

Introduction

“COMING OUT TO THE STREETS”

One day after my shift as a volunteer at a San Antonio shelter for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) youth experiencing homelessness, I opened my laptop and typed in the web address for Craigslist. During my volunteer shift the previous night, youth residing at the shelter had discussed seeing advertisements on the website by Camila and Zoe, two Hispanic heterosexual transgender women who, until recently, had been staying at the LGBTQ shelter. Staff had suspended them for doing drugs and missing curfew. I skimmed the personals section of the advertisements on Craigslist until I found their ad.¹ I found the following ad. It read: “Pretty Ts Girls—t4m (Downtown) Hi guys I’m Camila, with black hair, 22 5’8 and I’m Zoe, with red hair, I’m 19, 5’5. We’re both transgender crossdressers. We trying to get a room for the night to chill, we’re laid back and looking to meet some cute guys. Looking to meet guys with party favors. Both versatile bottoms looking to have a drink, smoke some bud and have some fun.”²

I had met Camila and Zoe while conducting fieldwork on LGBTQ youth homelessness in central Texas. Zoe’s story captures the complexities of youth homelessness. “I first started coming out to the streets whenever I was thirteen,” Zoe began, as we sat down for an interview a few months

after she posted the Craigslist advertisement. Zoe grew up with a single mother. Her dad—whom Zoe called her “sperm donor”—went in and out of jail during Zoe’s childhood. He abused Zoe as well. At age thirteen, Zoe started doing drugs. She explained, “The only reason I started doing dope was because I felt unwanted from my family. Gay was a big issue. Me liking boys was a big issue. I tried to kill myself by doing the dope—to hurt my family.”

Zoe started taking hormones while living on the streets, but as her breasts grew, she wondered if she should continue. She feared how her family would react. “I didn’t know how to come out to tell them that I want to be a girl. And I didn’t know if they were going to accept me,” she explained.³ “Well, this is my life. I am who I am. And if God didn’t want me to be this girl, he would’ve already taken me.” To emphasize her point, Zoe described a moment where she thought she might lose her life. “I tried to steal my grandfather’s wallet,” she recollected. “I was messed up on heroin. Then I smoked crack. Then I drank Sex on the Beach—a whole bottle. And I was intoxicated.” She continued, “Well, [my grandfather and I] started fighting, and I busted out the windows in his truck. Knocked his AC [air conditioner] unit out. Called my *tia* and said, ‘He’s going to shoot me. Papa’s going to shoot me.’ Well, he got that gun. And boom, he got me.”⁴

She credited God for keeping her alive. But along with this harrowing family life, Zoe faced challenges outside the home as well. One of the hardest was her peers’ negative reactions to her expansive expressions of gender—expressions that clashed with dominant societal notions of masculine men and feminine women. “I would dress up like a gangsta boy—muscle shirt, basketball shorts,” she explained. “And everyone thought I was a butch lesbian.” People did not react well to this appearance. Choking up, she added, “[Smoking weed] numbed the pain from going to school. Numb the pain of people looking at me. People calling me a faggot. They don’t realize how hurtful the word *faggot* is.”

In response to this bullying, school staff recommended that Zoe’s mom home-school her, which her mother had neither the time nor resources to do. In seventh grade, Zoe dropped out of school and started living on the streets. Eventually, she ended up in Child Protective Services (CPS). She told me, “I got taken away ’cause of the drug problems I had,” and the state then sent her to “a boy’s ranch [that] was like a behavioral place.” Set

in a wilderness environment, the ranch used Boy Scout philosophy to teach “young men” to accept authority, take personal responsibility for their actions, and build successful skills to return to the community.⁵ Zoe said she stayed at the ranch for about a year. Upon completing the program, she went back to living on the streets.

