

Introduction

Hello Friends!

Captive Genders is an incredible book, but difficult by nature. However, where some academic texts are difficult for the sake of being difficult, *CG* is difficult in order to be inclusive. We could call it “functionally difficult”—it’s trying to let a lot of people say a lot. This text may seem all over the place, but this messiness intentionally empowers many different perspectives, unified by their shared carceral oppression. It doesn’t want to speak for people, it seeks to speak *with them*.

One benefit of this expansive approach is that *CG* can be used in a variety of ways. You *can* read just one piece and get a lot out of it, especially if it reflects your own experience. *CG* can also be read together, challenging you to fit each article together like a puzzle. Though this second method is perhaps more daunting, it can illuminate what we already know is true: carceral and gender oppression is shared, but can appear terribly unique and, in turn, horribly isolating. This collection is meant to draw you towards larger projects and themes through an emphasis on the personal, intimate, and subjective.

CG is constantly blurring lines. It blurs definitions, authority, legitimacy, as well as the limits between historical recollection and private feelings or emotions. Without imposing a hierarchy, *CG* presents some pieces that are entirely personal, gently alluding to abolition, while others are strict codes of conduct that provide explicit methods to undermine carceral structures. Ultimately, *CG* hopes to show that the conventional definitions of gender, prisons, surveillance, and oppression are often one-sided, and never the whole story. We need conventional narratives that attempt to represent carcerality to take subjective experience seriously and if these narratives fail to do so, it means we need to change them.

These pieces work together to present a theory of captivity that constantly holds itself accountable to reality. Reality is blurred, and strange, and absolutely inclusive. At the same time, reality is also consistent and reliable, assuming we know what to look for. *CG* recognizes difference, only to reintegrate that acknowledgement towards the larger project of liberation. It asks us to stretch the limits and contents of theory so that we can effectively implement our practical strategy.

In Solidarity,
Chris Alfonso

Pre-reading Gameplan

Each piece will address the concept of gender and its relations to incarceration. I suggest we go into each reading with a game plan. Being able to root our interpretations to simple questions can help us find out why this text is relevant to our own personal struggle, as well as the overall movement. Before reading these works, be prepared to ask yourself:

- 1) How does the author understand gender? How do you, the reader, understand gender versus sex? Is your definition similar or different from the authors?
- 2) In this piece, how has the author described incarceration? What are its identified mechanisms? How is incarceration traumatizing those depicted in the piece?
- 3) Have you witnessed anything similar? How does this match or differ from your own experience?
- 4) Does the author indicate any methods for overcoming these problems? Has the text inspired any ideas in you?

- 5) Listen to your peers and figure out how you align and deviate in your interpretations and experiences. How do we construct a theory and program that can speak to all of our needs?

If you can just begin to answer (and share!) these questions, CG has done its job.

Picking a Piece

CG has a mixed offering. There are interviews, personal stories, as well as more conventionally academic pieces. While I admit that no general category could possibly fully grasp these works, I hope to provide you with some modest divisions in order to guide your investigation. I encourage you to utilize this exclusively as a departure point.

Schematic:

- Introduction: Fugitive Flesh: Gender Self-Determination, Queer Abolition, and Trans Resistance *Eric A. Stanley* (1);
- Building an Abolitionist Trans & Queer Movement with Everything We've Got *Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, Dean Spade* (15);
- How to Make Prisons Disappear: Queer Immigrants, the Shackles of Love, and the Invisibility of the Prison Industrial Complex *Yasmin Nair* (123);
- Identities Under Siege: Violence Against Transpersons of Color *Lori A. Saffin* (141);
- Transforming Carceral Logics: 10 Reasons to Dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex Using a Queer/Trans Analysis *S. Lambel* (235);
- Maroon Abolitionists: Black Gender-oppressed Activists in the AntiPrison Movement in the US and Canada *Julia Sudbury AKA Julia C. Oparah* (293)

Historical:

- Looking Back: "Street Power" and the Claiming of Public Space: San Francisco's "Vanguard" and Pre-Stonewall Queer Radicalism *Jennifer Worley* (41);
- The Bathhouse Raids in Toronto, 1981 *Nadia Guidotto* (63)

Punitive Culture:

