To mami, papi, Yesu y Reyving por ser mis ángeles en la tierra y por los sacrificios que hicieron para que yo llegara a este punto. Su sabiduría y amor son la mejor herencia.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though I wrote this dissertation myself, it feels like it belongs to the countless of people who helped me every step of the way. I dedicate this dissertation to Ramón and Maritza Mayora, mami y papi, who gave up everything so that I could have a place in the world. My siblings Yesu y Reyving worked all kinds of jobs to support our family when we immigrated to the U.S., and without them, I simply would not have had the chance to be doing what I chose to do. Yira’s unconditional support helped make this journey a lot more bearable.

Without the input and enthusiasm of Efraín Barradas, Amy Ongiri, and Kim Emery, I would be completely lost. I thank them for asking the tough questions; my work is stronger because of them. Creed Greer, Martin Simpson, Terry Harpold, and Kenneth Kidd kept me employed so that I could actually afford to work on this project. Without Leah Rosenberg, Sid Dobrin, Emilia Hodge, Sarah McLemore, who helped me receive the Delores Auzenne Dissertation Award, I would not have been able to finish it. Carla Blount, Melissa Davis, and Kathy Williams at the Department of English and Mary-Lynn Bassett and Jessie Runge at the University Writing Program were indispensable in helping me navigate the administrative elements of graduate school. Then there is the late great Scott Nygren, whom I miss enormously. His encouragement and intelligence made me a better scholar, and I hope to make him proud with this work.

I want to thank my students for continuously inviting me to challenge myself and help me discover my passion for teaching, especially my spring 2014 “Writing About Theatre” students and my fall 2015 “Testimonios: Race, Gender & Sexuality in Latina/o Popular Culture” students. My mentees at the University Writing Program, Jackie Elliott, Holly Pratt, Eileen Rush, and Jackson Sabbagh, were some of my biggest cheerleaders
during the last stages of finishing this project, and their assistance during the year we taught together was key in completing this project; it was inspiring to see each of you in the classroom and get to learn from you every day. Those involved in Professor Tace Hedrick’s dissertation writing group offered critiques and encouragement throughout, and I especially want to thank Renee Cole, Kristin Allukian, Shoniqua Roach, Tamar Ditzian, and Berit Brink. I was fortunate enough to have countless of friends to always offer a word of support, a useful critique, or an adult beverage when that is what was needed. While it is impossible for me to name them all, I have to mention the incomparable Adrienne Reeves-Gower, as well as my dear friends Michael Gower, Alison Coman, Anthony Coman, Thomas Cole, Amy Brown, and Cathy Duarte.

There are not enough words to describe my dissertation chair Tace Hedrick’s role in my life; she’s a friend, mentor, life coach, teacher, and cheerleader. Tace took my very rough idea and helped shaped it into this project. When I was ready to quit, she refused to let me, and I am on this path because of her. I also have to thank my colleague Jackie Amorim, my partner in crime, whose friendship got me through the best and the worst of graduate school. Finally, I thank Timothy Robinson—my love, my partner in life, my colleague, and my best friend. His humor, intelligence, patience, and relentless support made the present and the future possible.
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This project analyzes representations of *locas*, a term used to refer to queer Latinos who are defined by a public display of qualities associated with “bad” citizenship in today’s queer culture (such as overt sexuality, femininity, homelessness, and a sense of entitlement), across a variety of texts in contemporary U.S. popular culture, ranging from the late 1960s to the present. These texts are produced by white queer authors and/or designed to be consumed by a predominantly white queer audience. The *locas* I write about are predominantly Nuyorican or U.S.-based Puerto Ricans; thus, I seek to add specificity to my argument and move away from a monolithic notion of Latino/a subjectivity. Moreover, I situate the *locas* in this project within the colonial history that has defined the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico.

The study seeks to criticize and challenge the ways in which, through media representation, the dominant 21st-century LGBT movement in the U.S. has created an image of “good” citizenship for queer people shaped around white, middle-class, neoliberal values. I argue that this form of citizenship has relied on regulating, disciplining, and normativizing disenfranchised queer Latino bodies without taking into
account the legal and affective needs and desires of those bodies. The study also seeks to reframe the role of performance in the representation of *locas* by white queer authors, not in terms of victimization, but rather as a site of potentiality to expand *and* disrupt hegemonic notions of “good” citizenship. Since *locas* were key participants in the Stonewall Riots, which today are seen as the catalyst for the rise of the contemporary organized LGBT movement, they are intrinsically connected to rights-based ideology surrounding queer people, and thus are immensely valuable to explore larger questions about legal and affective citizenship of queer Latinos in the United States.

The first section provides a critical approach to neoliberal notions of citizenship, criticizing teleological narratives that define “good” citizenship in relationship to an individual's ability to contribute to the maintenance of dominant institutions. The second section analyzes works centered on Nuyorican *locas* Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn. Rivera was a Stonewall veteran and an LGBT activist, and Woodlawn was a performer best known for being an Andy Warhol “Superstar” after starring in the Factory’s 1970 film *Trash* directed by Paul Morrissey. I analyze (auto)biographical written and visual narratives to criticize the ways in which Rivera and Woodlawn have been historicized, emphasizing how their representation and performance serve to both regulate citizenship *and* challenge it. The last section examines the legacy of the former texts by focusing on the Puerto Rican contestants in the reality TV show *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. The dissertation relies on an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to move beyond criticizing dominant forms of gay citizenship and providing queer Latino subjects with alternatives to the stifling ubiquitous concept of the “good” queer citizen.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: FROM THE BACK OF THE BUS TO THE FRONT OF THE LINE
AND BACK AGAIN

_They cheered at my persistence_

_But prayed for my decline_

_The path of least resistance_

_Led to Hollywood and Vine_

_I tried to go the distance_

_But they just keep moving the line._

March Shaiman & Scott Wittman, “They Just Keep Moving the Line”

**They Just Keep Moving the Line**

During my time 10 years living in Gainesville, FL, as both an undergraduate and now a graduate student, I have been part of multiple gay social circles. Though in the popular U.S. imagination, small Florida towns tend to be thought of as conservative, the Gainesville region has a significant liberal population (as represented by its voting habits), which is perhaps why its gay, transgender, and drag queen communities have a certain kind of visibility in the town that may surprise an outsider. These communities in Gainesville are quite heterogeneous, composed of people from various socioeconomic, ethnic, racial and disability backgrounds; yet, as it is too often the case, the most visible and powerful members of the Gainesville gay community tend to be upper middle class and white. So we’ve had a gay mayor, a white gay mayor. Yes, we have two gay bars, and from one of them emerged a drag queen selected as a contestant in _RuPaul’s Drag Race_; and yet, these bars are owned by and staffed with white (typically male) men, and that drag queen, Jade Jolie, is white as well. And yes, while two major organizations (Pride Student Union and OUT Grad) in the University of Florida campus are dedicated to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) student community, when I
criticized the treatment and portrayal of drag queens of color in today’s LGBT culture at a Q&A following a Pride Student Union-sponsored screening of the film *Wigstock* sponsored by these groups, the room became filled with palpable hostility, especially since my critiques followed a white colleague’s bubbly, optimist portrayal of gay people in the United States today.

Being a brown-skinned Venezuelan-born gay immigrant cys man, I have spent 10 years wrestling with the fact that my circle of friends and colleagues is notable for its whiteness. This was not the case in Miami, where I grew up as a teenager, but in Gainesville, out at a gay bar, or at a friend’s game night, or at a graduate meeting, I often find myself being the only person of color in a room. This is particularly true when I spend time with my gay friends. Though I often bemoan this fact, the truth of the matter is it has made me privy to the way white upper-middle-class gay men talk about people of color. The mere fact that these gay men talk about people of color as freely as they do in front of me speaks to the ways in which my Latinidad and color can become irrelevant in the eyes of these men, an important point in a dissertation about the regulation of Latinidad and queer people of color in contemporary American culture.

I recently had to endure a conversation in which a bunch of these men talked about the use of the word “nigger,” which so-and-so, let’s call him Tom, had used to refer to a young black woman who had abruptly stepped in front of Tom’s car. My friend (an affluent white science type) was explaining to the nearly indistinguishable group of white, middle-class men in front of him (and me) that Tom had gone “too far” by referring to this woman as a “nigger,” going on to specify the times he thought it was appropriate to use the word. More shocking to me was hearing the gay clones using the
word as if it belonged to them—no “n-word,” just “nigger”; even worse, they began to say it repeatedly, supposedly to mock the fact that they would never say it. As my friend kept apologetically explaining why he would not hang out with Tom again, Tom’s friends looked skeptical, not understanding why someone would not hang out with someone for such a seemingly insignificant reason. Well, I would say they almost looked skeptical, except they did not care that much; this was clearly a topic that would get filed in their brain with the same, or maybe even less, relevance as their next choice of cocktail. Filled with a kind of rage that was surely accentuated by my own choice of cocktails, I stormed out of the club...well, I first said a polite goodbye to my friend who had likely forgotten I was there, and in what I considered to be an act of defiance in the moment, I refused to acknowledge the rest of the clones to whom I had been introduced. I’m sure that taught them a lesson.

The truth of the matter is that this is as far as I was able to vocalize the fury, sadness, and disappointment I felt at that moment, especially since before that conversation took place I was in a celebratory mood. The reason I was out at the gay bar with my friends and friends of friends in the first place was because earlier that day the Supreme Court had announced a historic decision: in a 5-to-4 vote, the Court had declared that the United States Constitution does, in fact, support same-sex marriage, thus declaring any bans on same-sex marriage unconstitutional. Being trained as a queer scholar, I approach the issue of same-sex marriage with a lot of skepticism; as most academic queer critics have staunchly argued since the 1990s, same-sex marriage should not be the priority of queer people in the U.S. since most rights-based discussion on same-sex marriage tend to rely on normative rhetoric. The queer scholar
in me felt skeptical, but the flesh-and-bone gay man that I am in reality was elated to know that as a gay man the legal system had recognized my rights. As a first-generation immigrant in the United States since 2001, I had become a naturalized U.S. citizen about a year and a half before that moment; as a lifelong gay man, I felt I had become a U.S. citizen again that day, for as Shane Phelan writes, citizenship requires “recognition embodied in central institutions and universal services” (2). The United States government, through its “central institutions and universal services” had now recognized me as a full citizen. Yet, here I stood in the middle of a group of white, middle-class men talking about a word that has been used to deny the rights of black people in the U.S. for centuries. My own right to not witness this conversation, to feel visible among this group of men, to feel truly acknowledged was simply nonexistent as was my ability to speak out against this type of conversation without feeling ashamed, or singled out, or “out of line.” So there we were, celebrating the United States’ recognition that people of the same sex have a legal right to be part of an established institution while the affective citizenship of the black girl in my friend’s story was being trivialized by the group of men whose own citizenship was being honored. Whatever illusion of power I thought I had gained through my own acquisition of legal citizenship that morning soon faded when it was clear that my only form of resistance was to walk away from a group of people who already forgot I was there.

I share this anecdote not to indulge in a personal story but to reveal the type of atmosphere this dissertation is born out of and the types of deep-rooted issues that drive my discussion of legal and affective citizenship for queer people of color in the United States at a time when terms like “diversity” and “LGBT rights” are celebrated, too
often without taking into account the needs and desires of those people whose personhood, livelihood, and survival depend on a much more politically valuable version of those terms. The type of contradiction that encapsulates this moment, a celebration of legal rights for gay people that results in a proud and casual subjugation of the affective citizenship of people of color, is one that deeply disturbs me. This dissertation represents my attempt to intervene and disrupt celebratory contemporary understandings of citizenship for minoritarian subjects as well as an attempt to think about forms of citizenship that take into account the needs and rights of people for whom mere legal recognition in front of the law has simply not been enough. In this way, this project is a critique, an indictment, and also a space to imagine survival.

**Let's Start at the Very Beginning**

Recently, while on a trip to New York City, I was on the phone with my mom, a Venezuelan immigrant who does not speak English and is generally unfamiliar with U.S. pop culture phenomena. I was explaining to her that I was very excited because I was going to see the Broadway hit musical *Hamilton*, written by Nuyorican author and composer Lin-Manuel Miranda. Tickets for the show were sold out for a year, and I had spent months reading about the show’s unique retelling of Alexander Hamilton’s biography which relies on casting people of color to play white historical figures\(^1\) and using hip-hop, rap, and R&B as its main musical language. Everything about the opportunity of seeing the show made me incredibly excited. But my mom had never

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\(^1\) At the performance I saw with the original Broadway cast in March of 2016, Lin-Manuel Miranda played the role of Hamilton, black rapper Daveed Diggs played Thomas Jefferson, and Chinese-American actress Phillipa Soo played Hamilton’s wife Eliza Schuyler.
heard of the show and seemed quite disinterested in the conversation. Finally, I resorted to the tactic, the hook, that I knew would catch her interest: “You haven’t heard of it on Univision? It’s this really successful show that was written by a Latino.” My strategy succeeded. Right away, my mom became invested in the conversation; she expressed an honest sense of pride for Miranda and became genuinely excited to hear about his success, despite the fact that a moment earlier she had no idea who he was, what the show was, or why I was looking forward to seeing Hamilton. Then, she justified her enthusiasm with a line that surprised me and that has stayed with me since (I translate from memory here): “You know how it is, once you come here you are no longer Venezuelan, you are a Latino.” Her palpable sense of pride forced me to think critically about my own use of the term “Latino” in this dissertation along with other historically charged terms I use throughout. Therefore, before I continue, I spend time defining these terms that have such a rich and tense history with the purpose of reframing these terms within the particular context of this project.

This project specifically focuses on the citizenship of queer Latino/as whose sexual, racial, ethnic, and class subjectivity often compromises their legal and affective rights in three realms: the official LGBT community in the United States, non-queer white U.S. citizens, and Latino/a communities.² The term “Latino/a” itself is directly connected to the citizenship and representation of immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba, the Hispanophone Caribbean, Central

² This is not supposed to be an all-inclusive list of the realms that exclude queer Latino/as, but rather the ones I write about in this project.
America, and South America. Marketing scholar Arlene Dávila relates the emergence of the term “Latino” to the growing perception of the individuals it purports to include as a politically relevant and marketable group. For Dávila, “Latino” became an easy way for hegemonic institutions to erase “veil complicity and alliances, as well as differences in backgrounds, political stances, and subject positions, among and across members of what is supposedly ‘the same group’” (5). Just like with any other group, there is no such thing as a uniquely “Latino/a” experience; when it comes to the subject of citizenship, for example, the experience and history of Mexican-Americans and Chicana/os is entirely different from that of Puerto Ricans, Nuyoricans, and people from Puerto Rican descent who live in the continental United States.

National identity—along with skin color, gender, sexuality, class, and other social forces—plays a large role in the distinction among people who fall under the “Latino” label. While I seek to make a larger argument for and about queer Latino/as, the subjects at the center of my primary texts all have a connection to Puerto Rico: late Nuyorican queen Sylvia Rivera, Stonewall veteran and transgender activist, is an Afro-Latina from Venezuelan and Puerto Rican descent; late former Andy Warhol “Superstar” Holly Woodlawn is a white Puerto Rican-born queen who moved to Miami, FL at the age of 2, where she grew up with her Puerto Rican mother and Jewish stepfather before moving to New York City; and finally the drag queens and performers from RuPaul’s Drag Race I write about in the last section of the project are all connected to Puerto Rico. At times, I use the term Rican to encompass Puerto Ricans living in the continental United States, such as Jessica Wild or Carmen Ferrara, or who share Puerto Rican descent, such as Sylvia Rivera. To refer to Rivera and Woodlawn, I often
use the more specific term Nuyorican to highlight the relevance of location to some of my discussions of their representation and performance. My goal in my close readings is to move away from scholarship that ignores the large role that the uniquely and explicitly colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States plays when addressing the citizenship of this group.

I refer to this relationship as “uniquely and explicitly colonial” because of Puerto Rico’s status as a “commonwealth” of the United States. While Puerto Rico has fought to maintain a sense of national identity, historically the United States’ approach to the citizenship and rights of Puerto Ricans—both in the island and in the continental U.S.—has made it clear they do not possess full national autonomy. Rican scholars have used colonial rhetoric to theorize the liminal status of Puerto Ricans’ citizenship, emphasizing the fact that Puerto Rican subjectivity is limited by a nation-state whose entire image is based on the idea of democratic pursuit (Cruz Malavé, “The Oxymoron of Sexual Sovereignty” 61; Flores 9; Negrón-Muntaner 6). Negrón-Muntaner does not believe that this colonial status has kept Puerto Ricans from finding ways of benefitting from this relationship with the United States. She writes that Puerto Ricans use this colonial relationship as “a political strategy that avoids becoming fully subjected to any one nation,” choosing instead “to be ‘part of the richest, most powerful country in the world’ while affirming themselves as culturally distinct nation from the United States” (4).

From this perspective, the term Ricans represents a rich concept that allows queer Latino/a and Rican critics to address the strategies of survival on which the performers and authors I analyze in this project have relied to maintain a cultural national identity alongside the dominant U.S. system.
Similarly, in my analysis, Rican subjectivity and Latino/a subjectivity are concepts that exist alongside each other and can be theorized together, with caution, since Puerto Ricans in the continental United States and U.S. Latino/as share “obvious cultural affinities starting with language background and important historical parallels” (Flores 10). Ultimately I side with Juan Flores’ argument that first the “Latino community,” similar to the term “public” I explore below, is an “imagined community,” but one that “must always be assessed with a view toward how they are being imagined (i.e., from ‘within’ or ‘without’) and to what ends and outcomes” (193). It is a community within the popular consciousness that exists as a direct result of Latin Americans’ immigration to the United States which, in turn, reflects how “[a] portion of Latin America has been incorporated into what has become the United States.” Second, I also side with Flores’ assertion that “Latino identity is imagined not as the negation of the non-Latino/a, but as the affirmation of cultural and social realities, myths and possibilities, as they are inscribed in their own human trajectory” (200). I would also add that for those of us whose national Latino American identity is not related to one of the traditionally invoked “Latino” identities (Chicana/o, Cuban-American, Puerto Rican/Nuyorican, Caribbean), “Latino/a” is the only term that makes us intelligible not only in the eyes of dominant communities but also in the eyes of those who are scholarly invested in race, ethnicity, and Latininidad. For example, my experience as a Venezuelan immigrant, an experience that I believe connects to the issues of citizenship I address in this text, has very little meaning to the majority of readers until I frame it and code it around Latino/a identity. Rather than remain unintelligible, the term “Latino/a” has given me the opportunity to contextualize my own subjectivity and that of many others.
Hence, like my mom, I find the term “Latino/a,” when cautiously used and explained, to be incredibly valuable to make sense of the range of experiences individuals who fall under this rather large category. Like Flores, I do not find that the term should only be understood as a negative word that negates the particularities of Ricans, Chicana/os, Dominican-Americans, or yes, Venezuelan-Americans, to name a few; rather, invoking this term from a critical and informed perspective can contribute to building bonds among groups whose citizenship is continuously denied and violated. When I use the terms “Rican” and “Latino/a,” then, I am aware of the historically specific connotation of both terms, and I seek to highlight their connections without denying their singularities. Generally, I reserve the terms “Ricans” and “Nuyoricans” for sections in which I seek to highlight the national identity of the subjects within my discussion, fully understanding that national identity is always significant.

Another focus of the project is the LGBT rights movement and the becoming of LGBT people in the United States as citizens. I focus on this group since I argue that it is the most vocal and politically successful rights-based group today. I also argue that this success has depended on a normalization of the members of the community it looks to represent, a normalization that has largely been achieved due to the fact that, as a movement, it has the privileged position—unlike race-based groups, immigrant groups, labor unions, or feminist groups—of erasing what are perceived as the potentially threatening aspects of its members (sex, racial and ethnic heterogeneity, poverty, inability to sexually reproduce, femininities), instead modeling itself around the needs and desires of the heteronormative majority. What I mean is, unlike African-
Americans, or Chicana/os, or feminist women activists, many LGBT people have the ability to (and have made a conscious effort to) “pass.”

When I refer to the “mainstream,” “public,” or “official” LGBT movement or LGBT community, I am specifically referring to prominent and powerful LGBT rights-based organizations, such as GLAAD (a former acronym for Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), and the Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA), as well as those individuals whose interests, behavior, and attitudes align with the ones cemented by these organizations. Moreover, following feminist black scholar Patricia Hill Collins’ assertion that, “images and representations do not determine behavior, but they do provide an important part of the interpretive context for explaining it” (18), I consider popular culture texts produced by and/or targeted to LGBT audiences in the U.S. to be an integral part of this movement and community. As is the case with the term “Latino,” relying on an umbrella term to describe such a varied and heterogeneous group of institutions and community members can result in an inaccurately monolithic representation of that community. Yet, these groups have actively sought to be perceived as a monolithic uniform group, and through this process they have turned into a public. In Publics and Counterpublics, prominent queer critic Michael Warner acknowledges that the word “public” in itself is a myth, a powerful one, while establishing that it functions as a valuable term to address institutions that “have a functional intelligibility across a wide range of contexts” (8-9), a description that surely fits the ways in which the LGBT movement has successfully attempted to fashion itself since it entered the popular consciousness following the Stonewall Riots in 1969.
Discussing the LGBT movement brings forth questions of what exactly LGBT, gay, and queer means, all terms that I use interchangeably at times, and that at others take a different meaning that is relevant to the context surrounding its use. This rhetorical choice is influenced by queer political theorist Jane Ward’s decision to use the terms “LGBT” and “queer” interchangeably in her book *Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations*. Ward historicizes “queer” as a term that in the context of 1980s sex-based activists came to stand in opposition of “lesbian” and “gay,” which “were (and still are) fast becoming associated with assimilation and normalcy.” Of course, in academic contexts, “queer” came to identify a critical approach to questions of gender and sexuality, one that moves beyond what came to be perceived as the rigid limitations engrained in labels like “gay,” “lesbian,” and even “bisexual.” In other words, “queer” came to function as a politically valuable form of resistance to a fixed notion of identity, something that is “abnormal, defiant, and generally unmarketable to straight consumers.” At the same time, the term became part of the vocabulary employed by precisely those communities it was meant to oppose. Ward mentions the example of the highly influential gay-themed makeover show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-2007), which used the term “queer” to present a “glossy” and “marketable” version of gayness that was safely packaged for straight consumers. The TV show *Queer as Folk* also comes to mind, as does the slogan “We're here, we're queer, get used to it!” that originated with AIDS activist organization Queer Nation but is now commonly used by LGBT rights-based organizations, attention-grabbing headlines in mainstream outlets and t-shirts targeted to gay people. It is clear to see then that “the meaning of queerness is hardly a resolved matter”; using the terms “LGBT” and “queer”
interchangeably to refer to a movement that is largely defined by its simultaneous ability to create spaces to challenge normative conceptions of gender and sexuality while promoting a marketable view of queerness, I side with Ward’s assertion that such a choice contributes to “the tensions embedded in queer politics itself” (3-4). Still, at times I will employ the word “queer” from an academic perspective, and those instances are informed by context.

Finally, I end this section by providing a brief explanation of my approach to the term “citizenship.” This concept is so large and has so many different implications that I only superficially describe it here as a preview of a much more thorough overview of theories surrounding this term in the following chapter. Briefly, I will say that citizenship is “unique for what recognitions entails” since, as Phelan adds, it “is supposed to guarantee both fair treatment and home and protection abroad. It implies that one’s government, and one’s fellow citizens concern themselves with one’s welfare and one’s opinions” (3). All throughout, citizenship scholarship emphasizes the significance of visibility to citizenship, especially in the way that citizenship has been pursued by rights-based groups. Phelan captures the limitations and value of such an approach when he writes that “Visibility is no guarantee of either citizenship or equality,” while establishing that individuals who have “no part in the national imaginary except as threat, cannot participate in citizenship, no matter what rights its members come to enjoy” (6-7).

Phelan’s work provides a complex understanding of citizenship, one that cannot simply rely on recognition by the nation-state. Beyond legal recognition, but not existing outside of it but rather as connected to it, there is what I will refer to as an affective citizenship, a type of citizenship that cannot be accounted for by visibility, or laws, or public rights-
based groups. For disenfranchised queer Latino/a subjects, it is this type of citizenship that represents rich sites of potentiality.

**The Neoliberal Context**

Sixteen years into the 21st-century, it is time to declare that conceptualizing of visibility as a tool to acquire citizenship and rights is a failure. The topic of visibility and media representation is quite “in” today. After the 88th Annual Academy Award nominations were announced in January of 2016 and no people of color were nominated, a huge outcry erupted on social media outlets denouncing the lack of “diversity” in the nominations. On social media, #OscarsSoWhite became a trending topic; Oscar-winning actors of color like Lupita Nyong’o and Halle Berry spoke out against the lack of “diversity” while, on the other hand, two-time Oscar-winning white British actor Michael Caine said in a BBC radio interview that black people needed to be patient because, after all, it took him years to win an Oscar (Szalai). Haphazardly responding to what quickly became a PR disaster, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), led by Academy President Cheryl Boone Isaacs (the Academy’s first and only African-American president as of 2016), quickly developed a poorly received plan to double the number of minority and women Academy members by 2020 (Pedersen). Being an avid fan of all things Oscar, never had I heard the term “diversity” more in my entire life. All of the sudden “diversity,” which in the public was constructed as another term for visibility, became the type of (neo)liberal issue that a large group of people could get behind mainly because of the current state of racial politics in the U.S. and because the solution seemed very easy to achieve: just add a few more people of color and women in there and problem solved.
What this controversy revealed was how much the idea of visibility is used to ignore the large structural systems in place that keep people of color, sexual minorities, and other marginalized individuals from gaining access to the resources that allow white, affluent people to make the type of art that is recognized by an established institution like the AMPAS. Nor was there much of a discussion regarding the changes needed to our approach to evaluating the art produced by disenfranchised groups. In her 1988 essay “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” Toni Morrison expertly interrogates the “whitemale” origin of the canon of American literature, a canon that claims to be shaped by the idea of maintaining standards and quality, concepts that Morrison reminds us are too subjective to mean much in the evaluation of art. For Morrison, “What is possible is to try to recognize, identify, and applaud the fight for and triumph of quality when it is revealed to us and to let go the notion that only the dominant culture or gender can make those judgments, identify that quality, or produce it” (125). Though Morrison is speaking about canonical American literature, her writing serves to reveal the weaknesses and limitations inherent in conversations about “diversity” and “visibility” that do not address the processes through which we judge and evaluate quality. These limitations simply result in changes without transformation.

LGBT people in the U.S., including LGBT people of color, certainly have gained visibility in the past few decades. However, when I see TV shows or films featuring gay characters, or when I look at advertisements targeted to gay people, or when I hear my students talk about gay people in the classroom, I see that homogeneity, upward mobility, normativity and respectability have become the criteria by which the success of the gay rights movement is measured. This is not to say that that which opposes those
qualities has been fully excised; if that were the case, there would be no basis for this project. Instead, the individuals, representations, and acts that do not clearly align with the movement’s neoliberal goals have often been redefined and realigned, disciplined and regulated, in an effort to present an image of gayness that gives the illusion of “diversity” in a way that safely protects and reaffirms dominant forms of citizenship. What cannot be absorbed into the system and repackaged for the consumption of heteronormative culture—racialized bodies, race-conscious artists, activists and scholars, the unapologetically sexual, the feminine, the “classless”—is designated as shameful, low-quality, or harmful.