Street life, of course, came with its own difficulties. The police arrested Zoe “no more than fifteen times,” often for prostitution and public intoxication. These arrests kept her continuously “going in and out of prison.” And homelessness shelters provided no respite. “I’d have to shower in the men’s [shelter bathroom],” she explained. “And I was afraid I was going to get raped. And [some of the men] would tell me that I don’t belong in there ‘cause I’m a girl. And I’m like, I have to be clean. I can’t let these fucking men run me out of this fuckin’ shower.”

Such discriminatory experiences toward LGBTQ youth, especially toward transgender and gender-expansive youth such as Zoe, commonly transpire in shelters. Partly in response to these experiences, an LGBTQ shelter opened in San Antonio to give LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness a safer space to sleep and shower and to provide them with specific LGBTQ services, such as hormone replacement therapy and helping them change their name and gender marker on their identification (ID) card. Acknowledging the importance of the LGBTQ shelter in her life, Zoe stated, “I think . . . every state—all around the world—should have an LGBTQ spot.”

Although it served as a refuge, the LGBTQ shelter also came with rules and regulations. One evening, Zoe went on an “ice skating” binge—slang for getting high on crystal meth—with Camila. Later that week, the director of the shelter drug tested them. When the test came back positive, the staff suspended them from the shelter for thirty days, which sent the young women back to the streets. That was when they posted the advertisements on Craigslist, seeking sex, drugs, and a place to stay.

THE LIVES BEHIND THE STATISTICS

Zoe’s story reveals the pervasive inequalities that exist in US society and that perpetuate youth homelessness. Generally, homelessness means lacking a

fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. People experiencing homelessness sleep in shelters, on the streets, in abandoned buildings, at bus or train stations, and on friends' couches, among other impermanent options.⁶ One in ten—around 3.5 million—youth, ages eighteen to twenty-five, experience homelessness each year in the United States.⁷

LGBTQ youth comprise around 40 percent of this youth homeless population, despite only comprising 5 to 8 percent of the US youth population.⁸ Furthermore, LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness face a host of obstacles, including physical and sexual victimization and mental health challenges.⁹ In one study, 58.7 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth experiencing homelessness reported victimization, and 41.3 percent of that population reported depressive symptoms, including suicidal ideation.¹⁰ As captured in Zoe's account, these challenges are exacerbated for transgender and gender-expansive youth experiencing homelessness, who have to navigate the gender segregation of shelters and services while facing other obstacles such as trying to obtain an ID card and clothing that aligns with their gender identity and gender expression.¹¹

The numbers and challenges paint a bleak picture.

But I wanted to learn about the lives behind the statistics. I wanted to know what feminists call “lived experiences”—the firsthand, everyday accounts of how marginalized people experience the world and the personal knowledge they gain from these experiences.¹² Specifically, I wanted to know about the perceived pathways into and experiences of homelessness for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness.¹³ Learning about these lived experiences centers the youth's voices, foregrounding what they identify as the main issues affecting them and the solutions to helping them. To document the youth's lives and to learn from their lived experiences, I conducted eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in central Texas. I also interviewed forty LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness and ten service providers who worked with the youth.

Through doing this research, I found that LGBTQ youth homelessness involves more complicated processes than the usual narrative of “coming out”—or disclosing an LGBTQ identity—followed by parental rejection. Instead, LGBTQ youth homelessness often involves complex issues around gender expression and is not solely about the rejection of a child's identity. LGBTQ youth homelessness involves the policing of expansive

expressions of gender and how these practices intersect with sexuality, race, and class to influence the youth's lives. These lives are simultaneously often marked by familial abuse, bullying, rejection, relegation to state child custody systems, drug use, violence, sex work, mental health challenges, encounters with police, criminal records, failure to get an ID card, the lack of a safe place to shower and sleep, and a host of other cumulative disadvantages.

These inequalities begin in childhood. Like most youth in this study, Zoe grew up amid poverty and instability. She felt unwanted because of her attraction to boys, and she feared disclosing that she was a girl. Despite these trepidations, Zoe took hormones, knowing that her changing body would probably further strain her familial relationships, which were already tenuous, as she had stolen money from her family for food and drugs. In effect, the problems of poverty and instability were compounded by Zoe's feelings of being unwanted for her gender identity and expression.