- Brushes with Lily Law *Tommi Avicelli Mecca* (57);
- "Rounding Up the Homosexuals": The Impact of Juvenile Court on Queer and Trans/Gender-Non-Conforming Youth *Wesley Ware* (77);
- Regulatory Sites: Management, Confinement, and HIV/AIDS *Michelle C. Potts* (99);
- Awful Acts and the Trouble with Normal: A Personal Treatise on Sex Offenders *Erica R. Meiners* (113);
- Being an Incarcerated Transperson: Shouldn't People Care? *Clifton Goring/Candi Raine Sweet* (185);
- gender wars: state changing shape, passing to play, & body of our movements *Vanessa Huang* (281)

Personal Narrative:

- Hotel Hell: With Continual References to the Insurrection *Ralowe T. Ampu* (85);
- Krystal Is Kristopher and Vice Versa *Kristopher Shelley "Krystal"* (165);
- "The Only Freedom I Can See:" Imprisoned Queer Writing and the Politics of the Unimaginable *Stephen Dillon* (169);
- My Story *Paula Rae Witherspoon* (209);
- Exposure *Cholo* (215)

Interviews:

- Out of Compliance: Masculine-Identified People in Women's Prisons *Lori Girshick* (189);

- No One Enters Like Them: Health, Gender Variance, and the PIC *blake nemec* (217);
- Making It Happen, Mama: A Conversation with Miss Major *Jayden Donahue* (267);
- Abolitionist Imaginings: A Conversation with Bo Brown, Reina Gossett, and Dylan Rodríguez *Che Gossett* (323)

Designing your own questions

I have included questions that correspond to a piece from each section of CG (Out of Time, Prison Beyond Prison, Walled Lives, and Bustin' Out). These questions are not meant to be taken as representative of the entire text, nor are they meant to be the most important concepts and points made within the piece. These questions, as with everything else provided here, are meant to facilitate and promote *your* discussion. I hope to encourage you to speak with each other and find out how you can use this text to *best serve your own goals*. Please feel free to add or dismiss anything provided.

If you've decided to start with my questions, I invite you to think about what I've missed and/or what I failed to highlight. What kind of additional questions would appropriately address this oversight?

Each question is paired with an excerpt that attempts to answer it. I encourage you to first answer each question without looking to the provided excerpts, and sometimes without looking at the text at all. Then return to each question and try to address it intentionally guided by the text and compare how your two responses differ or align. This practice will help you create a more comprehensive understanding of the concepts you are investigating.

BUILDING AN ABOLITIONIST TRANS AND QUEER MOVEMENT WITH EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT

1. How does this first piece frame the evolution of mainstream LGBTQ from Stonewall to the contemporary era?
2. Compare/contrast one of the solutions offered by the "official" column with one offered in the transformative justice column.
3. According to the text, what two historical processes influenced the LGBTQ movement towards its official conservative stance?
4. Describe some of the tactics towards a "new world order": Austerity (Pull Yourself Up by Your Bootstraps, Again), Scapegoating, Fear-Mongering, The Myth That Violence and Discrimination Are Just About "Bad" Individuals, Undermining Transformative Organizing, The Hero Mindset
5. Describe some of the transformative justice approaches provided in the text: 1) We refuse to create "deserving" vs. "undeserving" victims, 2) We support strategies that weaken oppressive institutions, not strengthen them, 3) We must transform exploitative dynamics in our work, 4) We see ending trans imprisonment as part of the larger struggle for transformation.
6. Do the authors think the LGBTQ movement needs to *become* more radical or *return* to radicalness? What is the difference? Where does the text suggest we look for answers on how to transform our movements and our societies?

IDENTITIES UNDER SIEGE: Violence Against Transpersons of Color

1. Who does the author clarify as the “conventional trans-subject”?
2. How does a trans-identity bleed into other forms of marginalization?
3. What, according to the author, prevents trans and sex-work “hate” crimes from inciting vigils and protests?
4. Provide examples of how racism, misogyny and transphobia plague communities that face their own form of identity oppression.
5. How does hate-crime legislation actually work against the communities it claims to protect?
6. How does support for hate-crime legislation act as a way to bolster pro-incarceration sentiments among communities that are most affected by incarceration?