Building a movement on the basis of “equality,” the public gay rights movement’s willingly has sought to become absorbed by contemporary U.S. hegemonic culture at large while relying on and expecting the (inactive) presence of queers of color. Following the work of cultural critics such as Jane Ward, Cathy Cohen, and Horacio Roquez Ramírez, I see this drive as distinctly rooted in the concept of “manageable diversity” that is characteristic of the larger context of neoliberal political ideology that pervades contemporary American society. Neoliberalism, a political economic theory, emphasizes an individual’s freedom to pursue her or his capital goals through private property and the free market. For Jane Ward, beyond its emphasis on economic issues, the principles of neoliberalism extend to moral and political principles: “these principles include equality, democracy, and inclusion, which are reframed as the very corporate ethics that enable Americans to leverage human differences (including race, gender, culture, sexuality, etc.) in the service of capital” (7). Ward sees the relationship between diversity and neoliberalism as one in which the culture “focuses on cultural expression,
identity-based rights, and mainstream inclusion, yet [is] simultaneously supportive of global capitalism and its aspirations” (7). In the context of neoliberalism, people of color are only of value insofar as they support, cement, and protect capitalist interests and values. Instead of rejecting racial minorities, neoliberalism absorbs them into the system. Being part of the U.S. capitalist system may have opened up opportunities for (some) people of color to gain certain financial liberties associated with individualistic ideas of success in America. However, there is very little evidence that suggests the legal and social rights of disenfranchised people in the United States are valuable and relevant to 21st-century nation-building processes.

Ward connects this lack of consideration of the rights of people of color today to two major effects that emerged from the vacuous idea of “diversity” characteristic of neoliberal politics. On one hand, the idea of “diversity” has created a culture in which “disapproving of the most blatant forms of racism. . . [has] become a routine part of the way that ‘good’ Americans think, work, and produce culture” (8). She argues that this way of thinking has made Americans view racism as “a violation of social norms”; in turn, the visibility of people of color in the media has largely increased, to the point that it has become expected, a given. To this argument I would add that mainstream contemporary society has vilified “blatant forms of racism” to such an extent that it has gained an almost mythological status, something relegated to a far-away past (somehow Americans seem to have managed to convince themselves that our temporal distance to racial segregation, for instance, spans centuries rather than a few decades), to other nations (such as South Africa, for example), or to very rural, white-dominant, extremely poor communities in towns that no one has ever heard of and may not even
exist. Simply put, the vilification of “blatant forms of racism” driven by the cultural—not to mention financial—capital that “diversity” enjoys today has turned this type of racism into something intangible and nearly impossible, so that when American citizens are witness to incredibly obvious forms of racism, they are unable to recognize it as such. They instead find all kinds of creative ways to criticize and dismiss any discussions of race and racism. How else can we understand someone actually saying to me that “Ferguson is not about race”\(^3\) (true story) without any hint of irony?

This type of behavior relates to the second effect Ward addresses, which states that in a society in which “blatant forms of racism” are a violation of social norms and diversity is offered as the proper solution, “more subtle forms of racism to emerge.” Ward’s book was written in 2008, yet her argument feels particularly impactful when considering contemporary understandings of race in 2015. Diversity and multiculturalism remain major concepts in neoliberal politics, and I would argue that in the 21st century, blatant racism has become more prevalent as more and more people see racism as a non-issue anymore (which in itself is an act of racism). The paradox here is evident in the conversations surrounding the position of United States President. Students and friends have explicitly said to me that the election of President Barack Obama as the first African-American president of the United States means that racism in the United States is “over.” At the same time, Donald Trump, one of the leading presidential candidates of 2016, has successfully built an entire platform out of race-

\(^3\) “Ferguson” refers to the fatal shooting of black unarmed teenager Michael Brown by white cop Darren Wilson in Ferguson, MO, which resulted in a series of protests that received nationwide media attention.
based discourse that relies on a portrayal of Latino/a immigrants as lower class Mexicans. In the context of neoliberalism, the end of racism is signaled by a person of color’s ability to adopt the qualities associated with “good” American citizenship—respectability, political and financial power, heterosexuality, and masculinity, for example—in such a way that he can be elected as the citizen to lead all citizens. However, existing alongside this success story, and even possibly existing as a response to this type of success story, is the representation of people of color as “bad” citizens in order to gain political, financial, and social capital.

Indeed, a central element of neoliberalism is the concept of the “good” citizen; this citizen represents, respects, and maintains social norms associated with hegemonic forces. In terms of diversity, Ward argues that for white U.S. society, one aspect of contemporary “good” citizenship means recognizing that blatant forms of identity-based oppression are “bad.” As a result, the concept of “good citizenship” has been expanded to adopt people of color into the system as agents of diversity. Such a reading, an important reading, considers what people of color mean to the cultural and legal citizenship of white U.S. society from the perspective of white people. But what does it mean for people of color to be part of this system? What is gained and lost, often simultaneously, by playing the part of agent of diversity? These questions, particularly as they relate to queer U.S. Latino/as, are at the center of my project.

Trump’s use of the undocumented Mexican immigrant trope to talk about Latino/as has a two-fold effect. On one hand, it relies on the erasure of the heterogeneity of Latina/o subjectivity by invoking “poor” citizenship: Mexican-ness, illegal immigration, and poverty. At the same time, the strong reactions from Latino/as who are deeply insulted by the comparison reveals how much Latino/as deride the citizenship status assigned to undocumented Mexican immigrants.
Thesis and Structure

To discuss the role of queer Latinos in the context of neoliberal politics, gay rights and “good” and “bad” citizenship, I turn to representations of Nuyorican and Puerto Rican locas living in the U.S. in popular culture, starting with texts from 1969 to the present. While my argument relates to various types of queer Latina/os in the United States, I concentrate on Nuyorican or Puerto Rican locas living in the U.S. as a way to move away from monolithic understandings of queer Latinidad, adding specificity and consistency to my discussion. Locas, as I will explain more in-depth later on, are uniquely Latina/o queer subjects. Though locas do not occupy a fixed gender or sexual identity category (some identify as male, some as female; some seek same sex partners while others do not), the term loca, as I am invoking it in my writing, refers to lower class, queer-identified Latino/a individuals born with male genitalia, whose gender performance aligns closer to typical understandings of femininity than masculinity. For example, locas often wear female clothes either as drag queens or as part of their everyday clothing, in which case they often combine articles of clothes designated for women (e.g., skirts, female underwear, wigs) with their more traditional male appearance (e.g., facial hair). The word “loca” literally means “crazy woman” in Spanish, so the word has been traditionally reserved to refer, often pejoratively, to homosexual men considered to be the craziest kind: those who choose to perform a sort of womanhood in a society where normative versions of masculinity are synonymous with power.

Nuyorican locas and locas from Puerto Rico living in the United States are key to my discussion of citizenship for multiple reasons. Unlike the words “queer” or “trans,” which bring with them a uniquely North American history, the term loca is a term that is
specifically rooted in Latin American and Latino understandings of a type of effeminate queer masculinity. Beyond its gender and sexual dimensions, the term has historically been associated with abject poverty, a poverty that is less connected to financial capital than it is connected to what a poverty of the mind, an “innate” poverty—an aspect that I contextualize within 1960s portrayals of Puerto Ricans in New York in artistic, legal, and sociological realms. As in the case of 1960s representations of Puerto Ricans, even when locas have money or enjoy some type of public visibility within the system, locas are still seen as classless, difficult, loud, and excessive. Therefore, their subjectivity is characterized by lack of a stable professional life and at times even an absolute disinterest in working (performance, prostitution, hustling, and/or stealing are often their sources of income), lack of property (many of them are homeless or squatters), reliance on public funding, “excessive” sexuality, violent behavior, and above all, a firm insistence on their legal and affective citizenship—all characteristics that go against the ideals of “good” LGBT citizenship today.

Locas associated with Puerto Rico occupy such a significant place in this discussion since “after 1898 the United States would constitute itself, set its boundaries and national identity...by including [the Puerto Rican other] as a subject to American sovereignty while simultaneously withholding it from rule of Law” (Cruz-Malavé 62). In this way, conceptions of citizenship in the United States are historically linked to the

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5 This point is particularly relevant to my argument since the locas I write about here have all, at some point or another, enjoyed some type of celebrity status that has kept them from permanently living in abject poverty. My argument about the portrayal and understanding of locas applies beyond those moments since locas, in a very problematic way, are considered to have a sort of innate poverty that has less to do with their financial situation and more to do with their attitude and identity performance.
subjugation and regulation of Puerto Rican citizenship. In the continental United States, and especially in the east coast, this view of Puerto Rican subjectivity as something that requires the order and control of the Law while existing outside of the Law has been represented in relationship to class, sexuality, and gender. In the work of American white writers, anxieties about the migration of Puerto Ricans to New York City engendered a whole rhetoric of Puerto Rican women and men as pathologically sexual and excessively gendered (Cruz-Malavé 101).  

At the same time, Puerto Rican narratives have represented Puerto Ricans who leave to the United States in relationship to unstable gender dynamics, with New York being represented as “a place so queer that women become more like men and men more like women” (Negrón-Muntaner 87). It is because of this tense and complex history of immigration, violence, and neocolonialism that defines Puerto Rico-U.S. relations that gay Latino/as with Puerto Rican connections are valuable folks to address the issue of LGBT rights, U.S. Latina/o identity, and citizenship.

By analyzing the representation and performance of queer Rican locas across written and visual rhetoric, this project is invested in deconstructing the various ways in which queer Latina/o identity has become a tool to protect, cement, and highlight the values of “good” citizenship within the public LGBT rights movement. I argue that these representations and performances reveal an active desire from gay dominant groups to

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6 Cruz-Malavé cites Laura Briggs’ Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico as a particularly useful study of 1960s rhetoric regarding the representation of Puerto Ricans in sociological narratives as having a “culture of poverty” that is directly connected to “unbridled female sexuality whose logical counterpart was an impotent masculinity and an excessive compensatory, irrational machismo” (100-101).
repackage queer Latina/o identity in such a way that it benefits the objectives of those groups while ignoring the question of rights for queer Latina/os. By focusing on the significant role that queer Latina/os have played in the gay rights movement since its so-called origin in the Stonewall Riots, I see the existence of the contemporary mainstream LGBT movement as indelibly tied to the subjugation and exploitation of queer Latina/o identity. At the same time, it is in this oppressive relationship that I find room to explore how queer Latina/os' key role in the creation and maintenance of LGBT rights in the U.S. represents a site to interrogate, challenge, and expand the methods of archiving and representing queer Latino/a subjectivity. For being absorbed into the system, more than simply representing the complete erasure of the subversive aspects of queer Latina/o identity, also allows queer Latina/os to disidentify with the ideals of “good” citizenship. My focus on “celebrity” locas in particular is directly tied to my argument. If locas are "bad" citizens because of their radical insistence to perform the private in the public realm, the very public realm of popular culture magnifies the radical potential of locas' form of citizenship.

Chapter 2, “Hashtag It Gets Bourgier: Citizens on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown,” provides an overview of contemporary discussions of U.S. citizenship in the popular consciousness as well as academic realms, paying particular attention to the relationship between the concepts of legal and affective citizenship for LGBT people and Latino/as. This chapter seeks to establish the context in which this dissertation attempts to intervene. Through my review of theories and approaches to the subject of rights, citizenship, and representation, I question the ways in which neoliberal politics has engendered limiting conceptions of “good” citizenship for queer Latino/as who do
not neatly fit within the boundaries set by normative ideas about rights in the United States. I also establish a connection between representation and the construction of a “good” and “bad” citizen. Finally, I introduce research that supports my analysis of *locas* as politically relevant. Chapter 3, “Fashioned, Not Born, This Way: Interrogating (Auto)Biographical Narratives of Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn,” analyzes the representation of two historically relevant *locas*, Stonewall veteran Sylvia Rivera and Andy Warhol “Superstar” Holly Woodlawn, in (auto)biographical narratives, mostly focusing on Martin Duberman’s *Stonewall* and Holly Woodlawn’s autobiography co-authored with Jeff Copeland titled *A Low Life in High Heels: The Holly Woodlawn Story*. Rivera (1951-2002) was a Nuyorican/Venezuelan LGBT activist who participated in the Stonewall Riots; Woodlawn (1946-2015) was a performance artist known in academic circles as the surprising star of the Andy Warhol-produced film *Trash* (1970). This chapter seeks to emphasize how these (auto)biographical narratives engage with the process of repackaging *loca* identity, specifically through Stonewall narratives.

Chapter 4, “Trashing Stonewall: Locas, White Artists, and Regulation and Resistance in *Trash* (1970) and *Stonewall* (1995)” continues my discussion of LGBT archives, this time analyzing visual representations of Woodlawn and Rivera. I argue that visual rhetoric showcases a key tool for the challenging of traditional constructions of *loca* subjectivity: performance. Therefore, this chapter mostly questions the role of the white, queer gaze in the 1970 film *Trash*, directed by Paul Morrissey and produced by the Andy Warhol Factory, and the 1995 film *Stonewall*, directed by white British gay director Nigel Finch. Through my analysis, I unpack the tensions between the white, queer gaze and the radical potential of *locas’* performance. This tension makes its way
into my fifth chapter, “Cover, Girl: Branding U.S. Puerto Rican Drag in 21st-Century U.S. Popular Culture,” which culminates my analysis of (auto)biographical and performance by discussing the representation of Rican drag queens in the reality TV show RuPaul’s Drag Race. By focusing on a more contemporary form of representation, I evaluate the legacy of Woodlawn and Rivera’s form of citizenship while interrogating the teleological narratives so prevalent in our contemporary notions of LGBT rights. Finally, the conclusion ties my analysis of representation to concrete ways of imagining a movement that takes into consideration the rights and needs of queer Latina/o subjects.
CHAPTER 2
HASHTAG IT GETS BOURGIER: CITIZENS ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

Not all things are actually the same size.
Some things are more equal than others.

There is a difference between being insecure and being incarcerated
Between being lonely and being placed in solitary confinement
You call it a ‘rainbow;’ we call it a ‘racial wealth divide’

Sorry Dorothy your rainbow brick road was built by colonized and enslaved people

Dark-Matter, “It Gets Bourgie Project”

La Vida Loca

On May 2010 international pop star Ricky Martin came out of the closet, ending over a decade of speculations about the Puerto Rican star’s sexuality both outside and within the world of academia (Huffington Post). Soon after coming out as a gay man, Martin, who had been generally absent from the American media for a few years before the announcement, quickly gained a newfound visibility and popularity in the media. By November of the same year, his memoir Me was on the New York Times’ list of nonfiction best-sellers (New York Times). On February 2012, he had a high-profile guest appearance on the then trendy FOX Network TV series Glee, a show executive produced by ubiquitous gay producer Ryan Murphy that often tackled “gay issues” and was praised for featuring many LGBT principal characters. The next month, Martin

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1 Having come of age in a Latin household during the height of Martin’s popularity in the late 90s/early 2000s, I often listened to conversations among family, friends, and even the Latin American media about whether or not Ricky Martin was gay. In academic circles, Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s Boricua Pop addresses Martin’s queerness in 2004, a full six years before the pop star’s official coming out.
started performances as a co-lead in the first Broadway revival of *Evita* opposite unknown Argentinean actress Elena Roger; as the clear selling point of the show, Martin drew roughly $1 million per week (BroadwayWorld.com). The revival of Martin’s career directly following his coming out announcement reframed his persona in relationship to gay advocacy and the issue of rights. In 2011, he was named by the giant LGBT organization GLAAD as the recipient of the Vito Russo Award, an honorary award that according to their website is “presented to an openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender media professional who has made a significant difference in promoting equality” (GLAAD.org). His new position as an expert on LGBT rights was further cemented when he was asked to deliver a speech at the United Nations’ Leadership in the Fight Against Homophobia panel in 2012, where he spoke about the one cause that unites the LGBT movement: “equality and love and social justice” (Lederer).

Though I find this reception to Martin’s newly “out” identity somewhat refreshing, I cannot help but think about the process by which Ricky Martin’s recognition in the United States as one of the stars of the so-called “Latin explosion” in the late 1990s became rebranded in relationship to his gayness. Away from his Latinidad or Puerto Rican-ness, his marketability was now built around his identity as a celebrity who was considered “brave enough” to come out of the closet. This commercial rebranding of sorts, one encouraged and supported by those who have the financial and artistic authority to give him a platform as a performer, seems to then have gone from the realm of popular culture (i.e., celebrity memoir, network TV, Broadway) to the realm of mainstream outlets for the discussion of rights and social justice (i.e., UN and GLAAD),
suggesting that in today’s culture, the line between the commercial success of modes of representation and the issue of rights has become increasingly blurred.

Ricky Martin’s coming out’s relevance to the public gay rights movement might not be so apparent at first; but thinking through this issue calls attention to the kind of gay Latino masculinity the public is willing to consume. Martin’s form of citizenship, one that isn’t messy or undesirable, that is sexy but not sexual, and that is masculine but not threatening, reflects the “official” gay movement’s current agenda: become a model citizen and we’ll embrace you. In other words, despite his status as a queer Puerto Rican male icon, Martin has embraced a model closer to the stereotypical North American, white-collar, gay masculine ideal than he has to forms of queerness associated with Latino/Rican, feminine and/or working-class sensibilities. Ricky Martin’s queer performance functions here as a starting point to discuss the public’s inability to deal with Rican/Latino masculinities whose gender, queer and/or racialized expressions challenge hegemonic manifestations of gay identity performance. The willingness of the American public to embrace the performer’s new persona brings forth a set of questions about the relationship between Latino queer masculinities, marketability, and contemporary definitions of LGBT citizenship in the United States. Why did these official sites of representation, such as network TV and the Great White Way, suddenly become available and commercially viable outlets for Ricky Martin’s career? How does Ricky Martin’s raced and gendered performance attract queer and non-queer audiences? What about Ricky Martin’s socioeconomic status as a wealthy, light-skinned, out gay Puerto Rican man in the popular media makes him a natural choice to represent 21st-century LGBT advocacy in mainstream discussions of rights? And more
importantly, who is being left behind by contemporary U.S. gay politics? To think through these questions is to confront the status of the representation of queer Latino/Rican subjectivity, citizenship, and rights in the United States. I discuss Ricky Martin here because the particular phenomenon of his public coming out experience speaks to the type of non-threatening forms of gay pride that are celebrated in traditional media representation of LGBT issues. And while writing about the embrace of a Latino and gay public figure such as Ricky Martin is certainly both alluring and relevant, what interests me about this story is what is left unspoken and who is left unseen.

For there are many citizens who have historically remained hidden from the discussion of LGBT rights and citizenship, citizens whose public performance may not neatly align with the dominant notion of what an ideal LGBT citizen should be like, look like, act like, talk like. This chapter seeks to unpack some of those dominant notions in order to move on to a detailed analysis of the representation and performance of queer Latinos in the United States. I provide an overview of the contemporary state of 21st-century U.S. politics, centering on the influence that neoliberal attitudes exerts on notions of citizenship for people of color and queer-identified individuals. I first unpack theories of citizenship that inform my analysis. From this overview, I move on to a critique of the homogenized image of “official” gay politics. In addition to focusing on the corporate-driven interests of the LGBT movement, I engage with criticisms from traditional academic queer circles against this representation of queerness, pointing to the fact that the response from many white queer academics has revealed a comparable lack of interest in ways of imagining a queer public in relationship to race,
and more specifically, Latinidad. Therefore, as I invoke the writings of established and canonical white queer authors, such as Michael Warner and Douglas Crimp, to criticize popular imaginations of queer citizenship, I also critique what I see as an inability or unwillingness from these authors to engage with Latino/a subjects, whose history of oppression is as present in academia as it is outside of it.

This type of double-sided argument, one that relies on highlighting the value of certain dominant forms of discourse while evaluating the shortcomings and potential dangers of this type of discourse, runs through the entire dissertation. The main reason for this approach stems from my firm refusal to fully dismiss authors, texts, or research as “problematic.” If as queer critics of color we refuse to engage with texts that cement dominant values, how would we know what we are working against? The sheer amount of works and authors we would have to eliminate from our critical arsenal would be alarmingly astounding. Turning away from the work of these critics quite frankly would represent a missed opportunity for queer critics of color to examine the tools that are used to shape critical race and queer studies. It would represent a missed opportunity to create change from within, to disidentify with this discourse. And that is the goal of this dissertation: to incorporate and maybe even replicate certain rhetoric but with a difference. It is in this difference that I believe there is genuine potential to imagine transformation.

A “Peer of Kings”: The Construct of American Citizenship

I became a US citizen, un ciudadano americano, in late 2013 while in the middle of working on this project. As it is the case with the majority of immigrants who come to the United States, getting our citizenship was my family’s main goal since we arrived here from Venezuela back in 2001; not being able to actually become a naturalized
citizen until 2013, this felt like one of the most elusive goals imaginable. Once it happened, I was deeply involved in this project, and inevitably the process of naturalization made me think of citizenship as a performative act, one that seems as married to ideas of social, economic and legal constructs as gender. Hence, I became interested in exploring and researching the implications of that word, “citizenship,” especially as it relates to Latinidad and queerness within the confines of the United States.

The potential fluidity of the concept of American citizenship is acknowledged by the material provided by the government as part of the citizenship package that I received the day of the oath ceremony. I say this because this material, which includes a letter from the President, a booklet titled *The Citizen’s Almanac*, and a pamphlet titled “Important Information for New Citizens,” among others, often defines what it means to be an American citizen, thus suggesting an active effort to set the boundaries of this concept.

These materials put forth an image of citizenship in which the acquisition of privileges is indelibly tied to the *duties* that us naturalized citizens must perform and uphold. The brief write up on the back cover of *The Citizen’s Almanac* quotes former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis as saying that, “The only title in our democracy superior to that of President [is] the title of citizen.” Through this context, it is important for this material to establish the qualities of a “good” citizen for a group of immigrants who are about to step into the responsibilities of such a key role within American democracy. The letter from President Barack Obama refers to the “price and the promise of citizenship,” the pamphlet reminds us that “with the rights of citizenship come
equally important responsibilities,” and the introduction to the Almanac by the Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services mentions that when I made the oath to become a citizen, I made “a commitment to this country” and was “therefore awarded its highest privilege—U.S. citizenship,” before adding the clause that “great responsibilities accompany this privilege” (v). These various pieces of civics rhetoric geared toward new American citizens train naturalized citizens to understand U.S. citizenship as a status that is less about gaining rights and more about the new citizens’ responsibility to “maintain our system of government” (vi). This duties-centered civic rhetoric discourages naturalized immigrants from thinking of the ways in which citizenship can contribute to their individual objectives. Instead, the success of this immigrant form of U.S. citizenship depends on the contributions one can make to the larger interests of the nation.

In this way, this representation of U.S. citizenship privileges the immigrant’s “value” as defined by the nation-state. In Sexual Strangers: Gays, Lesbians, and the Dilemma of Citizenship, Shane Phelan supports the claim that “American citizenship is no longer understood simply as a matter of bearing arms, voting, and being concerned with public honor” (51) by connecting contemporary notions of American citizenship to production of capital. Phelan, quoting late political theorist Judith Shklar, writes, “The social standing central to citizenship is found...in the ‘marketplace, in production and commerce, in the world of work in all its forms, and in voluntary associations’ (Shklar 1991, 63)” (51). As evidenced by the naturalization materials above and Phelan’s writing, adopting the basic civic responsibilities and privileges conferred to American
citizens by the Constitution and Bill of Rights may be enough to be considered a basic citizen.

Yet, contemporary notions of “good” American citizenship rely on a capitalist understanding of the citizen’s usefulness to uphold, not change, the system. For Michael Warner this emphasis on “value” is intertwined with the distinction of the public and the private that emerged from the United States’ growth into a “modern bureaucracy” in the early eighteenth century. Describing the role that “the liberal tradition” played in the early feminist movement in the U.S. in his book Publics and Counterpublics, Warner establishes that as the United States began defining the parameters of its citizenship, the public and private spheres became distinctly defined in terms of their value to maintain the nation’s ideals: “Those aspects of people’s lives that particularize their interests came to be seen as inappropriate to public discussion. To be properly public required that one rise above, or set aside, one’s private interests and expressive nature” (40). To properly exercise American citizenship means that one has to be considered valuable to the community; the attainment of this citizenship then can only be reached by sacrificing one’s personal interests, what is private and individualized, in favor of the public wellbeing, a wellbeing that is consequently homogenized due to the excision of the private. Warner’s point that “to be properly public required that one rise above...one’s private interests and expressive nature [emphasis mine]” further helps to illustrate how a refusal to give up the private is seen as something indulgent, self-satisfying, and therefore, not useful for the community. In this context, “bad” citizens are then seen as people who do not have the will and/or the ability to “rise above” the private, a point that is particularly important when discussing
locas’ refusal and inability to engage in traditional forms of employment, their perceived indulgent sexuality and excess, and most of all, their unabashed sense of entitlement.²

As with many of the concepts, people, and ideas I analyze in this project, citizenship is a concept that interests me because of its regulatory tendencies and its subversive potential. It is important to note that when I address the concept of citizenship, I am addressing the terms from its philosophical implications as well as its legal implications. As such, citizenship cannot be understood as a monolithic concept that always acts the same way or does the same thing. Here, I turn to Marcia Ochoa, whose complex portrayal of citizenship in her essay on Venezuelan locas is particularly valuable. Ochoa writes,

> Citizenship can be a disciplinary structure (González Stephan 1996) that crystallizes identities through the control of state and ideological mechanisms, or a political structure within which the subjects of rights and political actors capable of intervening in governance are recognized (as it is defined by the Real Academia Española). ‘Citizenship,’ as an idea that refers to the subject position of individuals with respect to governance, contains both structural components (the law and other practices of citizenship, such as carrying a national ID card, getting a birth certificate, being recognized by the state, and voting) and affective components (feelings of belonging, participation, one’s stance with respect to state recognition or lack thereof). Both structures and affect will condense into practice (156).

Ochoa’s complex take on citizenship manages to synthesize all the various aspects encompassed in this concept that are relevant to my analysis, addressing its existing multiplicity while simultaneously pinpointing the unifying factor that runs through

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² Later in the piece I elaborate on this “sense of entitlement,” but I want to note here that my description of locas as having a “sense of entitlement” is not meant to be pejorative; quite the opposite, I find this to be one of the most fascinating, subversive, and quite frankly, admirable qualities of locas, a refusal to play the part of the eternally grateful poor Latino/a.
all of its varied definitions—recognition and visibility. More importantly, the last sentence in Ochoa’s quote above establishes how practice merges the legal and affective implications of citizenship, pointing to the fact that even though legal citizenship depends on recognition from the nation-state at a practical level, it has direct implications in philosophical (and equally important) understandings of citizenship.

By refusing to acknowledge an individual as a citizen, the government limits that individual’s opportunity to align her or his personhood around to the ideals of citizenship set up by the nation-state. In today’s political context, Latino rights-based groups focus on the fight for legal citizenship, centering on immigrants whose inability to be given legal documents makes them invisible in the eyes of the Law. This lack of documents is directly responsible for immigrants’ status as “poor” (non)citizens in the popular consciousness. For example, not being able to obtain a driver’s license limits how far a person can travel to obtain a job; even if they are able to travel through public transportation, the fact that they do not have a Social Security Number means undocumented immigrants cannot obtain any legal employment. This invisibility extends to an individual’s access to government aid and education. When I graduated high school I was ineligible to receive financial aid from the government to go to college because my family and I were in a sort of legal purgatory with the U.S. Immigrations Services, neither was I able to enroll in a university outside of the community college system since I did not have a Social Security Number. Despite my earnest drive at the time to contribute to the maintenance of the system through the pursuit of education, this legal invisibility denied me access to the spaces and systems that are in place to support this drive at the government level. Since “good” citizenship in the U.S. is tied to
a direct engagement with capitalist practices, not being able to get an education or a job (which beyond a lack of participation in modes of production keeps someone from earning money they can go on to spend as consumers) because of a lack of legal recognition leaves immigrants with few opportunities to pursue avenues of “good” citizenship.

