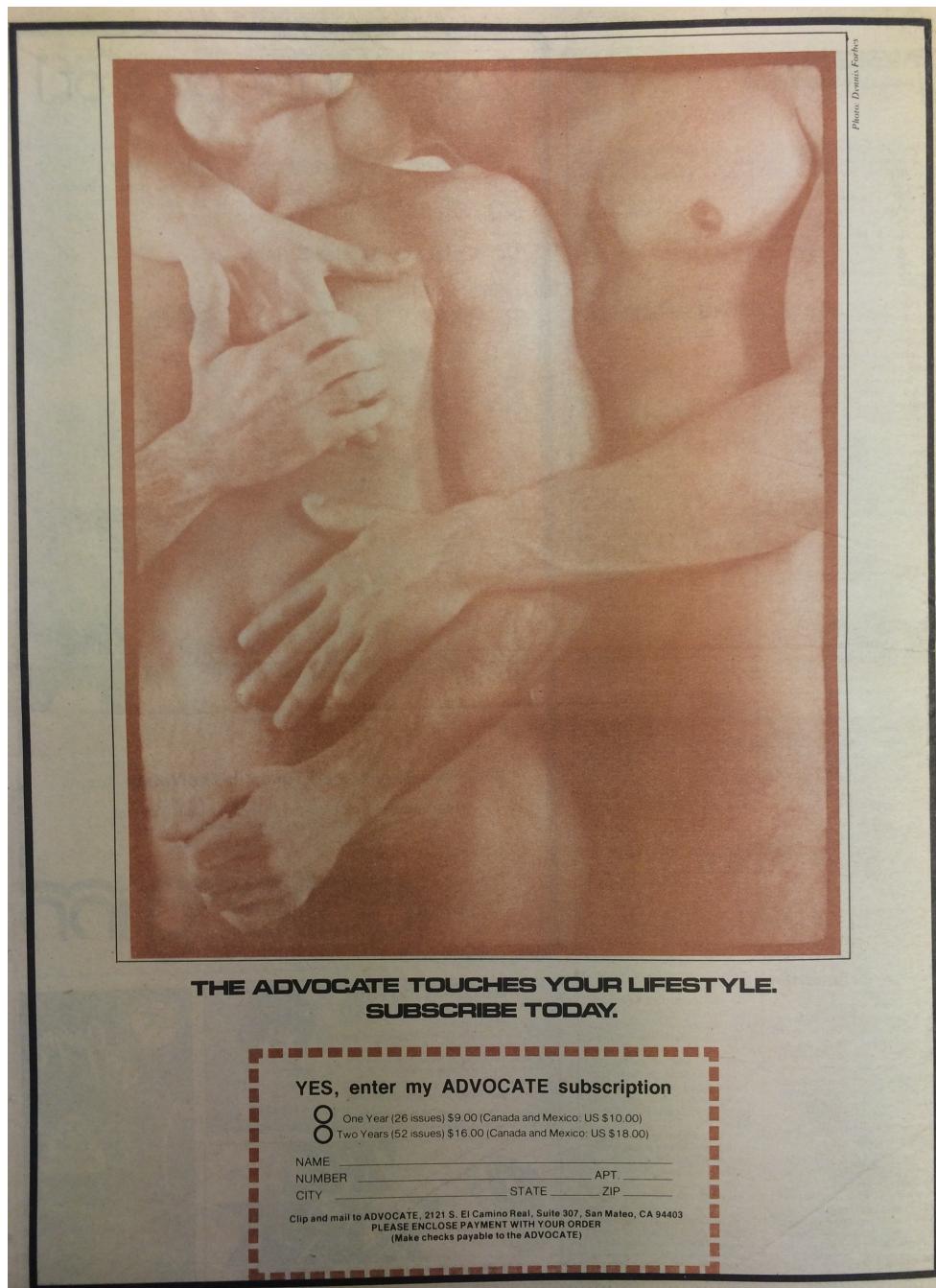


Figure 11. "Touching Your Lifestyle" campaign.

Source: *The Advocate*, No. 163, May 7, 1975, back cover, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

The article concludes that although law enforcement officials deny that, “gay people are in any special danger of assault or murder” the recent unresolved Orange County Torso Murders serve as an example of a testament that gay people are targeted because of their orientation.⁸¹ The specific details or victims of the torturous murders are only mentioned in passing; the story is more concerned with the lack of “valid statistics on sexual orientation of assault and homicide victims.”⁸² Those examples illustrate a shift of focus within the LGBTQ movement toward with advocating for policy change took the main stage.

Juxtaposing violence with naked men did not last into the 1980s. “Touching Your Lifestyle” campaign was replaced in the beginning of 1979 with new tagline, “America’s Leading Gay Newsmagazine.”⁸³ By the end of 1979, *The Advocate* had turned a profit for the first time since its first release in 1967. A striking contrast between eras can be noted when looking at the covers published 10 years apart featuring the Stonewall Riot (Figure 12). The September 1969 issue shows a naked Jon Voight while 10 years later we are offered a rather conservative recolored photo of Pride marchers.⁸⁴ Also, by the 1980s pastoral images of nude men disappeared along with front-page stories on street violence, which they used to accompany.

⁸¹ Joe Baker, et al., “Murder Victims: A Correlation with Sexual Orientation?” *The Advocate*, No. 178, December 3, 1975, 13.

⁸² Ibid., 12.

⁸³ For some months in 1979 it was also “Celebrating your Lifestyle” before becoming the “America’s Leading Gay Newsmagazine” and then “The National Gay Magazine.”

⁸⁴ *The Advocate*, September 1969, Cover; *The Advocate*, No. 271, 12 July, 1979, Cover.

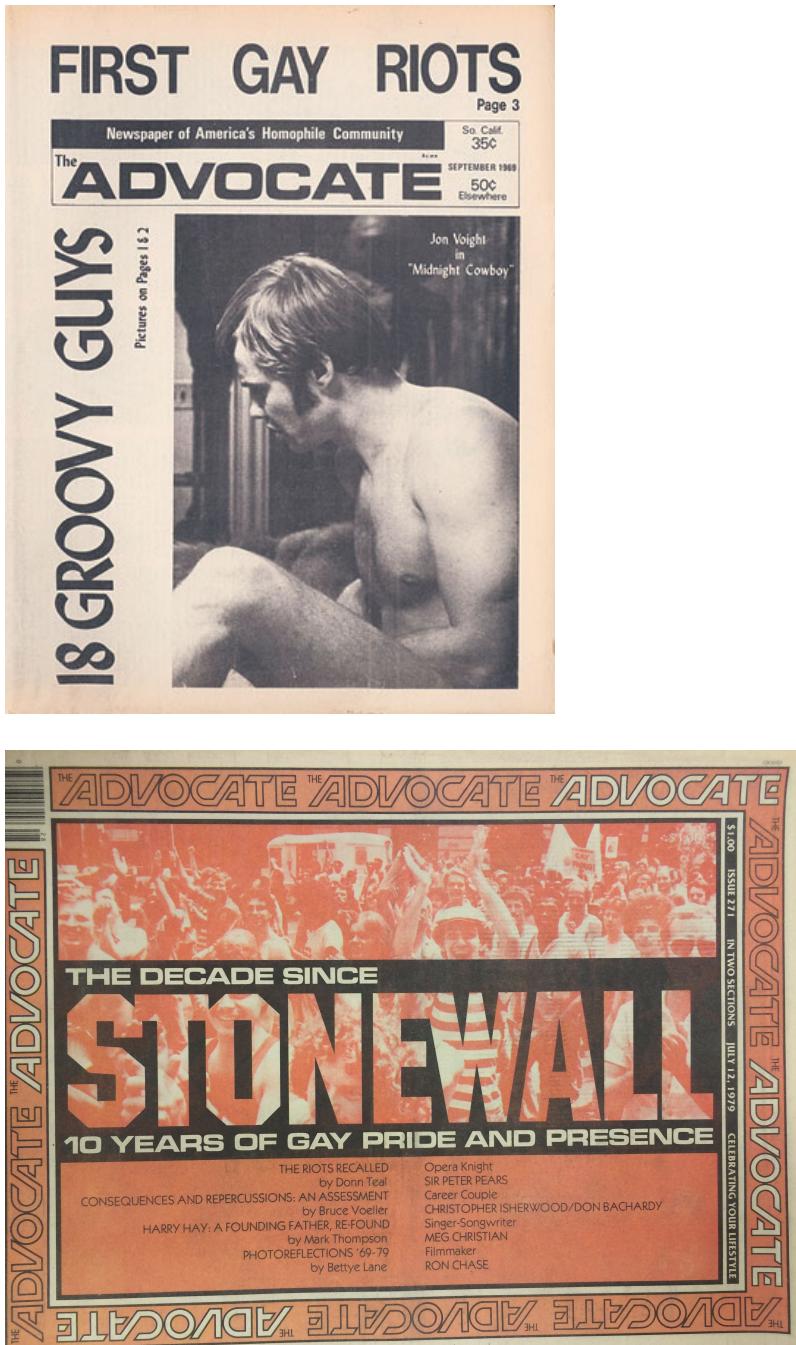


Figure 12. Stonewall Riots in 1969 and 1979.

Source: *The Advocate*, September 1969, Cover; *The Advocate*, July 1979, cover, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

The 1980s was a time of desexualization and policy due to the AIDS epidemic but also because there was a conservative shift in the news culture in general. Schuldsen argues that media that had moved left in the 1970s shifted to the right in the 1980s, following the Reagan administration and the influence of the conservative movement.⁸⁵ This further relegated the sexual aspect of gay culture to the private realm. The magazine even more than before started to cater to a specific demographic of well-off urban men and emphasized the movement's mainstream elements. This was part of Goodstein's attempt to get mainstream companies to advertise in the magazine, but he also believed that further mainstreaming the image of the homosexual would help to stop discrimination.⁸⁶

While documenting the desperate attempts of the community to cope with the AIDS crisis in hostile cultural climate and government neglect, there was no room to focus on specific anti-LGBT street violence cases. The majority of covers and stories focus on some aspect of the AIDS crisis. There are only a few a cover stories in the 1980s that deal with the topic of street violence, but they do not highlight a specific individual or case.⁸⁷ The only story about a direct act of

⁸⁵ Michael Schuldsen, "National News Culture and the Rise of the Informational Citizen" in *America at Century's End*, ed. Alan Wolfe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 271.

⁸⁶ Streitmatter, "The Advocate: Setting the Standard," 453.

⁸⁷ "Queer-Bashing: How Can You Protect Yourself?", *The Advocate*, No. 314, 2 April 1981, Cover; "Homophobia: Why do they hate us so? What can we do about it?", *The Advocate*, 30 April 1985, Cover.

violence to make it to the cover, involved an 18-year old gay perpetrator, Robert Rosenkrantz who shot his schoolmate because the latter exposed his sexuality.⁸⁸

The 1980s was the time when the legal ground for “hate crime” law was established, with the Anti-Defamation League as one of the prime promoters. The phrase “hate crime” was coined by Representatives John Conyers, Barbara Kennelly, and Mario Biaggi who in 1985 cosponsored a bill in the House of Representatives titled, “Hate Crime Statistics Act.”⁸⁹ The use of the term increased after that: in 1985 only 11 news articles used “hate crime” to refer to crimes driven by bias whereas in 1990 the number was 511.⁹⁰ The bill was enacted in 1990. The Hate Crime Statistics Act required the Justice Department to collect data on crimes which “manifest prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity” from law enforcement agencies across the country. This was the first federal statute to recognize lesbian, gay and bisexual people. The “gender and gender identity” category was added after 2009 with the

⁸⁸ “A Killing in Calabasas,” *The Advocate*, No. 459, 11 November 1986, Cover. Interestingly, in the 1960s and also beginning of 1970s, *The Los Angeles Advocate* reported a number of violent crimes committed by jealous lovers, or gay sadists preying on young men, or simply gay men against each other and women. It seems odd if the intent was to counterbalance negative mainstream depictions of “gays.” We don’t see this in contemporary gay media. It could be that any story on a non-heterosexual person was valuable and interesting for the LGBT community to read since there was in such a plight of representation. There is perhaps perverse comfort in knowing that gays able to cause pain, too, and not always be the ones whom pain is inflicted upon.

⁸⁹ James B. Jacobs and Kimberly Potter, *Hate Crimes: Criminal Law & Identity Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4. The authors provide an unusual view on why hate crime laws are problematic. They attribute a lot of power to advocacy groups and make assumptions about cause other than bias toward a particular minority group. Jacobs and Potter justify their conclusion by showing that perpetrators were not part of hate groups.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2.

passage of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crime Prevention Act.⁹¹

In late 1994, Jeff Yarbrough, the new editor spoke about *The Advocate's* redesign at the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association: "We needed to clean up our act and get a little more happy and shiny to attract advertisers."⁹² The gay media market was getting competitive with separate publications for different segments of the LGBTQ community and the magazine could no longer only count on its loyal subscribers for revenue. As the gay political consciousness shifted explicit gay eroticism was no longer an acceptable means to sell a serious magazine in the 1990s.

Economist Lee Badgett writes how "politically, one important part of the response to public homophobia and concern surrounding the epidemic was the 'desexualization of gay men.'"⁹³ Part of "cleaning up" the magazine was to take out the sex ads, which became a stand-alone magazine *Advocate Classifieds* in 1992. 1993 has been dubbed the "year of the lesbian" which is not irrelevant in the context of the magazine broadening its target audience to include "lesbians" and trying "cleaning up their act" to be more attractive to women.⁹⁴ However, happy, shiny and clean also meant that the covers featured less LGBTQ people

⁹¹ The Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Hate Crime Statistics Act," available at <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2011/resources/hate-crime-statistics-act>, accessed 20 March 2016.

⁹² Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), 309. The tagline was now "The National Gay & Lesbian Newsmagazine."

⁹³ M.V. Lee Badgett, *Money, Myths, and Change: The Economic Lives of Lesbians and Gay Men* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 113.

⁹⁴ Baim, *Gay Press, Gay Power*, 53.

and more mainstream stars of the 1990s like Marky Mark, Antonio Banderas or campy gay idols Cher and Liza Minnelli.

In terms of anti-LGBTQ violence, we also see a shift back to a focus on specific individual cases. In the first half of the decade, the most well known incident of violence against a gender non-conforming person was the murder of Brandon Teena in December 1993 in Humboldt, Nebraska. Two other hate crimes to receive mainstream attention occurred in 1995, but only covered briefly by *The Advocate*: the brutal murder of the lesbian couple Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill in Medford, Oregon; the shooting murder of Scott Amedure in Lake Orion, Michigan.⁹⁵

The murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming is the most famous anti-LGBT hate crime to date to receive serious attention not just on the pages of *The Advocate* but also from major mainstream media outlets. The first cover story on the case is published on November 24th, 1998 and features a small-cropped image of Shepard set against an all black background with the title “The Ultimate Ex-Gay” above” (Figure 13).⁹⁶ The cover is followed by an 8-page story inside. The magazine would revisit the story over the years, if not directly then through special feature stories.⁹⁷ January 18, 2000 issue of *The Advocate*

⁹⁵ “A Question of Motive,” *The Advocate*, No. 717, 1 October 1996, 14; Daniel Foster, “When Talk Turns Deadly,” *The Advocate*, no. 694, 4 November, 1995, 38-46.

⁹⁶ “The Ultimate Ex-Gay,” *The Advocate*, No. 773, November 24, 1998, Cover.

⁹⁷ Other instances: *The Advocate* no. 781, March 16, 1999 features Shepard’s mother, Judy against the background of the vast sky and sunburnt fields of Wyoming. A year after the incident, *The Advocate*, No. 796, October 12, 1999, cover includes a black and white cropped and enlarged close-up of Shepard’s face. *The Advocate*, No. 1017, October 21, 2008 covers the murder 10 years after. Although not a cover story, he first page inside includes an image of Shepard and followed by another 8-page article.



Figure 13. First cover story on Matthew Shepard.

Source: "The Ultimate Ex-Gay," *The Advocate*, No. 773, November 24, 1998, Cover, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

includes a cover story of smiling Matt Damon above “Plus! Matthew Shepard: What the Trial of The Decade Will Mean to Our Future” (Figure 14).⁹⁸ The similarities between the two men cannot be overlooked. This kind of juxtaposition is part of the affective ideology that helps to establish Shepard as a celebrity figure and the go-to model when we think about anti-LGBTQ violence.

There has been a lot of discussion on why Shepard is the ideal victim that fits a particular mold. This particular mold of an ideal victim has been shaped on and off the pages of *The Advocate* since it started its publication in September 1967. The pastoral landscape that gets emphasized and re-empathized in the case of Shepard is part of the gay collective unconscious as an idealized trope. Even after no longer plastering naked men in pastoral settings over the cover, every once in a while over the course of 30 years, *The Advocate* would do a special feature on “the country” or “the rural gays.” The “rural gay” was usually blond, young, and handsome set against the vast blue sky (not unlike unique to Wyoming) (Figure 15). The “rural” and “local” were never completely out of sight, but part of the affective ideology that confirmed the dominant metronormative narrative.

⁹⁸ “Plus! Matthew Shepard: What the Trial of The Decade Will Mean to Our Future,” *The Advocate*, 18 January 2000, Cover.

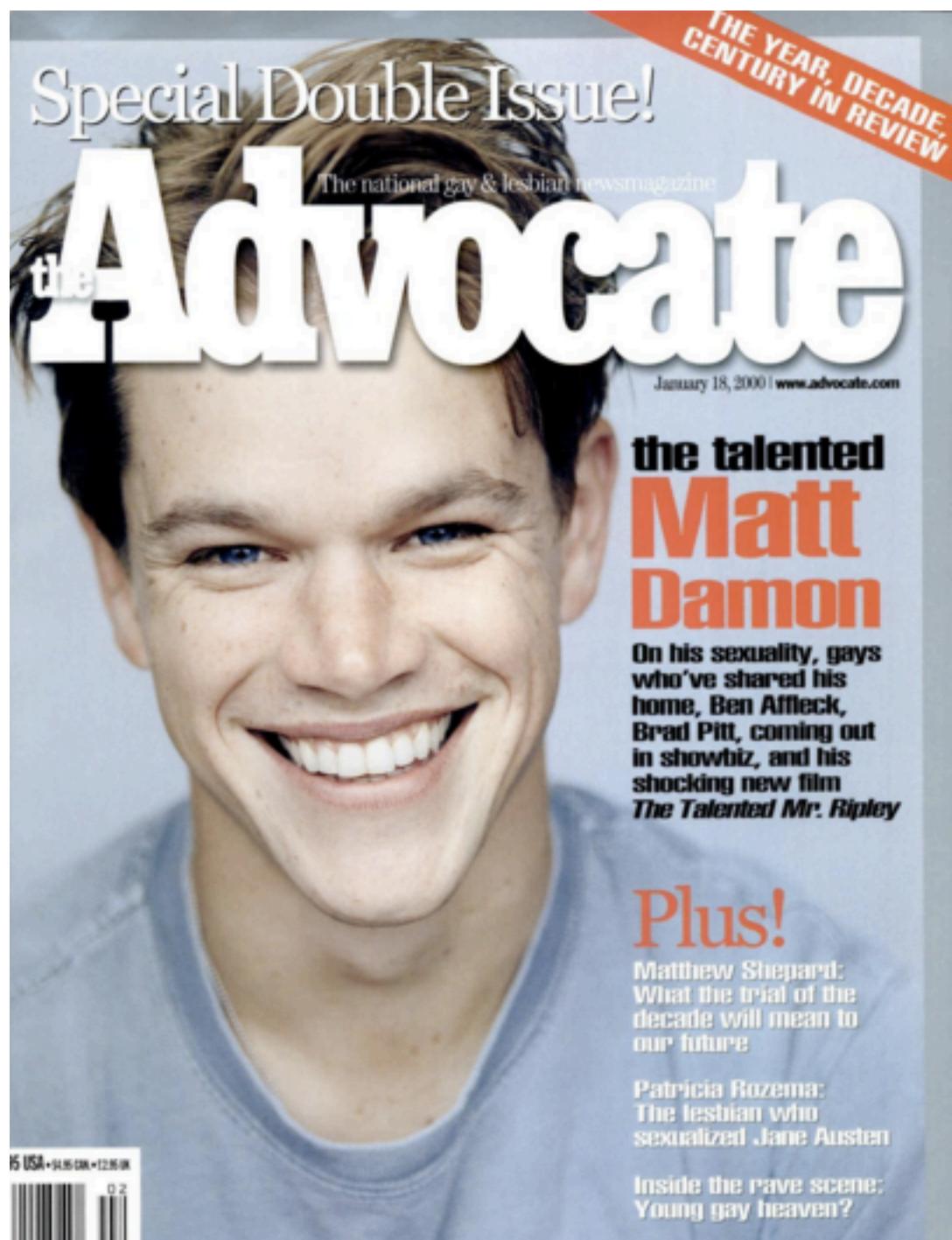


Figure 14. Matt Damon as Matthew Shepard.

Source: *The Advocate*, January 18, 2000, Cover, Screenshot, Google Books, accessed March 27, 2016,

https://books.google.com/books?id=jmQEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

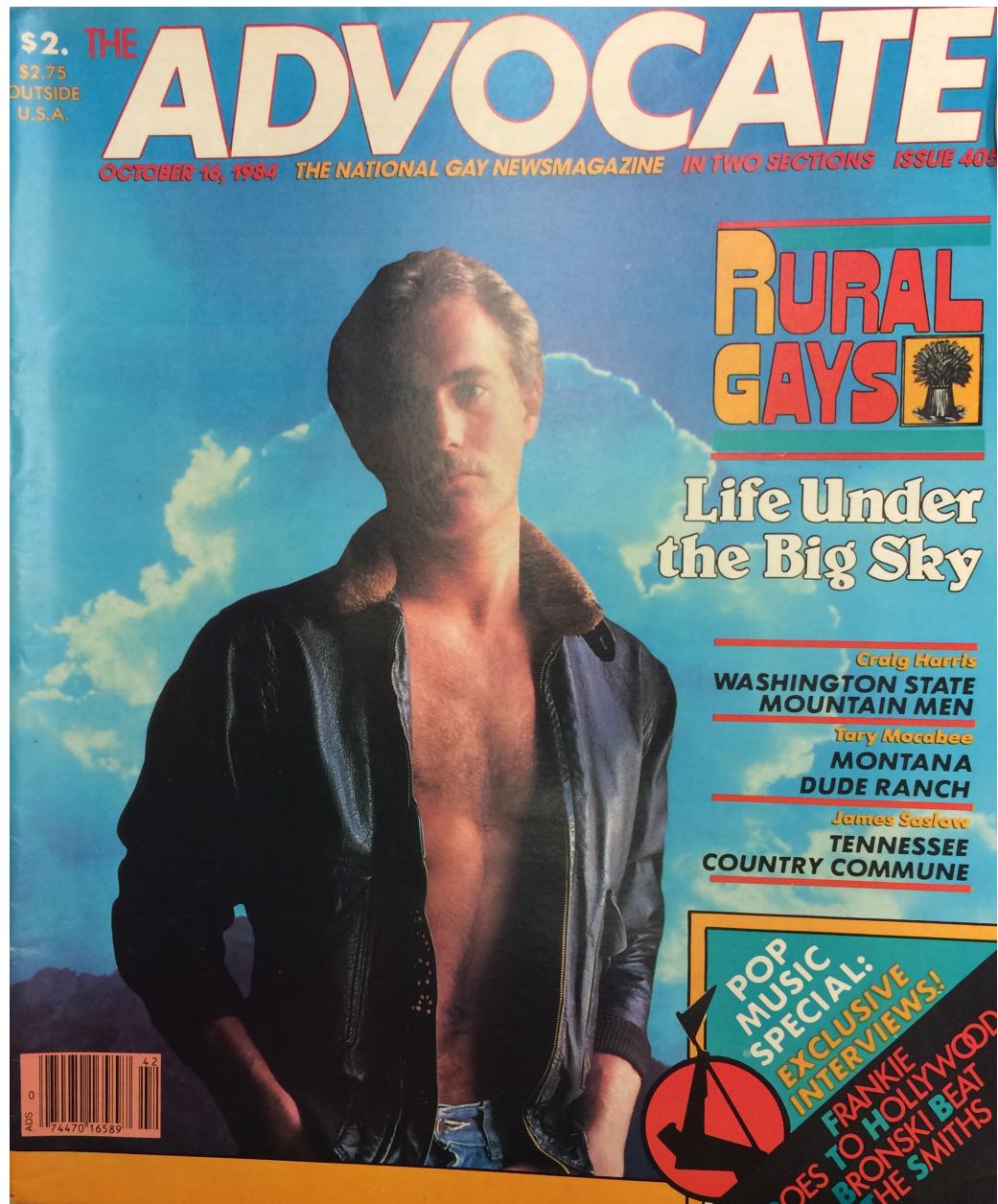


Figure 15. Special issue on "Rural Gays."

Source: *The Advocate*, No. 405, October 16, 1984, Cover, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

It is not that the current *The Advocate* does not talk about intersectional identities at all, of course it does. How it fits in with the rest of the narrative, however, serves to do nothing but reinforce the pro-gay anti-violence discourse that privileges the ideal prototype of which is Matthew Shepard.

A column by the blogger and political consultant, Jasmyne Cannick in the November 6th, 2007 issue deals explicitly with the whitewashed image of anti-LGBTQ violence victims (Figure 16).⁹⁹ She begins the column by talking about the beating that resulted in the death of a 29-year old New Yorker Michael Sandy. Sandy was an interior designer for Ikea and an openly gay man. On October 8th 2006 two white men pretended to be gay online and lured him out to Plumb Beach – a popular cruising area. At the site, he was beaten and robbed by four white men. When he finally managed to break free, he was chased into Belt Parkway, hit by a car, and severely injured. Sandy died 5 days later in the hospital.

Cannick expresses frustration over the lack of public attention and outrage about this case. She brings up Matthew Shepard and while his death is “unquestionably terrible,” it is no more unusual that the death of Sandy.¹⁰⁰ She asks whether Reverend Jessie Jackson or Al Sharpton would have picked up the case if Sandy had been straight; or if Sandy had been white would national gay organizations have gotten involved. Cannick says that the response of

⁹⁹ Jasmyne Cannick, “Hate Crimes in Black and White: It Could Have Been You; It Could Have Been Me,” *The Advocate*, No. 996, November 6, 2007, 22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

COLUMN | UNDER MY SKIN



JASMYNE CANNICK

Hate Crimes in Black and White

It could have been you; it could have been me

THE DEATH OF 29-YEAR-OLD New Yorker Michael Sandy, resulting from a beating by a group of white men who had intentionally lured him to a parking lot, was cold, calculated, and brutal. Chat messages between Sandy and the men were reportedly found on his home computer, and a printout from his computer showing directions to Plum Beach, a popular cruising area in Brooklyn, was found in his car.

Sandy was robbed and beaten by three men. He managed to break free but was chased onto the Belt Parkway, where he was struck by a car and severely injured. He never regained consciousness and died on Friday, October 13, 2006—a day after turning 29—when his family removed him from the respirator that had kept him alive for five days after the attack.

It's been just over a year since the death of Michael Sandy, an interior designer for Ikea. The trial of the three men accused in his killing is coming to an end with a startling admission from one that he too is gay. But in the beginning, relatively little was said by gay groups and even less was said by black civil rights groups about Sandy's death. One national gay group said that Sandy's death was a local issue, so they were yielding its management to local organizations.

But tell me this: When Matthew Shepard was murdered, was his death viewed as a local issue? If my memory serves me correctly, the world stopped because white gays across the country made Shepard's death a nationwide issue for the media, politicians, and community groups.

Why didn't Sandy's death merit the same response?