NO ONE ENTERS LIKE THEM: Health, Gender Variance, and the PIC

1. What seems to be the most important goal for the police engaged in the situation with Kim and Blake?
2. How is the recounted story an example of the PIC extended beyond the walls of the prison?
3. According to the author, how do COs use transgendered people to “keep violence rates down”?
4. How does Kim Love and the author describe CO behavior as pimping?

MAKING IT HAPPEN, MAMA: A Conversation with Miss Major

1. Who is Miss Major?
2. Miss Major briefly speaks to the problems of paternalism. Why is it important to empower marginalized communities rather than simply struggling *for* them?
3. Why does Miss Major say its important to stay close to those still locked down?
4. How does Miss Major differentiate her own politics from the liberal queer movement?

Corresponding Excerpts

Building 1

“These early freedom fighters knew all too well that the NYPD—“New York’s finest”—were the frontline threat to queer and trans survival. Stonewall was the culmination of years of domination, resentment, and upheaval in many marginalized communities coming to a new consciousness of the depth of violence committed by the government against poor people, people of color, women, and queer people both within US borders and around the world...Could these groundbreaking and often unsung activists have imagined that only forty years later the “official” gay rights agenda would be largely pro-police, pro-prisons, and pro-war—exactly the forces they worked so hard to resist? Just a few decades later, the most visible and well-funded arms of the “LGBT movement” look much more like a corporate strategizing session than a grassroots social justice movement. There are countless examples of this dramatic shift in priorities. What emerged as a fight against racist, anti-poor, and anti-queer police violence now works hand in hand with local and federal law enforcement agencies—district attorneys are asked to speak at trans rallies, cops march in Gay Pride parades” (16)

“Although there is no neat line between official gay “equality” politics on the one hand, and radical “justice” politics on the other, it is important to draw out some of the key distinctions in how different parts of our movements today are responding to the main problems that queer and trans people face.” 17

Building 3

“(1) the active resistance and challenge by radical movement to state violence, and subsequent systematic backlash,⁷ and (2) the massive turmoil and transformation of the global economy.⁸ Activists and scholars use a range of terms to describe this era in which power, wealth, and oppression were transformed to respond to these two significant “crises”—including neoliberalism, the “New World Order,” empire, globalization, free market democracy, or late capitalism.” 19

Building 4

- Pull Yourself Up by Your Bootstraps, Again
 - “The US government and its ally nations and institutions in the Global North helped pass laws and policies that made it harder for workers to organize into unions; destroyed welfare programs and created the image of people on welfare as immoral and fraudulent; and created international economic policies and trade agreements that reduced safety nets, worker rights, and environmental protections, particularly for nations in the Global South. Together, these efforts have dismantled laws and social programs meant to protect people from poverty, violence, sickness, and other harms of capitalism.” 20
- Scapegoating
 - “The decrease in manufacturing jobs and the gutting of social safety nets for the poor and working class created a growing class of people who were marginally employed and housed, and forced into criminalized economies such as sex work and the drug trade. This class of people was blamed for the poverty and inequity they faced—labeled drug dealers, welfare queens, criminals, and hoodlums—and were used to justify harmful policies that expanded violence and harm. At the same time, criminal penalties for behaviors associated with poverty, like drug use, sleeping outside, graffiti, and sex work have increased in many parts the United States, and resources for policing these kinds of “crimes” has also increased.” 21
- Fear-Mongering
 - “The government and corporate media used racist, xenophobic, and misogynist fear-mongering to distract us from increasing economic disparity and a growing underclass in the United States and abroad. The War on Drugs in the 1980s and the Bush Administration’s War on Terror, both of which are ongoing, created internal and external enemies (“criminals” and “terrorists”) to blame for and distract from the ravages of racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism. In exchange, these enemies (and anyone who looked like them) could be targeted with violence and murder. During this time, the use of prisons, policing, detention, and surveillance skyrocketed as the government declared formal war against all those who it marks as “criminals” or “terrorists.”
- The Myth That Violence and Discrimination Are Just About “Bad” Individuals
 - “Discrimination laws and hate crimes laws encourage us to understand oppression as something that happens when individuals use bias to deny someone a job because of race or sex or some other characteristic, or beat up or kill someone because of such a characteristic. This way of thinking, sometimes called the “perpetrator perspective,”¹⁴ makes people think about racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism in terms of individual behaviors and bad intentions

rather than wide-scale structural oppression that often operates without some obvious individual actor aimed at denying an individual person an opportunity” 23