Legal citizenship is also a way to ensure the protection of minoritarian subjects who, without these rights, are left vulnerable to institutionalized and practical forms of violence that ensure their continued abjection. LGBT people, particularly transgender individuals of color, are currently facing a strong wave of violence that seems to be a direct result of the lack of clear laws designed to provide protection at the legal level to LGBT citizens. Phelan finds this vacuum in the law to be “quite stunning both at the level of individual police, and more tellingly, among politicians, many of whom are reluctant to endorse hate crimes legislation if sexual orientation is included” (5). He finds this reluctance to be a key factor hindering the realization of LGBT people as citizens since he argues that, “if individuals cannot rely upon the protection of the laws, they cannot fully participate in public affairs” (5). This is one of the most alarming issues facing queers of color in today’s conceptions of citizenship given that in 2010 out of 27 reported murders in which the victims were LGBT people, 70% of them were LGBT people of color (Lavers). More recently, the Human Rights Campaign reported 21 transgender homicide victims in 2015, indicating that just about all of the victims were women of color; of 52 homicides of transgender people ranging from 2013-2015, “not a single one was prosecuted or reported as a hate crime” (Stafford). In this way the experience of LGBT people of color in the U.S. illustrates the urgency behind obtaining
legal recognition, an urgency that both puts to shame the unfortunate prioritization of
same-sex marriage as a legal platform from mainstream LGBT rights groups as well as
the ways in which white academic queer criticism often depicts queer people’s pursuit
for legal recognition as misguided and insufficiently subversive. It is easy for these two
groups to opt out of a violence-based discussion of rights when their citizenship status
does not threaten their livelihood.

At the same time, the limitations of citizenship cannot be ignored; especially,
though legal citizenship is tied to affective citizenship, the existence of the former does
not imply the existence of the latter. In other words, state recognition can limit
someone’s sense of belonging or participation as well as it can lead to legally
sanctioned forms of disenfranchisement. These limitations have become alarmingly
apparent in the face of the recent string of homicides and deaths under suspicious
circumstances of black people in the hands of the police across the United States,
including Trayvon Martin (a 17-year-old murdered by police officer George Zimmerman
in Sanford, Florida—Zimmerman was acquitted by a jury), Mike Brown (an 18-year-old
murdered by police officer Darren Wilson in St. Louis, MO—Wilson was cleared by the
U.S. Department of Justice and never indicted by the St. Louis County grand jury),
Sarah Bland (a 28-year-old violently arrested by state trooper Brian Encinia in Waller
County, Texas—the grand jury also declined to indict Encinia for homicide but indicted
him for perjury), and Eric Garner (a 43-year-old whose death in the hands of the NYPD
in Staten Island, NY was ruled a homicide, with police officer Daniel Pantaleo
considered responsible for the chokehold that killed him—a grand jury once again
decided not to indict Pantaleo and instead a settlement for $5.9 million to Garner’s
family was later reached). If citizenship is a “disciplinary structure,” as Ochoa writes above, one way to grasp its limitations is understanding who exactly is being disciplined. Furthermore, if we understand citizenship to be defined by protection under the law, then it is clear that legal citizenship has failed black people in the United States and disrupted their roles as full citizens.

A similar type of limitation affects the Latino/a queens that I write about in this project. Writing about Venezuelan locas, Ochoa acknowledges that, “‘citizenship’ has been a mechanism used to exclude them. They are denied social participation, their rights are violated (both as citizens and as humans), and many times they themselves refuse to participate in...‘good’ citizenship...No complaints are filed because the complaint is not a useful tool for them” (153-155). I argue that United States’ locas are similarly unprotected under the law. This distrust of legal forms of recognition highlights the limitations of citizenship. And yet, if this type of citizenship does not provide a “useful tool for them,” then it is imperative to identify the tools that are useful to locas’ citizenship, a type of citizenship that considers and protects their personhood without regulating it.

Indeed, this is why the type of citizenship that mainstream LGBT rights-based group have historically pursued is yet another tool that is not useful for locas. These groups continue to focus on a pursuit of citizenship for queer people in the U.S. that privileges an increase in visibility and representation over actual changes to practices that continue to ensure the government-sanctioned violation of disenfranchised queer people of color in the United States. Such an emphasis has led to a mainstream LGBT community that has fashioned itself in a way that is intelligible to those who have the
power to grant citizenship. The fight for same-sex marriage that has so prominently defined this public gay rights movement is a definitive example of a struggle for civil recognition designed to maintain the order of the nation-state instead of altering to improve the lives of minoritarian queer subjects. Whereas white queer scholars today mostly claim that the pursuit of marriage rights for queer people is altogether misguided, I take issue with the objectives behind this pursuit as well as the methods through which it has been realized. Instead of using the social power of marriage to help disenfranchised queer people (for instance, undocumented LGBT immigrants or unemployed LGBT widows/widowers whose financial stability becomes compromised when the primary earner in the couple dies), the LGBT movement has used marriage as a tool to gain access to hegemonic notions of citizenship.

The LGBT citizen, in her or his pursuit of legal recognition, must wisely and carefully use rhetoric that represents queer citizenship as distinctly American— with all the qualities that a “good” American citizen must have as detailed in the naturalization material I discuss earlier. Hence, the rhetoric employed by LGBT rights-based groups in relationship to same-sex marriage consistently seeks acceptance into the system by promising an unabated loyalty to the protection of neoliberal ideals that sustain a limiting, disciplinary, and “not useful”—as Ochoa writes—citizenship. A unique artifact that reflects this rhetorical strategy is Michael Nava and Robert Dawidoff’s 1995 polemic Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter to America. From all the resources produced by LGBT authors, activists, celebrities, and citizens, I bring up Created Equal because of its particular authorship and its characteristically earnest approach to the issue of LGBT rights in the United States. Dawidoff, a renowned Anglo historian who specializes in the
history of democracy and American gay and lesbian history, currently serves as an advisor for the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC (University of Southern California) Libraries, which advertises itself as “the largest repository of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer materials in the world” (ONE Archives Foundation). Nava, whom I first encountered through his series of novels featuring out gay, Mexican-American criminal defense lawyer Henry Rios, is a gay Mexican-American author and attorney who has been an active member of the CA judicial system for decades. The potential heterogeneity that these authors could bring to a discussion of LGBT rights—Dawidoff’s queerness, Nava’s identity as both gay and Mexican-American—is left unrealized; instead, their argument is dependent on the homogeneity that is required of LGBT citizens who are admitted to the kind of privileged positions Dawidoff and Nava currently hold.

While the title of the book seems to suggest that Nava and Dawidoff are interested in an expansive view of rights for gay people in the U.S., it rather uses rights-based rhetoric to argue for the institution of gay marriage, giving the illusion that rights and gay marriage are somehow equivalent when, in fact, a close inspection of their writing points to the limitations of legal citizenship. Nowhere is this more apparent than in what can be read as the book’s thesis when the authors insist that, “it bears repeating that what is sought by gays and lesbians is not new or special rights, but, rather, the extension of existing rights guaranteed to all American citizens by the Constitution and

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3 I wrote my master’s thesis on Nava’s 2001 novel *Rag & Bone*, which I argued realized a valuable queer portrayal of Chicano masculinity and the Chicano/a family that reflects a far more subversive attitude toward queer issues than *Created Equal* suggests.
identified by the Declaration of Independence as the purpose, not the gift, of government” (27). I am struck by the way in which the writing here so closely matches the definitions of American citizenship that I found in the naturalization materials. Just like those government-issued documents invoke the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to insist on a definition of good citizenship that revolves around upholding, not changing, American ideals, Nava and Dawidoff argue for rights by explicitly conceiving LGBT citizens as contributors to established notions of citizenship. The authors’ writing here can be characterized as polite and controlled, with a very deliberate attempt to avoid appearing as demanding or entitled. They reject words such as “new,” “special” and “gift,” terms that have historically been employed to represent Latinos’ pursuit of rights and legal recognition. By contrast, they emphasize neoliberal ideals of “extension” (a moment that can be understood in relationship to that magical word so important within neoliberal politics: “diversity”) and “purpose.” For Created Equal, citizenship for LGBT people must be politely requested and should be conferred on the grounds of its ability to contribute to “existing” notions of citizenship as well as its perceived inherent inability and outright disinterest in destabilizing the system.

The prominence of this stale, barren, and disappointing construction of citizenship for LGBT people in the United States is directly responsible for the fact that the “dominant academic climate...is dominated by a dismissal of political idealism” (Muñoz, Cruising Utopia 10) that characterizes the contemporary work of some of the most canonical queer critics. The most popular of these works, Lee Edelman’s No Future, one of the most widely taught and cited books in contemporary queer studies, claims that contemporary citizenship as a concept is so rank, so useless to queer
people that there is no point in “partaking of this narrative movement toward a viable political future,” further claiming that “the queer” stands in direct opposition to “every social structure or form” and as such should “refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation” (Edelman 4). Of course, Edelman’s writing here valuably criticizes the teleological ideology that has been so engrained in the LGBT popular consciousness, an ideology that I myself criticize at various points in this project. Still, I can’t help feeling reluctant about his rather homogenized portrayal of “the queer,” a portrayal that can potentially replicate some of the problems of the mainstream discourse that Edelman himself is working against. Furthermore, I insist that it is those queer scholars who enjoy a certain level of cultural and financial capital (due to their race, level of education, socioeconomic background, job title, and/or gender performance, just to list a few) who can not only easily reject the concept of hope, political future, or legal protection but also who can create and have created an intellectual hierarchy in which those who are invested in those concepts are naïve, ignorant, and less intellectual (Muñoz, Cruising Utopia 10).

For locas, death drive, negation, and a lack of futurity are not vague, abstract concepts for graduate students to safely discuss within the confines of the university or rhetorical terms that a white intellectual can use to gain prominence in a field by continuing that field’s unfortunate tradition to often ignore or elide the experiences of people of color. Quite the opposite, given their strong likelihood to be legally victimized by institutions and individuals, their inability to participate in political matters, and the constant exploitation of their bodies and personas in the name of politics and art, the normative state of locas is one in which their agency is continuously negated. In this
case, imagining survival, protection, political change, and sites of hope functions as the subversive act. So while accepting current forms of citizenship available to U.S. queers may not be an option, neither is opting out of them.

To find a politically viable alternative, I turn to the seminal work of late Cuban-American queer performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz, who in his ingenious book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* offers one of the most valuable approaches to finding potential within a system that seems to offer none. Muñoz addresses the problematic implications tied to both the acceptance of dominant representations of “good” citizenship within the public LGBT community in the U.S. as well as the rejection of those values so prevalent in queer scholarship today. Synthesizing the work of French philosopher Michel Pêcheux, Muñoz describes three modes of engaging with hegemonic systems: identification, counteridentification, and disidentification. Identification refers to uncritically adopting a hegemonic set of social codes; Ricky Martin’s post-coming out persona as a model gay Latino citizen, for example, can be seen as an example of identification, so can Nava and Dawidoff’s plea to be accepted into the system in *Created Equal*. By contrast, counteridentification refers to a complete rejection of dominant norms, much like the way Edelman does in *No Future*. While the problematic implications of identification are apparent and easier to grasp, the shortcomings of counteridentification may not be as obvious. Muñoz sees counteridentification as another form of “[validating] the dominant ideology by reinforcing its dominance through the controlled symmetry of ‘counterdetermination’.” Finally, there is disidentification, a mode of engaging with hegemonic citizenship that “neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly
opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (11), one that, as I will argue throughout this project, is particularly valuable for queer Latino subjects who are not able to or refuse to conform to “the phantasm of normative citizenship” (4).

Muñoz’s theory of disidentifications is central to my project and is one that I will continue to return to and further expand throughout my chapters. In this section, however, I invoke it because it opens up options to deal with normative citizenship beyond the two alternatives of assimilation or rejection. This willingness to find useful tools beyond those two alternatives draws me to the rich work of race- and class-conscious social theorists, queer critics, and/or race studies scholars who, in acknowledging the rampant—and consequently regulatory and disciplinary—social power of citizenship, refuse to walk away from it. Ochoa recognizes that rights and citizenship “are mechanisms for exercising social power” (153) and as such cannot be completely ignored when addressing subjects whose social power is consistently compromised. Looking for valuable approaches to citizenship, Horacio Roque Ramírez points to the term “cultural citizenship” developed by critic Renato Rosaldo. Based on Rosaldo’s ideas, Ramírez describes cultural citizenship as a way to “[address] notions of belonging and equal representation in a democratic society without losing respect for individual and group differences” (176). Ramírez warns against looking at this concept uncritically; indeed, mainstream LGBT-rights groups have used ideas of “equal representation” and “respect” to promote visibility and recognition without change. Yet, Ramírez argues that the concept of cultural citizenship has “queer racial promise” (176). For me, this queer racial promise emerges in challenging, redefining and co-opting
hegemonic notions of “equality,” “respect” and the “individual,” something that representation of locas has the potential to offer.

**Getting “Better”: Visibility and the Corporization of Rights**

A former professor recently shared the 2014 spoken word poem “It Gets Bourgie Project” on a social media site. The poem, written in collaboration by Alok Vaid-Menom and Janani Balasubramanian, who together form the trans South Asian performance art duo DarkMatter, is an ingenious takedown of ubiquitous gay journalist and activist Dan Savage’s misguided It Gets Better Project™, the campaign and eventual organization that was created as a response to the string of reported suicides by gay teenagers in 2010 across the United States. The It Gets Better Project™ started as a series of videos featuring gay, straight, bisexual, and trans celebrities (Ricky Martin being one of them) sharing their own struggles growing up, culminating with the now trademarked soundbite, “it gets better.” Today, in 2016, it is a nonprofit organization that calls itself “a worldwide movement” on its official site, right on the same page where the logos of its corporate sponsors Wells Fargo, West Elm, Doritos, and Uber are prominently displayed. In the “It Gets Bourgie Project,” Savage’s organization symbolizes the oppressive dominant views of gay groups and individuals, with the poets seamlessly switching from criticisms of capitalism-driven gay politics (“you’re sleeping with Wall

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4 Online sources credit the death of Indiana teen Billy Lucas, who hung himself following consistent physical and verbal abuse from classmates who suspected him of being gay, for “inspiring” the It Gets Better Project. That Billy Lucas was brown adds to the history of official LGBT institutions of growing out of the sacrifice of people of color (“Remembering Billy Lucas, the Boy Whose Suicide Inspired a Movement,” LGBTQ Nation, September 9 2013).

5 The project went “viral” and soon people who are not celebrities were encouraged to participate, and they did.
Street/and I’m taking stock of your hot mess”; “Guess the only change you believe in is the one in your bank account!”) to the sexual othering of queer people of color (“when you said you were homosexual did that just mean you wanted to fuck yourself?”) to the legal inequalities inherent in the rights-based rhetoric of today (“what about the homeless queer youth?/Oh wait! They were #BornThisWay to be poor./criminalized, and thrown into jail”). If Michael Nava and Robert Dawidoff’s *Created Equal* exemplifies the type of dignified rhetoric that promised a future in which LGBT people would be absorbed into the system, Alok Vaid-Menom and Janani Balasubramanian present the fulfillment of that promise as an almost post-apocalyptic dystopia for queer people of color. Thus, the “It Gets Bourgie Project” is an urgent reminder of the corporization of gay rights and its connections to the oppression of the legal, sexual, cultural, and basic human rights of queer people of color by official, nationwide forms of LGBT representation.

Whereas the previous section focused on theorizing citizenship, 21st-century U.S. citizenship in particular, this section zeroes in on a more concrete portrayal of “good” citizenship for gay people in the United States in order to contextualize the disruptions that I later argue *locas* offer. U.S. gay citizenship in the 21st century mostly relates to the institutions that have designated themselves as the “voice” of the LGBT community; in turn, mimicking democratic processes in which the vocal majority rules, LGBT people, as a general demographic, have adopted and validated these institutions as fair representatives of their interests and desires. A close inspection of these interests and desires reveals the white, male-centered, gender-conforming, sex-phobic, nationalist qualities around which this LGBT community has been imagined.
Perhaps this is why I feel so comfortable using words such as “mainstream,” “public,” and “official” to describe the movement and the community it imagines. Though these qualifiers next to the noun “LGBT” seem to create a paradoxical term, in a socioeconomic and political environment in which a major US banking institution such as Wells Fargo publicly sponsors gay activism, these terms seem more appropriate to describe LGBT rights than ever before. Part of this is that these so-called official forms of LGBT groups have actively sought to be “public” in multiple ways. Michael Warner’s theory of publics and counterpublics helps illustrate the political relevance of this term. The term “public” is by nature a general term that, like the word “citizenship,” provokes a set of questions about the individual using the word (who am I imagining as the public when I invoke the word?) and about the word itself (who is the term “public” naming as such?). Warner’s theory is a valuable source to address these issues, particularly since he recognizes that the category “public” is inherently fictional and imagined, at the same time as it plays an important role in constructions of “good” and “bad” citizenship (8-9). His argument that, in light of the development of an American national identity, a “public” queer citizen could only emerge by sacrificing a “privatized notion of identity” accounts for both the reasons why the LGBT movement gained so much prominence between the 1990s and the 2010s and for the types of political goals that currently characterize this movement. These political goals typically include visibility in the media, the right to same-sex marriage, and anti-bullying campaigns. The goal is to be considered part of a public, to achieve (legal, political, cultural, and financial) recognition. Yet this pursuit tends to be filtered through or driven by a desire to gain access to aspects of the culture that are entrenched in the most vapid notions of
contemporary American citizenship. In this way, the fight for LGBT rights today seems to be about the fact that “what lesbians and gay men want most is access to a mainstream, safe, and respectable existence filled with high fashion, stylish home décor, and the possibility of parenthood” (Ward 12-13).

It is important to note that, for certain people, this branding of the LGBT community as a group of normal, public, and willing consumers has been relatively successful. Really, it would be misguided not to acknowledge the changes in attitude American society has experienced toward gay people and even gay people of color. The 2015 Supreme Court ruling declaring state laws banning same-sex marriage stands out as the highest-profile victory for LGBT rights-based groups. Similar to the way in which neoliberalism reshaped attitudes toward the most obvious forms of racist practices, it has reshaped many of the attitudes of U.S. citizens toward the most obvious forms of homophobic practices, and a similar phenomenon seems to be developing with regards to transgender rights. Since visibility in the media has played such a central role in the construction of mainstream LGBT rights, this distinctly contemporary form of acceptance has been extended to the representation of queer characters in films, TV shows, plays, Broadway musicals, and top-charting tunes. In the United States we currently have an entire TV network dedicated to gay people, LogoTV; one of the central couples in the ABC ratings juggernaut ensemble family sitcom Modern Family, currently in its seventh season, is a married gay couple; the

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6 As Kenji Yoshino notes, though still extant today, legally sanctioned conversion therapy and antisodomy laws are no longer the norm (77)
aforementioned TV show *Glee*, which ran on FOX for six seasons and became a pop culture phenomenon, at one point had as many as five LGBT main characters and won awards for its two out gay actors, lesbian comedian Jane Lynch and newcomer gay performer Chris Colfer; not to mention the ever ubiquitous Neil Patrick Harris whose public coming out while playing a heterosexual womanizer on the CBS sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* took him from being a dependable, somewhat recognizable former child actor to beloved, bankable, and powerful actor/host/author/personality/advocate (I’m sure I’m missing a title there). In the presence of such outstanding evidence, how in the world could we, gay people, argue that we are oppressed? I mean, what more do we want?

Really, this type of representation often becomes one of the main tools through which the terms “LGBT,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “transgender,” and “queer” become homogenized. In many cases, the characters’ queerness becomes a quirk, something that makes them stand out, something that adds to the “diversity” of the product, the network, and/or the institution, something that attracts a new market. The fact that this visibility is targeted to LGBT consumers as a sign of “how far we’ve come” (it gets better!) and to non-queer consumers as a sign of how far they’ve come or how “open-minded” they are suggests that in the United States, political realization and model citizenship is rooted in the ability to be marketable and marketed to. The recent reception of transgender rights and representation into the popular consciousness can be directly connected to the emergence of transgender stories as profitable resources that serve to make non-transgender people feel good about their own citizenship while winning awards and gaining financial capital. The *20/20* Diane Sawyer exclusive
interview with former Olympian and reality TV star Caitlyn Jenner, in which Jenner revealed she is a transgender woman and was in the process of transitioning, garnered a whopping 20.7 million viewers for ABC, a number practically unheard of for TV news coverage and which represented ABC’s highest rated Friday night since 2004 (Patten).7

The Amazon series Transparent, about a late 60s affluent L.A. patriarch who “comes out” as a transgender woman to her children, won a Golden Globe Award for Best Comedy Series in 2015 and a Best Actor in a Comedy award for non-transgender actor Jeffrey Tambor. And the celebrated Netflix series Orange is the New Black garnered black transgender actress Laverne Cox an Emmy nomination for Guest Actress in a Comedy and has become one of the most talked about shows in the streaming network’s young history.

Part of why Latino subjectivity is relevant to this discussion has to do with the fact that the rise and prominence of Latinos in popular culture parallels the one LGBT people have been experiencing in the past couple of decades. This seemingly sudden prominence of Latinos in popular culture, the so-called “Latino explosion,” gained momentum in the mid to late 1990s. As with the rise of representation of LGBT people, this “explosion” emerged when “census figures and marketing demographics were touted as evidence that Latinos had arrived on the (commercial) scene, giving rise to the aggressive marketing of ‘Latino’ products, music, and dance” (Hedrick 2). This cause-and-effect relationship cements the fact that the visibility of Latinos, similar to the

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7 These numbers include DVR and delayed viewership. The story was reported as the best ratings newsmagazine 20/20, under which the interview aired, has gotten in over 15 years.
contemporary LGBT public, is rooted and indelibly tied to their perceived relevance as legal citizens whose rising census figures were thought to have an impact on democratic processes as well as cultural American citizens whose marketing demographics suggested that they would have an impact on consumer culture. In Chica Lit: Popular Latina Fiction and Americanization in the Twenty-First Century, feminist U.S. Latino/a scholar Tace Hedrick demonstrates how this relationship among legal discourse, corporate interest, and media visibility has served to limit and regulate the type of citizenship available to Latino/as in the United States. Citing Arlene Dávila, Hedrick refers to the “corrective impulse” characterized by “celebrations of Latina/o success, and their concomitant demonization of Latino poverty” in popular representations of U.S. Latina/os, thus showing how the homogenous view of Latino/as as inherently working class is being replaced with a homogenous view of U.S. Latinos as “good” American cultural citizens (Hedrick 7).

Interestingly, both Arlene Dávila and Jane Ward find that the homogeneous mainstream forms of representation of the respective minoritarian groups their work evaluates, Latino/as for the former and LGBT groups for the latter, is directly informed by the immense power of corporate ideology and of actual corporations within a neoliberal system (Dávila 28, Ward 13). Their work grounds the interest of public institutions in developing such a rigid type of citizenship for Latinos/as and LGBT people to the acquisition of capital gained through collaboration with private institutions. By partnering with private companies, identity-based groups enter a symbiotic relationship with the corporate world: the corporations provide financial stability and validity in the form of sponsorships while the organizations provide them with a platform to “brand
their product as the official cell phone, sports car, credit card, beer, and so on,” for that particular “community” (Ward 13).

Writing about LGBT rights-based groups, Ward identifies another dangerous way in which public versions of the movement are modeling themselves after corporate ideology:

In addition to accepting corporate grants and sponsorships (which are arguably needed), queer activists also turn to the business model for ideas about how to manage and represent their own internal race, gender, and socioeconomic differences; how to handle conflict and inequality; and how to transcend gay-only politics and achieve diversity. Corporate marketing techniques and diversity practices not only inform how LGBT activists sell gay identity to funders and the public, they also influence how LGBT activists represent a much broader range of identities and social justice issues—to the public, to each other, and to themselves. While critical research on the gay market tells us much about the reframing of gay identity, here I consider a different question: How have corporate-originated ideas about race, gender, and socioeconomic class been imported into the LGBT movement? (13)

Ward makes the connection among consumerism, LGBT-based politics, and the oppression of queer people of color apparent by tying the corporate approach of the LGBT movement to the homogenization and safe form of diversity propagated by the leaders of this movement. Her use of marketing rhetoric when she writes about “LGBT activists sell[ing] identity” places an emphasis on the role that branding and marketability plays within the creation of LGBT citizenship, which is central to understanding how excess, abject poverty, a sense of entitlement, and a disinterest for self-discipline in favor of the homogenized movement are characteristics that are not at all welcome in this context—where do locas fit within this context?

Does it get better for locas? Or does it just get bourgier for LGBT people who fit the concept of “good” queer citizenship? What I gather Savage and his husband and co-founder Terry Miles sought to do with the “It Gets Better Project,” at least publicly, was
to show gay teens, and really the LGBT community, that other LGBT people achieved “success.” At its most extravagant and unreachable, this success was defined as celebrity stardom, but even when that was not the case, it was clear that for Savage and Miller “getting better” meant gaining enough capital to move to an urban space like New York City, San Francisco, or Los Angeles, finding a stable romantic relationship, and perhaps having a gym membership at a fabulous gym preferably in the gay part of the city. The phrase “it gets better” eerily recalls Michael Caine’s aforementioned unbelievably condescending and tone-deaf statement to black actors that they just need to be patient if they want to get Academy Award nominations; both statements encourage a kind of passive stance from minoritarian groups that suggest that no political action is required because somehow, magically political change will happen. In the meantime, while people’s lives are been threatened, violated or simply ended, the “It Gets Better Project” became a corporation. Unlike the future of most of the victims it pretends to serve, its real future is captured by the ™ sign that now accompanies it. This process from well-intentioned idea to a corporate-sponsored, self-congratulatory trademarked organization mirrors the journey of many organizations associated with LGBT rights in the United States.

**Lacking a Decent Pair of Panties: The Welcome Difficulty of Categorizing Locas**

It is within this tense, complicated sociopolitical and historical moment that I situate my analysis of (self-)representations of locas. I argue that the representation and performance of locas disrupts the confining notion of a public citizenship for LGBT people and Latino/as in today’s U.S. culture. To understand this claim, I contextualize the term loca in relationship to the specific experiences, backgrounds, attitudes, and legacies that I address in this project. As I write in the Introduction, locas is a term used
in Latin American and U.S. Latino/a cultures to pejoratively name a certain type of queer Latino “man” who performs femininity instead of compulsory masculinity. The category “man” has to be used with caution here since locas often do not consider themselves to be men or women. I do think it is important to use it given that the derogatory aspect of loca as a term emerges precisely because locas are perceived as failed, crazy men.

In the United States, both in traditional white academic queer circles as well as in public LGBT representations, the word “transgender” would most likely be used to describe this type of gender and sexual performance and identification. I find the word “transgender” to be filled with the same kind of destabilizing potential that loca does, since, as queer critic Jack Halberstam writes in the canonical queer theory book In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives, the word “transgender” “embraces more hybrid possibilities for embodiment and identification.” In that same section, however, Halberstam conceptualizes transgender theory as one that “do[es] not reduce [transgender bodies] to either ‘women all along’ or ‘failed men’” (54). In my project, I do not fully contextualize locas through the term “transgender” since the North American conceptions of the term do not fully take into account the culturally specific ways in which locas are indeed perceived as “failed men,” an aspect of their subjectivity that contributes to their role as “bad” citizens for Latino/as and LGBT people alike. This is the perspective through which I analyze locas; it is in no way meant to negate the value and potential of scholarship that reads their performance, representation, and gender identification in relationship to transgender theories. In fact, I rely on transgender theory, such as Halberstam’s to contribute to my scholarly reading of locas, and many of the research about locas that I cite throughout uses terms such as “transgender,”
“transsexual,” “transvestites,” and “drag queen” to refer to them. That locas present such a rhetorical challenge for scholars, popular authors, and historians who seek to find the “right” vocabulary to write about them adds to their refusal to belong to a fixed gender category. Therefore, even though for the purpose of my analysis I use the term loca to refer to a set of cultural subjectivities embodied by a group of individuals, the reality is that the term loca, much like the term “queer,” is one that is defined by its inability to truly be defined.

In the context of 21st-century U.S. politics, I do worry that the term “transgender” is becoming co-opted by the LGBT movement, both when it comes to representation in popular culture (as described in the previous section) and in terms of “official” transgender rights. The type of citizenship that I argue locas represent is not an expansion of this official version of transgender rights, neither is it a rejection of those rights or something that exists parallel to that discussion. Rather, loca citizenship can benefit and has influenced contemporary discussions of transgender rights, yet since as I established earlier legal rights are simply not enough, it cannot be encompassed by widespread, dominant (liberal) notions of what transgender rights means in the United States context today.