In the spirit of all things being equal, if Michael Sandy had been heterosexual,

would that have brought out black America's reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton? If Sandy had been straight, would that have made it OK for the NAACP to get involved and for other black civil rights groups to take notice and speak out on hate crimes?

But this is *The Advocate*, not *Ebony* magazine, so chances are that the readers of this column are white and gay, not black and straight. So I'll continue with my first point. It's no secret that gay America suf-

fers from denial when it comes to issues of race. Whether we admit it or not, gay groups react differently to hate crimes involving white victims versus those involving nonwhite victims. It's not an easy fact to swallow, but one look at the silence surrounding the death of Michael Sandy and the disparity is clear to see.

Unfortunately, chances are that we will continue to see hate crimes committed against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. But if all hate crimes are considered equally horrible, then our response has got to be the same across the board whether the victim is white, black, or brown.

And to my brothers and sisters reading this, it is our responsibility as same-gender-loving people to call attention to tragedies like the case of Michael Sandy. It was no mistake that the deaths of Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena went on to make international news—there was a community of folks to make sure of it. We owe it to the Michael Sandys of the world to hold not only straight blacks and gay whites accountable but ourselves as well. Michael Sandy could have been any one of us, and he was all of us.

I don't expect gay groups that know little to nothing about African-Americans to somehow take up issues relevant to their black LGBT constituents on their own. It would be nice, but it's not expected. However, I do expect black gays to educate those gay groups on issues relevant to the entire gay community—and hold them accountable.

Michael Sandy's death is just one example of a tragedy the gay majority slept through. He deserved better from all of us. No one hate crime is more important than another. While Matthew Shepard's death was unquestionably terrible, so was Sandy's.

Remember, it could have been you; it could have been me. ♣

If memory serves me, the world stopped because white gays made Matthew Shepard's death a nationwide issue. Why didn't Michael Sandy's death merit the same response?

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Figure 16. Michael Sandy.

Source: Jasmyne Cannick, "Hate Crimes in Black and White: It Could Have Been You; It Could Have Been Me," *The Advocate*, No. 996, November 6, 2007, 22, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

one of the national organizations was that this was a “local” issue and local organizations should deal with this. Cannick does not buy the “local” argument but points out that when Matthew Shepard was murdered “the world stopped because white gays across the country made Shepard’s death a nationwide issue for media, politics, and community groups.” The phrase “white gays” seems to exclude the other letters in the LGBTQ spectrum but it is nevertheless very apt.

Jasmyne Cannick did not only write about the case in *The Advocate* a year after the incident. She wrote about it in her blog and was referenced by several other bloggers as one of the main commentators on the case. Her column is great in many ways. It includes a professional black-and-white close up of Sandy’s face, which fits the contemporary aesthetics of LGBTQ victimhood. His head is turned on the left side a little bit with a slight smile on his face. He is a bald black man with a modest smile and kind eyes. The image that she uses breaks the mold of images usually used in cases of hate crimes where the victims are trans or/and people of color.¹⁰¹

Hegemony works by commodifying resistance and “allowing” such moments of counter-narratives. The cover of the magazine a few months earlier, September 25th, 2007, was a special 40-year anniversary issue listing 40 LGBT heroes (Figure 17). The people central to this image and most prominently visible

¹⁰¹ Christopher Lisotta, “Killed in Broad Daylight,” *The Advocate*, No. 998, 4 December 2007, 29-33: focused on the murder of a fidji-Indain immigrant Satendar Singh. The murder of 15-year old trans youth of color, Lawrence King was featured in Neal Broverman, “Mixed Messages,” No. 1005, April 2008, 28-33. However, the stories used visuals and employed aesthetics that served to further marginalize the victims of color. I will talk about more about the problematic aesthetics of when it come to representation of anti-LGBTQ violence in Chapter 5.

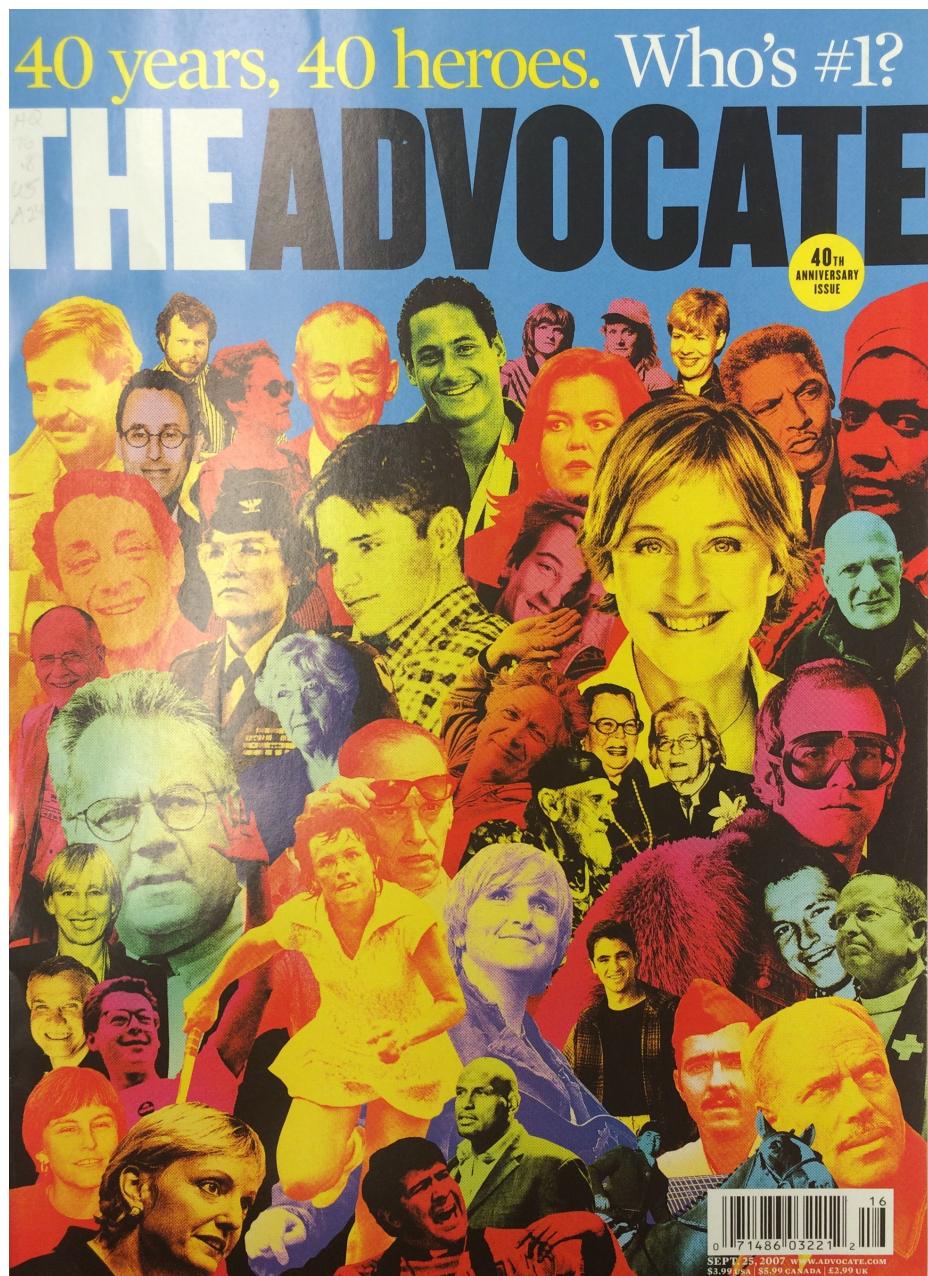


Figure 17. 40 Years, 40 Heroes, Who's #1?

Source: 40 Years, 40 Heroes, Who's #1?", *The Advocate*, No. 993, September 25, 2007, Cover, courtesy of Human Sexuality Collection, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

due to size and coloring are Matthew Shepard and Ellen DeGeneres.¹⁰²

Unsurprisingly, the top 5 heroes are all cisgender and white: #1 Ellen, #2 Barney Frank, #3 Harvey Milk , #4 Mathew Shepard , #5 Melissa Etheridge.¹⁰³ Even if we have a counter narrative that criticizes the mainstream “white gays,” it does in no way change the hierarchy. On the contrary, counter-narratives often reinforce the mainstream values by way of tokenism or illusion of alternative voices. Having a short one page column by an activist blogger on racism in the community makes it seem that mainstream gay media is not racist after all and does more than only cater to a very narrow section to the LGBTQ community.

Contemporary media market is saturated with LGBTQ publications, bloggers, online aggregators, and advocacy groups. Although *The Advocate* does not have the kind of presence it did in the 1970s or 1990s, what it represents is nevertheless significant today. Looking through *The Advocate* since 1967 when LGBT community started to publicly define – through words and images – the violence inflicted upon them because of their sexuality or gender presentation gives us idea how did we get to the kind of affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence we take for granted today. It is usually not about covering an incident or not, but how it gets done that most strikingly reveals the racist, classist and misogynist underbelly of LGBTQ rights advocacy.

¹⁰² “40 Years, 40 Heroes, Who’s #1?,” *The Advocate*, No. 993, September 25, 2007, Cover.

¹⁰³ “40 Years, 40 Heroes, Who’s #1?,” 50-54.

Chapter 3

Reading Time and Place: Creative Queer Resistance in The South

To affirm a materiality or, to be less abstract—to insist on the livability of one's own embodiment, particularly when that embodiment is culturally abject or socially despised, is to undertake a constant and always incomplete labor to reconfigure more than just the materiality of our bodies.

—Gayle Salamon¹

If you don't understand gendered life on the edge, you don't understand gendered life at the center.

—Jacob Hale²

Against popular belief, the Southern United States is home to more queer people than any other region in the country: nearly one-third of all estimated 8 million “out” LGBT adults live in the 14 Southern states.³ At the same time, those 2.7 million LGBT identifying folks do not benefit from the recent policy gains occurring in the rest of the country. Since only 3-4% of domestic LGBT funding goes to the South, queer activists have been forced to be creative and develop innovative organizational strategies that rely on strong intersectional relationships.⁴ Therefore, despite existing in our popular imagination as one of the most homophobic and racist regions in the United States, the South is also the place of origin of some of the most thoughtful, original, and successful acts of

¹ Gayle Salamon, “The Bodily Ego and the Contested Domain of the Material. Differences” in *Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2004): 95-122.

² Susan Stryker, *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Rutledge, 2006), 118.

³ Lyle Matthew Kan, *Out in the South, Part One: Foundation Funding LGBTQ Issues in the South* (New York: Funders for LGBTQ Issues, 2014), accessed October 31, 2015, https://www.lgbtfunders.org/files/Out_in_the_South_Foundation_Funding_for_LGBTQ_Issues_in_the_U.S._South.pdf.

The report includes 14 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

⁴ Ibid.

social justice activism. I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the South as a region in our popular imagination and queer writing. I will then challenge the current cultural politics and affect of the South by putting the issues raised by scholars into conversation with the perspectives of LGBTQ activists living in this “mysterious” region.

To this aim, I interviewed the members of Southerners on New Ground (SONG): a Southern based multi-gender and multi-cultural queer liberation organization. Headquartered in Atlanta, GA, SONG was founded in 1993 by three black and three white lesbians.⁵ The organization currently covers four Southern states in addition Georgia: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and most recently Alabama. SONG follows a very Southern tradition of (re)building relationships and lives against the odds of often hostile cultural climate and geographical challenges. Unlike the often limited advocacy focus exhibited by mainstream LGBTQ platforms such as the Human Rights Campaign, SONG’s activism connects the most pressing injustices that LGBTQ people with intersectional identities face. This means not necessarily focusing on marriage equality or street violence but looking at where social, cultural and physical landscape converge to perpetuate deep-rooted structural violence. We are not used to seeing Black Lives Matter, immigration reform, food justice, livability and health care in rural areas as campaigns led by queer folks, but the work that SONG does shows that in fact they are. Similarly, we are not used to seeing

⁵ “In Your Face and in the Trenches”: Southern Trans People Speak Out,” Southerners On New Ground Report 2010, accessed March 22, 2016, <http://southernersonnewground.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/SONG-In-Your-Face-And-In-the-Trenches-Trans-Report-2010.pdf>.

coalitions between those campaigns and queer activist groups but in fact some of the most effective collaborative work happens at those intersections. I will demonstrate in this chapter how SONG's activism shifts the affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence by debunking commonly held misconceptions about the South and challenging mainstream middle class ideas about identity, politics, and culture.

SONG is the fruit of the peculiar conditions of the South: a place of many contradictions. As an imagined space, most people know exactly where the South is. Yet once you start to demarcate its exact boundaries, the conversation gets messy. If we think of the South as it is imagined in mainstream popular culture: a place of poverty and bigotry, we can point out cultural “Souths” all across the United States and the world. Since “region is a fluid geographical concept in the American context,” there has been considerable debate where exactly the South as myth and physical geography coalesce.⁶ There are at least a few ways of how to count the Southern states and how someone defines the South often says more about the person than about the South as a region.

Census Bureau’s Geographic Terms and Definitions divide the South into three regions: the South Atlantic states (Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia); the East South Central states (Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee); and

⁶ James Noble Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7.

the West South Central states: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas).⁷ Yet as James Noble Gregory notes, what makes a space “seem southern” differs over periods of time and whom you ask: “Is Florida a Southern state? Some would say ‘yes’ at the start of the twentieth century, ‘no’ after decades of migration from New York and Cuba. Are Baltimore and Washington, D.C., southern states?”⁸ Most people living in what some classify, the Deep South would also probably answer “no” to the latter question.

Current popular opinion tends not to see Delaware, District of Columbia, and Maryland as part of the South.⁹ Deep South as a region within the region is a debatable entity in itself, mostly seen as consisting of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, and sometimes Arkansas, but not always. Traditionally, the South includes 11 former Confederate States: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Often Kentucky, Oklahoma, and West Virginia are added as part of the region, which makes the total number of Southern states 14. This idea of the South and Southerness gets even more complicated when we consider the particularities of different counties and metropolitan areas within the states. For the purposes of this chapter, I will trust there is enough overlap in opinion to count for 14 Southern states within the United States.

⁷ “Geographic Terms and Definitions,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed October 31, 2015, <https://www.census.gov/popest/about/geo/terms.html>.

⁸ Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 7-8.

⁹ Walt Hickey, “Which States Are in the South?” *DataLab*, April 30, 2014, accessed March 22, 2016. <http://fivethirtyeight.com/datalab/which-states-are-in-the-south/>.

As flyover country, the South gets imagined in our current popular media landscape as “mythically rural, white, poorly educated and thickly accented region that has yet to join the 21st century.”¹⁰ Reality television brings us Honey Boo Boo in Georgia and “Swamp People” in Louisiana. The image of a Southerner as “white trash” never seems to cease to be a source of comedy. I have noticed that there is something inherently humorous about the idea of poor uneducated rural white people among academics. For academics, “white trash” functions as the perpetual “Other:” you can’t be “white trash” and an academic; one eliminates the other. I have yet to see a scholarly conversation when person uttering the phrase “white trash” does not smirk or smile even a little. Try saying it. The importance of this kind of affect should not be underestimated. Humor is a very powerful rhetorical tool that establishes a power dynamic which often renders the opponent defenseless.

This humorous image of the Southern working class is equally hospitable and violent, as the old saying goes, “southerners are friendly until they are mad enough to kill you.” In *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (2014), Nadine Hubbs argues, there is a “moral suspicion” attached to “the white working class as (purported) ground zero for America’s most virulent social ills: racism, sexism, and homophobia.”¹¹ Hubbs traces how country music helped to establish white liberal bias against white non-urban working class that became especially prominent in the 1970s with the “gay liberation” movement. Driven by the politics

¹⁰ Karen L. Cox, “The South Ain’t Just Whistlin’ Dixie,” *New York Times*, September 17, 2011, accessed March 22, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/18/opinion/sunday/the-south-aint-just-whistlin-dixie.html>.

¹¹ Nadine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 42.

of respectability the “gay liberation” movement dropped the *queer* over gay and started to distinguish themselves as middle class and move away from the working class.¹² This according to Hubbs resulted in:

shifting of ideological poles in the realm of sexuality and class. Homosexual acceptance has gone from being working class and bad to the middle class and good, while homosexual aversion – what we now call homophobia – has gone from being middle class and good to working class and bad.¹³

Such shift in popular opinion is part of establishing affluent, urban and attractive white male as the focus of LGBTQ advocacy and ultimately the prototypical hate crime victim. Yet even shows as blatantly exploitive and stereotyping as *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* remind us that queer people exist among the rural working class. Sadly, however, rural queers – in this case Uncle Poodle – get judged against established mainstream LGBTQ aesthetics and remain culturally significant only as the stereotypical humorous trope.

In recent years, historians have challenged the idea of the South as exceptionally homophobic and racist. Historical writing has moved from Southern Exceptionalism toward anti-regionalism, which aims to debunk the idea of the South as a more unique than other regions in the United States. In his essay, “Mississippi As Metaphor,” Joseph Crespino concludes, “in rejecting the framework of Southern exceptionalism the synecdoche and scapegoat tropes both suggest that in the civil rights era, regional distinctions among Americans

¹² George Chauncey’s now classic book, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makers of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) discusses a similar development of homosexuality from working class *perversity* in the late 19th century New York City to a sign of middle class liberalism during World War II.

¹³ Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers*, 150.

were less important than racial ones.”¹⁴ Crespino argues that by imagining Mississippi as a synecdoche for racism in the country made it more difficult for civil rights activists to argue that their work is needed in other regions, too.¹⁵ By making Deep South as the scapegoat exonerates other regions. Such dynamic works especially in favor of the Northeast and West Coast, which are imagined as racially unbiased whereas in fact racism in those regions is masked as middle class respectability. Historian Christina Hanhardt has documented how gentrification in New York City and San Francisco neighborhoods was partly the result of middle class LGBT activists’ further criminalization of the classed and racialized “other” in their push for “safe spaces.”¹⁶ It’s not that the South as flyover country is exceptionally racist and the bicoastal metropolitan areas are not, but bias against minorities simply manifests differently across regions.

In the introduction to *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, Lassiter and Crespino argue that when we compare the South to other regions, “differences of kind are really differences of degree – such as rates of unionization or immigration, patterns of religiosity or voting behavior, the pace and scale of urbanization or economic change.”¹⁷ Lassiter and Crespino’s book is a collection of essays that seek to demythologize our social fantasies about the South, as they argue, “the notion of the exceptional South has served as a myth one that

¹⁴ Joseph Crespino, “Mississippi as Metaphor: Civil Rights, the South, and the Nation in the Historical Imagination” in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 116.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Christina Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹⁷ Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, “Introduction: The End of Southern History,” in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.

has persistently distorted our understanding of American history.”¹⁸ Although the South exists first and foremost as a strong and overused metaphor, it does not mean that the effects of this imaginary space remain immaterial. On the contrary, affective value of the South makes the boundaries between imagined and real geographies collapse as the consequences of state authorized racism, poverty, and homophobia become physically imprinted on bodies and environments.

Not just in popular culture, the South as the regional “other” has been also frequently equated with the “rural” that bicoastally biased queer theory and writing regards as an inhabitable place of misery. The majority of scholarship done on LGBTQ issues locates the heart of queer culture in the city.¹⁹ Among others, John D’Emilio has pointed out that queer identities emerged together with the historical development of urban capitalism, and rural to urban migration, which ultimately altered (heterosexual) family relations.²⁰ Not only has the development of queer identity paralleled processes of urbanization but as Jack Halberstam points out, the construction of queer subjectivity is itself embedded within a narrative of rural to urban migration that maps the psychological journey

¹⁸Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, “Introduction,” 7.

¹⁹ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: The Landmark History of Gay Life in America* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1997); David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Margot Canady, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Siobhan B. Somerville *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1987).

²⁰ D’Emilio *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 102.

of “coming out” onto a physical journey to the city.²¹ *In a Queer Time & Place*, Halberstam criticized such dominant discourse and provided a definition of metronormativity. Halberstam writes:

The term metronormativity...reveals the conflation of urban and visible in many normalizing narratives of gay/lesbian subjectivities. Such narratives tell of closeted subjects who come out into an urban setting, which in turn, supposedly allows for the full expression of the sexual self in relation to a community of other gays/lesbians/queers.²²

Within this urban (mostly New York City) queer writing tradition, “rural” has been infused with tales of isolation, prejudice, and physical violence characterizing the experiences of the queers who live there.

In *De-Centering Sexualities - Politics and Representations Beyond the Metropolis*, Richard Phillips and David Shuttleton recognize a polarized view in sexuality studies that leaves out the in-between: “the small towns and rural parts of Europe, Australia and North America.”²³ Phillips and Shuttleton argue that main focus in sexuality studies has been on “sexualized metropolitan centers such as New York and or on differently sexualized, marginalized and colonized spaces including the Orient and Africa.”²⁴ Although queer popular culture, theory, and writing have ignored rural places or deemed them as insignificant, it is clear that urban queer subjectivity cannot exist without a rural counterpart. Mary L. Gray, one of the scholars writing about the rural queers has noted that metronormative “politics of visibility needs the rural (or some *otherness*, some

²¹ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 36-7.

²² Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place*, 36-7.

²³ Richard Phillips and David Shuttleton, *De-Centering Sexualities - Politics and Representations Beyond the Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

²⁴Ibid.

place) languishing in its shadow to sustain its status as an unquestionable achievement rather than a strategy that privileges the view of some by eliding the vantage point of others.²⁵ In other words, the non-urban needs to be counted for, but often no more than to serve the urban as token that exonerates mainstream “gay” culture from appearing to be as monopolizing, elitist, and exclusive as it in reality is.

In recent years, a number of scholars besides Gray have been writing against the metronormative grain and contributed to counterbalancing the urban bias within LGBTQ studies. Those studies that commonly could be referred to as *queer anti-urban* writings are diverse in terms of methodology, the time periods, and regions they cover. *Queer anti-urbanism* is a concept developed by Scott Herring in *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (2010) to refer to “a means to critically negotiate the relentless urbanisms that often characterize any United States based ‘gay imaginary.’”²⁶ Herring discusses rural queer aesthetics in the Midwest and in the Deep South to challenge the dominant middle-class urban aesthetics.

Other *queer anti-urban* studies include Peter Boag’s *Re-Dressing America’s Frontier Past* (2012) that focuses on cross-dressers and gender-benders in the West at the turn of the 20th century when homosexuality and heterosexuality as

²⁵ Mary Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: New York University press, 2009), 9.

²⁶ Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 13.

categories were created.²⁷ Colin R. Johnson's queer historiography, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (2010), picks up where Boag's book ends to reveal how middle-class urban bias took hold within queer culture in the first half of the 20th century.²⁸ Johnson's focus is mostly on white gay male culture (except one chapter on "Hard Women") to counter the stereotypical image of white working class rural men. Patrick Johnson's *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (2008) is a much-needed collection of oral histories, photographs, and discussion on black gay men in the South.²⁹

Queer anti-urban writing has reshaped our notions about LGBT lives, aesthetics, and culture and shown that what we imagine as rural cannot be pinned down to a specific region. Rural queers can be found in Iowa farming community, Northwestern lumber camp, in frontier-era Idaho, mid-century Mississippi, and present day Alabama. Although these community studies have shown the uniqueness of each locality, even the academic subculture of queer anti-urbanism cannot escape the hierarchies of patriarchy: the focus has been overwhelmingly on white gay men. Unknowingly, this bias coaxes us into generalizations that eliminate the more dynamic intersectional histories of non-binary folks, women, and people of color.

²⁷ Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

²⁸ Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013).

²⁹ Patrick Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

Gender historian, Leisa Meyer warns us of “fragments” that have the tendency to “slowly transmute into new competing generalizations.”³⁰ In order to avoid generalizations and common bias in writing about marginalized histories we need constant “narrative intervention[s]” that result in the fragmentation of the fragment. Collections of oral histories and personal narratives on the South – *Out in the South* (2001) edited by Carlos Drews and Carolyn Leste Law; *Carryin’ on in the Gay and Lesbian South* (1997) edited by John Howard; and most recently, *Crooked Letter i: A Moving Anthology of Coming-Out Stories* (2015) by Connie Griffin – have slowly countered the male bias within queer rural histories.³¹ Boyd and Ramírez argue for the importance of oral histories as a vital method in queer knowledge making: they bring us stories that have not been recorded elsewhere.³² I’m not discarding the significance of this body of work. Oral histories are crucial to our understating of LGBTQ life on the margins. However, currently only few of those community studies based on oral histories have been contextualized with critical theory and broader historical background.³³ Edited volumes are mostly anthologies that rely on oral histories as their main archive

³⁰ Leisa Meyer, “Interrupting Norms and Constructing Deviances: Competing Frameworks in the Histories of Sexualities in the United States” in Eileen Boris, S. Jay Kleinberg, and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *The Practice of U.S. Women’s History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 281.

³¹ Carlos Drews and Carolyn Leste Law, *Out in the South* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001); John Howard, *Carryin’ on in the Gay and Lesbian South* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1997); Connie Griffin, *Crooked Letter i: A Moving Anthology of Coming-Out Stories* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2015).

³² Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³³ The ones that have been more extensive historical inquiries focus on men: John Howard’s *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2001); Patrick Johnson’s *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

but tend not to take the next step that would give those valuable stories a connection to a past and place them within cultural politics today.

As this brief literature review shows, besides writing done on LGBTQ in metropolitan cities, there has actually been considerable research done on the “in-between” in terms of small town communities as Philips and Shuttleton describe it. Much more rare are studies that focus on the queer “in-between” that refuses to be confined by the urban/rural binary. In other words, to paraphrase Meyer, there has not been enough fragmentation to challenge this binary generalization that confines people and places as one or the other and does not truly account for the non-binary in-between. The in-between that disrupts the rural/urban binary has been articulated in terms of Californian suburbia by Karen Tongson in *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (2011).³⁴ However, there have not been enough empirical community studies on queers that focus on rural/suburban/urban categorization but also challenge this very categorization by arguing against a static notion of place.

In her essay, “A Global Sense of Place,” British geographer, Doreen Massey brings together post-1960s trends in scholarly thinking about place: from McLuhanian global village to reactionary (nationalist) rootedness.³⁵ Massey is critical of traditional time-space compression arguments that focus on the circulation of capital and economic geographies. She proposes a progressive

³⁴ Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011).

³⁵ Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” *Marxism Today* (June 1991): 24-29.

concept of place that is “absolutely not static,” but instead a process.³⁶ She argues that *place* as process is similar to Marxist idea of capital as process. According to Massey places do “not have to have boundaries in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures” nor “single, unique ‘identities,’” but are “full of internal conflicts.”³⁷ Importantly, however, Massey’s progressive idea of place does not take away the “uniqueness of place” and its specificity. The sources of uniqueness reside not in “some long, internalised history” but in “a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations.”³⁸ In other words, places are not enclosed with clear inside and outside; they have multiple identities, and always changing. It is the complex and multiple relationships between identities, mobility (or lack of), material and immaterial social-economic-cultural-geographical environments that make a *neutral* space into a distinct place.

Massey theories allow us to look at places as affective entities. Similar to Sara Ahmed’s discussion of affect, Massey connects the idea of “place as process” to Marxism.³⁹ As discussed earlier, the South exists above all as a social fiction: not unlike a particular affective economy the value of which increases through circulation and yet does not reside in any specific point or place in time. Affective value materializes through relationships and movement of ideas. In order to consider the complexity of affective economies of queer place and identity we need to move beyond traditional categorization.

³⁶ Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” 5.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 4.

³⁹ Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 120.