- Undermining Transformative Organizing
 - “First, the radical movements of the 1960s and ’70s were criminalized, with the US government using tactics of imprisonment, torture, sabotage, and assassination to target and destroy groups like the Black Panthers, American Indian Movement, and Young Lords, among others. Second, the growth of the nonprofit sector has seen social movements professionalizing, chasing philanthropic dollars, separating into “issue areas,” and moving toward social services and legal reform projects rather than radical projects aimed at the underlying causes of poverty and injustice” 25
- The Hero Mindset
 - “These narratives hide the uneven concentration of wealth, resources, and opportunity among different groups of people—the ways in which not everybody can just do anything if they put their minds to it and work hard enough. In the second half of the twentieth century, this individualistic and celebrity-obsessed culture had a deep impact on social movements and how we write narratives. Stories of mass struggle became stories of individuals overcoming great odds” 26

Building 5

- We refuse to create “deserving” vs. “undeserving” victims
 - “we recognize that all people impacted by the prison industrial complex are facing severe violence. Instead of saying that transgender people are the “most” oppressed in prisons, we can talk about the different forms of violence that people impacted by the prison industrial complex face, and how those forms of violence help maintain the status quo common sense that the “real bad people”—the “rapists,” “murderers,” “child molesters,” in some cases now the “bigots”—deserve to be locked up. Seeking to understand the specific arrangements that cause certain communities to face particular types of violence at the hands of police and in detention can allow us to develop solidarity around shared and different experiences with these forces and build effective resistance that gets to the roots of these problems. Building arguments about trans people as “innocent victims” while other prisoners are cast as dangerous and deserving of detention only undermines the power of a shared resistance strategy that sees imprisonment as a violent, dangerous tactic for everybody it touches.” 33
 - “Individualizing solutions like hate crimes laws create a false binary of “perpetrator” and “victim” or “bad” and “good” people without addressing the underlying systemic problem, and often strengthen that problem. In place of this common sense, we understand that racism, state violence, and capitalism are the root causes of violence in our culture, not individual “bigots” or even prison guards. We must end the cycle of oppressed people being pitted against one another.” 34
- We support strategies that weaken oppressive institutions, not strengthen them
 - Reject “harm reduction” compromises that bolster destructive institutions
 - “Particularly in light of the dangerous popularity of “gender responsiveness” among legislators and advocates alike, we reject all notions that we must expand the prison industrial complex to respond to immediate conditions of violence. Funneling more money into prison building of any kind strengthens the prison industrial complex’s death hold on our communities. We know that if they build it, they will fill it, and getting trans people out of prison is the only real way to address the safety issues that trans prisoners face. We want strategies that will reduce and ultimately eliminate the number of people and dollars going into prisons, while attending to the immediate healing and redress of individual imprisoned people.” 34
- We must transform exploitative dynamics in our work
 - “Despite often good intentions to raise awareness about the treatment of transgender and gender-non-conforming people in prisons, we recognize that much of the “public education” work around these issues often relies on sexualization, voyeurism, sensationalism, and fetishization to get its point across...Unless we address these exploitative power dynamics in our work, even our most “well-intentioned” strategies and movements will reproduce the prison industrial complex’s norms of transphobic, misogynist, and racist sexualized violence. Research, media, cultural work, and activism on this issue needs to be accountable to and directed by low-income transgender people and transgender people of color and our organizations.” 35
- We see ending trans imprisonment as part of the larger struggle for transformation

- “Struggling against trans imprisonment is one of many key places to radicalize queer and trans politics, expand anti-prison politics, and join in a larger movement for racial, economic, gender, and social justice to end all forms of militarization, criminalization, and warfare.” 36

Identities Under Siege 1

“Most current discussions of transgender issues separate out transphobia, heterosexism, and misogyny from racism, ethnocentrism, and Eurocentrism.⁴ In examining transgender identities in isolation, a white, middle-class transgendered subject is assumed. By analyzing anti-transgender violence as separate from race and class, the lived experiences and specificity of transpersons of color are ignored. Moreover, examination of violence against transpersons in isolation is myopic because it fails to connect anti-transgender violence to other systems of oppression, such as poverty and racism.” 142