I also think using locas helps fill and point to the major gap in U.S.-based research about locas within the boundaries of the United States that considers their culturally, racially, and socioeconomically specific history. This differs from Latin American scholars, who offer a rich wealth of research that, in contrast, takes into account the rights, potentiality, and personhood of locas; these include Diana Palaversich’s thorough study of the locas that populate Chilean author Pedro Lemebel’s
fiction, Marcia Ochoa’s incredibly complex and shockingly accurate study of *locas* and the Law in my hometown of Caracas, Venezuela, and Puerto Rican cultural critic Efraín Barradas’ pointed reading of Puerto Rican and Hispanophone drag queens as an allegory for the Caribbean in Puerto Rican author Mayra Santos-Febres’ novel *Sirena, Selena*. Fortunately, a few Latina/os critics have developed scholarship about *locas* in the context of the United States; indeed, scholars like Arnaldo-Cruz Malavé, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Lawrence LaFountain-Stoke, Jessi Gan and Tim Retzioff offer valuable analyses that engage with the citizenship of *locas*. In the United States, however, it is hard to find a long-form project fully dedicated to exploring and engaging with the representation and political relevance of *locas*.

One of the most important influences on my work is Diana Palaversich’s take on renowned Chilean author and proud *loca* Pedro Lemebel’s writing, “The Wounded Body of Proletarian Homosexuality in Pedro Lemebel’s *Loco Afa*.” According to Palaversich, Lemebel privileges what Palaverisch calls “the Latino model of homosexuality” (a mode she rightly points most people see as “hierarchical and anachronistic”) over the North American model. This model consists of *el activo*, a male who performs the role of the penetrator and is typically thought of as heterosexual; by contrast, *el pasivo*, the man who is penetrated, is not only seen as gay but is also associated with femininity due to his perceived inability or lack of desire to perform dominant modes of masculinity through the sex act. Palaversich’s article argues that Lemebel privileges this attitude towards *locas* as a way to oppose the North American model of gay masculinity, a model that promotes an image of gay male identity as tied to manifestations of
hegemonic masculine practices while repelling female identification (123). Finally, Palaversich directly states the political value of Lemebel’s conception of *locas*:

Lemebel’s use of the *loca*’s very name has two highly charged effects: the *loca* is depicted as a subversive identity category in which gender fixities have become unintelligible and connotes a challenge to the notion of an irreducible gay identity. Lemebel focuses on the *loca* not because she is representative of the homosexual in general but because she provokes the greatest rejection and discrimination not only from heterosexual society but also from homosexuals who adhere to a Western gay model…The *loca* sexuality represents an escape from normativizing codes and, as such, serves as a symbol of the freed sexuality that the dominant gay model attempts to exclude. (110-111)

Palaversich’s writing connects the fairly recent “Western gay model” to “normativizing codes,” and in doing so highlights the value of *locas* to an academic discussion of citizenship and rights. Even though I disagree with a conception of *loca* in terms of an “escape,” I do find the specificity behind Palaversich’s analysis of Lemebel key to establishing the significance of *locas* to the question of citizenship status of queer U.S. Latinos. This is particularly clear when Palaversich conceives of *locas* not in terms of *representation* of homosexuality but in terms of their *rejection* of hegemonic ways of imagining citizenship. An embodiment of *locas* as *rejection over representation* is not invested in theorizing their identity into the rigid constraints of mainstream gay rights; as a matter of fact, as my analysis reveals, because of their raced, classed, and sexed behavior, *locas* have the potential to create a disidentificatory relationship with the movement. By disidentifying with contemporary understandings of abstract concepts such as rights, citizenship, historiography, masculinity and sexuality, *locas* reveal the instability of those concepts.

I encourage a reading of *loca* performance as a loose term to engage with, rather than categorize, these subjects. This is an important distinction because not all *locas*
consider themselves drag queens, transgender, females, or gay; even when they do, their self-performance modifies the meaning of those terms. For example, as I later discuss, Woodlawn hated being termed a drag queen, and she did not think of herself as a gay man:

I wasn’t interested in gay men because I thought I was a woman and I wanted to be treated accordingly, unlike some of the other girls who could put on pants and become a man. I was a woman regardless of what I was wearing. (110)

Even as she defines herself as a woman, the label here does not align with hegemonic conceptions of that category. Similarly, throughout different writings, Sylvia refers to herself as a “drag queen” at times, and a “transvestite” at others.⁸

As Judith Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*, “there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion” (125), so I emphasize that *locas* are not “inherently” subversive or challenging to the status quo, neither do I claim that the *locas* I discuss in this chapter are willingly or knowingly offering ways of thinking about hegemony. Still, Butler’s conception of drag offers up an opportunity to discuss the potentiality of *locas* when she adds that, “at its best, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the regimes of power that one opposes” (125). While Rivera and Woodlawn do not always consciously adhere to such a politically challenging representation, my argument is largely invested in theorizing the

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potential of their personas “at their best”; that is, examining their representations in an
effort to recognize the shortcomings of such representations, but equally highlighting the
ability of those representations to become sites of agency and potentiality.

In the 21st century, developing a theory that conceptualizes locas’ radical form of
citizenship is essential to address the state of contemporary U.S. understandings of
rights and citizenship for two reasons that are very much interconnected. First of all,
locas were part of the group of disenfranchised queer people of color who were directly
involved in Stonewall, the 1969 riots in which queer people fought against the police
after a raid at the Stonewall bar in New York City. In the U.S. queer popular
consciousness, the LGBT rights movement has actively and successfully turned
Stonewall into “the emblematic event in modern lesbian and gay history” (Duberman
xv). In an attempt to create a legitimate public movement in the eyes of the nation-state
during the 1990s, a movement that was defined by pride and celebration rather than
death or sexual promiscuity as it had mostly been prior to this decade, a newfound
interest in Stonewall emerged, and with this interest came an attempt to represent those
“pioneers” who were actually there. The problem was that those “pioneers” were not
ready for primetime. The late 1960s and early 1970s then became a charged zone for
LGBT representation. A recovery project which attempted to recognize and celebrate
locas as part of the fabric of LGBT culture in the U.S. was initiated and remains very
much alive today, undoubtedly informed by the corporate need for “diversity.” This
project involved events sponsored by official rights-based groups, such as parades,
panels, and commemoratory events, but it also involved LGBT films, historiographies,
biographies, and scholarship. These are the projects I analyze here, projects that I
argue attempt to give _locas_ affective citizenship through _acknowledgment_ while using them to obtain legal citizenship for LGBT people, a legal citizenship that, in fact, is not shaped by the needs of _locas_. Moreover, acknowledgment does not inherently result in affective citizenship. Instead, what these recovery projects achieve is a regulation and normalization of _locas_ that further stress the binary between "good" and "bad" citizenship. It is this public regulation that provides the space for a critique of the radical potential of _locas_ and the normalizing nature of contemporary notions of U.S. legal and affective citizenship in the 21st century.
“I remember singing but I haven’t overcome a damn thing.
I’m not even in the back of the bus.

My community is being pulled by a rope around our neck by the bumper
of the damn bus that stays in the front.”

Sylvia Rivera

“Being a Superstar was like being a piece of art, and I wanted that
status. I needed that stamp of approval. Without it, I was nothing. Not
that this so-called status ever paid the bills.”

Holly Woodlawn, A Low Life in High Heels

“Basically Pushed into this Role”

A few years ago I had to deal with that mortifying first-world problem of a waiter
approaching me with concerned politeness as I took out my credit card to pay for a meal
at a casual Turkish lunch place in Greenwich Village: “I’m sorry, we’re a cash-only
restaurant; do you have any cash?” I did not. Quickly, I left my partner there as a form of
promise that I would come back, and ran around the Village like a maniac looking for an
ATM, as if this was the biggest emergency that I could possibly encounter. The shame
of not having money as a Latino is real. While I was familiar with the Village from my
previous travels and NY-based queer scholarship, I assure you that the rich queer
history of the Village was the last thing on my mind when I was desperately looking for a
cash to prove that I did, in fact, have money to pay for this meal. Undoubtedly this is
why I was so surprised when I hit an intersection and read the name of the street; it was
right there in front of me, I mean, I was standing on it: Sylvia Rivera Way.

Years later, while watching the Academy Awards ceremony in 2016, I was once
again surprised by the commemoration of a celebrity loca in a very unexpected place. In
what was the real shock of the ceremony for me, during the *In Memoriam* montage, among somber images and clips of late film artists such as the prestigious British actor Alan Rickman and Hollywood Golden Age movie star Maureen O’Hara, all of the sudden appeared an image that I was not expecting. It was Ms. Holly Woodlawn, who died in December of 2015 at the age of 69, an incredible achievement in itself given the short lives that *locas* generally live due to extreme violence, poor living conditions, lack of access to healthcare, and/or drug and alcohol abuse.

Seeing abject figures like Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn being commemorated in this way calls attention to the undeniably significant role that *locas* have played in the construction of a queer imagination, a queer history, and hence, a concept of queer citizenship in the United States. Since they play a prominent role in the construction of LGBT histories, a critical analysis of the ways in which *locas* have been incorporated into and excluded from the LGBT popular imagination is necessary given the LGBT movement’s history of subjugation, regulation, and exploitation of queer Latino bodies. Most scholars who write about *locas* in the United States, such as Tim Retzioff, Jessi Gan, and Frances Negrón-Muntaner, have written about the representation of Rivera and Woodlawn in terms of what is denied to them, with shame often being the central affect that these scholars have—valuably—employed as their mode of criticism. My work is thoroughly influenced by their research; however, my critical approach, while considering the value of shame, privileges *locas’* radical potentiality in order to find sites of agency in the representation and performance of Rivera and Woodlawn. Therefore, I would argue that my approach is more interested in *shamelessness*, both the shamelessness from official forms of LGBT representation in
their transparent regulation of *locas* and, more importantly, the shamelessness that allows Rivera and Woodlawn to critique current notions of legal and affective citizenship for queer people in the United States.

In this chapter, I analyze written biographical and autobiographical narratives, often filtered through a white queer perspective and targeted to a white queer audience, that attempt to fashion a complicated image of Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn that at times pathologizes them, regulates them, fetishizes them, punishes them, and commemorates them. My goal is to dissect the methodology behind creating a persona, really a character, while coping with the most “difficult” aspects of that persona. I mainly focus on the two most comprehensive and relevant biographical texts about Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn, both of which were born out of the 1990s turn to Stonewall-era figures. The first text is LGBT historian Martin Duberman’s 1993 book *Stonewall*, which has the distinction of being the first book to chronicle the events surrounding the Stonewall Riots and the people involved in them. While not a traditional biography of Rivera—none exists—it certainly spends a lot of time creating a biographical portrait of Sylvia Rivera both as a key participant in the Stonewall Riots and as a poor, troubled, drug-addicted Venezuelan/Nuyorican queen; it also is one of the first texts to critically connect Rivera and Woodlawn. The second text is the celebrity autobiography *A Low Life in High Heels: The Holly Woodlawn Story*, published in 1991 and written by Holly Woodlawn and co-authored with then first-time, presumably non-queer, author Jeff Copeland (now Jeffrey S. Copeland). Throughout my reading of these primary texts, I incorporate an analysis of other chronicles, interviews, and testimonies that present a biographical narrative of Rivera and Woodlawn, including Sylvia Rivera’s
autobiographical (if too brief) testimony in the collection *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary* and her 2001 speech at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center for the Latino Gay Men of New York (LGMNY), Dave Carter’s *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*, and Ann Bausum’s *Stonewall: Breaking Out in the Fight for Gay Rights*.

I argue that these narratives often tend to celebrate the aspects of Rivera and Woodlawn that are most beneficial to white, queer culture (Rivera’s involvement in Stonewall, Woodlawn’s work with artists Paul Morrissey and Andy Warhol), while diminishing, exoticizing and/or pathologizing the aspects of their subjectivity that are most closely associated with Latinos and Ricans in the United States. Yet, these attempts are filled with failure, a failure that highlights *locas’* insistence on an authorship of the self that relies on performing that which is supposed to be private in the public realm. These (auto)biographies further serve to reveal *locas’* own participation in cementing or engaging with racial, class, and gender hierarchies, an important point that works against the idea of romanticizing *locas* as symbols of a “model” or “ideal” citizenship. The fact that *locas* refuse to fit into neat categories of “model” citizenship adds to my argument that analyzing their narratives helps to challenge traditional understandings of legal and affective citizenship, but—perhaps more importantly—moves us away from theorizing *locas* as martyrs, saints, sassy fun girlfriends, “colorful” characters, or dangerous queens.

This is important because some of the narratives I discuss here tend to treat *locas* as symbols rather than flesh-and-bone people; others profess to capture an “essence” of what they were really like. On one hand, thinking of *locas* as *symbols*
makes it easy to ignore both their legal and affective citizenship; understanding that they are difficult, complex, tangible human beings stresses the imperative need to expand contemporary notions of rights and the real-world implications of this project. On the other hand, to pretend that any form of archival process, even first-hand testimony or autobiographical narratives, leads to a “realistic” or “accurate” portrayal of the past is a naïve, pretentious, and misguided approach. Consequently, this chapter is more interested in the value of locas’ (self)-representation than in any sort of attempt to create a corrective or definitive narrative about Woodlawn and Rivera. What I do seek to do is reframe their role within U.S. queer culture by providing what I hope is a more nuanced and less white-centric take on their biographies. In doing so, my purpose is to highlight political challenges that I believe are capable of having a concrete impact on disenfranchised queer Latino subjects today.

I frame my reading of Stonewall and locas in relationship to white, queer men since the U.S. LGBT archive I invoke here is one that I argue is firmly rooted in patriarchal notions of temporality, history, racial otherness, and consumption of the (Afro)Latino queer body. In no way is my framing meant to downplay the key role that lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and other queer and non-queer women have played in constructing an American queer archive, organizing radical and non-radical queer activism, and creating narratives that have shaped the fabric of LGBT communities in the United States. Lesbian writers such as Martha Vicinus, Sarah Schulman, Joan Nestle, Judith Schwartz, and Deborah Edel have provided incredibly significant contributions to the gay archive post-Stonewall. My emphasis on white gay men’s role in the construction of a queer history following Stonewall is born out of my interest in a
critique of the patriarchal origins that shaped the aspects of the archive that I analyze in this project. For example, Felice Picano, co-founder of the influential gay publisher Gay Presses of New York (GP Ny), grounds the historical significance of his publisher in relationship to what he perceived as a lack of support for gay male writers in the late 1970s. In his memoir *Art and Sex in Greenwich Village: Gay Literary Life after Stonewall*, Picano argues that because of the prominence of the early 1970s feminist movement, “lesbian literature and publishing had fared a lot better than men’s work in terms of output.” This imagined binary between lesbian literature and gay male literature becomes alarmingly misconceived when he claims that, “politically speaking, lesbians interested in furthering their culture in the early 1970s received all kinds of support from feminists in a way rare for openly gay men” (9). Picano imagines the post-Stonewall 1970s political and literary climate as one in which lesbian writers had a support system and gay men did not in order to emphasize the memoir’s argument that the work he did “changed things so completely that most GLBT people alive today are unaware that pretty much most of their ‘establishment’ was created” by Picano and his partners, authors and publishers Larry Mitchell and Terry Helbing (3). Picano elevates and self-aggrandizes his role in contemporary “GLBT” culture as he calls it (naturally placing the “G” before the “L”) based on the idea that lesbian women had it so much better than gay men, and we should all be so grateful he rescued gay men from obscurity. For him, gay male citizenship was compromised in ways that lesbian citizenship was not, and therefore, he needed to intervene. Picano’s male-centric claims gain even more relevance in the context of this project since he considers himself responsible for launching Martin Duberman’s career as a relevant figure within LGBT
culture. Because of arguments like Pacino’s, I decide to focus my analysis on white male interests and desires that inform and have shaped the LGBT archive.

The Trouble with “We Shall Overcome”: Stonewall, Nostalgia, and Progress

I contextualize my analysis of (auto)biographical narratives of Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn within three distinct but widely connected temporalities in U.S. history in order to complicate the teleological ideology that defines the public gay rights movement and to reveal the conscious and convenient ways and times in which gay men have archived the lives and experiences of disenfranchised queer Latinos. The first temporality is the Stonewall era (late 1960s and early 1970s), a time that, following decades of fragmented and comparably unsuccessful efforts from queer people nationwide, saw the emergence of a unified public gay rights movement largely influenced by radical political movements of the 1960s. The second is the 1990s, a period during which gay male historians, authors, and scholars, responding to the trauma of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, turned to Stonewall and Stonewall-era figures—including Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn—to create a queer American history that celebrated, commemorated, and romanticized a nostalgic portrayal of what was perceived as the “beginning” of the U.S. gay community. Finally, there’s the 2000s and 2010s, a time period during which the LGBT community seems increasingly invested in promoting a depoliticized, desexualized, and properly public image of the LGBT community, a goal that is often dependent on conscious efforts to remove “inconvenient” Latino figures from the queer archive or on eliding their racial, ethnic, national, sexual, and classed subjectivity under the umbrella of “queerness” or “gayness.”
I begin my research with Stonewall not because I align with the widespread belief that Stonewall is *the* day that the gay rights movement began, but rather because other people believe that it is, in fact, *the* day that the gay rights movement began. I would venture to say that many self-identified gay men and women in the United States are familiar with the name “Stonewall” regardless of how “political” the person considers her/himself to be. In quite literal terms, the Stonewall Inn is the New York gay bar where its patrons decided to fight the police after a raid in June of 1969, leading to a nationally publicized days-long protest held by gay people and non-queer. But really, Stonewall means so much more for the twenty-first century gay community. Stonewall is a symbol and a God, a legend that gay men and women in the United States are taught to admire as an Important Part of Our History. Across fields—popular culture, queer scholarship, gay historiography, politics—Stonewall is depicted as *the* day that signals the beginning of gay rights. Martin Duberman’s *Stonewall* crystallizes the general understanding of Stonewall when he writes that it is “*the* emblematic event in modern lesbian and gay history,” adding that “the 1969 riots…mark the birth of modern gay and lesbian political movement—that moment in time when gays and lesbians recognized all at once their mistreatment and their solidarity. As such, ‘Stonewall’ has become an empowering symbol of global proportions” (xv).

The symbolic standing of Stonewall creates a rich site for discussions about the construct of LGBT citizenship and the shortcomings of representing queerness through hegemonic notions of history. Duberman’s alignment with teleological constructions of history place Stonewall within a timeline of American History that fully identifies with progressive narratives. The emphasis on the word “birth” reveals Duberman’s
investment in Stonewall as a place of historical (even teleological) origin. Rather than animating the past (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 28) or observing its “persistence…in the present” (Love 19), Duberman eagerly establishes Stonewall as the moment in which the nebulous past of gay men and women in the U.S. was overcome, and those same gay men and women came together in “solidarity” and remained that way, joined together as a monolithic group, only “getting better”™. In this conception of history, there is little room to acknowledge sites of LGBT forms of resistance in the pre-Stonewall era\(^1\) or to complicate the oppressive “it gets better” attitude of the public gay rights movement today. At the end of the day, more than a place or an event, Stonewall is figured as a symbol that teaches people, gay and straight, how LGBT citizenship fits within classic teleological notions of American citizenship.

Turning Stonewall into a symbol is not necessarily the problem. The riots were indeed a significant historical event through which a heterogeneous group of LGBT people actually opposed the Law to protect their right to an affective citizenship that did not depend on legal recognition. From this perspective, Stonewall has the potential of being a productive symbol, alas this is not the dominant reading or representation of Stonewall. Sharing a similar trepidation about the hailing of Stonewall, Kenji Yoshino concludes that, “we have fixed on this moment because we need, as a community, a moment that replicates the moment of coming out in our individual lives” (61). Simon Hall provides an equally nuanced but more historically contextualized approach;

\(^1\) Fortunately, the work of scholars like Heather Love, John Katz, and John D’Emilio have dispelled the misconception that LGBT people were not involved in queer-based political activism before Stonewall.
acknowledging the key influence that the “homophile movements” of the 1950s and 1960s exerted on the public emergence of a public LGBT movement, Hall writes that, “rather than a decisive break, Stonewall marked the movement’s evolution from a ‘thinly spread reform effort’ into a ‘large, grassroots movement for liberation’” (657). Yoshino’s take on Stonewall as the “coming out” day of the public gay rights movement matches Hall’s description of this day as a major—not the single—catalyst for a rights-based LGBT movement. Their ideas serve to highlight questions about what it means for Stonewall to symbolize the threshold that makes the movement public. We must question how this symbol has been shaped, toward whom it has been tailored, and what has been lost in creating the legend of Stonewall.

To address these questions, I find it necessary to get a more historically conscious context both about the Stonewall Inn and the Stonewall riots. Again, there is little point in trying to capture what the Stonewall Inn was “really like” the way that many of the narratives about Stonewall written by the likes of Duberman, David Carter, and Ann Bausum profess to do. What the critic can do in this case is gather the various descriptions of this space and look at what the historian’s description implies about the historian’s relationship with contemporary notions of LGBT citizenship. In the most recent book about Stonewall, 2015’s Stonewall: Breaking Out in the Fight for Gay Rights, author Ann Bausum’s tone remains consistently celebratory and excited throughout. She conceives of the Stonewall Inn as an utopian space, “one of those rare place where [the patrons] felt like they belonged (6); recalling the neoliberal emphasis on diversity that Ward presents in Respectably Queer, Bausum includes pretty much every person imaginable when representing the clientele at the bar: “closeted males
with respectable jobs and reputations seeking a discreet way to express their same-sex preferences,” “married men acting on their desires,” “runaway youths, drawn by New York’s gay scene,” openly gay “artists, performers, and intellectuals,” and “a few straight friends of gays” (5-6). This “utopian universalization,” to borrow from Cruz-Malavé (66), of the Stonewall clientele eagerly represents this space as “diverse,” a safe space in which people of all walks of life could come together united by the powerful bond of their queerness, thus betraying the presentist perspective that allows Bausum to easily erase the tensions that define queer modes of citizenship today and in 1969 New York City.

When considering disenfranchised queer Latino subjectivity, a closer look at the depictions of the bar reveals a much more complex set of interactions among the patrons that point to Stonewall’s value to historicize the contemporary suppression and oppression of queer Latino/a citizenship. While many testimonies do seem to consistently agree that the clientele as the Stonewall Inn was mixed, the bar had what David Carter refers to a “social geography.” The bar was divided into two rooms and each room was segregated based on race. The front room was the “white room” and the back room, naturally, was the “black” or “Puerto Rican room”; the back room itself was further segregated based on class and race, “with the street end being where the most marginal of the Stonewall’s customers congregated” (Carter 73). For the white clientele and the white historians, the back room was the “fun” room. Tommy Lanigan-Schmidt’s testimony in Carter’s chronology represents the back room as “soulful,” “spirited,” “lively,” and “energetic” (73). For Lanigan-Schmidt, and presumably other white Stonewall clients, the back room represented a space where they could freely consume commodified aspects of black and Puerto Rican culture. Replicating the colonial
relationship that historically defines the dynamic between Puerto Rico and the United States as well as white Americans and African-Americans, the white gay consumers could easily go into the back room to enjoy a queer racialized otherness, whereas the Puerto Rican and black clientele were not necessarily welcome in the front room.

The descriptions of the Stonewall Inn from Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera do not match the universal and exotic utopia that the testimonies above seem to support. Holly Woodlawn compares the bar to a speakeasy, given the secrecy involved in getting in (due to consistent raids from the police) and the actual darkness of the space. She further describes the clientele as “an eclectic bunch: butch guys, preppy boys, older men, a few lesbians, and a few so-called straight men” (110). Rivera gives a similar, but more pointed description of the patrons: “what people fail to realize is that the Stonewall was not a drag queen bar. It was a white male bar for middle-class males to pick up young boys of different races” (80). Unlike Carter and Bausum’s accounts, these descriptions of the Stonewall Inn work against an image of the Stonewall Inn as an “energetic,” “exotic,” and “soulful” utopian space. The secrecy of getting into the bar contradicts the images of proud gay men fighting for their rights that are associated with Stonewall, and the constant threat from both the police and the mob work against the stability of Stonewall as a “safe space” for their clientele. Woodlawn’s exclusion of (Afro)Latina/o queens in his seemingly comprehensive list of people who attended the bar is interesting and, as I will analyze later, not inconsistent for her since she often privileges her white skin color; hence, her account matches Bausum’s similar inability to discuss the racial makeup of the clientele. Being a visibly ethnic loca, Rivera is much more aware of the racial tensions that defined the bar. She does not deny or ignore the
racial differences among the customers; even more, she stresses the way in which race and gender performance determined who the Stonewall owners and employees catered to, and what kind of erotic power dynamics were at play here (the white patrons as the predators, the “young boys of different races” as the object/abject).

Thus, the Stonewall Inn was not a place where people could, or perhaps more importantly, wanted to come together; not too different from what it became to symbolize, the Stonewall Inn itself was a site where social hierarchies played a large role in how gay men related to one another, and the inability to cover (as white, like Holly was able to, or as a cys man like the middle-class “respectable” customers did) literally sent the homeless queens of color to the back of the room. The irony, of course, is that it was the queens of color (like Rivera and her good friend Marsha “Pay It No Mind” Jonson, a black queen considered a key participant in the riots) who were targeted by the police and the ones who—according to various sources—started fighting, only to see their efforts used to advance white middle-class ideals.

In the context of Stonewall, what has been prioritized over the years has been the huge impact it has had for the gay community as a whole, regardless of the whos, whats and whys of the event (Gan 127). At the same time, likely as a product of queer nostalgia for a pre-AIDS community, the early 1990s signaled a period—very much in place still today—that marked an investment in Stonewall-era figures within popular, legal, and academic discourse (Retzloff 148). It was during this period that the two major books relevant to this chapter were released: Martin Duberman’s 1993 Stonewall, a non-fiction book in the style of new journalism that sought to tell the “human stories” behind the riots (xvi), and Holly Woodlawn’s autobiography A Low Life in Heels: The
Holly Woodlawn Story, released in 1991. The release of these books is not an isolated event. Even before the 1990s, Stonewall and Stonewall-era figures have been celebrated in multiple ways, though the peak of these celebrations was in the 1990s—today mostly we are left with the memorialization of these figures (the “Sylvia Rivera Way” street sign, Stonewall’s newly gained status as a “landmark”) rather than visible celebrations. Following the publication of Duberman’s book, Rivera became a public face for Stonewall: in 1994 she led a march in New York City in honor of the 25th anniversary of the riots; in 1995, Nigel Finch’s film Stonewall (which I discuss in the following chapter), a fictional adaptation of Duberman’s book, featured a lead character based on Rivera; and five years after the release of the film, she was honored at World Pride in Rome (Highleyman 1974). Though much less identified in terms of Stonewall itself, by the 1990s Woodlawn was known as one of the few surviving Warhol Superstars (a title that had gained more significance after Warhol’s death), which rightly gave her the reputation of “survivor”; in an era defined by queer nostalgia for a fictionalized utopian 1960s, Woodlawn was seen as a symbol of that past when “everything seemed possible,” so she kept showing up in LGBT popular culture: she appears in the film To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar, in addition to a slew of niche gay films, and before she died in 2015 she appeared on an episode of the highly acclaimed TV series Transparent.

Though there are clear intersections between the two, Rivera and Woodlawn also occupy different roles in scholarship. Over the past ten years, the topic of Sylvia Rivera’s place in official accounts of gay history has become a major point of discussion for queer Latino/a scholars. My project owes a great deal to these scholars whose in-
depth, historically specific work refuses to dismiss Rivera as a “problem.” Instead, these authors question the work of the mainstream gay movement to memorialize her, and they further expose the inability of white queer theory and non-queer focused Latina/o theory to deal with Latino/as who imagine themselves as members of those communities. Unlike the works by historiographers concerned with LGBT History, authors like Jessi Gan, Tim Retzloff, and Liz Heighleyman actually explore issues of race and class in their analysis of the history built around Rivera. More specifically, Gan criticizes the field of Latino/a studies for the lack of work on Rivera, sharing Retzloff’s argument that this lack of scholarship relates to gay historians’ emphasis on gay and/or transgender activism, overlooking and erasing Rivera’s class and ethnicity in the process (Gan 128; Retzloff 143).