LGBTQ youth homelessness, however, involves not only familial rejection, but also problems with other institutions and relationships. School peers bullied Zoe, using homophobic language. Instead of addressing the bullying, school staff put the onus on Zoe and her family to resolve the issue. Subsequently, state child custody workers sent Zoe to a residential behavioral center—the boy's ranch—which did not affirm Zoe's gender identity and expression.

Institutions often fail LGBTQ youth. Peers and authority figures, along with the gender-segregated layout of most institutions, often constrain and punish LGBTQ youth, particularly through gender policing and homophobia. These practices in turn create unsafe and violent spaces for LGBTQ youth. Poor Black and Brown LGBTQ youth, such as Zoe and most of the youth in this study, face the harshest consequences of these punishing practices, as structural racism and racial profiling exacerbate the surveillance and punishment that they contend with. Because of this punishment and bullying, youth such as Zoe ended up on the streets.

The punishment of gender expression and sexuality continues once the youth experience homelessness. Zoe said police profiled her as a sex worker, a common experience of transgender and gender-expansive people of color on the streets. This "trans profiling" led to police not only repeatedly stopping Zoe on the streets but also harassing her, ticketing her,

checking her for warrants, and cycling her in and out of jail. Furthermore, social service organizations and governmental services for people experiencing homelessness often segregate sleeping and showering arrangements based on the gender binary. As a consequence, Zoe experienced violence in shelter bathrooms. To ameliorate some of these difficulties, she engaged in sex work and intimate encounters to obtain temporary shelter—often at a hotel—and to earn money and get drugs. Essentially, she used her sexuality and gender expression to obtain resources that society failed to provide to her.

While Zoe found respite from the violence of the streets at the LGBTQ shelter, staff regulated her and others' behaviors, including their sexual behaviors, their gender expression (e.g., how they dressed), and their substance use. Zoe had a safer place to shower and sleep, and she could meet other LGBTQ people, access hormones, and obtain an ID with her name and gender marker changed, but she had to deal with new rules. If she did not adhere to the rules, she went back to sleeping on the streets. This contradiction of the shelter as an LGBTQ refuge from the violence of the streets, yet also a regulating institution that policed sexual behaviors and gender expressions, kept Zoe and other youth cycling through unsafe environments, including the streets, shelters, and jails. The cycle of homelessness continued.

THE LIMITS OF RIGHTS AND IDENTITY

While Zoe was living on the streets and in shelters, many people in the United States celebrated certain gains in civil rights for LGBTQ people. During this study—in June 2015—the US Supreme Court federally legalized same-sex marriage. Five years earlier, the federal government repealed “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” allowing gay, lesbian, and bisexual people to serve openly in the military. Lawmakers in certain states and cities have also passed laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity and gender expression with regard to employment and housing. How, then, can we understand Zoe’s life and the lives of hundreds of thousands of other LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness during an era of same-sex marriage and other LGBTQ civil rights gains?

The gains in civil rights have not benefitted all LGBTQ people equally. A few months after the US Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, the people of Houston—in November 2015—voted to repeal the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, making Houston the largest US city without protections for LGBTQ people. A drive to repeal this ordinance involved fearmongering around transgender and gender-expansive people using public restrooms appropriate to their gender identity and/or expression. Other state and city legislatures have also introduced—and some successfully passed—“bathroom bills” to codify this public restroom discrimination against transgender and gender-expansive people, forcing youth like Zoe into bathrooms that make them more vulnerable to experiencing harassment and violence. And during this writing, the Trump administration has banned transgender people from serving in the military. A leaked memo has shown that the Trump administration wants to define gender as biological and immutable.