Identities Under Siege 2

“The interconnection of racism, classism, and transphobia propels many transpersons of color into positions that put them at an increased risk for violence. Due to rejection from the lesbian and gay community, as well as the structural realities of racism, many transpersons of color who are victims of violence have limited support systems in place and thus, for survival purposes, often have to consider performing dangerous work. For example, many turn to sex work out of economic necessity, or work long hours in minimum-wage jobs because they have been forced to quit school or leave home, resulting in a lack of social, economic, and emotional resources. By foregrounding violence enacted against transpersons of color while also demonstrating that this violence is not individual or random, but part of a much larger structure of racism, classism, and trans/homo-phobia, a more complex, multilayered way of understanding identity and the interlocking systems of oppression and violence can be mapped.” 142

Identities Under Siege 3

“Certainly the heinousness and brutality surrounding all of these murders would merit a public outcry and point to the level of queer hatred exuded not just by particular individuals, but also embedded within larger social systems. It is the structural connectedness of racism, classism, and heterosexism that produces a disproportionate number of transpersons of color as hate crime victims and also contributes to the silence and apathy surrounding mobilization efforts.

The countless reported and unreported victims of hate-motivated violence point to several structural intersections. Most of the victims of gender-based violence are people of color. Black and Latino/a individuals account for 85 percent of the known victims of gender-based violence.²¹

This suggests that the intersection of race and gender-non-conformity is crucial to increasing a person’s vulnerability to fatal assault. Richard Juang argues that anti-transgender discrimination and violence are often accompanied by racial and ethnic discrimination, and conversely, that situations interpreted as instances of racial and ethnic injustice often also involve a policing of gender and sexual boundaries.²²

Moreover, most of the hate crime victims of anti-transgender violence are poor. They have been forced out of school, out of homes, and out of jobs, resulting in the interconnection of poverty and gender-nonconformity in many of these fatalities.” 144

Identities Under Siege 4

Queer racism

“Racism within the LGBT community, together with possible ostracism from one’s own ethnic community, puts transpersons of color in a very precarious position as outsiders among the margins, forced to differentiate between identities that both communities deem as conflicting. This becomes particularly damaging as binaries become reinscribed, where the queer body equals a white body, and the brown or black body equals a heterosexual body. Rigidly constructing and reinforcing the boundaries of identity erase the lived realities of transgendered persons of color. As a result, when brown or black queer folks, like Jessica Mercado, Shelby Tracey Tom, Christina Smith, Selena Álvarez-Hernández, or Donathyn Rodgers are violently killed, their bodies are marked as “unknown” or “unidentified,” and it is the silence from both the LGBT community and racial communities that mark their deaths. Yet, the murder of any queer person of color sends a message loud and clear to both the LGBT community and to racial communities: structural violence remains a lived reality” 147

Homophobic Sentiments Within Communities of Color

“Communities of color are no more homophobic or transphobic than whites; however, accusations of homo- or transphobia are generalized to an entire community, despite the pervasiveness of homophobia crossculturally. Queer persons of color, like whites, are still frequently rejected from their families or communities because of homo- or transphobia. Keith Boykin contends that “unfortunately in the Black community at large, homophobia and heterosexism reach all demographic groups...and are frequently seen not as prejudices but survival skills for the Black race or the Black individual.”³³ Sometimes, queers of color are associated with the decline of the community whereby queerness is seen as an outgrowth of white racism or as a by-product of the breakdown of the family.” 147

Economic Inequality

“Economically, raced-based inequalities result in a disproportionate number of people of color living in poverty. According to the 2008 US Census Press Release, the poverty rate for people of color was drastically higher than—and in fact, almost triple that of—whites. Blacks had a poverty rate of 33 percent, Asians 20 percent, “Hispanics” 31 percent, and American Indians 23 percent, compared to whites, whose poverty rate was estimated at about 12 percent.⁴³ These numbers indubitably demonstrate that gross economic disparities exist for people of color. Although studies suggest that poverty has decreased among blacks and “Hispanics” in recent years, issues of food, housing, and employment hardships have remained.⁴⁴ These economic inequalities have forced many people of color into lowpaying, dangerous jobs that subject them to economic, physical, and emotional vulnerability.” 149