Though not exactly hailed as the “Rosa Parks of the transgender movement” like Sylvia Rivera, Woodlawn has been sporadically been written about across academic fields, including queer cinema studies, art criticism, and Latino/a queer studies, mainly in terms of her bravura performance in Paul Morrissey’s Trash (1970). My discussion of Woodlawn then aligns with Frances Negrón-Muntaner, whose book Boricua Pop features one of the most extensive sustained analytical work on Woodlawn and who sees Woodlawn as someone who “claims her radical right of beauty and dignity” (88). As I have noted, Woodlawn’s visibility reached its height in the years surrounding the making, release and reception of Trash, a time period in which films produced under the aegis of Warhol’s Factory were considered underground hits, and—as part of the effort to cement his status as an icon—his Superstars were imagined as glamorous artists. Thus, Woodlawn’s major moment of fame as the unexpected star of a deeply queer film
is contextualized in late 1960s/early 1970s New York culture, so Stonewall inevitably casts its shadow on the creation of the Woodlawn persona, and conversely on Stonewall itself. It is from this generational correlation that Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes groups Rivera and Woodlawn together as “second-generation [Puerto Rican] trans activists and performers” (xxiii).

On the surface, this attention on the “survivors of the past” suggests an attempt to incorporate locas into the discourse surrounding LGBT citizenship. As I have already established, however, visibility is simply not enough. We have to interrogate the purpose of this visibility, whom exactly is it meant to benefit? Looking for ways to start answering this question, I turn to Hiram Perez’s response to the theorizing of shame within traditional white queer theory as a site of resistance to normativity. Responding to a 2003 conference themed around “gay shame” held at University of Michigan attended by prominent established white queer theorists, Douglas Crimp and Michael Warner among them, Hiram Perez describes how, much to his horror, multiple panelists theorized past shame as an affective resistance to normativity, a resistance that, as theorized by these scholars, relied on the commodification and fetishization of the queer Latino body: “At Gay Shame, for example, [the] primal past included the ‘New York City queer culture of the 1960s.’ This designated period of prenormalization is idealized as precivilized, but queer theory must then recruit the brown body to authenticate the scene as primitive” (175). Perez’s work helps to contextualize the turn to Stonewall-era locas within queer popular, legal, and academic discourse; the idea of a “precivilized” past dominated by locas reveals a lack of acknowledgment of their citizenship.
Furthermore, Perez helps to show how queer discourse is shaped around the consumption of the sexualized, racialized, disenfranchised queer Latino body.

As part of my critique of LGBT modes of building citizenship through history I turn to Michel Foucault’s theory of historiography in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. For Foucault, there are two main approaches to historiography. The first approach, one which he considers outmoded, treats the historical document as “an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains,” developing a process mainly concerned with “the reconstitution...of the past” (6). This approach best describes the project of critics like Duberman whose effort to humanize the voices of Stonewall antithetically functions to turn the event into a symbol for Americans, elevating the people he selected as “key players” to the status of martyrs or pioneers. Such an approach invests energy on teleological conceptions of Stonewall that can easily fit into dominant views of history and rights-based movements. The second approach is one that more closely fits the purpose of my analysis. In Foucault’s second approach the historian is “trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations” (7). Moving away from treating the historical document as an “inert object” shifts the focus from the subjects of history and toward the way in which those subjects have been incorporated into history.

**Introducing Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn**

The respective biographical histories of Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn help explain their abject status they occupied throughout their lives even when they enjoyed a public visibility in some popular sectors. Their known life events also help to contextualize them within the troubling traditional methods of writing queer Latinos into
white U.S. LGBT history while revealing how their individual racial, ethnic, national, capital, sexual, and gender identifications actually invite a heterogeneous representation of *loca* identity, something that tends to be elided in (re)constructions of their history in the work of U.S. queer historians and biographers.

Both Rivera and Woodlawn's personas are usually contextualized within the context of Nuyorican culture in 1960s New York City, although most of the scholarship depicts Rivera and Woodlawn as belonging to separate scenes (and in some ways they did, particularly as they got older). Rivera lived in and out of New York City, mainly hustling in the Times Square (Afro)Latino community of *locas*, living off of sex work and temp jobs. While biographical writings about Rivera tend to refer to her as “Stonewall veteran” or “LGBT activist” or “transgender activist” (which she was), the reality is that she was not really allowed to perform any of those roles in any sort of official capacity when she was alive—not in a way that gave her the opportunity to profit or make a living the way that the majority of mainstream gay activists have been able to do for decades. A romanticized (and indeed valid) reading of this fact would be that Rivera’s political efforts rejected capitalist notions of being a rights-based activist, thus supporting the idea that for her it was more important that her citizenship be understood in terms of affective notions of rights rather than a capitalist, neoliberal form of citizenship. Yet, what this meant when she was alive was that she was denied the opportunity to have a job doing what, in my reading, she knew how to do best—fight for her own legal *and* affective citizenship—a job that went to middle-class, white, mostly male, gay men who profited fighting for *their* own rights.
Whereas Sylvia Rivera tends to appear in rights-based, especially Stonewall-based, chronicles, biographies, and testimonies, Holly Woodlawn’s public persona is rooted within the artistic realm and celebrity culture of the early post-Stonewall scene and extends to the queer recovery project of the 1990s and 2000s. Woodlawn’s indomitable desire to be famous and her genuine, if extremely fringe, star quality coincided with the rise of popular celebrity culture associated with artist Andy Warhol. Thus, she was able to become associated with underground artists and semi-famous drag queens, the experimental theatre and film scenes in New York City, and the cabaret and bathhouse circuit. Still, even as Woodlawn and Rivera were part of very different scenes and lived fairly different lives, they share some common biographical characteristics that help to understand their subjectivity in relationship to *locas* of the time period; after all, much like Rivera, Woodlawn went through periods of time where she was homeless, imprisoned (for fraud and theft), addicted to drugs, and hustling for money and/or drugs in a pre-Disneyfied Times Square. By providing a brief biographical overview of the two of them, I intent to highlight both the key differences and similarities in their experiences that I believe are useful to an analysis of their representation and their value to questions of citizenship in the United States.

Sylvia Rivera was born Ray Rivera Mendoza in New York City to a, presumably lighter-skinned Venezuelan-Mexican-American mother and a dark-skinned Puerto Rican father. Left by her first husband when Rivera was very young, her mother married another Puerto Rican man—a lighter-skinned Puerto Rican, this time—an abusive drug dealer who threatened to kill Rivera’s mother and her two children, a three-year-old Rivera and Sonia, her two-month-old sister born out of her mother’s second marriage.
At age 22, Rivera’s mother killed herself by ingesting rat poison, unsuccessfully trying to poison a three-year-old Rivera in the process (“she wanted to kill me because she knew I would have a hard life” [Rivera 68]). After her mother’s death, Rivera had to live with her Venezuelan grandmother, a first-generation immigrant whose Mexican husband had abandoned her when Rivera’s mother was young herself and a factory worker who made fifty dollars a week (per Duberman’s account, Sonia was sent away by her father to be adopted by a Puerto Rican family, suggesting that perhaps he did not want her to be raised with her Venezuelan grandmother).

The national, racial, and ethnic background of the players in Rivera’s early life speak to the difficulty of pinning down Rivera’s subjectivity as a Latina, at the same time as it supports the value of the word “Latina” to account for the multiple forces that informed Rivera’s personhood since she was born. Duberman’s account does not ignore the national identity of Rivera’s family, but after the initial setup, he favors the term “Hispanic” the few times he alludes to Rivera’s ethnicity. By contrast, in “Queens in Exile, the Forgotten Ones,” an essay by Rivera that is included as part of the 2002 collection *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*, Rivera spends a bit more time discussing the politics behind her family’s background, especially her grandmother’s attitudes toward Puerto Ricans, black people, and the Spanish language, all of which she relates to her grandmother’s Venezuelan background. In Rivera’s words, her grandmother did not love her because Rivera was Afro-Latina and had Puerto Rican “blood.” She writes, “[My grandmother] wanted me to be a white child. She was a prejudiced woman. I mean, dark people, African-American people, would scare her. She came from Venezuela.” She later adds that her father was “a very dark-
skinned Puerto Rican,” and her grandmother “didn’t like the idea of me having Puerto Rican blood. It would have been better if I had just been a Venezuelan child” (68). Furthermore, she enrolled Rivera in an all-white Catholic school and got “upset” when Rivera spoke Spanish.

This portrayal of the tense racially, ethnically, and nationally driven attitudes of the grandmother character in Rivera’s narrative depicts a nuanced representation of the complicated ways in which people grouped under the term “Latino” interact with each other. It seems that for Rivera, and for Rivera’s grandmother, the category “Venezuelan” is defined in terms of its ability to reproduce and embody the image of the “model” immigrant citizen that in the eyes of the grandmother seems to be connected to whiteness—a curious attitude since a majority of Venezuelans have historically been multi-ethnic, and especially before the influx of white European immigrants who fled to South America after World War II, which happened long before Rivera’s grandmother was born. Still, by the late 1940s and early 1950s, immigrants had already developed a hostile attitude toward Puerto Ricans who migrated to New York City; these New York-based Puerto Ricans “[insisted] on defining themselves as other than, or more than, ‘Negro,’” which became a “great source of anxiety for a population of recent immigrants who aspired to leave behind their ethnic roots, which symbolically racialized them, and assimilate into American society by becoming simply ‘white’” (Cruz-Malavé, Queer Latino Testimonio 126). Rivera’s mention of her grandmother’s disdain of her “Puerto Rican blood” in relationship to her dark skin reveals how, for her grandmother, Rivera was already contaminated from birth and thus did not stand a chance to be a proper U.S. citizen. The irony, of course, is that being born in the United States, Sylvia Rivera
was legally a United States citizen and not an immigrant like her Venezuelan grandmother, and yet her Afro-Rican background compromised her affective citizenship and made her socially inferior in her grandmother’s eyes.

Rivera’s grandmother’s disdain further extended to Rivera’s gender as a boy, at the time, and Rivera’s eventual display of queer behaviors. Along with the grandmother’s prejudice toward African Americans and Puerto Ricans, she also told Rivera that “she wanted my sister because she was a girl, and I was a boy” (68). However, despite rejecting him based on her Afro-Latino masculinity, she also attempted to regulate Rivera’s gender and sexual behavior, creating the first type of space where Rivera felt she needed to hide her sexual attraction to men as well as certain behaviors associated with traditional female gender performance in Western culture. Rivera writes about wearing makeup to school in the fourth-grade because she did not think there was anything wrong with it, and says she was already having sex regularly, with male relatives and men in her neighborhood, since she was seven. Her encounters with the public did not trouble her at the time. She recalls an incident in which she was called to the principal’s office when she “beat the daylights out of [the sixth-grade bully]” for calling her a “faggot.” Rivera writes that though she “didn’t know what a faggot was,” she “felt insulted,” adding that she considered her sexual encounters with men “all part of just being who you were” (68-69). Unlike Duberman’s retelling of this part of Rivera’s early life, which treats the fact that Rivera started having sex when she was seven as a surprise revelation (Duberman 23), Rivera’s testimony in *GenderQueer* takes a matter-of-fact approach to these stories. Particularly, she says that while everyone in the neighborhood could tell when she had just had sex, the
remarks only bothered her because she knew the rumors would get back to her grandmother, and not because of fear of violence or any sense of sexual shame or guilt.

This flip of public/private tensions helps to understand how *locas* continuously refuse to fit into neat expectations about their relationship with the public. For Rivera, it is not the encounter with the principal, a disciplinary public authority figure, or the neighborhood’s public knowledge that represent relevant sites of tension in this early part of her life, showing how from early on Rivera authors her public persona around activities that are considered private. Rivera’s testimony instead presents the grandmother’s home, the private space, as the space where she instinctively knew that her behavior was not allowed. She knew to put on her makeup on her way to school rather than at home, and to remove it by 5 o’clock before anyone got home (68). Sex was harder to hide from her grandmother, who would come home “and it smelled like a French whorehouse” causing Rivera to get “many ass-whippings from her” even though she plainly states that this punishment “didn’t stop me” (69).

I once again connect the grandmother’s disciplinary role in these anecdotes to attitudes toward Puerto Ricans in New York at the time and their connection to limiting forms of “good” citizenship for immigrants who were seen as more able to assimilate. For example, the grandmother’s preference for Sonia (whose father was a light-skinned Puerto Rican, and therefore, in the eyes of the grandmother gave her the opportunity to be more Venezuelan, and in turn, white) over Sylvia based on Sylvia’s Afro-Rican masculinity at the time can be connected to Laura Briggs’ argument that social science discourse from this time period explained Puerto Ricans’ cultural identity in the Island and in New York in terms of “a culture of poverty,” which translated into “gender and
sexual difference...an impotent masculinity and an excessive, compensatory, irrational machismo (Cruz-Malavé 100-101). The question arises whether the grandmother felt that Rivera’s Puerto Rican-ness either as an “irrational macho” or an “impotent [aka queer] masculinity” compromised the model form of citizenship she had fought so hard to earn as a willing participant in capitalist, patriarchal, white-centered behavior, given that per Oscar Lewis’s infamous and widely-influential anthropological and pathological take on Puerto Ricans in New York saw this “Puerto Rican ‘culture of poverty’” as something “perpetuated culturally through deficient child rearing or bad mothering” (101). This Venezuelan grandmother surely had not worked so hard to end up becoming an affective Puerto Rican citizen by association. I see this complex relationship between Rivera and her grandmother as an example of the ways in which locas, rather than always being shamed, produce shame to others by seemingly compromising their hard-earned citizenship status. I also see this shaming as a valuable aspect of loca identity, something that tends to make her a destabilizing presence. It is important to address this potentiality with caution; after all, mirroring prevalent contemporary approaches to loca citizenship, Rivera’s destabilizing potential was perceived by her grandmother as “inherent” and “natural,” but paradoxically as something that could also be regulated and fixed through physical and mental violence—ultimately, making Rivera feel that she was left without love, an affect that black feminist writers, such as Toni Morrison and bell hooks, have so expertly and urgently established as a critical and philosophical tool to self-realization.

Even before getting kicked out of her grandmother’s house, Rivera sought capital acquisition by hustling on 42nd street, which was a characteristic aspect of poor
homeless queers of color in 1960s New York. Finding a community in older (relative to Rivera’s young age at the time, anyway) Latina drag queens who introduced her to the drag scene; it was this community that baptized her as Sylvia. Throughout the 60s, Rivera mainly lived off hustling, attended drag balls in Harlem and downtown, and did drugs like heroin and Benzedrine—an experience that is not too different from that of most of the homeless black and Latina/Nuyorican queens in New York during this time period. Here, there are also some discrepancies between Duberman’s account and Rivera’s testimony. Describing Rivera’s initial experience living her home and becoming homeless, Duberman’s tone becomes uncomfortably excited: “[Rivera] hardly felt ‘disgusted.’ ‘Elated’ was closer to the mark. When a man offered him ten dollars to have sex his very first night on the street, Ray was ecstatic: ‘Ten dollars?! Wow! Ten dollars of my own! Great! Let’s go!’” (66). First of all, Duberman’s continued refusal to use Sylvia’s name here, along with his use of the masculine pronoun, reveals the author’s insistence on maintaining a firm distinction between “Ray” and “Sylvia,” as if they are two wholly different people, with “Ray” being the “original” and “Sylvia” being the persona that emerges once Rivera abandons the private space of her grandmother’s home for good. But more importantly to my point here, the repeated use of exclamation points, the use of enthusiastic word choices such as “ecstatic” and “elated,” and the overall wide-eyed portrayal of Sylvia who in this depiction is just so excited to make money romanticizes Sylvia’s choice to become homeless while condescendingly framing her experience as being so engrained in a “culture of poverty” that she simply does not know any better. This is one of those moments in which Duberman’s own limitations as a biographer come into play, attempting to mask a challenging moment in
Rivera’s life by reframing it as fun, exciting, and palatable. Readers can either choose to feel bad for Rivera for not knowing any better or find her to be a tough but happy survivors, in that way that people of color are often asked to be to keep white privileged people from confronting any sort of uncomfortable feeling while consuming the story.

Sylvia Rivera’s own depiction of her life as a homeless youth in Times Square has a tone that is less assured, certainly less excited, and filled with more reservations about this particular moment in her life than Duberman’s version of the story suggests. Rivera heard about 42nd street from her family, who would refer to 42nd street as the place were effeminate men would “make money.” Before leaving home, Rivera says she “dabbed” in the hustling culture there: “I made money selling my body.” There are no exclamation points here, no joy, no incredible sense of wonder or excitement, just a simple sentence that reflects Rivera’s understanding of how it was through her racialized, ethnic, queer body that she could produce capital. Once she decided to move to 42nd street for good, Rivera admits she was a novice (justifiably, given the fact she was 11 years old), but immediately adds that she knew how to survive (70). In this narrative, it is survival, not living and certainly not joy, that Rivera prioritizes. She admits she was afraid, but “didn’t really think of it because I needed to survive,” later she adds that “it was dangerous on 42nd street,” and again, this time when addressing the queens’ work as prostitutes, she writes that, “The street queens have always been prostitutes to survive, because some of us left home so early, or it just wasn’t feasible to be working if you wanted to wear your makeup and do your thing” (70-71).

For Sylvia Rivera, citizenship is not defined in terms of upward mobility, ability to make money, progress narratives of self-realization in urban spaces, or acceptance into
an established community. What Duberman filters as a “fun” experience driven by Rivera’s realization of the (cheap) value and marketability of her dark-skinned, queer body to the white, gay johns, Rivera sees as a moment defined by instability, fear of violence, and her limited options to survive within a capitalist system. Prostitution, in particular, is not something that Sylvia Rivera sees as a thrilling opportunity; rather, she focuses on the ways in which to gain access to traditional employment, she has to sacrifice her own version of affective citizenship in order to participate in a capitalist system that is not interested in respecting her personhood. While her grandmother sees Rivera’s Puerto Rican background and her dark skin, genetic characteristics, as qualities that will keep her from being a “model” Latina citizen, Rivera prioritizes “doing her thing,” something that the public would consider “fixable” or “adaptable,” over gaining access to traditional modes of gaining capital and thus being a “good” citizen. What’s more, and something that is characteristic of the representation of locas I advance in this project, Rivera suggests that it is the system that has to change, not her. This attitude goes entirely against the ways in which both the LGBT movement and the Latino/a immigrant movement have gained political capital, suggesting other modes of citizenship that still allow for survival within the dominant system.

Rivera’s discussion of sex work in “Queers in Exile” matches a similar point she made in a speech at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York City in 2001. Recalling the fourth anniversary of the Stonewall Riot, Rivera describes a moment in which Jean O’Leary, whom he describes as “a radical lesbian,” disrupted the celebration because she took issue with the fact Rivera was wearing makeup and a
miniskirt, claiming that this was “offensive to women.” In the 2001, Rivera reacted by saying,

Excuse me! It goes with the business we’re in at that time!...Everybody thinks we want to be out on them street corners. No we do not. We don’t want to be out there sucking dick and getting fucked in the ass. But that’s the only alternative we have to survive because the laws do not give us the right to go and get a job the way we feel comfortable. I do not want to work looking like a man when I know I am not a man. (121)

Again, I am deeply interested in the way Rivera continues to use the word “survival” to refer to her experience. This is one of the moments in which she connects the lack of a legal system that takes into account the “right to feel comfortable” at the workplace to her inability to participate in LGBT celebrations or in the larger aspect of U.S.-based recognized forms of citizenship, such as obtaining employment. Furthermore, Rivera directly talks about her sexual labor with no hesitation while calling for a system in which locas can be sexually liberated, not by having a lot of sex or talking freely about sex, but by not having to rely on sex to acquire capital.

The political awakening of Duberman’s version of Rivera is typically characterized in terms of anger or in terms of a fad connected to Rivera’s scene at the time. Yet, these other writings suggest a more political savvy persona than the one Duberman depicts in his book, even at the later moments in Stonewall when Rivera is older and has experienced the Stonewall Riots. However, in her community, Rivera became familiar with discussions about political unrest. She recounts how the queens would sit on the sidewalk in Times Square and talk about the different social movements taking place in the city and around the country. Her participation in the Stonewall riots is her most public contribution to recognized political movements, but before Stonewall, Rivera marched for the Black Panthers, the women’s liberation
movement, and the anti-Vietnam protests (Rivera 77). Yet, it was when she was seventeen that she became part of official LGBT History, when, during a customary police raid at the Stonewall Inn, the queens decided to fight back.

As I mentioned throughout, Rivera is often credited with being a key participant in the Stonewall riots, even—mistakenly—credited by some with having thrown the first bottle at the cops; Rivera herself denied this, claiming she threw a Molotov cocktail that was handed to her by one of the locas who had already been throwing pennies and bottles at the officers who were trying to arrest them (Isay 75). After the events, she helped found the Gay Liberation Front and then the Gay Activists Alliance, groups from which she was ousted when she vocally protested the exclusion of civil rights of drag queens and transgender people from their agenda (Wilchins). She also participated in activism related to helping homeless Puerto Rican youths in New York City.

By the time the 1990s arrived, as she began to be recognized as a Stonewall activist, Rivera was living in a communal house for homeless trans-individuals and dealing with an addiction to crack cocaine. Still, throughout this time and up until the last years of her life, she was a vocal activist for transgender rights, often criticizing the mainstreaming of gay rights. She had a life partner, Julia Murray, whom she often talked about in part to contribute to her efforts to raise awareness about queer transgender relationships not defined by normative understandings of gayness, transgender identity, or lesbianism. In 2002 Rivera died of liver cancer, months after her talk for the Latino Gay Men of New York; in his introduction to the transcript, queer Rican scholar Lawrence Fountain-Stokes incisively details how the talk organizers had to request special permission for Sylvia Rivera to give the talk since she was banned from entering
the Lesbian and Gay Community Center in New York City (now renamed the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center [my emphasis], possibly showing signs that Rivera’s actions had an impact).

Unlike Rivera, Holly Woodlawn was born in Puerto Rico to a Puerto Rican mother and an American father, a soldier of German descent who abandoned the family soon after Woodlawn's birth (29). According to the article released at the time of her death, her birth name was Haroldo—no mention of this name is made in *A Low Life in High Heels* (Grimes). In the memoir, Woodlawn extensively writes about her identity as Harold, an identity that for her was incredibly important to distance from Holly. Like many Puerto Ricans living on the Island, Holly’s mother left to New York City in 1948 to find work when Woodlawn was two, leaving Woodlawn to live with her grandparents for some time during her early childhood (30). Woodlawn's experience with her grandparents was very different from Rivera’s though—unlike the dark-skinned, Venezuelan/Puerto Rican Rivera from New York City, Woodlawn was a white Puerto Rican in Puerto Rico. Complicating traditional *locas* narratives in which the young effeminate boy is rejected by her Latino family for not embodying traditional modes of masculinity, Woodlawn privileges her white skin early on in *A Low Life in High Heels* and frames her relationship with her grandparents around her whiteness: “I was the favorite grandchild...I was different from all my cousins as well as the other children in town. Due to my German heritage, I was born a natural blond, and with my mother’s piercing green eyes, I was a beauty” (31-32). Right away, Woodlawn’s autobiographical narrative distances itself from the type of Afro-Latino abjection that denied Sylvia Rivera’s affective citizenship from the time she was born. Whereas Rivera’s racial and
national subjectivity is represented in terms of her polluted “blood,” the rhetoric here emphasizes an inherent whiteness (“heritage,” “natural”) that makes Woodlawn “different” and “a beauty,” revealing what Frances Negrón-Muntaner sees as Woodlawn’s refusal to “see herself in other ‘like’ her” (92). As a celebrity memoir from the early 1990s—co-authored by a straight white author—the book engages in traditional representations of Puerto Ricans as ugly and ordinary.

This whiteness becomes an important tool for survival for Holly once her mother, who married a “wonderful Polish Jew” named Joseph Ajzenberg in New York, takes her from Puerto Rico to New York City and then to Miami Beach. Woodlawn proudly claims that by the time she was four, she “had completely lost [her] Spanish accent and had become a full-blown Americano” (36). I am fascinated by the fact that before the New York Times obituary, I had not encountered the name Haroldo in any of my research, certainly not in A Low Life in High Heels. It is not the inaccuracy that fascinates me since as I have established, I am not interested in analyzing the book as a realistic representation of Woodlawn’s life. What fascinates me is that when she writes about becoming a “full-blown Americano,” she makes no mention of the fact that Harold was part of that change. This aspect establishes Woodlawn’s willingness and ability to successfully shape her own citizenship within the United States boundaries, a citizenship that is dependent on her rejection of her Puerto Rican subjectivity and only accessible because of her middle-class whiteness. That she centers on the differences between Holly and Harold, and completely erases any traces of Haroldo, implies that her Latinidad was an aspect of her subjectivity that she was simply not interested in highlighting.
At the same time, Woodlawn calls attention to the malleability of the category “whiteness,” which she smartly uses as a way to survive in systems that are typically oppressive of immigrant and queer people. In Puerto Rico she can use the power of whiteness to obtain her grandfathers’ affection—something Sylvia Rivera could not do—and the practical benefits that came with it (she was the only grandchild allowed to nap with her grandfather, for example); Woodlawn adapts this same whiteness to the context of United States society, recognizing that for the effeminate son of a Puerto Rican mother and a Polish Jew in 1950s New York, the smartest move for survival was to brand herself as a white “Americano.” Indeed, rather than adopting the identity of a Puerto Rican gay man or a Puerto Rican woman, Holly reinvents herself as a white woman.

Growing up in Miami in an economically family, Woodlawn claims that her initial exposure to the gay community was shaped by the middle-class gay people who went to the gay beaches in Miami Beach. She started hanging out with “the boys at the beach” because, being older, “they could drive and go to parties in the Coral Gables, which for the boys was the hoity-toity place to be” (41). Even Woodlawn’s coming out story is narrated as a classic, middle-class, white coming out story in which her parents confronted her after learning she was hanging out with other queer people and she screams: “Yes, I’m queer! I’m queer!” (43). Once her public queerness enters the private household, the space is no longer one that Woodlawn can withstand; she decides to run away to New York City “to be free” (45).

Through the 60s, Woodlawn lived in New York City on and off from the age of sixteen. She was homeless as soon as she arrived there and, like Rivera, she
eventually found a community of queens on 42nd street who introduced her to hustling as a source of income. In New York she developed a queer identity as Holly Woodlawn; she includes conflicting versions of how she came up with the name “Holly,” but it is her writing about the name “Woodlawn” that interests me. In the first chapter of *A Low Life in High Heels*, she writes that the last name “Woodlawn” comes directly from Holly’s desire to brand herself as a celebrity, particularly in relationship to Andy Warhol. She writes that female stars who became celebrities because of their work with Andy Warhol were “young heiresses to family fortunes,” “spoiled little principessas just itching to pounce upon their waiting thrones.” Meanwhile, Holly was “itching for food stamps and pouncing on men!” somehow she decided that to “groom [herself] for stardom” she would develop an identity as the heiress of the Woodlawn Cemetery, and so the name Holly Woodlawn was born (3). The alleged origin of the name Holly Woodlawn highlights Woodlawn’s continued insistence on authoring her own identity. Her name becomes a tool designed to shape her own image as a celebrity, but it also mocks the image of privileged 1960s female celebrities who were known more for their looks and fame than for their artistic skills or contributions. Moreover, the fact that she understood celebrity in relationship to Warhol and his female Superstars further reveal her desire to develop an identity around white queer culture.

During the years leading to her splashy feature debut in Paul Morrissey’s *Trash*, Woodlawn was either living with a friend or lover at some points, and she was homeless in the streets of New York at other points. Her memoir suggests that she tried any drug her current boyfriend or john was into, though she depicts a particular period of her life in the late 60s and early 70s as a time when she was specifically addicted to heroin and
speed. When she was not living with a lover who supporter her, she earned money through different temp jobs, in addition to fraud and stealing. Hanging out on the streets of New York, she eventually met queer Andy Warhol Superstars Jackie Curtis and Candy Darling. It was them who introduced her to the underground, experimental theatre scene in New York.