SONG is truly a movement in more than one sense of the term. It creates an alternative subcultural space across the South that challenges the boundaries between rural-urban, and the idea of the South as an enclosed, static place. This gets done not just on the level of how they conduct workshops or structure the organization. The people I interviewed move between the official and unofficial definitions of the South. They understand the South as imagined by the Census Bureau and the intricacies of rural queers' world-making. The oral histories with SONG show how people who have the privilege of mobility further challenge mainstream ideas about violence, queerness, community, and place. The main issues that came up in interviews were: criminalization of people of color, poverty, deportation, and violence against trans women. All those issues are connected, lead to further structural forms of violence (health care, education, transportation infrastructure, food justice, livability of places), and speak to above all violence at the hands of the state.

Existing and moving through the physical and symbolic borderlands makes SONG members liminal characters. Victor Turner describes liminal subjects, "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial"⁴⁰ Being part of a sexually defined subculture within a geographically defined one, but physically and politically moving in and out of those geographies can be dangerous. However, this is what also what makes the people involved with SONG *dangerously* powerful as activists. The fact that SONG was founded in 1993 at a time when

⁴⁰ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (London: Aldine, 1969), 95; Also on this: Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

the World Wide Web started to redefine communication and a space to be occupied with alternative ideas, adds to the complexity of what it means to be situated in a place.

I want to pause here and discuss the different degrees of liminality at work. First, SONG brings together people of color, undocumented queers, and trans folks – identities that are least represented in mainstream LGBTQ culture and politics. Secondly, SONG folks inhabit places that are considered uninhabitable by popular LGBTQ imagination and also exist on the margins of queer academic writing. Thirdly, their queer bodies and mobility challenge not just fictional ideas about rural-urban, but the boundaries of the pressure points – gender, class, race, immigration status – that we as humans potentially experience. Since neither SONG folks nor the places they inhabit are adequately represented politically or culturally – often desexualized, sexualized, eroticized, or seen as deviant – an opportunity arises in this in-between liminal space to redefine how we make meaning in the world.

When I started with my research I was very much invested in the “rural” aspect of SONG only to discover that most of the people I interviewed if not living in the city were at least very much connected to the metropolitan areas close to them. At the same time most of them identified very strongly as queer Southerners. A number of queer people of color I interviewed made the connection between “home” and the “South” and “land” even when raised in what is traditionally considered the North in the context of the United States. The difference between a “rural” or an “urban” queer is therefore rather ambiguous

because it comes down to how the person feels and carries themselves which alternates and changes over time and space as they go about their everyday lives.

Movement, not only in terms of psychological change or state of mind, but also through physical space has been one of the most prominent themes in queer theory. The psychological and physical movement of people affiliated with SONG does not match the metronormative narratives described by Jack Halberstam to which we have become accustomed through mainstream media. There is no progress narrative from “rural” to “urban” that would be attached to a “coming out” process. The lives and trajectories of the people I interviewed speak to ideas of movement and mobility, but they lack the coherence and order characteristic to progressive homo-and metronormative narratives.

I noticed that the people interviewed truly inhabit Massey’s idea of place as process by moving back and forth between rural and the urban, the known and unknown, the popular and unpopular. This happens in terms of culture by identifying with and connecting diverse groups of people of color and white folks, straight allies and queers, radical ideas and mainstream narratives. Connecting, very importantly, information and power with lack of information or misinformation and disenfranchisement; and access to resources with lack of resources. Movement also happens in terms of moving through space: from “urban” areas to “rural” or the other way around; from places connected to the rest of the world via transportation (train, bus, car) in multiple ways to areas with very few means of making a connection (no public transportation, only by car).

Although seemingly the previous paragraph forces our thinking into some dangerous binaries, the key is to focus on the spaces in movement in between: the bodies of SONG activists. I'm careful when it comes to using words "middle" or "between" because that would in turn reinforce binary thinking and deny the mobility and movement of bodies and ideas in a nonlinear fashion; or imply that "rural" and "urban" are discrete and finitely defined rather than fluid and able to merge into each other. SONG activists' physical and psychological movement creates a liminal space that brings together isolation (economic, cultural) with connectivity (community, resources). This bridge building can only be done by not staying static but changing and transforming themselves and the bodies and materialities around them.

Challenging normative identity categories is one of the ways in which SONG subverts the traditional social topography of the South. SONG works against the late capitalist trends that Slavoj Žižek criticizes in "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism."⁴¹ Žižek sees late capitalism's historical ideology of multiculturalism as something that seeks to exclude and further marginalize rather than include:

In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a "racism with a distance" — it "respects" the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed "authentic" community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position. Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a direct racist, he doesn't oppose to the Other the particular values of his own culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged

⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or The Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," *New Left Review* 225 (Sept.-Oct., 1997): 28-51.

empty point of universality from which one is able to appreciate (and deprecate) properly other particular cultures — the multiculturalist respect for the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority.... The conclusion to be drawn is thus that the problematic of multiculturalism — the hybrid coexistence of diverse cultural life-worlds — which imposes itself today is the form of appearance of its opposite, of the massive presence of capitalism as universal world system: it bears witness to the unprecedented homogenization of the contemporary world.⁴²

Multiculturalism that is forced upon from above works as a Divide and Conquer model. Current ideology of multiculturalism seemingly offers increased participation for marginalized communities while at the same time creating divisions by race, class, gender identity, sexuality, and immigration status. Belonging to one or more of those designated groups determines your relationship to the state. However, people with intersectional identities are often forced to privilege one category over the other and are not able to connect across those fictional categories with other marginalized groups.

The staff members of SONG express their intersectional identities in ways that goes beyond the sex-gender binary. Paulina Helm-Hernandez refers to herself as a “queer femme cha-cha girl, artist, trainer, political organizer, strategist & trouble-maker-at-large from Veracruz, Mexico.”⁴³ Roberto Tijerina “is a queer, Latino, first-generation child of immigrants, keeper of the heart-space, and closet diva.”⁴⁴ How the staff defines themselves in non-binary terms is a statement of resistance to mainstream LGBT politics of respectability that places

⁴² Žižek, “Multiculturalism,” 44-46.

⁴³ “Staff,” Southerners on New Ground, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://southerneronnewground.org/about/staff/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

subjectivities in categories that separate gender from sexuality and other identity markers.

Hubbs argues that, “in the first half of the 20th century people with same-sex desire did not constitute themselves as one people but as many distinguished by class color, sexual practices, and gender style.”⁴⁵ The 1950s and the politics of respectability of the homophile movement favored sexuality over gender identity and identified “against racially and class-inflected public sexuality and cross gender behavior.”⁴⁶ Since the 1970s a separation between transgender and homosexual identity became more established “placed community members in the position of having to represent and negotiate their experiences, selves, and needs” through middleclass sex-gender worldview.⁴⁷ The effects of this shift continued even into the 1990s when gender variance became a more central issue. Anthropologist David Valentine’s study from the late 1990s New York shows how middle-class institutions’ linguistic regime and social service agencies used power and resources to correct young poor gender variant African-Americans and Latinos self-designation as “gay” or “trans.”⁴⁸ This splintering development observed by Hubbs and Valentine coincides with Žižek’s warnings of the rise of multiculturalism that although demands “respect for the Other’s specify,” serves to judge the latter against the “privileged empty point of universality.”⁴⁹ The socially fictional categories, although seemingly progressive,

⁴⁵ Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers*, 146.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁸ David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴⁹ Žižek, “Multiculturalism,” 44.

further separate, marginalize, and increase institutional violence toward most vulnerable populations.

Words always limit a critical project. Talking about the vastness of the West, the critic William New said, “to find words to articulate it, paradoxically at once to create and limit it. In the act of articulation, the endlessness of possibility is circumscribed, for an actual identity is announced.”⁵⁰ Yet not all words are created equal. SONG activists, of course, use words to demarcate their existence and participate in culture, but their identification is subversive of the gender-sex paradigm. “Keeper of the heart space” disrupts the linguistic regime of middle class multicultural identity politics by taking up the space that words with cultural authority would traditionally occupy. In mainstream LGBTQ culture, Roberto Tijerina would be categorized simply as gay, or perhaps a gay man of color. Yet he chooses to exist not only beyond the sex-gender categorization (“queer” and “closet diva”) but also identify with words that are not conventionally seen as significant within contemporary identity politics discourse. “Keeper of the heart-space” denotes an identity or being that exists outside white middle class conceptual models.

SONG recognizes that queer issues cannot be limited to sexuality alone. Unlike mainstream LGBT organizations, SONG relies on intersectionality as one of its main strengths and consciously works to bring together queer folks across

⁵⁰ William H. New, *Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), xii.

the South from socioeconomically and geographically diverse backgrounds. Their mission statement reads:

Southerners On New Ground (SONG) is a regional Queer Liberation organization made up of people of color, immigrants, undocumented people, people with disabilities, working class and rural and small town, LGBTQ people in the South.⁵¹

SONG sees the conservative Right as a force that has a “Southern-specific strategy...to divide and conquer Southern oppressed communities using the tools of rural isolation, Right-wing Christian infrastructure, racism, environmental degradation, and economic oppression.”⁵² Truly committing to the mantra that all oppression is connected reflects in how the organization is structured, their activist projects, and the people who are in leadership positions.

Although SONG relies on coalition building and works to build connections across marginalized groups it does so by allowing people with diverse backgrounds and identity pressure points to have discussions in shared safe space first. Coalition building as grassroots activism does not mean that everybody comes together and erases the different facets of their subject position for common good. That would likely perpetuate the power dynamics that value the opinion of certain groups (white, cisgender, documented citizens) over others (people of color, trans, undocumented). Coalition building means people first working separately in groups that they identify most with and then building allyships across injustices. For instance, trans women of color have meetings

⁵¹ “About,” Southerners on New Ground, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://southernersonnewground.org/about/>.

⁵² Ibid.

where only trans women of color are present to allow them to discuss issues that are important to them without censorship or the need to explain themselves to outsiders. As part of their coalition-building mission, SONG has been organizing separate retreats for people of color, “lesbigaytrans” folks, and artists since it was formed in 1993.⁵³

I was able to experience how SONG’s coalition building works during the annual Q-Summit held at the University of Richmond on March 21, 2014. This was also the first time I made contact with SONG activists in person. The daylong event was targeted toward queer youth with multiple breakout sessions divided into groups (women/people of color; trans/genderqueer; black/brown/queer) that were not open to participants who did not identify with the theme. There were also workshops that were open to all: healthy relationships, growing your own food, and queerness and Christianity. At the end of the day, everyone met together in the main space, listened to the keynote by ngoc loan tran, and did activities together as a group. Coalition building seems exclusionary at first blush, but it truly allows most effectively for groups to tackle most pressing problems that are unique to them. The key, however, is in coming together at the end of the day, listening, connecting and finding common ground.

This separate and united organizing is also evident when looking at SONG’s organizational records at the archives. SONG is very much spread out across the five states it covers and intentionally so. The headquarters is in

⁵³ Southerners on New Ground Records, 1993-2003, RL.01231, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

Atlanta, GA yet the main repository for documents and ephemera related to the organization are housed in Durham, NC at Duke University's David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Duke University makes sense as a place of repository for SONG's records. SONG is very active in Durham with the campaign coordinator Serena Sebring and one of the former long-time SONG co-directors, Caitlin Breedlove living in the area. The materials, acquired as part of the Sallie Bingham's Center for Women's History and Culture, currently consists total of 7 boxes (7200 items; 9.6 lin. Ft) and includes years 1993 through 2003.⁵⁴ The boxes contain printed out email exchange between staff members, financial records, documents related to retreats and community events organized or supported by SONG such as the Bayard Rustin project, People of Color Activities, and Pride at Work. The Rubenstein Library also houses the extensive collection one of the founder's, Mandy Carter Papers that expand over the course of 40 years, 1970-2013 and can be found in 283 boxes (24875 items; 166.5 lin. ft.).⁵⁵

The last acquisition of materials occurred in 2008-2009 with the most recent documents dating from 2004. Caitlin Breedlove, who was SONG's Co-Director from 2004 to 2015, noted that they have "piles of materials" from more recent years that still needs to be to "dropped off" at the library, but that those are very unorganized.⁵⁶ There is still a lot of archival activist work that need to happen to do justice to the important work that SONG has done over the years.

⁵⁴ Southerners on New Ground Records, Duke University.

⁵⁵ Mandy Carter Papers. 1970-2013, RL.00195, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁵⁶ Caitlin Breedlove (activist), in discussion with the author, March 21, 2014.

Although the more recent organizational documents are not available at the archives since Breedlove and Paulina Helm-Hernandez took the leading positions in 2004, the majority of activist projects and information are available to the public through their website, Facebook page, and blogs. The non-traditional archive of the Internet has more activist potential than the special collections of a library as more people have access to materials without having to schedule a visit weeks ahead and physically make a trip to the location.

As mentioned earlier, SONG has had two Co-Directors, Caitlin Breedlove and Paulina Helm-Hernandez since 2004. The idea behind two directors is to have a dynamic power structure within the organization that leaves more room for dialogue and discussion. There is not one power figure; all final decisions have to be argued through two Co-Directors. In September 2015, Caitlin Breedlove announced her transition out of the co-director position after a “nine year work marriage” with the other Co-Director Pauline Helm-Hernandez.⁵⁷ Breedlove explained her decision:

As a white leader in an LGBTQ movement full of transition, I recognize how important it is to lead from other seats than a Director’s chair. Ships sail or falter based on a whole crew, not only a captain and when captains appear out of the ranks it’s important that they get their rightful place and time in power. The accompaniment and support I can provide new captains is one of the best ways I can lead right now both for SONG and for the movement.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Caitlin Breedlove, “Willing to be Transformed: A Nine Year Queer, Cross-Race Work Marriage,” *Caitlin Breedlove Blog*, September 24, 2015, <https://medium.com/@caitlinbreedlove/willing-to-be-transformed-a-nine-year-queer-cross-race-work-marriage-33dd247d0bd5>.

⁵⁸ Caitlin Breedlove, “Building The Ship We Need For This Moment: A Message From Caitlin Breedlove,” Southerners on New Ground, last modified September 15, 2015, <http://southernersonnewground.org/2015/09/buildtheship/>.

Breedlove's decision is a testament to the dynamic nature of SONG. The structure of the organization entails movement and change in order to remain relevant as a queer liberation movement and serve the community. Breedlove's position was taken over by SONG's field organizer in Atlanta, Mary Hooks in October 2015.⁵⁹

Mary Hooks is one of those liminal people who defy normative notions of place and identity. She is an African American lesbian who raises a 3-year-old daughter with her partner in Atlanta, GA. Like most people I interviewed, Mary does not live in areas that are "rural" by definition. According to the Census Bureau urban areas (UAs) have the population of 50,000 or more and "rural" encompasses "population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area."⁶⁰ However, Mary has been fostering communication and connections between folks who live all over the South in more traditionally "rural" areas. Mary's liminality is found in how she identifies and sees herself in connection to geography, region, and land.

I interviewed Mary Hooks before a SNaPCo – Solutions not Punishment Coalition meeting in Atlanta in September 2014 (Figure 18). Formed in February 2013, SNaPCo brings together dozens of social justice organizations in Atlanta.⁶¹

⁵⁹ "Getting Saved to Organize In the South: Welcoming Mary Hooks as SONG's New Co-Director," Southerners on New Ground, last modified October 9, 2015, <http://southernersonnewground.org/2015/10/maryhooks/>.

⁶⁰ "2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria," The US Census Bureau, accessed October 31, 2015, <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html>.

⁶¹ Everette Thompson, "Solutions, Not Punishment: For People Just Trying to Survive," Racial Justice Action Center, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://rjactioncenter.org/sites/default/files/files/SNaPCo%20Little5PointsStatement.pdf>.

SNaPCo came together to oppose the Banishment Ordinance and support pre-Booking Diversion for low-level sex and drug offences. The organization got more active over the summer of 2014 after several attacks against trans women of color occurred on the public transport system, MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority).⁶² SNaPCo demanded the City of Atlanta to cooperate with MARTA and other transportation systems to ensure a public education program “similar to the Trans and Gender Identity Respect Campaign out of Washington, D.C.”⁶³ The bystanders who filmed the beating and shared the videos on social media added a layer of callousness and violence to already disturbing and senseless attacks. The videos were disrespectful to the survivors and more than anything served to sensationalize gender nonconforming people and violence.

At the time of our interview, Mary was a field organizer in Atlanta, GA. She started organizing part-time for SONG in summer 2011. Although she only had four contacts to start with, she got in her car and drove around Alabama looking for “gay people.”⁶⁴ In her own words:

I hopped in my car and tried all sort of ways. Went to the artsy parts of town and would smoke and people who walked pass offer light. I would go to straight places where I knew that there would be gay people there. I would out myself. I went to an open mic and said that I was a lesbian woman who was part of this organization.⁶⁵

⁶² Thompson, “Solutions, Not Punishment.”

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Mary Hooks, conversation with author, September 9, 2014.

⁶⁵ Ibid.



Figure 18. Mary Hooks.

Source: Mary Hooks' Facebook page, November 29, 2015, accessed March 27, 2016,
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153772368497743&set=a.462792367742.261241.651052742&type=3&theater>.

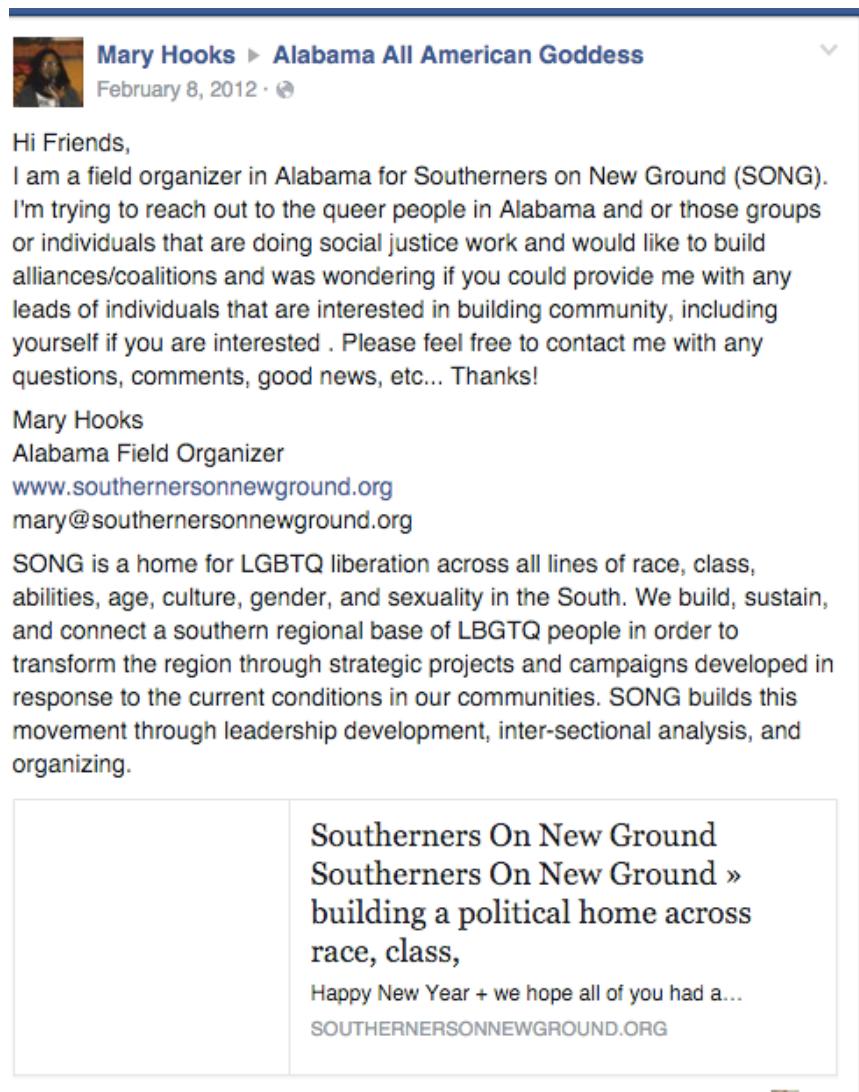
Mary would have young African American women approach her and be astonished that she was a “lesbian.” The main goal of her travel was to collect contacts, create networks and bring people together for social gatherings. When she found enough people across the state, SONG organized get-togethers and movie screenings.

Mary’s liminal movement that defies notions of space and time is possible only because of her ability to read the physical, social, and cultural landscapes of Alabama. As a field organizer, Mary moved in “straight places” and created opportunities for queer places by outing herself because she “knew that there would be gay people there.”⁶⁶ She would consciously put herself in liminal places in the already liminal geography of rural Deep South: sanding in the streets and smoking, optimistic for queer places to emerge by the light of a cigarette. The Internet as a means of communication cannot be discounted in creating this heterotopic space of possibility (Figure 19). Mary used social media as a catalyst for movement and reached out to people via LGBT related groups in the area.⁶⁷ Mary’s experience makes evident the need for queer activism on the margins to be culturally multilingual in order to be effective in creating itself a new position that is no longer on the fringes of society, but brought to the center.

Being literate in more than one language – heteronormative mainstream, homonormative LGBT, marginalized queer subculture – can be a dangerous place to be: this heterotopia can turn either into queer utopia or dystopia.

⁶⁶ Hooks, conversation with author.

⁶⁷ Ibid.



Mary Hooks ▶ Alabama All American Goddess
February 8, 2012 ·

Hi Friends,
I am a field organizer in Alabama for Southerners on New Ground (SONG). I'm trying to reach out to the queer people in Alabama and or those groups or individuals that are doing social justice work and would like to build alliances/coalitions and was wondering if you could provide me with any leads of individuals that are interested in building community, including yourself if you are interested . Please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, good news, etc... Thanks!

Mary Hooks
Alabama Field Organizer
www.southerneronnewground.org
mary@southerneronnewground.org

SONG is a home for LGBTQ liberation across all lines of race, class, abilities, age, culture, gender, and sexuality in the South. We build, sustain, and connect a southern regional base of LBGTQ people in order to transform the region through strategic projects and campaigns developed in response to the current conditions in our communities. SONG builds this movement through leadership development, inter-sectional analysis, and organizing.

Southerners On New Ground
Southerners On New Ground »
building a political home across
race, class,
Happy New Year + we hope all of you had a...
SOUTHERNERONNEWGROUND.ORG

Figure 19. Mary Hooks' use of social media as a catalyst for movement.

Source: Mary Hooks, "Mary Hooks Post to Alabama All American Goddess," February 8, 2010, Screenshot, accessed March 27, 2016,
<https://www.facebook.com/AlabamaAAG/posts/237381429680778>.

During a time of crisis multilingualism has often meant, “walking on thin ice” as the first casualties of war have historically been the liminal characters who walk between the normative (“civilization”) and the non-normative (“wild”).⁶⁸ However, in terms of direct potentially dangerous encounters Mary only recalled one negative experience when during “one black led organization event, a woman came up” and “said stuff about God.”⁶⁹ Mary’s experience does not confirm the stereotype of rural Deep South as exceptionally homophobic. On the contrary, Mary’s presence as a queer activist of color that poses danger to mainstream politics and stereotypical ideas about LGBTQ people on the fringes of society.

Mary’s work as a filed organizer Alabama is extreme in a sense that she had to build community from scratch, but it also highlights how SONG operates on the most grassroots level. Alabama is to date the most recent addition to SONG; other states especially Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia have more established networks. After a year and a half, Mary left her human resources job and joined SONG as a full-time field organizer in Atlanta, GA in February 2013.⁷⁰ She said she felt a calling.

For Mary this calling was connected to a sense of belonging in the South, what she calls her “home-base.”⁷¹ Throughout her life, Mary has lived in different places in the United States. She grew up in Racine, Wisconsin and graduated from Carthage College in spite of her religious aunt trying to get her expelled

⁶⁸ Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 21.

⁶⁹ Hooks, conversation with author.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

because of her “lesbianism.” Although moving to the suburbs of Atlanta, coming back to South meant coming back “to the land in a lot of ways:”

I identify as a Southerner. My grandparents are from Mississippi, Tuskegee Alabama. I identify with the culture. I’ve lived in different places and so it has influenced how I express myself. But in terms of what South means to black folks, I certainly identify as a Southerner. Going back South is as close as you can get for black folks in terms of going back to Africa. I mean to the land in a lot of ways. The South is where black people identify as a home base even if you were raised in the North.⁷²

Mary’s movement speaks to a reverse trend of African Americans migrating to the South in the late 20th century.⁷³ During the Civil War, ninety-five percent of all black people lived in the South, constituting “one-third of the population in contrast to [...] 1 percent of the Northern population.”⁷⁴ In the early decades of the 20th century, however, African Americans started to migrate to the North away from Jim Crow in search for better life and working conditions. Historians tend to differentiate between two migration waves: first Great Migration after World War I and the second more substantial one after World War II. Historian James Noble Gregory writes, “as long as there have been something called the American South, southerners in significant numbers have been leaving.”⁷⁵ In other words, not only were African Americans leaving, the whites were leaving too during a period between 1915 and 1965.

According to William F. Frey’s study on migration patterns between 1965

⁷² Hooks, conversation with author.

⁷³ Larry Copeland, “For Blacks, a Return to Southern Roots,” *USA Today*, July 1, 2011, accessed October 31, 2015, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2011-06-30-black-south-census-migration_n.htm.

⁷⁴ James M. McPherson, *Drawn with the Sword. Reflections on the American Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15.

⁷⁵ Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 12.

and 2000, this trend was reversed in the late 1990s when more African Americans were moving back to the South whereas “major metropolitan areas of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco” experienced “the greatest out-migration of blacks.”⁷⁶ College graduates are leading this new reverse migration of African Americans to the South. Between 1995 and 2000 the biggest “brain gain” state was Georgia, while “New York suffered the largest net loss.”⁷⁷ In 2010, 57 % of black Americans lived in the South, which is the highest percentage since the 1960s.⁷⁸ The top 5 states with the largest “black alone-or-in-combination populations” in 2010 were New York (3.3 million), Florida (3.2 million), Texas (3.2 million), Georgia (3.1million). Between 2000 and 2010, the black alone-or-in-combination population grew most in Florida (29%), Georgia (28%), Texas (27%), and North Carolina (21%).⁷⁹ At the same time, Washington, DC formerly known as the “Chocolate City” and which is considered part of the Census-defined South saw a 10.3% decrease in black alone-or-in-combination population.⁸⁰ As a result of new reverse migration in 2010, 47% of black alone-or-in-combination population lived in the 11 former Confederate states.⁸¹

Although African American expatriates are moving back into the region, it does not mean that there is magically less discrimination in the South. More

⁷⁶ William H. Frey, “The New Great Migration: Black Americans’ Return to the South, 1965-to 2000” (The Brookings Institution, 2004), 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Larry Copeland, “For Blacks, a Return to Southern Roots,” *USA Today*, July 1, 2011, 1A, accessed March 17, 2016, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2011-06-30-black-south-census-migration_n.htm.

⁷⁹ Sonya Rastogi et al. for the U.S. Census Bureau, “The Black Population: 2010,” The U.S. Census Bureau, September 2011, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Rastogi, “The Black Population: 2010,” 7.

⁸¹ Orville Vernon Burton, “The South as the Other, The Southerner as Stranger,” *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 79 Issue 1, (February 2012): 37.

recent statistics show that people moving back to their home states are poor, and a lot of migration actually occurs within the Southern states.⁸² SONG people I talked to were not so much concerned with street violence coming from civilians as they were and had experienced violence from the state. During our interview, Mary recalled two recent occasions when she endured mistreatment and violence at the hands of the police.