Sex Work: Working on the Margins

“As in the cases of Jessica Mercado, Shelby Tracey Tom, and Donathyn Rodgers, economic need and limited avenues of support propels many transgender persons of color into sex work. With few sources of social support compounded by economic inequality, sex work becomes, perhaps, the only means for survival. This not only puts queers of color at high risk for violence, such as exploitation, rape, robbery, and physical threats, but also endangers their health from increased exposure to HIV and STIs. Economic and class position influences a sex worker’s ability to screen out undesirable clients and to refuse dangerous services. Sex workers with little class privilege working in low-status positions are generally afforded the least respect and are considered the most “deserving” of abuse by clients, the police, and the public.⁴⁸ Queers of color—specifically transgender women—who are poor and who work as sex workers are under constant surveillance from police and frequently subject to ongoing harassment and violence.” 151

Identities Under Siege 5

Hate Crimes Laws = Emancipation for Whom?

“In theory, hate crimes legislation has been created to protect the rights of individuals who have been victimized by hate-motivated violence. However, this legislation also enforces extremely narrow, binary views of identity. Because of the interconnectedness of racism, classism, and heterosexism, hate crimes against queers of color are not individual acts of violence but larger structural inequities that disproportionately target specific groups of people. Hate crimes do not just affect the individual who is attacked, but also generate a message of violence that spreads communitywide. When transpersons of color are murdered, the effects of these crimes do not just spread within the racial or ethnic population or the queer community, but through both, including the various ways in which these communities intersect.⁵²” 153

“It is the structural interconnection of racism, classism, forced gender conformity, and heterosexism that allows violence to continue against transpersons of color and also contributes to the apathy exuded by communities of color and the lesbian and gay community. Although the last decade has witnessed an increase in discursive material produced about gender and sexuality, the ways in which queerness and transgender identities intersect with race, political economy, and the law are often ignored. When transpersons are subject to violence, how communities respond to violence and how hate crimes are exposed is predicated on the economic status, race, and gender of the victim.” 154

Identities Under Siege 6

Political Failings—Sustaining the Prison Industrial Complex

“Hate crimes legislation proposed by national LGBT organizations like the Human Rights Campaign, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund is fundamentally flawed. Hate-motivated violence is an important issue, but one that must be examined through the lens of “oppressive violence” and contextualized within intersecting systems subordination, including racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism. As Cathy Cohen writes, “We must...start our political work from the recognition that multiple systems of oppression are in operation and that these systems use institutionalized categories and identities to regulate and socialize.”⁵⁸ When national LGBT organizations place anti-gay violence at the center of analysis without regard for how their legislation is dependent on a punitive criminal justice system; the marginalization of communities of color and the poor; static, uncomplicated, and myopic versions of identity; and assimilation into existing systems of domination, they are refusing to acknowledge their own complicity in maintaining systemic oppression.” 156

No One Enters Like Them 1

“Please un-cuff her,” I plead.

“Ma’am, can you please step outside with us?” they ask me again. They tell me that the handcuffs stay on until the paramedics get there. They tell me to relax and step away. My knowledge of police brutality provokes me to question them, but I know this is also dangerous, and it’s hard to know what to do. I fear leaving the apartment to go to the hallway as they want, but not more than I fear them separating us. I go to the door and block it with my body, so I can still see Kim; we are terrified of what could happen next, so we keep talking loud so we can hear ourselves repeat what is happening. Kim keeps telling me how she’s feeling afraid and humiliated.

They will not take the handcuffs off her. I am getting names and a star number: M. Hodge (the “nice cop” keeping me “relaxed”) and Star 655 (the one who was handcuffing and manhandling Kim).

The paramedics come and keep her handcuffed while manhandling her.

“Is it necessary to handcuff her while seeing if her body is hurt?”

“The handcuffs are not a problem for us,” they reply

The door keeps being left open, and they still have Kim standing in the center of the apartment for anyone passing to see.

We continue to plead for them to leave. After an hour, the ten- to twenty-person group finally did leave. They never produced a warrant. Their alarmist and sustained actions came from one call with allegations that were never confirmed by their search.