Holly Woodlawn’s involvement with Paul Morrissey and the Andy Warhol Factory came from transgressions that I relate to issues of legal and affective citizenship. First, Woodlawn unsuccessfully tried to get a camera worth $2000 by charging it to Warhol’s account, an operation that ended with Woodlawn running from the store when she saw the clerk calling the Factory to confirm the purchase. Second, appearing in the chorus at one of Jackie Curtis’s off-Broadway plays, Woodlawn gave a newspaper interview claiming to be an Andy Warhol Superstar. These two “transgressions” garnered Woodlawn the attention of the Factory, particularly Paul Morrissey who was “intrigued by [Woodlawn’s] boldness” (5). That Woodlawn achieves her desire to become a star by attempting to steal from Warhol and then inserting herself into the canon of Andy Warhol Superstars through a public outlet shows that Woodlawn’s citizenship is built around going against legal modes of citizenship while insisting on a public recognition of her persona.

When Morrissey’s Trash was released in 1970 under the Andy Warhol Factory, Woodlawn earned a certain level of celebrity as an actual Andy Warhol Superstar. She says this title allowed her to attend the best parties and hang out with all kinds of celebrities. It also meant very little in terms of capital gain or her ability to develop a stable career as a performer in the future (24). Unfortunately, Holly’s follow-up
performance in Paul Morrissey’s next film, *Women in Revolt*, was poorly received by audiences, critics, and even the director; she was never able to be part of a film as acclaimed as *Trash*. Still, she was able to build a career off of the relative success of *Trash*, working as a headliner in the cabaret circuit for a while, and doing theatre off-Broadway. Woodlawn died on December 6, 2015 from cancer complications at the age of 69 (Grimes).

**Dressing Them Up: Making Locas Intelligible**

Part of what makes Duberman’s *Stonewall*, Woodlawn and Copeland’s *A Low Life in High Heels*, and other (auto)biographical narratives of Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn valuable to a discussion of citizenship is the ways in which they point to the instability of homogeneous concepts of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, they indicate that for disenfranchised queer Latino/as, such as *locas*, race, national identity, ethnicity, and class further threatened the stability of these concepts, a stability that the contemporary LGBT rights movement has attempted to replicate and promote.

In *Stonewall*, Rivera tells Duberman about feeling a deep pressure to be either a *macho* man or a “fag” in her childhood community; part of the narrative then becomes about Rivera gaining an understanding of herself as a dark-skinned Puerto Rican queen who wants to exist both as male and female who is gay and straight. I tie this journey to moments of agency within her biography because it is her acknowledgment of the oppressive nature of these demands that constantly politicizes her identity performance, one that refuses to remain private within the public realm. The comments she makes about her own gender identification often reveal the most complex interactions between the personal and the political: “I came to the conclusion that I don’t want to be a woman… I like to dress up and pretend, and let the world think about what I am… That’s
what I enjoy” (Duberman 125). The verbs “dress up” and “pretend” serve to characterize the category “woman” as a social construct, a series of codes for the world to figure out. Even more, Rivera makes a conscious decision not to follow this code, favoring a presentation of her gender as an illusion in which the codes do not necessarily match: “I like to pull some shit out of the closet, throw on some female attire, a blouse or whatever—not complete drag—paint on a little makeup—and hit the streets” (126). The idea of a “not complete drag” identity, the body that is not quite female and not quite male, not straight and not gay, threatens those categories by highlighting their illusory nature. When Rivera refers to enjoying making people guess her gender she is able to express gender in terms of her own enjoyment. The journey from the closet to hitting the streets quite clearly one that goes from private to public.

This discussion of the limitations on Rivera’s—and locas’—affective and legal citizenship within the United States stems the rigid definitions of gender and sexuality within both U.S. and Latin(o) American cultures. In her personal testimony in GenderQueer, Rivera writes, “As I’ve grown up, I’ve realized that I do have a certain attraction to men. But I believe that growing up the way I did, I was basically pushed into this role. In Spanish cultures, if you’re effeminate, you’re automatically a fag; you’re a gay boy” (69). Later, she expresses a similar reluctance to be named in terms of traditional American understandings of gender and sexual identity, “People now want to call me a lesbian because I’m with Julia, and I saw, ‘No. I’m just me. I’m not a lesbian.’... I don’t even like the label transgender...I am Sylvia Rivera” (77). I consider this reclaiming of her individuality and personhood away from traditional legal recognition or dominant modes of understanding affective queer identity to offer a radical and valuable
approach to the interaction between race, gender, queerness and "good" citizenship. Rivera warns against a fight for rights based on a desire to achieve what is "normal"; rather, she seems to be calling for a form of queer citizenship rooted in specificity and individuality. The contrast between Sylvia’s ideology and the goals of the movement she supposedly commemorates evidence the very conscious decision of gay leaders to appropriate historical figures for purposes that do not resemble those figures’ actual philosophies in any way. It becomes clear that gay historiography commemorates the past in order to silence its potential challenges to current politics, a potential explanation for why the largest biographical work on Rivera is told through the perspective of a dominant white male historian.

If Sylvia Rivera’s persona and journey are fashioned around a complex mix of Sylvia’s abject self and her political consciousness, the Holly Woodlawn persona is designed in complete opposition to gay politics, which of course only makes her narrative as politically charged (albeit in less obvious ways) as Rivera’s. Woodlawn had similar issues with gender and sexuality when she was young; her character’s journey consists of rejecting heterosexuality, then wanting to become a biological woman (thus rejecting gay and male identity) to validate a relationship with a straight-identified male lover, per his request. Eventually, Holly decides against the surgery, seeing her femininity away from medical interventions of her body. This decision leads to some of her biggest successes, especially her career as a performer in film, the stage, and cabaret.

For subjects like Woodlawn, survival is the ultimate triumph and being a loca provides her with the tools to achieve this. At the beginning of her memoir, she
describes her turn from Harold to Holly as imperative to her existence, offering the comparison between “a brown moth to a psychedelic butterfly” to express the contrast between the two personas, adding that, “Harold was lifeless and insecure. Holly, on the other hand, was loud and outrageous, a psychedelic darling of the underground” (4). This new sense of agency is not embedded in a stable change of Woodlawn’s identity categories; that is, Holly Woodlawn does not need to be a biological female or to identify herself as a gay man or a straight woman to go from “lifeless and insecure” to “loud and outrageous.” Therefore, disidentifying—as opposed to counter or fully-identifying—with hegemony becomes the only available method for Woodlawn to realize a sense of self she feels satisfied with. The fact that she defines her own mode of performing identity shows the radical potential of locas’ subjectivity.

The connection between agency and the destabilization of social norms bookends Woodlawn’s memoir; the fact that this connection frames the entire narrative marks the centrality of the power of disidentification in Woodlawn’s life. Toward the end of her book, she shares a story about being invited to The Geraldo Show; during the taping of the episode, the infamous host surprises her with what Woodlawn describes as “below-the-belt questions” about her gender and sexual identity. Geraldo Rivera asks Woodlawn questions such as, “when you put on a woman’s dress, do you get sexually excited?” and “what’s it like to be a woman trapped in a man’s body?” (278). The questions are meant to exoticize, pathologize and condemn Woodlawn all at once, something that becomes even more obvious when Geraldo asks, “but what are you? A man or a woman?” Because she has been marked by these questions throughout the memoir, Geraldo Rivera embodies all the forces attempting to regulate Woodlawn’s
identity. What matters here is that Rivera literally voices questions from certain readers, and in this way he also works as a platform for Woodlawn to address those questions. Her answers reflect her wit in engaging with such questions, “I’m not trapped in a man’s body, I’m trapped in New York City!” and “what difference does it make [whether you’re a man or a woman] so long as you’re fabulous!” (278). That Holly Woodlawn describes her answers as a “defense” directly connects to Muñoz’ contention that disidentification is a survival strategy.

What I find impressive and smart about Holly Woodlawn’s attitude is her ability to talk about agency without subscribing to a romanticized idea of progress, happiness, or achievements. On one hand, she denies her affiliation with masculinity or femininity, rejecting the common misconception that locas are just men trapped in a woman’s body and using “fabulous” as her defining label; on the other hand, she does not deny feeling “trapped” (in New York City, according to her), pointing to her current socioeconomic situation. Even in a post-Stonewall context, the status quo, seen here through the character of Geraldo Rivera, is as unable as ever to deal with liminal forms of gender and sexuality; little progress has been made, as these are the same type of questions that plague Woodlawn before Stonewall. Still, Holly Woodlawn finds room for agency within the personal; it is her ability to answer Geraldo Rivera’s questions without relying on normative understandings of “good” citizenship that represents the triumph of the loca self. The memoir rejects the notion that hegemony can be altered through mainstream social movements; in fact, the book might align with the idea that hegemony is not a malleable force. What is malleable, and therefore more politically
relevant, is the relationship and interactions between the self and hegemony. *A Low Life in High Heels* envisions the (loca) self as the site for political awareness and agency.

Given that the tendency from scholars and audiences is to romanticize such a site of political potential without questioning its costs and implications, any analysis of locas would be largely incomplete without a discussion of the dangers affecting locas’ status as social citizens. The narratives of Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera are characterized by the tensions between the private (i.e., how they feel about the rest of the world and themselves) and the public (i.e., their body, history, the law), suggesting that while liminal forms of self-expression might be politically valuable, they also come at a price. Given Sylvia’s role within gay historiography and gay rights, the price is often portrayed in relationship to her public political struggles; Holly, as a performer writing a memoir, focuses more on issues related to the personal—her struggle to be taken seriously as an actress and her sexual/romantic relationships. This contrast is significant as it allows us to see different ways in which locas interact with various aspects of citizenship.

Rivera was very critical and very aware of how her refusal to pass kept her from being treated like a fully realized citizen. Across interviews, books and talks, she mentions the different moments her sense of self collided with multiple “official” figures over the years. From the time she was young, she was arrested for wearing female clothes. Martin Duberman uses Sylvia’s arrests as a way to depict her as an accidental activist,

Never having been arrested before, Sylvia found the whole thing vastly amusing. When the arraigning judge looked down on the crowd of some fifty queens. . .[and said], “The names you read are all male names, but I
see quite a few females here,’ Sylvia burst out laughing, thinking the judge had made a deliberate joke. (69)

Yet, in her entry in *Queens in Exile*, Rivera provided a less fun perspective:

When drag queens were arrested, what degradation there was. I remember the first time I got arrested, I wasn’t even in full drag. . . . We always felt that the police were the real enemy. We expected nothing better than to be treated like we were animals—and we were. (82)

Duberman manages to address the tension between *locas* and the law without assigning much blame to the police, and simultaneously depicts Rivera as an accidental outlaw who had little awareness of the dangers of being arrested. By contrast, Sylvia’s statement openly envisions the police as “the real enemy”; the emphasis on “degradation” and being “treated like we were animals” establishes the role of the law in divesting *locas* of the rights that come with full citizenship. Yet, she later adds, “When I ended up going to jail, to do 90 days, they tried to rape me. I very nicely beat the shit out of a man” (83), stressing her refusal to be read as a victim.

Though Rivera usually contextualizes these encounters with the police in terms of pre-Stonewall U.S., she seems to argue that, for her, Stonewall marked a switch from police discrimination to discrimination from the gay mainstream. In this way, she seems to suggest that rather than signaling a turn in which the concept of citizenship was expanded to incorporate various queer communities; queerness itself became a regulatory tool, a role that was previously occupied by legal discourse and institutions.

Recollecting her activism during the Stonewall era she says, “I remember singing ‘We Shall Overcome,’ many a times, on different demonstrations. . . . I remember singing but I haven’t overcome a damn thing. I’m not even in the back of the bus” (Rivera 120). Her anger at being left behind by the movement she helped create allows her to criticize the empty promise of teleological narratives spread by the mainstream gay movement. The
juxtaposition between the fantasy of the song “We Shall Overcome” and the reality of her stark present express a sense of disappointment rather than the sense of gratitude she is supposed to feel.

Disappointment and anger are a part of Sylvia’s persona that often gets ignored in the memorialization of her place in Stonewall history, but they are a major part of her persona, and they represent affects that engender her political subversion. Yet, it is clear to see why they are left out, as they are affective forces deeply intertwined with contemporary gay rights:

On the fourth anniversary of the Stonewall riot, the transgender community was silenced because of a radical lesbian named Jean O’Leary, who felt that the transgender community was offensive to women because we liked to wear makeup and we liked to wear miniskirts. Excuse me! It goes with the business that we’re in at that time! Because people fail to realize that—not trying to get off the story—everybody thinks that we want to be out on them street corners. No we do not. We don’t want to be out there sucking dick and getting fucked up the ass. But that’s the only alternative that we have to survive because the laws do not give us the right to go and get a job the way we feel comfortable. I do not want to go to work looking like a man when I know I am not a man. (Rivera 121)

This moment in Rivera’s speech exemplifies how the intersection of race, gender, class and sexuality keeps her from being a part of the mainstream gay rights movement. O’Leary’s reductive attitude toward Sylvia goes beyond simple ignorance; the criticism comes from O’Leary’s place as a privileged white woman who lacks any desire to understand Rivera’s socioeconomic position within the status quo, and any awareness of her own privilege. That the official gay movement chose to exclude Rivera from the celebration based on O’Leary’s criticism reveals the values (whiteness, privilege) that the movement wants to be associated with, and those they reject. Much like the police, the gay mainstream portrays Rivera as a bad citizen, and they use this to keep her from the fight for rights. As Rivera says, “You have acquired your liberation,
your freedom, from that night. Myself, I got shit, just like I had back then. But I still struggle, I still continue the struggle” (122).

Holly Woodlawn’s persona is less about public, legal discourse and more about her own difficulty with affective concepts related to citizenship like womanhood, drag, and gayness. Though questions about her own gender and sexuality were a major part of her life, the period in which she contemplates getting a sex change is the section of A Low Life in Heels where she talks the most about such questions. Woodlawn relates her desire to get a sex change to both her own shame and the shame of Jack, the man she was with at the time. She writes,

I couldn’t get over the painful shame that lay hidden in my panties. Yes, I had everything a woman of the day could desire: a beautiful husband, a fabulous wardrobe, every electrical appliance imaginable, a Macy’s charge card, and a glamorous career. What I didn’t have was a muff... a sex change, I thought, would put an end to all of my problems. I wasn’t much of a man, and I was so much more comfortable being a woman. (90-92)

The fantasy of successful femininity in a capitalist society (measured in terms of acquisitions and upward mobility) is not enough to satisfy Woodlawn in this case because she lacks what she believes makes her a woman. Indeed, capitalist success as a “woman” requires a “muff”; her performance of femininity is not enough to placate her shame.

Frances Negrón-Muntaner situates Woodlawn’s relationship to shame in the context of memoirs from Puerto Rican authors about overcoming the shame of “ethnic abjection” through “excessive discipline (schooling) and the protection of one’s ‘insides’ from transculturation,” finally concluding that, unlike these authors, “Woodlawn revels in her lacking location [and] implies that the best way to dare shame is not to measure up but to show off one’s ‘chocha for the world to see’” (89). Woodlawn then must use
different terms to readjust her take on what being a woman means. She does this by undercutting these moments of shame with a mixture of humor and poignancy. When the doctor denies her sex change surgery because she had not followed the official procedures, Woodlawn exclaims, “The nerve! I had been living as a woman long enough. I deserved my own snatch, but they refused, and so, in my despair, I went on a mad shopping spree!” (96). She also confesses that, “I never once felt like a woman trapped in a man’s body. I felt more like a man trapped in high heels! I was never miserable with my body, but for some strange reason, I played up the notion that I wanted to have ‘it’ cut” (94). In fact, medical discourses of “gender dysmorphia” tell her she should feel bad about her body when she does not actually feel that way. Because she refuses to enact the discourse, her doctor denies her the sex change that is supposed to “fix” her current state. The criticism here is not toward sex change or those who want it, the criticism is directed toward a system that forces Woodlawn to define her sense of self through medical discourses of proper gender “feelings.” Like Rivera, Woodlawn shows a sense of entitlement and anger (“I deserved my own snatch!”), and this response allows her to deal with the system around her. Ultimately, Woodlawn decides not to get the sex change, concluding that, “unlike some of the other girls who could put on pants and become a man. I was a woman regardless of what I was wearing” (110). Once again, it is the change in her response to the hegemonic system, and not a change to the system itself, that emerges here as a tool for survival.

Neither Sylvia nor Woodlawn overcome hegemony once they have figured out how to survive within the system; sometimes the same tool for survival acts as a threat to their life. In a section where she relates how she used to pass as a woman when she
engaged in various sexual activities with a lot of men, denying them vaginal intercourse when they asked for it and offering other sexual favors instead, Woodlawn shares, “I’m surprised I wasn’t beaten, raped, and burned at the stake for my wicked, lascivious ways” (102). Additionally, Woodlawn’s relationship to the mainstream was tense and never permanently fulfilling. Within white culture she was labeled a “hormone queen” by some (“I hate the term, but you know how our society is when it comes to labels” [Woodlawn 124]) and a (psychotic) drag queen by many others (“I did not consider myself a drag queen, nor was I about to be called psychotic” [152]). These labels haunted both Woodlawn and Rivera for a large part of their lives, and manifested throughout their (auto)biographical narratives. A minor moment in Duberman’s Stonewall exemplifies the difficulty the white gay majority had in dealing with the identity of Woodlawn and Rivera. This connection between Woodlawn and Rivera makes for one of the strangest moments in Duberman’s book, strange because it exemplifies how easily good intentions and political correctness can lead to confusing logic, eventually exposing more about the author than about the subject. Duberman writes,

By the early seventies, drag had very neatly gone mainstream, with Jackie Curtis, Candy Darling, and Holly Woodlawn all becoming Warhol-made celebrities, though the term ‘drag’ continued to be variously regarded. Individual definitions ranged from ‘dress-up artist’ and ‘performer’ to, in Holly Woodlawn’s case, a simple ‘fabulous’…Holly further insisted…that a ‘true’ drag was not someone who ‘always dresses as a woman,’ but rather someone who ‘only gets it on for the stage.’ Since prostitution might be regarded as a form of dramatic presentation, Sylvia would have qualified under Holly Woodlawn’s definition, as she surely did under Holly’s more encompassing ‘fabulous.’ (126)

The teleological ideology set up by Duberman is apparent even in the structure of his sentences, starting with “by the early seventies” which connotes to the audience a progressive sense of history; this structure signals to the reader that this is a
story/history where as time goes on, more advances are made. In this particular passage, Duberman chooses to examine the progress made in terms of drag culture, going as far as to depict drag during the early 70s as “mainstream.” Such a description manages to erase the simultaneous stigmatization and fetishization of drag culture very much alive in contemporary American culture today, while also brushing over the fact none of those girls—Holly, Jackie or Candy—would have called themselves “drag queens” or defined what they did in their performances on the Factory films and stage shows as “drag.” More troubling is the way in which Duberman uses Woodlawn’s definition of what being a drag queen means to awkwardly arrive at the conclusion that Rivera is a “true drag” because prostitution is “a dramatic form of representation” and he sees Rivera as fabulous.

Duberman’s misreading of Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera as drag queens connects to the tendency of the gay mainstream to swiftly explain, and not engage with or complicate, the gender/queer performance of subjects who threaten the limits of normativity. When Holly Woodlawn defines “true drag” in the passage, she is searching for a way to expand the connotation of the term “drag queen” because, much to her dislike, this was the label assigned to her by the public.² Her reasons for disliking the label are rooted in the process of passing; indeed, Boricua Pop Negron-Muntaner sees Holly Woodlawn’s fascination with passing for white as the most important “inconsistency” of A Low Life in Heels (92). Being a racial, gender, queer “other” might

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² Frances Negrón-Muntaner quotes Woodlawn saying, “I was branded a drag queen (a stigma which haunted me through my life). . . . that’s not my ambition, to be a drag queen, I want to be an actor. . . . I want people to say of me, there is a person so gorgeous” (104).
allow Holly Woodlawn to challenge heteronormative practices; yet, to imagine Woodlawn—or for that matter, Sylvia Rivera—as a martyr or as a neat solution to such practices would be to brush over what Negron-Muntaner identifies as Holly’s biggest “inconsistency,” the disdain she shows toward racially marked Puerto Rican locas. At the same time, this inconsistency supports a reading of locas as products of a so-called post-Stonewall America. Masculinity/femininity, male/female, gay/straight are not the only or the most imperative binaries locas challenge; in fact, treading the line between subversive/normative is a key characteristic to help engage of their liminal performances.

The discussion of Holly Woodlawn’s story of immigration belongs exclusively to the early section of the memoir. The rhetorical reasons for this become more lucid when Holly Woodlawn arrives to the section on Stonewall and the late 1960s New York gay scene. At this point, I wondered if Woodlawn and her co-writer Jeff Copeland imagined the ideal reader as highly forgetful, for this section gives way to a rant against Puerto Rican queens, with the label “Puerto Rican” supposed to solely describe a “them” that does not include Woodlawn herself. This moment emerges from a discussion about realness, who could pass and who could not; Woodlawn believes that most (presumably white) girls were “unreadable,” a characteristic she considers an attribute. However, she claims that black and Puerto Rican queens did not try to pass or go unnoticed, choosing instead to call attention to themselves, something that made them some of the lowest citizens in the U.S. queer social hierarchy. Woodlawn criticizes the queens of color for snapping their fingers at passersby and screaming at them using “their torrid tongues”:

The Puerto Rican queens in New York City were the most vicious. They ran in packs, and I made sure I stayed clear of their path. They carried
razor blades in their hairdos and knives in their panties. I heard all sorts of horrifying stories about these psycho queens from hell terrorizing the Lower East Side. (112)

She goes on to share two stories about Puerto Rican queens, one in which one of them disfigured the face of a (presumably white) “poor queen” because she was “too pretty”—the threat to white beauty presented here as the ultimate evil—and another one in which another Puerto Rican queen stabbed a guy who was taunting her for dressing in women’s clothing. The stories do not function at the same level (the first one suggests unprovoked violent behavior, the other one is a response to a verbal, potentially physical, attack); yet, the narrative places them on the same level. She closes this section writing, “I never messed with these psycho queens, and stayed as far away from them as possible. It was strange. . . . I had my own gang to run with, so to speak” (113).

This revelatory section suggests the huge role passing played in Holly Woodlawn’s life, as well as an idea of how much locas who are not able to pass are othered within communities to which they supposedly belong. The insistence on referring to the “Puerto Rican queens” as a “them” negates Woodlawn’s identification with Puerto Rico. The section is filled with moments in which Woodlawn counteridentifies with her own national and cultural background, which is seen in the language Holly Woodlawn reserves for these queens (“psycho queens from hell,” “spik,” “vicious”), to the portrayal of them as irrational and violent. By finishing the section with a supposedly naïve rhetorical question and highlighting the fact she had her own “gang,” Woodlawn leaves no doubts about her desire to reject her own past as a Puerto Rican-born queen. Counteridentification here produces a counterintuitive result: the passionate (never indifferent) tone of the writing suggests that Puerto Rico is an inevitable part of Woodlawn’s persona; she sees passing as white—not actually being
white—as one of her main sources of social power, hence her ethnicity can never be fully disassociated from her persona.

The irony of Woodlawn’s use of the term “Puerto Rican queens” is that it names her as the normative counterpart to that label—not Puerto Rican but white, not a queen but a woman; however, she was born in Puerto Rico. Sylvia Rivera, whose activism and sense of self are largely tied to her ethnicity and national identity, was born in New York. Yet, being an Afro-Latina of Puerto Rican descent others her in the eyes of dominant culture as well as other minoritarian subjects like Woodlawn. As I have established throughout the chapter, Rivera’s relationship to her cultural background was a major site of tension; actually, the shortcomings of social codes embedded in some U.S. Latino and Latin American cultures, similar to North American gay culture, are a platform for Rivera to criticize that which seeks to cement normativity. Whereas A Low Life in Heels’ description of Woodlawn’s childhood plays with traditional queer Latino stories, Sylvia Rivera’s narrative falls closely within that tradition. Duberman’s Stonewall uses Rivera’s grandmother, whom Duberman dubs Viejita, to portray this experience. Viejita embodies the stereotype of traditional Latin culture as deeply conservative: she dislikes Sylvia for being dark-skinned and for sleeping with men, she does not accept the money Sylvia gives her when she starts working on the streets (referring to it as “blood money”), and she wants Sylvia to date someone from her own race (in yet another clumsy moment written by Duberman he claims Viejita eventually accepted Sylvia’s attraction to men but would still yell the line, “why can’t you have a Spanish boy?”). The character suggests an attempt, evident in other parts of the book, to pathologize and exoticize Sylvia in terms white gay readers are familiar with.
Although the rhetoric Duberman chooses to characterize *Viejita* as a symbol of a privileged white gay man’s understanding of Latino and Latin American femininity, it does correspond with Rivera’s statements about her cultural background. Rivera expressed this idea in her talk for the Gay Latino Men of New York, “I know many of our countries are not as liberated as the United States, especially Latin American countries, because once again you got to remember that we have to play that big macho role” (123). This statement sees patriarchy as the root of oppression for *locas*, and it represents race as indelibly tied to gender performance and sexual identification. The depiction of Latin American as less “liberated” will be criticized by some as general and Anglocentric. I disagree with this view given the talk’s focus on criticizing systems of social power in both Latin America and the United States, never resorting to the kind of plain racist language on display in Woodlawn’s memoir (Rivera’s use of the word “we” stands in direct contrast to the “them” opposition set by Woodlawn). Regardless, what Rivera achieves here is an incisive analysis of her own experience as a product of the intersections of gender, race, sexuality and power. Because queerness does not exist in a vacuum, these intersections are an integral part of Rivera’s sense of self.

This awareness shown by Rivera herself makes it more surprising that official accounts of gay history have fashioned the Rivera persona as a Stonewall heroine and transgender icon by downplaying or ignoring her racial, national, and ethnic subjectivity. When Rivera shares that she tried to get Plume/Penguin, the publishers of Martin Duberman’s *Stonewall*, to publish the book in Spanish, the word “gay” in the term “gay rights” becomes defined as a position of privilege. Plume/Penguin did not think it was necessary to translate the book because “[i]t would not sell in Third World countries, in
Latin countries” (123), which suggests the history of this moment is not generally “gay” but rather specifically privileged through associations based on race, gender, and class. This clearly ignores the role racial minorities had in the riots, as well as the role race-based politics played in the events. According to Rivera, before queer-specific marches started to become a major part of political culture after Stonewall, queer people’s activism still existed in other political movements, such as the Civil Rights movement. In her opinion, it was being members of such groups that made the queens of color react to police oppression, an obvious form of civil rights infringement, the night of the riots (118). Thus, the notion that Stonewall marked the birth of a political gay public reveals a limited perspective that fails to consider the historical connection between race and political awareness.