On a societal level, then, certain sexuality-based rights have advanced, but a backlash has occurred, especially against transgender and gender-expansive people. This backlash around gender identity and expression negatively impacts many LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. Moreover, rights guarantee neither tolerance nor acceptance. And tolerance and acceptance often only benefit people who assimilate to dominant societal values. For instance, LGBTQ people who conform to societal standards such as marriage, monogamy, and dominant gender relations may find acceptance within society. But people who have expansive expressions of gender and/or who publicly display their non-heterosexuality, such as a same-gender couple holding hands in public, may not. People see expansive expressions of gender as “too gay.” People often see public displays of non-heterosexuality as “flaunting” sexuality, even when the behavior is similar to the behavior of heterosexual people. The message of tolerance communicates: you can identify as LGBTQ, but don’t make a show of it. Rights and tolerance do not celebrate difference.¹⁴

A central tenet of this book is that to understand this unevenness between LGBTQ social change and the lived realities of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, we need to move beyond notions of rights and identity. We need to focus on embodiments and enactments of gender and how gender expression intersects with sexuality, race, and class in intricate

ways that we often miss in our emphasis on identity and single-issue (often sexuality-based) rights. The gender binary, on a structural level, and negative attitudes and behaviors toward transgender and gender-expansive youth, on an interpersonal level, work to render certain youth vulnerable. Hence, a focus on rights and identity overshadows the meanings of LGBTQ embodiment; how contexts shape these meanings; and how gender expression, sexuality, race, and class influence LGBTQ people's relations to others, and their experiences within institutions.

This book intervenes by foregrounding how gender expression and its intersections with other social categories shape the lives of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness both before and during their experiences of homelessness. As this book will show, people's responses to the LGBTQ youth's expansive expressions of gender often led to policing the youth's assumed non-heterosexuality. Hence, gender regulation always incorporates sexual regulation and vice versa. These regulations always incorporate policing race and class as well. These intersecting regulatory processes form the youth's pathways to the streets and affect their experiences of homelessness. In amplifying, then, how gender embodiments and enactments centrally influence people's lived experiences, and specifically the lived experiences of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, *Coming Out to the Streets* proffers a new understanding of homelessness as shaped by processes of gender, sexuality, and embodiment, and shows that gender and sexuality always mutually interconnect through people's gender expression and its intersections with race and class.

GENDERING SEXUALITY

Zoe—a transgender woman of color attracted to men—looked like a “gangsta boy.” She often wore baggy jeans, tank tops, and skater shoes. She even said that people thought she was a butch lesbian. Zoe dressed in ways many people might consider masculine, and hence, she challenged and expanded our ideas of womanhood (including trans womanhood). People's perceptions of this gender presentation, though, shaped their assumptions about her sexuality—that she was a lesbian, even though she identified as heterosexual. Many transgender youth in this study discussed how

before they identified as a heterosexual transgender person, they identified as gay or bisexual (but not yet transgender). As their understanding of their gender changed, so did their understanding of their sexuality, showing a fluidity between these categories. During my fieldwork, many heterosexual transgender youth like Zoe would still refer to themselves as “gay” in many conversations. Gender and sexuality involve complex processes.

Part of grasping these complexities involves recognizing that gender means more than an identity or who we are. We also “do gender,” which consists of the way we embody and enact masculinities and femininities. Doing gender also entails the meanings people assign to gender embodiments and enactments within various interactions and contexts.¹⁵ The meanings of gender embodiments and enactments vary across time and cultures. Think about how some of the meanings around masculinity and femininity have changed from the 1800s to now. For instance, before the 1940s, in the United States, we used to dress girls in blue and boys in pink. People saw pink as a strong color and saw blue as delicate and dainty.¹⁶ Boys also wore dresses, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who is photographed as a child wearing a dress. Or consider, do people embody and enact gender the same way at work as they do at home, as they do at the bar? Contexts and other people shape experiences of gender.