The question that continues to surface in my reflection of this invasion is, what is a logical response to shock? It once again became clear to me the ease with which one can be charged with resisting arrest or failure to comply with police procedure, as the cop’s physical and verbal intimidation tactics spark all our instincts for self-defense: stating we’re being hurt, that we don’t consent to unwarranted searches, blocking a billy-club, and so on.” 219

No One Enters Like Them 2

“Like the story I just recounted, the cultural normalcy of violence in all locations of the prison industrial complex is experienced by everyone who has survived incarceration and is witnessed by those who do restorative justice work inside prisons or work with formerly incarcerated people. Gender-variant people who have done time are forced to accept varying amounts of violence as realities of completing their sentence. This takes different forms of active emotional/physical violence as well as “inactive” violence like neglect or denial of necessary medical care. In order to understand the complexities of these systems, we must understand how both active and inactive forms of violence work together.” 220

No One Enters Like Them 3

KL: Yeah, it is. It’s way different. County jails, there’s no freedom, especially for transgenders. You go to gym once a week. If they feel like taking you to the gym. As opposed to all the other inmates who get to go at least twice or three times a week. It’s segregated like that. In prison, from morning until time to lock up, you can go outside, except during count time. But you have more freedom. And you’re more recognized in prison, because you are a commodity in prison. The COs use the transgendered prisoners to keep the violence rate down.

bn: What is CO is an abbreviation for?

KL: Oh—correctional officer, they’re basically pimpin’. If you look like a female, they’ll put you in a cell. I’ve had them put me in a shock holdin’ cell, and I told them I did not want to be there. They told me that’s gonna be your husband, and that’s where you’re going to be and you’re going to love him. And I did my time with him.

bn: Sorry, that’s horrible.

KL: It’s horrible. Without the sexual tension being brought down, the prisoners would probably overturn that place. Because there’s more prisoners than there is COs. They use us. 222

No One Enters Like Them 4

As Kim Love’s experience shows, it is a prison industrial complex norm to use women’s bodies in unsafe ways to pacify male inmates. The prison staff and the PIC create sexually opportune environments (e.g., cage women in the same cells as straight men), coerce women into having unsafe sex with their cell-mates because there are few if any barriers for the sex acts, then validate the sexual roles with toiletries or medical favors (exchange of goods or services).

Forced boarding by a third party for sexual contact, or in prison “V-coding,” on the streets would be seen as pimping, as Kim Love called it. The placement of such coercion inside of prison, however, serves to locate pimping as a central part of a transwoman’s sentence. Most acts performed by prison staff, violent or not, are unfortunately upheld as the norm of prison culture. The vision of “sexual tension being brought down, to where there’s no sexual tension—they would probably overturn that place” screams to Love’s understanding of prison staff using her body to pacify her “husband.” 228

Miss Major 1

“Miss Major is a black, formerly incarcerated, male-to-female transgender elder. A veteran activist born and raised on the south side of Chicago, she participated in the Stonewall rebellion in 1969 and was politicized in the wake of the Attica prison rebellion. She has worked at HIV/AIDS organizations throughout California, was an original member of the first all-transgender gospel choir, and is a father, mother, grandmother, and grandfather to her own children and to many in the transgender community. Currently, Miss Major is the executive director of TGIJP. I wanted to talk to Miss Major about some of the core elements of TGIJP and its structure, campaigns, and future work. I also wanted to take a look at some of the contradictions inherent in identity-based organizing and how TGIJP works

to navigate in that space. We explore notions of political unity in a broad-based and diffuse movement as well as questions around what it means to be an ally and effectively take leadership from people most affected by the PIC.” 268

“Miss Major Griffin-Gracy: OK, I am Miss Major, none of this Ms. shit. I am not a liberated woman. I’m a transgendered woman and I’m working on being liberated as we speak. So, as far as TGJJP—Transgender, Gender Variant, Intersex Justice Project—we’re a nonprofit organization working under the guise of Justice Now as our fiscal sponsor, that is interested in promoting the well-being and mental health and stability of transgendered women of color that are housed in the prison industrial complex (PIC). We help those that are currently housed or recently released maintain their civil rights and help them fight—basically that’s the start to finish kind of a thing. We have a lawyer to help legally represent them; should their cases get an opportunity or a chance to go to court, we help them work with that and help to find suitable legal representation through the lawyer we have working here. We also help with cases here in San Francisco and push for alternative sentencing, which may or may not work, but it’s something we do push toward, making sure that the judges and the district attorneys have credible and viable information that pertains to the community itself and not this hyped up bullshit that’s floating around about us, about who we are and how we exist.” 269