First incident occurred in April 2014 when she saw black women getting pulled over by cops and videotaped the encounter. She realized that simply recording it “wasn’t enough” because “you only show it to friends and delete it when your memory gets full.”⁸³ Mary asked the women if they needed help and whether they knew their rights. One of the women happened to be a lesbian and asked if Mary could call her partner. When Mary asked the women, “Do you know that you don’t have to talk to them?” she was attacked by the police. In her own words:

The moment I said that, two white cops charged me, threw me to the ground and I ended up with a fractured elbow, had some scars on my forehead, and was thrown in jail for obstruction of justice and disorderly conduct.⁸⁴

Not even a month after this incident, she was harassed by a trooper in Alabama while on her way back from a conference in Mississippi. Here is her full description of the encounter:

⁸² Burton, “The South as the Other,” 35.

⁸³ Hooks, conversation with author.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

I was with two my comrades. Two or three o'clock in the morning. And yeah, he pulled me over, and was like, 'do you know how fast you're going?' I was like, 'no, but I believe I was slowing down because I was about to go out to an exit.' He says, 'if you don't know how fast you're going then maybe you should not be driving.' Started being really belittling, and I had to hold myself cause I still remember the trauma I had experienced from just getting beat up by the cops, which was not even a month ago, I think. And so he let me go didn't give me a ticket. This time I'm in tears because I didn't realize how much trauma I was holding my body in. He pulled me over again. And came back, and was like, 'are you mentally unstable? Are you?...Give me your license.' Snatched my license. Still didn't give me a ticket. But continued to berate me. He was like, 'why are you crying? Are you on drugs?' And I was like, 'my tears don't concern you. If you want to give me a ticket, give me a ticket.' It's really hard when you're being criminalized and experiencing violence by the state because you know, I'm a woman, and I know that in the past I have been able to flirt my way out of ticket. And I'm thinking to myself, I can't. The master's tools won't dismantle the master's house. I'm not going to put my titties in your face, nor am I gonna shuck and jive in order to not get a ticket.⁸⁵

Mary's stories are horrifyingly dehumanizing and speak to historical trauma among African Americans. There is no possible way to count for the violence inflicted upon African Americans and people of color by the police. National database that records police violence or even use of deadly force does not exist. The current FBI report on the use of deadly force by law enforcement contains numbers only from 750 law enforcement agencies out of the 17,000 in the United States.⁸⁶ Data from these contributing agencies shows that under justifiable homicide white police officer killed a black person "nearly two times a week" during the "seven-year period ending in 2012."⁸⁷ Also, "18% of the blacks killed

⁸⁵ Hooks, conversation with author.

⁸⁶ Kevin Johnson, Meghan Hoyer and Brad Heath, "Local Police Involved in 400 Killings per Year," *USA Today*, August 15, 2014, accessed October 31, 2015

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/08/14/police-killings-data/14060357/>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

during those seven years were under age 21, compared to 8.7% of whites.⁸⁸ Although giving at least an inkling of the dreary reality of police brutality, statistics like these should be used with caution because they can do more harm than good. It gives us an illusion of having an understanding of, or control over state violence whereas in fact we do not.

South, especially in recent years, however, is not just black and white, which also reflects very much in the politics of SONG. Claiming the South as going to “the land” as Mary described it is important also to immigrant communities, especially to immigrants of color. Sociologist Barbara Ellen Smith and geographer Jamie Winders have pointed out the problematic popular tendency to imagine the South as only black and white in terms of civil rights movement, which ultimately renders immigration invisible.⁸⁹ In terms of African American New Great Migration, people were returning who had connections to the South that went back for several generations. The growth of cities and industry in the Sun Belt is bringing in immigrants who do not have previous generational connections to the region and culture, which makes this population vulnerable to a unique set of institutional and street violence.

Since 1970, the Latino population has increased six-fold, from 9.1 million to 53 million in 2012.⁹⁰ According to the 2012 U.S. Census Bureau reports, the Hispanic population would more than double, from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128.8

⁸⁸ Johnson, “Local Police.”

⁸⁹ Jamie Winders and Barbara Ellen Smith, “Excepting/Accepting the South: New Geographies of Latino Migration, New Directions in Latino Studies,” *Latino Studies*, 10.1-2 (2012): 220-245.

⁹⁰ Jens Manuel Krogstad and Mark Hugo Lopez, “Hispanic Nativity Shift: U.S. Births Drive Population Growth as Immigration Stalls,” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project, 2014).

million in 2060. Consequently, by the end of the period, nearly one in three U.S. residents would be Hispanic, up from about one in six today.⁹¹ The South first saw a sharp increase in Latino immigrants in the 1990s. The fastest-growing Latino population in the nation over the past decade was in South Carolina, at 147.9 percent, followed by Alabama, at 144.8 %.⁹² The South saw a growth of 57 % in its Latino population, which was four times the growth of the total population in the region (14 %).⁹³ New arrivals are people escaping poverty in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. Important to keep in mind that Latinos are a diverse groups of people in terms of ethnicity, generations, education level, economic status, and documentation.

Despite the South's history of civil rights activism, the current situation for Latinos in the South is troubling enough that the inhumane immigration laws and discrimination that occurs on a daily basis have been referred to as Juan Crow. The South has some of the firmest anti-immigration laws in the nation (Alabama's HB 56 that was signed into law in 2011 being arguably the strictest).⁹⁴ In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of Latinos in the South, Southern Poverty Law Center interviewed more than 500 low-income people in five locations across the South: Nashville, Charlotte, New Orleans, rural southern Georgia and

⁹¹ "U.S. Census Bureau Projections Show a Slower Growing, Older, More Diverse Nation a Half Century from Now," United States Census Bureau, Accessed October 31, 2015, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04.pdf>.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Southern Poverty Law Center, "Under Siege: Life for Low-Income Latinos in the South," April 2009, accessed October 31, 2015, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/publications/under-siege-life-for-low-income-latino-in-the-south>.

several towns and cities in northern Alabama.⁹⁵ The study found that Latino populations are living under constant fear and facing harassment on a daily basis. Latinos do the hardest, most hazardous work for the least pay. Yet they face discrimination from the government, the law enforcement, employers, and landlords. The degree of this culture of fear varies within the diverse Latino population; diversity includes differences in the kinds of neighborhoods they live, the jobs people hold, and engagement in the community.

Diversity within the population and other more pressing daily issues has resulted in a lag of activism among Latinos. Perhaps surprisingly within a population considered religiously conservative, an undocumented activist movement has emerged lead by queer immigrants. A report released by the Williams Institute at UCLA in 2013 estimated that “there are at least 267,000 self-identified LGBT undocumented immigrant adults living in the United States.”⁹⁶ This does not count for people who are under 18 or the 637,000 self-identified LGBT people among the adult documented immigrant population.⁹⁷ LGBT undocumented immigrants fighting for immigration reform refer to themselves as “undocuqueer” and their numbers are most likely higher than revealed by the study.

National LGBTQ movement has not embraced immigration as one of their issues. Only a handful of organizations focus on the issue, The National Center

⁹⁵ Southern Poverty Law Center, “Under Siege.”

⁹⁶ Elena Shore, “Who Are the ‘UndocuQueer?’ New Reports Shed Light.” *New America Media*, March 8, 2013, accessed October 31, 2015, <http://newamericamedia.org/2013/03/who-are-the-undocuqueer-new-reports-shed-light.php>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

for Lesbian Rights being one of them. The latter, however, advocates equality through policy and legislation. There are no movement-building LGBT organizations besides SONG that have made immigration reform as one of their main causes. SONG believes in community organizing as a way to enact change. SONG has played a pivotal role in advocating for immigration reform in the South and fighting against systematic discrimination against Latinos in the region. The organization was part of the #Not1More (Ni uno más) campaign which was originally launched in April 2013 in response to deportations and state violence against immigrants in Arizona.⁹⁸ The campaign “builds collaboration between individuals, organizations, artists, and allies” to demand an end to unjust immigration laws and deportations that separate people from loved ones.⁹⁹ This coalition-based movement had SONG activists in the frontlines and got a major victory recently in Georgia when they won an injunction against section 7 of HB 87 wherein “harboring illegal aliens” was made punishable by law for individuals and organizations.¹⁰⁰

The dour state of immigration rights in the South has made the politics of citizenship more of pressing issue than sexuality for some SONG members. Salem Acuña, a field organizer in Richmond, VA is one of the most fierce immigration reform advocates within the organization (Figure 20). Salem was born and raised in Santiago, Chile for the first 7 years of his life before migrating

⁹⁸ NotOneMore Campaign, “About,” accessed October 31, 2015, <http://www.notonemoredeportation.com/about/>

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ “About: Vision, Mission, History,” Southerners on New Ground, accessed October 31, 2015, <http://southernersonground.org/about/vision-mission-history/>.



Figure 20. Salem Acuña.

Source: "Staff," Southerners on New Ground, accessed March 27, 2016,
<http://southernersonnewground.org/about/staff/>.

to the United States in 1997. He arrived in Miami, FL but grew up and went to high school in the Washington, D.C. metro area. Growing up he was more concerned with “where I fit in this immigrant experience. So a lot of the images that I look for were Latino folk or immigrant folk who were successful.”¹⁰¹ While still in high school he was active in organizing against the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006. He went to “a community college for some time” and moved to Richmond in 2008.¹⁰² That is where he discovered SONG and started to organize around immigration and LGBTQ justice. Being part of a family of documented and undocumented members, Salem sees immigration issues as “never really separate from queer issues.”¹⁰³ Considering not just the presence but also the invaluable work done by undocumented immigrants in the community is central to SONG’s organizing and how members communicate with each other.

The truly multi-issue focus of SONG was highlighted during an informal fundraiser event at Salem house in early November 2014. This was at the height of the Ferguson protest that erupted after police officer Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown. As a result, a lot of the SONG family was on the move that Fall; travelling to protests across the South to provide support. The Facebook invite to the event read:

Lovely SONG members, supporters, lovers and friends,

¹⁰¹ Salem Acuna, conversation with author, May 9, 2014.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Join the entire SONG board and staff, along with local members, for an evening of Queer Liberation RVA style! As a political home, SONG has always been about investing in building long-lasting connection and kinship among LGBTQ folks in the South. We would like to invite you to come out and learn more about SONG's work across the region, mingle with SONG leadership and experience some fierce spoken word from our local SONG members. And as always--come looking fabulous!¹⁰⁴

The core members, but also supporters all over the South had gathered at Salem's house. This included Mary Hooks who was making a stop on her way to protests in Baltimore; one of the original founders, Suzanne Pharr; and a number of people from the community who were not necessarily "members." The potluck-style gathering culminated with recap of recent activities and multi-racial bilingual slam poetry (in Spanish and in English). The performance ended with Mary Hooks, who happens to be a member of a queer choir in Atlanta, chanting words of empowerment while language justice activist, Roberto Tijerina translated each line into Spanish:

In this moment,
We are the movement.
Let's move while we can still do it.
It's not about fighting for rights,
It's about continuing the fight for
our lives.
We are the civil rights movement.

En este momento,
somos el movimiento.
Ahora vamos a movernos mientras que todavía
podemos.
No se trata de luchar por nuestros derechos.
Se trata de continuar la lucha para nuestras
vidas.
Somos el movimiento de derechos civiles.

¹⁰⁴ Salem Acuna, Facebook message to author, October 30, 2014.

The feeling of community and solidarity in the room after this communal chant could not be unfelt or forgotten. A diverse group of about 50 people present at the time were all connected with what Mary Hooks would call, “the fire in the belly” to imagine and work toward a more just South.¹⁰⁵

The people at Salem’s house differed not just in terms of race, ethnicity, immigration status, age, gender or sexuality, but also in terms of their work and where they lived in the South. As said there were core staff people in leadership positions, and committed members who would be very much involved in protests and events, but also folks who *feel* connected by simply living across the South. Those loosely affiliated folks included college professors, farmers, lawyers, high school teachers, and people working with various social justice non-profits across the region. Such diversity speaks to how the activist ideas in the South are shared and communicated: often not directly via a SONG staff member during a protest or meeting, but by an affiliated supporter who works in education or at a non-profit. Ultimately, SONG is a network of people, including me, who share the organization’s values and advocate for social justice in the South.

Hieu Tran is one of those loosely affiliated SONG member is whom I met at Salem’s house that same night (Figure 21). Hieu shares Mary’s idea of being close to land and building infrastructure in the South that would benefit people in

¹⁰⁵ Hooks, conversation with author.



Figure 21. Hieu Tran.

Source: "Staff," Lynchburg Grows, accessed October 31, 2015,
<http://lynchburggrows.org/our-story/staff/>.

diverse communities.¹⁰⁶ He works as a farmer for Lynchburg Grows in Lynchburg, VA. Founded in 2003, Lynburg Grows is an urban farm that focuses on promoting “sustainable food production” in the community. The non-profit’s main focus is to take “a hands-in-the-dirt approach” to provide “people with special needs a space to share their talents and skills while acquiring new ones.”¹⁰⁷ Food justice activism is crucial in improving livability in the South: it aims to provide people with skills to grow their own food and restructure neighborhoods to avoid and eliminate food deserts.

Although Hieu is not an active member of SONG in a sense that he is not part of the core staff, he is an activist in his everyday life and work who shares the organization’s aims to “transform economic, social, spiritual, and political relationships and create a more sustainable South.”¹⁰⁸ As discussed earlier, due to limited resources and restrictions posed by geography and culture, activists in the South need to build alliances across injustices. Although Lynchburg Grows consists of predominately white heterosexual staff members, environmental sustainability and ableism are key queer issues that demand coalition with queer people of color like Hieu.

Hieu’s position makes him another liminal character whose personal narrative cannot be bound by metronormativity, or normalized conceptions of rural/urban and South/non-South. Hieu identifies as a masculine presenting Vietnamese American gay man. Yet similar to other people I interviewed, being

¹⁰⁶ Hieu Tran, conversation with author, November 17, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ “Our Story,” Lynchburg Grows, accessed March 17 2016, <http://lynchburggrows.org/our-story/>.

¹⁰⁸ “About,” Southerners on New Ground, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://southernersonnewground.org/about/>.

gay is only one of many pressure points that shape his identity. Originally from Sterling, VA, Hieu grew up in a first generation Vietnamese American home and went to college in Richmond, VA. It was around that time he became involved with SONG and helped to organize with staff members Hermelinda Cortes and Salem Acuña. His movement is from Northern Virginia – a more liberal part of the state often regarded as more part of Washington, D.C. than Virginia – to the more rural Lynchburg, VA, home to one of the symbols of conservatism in the United States, Liberty University.

Through his work, mobility, and identity Hieu exists in the junctures of some of the most pressing injustice issues in the South. Hieu does not feel threatened by direct violence in his community, which he attributes mainly to his masculine gender presentation. However, being HIV-positive in predominately white heteronormative and rather isolated community makes him vulnerable to structural violence. Hieu says he has always felt “like an alien” and he feels like an “alien” right now in Lynchburg because connecting with other queer people is limited.¹⁰⁹ Hieu said he tries to go on “grinder dates,” but finding people to date complicated because there is still a lot of stigma attached to HIV, especially in regions that are misconstrued as disease free.

Yet Hieu’s HIV-positive diagnosis is not a rare or isolated case. The highest numbers of new HIV/AIDS cases are in the Deep South. The South is home to 37% of the US population and counts for nearly 50% of new HIV

¹⁰⁹ Tran, conversation with author.

infections.¹¹⁰ In a recent *Washington Post* article, Teresa Wiltz summarizes this shift in the politics of the disease:

The original face of AIDS was that of a middle-class, often white, gay man living in New York or San Francisco. That picture has changed over time as people of color have become disproportionately affected by the epidemic. Today, the face of AIDS is black or Latino, poor, often rural — and Southern.¹¹¹

As with anti-LGBTQ hate crime the “victim” gets imagined as white cis male who lives in the city. Stereotypical images like this distort our perception of the actual conditions of the disease, which means that regions with most vulnerable populations are disproportionately underfunded.

As a result of less state and private funding, people in the South do not have the kind of infrastructure in place that has been developed in New York City or San Francisco. HIV and AIDS treatment is expensive. The estimated cost per year for “early access to medical treatment, including retroviral therapy” was \$25,000 in 2012 whereas treatment during the disease progression could be as high as \$300,000.¹¹² The South has some of the highest levels of poverty in the US. Nine of the 10 states with the lowest median incomes are located in the South.¹¹³ The CDC report released in 2012 found that more than 40 percent of

¹¹⁰ “Southern States Manifesto: Policy Brief and Recommendations,” Southern Aids Coalition, July 2012, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://southern aids coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Southern-States-Manifesto-Update-2012.pdf>.

¹¹¹ Teresa Wiltz, “Southern States Are Now Epicenter of HIV/AIDS in the U.S.,” *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2014, accessed March 17, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/southern-states-are-now-epicenter-of-hiv-aids-in-the-us/2014/09/22/9ac1525a-39e6-11e4-9c9f-ebe47272e40e_story.html.

¹¹² “Southern States Manifesto: Policy Brief and Recommendations.”

¹¹³ Susan Reif et al., “HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the South Reaches Crisis Proportions in Last Decade,” Duke Center for Health Policy and Inequalities Research, last modified October 23, 2012, <http://chpir.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/HIVAIDS-Epidemic-in-the-South-Reaches-Crisis-Proportions-in-Last-Decade.pdf>.

those infected with the disease have an annual household income of \$10,000 or less.¹¹⁴ The Southern states have the least expansive Medicaid programs and the strictest eligibility requirements to qualify for assistance (it's not enough to be poor in order to qualify). Nine Deep South states with the highest rates of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses — Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas – also have the highest fatality rates from HIV according to Southern AIDS Coalition.¹¹⁵ Systematic challenges deter people living with HIV and AIDS to get help in the South – high poverty rates, racism, lower levels of education, inadequate transportation infrastructure, homophobia, no jobs and health insurance, restrictive Medicaid rules, and barriers to access to quality routine health care – are all connected and the reason why a huge part of the population's opportunity to make a life and survive are catastrophically low.

All those structural forms of violence covered so far are intertwined with economic justice. LGBT people in the South are at the greatest financial risk according to a recent report on the economic well being of LGBT people in the United States.¹¹⁶ The researchers found that the groups most at risk were: "LGBT people with children, LGBT people of color, LGBT older adults, and LGBT people living in states with low levels of LGBT equality."¹¹⁷ People with

¹¹⁴ Mikaela Conley, "HIV Hot Spots in America," Center for Health Journalism, July 10, 2013, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.reportingonhealth.org/2013/07/10/hivaids-hotspots-america>.

¹¹⁵ "Southern States Manifesto: Policy Brief and Recommendations."

¹¹⁶ "Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for Being LGBT in America," Movement Advancement Project and Center for American Progress, September 26, 2014, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.lgbtmap.org/file/paying-an-unfair-price-full-report.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ "Paying an Unfair Price."

intersectional identities are at even greater risk: 1 out of 3 LGBTQ people identify as non-white. African Americans in same-sex partnerships are “more than twice as likely to live in poverty” as heterosexual African Americans couples.¹¹⁸ Data from the U.S. Census report showed that women of color in same-sex couples are nearly twice as likely to be raising children as white women in same-sex couples (35% vs. 24%).¹¹⁹ Children raised by same-sex parents are almost twice as likely to be poor as children raised by married opposite-sex parents.

Most people I talked to brought up poverty and lack of jobs as the two main concerns for people in the South. During his interview Salem put the issue most poignantly, “People can talk about discrimination at their jobs if they have jobs.”¹²⁰ One of the founders of SONG, Suzanne Pharr has been actively organizing around social and economic justice across the United States since the early 1980s. She agrees that employment is the single most important issue for LGBTQ folks in the South. According to her, the recent protests in Ferguson, Missouri are the result of having “a whole generation of people who can’t have economically sustainable lives.”¹²¹ The root cause of economically unsustainable lives and communities is the systematic violence at the hands of the state that creates an inescapable cycle of injustice for marked bodies.

“Xicana queer feminist,” Hermelinda Cortés is the rural and communications organizer for SONG in Harrisonburg, VA (Figure 22). During our

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Gary J. Gates and Frank Newport, “Special Report: 3.4% of U.S. Adults Identify as LGBT,” Gallup Politics, October 18, 2012, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/158066/specialreport-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx>.

¹²⁰ Acuna, conversation with author.

¹²¹ Suzanne Pharr, conversation with author, September 10, 2014.

interview, Hermelinda pointed out that this vicious cycle starts with the criminalization of marked bodies:

You know, from SONG's perspective we have been talking a lot about the criminalization of the body in general. When we start talking about how our bodies have been attacked and criminalized, we can then talk about the state of food systems in the South, we can then talk about mass incarceration in the South, and the prison system. We can talk about the way undocumented people are treated in the South, we can talk about the way, you know, there are black health disparities because of a failed health system in the South.¹²²

Basis for economic security is good health. In order to have good health, you need a job to pay for your health care and rent in a neighborhood that is not a food desert. In order to have a job you need to have education and skills. Yet education system discriminates against marginalized groups systematically (the quality of schools depends on where you live) and directly (normative whitewashed standards and curriculum exclude minorities).

This cycle of systematic violence gets accentuated for LGBTQ folks by more abstract, but certainly very visceral form of violence as Hermelinda noted:

the sheer isolation that people are dealing with is an incredible form of violence that I think is probably one of the most overwhelming things that combat that people are dealing with. Even our folks on staff who are very well connected to each other and networks, but we all still get isolated as queer folks of color who are mostly working class and low income. It's you know... if nothing else gets you then isolation will. So I think that is what so much of our work is around trying to break that isolation because we see it as such a huge form of violence.¹²³

¹²² Hermelinda Cortés, conversation with author, April 12, 2014.

¹²³ Ibid.



Figure 22. Hermelinda Cortés.

Source: "Staff," Southerners on New Ground, accessed March 27, 2016,
<http://southernersonnewground.org/about/staff/>.

Southern cities, suburban areas, and college campuses are very different from regions off the interstates. Driving from Williamsburg, VA to Richmond is a short one-hour trip at most. The South as a more isolated region reveals itself when you decide to take the state routes instead of I-64. Taking Richmond Road (US 60 West) via Pocahontas Road, for instance, takes you past spread out town churches, barbershops, thrift stores, local non-chain diners, car repair stores, and a few Food Lions. You can't walk to a train or bus station. The only realistic means of transportation is by car, which makes livability index in those areas very low.¹²⁴ This is not something that makes the South necessarily exceptional. Places with low livability index can be found across the United States.

Movement and mobility entail privilege that many poor queer folks in the South do not have. As discussed earlier, SONG staff and folks are unique in that sense as they move between cities, suburban and rural areas. I interviewed Hermelina in Washington, D.C. as she was on her way to New York City to see some friends. Hermelinda's story reveals another aspect of SONG activists' liminality that redefines our notions of place and belonging. Clearly not adhering to metronormative narratives, Hermelinda is also not adamantly anti-urban and pro-South without reservations. Hermelinda, Hieu, Salem live in the South, but at times they long for a connection to the city and bigger queer community: they travel to Washington, D.C. or New York City. Yet they all want to live in the South and some of them in more traditionally rural communities. Even at times during which the activists did not live in the South, as many of them noted, they always

¹²⁴ "Livability Index: Great Neighborhoods for All Ages," *AARP Magazine*, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://livabilityindex.aarp.org/>.

identified as part of the culture. SONG folks' relationship to place is contested and not one-dimensionally celebratory or dismissive. They exist in the in-between borderlands both psychologically and physically, whereas the two cannot really be separated when it comes to queer world making. The presence of SONG activists and their work allows for the in-between spaces and geographic margins to become centers of transformation.

In his landmark book, *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach discusses borderlands where the socially peripheral can become symbolically central.¹²⁵ He connects the works of Benedict Anderson, Mikhail Bakhtin, Peter Stallybrass, and Allon White to argue that only on the borderlands of life, death, race, and gender can an “alternative historical model of intercultural encounter” occur.¹²⁶ Importantly, when borderlands “as the perimeters of reciprocity become the center, so to speak, of multilateral self-definition,” we are able to imagine a new kind of community.¹²⁷ SONG activists’ practice confirms Roach’s theories: the most intense, innovate, and productive life takes place on the many margins of our culture.

Here reveals the positive aspect of existing outside the norm: SONG can redefine activism and what LGBTQ politics mean. According to Sheldon Hackney, southerners “traditionally have had to define themselves in opposition to a presumed American norm.”¹²⁸ Defining yourself in opposition to something is

¹²⁵ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 39.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 189.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Sheldon Hackney, “The South as a Counterculture,” *American Scholar*, 42 (Spring 1973): 287.

a limited endeavor; SONG folks find themselves in the in-between of many normative values and dynamics of culture. Although statistics always hide more than they reveal, considering all the above-mentioned studies done in recent years we can conclude that the majority of the most diverse and marginalized populations within the United States live in the South. The South has more African Americans, immigrants, and LGBTQ identified people than any other region in the country. Yet, popular culture imagines the South as “country” that mostly consists of racist and homophobic white people. This uncharted gap in perception creates an opportunity to imagine a new world.

Existing in an uncharted in-between place, SONG folks got very little to lose, which can be liberating in terms of how they define themselves and their work. LGBTQ movement driven by “recognition politics” that is based on individual rights claims, only makes recognition available to a limited group of white middle class individuals.¹²⁹ As I have discussed in my previous chapters, in the context of anti-LGBTQ violence, recognition is limited to white urban cisgender gay men. Liminal position of SONG activists allows them go challenge the affective dynamics of what Deleuze and Guattari described as the capitalist faciality machine in three different ways.¹³⁰

First, people affiliated with SONG, dismantle faciality simply with their presence as queer people – and often queer people of color – in their own and adjacent communities who push the boundaries of mainstream LGBTQ

¹²⁹ Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers*, 135.

¹³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 167.

identification that is based on the middle class sex-gender model. SONG network is purposely pre-political. In *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993), Elizabeth L. Kennedy and Madeline Davis describe the midcentury working class femme-butch lesbians in Buffalo, NY as pre-political in as sense that their roles enacted served to enact social change outside the LGBT organizations advocacy.¹³¹ SONG performs activism by intentionally inhabiting gender-based pre-political and pre-homosexual identities and distancing themselves from mainstream LGBT culture.

When I asked who are the LGBTQ people that they follow or consider good role models, SONG folks would reference other members in their community, or some of the elders, and field organizers in other states. Especially for queer people of color the role models were not the Ellen DeGeneres, Anderson Cooper, or Neil Patrick Harris. Such stereotypical LGBTQ media personas are part of what I see as the abstract faciality machine in this context and shaped after the face of White Man – the most visible characters are affluent, white, thin, young, and mostly male.

Although a few people identifying as white would mention those names, they would also point out people in their community. For instance, Jo Benjamin, a white lesbian who works with youth at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA, said: “There are people I like just around JMU campus. There are a few forefathers, foremothers, fore-parents of the LGBT movement up here

¹³¹ Elizabeth L. Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 6.

in Harrisonburg.”¹³² Suzanne Pharr, one of the founding members of SONG, similarly pointed out Wendi O’Neal and Paulina-Helm Hernandez as some of the current people she follows and even considers her heroes.¹³³ Wendy O’Neal is a community activist in New Orleans and Paulina-Helm Hernandez who as mentioned earlier is currently one of the co-directors of SONG.

Second, SONG dismantles faciality by addressing some of the most pressing forms of discrimination that do not necessarily get covered in mainstream media. Especially issues around race, what Michelle Alexander has called “The New Jim Crow.” Alexander argues that what was accomplished by segregation and racial violence at the turn of the 19th century is achieved even more efficiently today by racial profiling, War on Drugs, and mass incarceration.¹³⁴ Tackling structural issues is not as easy to cover as street violence; racism does not make as glamorous of a magazine cover as a clean-cut case of anti-LGBTQ violence does, which allows us to identify the cause of the problem by pointing out the perpetrator and finding an easy fix through the prison-industrial complex.