These experiences and meanings of gender intertwine with sexuality. Queer theory emerged as a field of inquiry in the 1990s to examine how power shapes experiences of gender and sexuality and how desires, behaviors, embodiments, and other modes of expression disrupt notions of stable identities. Queer theory also gave us the key concept of heteronormativity—how discourses and practices in society construct heterosexuality as superior to all other expressions of sexuality. Heteronormativity also relies upon and works to naturalize the gender binary of masculine men and feminine women.¹⁷ Furthermore, many societies privilege people whose gender embodiments and enactments align with their assigned gender at birth and who desire—within this binary construction—the “opposite gender.”¹⁸ This binary system also privileges men and masculinity over women and femininity, and it devalues not only women and femininity but also people who challenge the gender binary such as gender-expansive people.

Notably, complex processes related to gender and sexuality play out daily on the interactional level. For example, enacting and embodying expressions of gender in a way not in line with one's gender assigned at birth threatens heterosexuality—especially in sexual situations—and the gender binary.¹⁹ People objectify and scrutinize gender-expansive people and gender-expansive bodies because expansive expressions of gender challenge dominant social structures.²⁰ If someone embodies and enacts an expansive expression of gender, such as a boy wearing fingernail polish, many people view the child as gay (or as going to grow up to be gay).²¹ Within a heteronormative society, many people often see being gay as negative. Thus, people might police this boy's gender expression—through acts such as bullying, calling the boy a fag or sissy, and taking away the fingernail polish—not only to make the boy conform to dominant notions of masculinity but also to try to prevent the boy from being or becoming gay. Gender policing entails regulating sexuality, as people gender-police other people to enforce expressions that conform to the dominant heteronormative gender relations within society. This gender policing through social sanctions such as bullying and physical violence aims to uphold the gender binary and heteronormativity as natural and correct. But the fact that we constantly monitor and police each other and ourselves to try to maintain these systems exposes that these categories are not natural and innate.

Re-gendering Sexuality

The lived experiences of the youth in this study involved messier processes and experiences than the categories and language we often use to make sense of people's lives. Some heterosexual transgender people in this study also thought of themselves as gay. And Zoe, who identified as a heterosexual transgender woman, dressed in ways deemed masculine; hence, people assumed she was a lesbian. Many of Zoe's experiences with people's negative reactions to her, including negative reactions to her sexuality, entailed negative reactions to her gender expression.

Sociologist C.J. Pascoe's concept of "gendered homophobia" illuminates this relation of sexuality and policing people's embodiments and enactments of gender. In her study, Pascoe examined how heterosexual

boys in high school used homophobia to police each other's masculinity. If a boy did something that his peers deemed feminine, those peers policed the boy's gender by calling him a fag, even though the boy was presumably not gay. Moreover, the boys who used the epithet *fag* did not see themselves as homophobic and said they had nothing against gay people. Homophobia often pertains to policing gender—specifically to policing masculinity. Importantly, the gender-expansive, gay person in Pascoe's study—who *embodies* the fag—experienced constant harassment and dropped out of school.²²

I want to magnify this last point.

In this study, I examine how gendered homophobia affects poor, gender-expansive LGBTQ youth, especially youth of color. I amplify how the policing of gender and sexuality intertwine to shape the lives of people who embody abject positions—people and bodies positioned outside of and challenging the dominant relations of gender and sexuality in society.²³ Particularly, in focusing on embodiment and policing embodiment, we see how sexuality *always* relates to gender and how homophobia always relates to sexuality *and* gender. This gendered homophobia occurs in ways that Pascoe documented. It also occurs in how a gay or lesbian couple experiences homophobia because two men or two women together challenge dominant notions of masculinity and femininity. For most of the youth in this study, the gender policing they faced was inextricably linked to policing (or trying to prevent) their non-heterosexuality. Indeed, most homophobic violence entails the perpetrator of this violence perceiving someone as gay because of the person's expansive expressions of gender.²⁴ Publicly disrupting gender often challenges heteronormativity more than same-sex desire does, or, for the sake of my point, more than a sexual and/or gender identity does.²⁵ In this book, I contend that separating gender and sexuality as analytically distinct fails to capture how gender and policing gender always pertains to sexuality and how sexuality and policing sexuality always pertains to gender.