Miss Major 2

“MM: A sprinkle, I can talk about that a sprinkle. As usual, there were definitely a lot of transmen involved in this in the beginning, in TIP. For some reason a lot of the trans guys are really more politically aware and astute than my transwomen are. There doesn’t seem to be this vanity floating through the fellas that simply butters itself up and down us transwomen. We’re just bathed in it. Having to be beautiful and this and that. It will drive you crazy. You’ll lose your hair trying to keep all of this shit together. So, our particular involvement as transgendered women is often minimal compared to the involvement of most trans guys. Usually they’re white trans guys and they’ve been to college and they have an idea of how the system works and how to deal with it. With a lot of the white privilege and the education that they’ve got there’s this tendency for them to step up and take charge and lead the way and say, “Follow me, I’ll protect you,” without educating people about what’s going on. Of course, there are the little differences and petty things that get involved over personalities. Before I got heavily involved, there were a lot of little personality clashes and the testosterone egos bumping into each other here and there. It was a lot of the “pissing contests” the guys go through. It calmed down and the dust settled and TIP got to rise up and TGJJP was a calmer space.” 270

Miss Major 3

MM: First of all, being in prison is filled with absolute, complete hell. Not a moment’s peace. You have no sanity and no safety and no safe haven and no spots to think and sort out how you deal with shit that you have to go through, just from being in prison as a transgendered woman. The reason why the things that we do, like fighting to get bras inside, are important is that people are forgetting that these are women housed in a men’s prison. They’re not giving any recognition to the fact that a majority of these people have breasts and oddly enough, they need to be cupped in a bra, for their safety, for them to maintain who they are and for them to hold on to their sense of self. And it’s not like it’s a luxury in there but you know, if women have bras in the women’s prison, then the women in the men’s prison should have them. It’s not that they want anything special; it’s just something to keep their breasts safe; to keep them from having to suffer the indignity of making them run around without that particular protection, because that’s what it is for them. Every now and then we get some in and it’s a major accomplishment. It’s like, let’s go out and throw a party. It becomes something that helps give the girls strength to sustain themselves while they are in there.

The reason we have the pen-pal program is when you’re in there you’re feeling so isolated and cut off and desolate and depressed and lonely. There’s nowhere to turn for anything. So, if you happen to get a letter from somebody who’s outside the damn wall to just say how are you doing, what can I do to help, this is what’s going on here, I’ve seen your old friend so-and-so, it keeps you connected to your life and who you are and what you stand for. This can make a big difference in how you relate to stuff and how you get through your bid. You gotta do the time; you can’t let the time do you. And without that connection to what’s going on outside that wall, the time winds up doing you. When I was in there, not getting a letter from people I knew or friends, it got to the point where I’d take a postcard from a stranger saying “hey, girl,” you know, just something to connect me to who I am. One of things that happens is that you lose yourself in there. All of a sudden you become Number 449632-C, and that’s not who you are; that’s just what you happen to be wearing at the time. Those things are awfully, awfully important.” 237

Miss Major 4

“MM: I eventually do want to get married, to the right person, pet, tree. At this point, I don’t care, but I don’t want to assimilate myself into a group of people who think that my very existence is abominable. Why do I want to do what they want to do? Why do I have to have a ring on my finger? Why do I have to pass? Why can’t I just be recognized and acknowledged for who I am. Well, he’s pretty, the man’s gorgeous. This society is not at that level and so that makes it hard to maintain. It makes it hard to go forward. It makes it hard to sit and just accept your damn self. They say, “We’re here to help.” You don’t know what help is. Try walking a mile in my shoes. Fuck walking a mile—why not wear my shoes, throw on my hair, wear this tight-ass dress, tuck my dick and balls into a gaff, child, and then run in front of police, jump over cars, and then snatch off your hair, put on different clothes, change your shoes and then walk down that same street past the motherfucker that was looking for you in the first place. Then you can give me some shit about who the fuck I am.” 267