This is not to say that direct acts of violence do not concern SONG members at all, which also brings us to the third aspect of how SONG as an organization disrupts the faciality machine and shifts the affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence. Although statistics clearly show trans bodies of color as the main targets of bias crimes, popular media does not mirror that. The incidents

¹³² Jo Ann Benjamin, conversation with author, March 5, 2014.

¹³³ Pharr, conversation with author.

¹³⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 3.

that inform SONG's work and lives of its activists share less with the mystifications of the faciality machine and are more in line with the reality of violence. Most people interviewed mentioned several trans women of color in their community who had been assaulted or killed, and also mentioned a more case that received mainstream attention: the violent attack against CeCe McDonald.

CeCe McDonald is a trans woman from Minneapolis, Minnesota who was attacked by group of four drunken white people during the night of June 5th 2011 while walking past a tavern with her friends. The attack was racially charged and transphobic as the group yelled words "faggots" and "niggers" at Cece McDonald and her friends who were all African American.¹³⁵ Although McDonald tried to leave, she was hit in the face with a glass of alcohol (a wound which later required stitches) and the two groups broke into a fight. At one point during the scuffle McDonald tried to leave again, but was followed by Dean Schmitz. McDonald took a pair of scissors from her purse, turned around and pointed them towards Schmitz in self-defense who was stabbed in the chest and died. None of the people who initiated the fight were charged, but McDonald was arrested on second-degree murder for what was self-defense against her attackers.

McDonald's story gathered considerable mainstream attention with trans activists Janet Mock and Laverne Cox speaking out in defense of Cece

¹³⁵ Nicole Pasulka "The Case of CeCe McDonald: Murder—or Self-Defense Against a Hate Crime?" *Mother Jones*, May 22, 2012, accessed October 31, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/05/cece-mcdonald-transgender-hate-crime-murder>.

McDonald. Ultimately what outraged activists even more was that not only was McDonald convicted of second-degree murder, but she was sentenced for 41-months in men's prison. Such outcome can only be tolerated in a society that insists that certain bodies are more deserving than others and others will be punished simply for surviving. McDonald was released after serving two-thirds of the time on January 20, 2014 and has become a trans rights activist herself.

The oral histories confirm some major disparities between the realities of queer people in the South and national organizational and LGBTQ media focus. South as a region is marginal in heteronormative national popular imagination, and also in homonormative bicoastal LGBT politics. Although the South can be seen as having a troubling history of repression when it comes to civil rights, there has always been a competing tradition of resilience and resistance to injustice. The people involved with SONG inhabit a geographically and socially marginal space: a subculture within an already subcultural region. This liminal space – often contested and painful – that opens up within and across these margins provides incredible possibilities for creative social justice activism. As this discussion shows, SONG works to reconfigure our notions of LGBTQ politics that have assumed hegemonic status. SONG entails the possibility to redefine from the edges of culture what humanity, (queer) identify, and citizenship mean in a time and place. Yet it is important to keep in mind that the discussion at hand is not representative of the South as a region in general. All places and localities are different. My argument would be different had I interviewed a different set of LGBTQ people in the South. The idea of activism discussed here is necessarily

ambivalent, imagining it in any other way would do injustice to the work done by SONG and would perpetuate the dominance of imperializing mainstream metropolitan LGBTQ narratives. Nevertheless, I believe that creative solutions to current crisis in social justice activism cannot be found in the mainstream but on the physical and psychological borderlands of society where conventional ideas about identity, place, and culture are dismantled and rebuilt as new.

Chapter 4

Reading the Silver Screen: Documentary Activism and Queer Truths



Figure 23. Robert Eads in *Southern Comfort*, opening scene.

Source: *Southern Comfort*, directed by Kate Davis (United States: HBO Documentary, 2001).

We hear roosters crowing in the background as the camera pans over a dirt road, a few houses, and finally stops to reveal the backyard of a trailer home. We see the back of a man in a cowboy hat sitting in a white plastic chair in front of a fire pit. “It’s Easter morning and it’s sunrise,” we hear a voice with a Southern accent say. The person in the chair, smoking his pipe, and watching the sun come up is a 52-year old Robert Eads who is planning an Easter cookout for his chosen family. Robert is a trans man who in this time of rebirth in the Spring has just come to terms with his terminal ovarian cancer and also fallen in love with a trans woman named Lola Cola.

This is the opening scene to *Southern Comfort*, a 2001 documentary by Kate Davis.¹ The film follows the last year in the life of Robert Eads, a trans man living in rural Georgia. Rural LGBTQ documentary may seem like an oxymoronic concept. Yet as I will show when it comes to the topic of anti-LGBTQ violence the majority of documentaries focus on cases that happened in traditionally non-urban areas. The idea that we do not have enough representations is a myth. We have a remarkable number of documentaries about the regional “other.” However, I argue that those representations are problematic as they function as sites of reference for mainstream culture to confirm the superiority of the urban and perpetuate the state of current affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence. It is not enough for the documentary to focus on the flyover country to be

¹ *Southern Comfort*, directed by Kate Davis (United States: HBO Documentary, 2001). The documentary is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH0L3wlV0hg>, accessed March 26, 2016.

considered an activist project. Often documentaries perpetuate the narrative of “mainstream national gay culture” that “associates urbanity with North and backwardness with the South.”² Time and time again rural stories have been juxtaposed against the progress narratives of the city. The city needs the “backwardness” of the imaginary non-urban in order to establish itself as a place of sexual freedom and queer utopia. Even the most recent queer documentary endeavors prove to be problematic. The web series *New Deep South’s* (2015) first episode “Instababy” follows the life of a young interracial lesbian couple, Toni and Keeta in Jackson, Mississippi as they are looking to adopt a baby via the social media network Instagram. The series displays the aesthetics and affect of a MTV reality show.³ There is nothing wrong with such aesthetics except for the characters in the documentary get judged and their lives evaluated against a background of aesthetics that are imposed by the dominant culture.

In comparison, *Southern Comfort* manages to exist on some of the most un-and misrepresented intersections of the LGBTQ community on its own terms. During the 90 minutes of *Southern Comfort* we meet Robert’s girlfriend Lola Cola, his adopted son Max and chosen family, his parents and one of his biological sons, Bo. Those encounters unfolding on the screen give the viewer a glimpse of the structural issues that a trans person living in rural areas might face concerning institution of family, identity politics, the medical establishment, and

² Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs, eds., *Between the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 34.

³ *New Deep South*, Episode 1, “Instababy,” directed by Rosie Haber and Lauren Cioffi, November 3, 2015, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.thefront.com/new-deep-south-series-episode1-instababy/>.

the overall livability of place. It shows the direct fatal effects that structural violence can have on non-normative people living in culturally and regionally subcultural communities. The film also brings to us the underrepresented image of a trans man. Although there is arguably more visibility now when it comes to trans men, in 2002 such images were close to nonexistent.⁴ I argue that the combination of those reasons, and several other aspects internal and external to the film, make *Southern Comfort* an activist project. To demonstrate the film's affective activist potential in this discussion of documentary images, I will continue to come back to *Southern Comfort* throughout this chapter and point out the ways in which it functions as such.

In the following pages, I will provide an overview of the academic debates on documentary film as a genre and see how LGBTQ representations fit in the discussion. It is fair to say that there really has not been written enough on LGBTQ documentary. The 1997 book, *Between the Sheets, in the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary* by Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs is still the most comprehensive collection specifically on LGBT documentary.⁵ Since the 1990s, there has been an extensive amount of scholarship done on queer media studies. Authors Alexander Doty, bell hooks, Roderick Ferguson have provided close readings of some pivotal queer texts and developed useful theoretical tools.⁶ Mary L. Gray has most recently elegantly connected queer rural oral

⁴ It is of course arguable how much visibility we have today. A lot of trans visibility has moved into social media, especially Tumblr and Instagram. The value of those online platforms cannot be underrated because those spaces are above all important to young LGBTQ folks, but they also should not be overrated as the be-all-and-end-all of visibility politics.

⁵ Holmlund, *Between the Sheets, in the Streets*.

⁶ Alexander Doty's notions of "queer reception" and "queer pleasure;" bell hooks' discussion of "oppositional gaze;" Roderick Ferguson's "queer of color critique."

histories and media studies.⁷ There have also been books on LGBT films in general, but not too much has been done on documentaries.⁸

In my discussion of the debates on the nature of documentary work, I will not refer to mainstream culture examples that have been used over and over again to explain particular modes or styles (*Thin Blue Line* as participatory, *Man with the Movie Camera* as reflexive, *Roger and Me* as expository). As an activist project, this chapter will provide an overview of LGBTQ documentaries that I have yet to encounter elsewhere. I admit that a lot of the categorization around documentary seems futile in poststructuralist writing about postmodern culture. Yet in order to understand where we are now, we need to be able to also understand the theories that have been shaping our views on documentaries, and despite criticism continue to be influential today.

In the now classic *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (1973), William Stott summarized the debates that had been going on around documentary since the 1930s. His straightforward seemingly obvious statement, *documentary* is a “complex contradictory word” remains truer today than ever before.⁹ What constitutes reality and documentary changes over time, as new technologies alter the way we perceive, consume, and reflect back on the world. While in the 1930s the debate around documentary concerned the art versus

⁷ Mary Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: New York University press, 2009).

⁸ Richard Dyer and Julianne Piddock, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); B Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013); Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); Barbara Mennel, *Queer Cinema: Schoolgirls, Vampires, and Gay Cowboys (Shortcuts)* (New York City: Wallflower Press, 2012).

⁹ William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 5.

propaganda dilemma, since the 1970s and especially after the 1990s with the rise of civil rights movement and media monitoring by different minority groups, the main concern has been discerning fiction from reality. The result of the debate between art and propaganda was a conclusion that documentary is a hybrid: both art and propaganda. The outcome of the ongoing dilemma between truth/reality and fiction/lies is the same: documentary is a little bit of truth and a little bit of fiction. New forms of communication and media convergence constantly make us re-conceptualize what documentary means. Yet no matter how drastically the technological-cultural playing field has changed historically, the questions have predominately remained the same.

The subgenre, LGBTQ documentary is even more of a complex concept. Does the director have to be LGBTQ in order for the documentary to count as LGBTQ? Or is a documentary considered LGBTQ when it focuses on the lives of LGBTQ folks? This gets even more complicated when we add more subcultural forms of existence on the plate: the South and the rural. What counts as a Southern rural LGBTQ documentary? Would the director have to be currently living in rural South, or have been living here at some point? Would the subject of the documentary have to rural South? As with most theoretical frameworks that reside at the intersection of multiple categories of social fiction, the question of what constitutes this framework is that of degree and not of kind. Therefore, I'd like to imagine Southern rural LGBTQ documentary as spectrum. Experimental documentaries by LGBTQ film makers living in the rural South and focusing on LGBTQ in the rural South on the one end of this spectrum and traditional

documentaries by non-LGBTQ directors on LGBTQ rural South on the other end.¹⁰

Southern Comfort resides in the middle of this spectrum. It is mostly a traditional documentary with a focus on LGBTQ life in the South and filmmaker who is not part of the community. Kate Davis met Robert Eads in 1998 at a female-to-male (FTM) convention called True Spirit in Maryland. At the time Davis was working with her husband on another LGBTQ documentary, *Transgender Revolution*.¹¹ They talked over coffee and Robert shared his story of having ovarian cancer and being denied treatment.¹² When Davis got back to New York, she realized she had to make a film about Robert. She called him up a week later and remembers Robert saying: "Yeah, I thought you'd call."¹³ Davis explains the reasoning behind Robert's intent to participate in the project:

Though Robert was a private person, he let me into his life, this mother of two who at age 35 decided to become a man, this cowboy with ovarian cancer. He knew that when the film was completed, he would be dead, and therefore 'safe.'¹⁴

¹⁰ I privilege the filmmakers over the content because I feel that the contemporary image driven culture and the politics of visibility often fails to look beneath the very thin surface. In our Neo-capitalist world, the power resides in those who are privileged enough to have capital, or considered valuable enough to be awarded capital from the more privileged. Having capital means having the power to add to the conversation on the politics of visibility and control over the images that make up our culture.

¹¹ Wife and husband, Kate Davis and David Heilbroner have been producing a number of LGBTQ themed documentaries as a team and separately. Besides *Transgender Revolution*, Davis and Heilbroner produced *Stonewall Uprising* (2000), which provides a historically accurate and dynamic narrative of the many groups who participated in the 1969 events. David Heilbroner is also the director-producer of the documentary *Anti-Gay Hate Crimes* (1999), which was part of A&E series called *Investigative Reports*.

¹² Tara Veneruso, "Behind the Scenes Interview with Kate Davis," *Next Wave Films*, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.nextwavefilms.com/ulbp/kate-davis-article.html>.

¹³ Veneruso, "Behind the Scenes."

¹⁴ Anka Theroux, "Kate Davis' *Southern Comfort* Rocks Sundance," *Imagine Magazine*, accessed March 26, 2016, http://www.imagine news.com/Archive/2001/MAR_2001/Text/FEAT03.htm.

Robert agreed to the documentary with social justice goals in mind: “If this film helps one other trans-man go to a doctor or changes the heart of one straight person, then it’s worth it.”¹⁵ The filming that took place six times over the course of a year was very much controlled by Robert who would invite Davis to his home when he and his circle of friends and family were ready for it.

Robert’s illness made the production process complicated because every shoot could potentially be the last one. Davis had no time to raise money and started filming without funding. She bought the small Sony VX1000 MiniDV camera that would allow her to be as unobtrusive as possible as she started out filming with a three-person crew.¹⁶ The minimal and relatively unobtrusive use of technology permitted a stripped-down shooting and produced an affect of intimacy that would not have been possible with a bigger crew and more technology. The technological determinants allow us to imagine ourselves as part of Robert’s community and make us want to act upon the many injustices he endures.

Berthold Brecht measured art’s ability to “activate” its audience as a measure of true success.¹⁷ How real is imagined, constructed, and interpreted through a diverse set of discursive processes changes constantly, yet the ability to “activate” the publics has remained an intrinsic quality of documentary work. Unlike Hollywood films, the driving force behind documentary work is not always money. LGBTQ documentaries unlike other subgenres can be considered works of activism with less of hesitation or suspicion. The idealistic aim of documentary

¹⁵ Theroux, “Kate Davis.”

¹⁶ Veneruso, “Behind the Scenes.”

¹⁷ Michael Renov, ed., *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 31.

work should be to further social justice for a particular marginalized group. This is not to say that money plays no role in activist documentary, of course it does. But the activist potential of documentaries has increased as video recording technologies coupled with online media platforms have become more prevalent, affordable, and accessible to diverse groups of people. Davis' film is only possible thanks to the relatively inexpensive technology that is also easily transportable. Therefore, quite remarkably Davis' seemingly greatest weakness in making *Southern Comfort* becomes her biggest strength, which allows for an affect that increases the potential of the documentary to "activate" the publics.

There isn't enough scholarship done today that would directly contextualize contemporary documentary as activism.¹⁸ The idea of documentary as activism might be self-evident, however, for a work to truly function as an activist project is contingent on many aspects. Whether the documentary has an activist affect that activates the publics depends on the characteristics of the latter and in the kinds of contexts the work is shown. *Southern Comfort* opened to a sold-out screening at the Film Forum in New York on February 21, 2001.¹⁹ It went on to be featured at the Sundance Film Festival, where it received the Grand Jury Prize in Documentary, and at the Hot Docs conference in Toronto,

¹⁸ Two collections to do so focus on Canada: *Screening Truth to Power: A Reader on Documentary Activism* (Montreal: Cinema Politica, 2014) edited by Svetla Turnin and Ezra Winton and *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010) edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker and Ezra Winton.

¹⁹ Erin Torneo, "Pride and Prejudice; Kate Davis's Love Story of *Southern Comfort*," *IndieWire*, February 23, 2001, accessed March 26, 2016, http://www.indiewire.com/article/interview_pride_and_prejudice_kate_daviss_love_story_of_southern_comfort.

where it won the Audience Award.²⁰ It's a critically acclaimed documentary that has received about 20 different awards.

There are many other more effective contexts in which a documentary work can function as an activist on its own right. Although the traditional place for documentary is the film festival, one of the most effective and radical places of screening is still the "private world of the family home."²¹ Television is one of the most intrusive forms of media that demands attention in a space where we are most vulnerable. HBO purchased *Southern Comfort* soon after its premiere at the festivals. The network to a remarkable degree has remained committed to social, political, and historical issues, such as racism, the women's rights movement, abortion rights, and various gay-related issues, particularly AIDS. HBO has showcased and co-financed several now iconic documentaries, *Common Threads* (1989) *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), and *Paragraph 175* (1999).²² *Southern Comfort* as a work of activism entered American homes during primetime at 10:00pm on a Sunday night on April 14, 2002.

The degree to which the documentary has activated the audience so far became highlighted in November 2015 when *Public Theatre* announced that the musical *Southern Comfort* has been added to the 2015-2016 downtown season.²³ *Public* sent out a call for cast who identify as transgender for the off-

²⁰ "Southern Comfort Awards," *Internet Movie Database*, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0276515/awards>.

²¹ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 186.

²² Stephen Tropiano, *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2002), 141.

²³ Imogen Lloyd Webber, "Southern Comfort Musical to Play Off-Broadway; the Public Theater Appeals for Transgender Actors," *Broadway.com*, November 5, 2015, accessed March 26, 2016,

Broadway production to open on March 7th, 2016.²⁴ This development, which indicates a shift in our culture's perception of trans men is only possible due to years of activist work, but also especially in recent years thanks to trans men breaking the flow of mainstream images by making their bodies visible online.

This recent development shows the coming together of three concepts developed by Henry Jenkins: media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence.²⁵ Jenkins argues that media convergence does not mean the replacement of old technology with new ones, but rather the "flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want."²⁶ I am not devaluing the activist potential of documentary, but I do believe that in order to be most effective in allowing public to participate in culture and shape collective intelligence, documentary work needs to be incorporated into other forms of media. As shown *Southern Comfort* has managed to do that to an unusual degree, which is one of the reasons why it is an effective work of documentary activism.

Similar to traditional archival sources, the availability of documentaries to the publics is vital when we consider documentary as activism. Lack of access to

<http://www.broadway.com/buzz/182702/southern-comfort-musical-to-play-off-broadway-the-public-theater-appeals-for-transgender-actors/>.

²⁴ Chloe Tse, "Southern Comfort is Hitting the Stage, Calling for Talented Transgender Actors," *The Feminism Project*, November 5, 2015, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://thefeminismproject.com/entertainment/southern-comfort-is-hitting-the-stage-calling-for-talented-transgender-actors/>.

²⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

²⁶ Ibid.

earlier films is a major archival problem that causes cultural amnesia among younger generation. Holmlund and Fuchs criticize the “queer youth” for “living in the now-oriented culture.”²⁷ They urge readers to “consider the perceived political gains of the present in the light of the coming years of the past.”²⁸ Yet how can the “queer youth” have a memory when older documentaries are not easily accessible or sometimes completely unavailable? Even if a documentary is available as a DVD to be ordered through the official film website, the effect it has on publics beyond its premiere in festivals, theaters, or on television cannot be compared to the effect to a documentary that can be streamed online at all times. As discussed in previous chapters, writing our own history has been extremely important to the LGBTQ community due to the lack of narratives in the past. Scholars and filmmakers have worked hard to have LGBTQ histories to tell. However, we should put more work in making sure materials and recordings of important moments in the past continue to be available for cultural continuity, memory, and critique. Affective economies are constituted in the relationships the publics have with the processes of knowledge and information acquisition.

In terms of memory, the availability of movies online makes a tremendous difference. There is a spectrum of accessibility here. The most accessible are free movies on YouTube, or other legal websites. For instance, as an activist project, *Southern Comfort* is available for free via YouTube and on a few other websites. Amazon.com is also a great option as it provides an opportunity to pay for every movie separately if you don’t have an annual Amazon Prime

²⁷ Holmlund, *Between the Sheets, in the Streets*, 8.

²⁸ Ibid.

membership. Netflix is an on-demand online streaming media provider that focuses only on films and television shows, but in order to view available content you need to buy a monthly membership. This may be trivial and obvious, but power resides in access to knowledge, which is tied to money. The reasoning behind why certain movies are available at certain times and not others may be as random as the relationship of signifier to signified, but similar to the latter the effects of it are no less real.

The black feminist lesbian scholar, Evelyn Hammonds reminds us that visibility is not the be-all end-all of activism. In her discussion on the complexities of intersectional identity politics, she writes: “But in overturning the ‘politics of silence’ the goal cannot merely be to be seen: visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen. The goal should be to develop a ‘politics of articulation.’”²⁹ “The politics of articulation” brings us to another important avenue for activism when it comes to documentary images: the writing and teaching done by scholars and educators on the documentary genre. On the one hand, erasure begins to an extent with scholars writing about LGBTQ documentary and not using terminology developed by other queer scholars but adhering to more popular and established mainstream theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, it makes sense to use the mainstream terminology that has been part of the documentary genre: it allows scholars to talk in a language that is understandable to a broader range of

²⁹ Evelyn Hammonds, “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality,” in *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*, eds., Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Shor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 152.

publics and allows for more nuanced “politics of articulation.” Also, LGBTQ documentary does not happen in space isolated from the rest of the society but is a catalyst of the surrounding culture. Using established frameworks is one step forward as it brings the arguments of non-normative images in the field of discussion of documentary film, and has a greater potential of ultimately puncturing and undermining mainstream notions about non-normative identities.

For those reasons, I find it important to discuss LGBTQ documentary in the context of the theories developed by mainstream film scholars. The most established analytical model for documentary film to date is the comprehensive mapping created by Bill Nichols. Scholars Erik Barnouw, Paul Røtha, and Michael Renov have also provided theoretical frameworks for classifying the diversity that documentary works exhibit but Nichols’ model continues to be the one that is most often used as a point of reference in writing about film.³⁰ His model is based on classifying documentaries in cinematic terms while considering the voice of the filmmaker in addition to the formal qualities of the film.³¹ Nichols started out with four categories in 1991: expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive.³² Over the years, he has edited the categorization and most recently, Nichols’ theory considers documentaries in terms of six “modes:” poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative.

³⁰ Paul Røtha, *Documentary Film* (New York: Hastings House, Publishers, 1970); Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Michael Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Often the categories by these scholars have been criticized as too general and broad, and the vocabulary as no a match to capture the nuances of contemporary documentaries.

³¹ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Second Edition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

³² Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

In the poetic mode, the “film form” is the filmmaker’s primary objective not the “social actors” which manifests in fragmentation, emotionalism, expressiveness, and ambiguity in order to convey a subliminal message or feeling.³³ *Fire in My Belly* (1987) by David Wojnarowicz could be considered as an example of the poetic mode. The Smithsonian censored controversial video was in 2010 due to one particular scene: insects, most likely ants, crawling over a painting of Jesus.³⁴ The video although never fully completed is available on YouTube and was meant as a tribute to Peter Hujar, Wojnarowicz’ lover who died of AIDS related illnesses in 1987.³⁵ The title of the documentary was inspired by an exploited child fire-breather Wojnarowicz’ saw during his trip to New Mexico.³⁶ The documentary images from the trip are mixed with dreamlike staged scenes shot in his New York City apartment. Most famous of those is the now iconic self-portrait of Wojnarowicz with his lips sewn shut. The documentary is commentary on the AIDS crisis and more broadly conveys themes related to loss, spirituality, and identity.

The purpose of expository mode is to provide information and persuade through “indexical images of reality; poetic, affective associations; storytelling qualities; and rhetorical persuasiveness.”³⁷ Expository mode “addresses the viewer directly with titles or voices that propose a perspective or advance an

³³ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 162.

³⁴ Philip Kennicott, “‘Fire’ Man: Wojnarowicz, Censored by Smithsonian, Sounded an Alarm in Dire Times,” *The Washington Post*, December 10, 2010, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/09/AR2010120905895.html>.

³⁵ David Wojnarowicz, *Fire in My Belly* (1987), accessed March 25, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fC3sUDtR7U>.

³⁶ “A Fire in My Belly (A work in progress),” Electronic Arts Intermix, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=15005>.

³⁷ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 167.

argument.³⁸ Some of the most important features of expository mode are voice-of-God narration or authoritative voice-over as used in television news and the use of archival and news footage. The affect of expository mode is that of credibility and omniscience that is achieved through constructed neutrality and detachment.

For instance, in *Saint of 9/11*, Sir Ian McKellen narrates the story of Father Mychal Judge, a New York City Fire Department Chaplain who wrestled with his sexuality and alcoholism as a priest, and became the first documented victim in the collapse of the Twin Towers in the line of duty. *Before Stonewall*, narrated by author Rita Mae Brown brings us the undocumented history of underground LGBTQ community prior to the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969. *After Stonewall* (1999) narrated by Melissa Etheridge focuses on gay rights movement from the Stonewall Rebellion to the present. *Stonewall Uprising* (2010) looked at the revolutionary event itself and notably uses historic “special reports” on homosexuality to bring us the attitudes towards LGBT prior to the historic 1969 rebellion in Greenwich Village. The Oscar-winning, *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* (1989) by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman narrated by Dustin Hoffman chronicles the NAMES Project and brings us the personal stories of AIDS victims commemorated in the quilt.

In the observational mode, the filmmaker is retired “to the position of observer” which “calls on the viewer to take a more active role in determining the significance of what is said and done.”³⁹ The camera is silent and unobtrusive to

³⁸ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 167.

³⁹ Ibid., 174.

portray film sequences as *objective* reality. Reality television shows use this mode to make the viewers believe that they are not just voyeurs but genuinely sharing experiences with the people on the screen. Documentaries such as *Silverlake Life: The View From Here* (1993) by Tom Joslin and Peter Friedman, and *Small Town Gay Bar* (2006) and *Bear Nation* (2010) by Malcolm Ingram are examples that employ observational mode. *Southern Comfort* would also fall under this category.

In the participatory mode, the “filmmaker interacts with his or her social actors and participates in shaping what happens before the camera.”⁴⁰ This often involves the filmmaker being part of the frame and directly asking questions and conducting interviews without being edited out. Participatory mode arguably holds most truth as it allows for the audience to see how the message is constructed, and shows the subjective nature of the camera. For instance, *Gay USA* (1977) by Arthur Bressan uses street interviews with Gay Pride participants across the United States as the main source of its evidence. In contrast, *Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* (1977), a documentary by four co-directors – Peter Adair, Rob Epstein, Andrew Brown, Nancy Adair – features interviews with 26 gay men and women is not participatory because the interviewer is never present in the frame.

The reflexive mode allows the viewer “to see documentary for what it is: a construct or representation.”⁴¹ This mode finds ways to draw attention to the conventions and methods of documentary filmmaking such as “fieldwork or

⁴⁰ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 151.

⁴¹ Ibid., 194.

interview.”⁴² The backstage of documentary work is made obvious with the subjects of the film being aware of the camera and addressing the audience; often having a meta-conversation about the filming process itself. The 30th-anniversary edition of *Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* included an introduction that talked about the filming process and how this documentary with 6 co-directors came about. This added feature makes it a self-reflexive documentary because it draws attention to the “dialogue between the filmmaker and his or her subject” and “stresses situated engagement, negotiated interaction, and emotion-laden encounter.”⁴³ Also, *Stonewall Uprising* (2010) that talks about the official “documentation” of the LGBT community can be seen as reflexive in its questioning the documentary work done in the past.