This attempt at untangling gender from sexuality has been part of gay and lesbian assimilation strategies. As some gay and lesbian people assimilated and achieved social acceptance, they wanted to distance themselves from gender-expansive people. Certain gay and lesbian communities engaged in gender policing practices to distance themselves from historical

discourses of “sexual inversion” that often linked same-gender desire to having inborn reversed gender traits.²⁶ Moreover, the category of transgender took hold in the 1990s partly to allow for certain gay and lesbian people to conform to dominant societal expectations and to engage in distancing from people who embody and enact expansive expressions of gender. The neat distinctions, though, between gender and sexuality, including gender and sexual identities, do not capture how these categories operate structurally, interpersonally, or individually in people’s lives.²⁷

To put it another way, we cannot study gender without studying sexuality. We cannot study sexuality without studying gender. The constant academic and political practice of separating gender and sexuality as analytically distinct (while still saying that they mutually constitute one another) needs a reexamination. Indeed, the fact that we have two separate words—*gender* and *sexuality*—fails to capture how people always experience these categories simultaneously in their lives. I have no easy solution to this language problem. But gender and sexuality actually do conflate in the ways many people experience these categories. As sociologist Karen Cuthbert argues, “[G]ender might *be* sexuality (and vice versa) in some contexts.”²⁸ This separation of gender from sexuality as different fields of investigation and as different identity categories cannot account for people’s experiences with these categories, especially certain poor LGBTQ people of color’s experiences.²⁹

Indeed, for many youth in this study, gender and sexuality interchanged—often were not seen as separate categories. One moment, a youth would identify as a heterosexual transgender woman, and the next moment as gay, or talk about “fagging out.” They often also experienced people policing their sexuality through the policing of their gender expression. These elisions of gender and sexuality make the separation of the categories analytically problematic in capturing embodied, lived experiences. In turning to the youth’s embodiments—and not just focusing on identity—we see the complexities and elisions of gender, sexuality, and other social categories. This move to examine embodiment and the gender and sexual regulations of abject body positions will show how people often experience gender and sexuality as the same thing. How the youth in this study experienced and discussed gender and sexuality in their lives creates a new departure in thinking about these social categories.

Gender, Sexuality, and Intersectionality

These experiences of gender and sexuality intersect, as well, with race and class. Intersectionality, as an analytical framework, examines how systems of power interconnect, shaping people's experiences of privilege, oppression, and their material realities. This framework originally began through feminists of color—notably non-heterosexual women of color—describing and analyzing how women of color experience life differently than white women and men of color. Identity categories such as “woman” or “person of color” ignore intragroup differences and do not take into account that different axes of power and oppression forge the lived experiences of women of color.³⁰

Furthermore, through historical processes and legacies of colonization and slavery, stereotypical images of Black women, such as mammies, matriarchs, jezebels, and welfare queens, live on today. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins shows how these controlling images objectify Black women and work toward justifying the oppression of them. For example, the controlling image of the jezebel constructs Black women as loud, promiscuous, muscular, and aggressive, and hence, as not embodying and enacting socially idealized white, middle-class femininity.³¹ Notably, these controlling images always entail stereotypes around race, gender, sexuality, and class. People often depict the mammy as loyal and asexual; whereas, people see and depict the jezebel and the welfare queen as poor and hypersexual. Other stereotypes, such as Latinas as sexually exotic and passionate, also serve to objectify and position Brown people and bodies outside of the white, middle-class relations of gender and sexuality in society.³² These processes also uphold white, middle-class enactments and embodiments of gender and sexuality as the dominant relations in society.