Talking about her activism stresses the relevant connection between race and queer politics. She describes being a passionate member of the political Puerto Rican youth organization, the Young Lords, because of “the respect they gave us as human beings” (85). This description of Puerto Rican political activism works toward a less general portrayal of the Latino community and its relationship to queer culture. During a Young Lords march in 1970, Rivera was able to bring out the STAR (Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries] banner for one of the first times. She portrayed this event as a utopian moment: “it was a fabulous feeling for me to be myself—being a part of the Young Lords as a drag queen—and my organization [STAR] being part of the Young Lords” (85). The “fabulous” moment does not relate to just queerness or just race. Rather, it is the fact that she feels respected as both a queen and a racialized Nuyorican (in other words, as a loca, with all the baggage that entails) that creates the
utopian moment. I place Rivera’s moment of respect and fabulousness in direct opposition to Duberman’s version of Gay History for First World citizens, whereas the latter takes advantage of Sylvia as a way to permanently model a history for gay people in the United States in terms of dominant values, the former is an ephemeral moment that celebrates those intersections that normative gay history tends to erase.
CHAPTER 4

Trash-y Obsessions

As part of a graduate seminar led by black queer critic and film scholar Amy Ongiri titled “Postwar Radical Social Movements and the Literary Imagination,” a seminar where we explored American radical politics within the context of the 1960s and where many of the politics that ground this project started to take shape, I was introduced to Paul Morrissey’s 1970 film Trash. As part of her description of the film, Amy mentioned a scene in which a Puerto Rican queen masturbates with a bottle while screaming “I want welfare”...I knew I had to watch it. Later in my research, I became embarrassed by my own fetishization of that moment when I went on to learn that this particular scene caused that Puerto Rican queen, Holly Woodlawn, deep embarrassment (Negrón-Muntaner 102). Yet, beyond the shock-value appeal of such a provocative image, I was drawn to Professor Ongiri’s description of the image in terms of its radical potential. When I finally watched the film, I did not know what to make of it. But something about Holly Woodlawn’s performance as Holly, a sexually frustrated woman who collects trash from the streets to create a home in the space where she lives with her heroin-addicted lover, made me think about the ways in which queer Latino performance can sometimes resist the power of the white gaze even as it is being regulated and framed within that context. In this way, the film made me think about the tense ways in which white queer artists archive, commodify and consume the disenfranchised queer Latino/a body. This chapter emerged from this unshakable intrigue to both further understand my obsession with this interaction, and to dissect and
unpack the role of a *locas’* citizenship within the visual representation and production of a homogenized queer identity through visual rhetoric.

This chapter focuses on film representations and preservations of Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera by focusing on two films: *Trash* (Paul Morrissey, 1970), the underground arthouse film that turned Holly Woodlawn into an Andy Warhol “Superstar” and gave her a space to develop a public image in the queer popular consciousness, and *Stonewall* (Nigel Finch, 1995), a narrative film adapted from Martin Duberman’s book in which Rivera’s involvement with the Stonewall movement is represented through a character named La Miranda. These two films in particular have attempted to capture both Woodlawn and Rivera in relationship to 1960s queer culture in New York City, a temporal site I have argued is key to address issues of citizenship and rights for LGBT individuals in the United States.

The two films have different temporalities and emerge from two very different modes of production. *Trash* is a film that attempts to represent what director Paul Morrissey saw as the trash of society in the 1970s: drug addicts, hippies, drag queens—in other words, “bad” citizens that in his view emerged from 1960s counterculture and radical movements. Part of a trilogy of films directed by Morrissey and produced under Andy Warhol’s Factory, *Trash* was an underground arthouse film at a time when there was a space for the distribution and profitability of those types of films. *Stonewall* emerges from the 1990s gay nostalgic turn to Stonewall and accordingly attempts to memorialize and capture a sanitized version of the kind of underground culture that *Trash* both depicts and is a direct product of. It was produced at a time when gay-themed films were starting to become viable profitable and visible products in
mainstream—not arthouse—contexts; as such, its formal and narrative language is much more grounded in traditional, popular Western cinema. These different temporalities and modes of production further depict how white queer artists have attempted to regulate locas’ bodies for their own goals, thus turning into an allegory for the ways in which the LGBT movement has regulated the legal and affective citizenship of disenfranchised queer Latinos. Both films show how this regulatory process has been a tool for the acquisition of financial, artistic, and cultural benefits at the expense of locas’ agency. Moreover, the tension that emerges from the queer white directors’ attempt to deploy a loca’s body to his own purpose point to how locas’ performance can often offer disidentificatory sites of refusal, resistance, and (in some cases) inability to become the director’s instrument, a resistance which is apparent throughout the films.

From Trash to Stonewall, an Overview

A superficial look at Trash and Stonewall makes it challenging to picture how these two films speak to each other; my analysis in this chapter relies on zooming in on the themes, motifs, and patterns shared by the texts with the objective of dispelling that initial reaction and placing these films in conversation with one another. This section establishes the background of each film with an emphasis on production history, critical reception, and the historical context in which they were released.

Originally titled Drug Trash, Trash was directed by conservative director Paul Morrissey, a frequent collaborator of Andy Warhol and an active presence in the Factory. The film was financially successful both domestically and abroad (Davies 122), and is regarded as “arguably one of the Factory’s best productions” (Negrón-Muntaner 101). The range of scholarship written about the film also easily makes it one of the most critically relevant films produced under Andy Warhol’s Film Factory. The movie
stars Joe Dallesandro as Joe, a drug-addicted hustler in New York City looking to score heroin, or the money for a score, around the city in various ways, such as hustling, prostitution, burglaries, etc. The episodic script develops through a series of encounters between Joe and the men and women from whom he tries to get drugs (or money to get those drugs) by promising sexual favors in return. Adding a comedic perspective of sorts, Joe is unable to get an erection due to the heroin he is consuming, which frustrates the characters trying to engage with him sexually. In the largest supporting character, Holly Woodlawn plays Holly, Joe’s live-in lover, who has a predilection for collecting trash from the streets to recycle into various accessories for their home. The home scenes featuring Joe and Holly mostly revolve around Holly’s frustration with Joe’s drug addiction and erectile dysfunction; later in the movie, Morrissey introduces a subplot about Holly and Joe adopting Holly’s sister’s unborn child. These strangely domestic and even affectionate scenes between Joe and Holly anchor the film both narratively and emotionally.

The production of the movie shares similarities to other underground films of the time: no formal script, an abridged and shoddy filming schedule,¹ and a very low budget (estimated at $25’000 [Davies 60])². Under this type of production model, the performers had a certain level of agency they would never have in a traditional mode of production. For example, shooting for only a couple of hours a day only allows for a

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¹ According to Jon Davies, the film was only shot “for a couple of hours on Saturday and Sunday afternoons in the basement of Morrissey’s brownstone in October 1969” (60).

² For comparison’s sake, MGM’s Midnight Cowboy (John Schlesinger, 1969), another X-rated film about New York City hustlers and a hit at the time Trash was conceived, had an estimated budget of $3.6 million (IMDB.com).
limited number of takes for each scene, which in turn gives the director less control over the final product.\(^3\) Naturally, this fact becomes even more notable when considering that most scenes in the movie were improvised, especially Holly’s scenes (in Holly’s words, there were “no retakes, no cuts, no changing camera angles, and no make up person to powder me down” [Woodlawn 136]). This agency—negotiated as it was through Morrisey’s own ideological, conservative goals—is of particular significance to my later analysis of the value of Woodlawn’s performance to the piece’s complicated politics.

The movie had its New York premiere on October 5, 1970 as an X-rated film. It features unabashed displays of nudity and sexual acts and explicit images of characters shooting up drugs. Its reception was as controversial as (I imagine) Morrisey, and especially Warhol, wanted it to be. Though wrapped in controversy due to the casting of what the public saw as a biological male playing a biological female, Holly Woodlawn’s performance was singled out by critics as the driving force behind the film, and for a very short period of time, she gained a certain level of celebrity in New York art culture, with queer Hollywood director George Cukor famously campaigning for her performance in the film to get a write-in nomination for a Best Supporting Actress at the Academy Awards (Davies 121). In fact, Woodlawn’s performance was a major *selling* point for the movie during its theatrical run; per Steven Watson, “With Joe Dallesandro’s bare body on the ads and buzz about Holly Woodlawn’s performance, the movie became the

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\(^3\) The late 1960s as a transitional moment in Hollywood leading from a director-driven, detailed (think storyboards, director-driven concepts/films) into New Hollywood, films known for a “roughe[r]” type of look/editing (i.e., shakier camera movement, more spontaneous cuts, less planned/polished photography).
biggest commercial hit ever produced by either Warhol or Morrissey” (404). Woodlawn was not merely a cast member in Trash, she was its unlikely star, was marketed as such, and through the strength of her performance (and not her body as in the case of Dallesandro), provided capital gains to Morrissey and Warhol. Naturally, following Warhol’s business practice at the Factory, Woodlawn never saw any of the profits; she also did not get that much-desired Oscar nomination.

Also relevant to my reading of Trash as a key historical text is the consensus that the film is “a product of its time.” In the process of detailing the entire journey of the film from conception to reception and aftermath, Jon Davies’ Trash includes a variety of the film’s reviews ranging from 1970 to the present. These reviews reveal the film’s status as an archive of a very particular historical moment. For example, Davies quotes a 1970 review from The Hollywood Reporter in which the critic describes Trash as “the closest thing to a sexual, sociological portrait of 1970 that the year is likely to see” (Ferguson 1998, 101; qt in Davies 117-118). An equal sentiment is displayed by a review published thirty years later in the gay-targeted publication The Advocate, the “official” magazine for the contemporary LGBT movement: “it’s hard to think of any other film that both satirizes and simulates the inertia and banality of life amid the late-'60s counterculture” (Stuart 2000; qtd in Davies 128). Looking at these reviews, it is clear that from its release and through the decades, Trash has been positioned by normative culture as a historical artifact that reflects and preserves some type of social “truth” about the behavior of non-normative cultures in the late ‘60s. Beyond its standing in (U.S. gay) history, Trash remains a fascinating piece for many reasons, from Holly Woodlawn’s incandescent, Oscar-worthy performance to the film’s mix of Hollywood
conventions with underground cinema to the relentless emphasis on Adonis star Joe Dallesandro’s flaccid penis.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the film remains the much-written about contradictions that exist among the director’s intent, the actual text, and the audience and critics’ reception. Trash is the second in a trilogy of films Morrissey wrote and directed for the Factory: 1968’s Flesh, 1970’s Trash, and 1972’s Heat. All three films star Joe Dallesandro as Joe, though the plot of each film is not presented as part of a continuous larger narrative. The films were not originally conceived as a trilogy either (Yacowar 53), so apart from Morrissey and Dallesandro’s key roles in each production, they are only loosely connected.

Attempting to find thematic connections among the three films, critics point to the trilogy as key to understanding Paul Morrissey’s moralistic attitude toward his actors and their lives. In The Films of Paul Morrissey (1993), Morrissey scholar and defender Maurice Yacowar writes that “the films belie the glamour of sixties street life,” further adding that the trilogy expresses Morrissey’s “moralist’s anger at the characters wasting their lives, spending themselves in drugs, prostitution, and betrayal of their loved ones” (52). At the same time, Yacowar feebly attempts to come to Morrissey’s defense by claiming that the films also reveal that Morrissey “feels for his characters’ pathetic needs” (52), thus revealing Yacowar’s own condescending attitude toward Morrissey’s subjects and accentuating Morrissey’s own disdain toward such “pathetic” characters. Yet, Yacowar begins to reveal the contradiction inherent in Trash—the moralistic intentions of its director and the subversive ways one can “read” the politics of the actual product. Davies’ Trash touches more explicitly on this duality: “While Flesh deals
specifically with prostitution, *Trash* with drug addiction, and *Heat* with fame, the entire trilogy tackles the broader ills of its era…the self-indulgence, corruption, and waste that Morrissey found so disgusting within bohemia. In short, the curse that was liberty” (47-48). Indeed, Morrissey’s trilogy attempted to expose and criticize that which he found “so disgusting”; that “the curse of liberty” is tied to the object of his disgust, however, paradoxically connects *Trash* to the continuing lack of liberty queers of color are allowed within the rigid notion of gay citizenship in the United States today. Still, if *Trash* was merely another text that actively abjects (queer) sexuality, drug use, and most of all poverty and its connections at the time to Puerto Ricans as a whole, its value to this project would be minimal. Instead, I am interested in the contradiction some critics have identified. Davies finishes his earlier statement about the trilogy by writing, “These social comedies could be seen as cautionary tales of a sort for big-city youth, were they actually as disapproving and preachy as their director” (48). This is where I believe *Trash* becomes a key object to discuss the use of *locas* to regulate affective modes of citizenship in the United States; rather than achieving its moral intent, something in the process between the film’s conception and its making, release and reception turned the movie into an accomplice to subversive modes of challenging normative notions of sex, gender, class, and race.

*Trash* clearly has been a critically relevant text ever since it was released. *Stonewall* is much less visible. The film has been practically ignored by critics and audiences alike from the beginning, as evidenced by the complete lack of secondary sources about it. The lack of sources becomes particularly obvious when the film is compared to something as notable and relevant as *Trash*. Obviously *Trash* is a stronger
film from every perspective, an ambitious piece produced by an iconic artist that, as seen by the reviews from *The Hollywood Reporter* and *The Advocate* and as evidenced by its discussion in publications across a variety of fields (Latina/o studies, queer theory, film studies, art criticism, etc.), has been recognized as such since its release in 1970.

*Stonewall* was produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and directed by a white gay British director, Nigel Finch, better known for being a documentarian for British TV. Since Finch died due to complications from AIDS, this is his final film, which means he did not get to direct future films that may have been more relevant and led to more critical attention on *Stonewall* as an early film. As with *Trash*, the two leads of *Stonewall* are also a *loca* and a white character, though this time they are played by professional working actors who never gained the notoriety or incandescent (if fast-burning) fame of the Warhol Superstars. Gay Latino actor Guillermo Díaz, in one of his first roles, plays La Miranda, a surrogate for Sylvia Rivera. Frederick Weller, a working actor today, plays Matty Dean, a surrogate for Martin Duberman and other people involved in the riots, such as Craig Rodwell. Much like Duberman’s book, the film seeks to create a (largely fictionalized) narrative of the events leading to the Stonewall Riots from different perspectives of the key participants.

Though it focuses on different characters, the film’s central characters are Matty and La Miranda. Matty Dean (Weller) is a young white gay small-town guy (my

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4 Finch was nominated for a TV BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) from 1988 through 1992 for the non-fiction TV series *Arena*; he won in 1989.

5 Díaz is now known for his TV work; he currently stars in ABC’s *Scandal*, one of the most successful long-running network dramas on the air.
description hopes to be as clichéd as the character type) who arrives to New York City penniless and wide-eyed, and quickly starts to experience different facets of gay life in the city, specifically middle-class white gay culture and the lower-class queer of color community. In a visit to the Stonewall bar, Matty meets La Miranda (Díaz), presented here as a sassy Latina drag queen, Julia Roberts’ “hooker with a heart of gold” from 1990’s Pretty Woman by way of Whoopi Goldberg’s “funny black woman” Oda Mae Brown in 1990’s Ghost. The movie is a hodgepodge of various Hollywood genres: the romance that emerges between La Miranda and Matty gets the Hollywood romantic comedy treatment, the documentary-style footage of people who were involved in Stonewall seems to reveal Finch’s attempt to use some of the formal elements that Steven Spielberg used in Schindler’s List to create a similar type of important film for queer people, Matty’s story from wide-eyed small-town boy into a mature and (sexually and politically) experienced city man mirrors classic stories in the style of director Alan J. Pakula’s 1982 adaptation of the novel Sophie’s Choice, and there are even musical numbers of Motown girl groups performed by La Miranda and her two drag queen friends interpolated in the movie as a way to comment on key plot events in the style of Bob Fosse’s 1972 film Cabaret. Furthermore, if we consider the fact that “Generally queer film promises to tell stories about gays and lesbians who negotiate events typical for their lived collective experiences: alienated youth and unrequited love; sexual awakening and coming out; the trials and tribulations of gay and lesbian communities”

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6 Goldberg’s performance in that film transcends this description—the portrayal of Miranda in Stonewall does not.
(Mennel 2), the film does not deviate from tradition. Yet, these attempts to make a fairly
typical Hollywood narrative film with the budget of an underground film result in a movie
that is filled with a type of weirdness that makes it more interesting than the more
traditional gay-themed films from the 1990s. Ultimately, the film played at a few gay film
festivals in Britain and the U.S. before premiering in 10 screens across the U.S. on July
1996. Per BoxOfficeMojo.com, the movie’s widest release was 17 screens; for
comparison’s sake, Independence Day, the highest-grossing film of the year, played in
2,977 theatres at a time. At the end of the day, it grossed a mere $692,400 domestically
(BoxOfficeMojo.com), a little more than half of the $1 million domestic gross of the X-
rated Trash three decades earlier.

Queer Cinema and Latino/Rican Representation

Following in the footsteps of Puerto Rican scholars like Frances Negrón-
Muntaner and Lawrence LaFountain-Stokes, my reading of these films zeroes in on the
performance of each film’s respective star, Holly Woodlawn and Guillermo Díaz; at the
same time, I also focus on the films themselves from both a formal perspective and a
cultural approach. Interconnecting these varied academic approaches brings to the
forefront the play between the tensions white queer artists and the construction of locas’
citizenship. This section first starts with an overview of Diana Taylor’s concept of the
archive and the repertoire; Taylor’s work helps to develop my reading of these films as
temporal texts themselves interested in preserving in some form a queer American
moment. To connect Trash and Stonewall to Taylor’s concepts, I provide an overview of
American queer cinema from the 1960s to the present. Though the films have a
different production history and emerge from entirely different contexts, contextualizing
these films within the features and history of U.S. queer cinema creates cohesion, and it
roots the texts in the tradition of using the *loca* body to create a white-dominant queer archive. The section then narrows in on the relationship between Latino/a representation in white (mostly queer) cinema; it is here where I rely on performance studies, as theorized from a raced and/or gendered perspective by authors such as Judith Butler and the aforementioned Diana Taylor, to provide a framework for my close reading of the films. More than serving as a literature review, these overviews seek to historicize and highlight the rich tension among white filmmakers, the queer Latino subjects depicted in their work, and the consumers of these texts.

Memory, or rather the means by which memory is preserved, contributes largely to the ways in which we understand concepts of gay citizenship in today’s culture. Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* offers valuable insights on how history-making operates. One of the leading scholars in the field of performance studies today, Diana Taylor considers how Latino/American subjectivity relates to and experiences the processes of representing, archiving, and preserving history and cultures. Interrogating the typical conception that history and historiography somehow represent an objective version of the “truth,” Taylor develops two key concepts: the archive and the repertoire. These two concepts do not exist in opposition to one another, nor are they meant to exist in terms of a binary (22); at the same time, these two terms cannot be understood away from each other.

Taylor explains that the archive refers to tangential and concrete forms typically associated with methods of accessing the past (i.e., books, videos, films, photographs, drawings) as well as methods associated with *recording* and *preserving* the past (i.e., museums, a collection, libraries, memorial buildings) (19). The archive is etymologically
and intrinsically connected to hegemonic power structures: “Archive, from the Greek, etymologically refers to ‘a public building,’ ‘a place where records are kept.’ From arkhe, it also means a beginning, the first place, the government” (19). Its emphasis on hierarchy suggests that the archive is a tool generally used to advance and sustain the hegemony of a teleological philosophy. Moreover, the fact that the archive invokes bodies such as “a public building,” “a place where records are kept,” and “the government” indicates that it (might) align more closely with the interests of those who are in legally sanctioned and relevant power structures than with forms of citizenship that pose a threat to such structures. Taylor also argues that the objects within the archive only are defined and confined to the given method of representation, which she sees as deliberate and subjective. Finally, the archive is not stable or permanent; it is often designed to accommodate and protect the changing needs and desires of hegemonic structures (19).

Though Taylor warns against binaries, it is hard not to conceive of the archive in terms of what is officially sanctioned within the public (legal citizenship) and of the repertoire in terms of affective citizenship. Her development of the repertoire as a series of performances “usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” supports this claim (20). Taylor offers the example of a video of a performance to illustrate the difference between the archive and the repertoire: “a video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire” (20). Because it is not selected as an official representation of history, the repertoire is not conceived in terms of stability or objectivity. Taylor specifies that the repertoire is commonly and erroneously thought of as belonging to the past, in turn emphasizing the role of the archive in promoting
teleological approaches to history. For Taylor, performance is not unrecoverable; instead, it replicates “through…structures and codes.” Taylor writes,

This means that the repertoire, like the archive is mediated. The process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission takes place within (and in turn helps constitute) specific systems of representation…They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next. Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge. (21)

Much like Muñoz’s take on disidentification, identification, and counteridentification, Taylor’s conceptualization of the archive and the repertoire serves to describe how the (archived) repertoire of visual culture is a valuable site to explore the process through which locas participate in a radical authorship of the self. The films I discuss here are all connected through the dynamics among the locas’ performance, how the performance is captured or mediated, the intention to record and preserve the performance, and what the performance represents in the context of gay legal and affective citizenship in the United States. In this way, reading Trash and Stonewall simultaneously as archives of a mainstream gay history and as repertoires of loca performance stresses the tensions and contradictions at the heart of my analysis.

Because of their roots in both the “official” nature of archiving and preserving, and the performativity of the repertoire, I read Trash and Stonewall as part of the tradition of U.S. queer cinema, which I see as being deeply engaged in replicating both processes, anxiously preserving a particular view of a “history,” but also providing—often unknowingly—access to a series of performances that expose or challenge hegemonic practices and institutions. For example, Barbara Mennel notes that, “drag queens were instrumental in ushering in the new era of gay rights but then turned into an emblem of the past during the 1970s” (62). I do think it is important to make the
distinction here that it was specifically drag queens of color who "ushered in the new era of gay rights," but Mennel’s claim exemplifies my argument regarding the liminal but seemingly central space locas occupy in queer visual culture. While they are celebrated for their (often comedic) “contributions” to the contemporary gay rights movement, they represent a past that can only be remembered as such—their representations are of something safely dead and preserved as a "memory" which is now somehow again safely past. We see this in the review of Trash from The Advocate included in the previous section, a patronizing review that memorializes the film nostalgically in such a way that the author can celebrate it as an archive of something that is no longer here, something that went from “we shall overcome” to something we overcame.

The failure of Stonewall as a profitable and culturally relevant film in the context of a major boom of gay-targeted Hollywood movies seems to further point to a disinterest from gay audiences (rather than artists, historians, activists, and scholars) in a politicized past. Instead, the gay-themed movies that succeeded at the time focused on the contemporary face and body of gay rights, which was represented as white, upper middle class, and masculine. In this context, a movie about the politics of a gay Latina drag queen may have been doomed before it even started; the film may have been interested in presenting this element of the archive, but the larger power structures at hand were not. Only through the repertoire can we move away from a view of locas as tools and victims of the archive of gay history in the U.S. only through the repertoire can we see locas, not as catalysts for a dissatisfying progress or as relics of the past, but as performers who by replicating codes and traditions “generate, record, and
transmit knowledge,” a knowledge that challenges traditional codes of “good”
citizenship.

I situate Trash and Stonewall within the tradition of queer cinema in the United
States. The value of using the term “queer cinema” here stems from the term’s ability to
conjure a sort of catalogue, an archive of sorts, of the different ways in which queer
people have coded their subjectivity in the popular consciousness. Queer cinema
describes more than movies specifically about gay characters or “gay issues”; rather,
“queer cinema also includes the traces of a hidden presence, readable in its imprints,
inferences, subtexts, and styles” (Mennel 2). Hence, queer cinema catalogues and
appropriates films, which can be seen as permanent records of the ephemeral;
Mennel’s writing of the “imprints, inferences, subtexts, and styles” closely match
Taylor’s earlier description of the repertoire as performances of “irreproducible
knowledge.” Through this understanding, I see queer cinema as an allegory of the
LGBT rights movement—it cements a properly public image of what an LGBT citizen
should be while offering a space for an analysis that finds nuances and inconsistencies
within that image.

While the topic of queer cinema has been covered extensively by renowned
canonical critics like Ruby B. Rich and Jon Dyer, I find Barbara Mennel’s take on the
term in her 2012 book Queer Cinema: Schoolgirls, Vampires, and Gay Cowboys to be
the most relevant to my understanding of queer cinema and, more importantly, to my
reading of Trash and Stonewall as politically relevant. Early in her argument, Mennel
writes that queer cinema is “inherently political” because it “[represents] defamed
desires and [allows] audiences an effective engagement with them” (2). This is possibly
the most important point in Mennel’s understanding of queer cinema, the basis of her
definition argument of the term, and an idea she returns to throughout the text. This idea
is further stressed when she writes about “the complex interconnections between
politics and aesthetics that fueled the film developments of what we now call ‘queer
cinema’” (5), a type of queer aesthetics that “challenge the cinematic conventions based
on gender-normative heterosexuality” (4). I do not see Mennel’s statements that queer
cinema is “inherently political” as a way of saying that all films archived under the label
“queer cinema” are politically subversive. Rather, it speaks to the impossibility of
representing the queer body without engaging with the politics that inform that body’s
subjectivity, especially since historically, mainstream narrative cinema has been thought
to operate mostly based on capitalist, heterosexual, white masculine desires; being part
of the archive, queer cinema cannot be apolitical or objective.

The queer aesthetic of the films I discuss here, either from a formal perspective
or a performance perspective, produce a complex and rich text. Mennel’s focus on the
interactions between aesthetics and politics places value on the power of the repertoire
as a series of acts reproduced and passed down. Throughout history the ways in which
these codes manifest themselves and the ways in which they are read by (queer and
heteronormative) audiences have obviously shifted, expanded, and also become
constrained. As Mennel explains, the well-to-do, white, and masculine gay man
prevalent in film representations of today is a “different incarnation” from the monstrous
queer figure of Peter Lorrey in films like The Maltese Falcon (John Huston, 1941) and
even earlier (Mennel 1); we can extrapolate that the tragic hero or the sassy queen
represent other iterations. What I like about the idea of “iteration” (which is connected to
Butler’s idea of gender as iterative) is that it disrupts a teleological reading of queer cinema, which can replicate understandings of present citizenship and the past as something embarrassing and tragic.

Mennel’s (and Butler’s) “iterations” closely resembles Taylor’s take on performance and the repertoire; it accounts for the presence of a character like the tragic gay person such as Rayon, played to Oscar-winning effect by straight-identified actor Jared Leto, in the 2013 film Dallas Buyers Club (Dir: Jean-Marc Vallée). Vallée’s film is a fictionalized account of the real life story of Ron Woodrof, depicted in the film as a straight man that contracted HIV in the 1980s and fought the FDA to import HIV medication was less harmful than AZT. The film’s script is pretty conventional; it depicts Ron’s growth from a deeply homophobic straight man into a defender and literal savior of gay people once he contracts the disease that defined the 1980s public image of queer people in the United States. Key to Ron’s triumph is Rayon, a drug-addicted HIV-positive drag queen who is kind to Ron despite his homophobic tirades against him; following traditional Hollywood narratives, the two eventually become (strictly platonic) best friends. By the end of the film Rayon dies and is greatly grieved over by the straight characters; his death will not be in vain, no, he will be turned into a cause, a martyr, a symbol that can make both heterosexual and gay people feel good about how far we have come. As the iteration of the “magical drag queen” (like the figure of the “magical black man”) Rayon is welcomed into the archive with open arms.

The audience and critical reception of a character like Rayon (Leto won nearly every award imaginable) in 2013 complicates notions that images of tragic queer people belong to the past of queer cinema. Teleological approaches would suggest that the
increasing visibility of gay characters in mainstream cinema (i.e., Hollywood movies, independent films released to a wide audience, etc.) that characterized the 1980s represents a sort of triumph for gay people. While more visibility meant that “audiences could see socially conscious, liberal films that portrayed gay and lesbians in enlightened contexts,” this visibility came at the cost of “the diversity of representation found in camp, B-movies and exploitation films, which slowly disappeared throughout the 1980s” (Mennel 51). It should be clear that these two options, the pre-1980s “camp, B-movies and exploitation films” or the later “liberal films” about gay people, represent problematic “choices” for queer Latino performers. Yes, the so-called “liberal films” provided Latino performers with less acting opportunities or more limited agency when they were represented; yet, it is important to note that the queer aesthetics of “trash cinema and B movies” from queer white artists like Andy Warhol and Jack Smith was developed by “embracing the abject and perversions in the form of trash, drag and camp” (Mennel 36).