Performative documentary emerged as the key mode of the 1990s and is consciously and transparently subjective by showing the filmmaker’s “heightened emotional involvement to a situation or role.”⁴⁴ One of the most essential stylistic devices of performative mode is autobiographical technique that “gives an added emphasis to the subjective qualities of experience and memory.”⁴⁵ Unlike reflexive mode the interaction with the audience is very personal and emotional. Ellen Spiro’s *Greetings from Out Here* (1993) follows her during a road trip in the Deep South and includes her voice-over handheld camera as she explains the process of making this documentary. More recent performative documentary, *Do*

⁴² Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 151.

⁴³ Ibid., 187.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 202.

I Sound Gay? (2015) by David Thorpe is a highly personal self-exploration of gay man coming to terms with his gender presentation.

Clearly, there will never be enough categories to express the complexity of documentary work and drive especially when technology and new media constantly reframe the basis of our argument. Nichols' taxonomy has been criticized by several scholars as restrictive especially when considering the often "hybrid" nature of contemporary documentary.⁴⁶

One of the most notable of critiques comes from Stella Bruzzi who in *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, outlines "the shortcomings and preoccupations of documentary's theorization" and bluntly states that Nichols' "family tree" is too reductive if not "breathtakingly simplistic" in nature.⁴⁷ Two main problems arise. First, this categorization is presumed to refer to a chronology of documentary film from primitive to advanced. However, documentaries exhibit different modes that are not bound by the time when they were produced. This categorization that relies partially on a progressive chronology makes little sense for LGBTQ documentaries since the majority of films have been produced after 1990. There were documentaries before, but a boom not just in documentary making but also in LGBTQ cultural productions in general occurred in the 1990s. Second, that this "family tree" places "hybrid" documentaries in categories where they clearly struggle to fit; next to films that have little to nothing in common. Bruzzi considers documentaries too

⁴⁶ Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005); Matthew Bernstein, "Documentaphobia and Mixed Modes: Michael Moore's *Roger & Me*" in *Documenting the Documentary*, ed. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannete Sloniowski (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998): 397-415.

⁴⁷ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002).

experimental and “heterogeneous” to be assigned to one mode.⁴⁸ She questions, and rightfully so, the overall usefulness of this taxonomy especially for contemporary documentary film analysis.

To Nichols’ credit, he admits that each documentary film does not necessarily fall into one mode but may combine several modes. First, about the chronological nature of his model he says, “The differing documentary modes may seem to provide a history of documentary film, but they do so imperfectly. Not only were most of them present from the outset, a film identified with a given mode need not be so entirely.”⁴⁹ He argues that “the modes do not constitute a genealogy of documentary film so much as a pool of resources available to all.”⁵⁰ According to Nichols, all this fluidity and hybridity is a “cause for celebration.”⁵¹ Therefore, seemingly rigid in his categorization, Nichols’ defends that his theories nevertheless provide a basis for a dynamic analysis of documentary film.

Since most documentaries tend to be hybrids, the key to Nichols’ theoretical framework lays in its use not on the macro, but micro-level of film analysis as Barry Natusch and Beryl Hawkins suggest.⁵² In “Mapping Nichols’ Modes in Documentary Film: *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* and *Helvetica*,” Natusch and Hawkins provide a scene-by-scene analysis based on Nichols’ taxonomy truly embraces the hybridity and complexity of documentary film as a genre. Ultimately, this micro-level “in-depth scene-by-scene analysis” allows for more

⁴⁸ Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 3.

⁴⁹ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 159.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 143.

⁵² Barry Natusch and Beryl Hawkins, “Mapping Nichols’ Modes in Documentary Film: *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* and *Helvetica*,” *The IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Summer 2014): 103-129.

coherency and transparency and helps us “better understand the film structure and the director’s vision.”⁵³ Scene by scene or frame by frame analysis allows us to see documentaries as a compilation of multitude of styles and approaches and removes a lot of ambiguity that a more rigid macro-level categorization still upholds.

One of the most quoted examples of performative documentary, Marlon Riggs’ *Tongues Untied* (1989) provides a striking example of the hybridity of the genre on the micro-level of the film. This autobiographical work explores the themes of homosexuality and racism in a style that pushed the boundaries of the documentary genre. In fact, Riggs’ film shows how futile any kind of macro-level categorization of documentary film is. The documentary mixes fiction and reality (poetic); includes interviews (observational), news footage of interactions between the police and street riots (expository); Riggs asks questions from other participants (participatory); talks directly to the audience in an impersonal (reflexive) and personal (performative) way. *Tongues Untied* as a documentary work of art defies all categorization.

Performative documentary played a huge role in shaping a trend that emerged in the 1990s in LGBT film scene, commonly referred to as New Queer Cinema. New Queer Cinema emerged in the atmosphere of identity politics and Culture Wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s, where “questions of identity and race were hotly debated both in the academy and other cultural and aesthetic

⁵³ Natusch, “Mapping Nichols’ Modes,” 103.

institutions.”⁵⁴ The invention of the term “New Queer Cinema” has been credited to film critic B. Ruby Rich in the early 1990s. Rich used the term to describe the emergence of certain films in the early 1990s that differed from earlier LGBTQ films in their explicit politicized take on queer culture.⁵⁵ A key characteristic of New Queer Cinema was its interest in “destabilizing the notion of a single fixed (queer) identity.”⁵⁶ Most films came from the independent scene, which allowed the directors to be frank when dealing with topics such as sexuality, and focus on subcultural queer groups that defied heteronormativity and lived on the fringe of society without having to worry about mainstream interests.⁵⁷

Most notable and famous example of this genre is a documentary. Jennie Livingston’s *Paris Is Burning* (1991) has become the mainstream site of reference what New Queer Cinema means. The title of Livingston’s film comes from the “Paris Is Burning” ball, which is the biggest of the annual balls in the Harlem gay scene. The focus of the documentary is the ball thrown by Paris Dupree and on the lives of the trans women of color and cross-dressing performers who participate in it. According to Michele Aaron, the film “offered a more sobering and artistically complicated vision of queer urban life than that offered by many other New Queer Cinema filmmakers,” and dealt with issues of

⁵⁴ Michele Aaron, *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 120.

⁵⁵ Ruby B. Rich, “New Queer Cinema,” *Sight & Sound*, Volume 2, Issue 5 (September 1992): 30-35.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Critic Karl Soehnlein already noted this “trend” in 1990, when he wrote that an “emerging flock of filmmakers is using provocative subject matter – transgression, gender-bending, and rude activism – to create challenging visions of sexual identity” (Karl Soehnlein, “Homo Movies” in *Village Voice*, September 1990, p. 66). New Queer Cinema films included Todd Haynes’ *Poison* (1991), Norman Rene’s *Longtime Companion* (1990), Gus Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), and Tom Kalin’s *Swoon* (1992). More recent films include *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Milk* (2008), *The Kids Are Alright* (2010), and *Concussion* (2013).

race and queerness at the same time, in a “decidedly” non-essentialist way.⁵⁸ However, today scholars look at this documentary as highly problematic in terms of race, gender, and exploitation. The academic Ping-Pong between Judith Butler and bell hooks on the film is well known and assigned in film studies classes to this day.

A significant part of LGBTQ documentary critique arises not only from the style and content of the work but from the subject position of the producers and the directors. Jenny Livingston has received a lot of criticism for being a white middle-class lesbian and exploiting poor queer people of color for fame and money. Livingston sensationalized the topic and people in the film, which is a common pitfall for LGBT documentaries produced by outsiders of the community on display.

The approach and style of *Southern Comfort* differ considerably from that of Livingston’s *Paris is Burning*, which is more of an activist project. The activist potential of *Southern Comfort* is highlighted in its critique as one of the reviewers notes, “the characters themselves are rather ordinary, even bland at times.”⁵⁹ Paradoxically, the “bland” characters contrast the stereotypical representations that sensationalize rural queers by showing that the everyday lives of LGBTQ people can be as boring as those of heterosexual people.

Yet one of the criticisms I have of Davis’s film is nevertheless conditioned by her subject position as an outsider whose cultural background is considerably different from the subjects in her film. I have no reason to believe that she is

⁵⁸ Aaron, *New Queer Cinema*, 120.

⁵⁹ Eric Snider, “Movie Review: *Southern Comfort* (Documentary)” accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.ericdsnider.com/movies/southern-comfort/>.

insincere when recounts the reasons why she has been involved in producing several social justice documentaries on LGBTQ issues and why she was so stuck by Robert's story:

When I think back to why I felt so strongly about these issues and wanting to humanize the plight of transgender people it probably goes back to my youth when I was a bit political in high school. I would argue with people about gender-based oppression. I was doing that in the 70's before it was a popular topic. I even took my girlfriend to the prom and I was wearing drag. It definitely was part of my psyche expressed 20 years later.⁶⁰

Davis casually implies her own genderqueerness, which may be conditioned by the freer expression of sexuality in the 1970s. However, in the context of today's strict mainstream identity politics, wearing drag makes her symbolically part of Robert Eads' community.

The same interview reveals a crucial classed dynamic in which puts Davis and Eads into two completely separate worlds. Davis jokingly states: "More than once, I asked myself why I was choosing to leave my cozy New York family for rural Georgia so that I could camp out in the trailer home of a dying transsexual."⁶¹ I see this as the white anthropologist complex who is not aware of her own privilege. It implies that we should regard Davis as a noble person who made a sacrifice for the sake of humankind and art. It is incredibly insensitive of her to diminish the lives of Roberts Eads and his family dismissing their everyday tragic life and living conditions. Although comments like these are problematic, they do not take away the fact that *Southern Comfort* stands as an unsensationalized visual evidence of the lives of LGBTQ folks in a geographically subcultural region.

⁶⁰ Veneruso, "Behind the Scenes."

⁶¹ Ibid.

The suggested “boringness” makes *Southern Comfort* is even more effective work of activism in contemporary media landscape, which runs on sensationalism. Linda Williams has suggested that, in the postmodern era, documentary films are increasingly foregrounding the processes of manipulation of the film medium, a strategy which calls into question the very documentary nature of the subjects they purport to present.⁶² Documentary as an antithesis to Hollywood fictions and source of “truth” has become complicated in this era of increased computer-generated imagery and manipulation.

Yet Linda Williams has noted that this uncertainty has only increased the publics’ appetite for realty. It is this indexical relation to “real” that makes documentary as a genre so appealing to us. The public is more aware than ever that cameras lie. This means, however, that the documentary drive toward the “real” is even more intensified and has manifested in performative postmodern documentaries that put the filmmaker in the center constantly ‘breaking the fourth wall.’ Another aspect of this cultural trend toward the real is even more prominent today than it was in the early 1990s when Williams was writing: the monopoly of reality television in contemporary media landscape. Paradoxically enough, self-reflexive documentaries can be as pre-scripted as reality television shows and both of those trends serve to blur and complicate the line between reality and fiction even further. The publics’ increasing distrust of the documentary images has amplified the demand for material which aims to manipulate with the little trust that is left.

⁶² Linda Williams. “Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History and the New Documentary,” *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Spring 1993): 12.

Williams is right to suggest that “an overly simplified dichotomy between truth and fiction is at the root of our difficulty in thinking about the truth in documentary.”⁶³ She argues that documenting the past should not be “a mirror with a memory.”⁶⁴ The medium of documentation provides us with a “hall of mirrors” and the best way to deal with this crisis is to “deploy the many facets of the mirrors to reveal the seduction of lies.”⁶⁵ How documentary does this today is different from the past. Williams calls for a definition of documentary “not as an essence of truth but as a set of strategies designed to choose from among a horizon of relative and contingent truths.”⁶⁶ Thinking of documentary as a subjective truth with many interpretations is a mirror of the world in general as we see it.

What Linda Williams is suggesting, is ultimately a phenomenological approach to documentary perception. Williams’ statement on Claude Lanzman’s holocaust film *Shoah* might best sum up the idea of truth as existing between the concrete pieces of the world that we encounter:

The truth of the Holocaust thus does not exist in any totalizing narrative but only...as a collection of fragments [...] The events of the past – in this case the totality of the Holocaust – register not in any fixed moment of past or present but rather, as in Freud’s description of the palimpsest, as the sum total of its rewritings through time, not in a single event but in the reverberations between.⁶⁷

Truth can be found in fragments and in the in-between space that exists in the relationships that the publics have with the documentary work. Williams’ idea of

⁶³ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁴ Williams. “Mirrors Without Memories,” 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 18.

documentary mode is that of the many pieces of the mirror that reflect back on each other and by way of doing this provide us with a behind the scenes view of the conventions of how truth is constructed in contemporary society.

The example from Holocaust brings us to what still counts as reality or truth. Williams argues the key to truth and reality relies in violence. Violence or death on the screen marks truth. The problem with this that we tend to exploit these topics until we get what anthropologist Ruth Behar describes “compassion fatigue”: our loss of ability to be moved or shaken by events that would have shocked people in the past.⁶⁸ Behar debates whether certain “limits of respect, piety, pathos “ should be crossed in anthropological work.⁶⁹ To paraphrase Behar, documentary that doesn’t “break your heart just isn’t worth doing anymore.”⁷⁰ Although it seems that contemporary publics’ need for more and more excitement pushes documentary to dangerous limits (more real, more violence), the documentarist as a social justice activist should continue to seek new creative ways to “break the sea frozen within us.”⁷¹ Such documentary drive results too often in displays of subjective violence, which when overdone, counteractively fails to move us.

Southern Comfort is an anomaly within this cultural obsession with real life subjective violence. The technological and situational determinants combined with Davis’ stylistic techniques allow for a very slow moving pace, which is traditionally more characteristic to European than United States film. The

⁶⁸ Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 86.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 86.

slowness of the documentary is representative of the structural forms of violence that although cannot always be pointed out, are felt in the everyday dreariness and even boringness of marginalized life. As such, *Southern Comfort* does not fail to "break the sea of frozen within us." The unconventionality of the documentary in terms of content and style lets us find a new kind of truth and reality.

Yet, the majority of LGBTQ documentary work involves violence. There are different ways to consider some of the major themes within the body of work. I see mainly three categories: structural violence, demands for access to places, and street violence. Documentary imagination reflects the attitudes of the culture the product of which it is and contributes in metronormative and homonormative discourse that privileges urban over the rural. As said earlier, this paradoxically means that rural cases have received a lot more attention compared to the city especially when it comes to acts of street violence.

Works that address structural violence include AIDS and HIV activism documentaries. *We Were Here* (2011) by David Weissman explores the arrival of AIDS in San Francisco and how the city and the LGBT community responded to the crisis. Also, journalist David France's very powerful *How to Survive a Plague* (2012) depicts the early struggles of ACT UP and TAG activists in the face of a national epidemic. Another aspect of this subgroup besides access to health care is bias within faith communities. Mentioned earlier *Saint of 9/11*, but also *Trembling Before G-d* (2007) by Sandi Simcha DuBowski about gay and lesbian Orthodox and Hasidic Jews struggle to reconcile tier sexuality and faith. 8: *The*

Mormon Proposition (2010) by Reed Cowan and Steven Greenstreet exposes the Mormon Church's involvement in the obstruction of same-sex marriage legislation in the country. *The Adonis Factor* (2010) by Christopher Hines looks into structural violence within the gay male community that favors and encourages a harmful body ideal. There are also a few documentaries about suicide: *Jim in Bold* (2003) by Glenn Holsten is a documentary about Jim Wheeler, a gay high school student in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, who committed suicide in 1997 as a result of bullying at school. *Broken Heart Land* (2014) by Jeremy Stulberg and Randy Stulberg follows the struggles of a conservative military family coming to terms with the suicide and secret life of their gay teen son in Norman, Oklahoma.

Documentaries focusing on access to public places as one of the main concerns of LGBT rights movement include Malcolm Ingram's *Small Town Gay Bar* (2006) about "Rumors" a gay bar in rural bar in Mississippi; Carol Burch-Brown's *It's Reigning Queens in Appalachia* (2003) tells the history of a gay bar in Bluefield, West Virginia; *Queens & Cowboys: A Straight Year on the Gay Rodeo* (2014) by Matt Livadary follows the gay rodeo scene; a more lighthearted, *All Aboard Rosie's Family Cruise* (2006) documents Rosie O'Donnell's organized first-ever cruise designed for gay parents and their families.

Documentaries about street violence focus on specific cases. There is no other anti-LGBTQ hate crime that has inspired more cultural productions than the murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming in 1998. Television films Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* (2002), Roger Spottiswoode's *The*

Matthew Shepard Story (2002), and Tim Hunter's *Anatomy of a Hate Crime* (2001). Documentaries include, Beverly Seckinger's *Laramie Inside Out* (2004), and most recently Michele Josue's *Matt Shepard Is a Friend of Mine* (2014). The story has been the featured in episodes of television shows such as *Six Feet Under*, *The West Wing*, and *United States of Tara*. Shepard's story has not only inspired filmic or television representations but also music, several books, poems, art, and theatre productions.

Another case to receive considerable mainstream media attention is the sexual assault and shooting murder of Brandon Teena in Humboldt, Nebraska in 1993. The most famous popular culture depiction of the life and murder of Brandon Teena is *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) starring Hilary Swank. A year earlier the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story* (1998) by Bless Bless Productions was released that still stands as the most accurate account of the tragic events. It was followed by more problematic television documentaries, *The Brandon Teena Story on 20/20: The Truth Behind 'Boys Don't Cry'* (2000) and *American Justice* episode, "The Life and Death of Teena Brandon" (2000).

There are documentaries about street violence that focus specifically on the perpetrators. *Licensed to Kill* (1997) written, directed, and produced by Arthur Dong that features interviews with various criminals known for their homophobic murders. Also, Paul Yule's *Lone Star Hate* (1998) brings us the murder of Nicholas West in Tyler, Texas. The story is framed predominately through the narration of his incarcerated murderers. There are a few documentaries that

focus on trans women: *Two Spirits* (2009) Lydia Nibley and *Valentine Road* (2013) by Marta Cunningham.

In contrast to documentaries on violence in the flyover country, documentaries that focus on the city give agency the victim and show a community overcoming acts of senseless violence; the rural queer is agentless within this landscape of oppression. There are no films made about the numerous trans women of color who have gotten murdered in the city. One of the most recent depictions of an anti-LGBTQ hate crime in the city, the short-form documentary *Facing Fear* (2013) by Jason Cohen is a story of reconciliation and redemption. In 1981, Matt was a 13-year old gay youth living in the streets of Hollywood who was left for dead in the night after being gay-bashed by neo-Nazis. Unknowingly, 25 years later Matt discovers that he has become friends with one of his attackers, now reformed neo-Nazi, Tim. The film is framed as a story of reform, forgiveness and overcoming hate and bigotry. It is not insignificant that the victims name is Matt, a young white, blond, small statured gay man. We are *honeyed* into the affective ideology of violence by those familiar markers. This is the story of Matthew Shepard all over again, yet in the city, even acts of violence can be used to confirm its position as a utopic queer space of progress and betterment.

Affective economies of violence allow for a striking omission: documentary silver screen is not a lesbian friendly space. One of the most known cases of hate crimes against lesbians is the shooting of Claudia Brenner and Rebecca Wight in 1988 during their camping trip in the Michaux State Forest in

Pennsylvania.⁷² The couple was shot eight times by Stephen Roy Carr, a man they had encountered briefly on the trail earlier. Claudia was hit five times, but survived the attack that cost the life of her partner Rebecca. In 1995, Claudia published *Eight Bullets: One Woman's Story of Surviving Anti-Gay Violence*, a book about the fatal night and the following investigation.⁷³ *In The Hollow*, a short documentary by Austin Bunn on the attack was released in 2015. Hate crimes against lesbians is a reality, which often remains unreported or gets masked as sexual assault. It is telling which identities culture values when we look at which stories have been regarded significant enough to move from the news culture and the Internet to slower and more expensive forms of media such as television, books, theatre productions, movies, and documentaries.

The boundaries between documentaries and films and television get extensively blurred especially when we get closest to truth, and “real” which as said earlier, according to Williams ultimately means violence. The confused notion of documentary responsibility became highlighted when the Hollywood fiction *Stonewall* by Roland Emmerich premiered in Summer 2015. Hollywood had produced another whitewashed version of a pivotal historical moment. The movie featured a young gay man from Indiana who arrives in New York City to finally become his true self and ultimately the catalyst of the entire gay liberation movement. This narrative excludes the key actors in the 1969 Stonewall Riots:

⁷² Jennifer Weiner, “Claudia Brenner A Shooting Victim Now Crusades Against Violence Aimed At Gays,” Philly.com, June 5, 1995, accessed March 17, 2016, http://articles.philly.com/1995-06-08/living/25688999_1_claudia-brenner-eighth-bullet-rebecca-wight.

⁷³ Claudia Brenner and Hannah Ashley, *Eight Bullets: One Woman's Story of Surviving Anti-Gay Violence* (Ann Harbor, MI: Firebrand Books, 1995).

drag queens, lesbians, and especially transgender women of color. Outrage emerged in LGBTQ and straight communities at these omissions. Even the oldest and most mainstream national LGBT magazine, *The Advocate*, listed the people who boycotted the movie as finalists in their “Person of The Year” award in 2015.⁷⁴ Yet this is a work of fiction without any responsibility toward accuracy of account. Nevertheless, the public is absolutely right to protest all inaccurate depictions, especially popular ones since affective economies in a world where the boundaries between real and fiction get blurred are shaped by such representations.⁷⁵

I argue for one version of truth in LGBTQ documentary through two interrelated and codependent aspects. The key to objectivity can be found in one most subjective characteristics of documentary film: emotion and aesthetics. Serious discussion of the interrelated relationship between emotion and aesthetics has been one of the most important omissions of the different taxonomies covered so far.⁷⁶ When discussing one of the modes in his taxonomy of documentary film – the ability to express – Michael Renov explores the relationship documentary work has with aesthetics.⁷⁷ Renov argues that the

⁷⁴ “Person of the Year Finalists,” *The Advocate*, November 5, 2015, accessed November 20, 2015, <http://www.advocate.com/people/2015/11/05/person-year-finalists>.

⁷⁵ In a world and meaning making where boundaries between real and fiction have become contested, Ang Lee’s Academy Award-winning, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) could be also seen as a story about Matthew Shepard. Annie Proulx published the story on *New York Times* before the murder, but the film was released after. Therefore, although the story is not about the case, the film in a lot of ways is.

⁷⁶ The reason may be the seemingly lack of seriousness when it comes to the field of film studies in academia. Film studies as a field is young compared to the established disciplines of literature or history. Often with more vernacular fields of inquiry scholars tend to come up with terms that make the research seem more “serious.” That is why we talk about *discourse* when we study *conversation*, for instance. Or we talk about *affect* instead of saying *feelings* or *emotions*.

⁷⁷ Michael Renov, “Towards a Poetics of Documentary.” In *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993): 12–36; Renov proposes four tendencies of documentaries:

“aesthetic function” has been “consistently undervalued within the nonfiction domain,” although “amply represented in the history of the documentary enterprise.”⁷⁸ Renov sees this “pitting of “truth” against “beauty” as the product of a “regrettable (Western) dualism that accounts for the rift between science and art.”⁷⁹ An outcome of this is a frequent presumption that “the creation of beautiful forms and documentary’s task of historical representation are altogether irreconcilable.”⁸⁰ I agree with Renov who sees the aesthetic qualities of documentary not as distractions but central to the documentary experience especially when it comes to the subgenre of LGBTQ documentary.⁸¹

Richard Dyer and Tom Waugh have marked that LGBT documentary has often made decisions of “form, style, and address analogous to the central act of coming out.”⁸² I would expand this argument and argue that those aesthetic elements are not just constricted to the specific phenomenon of coming out but to several elements of queer life in general. More often than not the affect triggered or conveyed by the interplay between images and aesthetics involves traumatic

to record, persuade, analyze or express. In comparison, Nichols does not care for aesthetics. He insists that truth in documentary depends on “a tension between the representation and the represented as experienced by the viewer. Remove this tension, enter a realm of aesthetic engagement, and the specific qualities and tensions no longer apply” (Nichols, Bill. “Representing the Body.” *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991: 232). The truth in documentary film still depends on how the viewer makes meaning out of the experience, but Nichols is more focused on the construction of film in general than the elements of aesthetics that trigger emotions.

⁷⁸ Renov, “Towards a Poetics of Documentary,” 32.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Renov’s discussion of the ability of documentary to express alludes to psychoanalytic theory, which has been a significant force in film studies since the 1970s. Most notable scholars shaping this aspect of the field include British feminist critic Laura Mulvey and French theorist Christian Mertz. Today the consideration of subliminal messages behind the images on screen or the subject position of the viewer (“gaze”) have been complicated further since the 1970s and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories are still used in film analysis, although less often in the case of documentary work.

⁸² Chris Cagle, “Imagining the Queer South,” 35.

experiences: rejection from family, depression, suicide, societal ostracism, and bodily harm. Therefore, the consideration of aesthetic elements is vital in our understanding of LGBTQ documentary work as activism that shapes the affective economies of culture and queer life.

In order to highlight the affect that is evident in LGBTQ documentary, I return to William Stott's *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* mentioned in the beginning of in this chapter. In 1972, William Stott provides a definition of documentary at the time when film studies did not have an established place in academic writing. Stott saw documentary, "pertaining to, consisting of, or derived from document," and differentiated between two different types of documentaries: human and official.⁸³ The human document is "not objective but thoroughly personal" while the official documentary should be the opposite.⁸⁴ This categorization is very rudimentary and definitely not as specific and elaborate as were later classifications. Yet I find usefulness in Stott's work that by way of its bareness actually allows for more complexity in discussion of the true nature of documentary especially when considering the affective quality of the medium.

Documentary as a human document is key to LGBTQ documentary analysis. Stott argues that documentaries as human document are an "exercise of the reader's feeling"⁸⁵ the main purpose of which is "to move us."⁸⁶ He refers to the work of Henry Adams to support his insistence of the importance of feeling in

⁸³ Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 8.

documentary work. Henry Adams propagated education in feeling and argued that intellect is trivial in comparison to feeling: “one loses temper in reasoning about what can only be felt.”⁸⁷ Therefore, we understand human document above all emotionally: “feeling comes first,” not intellect.⁸⁸ It is this very quality intrinsic to documentary that makes it possible to “feel oneself part of some other’s experience.”⁸⁹ As I have discussed, the determinants that generate this affect in documentary are diverse.

Documentary as human document is not an exemplary work of social justice. It is not politically correct, it mixes beauty with *truth*, makes us *feel* when we necessarily do not want to, and above all, activates us by making us learn things that cannot be *unlearnt*. *Southern Comfort* by Kate Davis is documentary as human document and as such an exemplary case of bad activism. The film does not respond to our mainstream cultural demands for more displays of subjective violence against LGBTQ people. In *Southern Comfort*, the subject matter, technological determinants, and aesthetics combine to deliver the publics the dreary and slow effects of structural violence, which paradoxically does not fatigue our compassion, but instead activates us. Yet the conditions of the film are far from “perfect.” Davis’ “behind the scenes” blindness to her class and heteronormative privilege is troubling to say the least, which nevertheless does not devalue her intent of making a positive change in the world with the tools that are available to her. Documentary as human document of bad activism *is* imperfect. It is the responsibility of publics to establish politics of articulation and

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 8.

continue to critique and discuss such documentary works. Queer truths exist within that space of articulation that keeps important works in our field of vision by questioning the medium, the document, and our own positioning.

Chapter 5

Reading Aesthetically: Digital Activism and Presentation of Queer Self

I view locality as primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial. I see it as a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts.

—Arjun Appadurai¹

Cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai is one of the scholars developing theories that would help us connect and understand the relationships between the micro and macro levels of society. Importantly to my project on the affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence, Appadurai's theories help to link global and local by taking into account the various surrounding "scapes" or contexts: technology, media, economics, and ideology. As "complex phenomenological quality" locality should not be looked at as a context, but we should see how contexts define the boundaries of localities.² For the purposes of this chapter the locality or what Appadurai also sees as the new "neighborhood" is defined by the context of the culture of anti-LGBTQ violence. The culture of anti-LGBTQ violence is charged with "social immediacy" as there is urgency to shift the discourse from groups all across the activism spectrum. Within this culture, affect is most directly dependent on the characteristics of our particular somatic conditions and geographical location but by all means not bound by what we traditionally consider the physical or material. Today the culture of anti-LGBTQ violence is immensely shaped by the relationships between the "technologies of

¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178.