The same sort of objectification holds for men of color. Controlling images of Black men, especially of poor and working-class Black men, often casts them as criminals, hypersexual, and violent.³³ The dominant relations of masculinity—called “hegemonic masculinity”—rely on marginalized masculinities, such as Black and working-class masculinities, to uphold its relation to middle-class whiteness.³⁴

Class matters too. In a study of high school girls, sociologist Julie Bettie documented how middle-class girls positioned themselves against the

working-class girls. The middle-class girls saw the working-class girls' heavy makeup and tight clothes as low class, oversexed, and tawdry. Gendered class differences, hence, were sexual class differences.³⁵ In effect, people of color experience processes around gender and sexuality differently than white people. These processes largely work to subordinate people of color and privilege white people. Class also shapes these meanings, negotiations, and processes, subordinating working-class and poor people's enactments and embodiments of gender and sexuality to those of middle-class people.

LGBTQ people of color such as Zoe also experience and negotiate their life by virtue of the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class. In her work on "sexually nonconforming" Latinas, sociologist Katie Acosta documents how mothers could accept the non-heterosexuality of their Latina daughters yet the mothers wanted their daughters to embody and enact dominant expressions of femininity. The mothers feared that expansive expressions of gender or expressions of masculinity would mark their daughters as visibly non-heterosexual, and hence, make their daughters' lives more difficult—lives already difficult as marginalized women of color.³⁶

Along with gender, race and class also shape experiences of homophobia. Poverty makes it harder for poor LGBTQ people of color to avoid violent contexts, whereas middle-class and/or white LGBTQ people have resources to access safer spaces. LGBTQ people of color also experience violence as an attack on multiple aspects of their identity, not just their sexual and/or gender identity. For example, LGBTQ people of color often perceive homophobic violence from other people of color, as punishment for "betraying" their racial group.³⁷ Race and class always constitute gender and sexuality, and the intertwining of these categories and their social processes have material effects on everyone's lives, with detrimental effects shaping the lives of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness.³⁸

Coming Out to the Streets depicts how LGBTQ youth homelessness often involves the policing and punishing of young people who embody intersecting abject positions—namely, the poor, Black and Brown, gender-expansive, and non-heterosexual (or presumably non-heterosexual) positions. Many issues facing LGBTQ people, especially LGBTQ people of color who are poor, are not directly or solely about sexuality or sexual identity. LGBTQ

people often do not disclose their identities. Embodiments, then, centrally shape—more so than identities—many LGBTQ people’s lives.

In a simple sense, this book continues the legacy of queer theory and queer of color critique to call into question categories and identities and to map the complexities and messiness of gender, sexuality, race, class, power, oppression, and resistance. In doing so, this book documents how when a youth is “down and out”—to use language from studies of homelessness—gender expression and its embodied intersections with other social categories often affect people more profoundly than their identities. This examination of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness will also show how these categories always work together and that many people cannot or do not separate these social categories, including gender from sexuality (or race and class from sexuality and gender), in their everyday lives. Often they also do not have the resources to control how others see and treat them because they are unable to access contexts and spaces that accept their embodiments. In the end, trying to contain categories as having separate meanings analytically produces dull understandings of people’s lives and the issues that affect them, and this is especially true for LGBTQ youth.

THE LIVES OF LGBTQ YOUTH

“Pigs!” The flaming queens shouted, as they flung beer cans at police. Bricks, rocks, and garbage cans flew overhead, as shattered glass rained down with the smashing of the bar’s windows. Many stories exist about that night. Perhaps, some exaggerated. But what is certain is that on June 28, 1969, poor, marginalized, non-heterosexual, and gender-expansive people had had enough, and they fought back against a police raid of the Stonewall Inn. Tired of police harassment and angry about gay bar raids, they resisted. And along with the Cooper Do-nuts and Compton Cafeteria riots a few years earlier, the Stonewall riots would launch a national LGBTQ movement. Nothing would be the same again.

A year later, Marsha “Pay It No Mind” Johnson and Sylvia Rivera founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). As women-of-color activists—whom many might today also consider