² Ibid.

interactivity" and online-offline queer subjectivities. The often ambiguous yet urgent points of entry to mainstream discourse allowed for and demanded by queer subjectivities highlight the "relativity of contexts" that make up this particular affective economy. For sure over the years, queer subculture – with its unique relationship to online worlds – has developed its own set of online communities, differing aesthetics and vernaculars. However, the relationships that concern me here the most – between "social immediacy," "technologies of interactivity," and "relativity of contexts" – and make up this particular affective locality become most clear when queer subjectivities make meaning, function, and strive within the mainstream online news culture. Although framed by narratives of subjective violence my focus in this chapter is less on the affective value of the latter and more on the queer ways of self-expression that is revealed within the digital materialities of this affective locality and function as a form of activism.

Online news culture has an undeniable immense effect on publics' ideas about gender, race, class, and sexuality. Not just in terms of what receives coverage and what doesn't but more importantly how certain stories of violence get covered. Over the years news media has developed ways of reporting that make us believe that what we read and see is the truth, which means that news stories are constructed and told in a specific manner in order to be considered *truthful*. Therefore, I'm here concerned with the content of news coverage but also with the meta-language or the syntax that comes together in order for the content make sense to the reader.

The aesthetics of representation tell a multilayered story of anti-LGBTQ violence. How stories are constructed and put together (what kind of words are used, next to which images and so on) create a particular kind of affect on their own. We often tend not to pay as much attention to the affective qualities of the structural aspects of news in our everyday consumption. Walter Benjamin argued that we apprehend architecture “in a state of distraction, unlike other practices, which we consume with due attention in appropriate surroundings – or try to.”³ I argue that when it comes to the form and syntax of online news, we take in information in a similar “state of distraction,” which perpetuates the invisibility of objective violence.

That is not to say that the affect we apprehend in distraction is any less important than the affect we register consciously. On the contrary, since our news culture is the product of a racist and patriarchal society, we should not take for granted its aesthetics: established conventions and formal characteristics. In other words, what I mean under aesthetics here involves the organization of text and images; the relationship between them; affective vocabulary and trigger words; the quality and formal characteristics of images; and the hierachal structures that ascribe more value to some qualities and devalue others.

As said before, one way of critiquing the established conventions of the affective economies of mainstream online culture and coming out of our current “state of distraction” is to look at which stories get published and receive attention and which ones do not. As discussed earlier since Lovendusky’s attack on May 24th, 2013, there have been a number of homicides of trans women of color

³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 241.

outside New York City, but there has not been an outrage one might assume would take over popular media discourse.

Konyale Madden was found beaten to death in her home in Savannah, Texas on September 1st, 2013. Melony Smith was discovered beaten to death in her hotel room in Baldwin Park, California on September 9th, 2013. Ms. Hartley was found beaten to death in her home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on September 19th, 2013. Eyricka Morgan was stabbed to death in her home in New Brunswick, New Jersey on September 24th of the same year.⁴ However, the *habitus* of our current media cultures does not let us see such images. In the first two months of 2015, trans women of color were murdered at rate of almost one per week.⁵ As one women explained, “My grandmother is 90 and I have more dead friends than she does. Killing us is nothing new. It's like being a policeman. When you go to work, you know you might get shot. It's just something that comes with the territory.”⁶ Online news media that caters to the taste of the mainstream audience continues to focus on white, male, and urban cases that fit the transnationally iconic image of anti-LGBTQ violence.

Another way to notice the overbearing racism and misogyny evident in online news coverage is to pay attention to how the cases that do not fit the ideal profile of a victim get portrayed. For instance, “Ms. Hartley” who was found dead in a vacant building in Baton Rouge, Louisiana was referred to a “transvestite” by

⁴ National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, “NCAVP Community Alert,” September 27, 2013, accessed on March 15, 2016,
http://www.avp.org/storage/documents/2013.9.27_ca_avp_islannettlesdastatement.pdf.

⁵ Samantha Michaels, “It’s Incredibly Scary to Be a Transgender Woman of Color Right Now,” June 26, 2015, accessed March 15, 2016
<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/06/transgender-women-disproportionately-targeted-violent-hate-crimes>.

⁶ Ibid.

the Baton Rouge local newspapers as and The Baton Rouge Advocate used her birth name and male pronouns in her obituary.⁷ It is also usual that in cases that deal with trans women of color their arrests for prostitution are mentioned, as was the case with Hartley. The news stories did not even investigate the story enough to find out Hartley's preferred first name. It is notable that no image was included with the murder case of Hartley. Again, we can assume that this means bad investigative work on the part of the journalists. However, including an image in the context of a murder case often perpetuates the same old stereotypes rather than draws attention to groups of people who are most vulnerable to hate crimes.

The image used by online news sources to report on the murder case of Eyricka Morgan shows her on a bed in her underwear with a bottle of liquor behind her (Figure 24).⁸ It is very uncommon to encounter a full body shot of a male identified victim of anti-LGBTQ violence. Not to mention that I have yet to find a news story that is accompanied by a sexual and provocative image, but focuses on a male victim. What made this coverage even worse was that the New Jersey *Star-Ledger* initially used Morgan's birth name, male pronouns, and refused to apologize or correct their mistakes in articles that remained

⁷ Sunnivie Brydum, "Trans Women Beaten to Death in Los Angeles, Baton Rouge," *The Advocate*, September 16, 2013, accessed on March 15, 2016,
<http://www.advocate.com/politics/transgender/2013/09/16/trans-women-beaten-death-los-angeles-baton-rouge>.

⁸ Sunnivie Brydum, "New Jersey Paper Refuses to Correct Coverage of Trans Woman's Murder," *The Advocate*, September 28, 2013, accessed on March 15, 2016,
<http://www.advocate.com/politics/transgender/2013/09/28/new-jersey-paper-refuses-correct-coverage-trans-womans-murder>.



Figure 24. Eyricka Morgan.

Source: Sunnivie Brydum, "New Jersey Paper Refuses to Correct Coverage of Trans Woman's Murder," *The Advocate*, September 28, 2013, accessed on March 15, 2016, <http://www.advocate.com/politics/transgender/2013/09/28/new-jersey-paper-refuses-correct-coverage-trans-womans-murder>

accessible to readers (although the newspaper switched to Morgan's preferred name in later articles).⁹

I am focusing here on online news media and aggregators. There are several reasons for this particular focus. Firstly, national television news coverage seldom manages to include incidents of anti-LGBTQ violence, unless it's a special feature program or a particular case receives more widespread attention. I will exclude television news because today there's often simply no footage. Secondly, the process of media convergence today means that the online news story sometimes includes a video of the television news coverage.¹⁰ Reading news online often means watching television news clips that are included with the story. Thirdly, today we have more 'news' online that there is offline. Some publications do not even have a printed out version yet their coverage – often the only representation of a case – is important.

Similarly to Maria Bakardjieva whose work is considered part of the second-generation of Internet scholars, I'm interested in the online experience of everyday life.¹¹ The first generation of Internet scholars were more concerned with Internet as a new frontier that would completely transform contemporary society and power relations as we know them. According to the first generation of scholarship the result of more online spaces and related technology would be

⁹ Sunnivie Brydum, "New Jersey Paper Refuses to Correct Coverage."

¹⁰ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Maria Bakardjieva, "The Internet in Everyday Life: Exploring the Tenets and Contributions of Diverse Approaches" in *Handbook of Internet Studies* eds., Mia Consalvo and Charles Ess (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011): 59-82.

either an egalitarian utopia or a post-apocalyptic dystopia.¹² It is often challenging and perhaps less interesting and marketable to talk about theoretical ideas and not fall into extremes. Our everyday life does not usually involve inhabiting utopia or dystopia.

If anything, Internet use on an everyday basis involves inhabiting heterotopia: a space that is full of potential and of the unknown. Foucault described it as “something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia, in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.”¹³ Heterotopia not only contains the potential of utopia but also dystopia, however never fully becoming one or the other. I believe the study of Internet as a heterotopic everyday phenomenon and practice is perhaps most apt and paradoxically enough least airy and theoretical of an approach.

Bakardjieva explains that the study of Internet as an ordinary experience does not mean that we see it was unimportant. It means that we look into the “Internet use performed by ordinary people,” consider the “the social and cultural environment in which Internet use takes place with its different levels and variations: personal, domestic, organizational, national,” and the explore the “the interconnectedness between Internet use and numerous other practices and

¹² Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); William H. Dutton, *Society on the Line: Information Politics in the Digital Age* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Frank Webster, *Theories of the Information Society* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹³ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias,” *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46-49. Original Publication: Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 mars 1967. Available at <http://foucault.info/doc/documents/heterotopia/foucault-heterotopia-en-html>, accessed March 20, 2016.

relations.”¹⁴ In other words, Internet as an ordinary experience means an all-comprehensive approach in which the boundaries between dichotomies (human/nonhuman, culture/science, material/immaterial) are challenged and all affective matter is given equal amount of attention and possibility of affective agency.

Agency (or the lack of it) has been a prevalent concern and criticism of (Marxist, structuralist, and cultural) theories attempting to understand materiality and material culture in general. According to Ian Woodward, poststructuralist analysis, similar to Marxist theories, is “relatively agentless, in a sense that he ignores the discourses and practices of actors.”¹⁵ The cultural approach, on the contrary, definitely sees the “agentic potential” of human entities, but is still relatively modest and anthropocentric when it comes to non-human entities.¹⁶ Our anthropocentric worldview and culture make difficult for us to see the world as one horizontal materiality and consider the affective potential of both human and non-human materialities.¹⁷

The use of language is the first materiality important to consider when it comes to rethinking our traditional views on human and non-human affective entities and imagining the world in a non-hierarchical material plane. There are

¹⁴ Bakardjieva, “The Internet in Everyday Life,” 59.

¹⁵ Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 74.

¹⁶ Ibid., 109.

¹⁷ We want to see change in materiality or for materiality to make a difference in order to assign non-human entities at least some agency. For instance, bananas on the kitchen table go through chemical processes in which starch breaks down to glucose. This process is indicated with the change in color from green to yellow to brown, but it does not happen fast enough for us to see the change in progress. (Ironically enough, in the context of structuralist and Marxist theories that denied agency, human and non-human actants were on a more equal plane: no one could alter the oppressive systems that seemed to have a life of their own.) We need to alter our perception of what change means in relation to time and visibility in order to move beyond the binary of human and non-human.

several ways to push our language in order to start to break down the traditional boundaries between materialities and get a more comprehensive sense of the affect that is created by the various contexts that inform the discourse on anti-LGBTQ violence. In other words, we could ask “what’s in a name?” The relationship between a word and an object it refers to is random, but nevertheless meaningful.

In which way should we then describe materiality that would provide us a conducive starting point for imagining the world differently? Some of the words used theorists challenging binary materialist thinking are: objects, things, non-human entities, and actants. I believe the most apt concept would be “actant,” which is understood to include “entities – both human and non-human – which have the ability to ‘act’ socially.”¹⁸ Scholars such as Jane Bennett or Donna Haraway have pointed out the difficulties of demarcating the exact boundaries of human bodies. To move beyond the rigid binaries between human vs. non-human and material vs. immaterial, Bennett argues for a “vibrant matter” that focuses on relationships between different (im)materialities in order to debunk our traditional hierarchical thinking when it comes to our bodies and the surrounding matter.¹⁹ I will keep the imprecise and often damaging nature of such binaries in mind, while exploring the affective value of contexts and subjectivities that form the affective economy of the online locality if anti-LGBTQ violence.

¹⁸ Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*, 15.

¹⁹ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

Here the work of Bakardjieva becomes especially useful since it combines several approaches in her study of the Internet as an everyday comprehensive experience. Similarly to her work, I'm drawn to the ideas developed by Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau which allow us to have an optimistic critique of the structures that hinder humanity and disconnect us from our everyday life, that is vital to creativity.²⁰ I'm not naively optimistic in my exploration of online communities and communication, but I do find it important to trace the differences in practice that make a difference and can potentially create a positive change toward more creativity and *just* structures.

Therefore, besides the features emphasized by Bakardjieva's list, I'd like highlight the importance of ordinary Internet users being the encoders and decoders of information to an extent that consumers of other media (such as television) are not, which complicates further any theory of rigid technological determinism.²¹ The possibility of oppositional reading can be made explicit especially through by online platforms such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and in the comments section of news stories.

²⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

²¹ Encoding and decoding are concepts developed by one of the founders of cultural studies, British scholar, Stuart Hall in "Encoding/decoding," *Culture, Media, Language* (1980): 128-138. Working within the frameworks of television studies, Hall's concepts have now become the basis of basic communications theory that explain the flow of information between the producers and the receivers. The fours stages involve: production, circulation, use, and reproduction. The key to this theory is that circuit in which the receivers of information decode and influence the further encoding of information while at the same time being affected by reading the coded message. The audience can take in the message (dominant reading), accept it partially (negotiated reading), or reject (oppositional reading).

Lefebvre's notions of "spatial practice, representation of space, and space of representation" are especially helpful when considering the complex and multilayered relationships between queer subjectivities, technology and online spaces.²² According to Lefebvre, we ought to look at the discourses around spaces: distinguishing between the discourse in space, the discourse about space, and the discourse of space. Although Lefebvre talks about built environment, my exploration of the affective qualities of non-traditional materialities, benefits greatly from his insights that place emphasis on the use instead of the production of buildings. Here too I'm concerned with the consumption, reception, and oppositional reading of information instead of the intent of traditional sources production (television, national news outlets). In this knowingly messy endeavor, I'm attempting to push the limits of phenomenological material culture approaches and mix it up with queer and communications theory and cultural studies in order to provide an understanding of a particular affect that is very material to so many of us yet which we continuously articulate into the world of the immaterial, ephemeral, and unimportant to not be counted as an actant or a subjectivity capable of enacting change.

Cultural critic and queer theorist Mel Chen has been an inspiration to me when it comes to moving between disciplines and methods. In their book about *animacies*, Mel Chen describes what they call "a somewhat 'feral' approach" to

²² Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 105.

their “shifting archive.”²³ According to Chen, a feral approach to disciplinarity forces the material at hand to “feralize” by “giving up any idealization about their domestication, refusing to answer whether they constitute proper or complete coverage.”²⁴ The affective economies that I’m attempting to uncover here with the archive at hand will always non-delimitable, provisional, and for multiple reasons forever lacking. I will start with the basic notion that subjectivities inhabit spaces and spaces inhabit subjectivities, and that the boundaries between entities get ambiguous and complicated, especially when we consider the online world. I’m interested in how affect becomes a formative spatial-social experience, especially when appears as an outcome of the relationship between online spaces and queer subjectivities.

In need and search for safe spaces queers have had a unique relationship with the online world. Internet scholars documented already in the 1990s how LGBTQ folks were quickly seizing on the opportunity to come out online, express themselves more freely and form communities. Nina Wakeford (1997) in her landmark essay “Cyberqueer” states that the LGBTQ community was amongst the earliest to embrace the opportunities and activist potential of the cyberspace: “Cyberqueer spaces are constantly reconstituted as points of resistance against the dominant assumption of the normality of heterosexuality in ways which are familiar to activists engaged in other struggles against heterosexism.”²⁵ Although

²³ Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics and Racial Mattering and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 18.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Nina Wakeford, “Cyberqueer,” in David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, eds., *The Cybercultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 408.

message boards and forums such as *Datalounge* or dating applications such as *Grinder* are uniquely gay male spaces, or sites such as *Autostraddle* target mostly lesbians, queer space as a non-normative alternative does not only exist in such LGBTQ identified sites.

Present day it is more likely that queer subjectivities come into contact with each other on mainstream sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and find each other in the comments section of online aggregators such as The Huffington Post. Media convergence allows users to connect their semi-private social media accounts to public news sites and blogs with just one click.

One of the reasons for why queers would take up Internet use so enthusiastically is the opportunity to have a safe space to express themselves which often could not be often found in the geographical location they were tied to. Social media platforms such as Facebook enable users to join LGBTQ groups that provide information and resources especially for youth who are in more isolated areas. Randal Woodland noticed this development already in the 1990s as he explains:

Computer-mediated communication has had a particularly dramatic impact on the lesbian and gay community, whose members may live in geographic or psychological isolation. Through email lists, USENET groups, and private BBSs (Bulletin Board Systems), communication across the Internet and on other computer networks has been a source of information, friendship, and support for many lesbian and gay people.²⁶

²⁶ Randal Woodland, "Queer Spaces, Modern Boys and Pagan Statues: Gay/Lesbian Identity and the Construction of Cyberspace," in David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, eds., *The Cybercultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 416.

The opportunity to have an online queer presence is especially important for queers who are more isolated by the physical and cultural geography of their space. Admittedly, online presence makes a significant difference for queers in rural areas without gay or lesbian friendly establishments or even without the safe knowledge of having other queers near by.

The Internet has been a space where many subcultural groups are free to express themselves, and “over time such spaces also became sites where identities are shaped, tested, and transformed.”²⁷ I agree to a degree with Woodland who argues that “identity is formed and strengthened by membership in a self aware community... In the fluid geographies of cyberspace, community boundaries shift as the discourse changes.”²⁸ However, participation in online communities each of which comes with their own etiquette and signifiers be it as floating as it may, also forces subjectivities into identity politics and ready-made marketable identity categories.

Nina Wakeford sees this as a process that since the mid-1990 has also challenged LGBTQ identities as “new technologies have become part of many people’s experiences of being a member of a sexual minority.”²⁹ This of course applies to non-minorities as well. Everyone’s identities have become challenged as online presence today is almost a requirement to be counted as a social

²⁷ Woodland, “Queer Spaces,” 430.

²⁸ Ibid., 428.

²⁹ Nina Wakeford, “New Technologies and ‘Cyber-Queer Research,’” in Diane Richardson, Steven Seidman, eds., *Handbook of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2002),123.

subject. Quite frankly, it is suspicious and feels unsafe if a person does not come up when you Google their name. Campbell and Carlson have called this “exchanging privacy for participation.”³⁰ As with all kinds of media and visibility, online worlds give us freedom to express our queer selves in a safe(er) space yet it also brings us closer under eye of the power structures of the state.

Photographs may seem anachronistic with the many possibilities of media today yet they are still arguably the most affective bits of information. Susan Sontag has argued that our memory as a “freeze-frame” has a single image as its basic unit.³¹ According to Sontag, “photographs – and quotations – seem, because they are taken to be pieces of reality, more authentic than extended literary narratives.”³² Therefore, photographs that permit us to linger over a single image of horror indeed have a greater affective impact on viewers than violence on television and in movies.

As the previous discussion indicates, the aesthetics of photographs used to accompany news stories about anti-LGBTQ violence on the Internet are varied. On the one hand, we have the extremely polished photographs in the like of Lovendusky and Shepard. On the other hand, we have the low quality photos taken by bystanders or most often by the victims themselves after or before the incident. Therefore, the digital vernacular of anti-LGBTQ violence has its own set of aesthetics that are mainly informed by the *truthfulness* of reporting (as discussed earlier), but also by the often-tumultuous relationship queers have

³⁰ John Campbell and Matt Carlson, “Panopticon.com: Online Surveillance and the Commodification of Privacy,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Vol. 46, Issue 4, (2002): 591.

³¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), 22.

³² Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1990; Original 1977), 74.

always had with technology, self-portraits and authority. The majority of images used in online news stories are not polished professional photographs yet they share characteristics that are common enough to talk about a specific digital vernacular of anti-LGBTQ violence. There are two kinds of images: 1) photograph taken after the attack in order to provide evidence of bodily harm and injury 2) a photograph taken before the attack for private or public (social media) use that gets picked up the media.

If the photograph is taken after the attack in order to have a record of injuries, the victim is alive and the image works as a way to have control over a situation in which the person's control over the safety of their body was minimized. In the case of such images, the victim often chooses to post the image on social media. The screenshot of Ben Stoviak's Facebook post from October 7th 2013 shows a close up of his face and written account of the incident (Figure 25). According to the post, Stoviak and his boyfriend were attacked in the evening of October 6th after leaving a local bar in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.³³ The image appears to be taken in Stoviak's home. We can see a beige couch and a pillow to his right in the background and a light coming from the space lamp from the right. The top of his head and part of his jaw do not fit in the frame, but we can see the right side of his face with visible bruises on his forehead, cheekbones, and lips.

³³ James Nichols, "Ben Stoviak, Pittsburgh Gay Man, Attacked In Alleged Hate Crime," *The Huffington Post*, 08 October 2013, accessed March 16, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/08/pittsburgh-anti-gay-hate-crime_n_4063670.html.

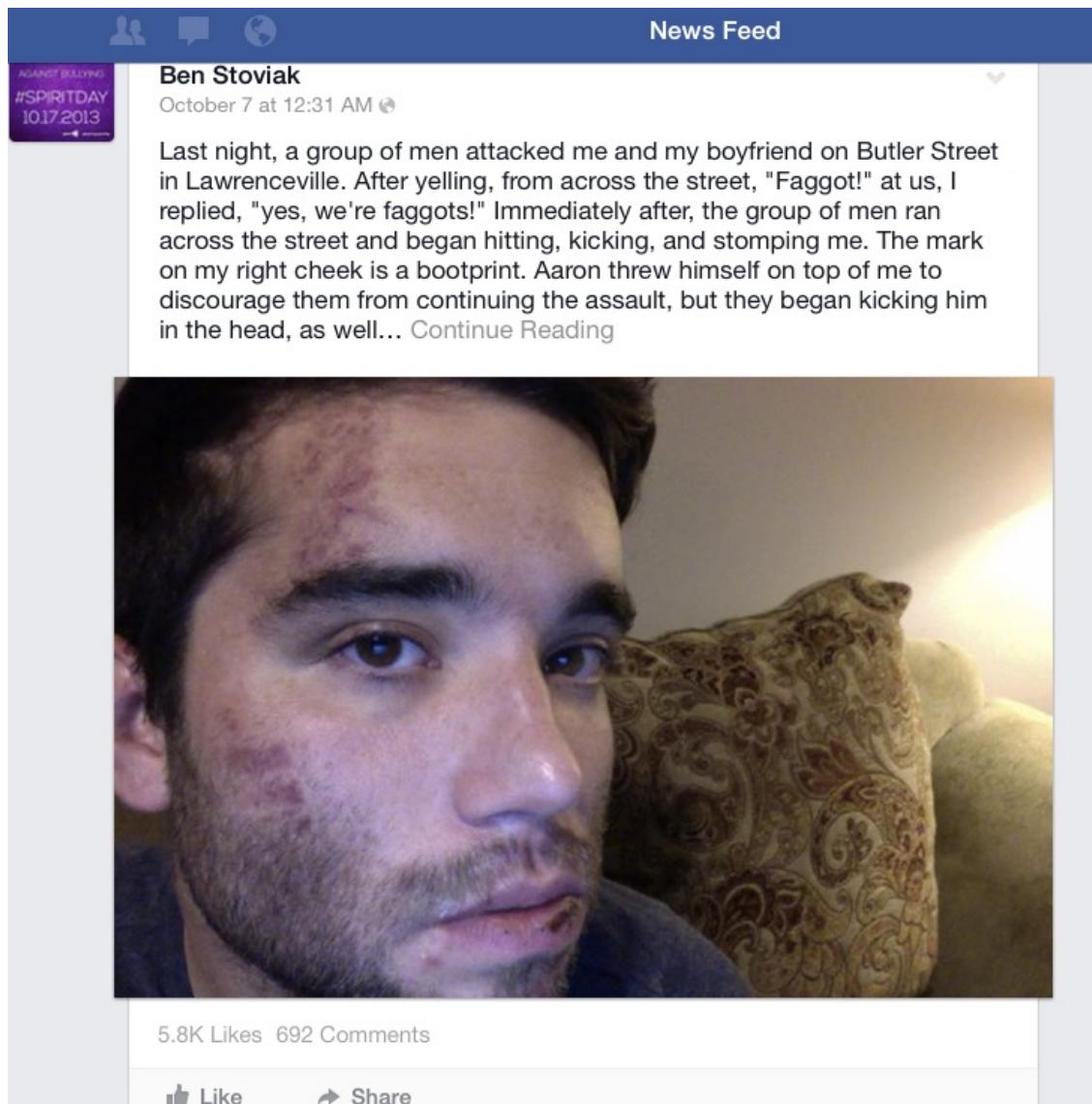


Figure 25. Ben Stoviak's Facebook post.

Source: Ben Stoviak's Facebook page, accessed October 18, 2013,
<https://www.facebook.com/stoviak>.

One of the most obvious aspects of everyday ordinary use of the Internet is the connection between different devices that provide Internet access. Most photos are taken with a smartphone. Stoviak's post received thousands of "likes" and "shares," and was picked up and used by online news blogs, *The Huffington Post* among them to contribute to the displays of subjective violence that is exciting, clickable and therefore marketable.

These reactions to violence are genuinely important in our "society of spectacle" of the 2010s. In such a setting it is the consumer of represented brutality who judges on the *truthfulness* of displays of violence and death, and not so much the perpetrators or victims. It is important however to notice the relationships between technologies, social media, and the audience in order to be able to critically look at this particular culture of violence, and the communities it creates.

The shared consumption and transmission of sentiments through telemediating devices evokes what Karen Tongson in *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*, calls "remote intimacy."³⁴ Tongson credits the term to Jennifer Terry, and building on her work argues that "in a pre-digital age, remote intimacies were practiced through the shared consumption (or some would say overconsumption) of broadcast television and popular music, as well as by 'hanging out' live."³⁵ In our current digital world, the Internet, and especially most recently the convergence of different media on the Internet allows "remote intimacy" to take up an unprecedentedly extensive space in our lives.

³⁴ Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011), 25.

³⁵ Ibid.

The second category of images is not taken with the intention in mind of reporting an act of violence on the part of the victim. Sometimes the person in the images has survived the attack and has given permission to use the photograph, and in the case of death, the image is pulled from the person's public social media account (mostly Facebook) or given to the media by the relatives, close friends, or chosen family. One of the images picked up to talk about the shooting murder of Mark Carson in New York City was a low angle close-up image of showing his face and upper body (Figure 26).³⁶ He is leaning forward and wearing a red T-shirt that reads 'HOTTIES.' It reads as a mirror image because it has been taken most likely with a camera attached a computer or laptop. The picture is taken indoors, perhaps at his home as we can see part of a white window awning and black shades in the background. The photograph is slightly off center. We can only see one of his left shoulders fully; the right shoulder does not fit in the frame. The light is coming in from the upper left corner of the image which makes part of his shaped head shiny. The image is rather pixelated and lower quality than that of Stoviak's, which against the backdrop of established *truthfulness* of anti-LGBTQ violence and hierarchy of images leaves Carson on the margins.

This brief discussion of those two examples brings us to an important yet often taken for granted aspect of photo taking and sharing that the everyday use of the Internet involves. Both photos share an important formal characteristic

³⁶ Dennis Slattery, Eric Badia, and Joe Kemp, "Gunman Shoots 32-year-old Mark Carson Dead in Greenwich Village Bias Attack: Officials Say," *The New York Daily News*, May 19, 2013, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/gunman-shoots-32-year-old-man-dead-greenwich-village-bias-attack-officials-article-1.1347776>.



Figure 26. Mark Carson.

Source: Dennis Slattery, Eric Badia, and Joe Kemp, "Gunman Shoots 32-year-old Mark Carson Dead in Greenwich Village Bias Attack: Officials Say," *The New York Daily News*, May 19, 2013, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/gunman-shoots-32-year-old-man-dead-greenwich-village-bias-attack-officials-article-1.1347776>.

which very much defines the aesthetics of this particular digital vernacular of violence. The photos are taken by the person depicted in the photo; in other words, these are what most Internet users would be able to identify as “selfies.” Selfies, anti-LGBTQ violence, and queerness converge to inform the affective economies of this particular digital vernacular. In order to understand the particularities of the kind of affect that this convergence possibly creates, it is important to consider and discuss the histories of the phenomena of the selfie and what could be considered its predecessor: the self-portrait. This discussion will help us to understand a small aspect in the development of queer subculture and its aesthetics and explore how the meanings shift when the encoders are queer, or have a set intention to queer the normative flow of mainstream images.

Although the selfie has entered the museum and art world, and even OED, some of the most common critiques see selfies as narcissistic, demonstrations of anxiety, perpetuating and enforcing normative beauty standards, and in general something that if practiced at all, should be done with caution and in moderation. However, there is a positive potential in queer selfies that manifests in resistance to mainstream limited perceptions of he queer possibilities: they challenge the dominant aesthetics and power relations by facilitating the trespassings of acceptable identity boundaries.

Selfies taken by queers and shared in the heterotopic sphere of the Internet can be utilized as what James C. Scott in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance* (1985) identified as the “weapons of the weak.”³⁷ Scott

³⁷ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 137.

discusses the everyday acts of resistance that occur in peasant and slave societies in response to domination. This includes things like “rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, anonymity.”³⁸ Scott explains that such means are particularly effective in situations where violence employed used to maintain dominant power structures, allowing “a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript... in which ideological resistance is disguised, muted and veiled for safety’s sake.”³⁹ Rebellions and explicit outburst of resistance are less common simply because the outcome would be fatal to the “weak.” Similarly, the “weapons” of resistance of marginalized groups, especially with multiple intersectional identities need to be “weak” in order to survive, make a life yet challenge and object the power structures that deny their existence. This resistance in the form of “weapons of the weak” is survival in both spiritual and physical sense and becomes our greatest strength.

The origin story of the selfie has a connection to bodily injury. According to the Internet legend, on September 13, 2002, a user named “Hopey” posted the following words accompanied by an image on an online forum: “Um drunk at a mates 21st, I tripped ofer [sic] and landed lip first (with front teeth coming a very close second) on a set of steps. I had a hole about 1cm long right through my bottom lip. And sorry about the focus, it was a selfie.”⁴⁰ Hopey’s need to share

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Pearlman, “Australian Man ‘Invented the Selfie After Drunken Night Out,’” *The Telegraph*, November 19, 2013, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/10459115/Australian-man-invented-the-selfie-after-drunken-night-out.html>.

his misfortune arguably marks the first documented use of the word “selfie” on the Internet. This image is what artist John Monteith would now call an example of the “Wild West days” of selfies—out of focus, blurred, at an odd angle.⁴¹ The word was in use in the early 2000s, and was used on Flickr in 2004, but it was not until January, 27 2011, the day Instagram first introduced hashtags, and Jennifer Lee from Oakland, CA added the historic #selfie to a photograph of herself.⁴² This # marked the beginning of a movement. Today, the ubiquity of selfies has made this mode of visual self-expression one of the most loved and hated activities in our social-media era.

Queer or not, selfies predominantly involve the close-up of a face, nearly always taken from within an arm’s length of the subject (unless taken in mirror). Not unimportantly, the emergence of selfie as an every day activity is linked to the development of communications technology. In 2010, Apple was first to introduce a phone, IPhone 4, with a front facing camera, which changed the aesthetics of selfies. This camera feature was mostly meant for Facetime or other video calling applications such as Skype. In terms of interactions between the person, their device, digital identity expression, and the world, the front facing camera feature gives more flexibility and control when it comes to taking a photograph and ultimately improves the quality of the image. A more recent, among the best innovations of 2014 according to *Time Magazine*, the Selfie Stick

⁴¹ Jerry Saltz, “Art at Arm’s Length: A History of the Selfie,” *Vulture*, January 26, 2014, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.vulture.com/2014/01/history-of-the-selfie.html>.

⁴² Sam Laird, “Behold the First ‘Selfie’ Hashtag in Instagram History,” *Mashable*, November 19, 2013, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://mashable.com/2013/11/19/first-selfie-hashtag-instagram/#SQUzV4UKrZqL>.

has been changing the practice of recording the self in everyday life even more in the last couple of years.⁴³

The face is, as Deleuze and Guattari claim, most produced topography driven by the desire to see the psyche or the self upon the flesh.⁴⁴ So what is the psyche or the self that presumably is revealed? True, as said at first blush selfies can be seen as Jerry Saltz writes, “silly, typical, boring. Guys flexing muscles, girls making pouty lips (‘duckface’), people mugging in bars or throwing gang signs or posing with monuments or someone famous.”⁴⁵ There is, however, a lot more to selfies as a vehicle of self-aggrandizement when considering the context of LGBTQ subcultural expressions.

Queer culture has a history of embracing and reclaiming the image of the exaggerated self that seem banal, get appropriated and celebrated by mainstream culture all at the same time. In her 1964 essay, “Notes on Camp,” Susan Sontag identified one of such recognizable aesthetics as “camp.” Sontag states, “to perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand being-as-playing-a-role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater.”⁴⁶ Ultimately, tongue in cheek, Sontag argues that camp is “good because it’s awful,” but only under very particular conditions.⁴⁷ I certainly would not put all selfies in the category of camp, but there is a unique relationship between queer folks and selfies that goes beyond the mainstream sensibility.

⁴³ Time Staff, “The 25 Best Inventions of 2014,” *Time*, November 20, 2014, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://time.com/3594971/the-25-best-inventions-of-2014/>.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

⁴⁵ Saltz, “Art at Arm’s Length.”

⁴⁶ Susan Sontag, “Notes On ‘Camp’” (1964).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

In her response to a surge of articles in 2014 that criticized selfies and people who are overly eager in their practice, queer blogger Feminist Griote touches upon the transformative potentials of those aspects of queer selfies:

The reason it is revolutionary and empowering to see selfies of beautiful Black women is because proper representation of people who look like me is nowhere near the point of over saturation. Fat people, queer people, trans* people, femmes, disabled people, POC need and deserve affirmation too! For many of us taking selfies is an exercise in putting our self-love into praxis. The act of loving, seeing, and accepting oneself in real time.⁴⁸

As Feminist Griote says visibility of non-conforming and queer bodies is very limited when it comes to mainstream media. If bodies that trespass acceptable identity boundaries happen to make it to the popular file of vision, they are often tokenized and misrepresented.

As an act of love and activist practice, I would argue that the experience and taking of queer selfies is at times more important than the photographs themselves. Art historian Geoffrey Batchen has observed that selfies represent “the shift of the photograph [from] memorial function to a communication device.”⁴⁹ As a means of communication, selfies have become emblematic when it comes to anti-LGBTQ violence. Similarly, the practice as an act of love is important in itself, and communicating a political stance characteristic to queer life, and queer selves. However, I believe queer selfies have not lost this very core and traditional memorial function that photographs serve—queer selfies perform an important mnemonic function as a visual record of recent queer

⁴⁸ Feminist Griote “The Radical Politics of #Selfies,” *TheFeministGriote.com*, November 22, 2013, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://thefeministgriote.com/the-radical-politics-of-selfies/>.

⁴⁹ Saltz, “Art at Arm’s Length.”

history, the stories of people whom we cannot see looking back at us in mainstream culture. Selfies mark strive to record one's queer self yourself because no one else is. Selfie, which in a traditional sense appears in the immaterial online world can have a very material affect on queer subjectivities whom the image reaches. There are traces of this particular materiality and rebellion when looking at some examples of queer self-expression over the past hundred years. The specific yet elusively ambiguous aesthetics of queer selfies have not appeared out of nowhere, but are connected to a history of photographic queer self-portraits that date back to at least late 19th century with photographers purposely ridiculing the norms sanctioning our bodies and behaviors.

One earlier bold examples of a queer self-portraitist can be found in Washington, DC. Frances Benjamin Johnston took several intriguing self-portraits in the late 19th century. Although Johnston is mostly known for her controversial Hampton Album, very little is written on these amazingly bold gender-bending photographs. In terms of subject matter and affect those few photographs from Johnston's huge portfolio of more than a century ago are similar to the majority of work done by Cindy Sherman in more recent years, especially the one in which she dressed up as a proper Victorian lady in an attempt to criticize the era's female beauty standards.

However, her most interesting self-portraits are the ones where the fluidly of gender is directly explored. A self-portrait from 1896 shows her as a liberated "new woman" (Figure 27). Historians Peter Daniel and Raymond Smock (1974)

have argued that, “three symbols of rebellion against Victorian formality appear in this self-portrait taken about 1896. Proper Victorian women were not expected to smoke, to drink beer, or to reveal their petticoats.”⁵⁰ Smoking a cigarette in 1896 was a very bold move indeed, considering the fact that until the 1920 it was illegal to advertise cigarettes to women.⁵¹ One of the first ads targeted to women appeared in the 1920s and depicted a young woman (without a cigarette) say, “Blow some my way,” to a smoking man next to her. It was not until 1927 when women were shown smoking in advertisements.⁵² Those tree elements show how Johnston – who was workingwoman who never married and had close relationships with several female friends – is consciously styling herself to challenge dominant cultural norms and practices here on several fronts.⁵³

In another, one could argue even queerer self-portrait, Johnston bends the gender norms of the 19th century further. This image shows the cross-dressed Johnston wearing a false mustache and standing next to a bicycle. The photo displays elements of queer dapper/dandy style that became prominent during the

⁵⁰ Peter Daniel and Raymond Smock, *A Talent for Detail: The Photographs of Miss Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1889-1910* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 1974), 31.

⁵¹ Larry C. White, *Merchants of Death: The American Tobacco Industry* (Sag Harbor, New York: Beech Tree Books, 1988), 127.

⁵² Gerard S. Petrone, *Tobacco Advertising: The Great Seduction*, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1996), 260.

⁵³ Johnston was not a women’s rights activist at the time in the traditional sense. Despite taking portraits of some of the main leaders such as Elizabeth C. Stanton, she never really saw eye to eye with them. There were many problems and frictions within the early movement, racism obviously one of the most appalling pressure points. It could be that Johnston’s sexuality was an issue, it could be also quite frankly because Johnston liked to drink her sherry and most of the early women’s rights activists were also part of the temperance movement.



Figure 27. Frances Benjamin Johnston as the "New Woman."
Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.,
accessed March 17, 2016. <http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b11893/>.

Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. One of the most dashing examples of this era is Gladys Bentley, for instance.

In *Materializing Queer Desire: from Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol* (2009), Elisa Glick explores the relationship between modernity and homosexuality by looking into development of the phenomenon of the dandy.⁵⁴ She begins in the late 19th century with Oscar Wilde and stops at different cultural moments and ends with Andy Warhol. Glick's most fascinating part of the book focuses on lesbian artists: Romaine Brooks and Radclyffe Hall. Most interesting to me, mainly because lesbians have remained historically and in academic writing invisible compared to gay men.⁵⁵ Glick discusses how Brooks and Radclyffe "drew upon the traditions of dandyism and decadent aesthetics 'as part of a desire to make a newly emerging lesbian identity publically visible.'"⁵⁶ Brooks and Radclyffe went against what we consider the traditional historical lesbian who preferred to remain unnoticed or confirm to mainstream aesthetics of womanhood.

When looking at queer photographers in the post-WWII era – for instance, the work of Robert Mapplethorpe, or Nan Goldin – we can detect a trend among queer artists, a sense of urgency to depict their vanishing queer community. Although Mapplethorpe and Goldin take pictures of their queer counterparts and friends, self-portraits play an important equalizing function and similarly to queer

⁵⁴ Elisa Glick, *Materializing Queer Desire: from Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol* (New York, NY: State Univ of New York Press, 2009).

⁵⁵ Important to note here as well that despite more attention, the image of gay men has remains very limited and unfairly stereotyped as scholars again and again focus on same figures such as Wilde or Warhol.

⁵⁶ Glick, *Materializing Queer Desire*, 7.

selfies today are a way of taking a political stance with and within their queer community. Of course, it is important to consider the forces of capitalism, the limits of technology, and the privilege inherent in every opportunity what the representation of the self entails. Yet within even those systems, queer self-expression as a “weapon of the weak” continues to challenge absolute compliance.

The dandy aesthetics, explicit displays and celebration of queer desire and sexuality, and queer community activism – are some of the examples of the current themes of queer selfies that are informed by the collective unconscious of the past. Glick argues that modernity destabilized the boundaries between public and private, and that the queer dandy is the manifestation of the porousness of this binary contradiction.⁵⁷ Today, the Internet has evaporated the boundaries between public and private even further. The communities and publics that the circulation of queer selfies calls upon often assemble and disperse chaotically. Those publics are fragmented across the heterotopic space of the Internet—there is no one set location for queer selfies. Indeed you can find certain images through hashtags (*feministselfie*), or specific tumblr pages (*sexy pos punks*), but in hyperlinked non-space of the Internet you never really know when a queer encounter might occur. Possibilities abound when the queer eye meets the potentially queer content of the screen. In this ambiguity of the queer selfie community lays its strength and positive potential—it allows it to pop up

⁵⁷ Glick, *Materializing Queer Desire*, 23.

unexpectedly and disrupt the imperialist flow of mainstream images, and more importantly provide recognition and affirmation of queer existence.

As this discussion shows, there is a long tradition of queer folks taking pictures of themselves as an act of dissent. When the worlds of queer self-proclamation and forces that attempt to eradicate it converge, we are often presented with a queer selfie. It is vital to know the importance of such self-portraits for queers and especially for queers of color in order to fully comprehend the meaning of such forms of self-expression. The established conventions and aesthetics of mainstream online culture perpetuate the current affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence. Visibility is granted to white male bodies and identities most vulnerable to violence are deemed culturally insignificant and left out from our field of vision. Although there was relative response to deaths of Mark Carson and Eyricka Morgan, as queers of color, they had to pay more in blood to achieve this kind of visibility. The criminalization of non-white bodies does not allow for a smooth transition to be included in the image of *truthfulness* of anti-LGBTQ hate crime. Even with current limited visibility, non-white, and especially female identifying victims get judged against established misogynist, racist, and classist mainstream LGBTQ aesthetics, the ideal of which is a polished image of a white cisgender gay male: Matthew Shepard. The positive potential of queer selfies provides an opportunity to shift the hierarchical structures of the online vernacular of anti-LGBTQ violence: it allows for the victim to reclaim their violated body (even posthumously) and

represent it in a self-directed way to friends, followers, online communities, and mainstream platforms.

Conclusion

Reading Globally: Homonationalism and Queer Solutions

Episode 6 in season 3 of the Netflix original series *House of Cards* takes us to contemporary Russia. U.S. President Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) and First Lady Claire Underwood (Robyn Wright) meet with Russian President Viktor Petrov (Lars Mikkelsen), the show's Vladimir Putin surrogate. The aim of their visit is to continue to discuss a plan for troops in the Jordan Valley, and to continue efforts facilitating the release of political prisoner Michael Corrigan (Christian Camargo). Michael Corrigan is an American gay activist, who was arrested in Russia for protesting its anti-LGBTQ laws.

First Lady and the recent United Nations Ambassador, Claire Underwood is assigned to work with Corrigan on his release, which is conditioned on his reading of the following statement:

I, Michael Corrigan, apologize to the citizens of the Russian Federation for breaking your laws. I regret my part in exposing minors to nontraditional sexual attitudes. I am grateful to President Petrov for the clemency my release demonstrates, and for allowing me to return to the United States.¹

Claire does her best in trying to convince Michael to apologize in public, which would result in his freedom to return home to his husband in the States. Michael refuses to read the statement although Claire tells him that he can recant the scripted words and reject their sentiment when he returns to the United States.

¹ *House of Cards*, "Chapter 32," season 3, episode 6, directed by James Foley, written by Melissa James Gibson, Netflix Original Series, February 27, 2015.

Michael believes in his cause and is disgusted that Claire would ask him to utter an apology for “exposing minors” to “nontraditional sexual attitudes.”

She spends the night before the planned press conference in Michael’s cell sleeping in the bunk across from him only to discover in the morning that he has committed suicide by hanging himself with her scarf. Claire makes it to the press conference still wearing the clothes she slept in. The affect of this undeniably connects us to the iconic images of Jackie Kennedy in the bloodstained outfit that she refused to change out of when appearing in public in the brief moments after her husband John F. Kennedy was shot. As a temporal drag of Jackie Kennedy, Claire diverges from her script and makes an impassioned speech for “gay” rights:

Michael was willing to die for what he believed in. He was brave, and his voice deserves to be heard. If it weren’t for this unjust law, and the ignorance and intolerance of your government, Michael would still be with us. Shame on you, Mr. President.²

This is a pivotal moment in the series: the beginning of a storyline of friction between Claire and Frank. Besides upsetting her husband and putting a strain on their marriage, Claire’s seemingly bold statement for “gay” rights, which supposedly serves to confirm her unexpected humanity, ruins the United States relationships with Russia. And as implied by the 1960s Cold War ethos of the episode, ultimately puts world peace on hold. The world stops to save privilege: a young handsome white gay man.

Show are dramatic. Yet this example highlights the real-life global outcome of affective economies of anti-LGBTQ hate crime in the United States.

² *House of Cards*, “Chapter 32.”

The development of this discourse at home that I have described so far has culminated in what the scholar Jasbir Puar termed homonationalism: “[A]n exceptional form of national heteronormativity is now joined by an exceptional form of national homonormativity, in other words, homonationalism. Collectively, they continue or extend the project of U.S. nationalism and imperial expansion endemic to the war on terror.”³ Puar discusses the rise of a homonational subject who is shaped by three aspects: sexual exceptionalism of the United States, biopolitics that are framed by the regulatory frame of queerness, and the ascendancy of whiteness.⁴ In other words, homonationalism supports and finances a “brand of homosexuality” that is an exceptional addition in supporting the values of the capitalist nation state while being exemplary in its politics of resistance and simultaneously engendering and disavowing entire populations of “sexual-racial others who fall out of its narrow terms of acceptability.”⁵ Crucial to shaping contemporary homonationalist politics is the dominance of the United States as the center in “gay” ideology.

Puar and a few other scholars use the concept of homonationalism to discuss the United States politics in Israel and Palestine and the colonization of Native peoples at home.⁶ I use the example on Russia to point to the lack of academic writing on homonationalism in that context and because this is something that I can speak to with the weight of an affect of growing up in a tiny

³ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sarah Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

post-Soviet country right next to it. The *House of Cards* portrayal of LGBTQ politics in Russia is fairly accurate as are contemporary exemplary politics of resistance represented by Claire. Putin uses the “protection of minors” as justification for the “gay propaganda” law.⁷ In recent years, Russian lawmakers have also proposed bans on allowing LGBTQ people to retain custody of their own biological children, as well as on pregnancy surrogacy.⁸ Children and family, previously regarded as anti-queer institutions, today emerge as an important feature of the homonationalist brand of homosexuality.

This dissertation explored past and present avenues of affect that have been shaping this current, very limited brand of homosexuality in the United States. My focus was on the discourse of anti-LGBTQ violence as a defining issue in contemporary LGBTQ movement. This meditation on the affective economies of anti-violence narratives followed a loose chronology, starting in the late 1960s and ending in the present day. The current state of such affective economies is the tip of an iceberg that reveals the underlying racist, classist, and misogynist basis of our contemporary culture.

As a field of academic inquiry, American studies is grounded in social justice activism in both theory and practice, and seeks to eliminate such social biases. As an American studies scholar, I not only discuss and theorize social

⁷ Zack Ford, “5 Ways ‘Russia Today’ Attempts To Justify The Country’s Law Banning ‘Gay Propaganda,’” *ThinkProgress*, August 21, 2013, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2013/08/21/2505051/5-ways-russia-today-anti-gay/>.

⁸ Zack Ford, “It Gets Worse: Russia Proposes Law To Deny Child Custody To Gay Parents,” *ThinkProgress*, September 5, 2013, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2013/09/05/2575731/worse-russia-proposes-law-deny-child-custody-gay-parents/>; Zack Ford, “It Gets Even Worse: New Russian Bill Seeks To Ban Same-Sex Surrogacy,” *ThinkProgress*, October 10, 2013, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2013/10/10/2766201/russia-gay-surrogacy/>.

justice, but also practice what I preach by approaching this dissertation as an activist project and contributing to a grassroots LGBTQ history. I look at a variety of cultural texts, critique narratives that play into current harmful affective economies, and identify moments that challenge homonormative and homonationalist discourses. Therefore, phenomenology—how we experience the world and make sense of it—is one of this dissertation’s overarching themes that runs through the diverse methodologies that my differing sources require. I consider the affective quality of a black-and-white photograph in mediated form, “gay” publication in the 1960s, place and people in “the South,” LGBTQ documentary reality, and participation in the contemporary society of spectacle.

As a queer scholar working within American Studies, I have the double obligation not only to question the culture that shapes me, but also to emphasize my own positioning and orientation within the culture that I critique. I begin this dissertation with a critique, which has been uncomfortable for me on a personal level. The current state of contemporary LGBTQ politics and our understandings of anti-LGBTQ violence have been shaped, to a large degree, by the murder of Matthew Shepard. I argue that Shepard’s murder has come to define the focus of mainstream LGBTQ movements to such an extent that we fail to notice those who does not fit into the narrow aesthetics of violence that he represents. As the patron saint of anti-LGBTQ violence and an ideal victim, Matthew Shepard encourages both the media and the public to seek out and focus on copies of cases that are most similar to this murder. This discourse excludes people of color, the poor, women, non-cisgender people, and above all those people

whose identity categories occupy these groups' intersections. The spectrum of recognition for anti-LGBTQ violence places those victims at the opposite end of Shepard, where one gets punished simply for surviving.

Most importantly, focus on street violence against young white men does not allow for a discussion of structural violence, which is the root cause of violence against the most vulnerable groups in our society. Arguing to redirect focus away from the senseless murder of Matthew Shepard is a difficult standpoint to take because it implies that I'm devaluing his suffering and death. This stance is even harder because I'm not a complete outsider to the story: I lived in Wyoming for two years. I have been to the bar where Shepard was picked up, I have interviewed the prosecutor on the case, I have talked to his friends. All of these pressure points connect me to Laramie, Wyoming and to Shepard's life and death. I have at times felt like I'm betraying him by going against the grain and not being exemplary in my politics of resistance. Yet I believe that it is only by questioning our own culturally-conditioned feelings that we can start to push for change in the dominant affective economies of violence. As I discussed in the beginning of this project, Gregory Bateson's ideas on logical typing helped to illuminate my own biases and facilitate movement between the different levels of learning, which has been vital to my understanding of this cultural phenomenon.

On an official institutional level, archives are probably one of the least emotional places we can imagine. We are trained to behave in ways that are fit for this disciplinary space: to sit in our assigned spot, not talk or make noise, and

in general not show any visible signs of emotion. However, in the eyes of queer scholars, archives are above all spaces of feeling and activism. My Chapter 2, “Reading Against the Grain of Mainstream: Archive Activism and New Histories of Violence” is an archive activism project of feeling that was made possible thanks to the Phil Zwickler Fellowship at the Human Sexuality Collection at the Cornell University. The existence of LGBTQ archives today is in itself a huge step forward in recognizing non-traditional sexualities and given those who identify as such the opportunity to articulate our pasts. However, this does not mean that we should be complaisantly thankful and refrain from extending our critique to LGBTQ archival work in fear of undermining the movement. Even primarily excellent work should be questioned and further fragmentation of narratives sought. We also should not be silenced even when we are grateful for the funds that allow us to be in the archives in the first place. Bad cultural criticism that is good should seek to provide critique of the place that funds us as an act of gratitude. The framework of this project does not grant me the power to reorganize archives, but I can critique even when the archive at hand has given me financial support to read mainstream publications—in this case, *The Advocate*—against the grain.

As an activist endeavor in its own right, Chapter 3, “Reading Time and Place: Creative Queer Resistance in The South,” brings the oral histories of grassroots activists in the South to the institutional space of the university on the pages of this dissertation. I question and complicate the traditional narratives we have of LGBTQ life in the South. In fact, the established concept of the South

does not hold up against the stories from LGBTQ activists in the region. SONG activists complicate the metronormative narrative as discussed by Jack Halberstam beyond simply reversing it. The activist stories show how geographical, cultural, social, and spiritual landscapes collide to create new meanings that push the traditional boundaries of identity and place.

My own personal narrative also confirms the ubiquitous ambiguity of the metaphorical South as a queer dystopia. The small-town South is seen as the other end of LGBTQ visibility and coming out, but I could not stand *not* being queer midway into my first year at William & Mary, which is located in the heart of Virginia's Colonial Williamsburg. Place like that is where queer personal narratives usually begin and lead to the "big city." Yet on a global context, I came to the United States from "the South:" from a small town in a country called Estonia, which as an unknown, probably uneducated region functions as this metaphorical other. Culturally and geographically, Estonia exists at the intersections of the very liberal Scandinavian countries and conservative and religious Slavic regions of the former Soviet Union. Very much pro-American, Estonia is an avid supporter of NATO, yet proposed laws protecting the rights of LGBTQ citizens have faced strong opposition in the Parliament (*Riigikogu*).

Why did I alter my traditional trajectory of life and come to the United States? Was it because I am queer? Or am I queer because I chose to alter this traditional trajectory? My move was pre-discursive and pre-political. I did not move here to be queer. Yet I cannot help but recognize the extent to which I was conditioned by the homonationalist culture that places the "gay center" in the

United States. It might not seem like it to Americans, but coming from a post-Soviet country, the entire United States is the metaphorical city in the context of LGBTQ rights.

Discerning the distinction between what is the *real* real and what is fiction is impossible in contemporary meaning-making. I discuss the blurred boundaries between truth and lies and possibilities for social justice activism that would embrace this ambiguity in Chapter 4, “Reading the Silver Screen: Documentary Activism and Queer Truths.” I provide an overview on LGBTQ documentary that does not currently exist in academic writing. This chapter is a rudimentary start of a conversation, which is vital to be continued by queer (and) film scholars in the future. In the light of ever expanding recording technologies, documentary work plays an increasingly important role in LGBTQ grassroots histories and world making. We need more scholarship which would help to contextualize the documentary work done today and put those narratives in conversation with the work done in the past. This above all means first making documentary work of the past available to contemporary publics and queer youth today.

My final chapter, “Reading Aesthetically: Digital Activism and Presentation of Queer Self,” works on highlighting a connection between the queer self-expression today and the past. The fastest and more effective activist work gets done by queer youth on the heterotopic space of the Internet. Official anti-LGBTQ narratives perpetuate the current harmful aesthetics that further marginalize identities which historically have been blocked from our field of vision. Today, this is done by exclusion, but even more harmfully through

inclusion and judgment. Technology allows queer youth to puncture such narratives and take up space online with their queer self-expression, which often manifests in the hated and loved phenomenon of the selfie. Queer selfies are a continuation of the tradition of dandyism, camp, and self-care; they are terrible and wonderful at the same time, and an excellent exercise in bad activism in all its messiness.

This queer archive of feelings at hand is one possible module for connecting scholarship with activism while approaching the contested cultural phenomenon of anti-LGBTQ violence. As any archive, mine too, is always lacking, incomplete, and above all, open to multiple interpretations. I hope to have shown that in such seeming weaknesses lies the strength of our purposely unexemplary politics of resistance, which makes this kind of activism good because it is bad.

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