As I will discuss toward the end of this section, for these artists “trash, drag and camp” were interchangeable, and most importantly for this discussion, were generally equated to Nuyorican drag performers; as the visual surrogates of trash (metaphorical but also literal trash), an entire form of queer aesthetics was developed at the expense of locas. This queer aesthetics could exist, in part, because “unlike white middle-class gay men, boricuas seemed more comfortable with publicly performing and enjoying their sexuality...and inhabited space in highly visible ways (Negrón-Muntaner 107). This makes them ideal performers for white artists who, as Negrón-Muntaner argues, could develop an aesthetic based on a view of Nuyorican locas as “inexpensive ‘found
objects,’ that could be useful in the making of art and/or as performing commodities” (111).

I mentioned earlier that queer cinema functions as an all-encompassing term for a large range of films whose only consistency is the use of what can be described as a set of queer aesthetics. Given that the two films I discuss here are produced by queer white filmmakers and are preoccupied with 1960s New York culture in the United States, I discuss the scope of queer cinema to refer to films directed and/or produced by queer white artists made for a primarily white audience.

*Trash* and *Stonewall* attempt to imagine the Nuyorican body in relationship to dominant narratives of affective and legal citizenship for Nuyoricans. For example, Holly’s demand for welfare, which takes over the last section of the film, can be understood in relationship to traditional discourse about Puerto Ricans as “bad” citizens who are dependent on taking from the state rather than contribute to it. Negrón-Muntaner explains how welfare became a symbol for what was perceived as the inherent “culture of poverty” of Puerto Ricans in New York to such an extent that “J. Peter Grace, a Reagan appointee, labeled the federal food stamp program ‘basically a Puerto Rican program’” (23). This type of discourse aligns with Morrissey’s project to portray “the worst” of 1960s culture. In *Stonewall*, Sylvia Rivera, through La Miranda, is instead recuperated not in terms of her Rican-ness or Latinidad but rather in relationship to a demand for the kinds of rights that benefitted a homogenized LGBT, not Rican or

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7 That *Stonewall* is produced by a British company and has a British director does not exclude it from this take. The film has an all-American cast, preserves a pivotal moment in U.S. history, and delves in a series of genres endemic to U.S. cinema.
Latino, community. If Morrissey imagined Holly as part of the worst of modern society, we can see how he tied this moral decay to the already pejorative images of Puerto Ricans in New York. If Finch imagined La Miranda, and in turn Sylvia Rivera, as a key participant of the Stonewall Riots, then we can see how he attempted to archive the role _locas_ played in a well-known moment that is considered to have impacted the course of U.S. civil rights. Latinos in these films are not quite invisible; they are archived to fit the particular intentions of white filmmakers within a specific time period.

The enlisting of Latino/a bodies with the purpose of advancing dominant ideology firmly aligns with traditions associated with queer cinema and the work of queer white artists who “repurpose” Latino/a performers not only to advance their respective political interests, but their financial and critical success as well. The casting of Holly Woodlawn in _Trash_, and the film’s reliance on Holly’s performance for its success (during filming and during the marketing of the film after its release), as well as the way _Stonewall_ carefully uses Sylvia Rivera’s story without using her name to avoid legal and financial commitments to Rivera, the person, reflect how implicated these two films are in this process. Negrón-Muntaner addresses the effects of the unbalanced power dynamics between the artists and the performers on the reception of the films, a reception that replicates and reinforces this lack of balance. Negrón-Muntaner writes of how “uneven power relations have resulted in a situation in which white queer artists are valued for their contributions to ‘art’ (theater, painting, film), while Puerto Ricans and other Latinos involved in these cultural projects are routinely ignored” (111). Looking at this moment in her argument in the context of this project recalls questions of authorship and agency. My analysis of these films seeks to disrupt the conception of white queer artists as the
authors of great art, and queer Latino performers as the objects/subjects. I argue that the concepts of the archive and the repertoire expand the modes available for thinking about the artistic contributions of queer Latino/a bodies to the aesthetics of queer cinema as well as its investment in the political realities of queer citizens in the United States.

In both of the academic fields that are the basis for my approach to this project, feminist Latina/o and Puerto Rican scholarship and white queer theory, performance has been largely adopted as an element of subjectivity that complicates, muddles the many binaries—dominant/passive, victim/oppressor, gazer/gazed, author/subject—we associate with the representation of minority cultures by those with more social capital. Significant to an analysis that considers the intersection of race and sexuality, performance theory places a strong value on the body and the body as a site of potential. One of the reasons I invest in performance theory here, especially as advanced by Latino/a and/or queer scholars, to write about the queer Latino body is because it privileges the potential of the body to generate both subversive and oppressive effects. Thus, it allows for a reading of the body as something that can tap into its subversive potential, but also as something that can be used to regulate or mediate that body, never considering these two processes as mutually exclusive. As Taylor writes, it is this “very undefinability” that makes performance such a valuable approach: “Performance carries the possibility of challenge, even self-challenge...As a term simultaneously connoting a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world, it far exceeds the possibilities of these other words offered in its place” (15). Seeing
performance as “a mode of transmission” and “as a means of intervening in the world” supports the potential of performance to transmit “traumatic memory, drawing from and transforming a shared archive and repertoire of cultural images” (Taylor 187). The similarities and differences between the memories shaped by the archive and those shaped by the repertoire (i.e., the performance and the image) create valuable ruptures to explore and discuss the portrayal of queer Latino bodies in American visual culture.

Despite a seeming disinterest in the dynamic between race, and gender and sexual identity that is so present in Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire*, a work immensely preoccupied with the gendered, sexual, and classed subjectivity of Latino/as and Latin Americans, Judith Butler’s seminal writings on gender and sexual identity performance are also valuable to my analysis. Butler sees the body as “a set of possibilities,” a “historical situation,” and as “a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation” (189). In these analyses of the body’s performance, Butler and Taylor keep emphasizing the body’s inherent connection to history. For them, situating performance within the historical context from which it emerges and within the historical context from which it is being analyzed, opens up sites for “cultural transformation” (188); in fact, the word “transformation” comes up often in both Taylor and Butler’s discussions of the body’s potential to challenge normative iteration of gender performances. Evoking Muñoz’s scholarship on disidentification (which owes to Butler’s work), Butler sees the body’s inability to function outside of the norm as what allows for the potential for transformation to even exist. Her argument that “When the norm appears at once to guarantee and threaten social survival…then conforming and resisting become a compounded and paradoxical relation to the norm, a form of
suffering and a potential site for politicization” (217) is central to my reading of Trash and Stonewall as films that both threaten and guarantee the “social survival” of Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera, thus representing tools for what Butler refers to as “politicization.”

For Negrón-Muntaner, the camp aesthetic critics ascribe to the work of white queer artists like Paul Morrissey and Jack Smith elides the large role the performance of Nuyorican performers had in contributing to this aesthetic. Thus, the tradition of recognizing the artistic achievements of the queer white artist at the expense of crediting the contribution of queer Latino performers remains intact. For example, Negrón-Muntaner quotes The New York Times’ review of Trash, which praises Holly Woodlawn’s performance by arguing that it is the “wit and warmth” of her performance that elevates this one film from the other films produced by the Factory, yet it “does not link Woodlawn’s outstanding performance to her ethnicity or transcultural identity” (106). Quoting Woodlawn saying that “everything” she did as a performer was “Puerto Rican,” Negrón-Muntaner argues that the camp performed by Woodlawn (and I extrapolate this argument to the kind of identity performance Stonewall attempts to capture from Guillermo Díaz’ La Miranda) was “not camp as defined by queer white men, but a kindred sensibility that [queer Nuyorican performers] saw as a cultural resource, without fully grasping the difference,” a performance that combined the comedic aspects of exaggerating social norms with something more “heartfelt” in its attempt to seek a connection with the audience (110). I would like to explore this idea further, an analysis of the queer Latino performance in Trash and Stonewall based on the assumption that the particularities of the performances as (valued), repurposed “trash” are rooted in and
attempting to reproduce the racial specificities of Nuyorican drag culture in the late 1960s.

**How Can I Tell If He Loves Me So? Is It In His Eyes? Holly and La Miranda through the White Gaze**

By closely engaging with *Trash* and *Stonewall*, this section seeks to explore how the queer white gaze enlists the queer Nuyorican body to benefit its own ideals, focusing on the effects of this process in relationship to affective and legal citizenship. I first discuss the relationship between the queer white directors and the use of locas as performers; since both films center on the relationship between a white protagonist and a Latina queen, I create a parallel between the way the relationship plays out on screen and the tradition of queer white artists using locas to advance dominant goals. Furthermore, I look at how this queer cinema tradition from which both films emerge tends to depict Stonewall-era locas as primitive, which I argue works to reaffirm the progress of LGBT people in the U.S. From this discussion, I begin to analyze the interplay between Nuyorican queerness and depictions of sex and sexuality. My portrayal of the public gay movement in the U.S. emphasizes the trend of de-queering the gay male body; I am interested in how the films treat the sexual aspect of the loca figure and how the sexual identity of each character is central to issues of history and citizenship. All throughout I concentrate on the regulation of locas’ cultural and legal citizenship; therefore, the section ends with a discussion of the tensions between locas and legal institutions as a way to address the challenges locas pose to normative modes of regulation from the nation-state.

To think about locas in these films in relationship to the archive and the repertoire, we have to consider the filter through which the characters are presented to
us. Directed by two queer white directors, *Trash* and *Stonewall* center on two white male protagonists; *locas* in these texts are only seen in terms of what they mean to the journey of the white protagonist, and in turn, for the queer white director at the helm. Still, the particularities of Woodlawn and Rivera as performers and/or subjects is important here, since as Lawrence LaFountain-Stokes explains, Woodlawn is “more often known for [her] association with gay, white avant-garde artists,” and though he recognizes that “Sylvia Rivera’s activist/political ‘performance’…is of quite a different nature from that of individuals in the world of the arts,” her case is still “similar in the ways in which she construed a public persona, one that served to advance a collective desire for political rights” (xxiv). Hence, it is impossible to conceive of the images of Holly Woodlawn or Sylvia Rivera (through La Miranda) as detached from their relationship to dominant culture. Framed under the white protagonist’s narrative and by the white director’s gaze, Woodlawn and Rivera are turned into narrative tools, symbols and devices designed to serve the intentions of the text. Thus, we can understand the films to function as archives of each director’s take of a particular moment in queer history, at the same time as they work as a repertoire of the tradition of using queer brown bodies to ratify hegemonic values, a tradition upon which a large portion of queer cinema and queer historiography has been built. To further explain this process, I turn to the movies themselves and the white protagonist-Latino/a lover dynamic at the center of both texts.

    Whereas a lot of the criticism pertaining to Holly Woodlawn’s turn as Holly in *Trash* centers on Woodlawn’s incandescent performance and its effects, I do not think enough attention has been paid to Holly’s relationship with Joe, and thus, the
character’s function from a narrative perspective. Really, writing about Holly’s narrative function inevitably brings the Holly/Joe relationship to the forefront because, in terms of the narrative, Holly (the character) is intended to exist in relationship to Joe. It is Joe who undoubtedly drives the story: his pursuit of the score and resulting inability to achieve an erection act as the narrative thread that connects the various scenes in the film. Yet, Joe’s journey has very little meaning without his relationship with Holly; it is she who raises the stakes.

I argue that Holly’s significance to the narrative is evidenced by the particularity of her character, how different she is from everyone else in the movie. Holly cares about Joe, what he does affects her, what she does gets to him, and when she is not on screen the audience understands that Joe’s actions have an impact on someone. In Holly’s opening scene, Morrissey relies on tropes associated with “social issue” dramas to depict Holly and Joe as a couple with money troubles. Joe curses at Holly, then he proceeds to fall asleep while she is talking to him about the little work he does and her expectations of him as the man of the house. Rather than acting casual or apathetic to Joe falling asleep, Holly flips out, calling him a “damn shit,” a “motherfucker,” and a “mooch.” In the director’s commentary featured on the DVD release, Morrissey says he imagined Joe and Holly as a family unwilling to adapt to American values. However, Holly’s anger at Joe and the language she uses to talk about him flips the type of discourse used to describe Nuyoricans in the United States. Holly has certain demands she expects from Joe, a white male who is defined here by his inability and unwillingness to listen to her. Here, Joe is the one who is framed in relationship to failure; he is the one who relies on Holly to survive and Holly’s use of the word “mooch”
to refer to him plays with the common representation of Rican as reliant on white people for their own survival. At the same time, in its reliance on conventional modes of portraying abject poor couples, the setup also serves to cement Morrissey’s inability to imagine disenfranchised characters outside of this specific trope.

Featuring a more typical lead character, *Stonewall* does not need La Miranda to give relevance to Matty’s actions, yet La Miranda serves to exoticize and also romanticize Matty’s journey. To be fair, as a character, La Miranda has more narrative agency than Holly. While the camera in *Trash* almost exclusively follows Joe—there is only one scene in *Trash* with Holly that does not feature Joe—La Miranda is firmly a co-lead in *Stonewall*, with the camera often following her even as Matty is both the audience surrogate and the director’s privileged lead. Still, the film opens with a shot of La Miranda’s lips as she is putting on lipstick and closes with a close-up of La Miranda’s face, giving her a prominence in the narrative that Holly simply does not have.

Even so, two montages at the top of the film frame La Miranda in relationship to two normativized figures: that of a 1990s version of Stonewall and that of the white male protagonist. The first montage follows the opening shot, and it consists of various real-life “talking heads”—LGBT activists involved with Stonewall, mostly white men—giving soundbites emphasizing the significance of Stonewall. This montage leads to another shot of La Miranda’s lips as she delivers a line saying that there are a lot of stories about Stonewall, which is followed by a cut to La Miranda in drag lip-syncing to a song. The performance cues a second montage sequence that intercuts images of La Miranda getting in drag and images of Matty traveling (like the small-town boy cliché he is, Matty is penniless and goes from a small town to the big city on a bus) and arriving to
New York City. What these montages reveal to me is Finch’s insistence on creating a visual association between La Miranda and white gay culture; in other words, La Miranda’s agency as a narrative subject relies on her ties to more dominant structures. The first montage imagines La Miranda in terms of Stonewall narratives, and so she becomes a key participant in an institution credited with engendering contemporary forms of white gay citizenship in the U.S. Similarly, the second montage visually connects the lives of La Miranda and Matty, foreshadowing their eventual romance, but more importantly to my point, figuring La Miranda’s narrative significance in terms of her relationship to the white protagonist. More than a character, La Miranda is a catalyst for two key changes Matty experiences in the story, she’s the magical drag queen that engenders his sexual awakening and his political awareness, changes I argue mirror the gay movement’s relationship with locas. Thus, both of these montages visually suggest that loca subjectivity is only valuable and only worth representing when considering its role in preserving and benefitting the hegemonic values of queer white masculinity.

The idea of La Miranda as an agent of change for Matty mirrors Sylvia Rivera’s role in the history of gay rights in the U.S. I have written about Rivera’s contemporary status as the “Rosa Parks” of the gay movement, a symbol of the national gay male citizen’s political becoming. Similarly, in Stonewall, Matty becomes aware of the dangers of being an out gay man from his interactions with La Miranda. Matty first meets La Miranda at the entrance of the bar when the doorman denies Matty entrance and La Miranda lies saying that Matty is with her, which grants Matty admission to the place. Quite literally, it is La Miranda who allows Matty to enter Stonewall. Later that
night, the police harasses La Miranda for wearing female clothes (an illegal practice in New York City for biological men at the time) during a raid at the bar; when Matty stands up for La Miranda, he gets beaten up by the police and sent to jail along with her.

Another moment of political awareness comes when La Miranda gets a draft notice later in the movie and is sent to get a psych evaluation for showing up to the draft office in drag. Matty dresses up in her clothes and pretends to be her during the evaluation, keeping her from being drafted or jailed. Matty’s own relationship with politics reflects the gay movement’s historical ties to Sylvia Rivera and other queens of color who are credited with opening up political avenues for gay people in the U.S.

Parallel to the journey of political awakening, the film follows the romantic relationship between the two leads. Given the film’s reliance on Hollywood tropes, La Miranda represents the sexually experienced, older female figure while Matty is the naïve and inexperienced small-town guy who comes of age through a sexual relationship with the female figure. Assigning the sexually adventurous role to the Nuyorican queer character follows LaFountain-Stokes’ assertion that “it is, after all, in pornography and in the sex trade where the naked or scantily clad diasporic Puerto Rican male body is most commonly exhibited for public consumption, often for a non-Puerto Rican gay audience” (154). Stonewall does not itself focus much on the “naked or scantily clad Puerto Rican male body,” a detail I further analyze later; however, the first sexual encounter between Matty and La Miranda starts with Matty asking La Miranda to let him see her naked body. Moreover, Sylvia Rivera’s work as a prostitute informs the sexualization of Matty through La Miranda, highlighting the value of queer Nuyorican subjectivity to the sexual awakening and enjoyment of white gay male desire.
Writing a historical take on Andy Warhol and those involved with the Factory in *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties*, Steve Watson takes issue with Woodlawn’s performance in particular: “Woodlawn was the best-known of the three [leads]…But Holly’s attempt to outdo his *Trash* performance seemed strident, particularly since there was no Joe Dallesandro as a counterbalance in the scenes” (406). Watson not only dismisses Woodlawn’s acting as cheap and unsophisticated, but he sees the failure of the performance as directly tied to the fact it is not there to serve the performance/journey of a white, heteronormative star. This point is emphasized by Watson’s further comment that white drag performer Candy Darling steals the spotlight from Woodlawn by playing up her elegance. Watson writes that,

Candy Darling provided a cooler note, playing a postdebutante socialite, snobbish, and bored…Candy’s role offered him a chance to display hauteur and glamour,” before listing all the classy, famous people, such as Jane Fonda and Truman Capote, with whom Darling was seen. (406)

Whereas Woodlawn’s performance “fails” for being obnoxiously loud in Watson’s view, it is Darling’s glamorous performance that comes across as nuanced and “cooler,” stressing the way in which, when on its own, Nuyorican queerness is seen as loud and trashy, while visual representations of whiteness can be appreciated as “high culture” (here represented by an actor whose “transgression” into drag can be rescued through artistic practices such as say the classic, Shakespearean tradition of male actors playing biological females).  

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8 This dynamic is still present today. As I discuss in the next chapter, on the reality TV show RuPaul’s Drag Race the Puerto Rican/Nuyorican contestants tend to be dismissed as less sophisticated than their white cohorts.
The dominance of white culture is generally validated by a depreciation of the work of the Latina/o performer; actually, it is this depreciation that allows white queer artists to use Latina/o performers for little money while making sure they receive the credit. Published in 2003, Watson’s writing echoes a review of Trash from 1971 published in the magazine *Encounter* which claims that,

Miss Holly, with her fuzz of dirty hair, her bird-like movements and her mad chatter, must take the all-time prize for ghouliness…There is no suggestion that Holly is an actress, although in a way I suppose she must be; she just exists in her sheer and total awfulness. (Weightman, qtd in Davies 117)

Though written about thirty years before Watson’s piece, this review again focuses on Holly Woodlawn’s “mad,” “fuzzy,” and ultimately “ghoulish” mode of being; at the same time, it sees Woodlawn’s artistic talent as accidental, something that works because she is who she is: too untalented, too ignorant, and too rudimentary to overcome her own “sheer awfulness” which then allows the critic to praise the effects of the performance over the performance itself. These reviews of Holly’s performance begin to reinforce the idea of Holly herself as a trashy “found object” enlisted to advance the artistic expression and financial rewards of Paul Morrissey and Andy Warhol. Such a reading of Holly Woodlawn’s performance manages to reduce the ability of the performer in order to posit the praise back into the hands of the queer white artist who was able to archive the “natural” state of the raced body. The work of critics is complicit in reaffirming this process.

Meant to *archive* history, the portrayal of the Nuyorican characters in *Trash* and *Stonewall* instead represents a repertoire of how these queer brown bodies allow for a critique of that history and tradition. What both movies do is take the “bad abject (queer, ethnic, racialized, lower class) citizen” represented by *locas* and refashion it as
something that can be of use to support the normative activity of domestic and nationalist narrative structures. The refashioning of locas can be thought of as recycling, which reflects a larger tendency from white normative gay culture to imagine lower-class, effeminate forms of Puerto Rican and Nuyorican masculinity as raw, “trashy, ugly, and ‘primitive’” (Negrón-Muntaner 113) much like the critiques of Holly Woodlawn above exemplify. Moreover, this tradition is rooted in late 1960s/early 1970s conceptions of Nuyoricans/Puerto Ricans, further adding to the race-specific aspect of my analysis.

The setting of the films creates a natural connection to the practices and aesthetics associated with the representation of Nuyorican queer bodies as trashy and primitive. In both films the location (New York City) and year (1969/1970) could be seen as their own character. For Holly, the streets of New York are her source of material property, and hence a significant source for her survival. Though we only see her in the streets once, one of Holly’s defining features as a character is the fact she collects garbage from the streets to use at the home she shares with Joe. The streets of New York then operate as a valuable resource for Holly. This point is stressed throughout: in her opening scene, Holly has just brought a bathroom sink and a mattress from the streets; later, in one of the most emotionally poignant moments in the film, Holly mentions she picked up a drawer to use as a basinet for her sister’s baby, which she planned to raise with Joe, before catching her trying to have sex with Joe.

La Miranda, on the other hand, has a more conflicted relationship with New York City. La Miranda is often seen standing on the streets of New York, walking outside, and attending various locations across the city, the Stonewall bar being one of them. As the audience, we are supposed to understand that La Miranda grew up on the streets, even
as the film erases hints that, like Holly in *Trash*, in actuality Rivera also used the streets as a resource for survival in the form of sex work and, more directly, because she was often homeless and found herself on the streets. The film does make an effort to paint the streets as a familiar place for La Miranda that was still dangerous to her cultural citizenship, her legal citizenship, and her physical life. The various scenes featuring police brutality and hostility from civilians (including white queers) toward La Miranda establish the tense relationship between La Miranda and the historically specific setting that surrounds her.

Earlier in this chapter, I wrote about how late 1960s/early 1970s queer representation is tied to “garbage aesthetics” that emerge largely from the “recycling” of queer Nuyorican bodies. These queer aesthetics are not merely confined to the realm of art, but are directly connected to the subjectivity of Nuyoricans as citizens in the U.S. For instance, “during the 1960s and 1970s, the height of the queer avant-garde, it was common to conflate unsanitary conditions or devalued objects with *boricuas*” (Negrón-Muntaner 112). At the same time, “Images of New York as a city in ruins were common during the 1970s, a period of great social unrest, white middle-class abandonment and flight to the suburbs, landlord dereliction, urban riots, high crime rates, and neighborhood burnouts” (LaFountain-Stokes 38). By representing the Nuyorican characters as “devalued objects,” both *Trash* and *Stonewall* depict these characters as part of the failed fabric of New York City as “a city in ruins.” From the perspective of the last years of the 1960s, anxiety about what the city might become, and who then will be the ruined city’s “natural” inhabitants, inflects the underlying ideological project of trash while it allows for a magical coming-of-age experience for the white character, and
indeed for the film’s gay historiography in *Stonewall*. The urban aesthetic of each film is then directly connected to choices related to creating a visual archive of Nuyorican gay citizenship from the perspective of a white artist.

Warhol and Morrissey definitely ascribed to this view of Nuyorican queens. Though produced by the Warhol Factory, Morrissey and Holly Woodlawn have insisted that Warhol’s involvement in the Morrissey films was reduced to his monetary investment and marquee value. However, the fact Andy Warhol funded the project is still relevant to an analysis of the modes of production, especially since regardless of how much he was involved in the actual making of the film, the critical and financial success of the movie as well as its place in the canon of avant-garde or underground queer cinema undoubtedly benefitted Andy Warhol and the Warhol brand. In *Boricua Pop*, Frances Negrón-Muntaner writes that “During a 1980 trip to Miami, Warhol claimed that ‘New York to Miami is the worst line to go on, everybody’s so ugly and Puerto Rican and Cuban and South American, it’s just sort of disgusting’ (113). Warhol also writes about drag with condescension and distaste; in journal entries he published in 1975, he writes about drag queens:

I’m not saying it’s the right thing to do, I’m not saying it’s a good idea, I’m not saying it’s not self-defeating and self-destructive, and I’m not saying it’s not possibly the most absurd thing a man can do with his life. What I’m saying is, it’s very hard work. You can’t take that away from them. (54)

Warhol constantly seeks to position himself as the observer whose white privilege and artistic fame gives him the right to view Latinidad as “ugly” and “disgusting,” and to pathologize drag as “self-defeating” and “self-destructive.” If the theoretical concept of double jeopardy is taken into account, then we can extrapolate that because of the intersectionality of Latinidad and drag, Warhol sees Latina drag queens as the ugliest,
most disgusting, most absurd beings. Yet, it is in these seemingly inferior beings that he finds a way to express his art, build his brand, and to make a profit. Indeed, the Factory largely succeeded as a business based on Warhol’s practice of paying performers a very small amount of money for their work, or not paying them at all, and providing drugs, alcohol, and very temporary shelter as payment (Negrón-Muntaner 97).

A much less performative speaker than Warhol, Paul Morrissey’s take on drag performers is less incendiary than Warhol’s while still revealing a patronizing distance that reaffirms the white gazer/brown performer dynamic. Morrissey does give a certain credit to the work of Nuyorican queer performers when he talks about the endurance of his art by speaking of them as “movie stars”:

A couple of hundred years from now if you look back on the 20th century you will remember the movie stars. They are the people who truly dominate…People are interested in film and the performers…I don’t think they’ll talk much about directors. Or the painters. Or the writers. But I think Holly Woodlawn will be remembered. (Morrissey qtd in Yacowar 5)

Yet he still replicates the misconception that Woodlawn’s talent has more to do with him and his eye as an artist than with her acting ability: “Holly struck me then as now as a basically very shy and unassuming person, unfailingly polite and instantaneously likeable…That so much determination and energy lurked beneath this façade was still, that first afternoon, only another hunch” (Morrissey qtd in Watson 404). Writing of Holly’s talents as “lurking beneath a façade” puts him in the position of the discoverer, the one with the talent to uncover the raw material Woodlawn’s acting represents. The fact he intended Trash to be a moralistic film about how “[t]here’s no difference between a person using drugs and a piece of refuse” (Morrissey qtd in Davies 18) speaks to his view of himself as a more advanced or moral person than his subjects.
My focus on Morrissey and Warhol’s comments on drag queens and people of color seeks to make an argument about how the specific aesthetics of *Trash* and *Stonewall* are indelibly tied to general ideas about the visual representation of subjects who had very little value as citizens in the eyes of those doing the archiving. In terms of aesthetics, *Trash* is considered both a continuation of Warhol’s work and as a departure from it. In “The Producer as Author,” David James argues that Morrissey’s direction continued some of the key elements that identified Warhol’s cinema: “the largely uninflected gaze of the camera with its movement restricted to pans and zooms…Cuts are not bridged by sound continuity nor are scenes broken down into shot/reverse-shot form…the spectator is stranded upon the self-consciousness of the performance” (143). On the other hand, James and other critics recognize that once he got to *Trash*, Morrissey’s aesthetic was much more commercial than Warhol’s. For example, in *The Black Hole of the Camera: The Films of Andy Warhol*, J.J Murphy explains that the screenplay of *Trash* has a clearly defined structure with clear scenes that have a narrative objective; in addition, in *Trash* the use of “disjunctive strobe cuts disappear[s] altogether and the performances become much more conventional…and the camerawork simply serves the narrative” (235). Addressing the commonalities and departures of Morrissey in developing his aesthetic, James and Murphy’s descriptions both highlight the use of aesthetic choices to serve the performances. Hence, we can see how the queer aesthetics from this time period privilege the performance, giving the work of queer Nuyorican performers a certain level of agency.

With this agency came hard work; the low-budget aesthetics of these films should not be equated with less work for the performers. Negrón-Muntaner explains that
“the lack of camera movement and the barebones outline or script were compensated by the intense labor of the performer, who had to costume him/herself, improvise the dialogue, and create filmable material—in only few takes” (97). To think of aesthetics developed from the hard labor of Latino performers produces two separate but related understandings of the performers’ agency in the mode of production and visual product. On one hand, the Latino performer is exploited in the name of the white artist’s expression, giving up credit for the performance as well as any type of ownership. On the other hand, this mode of production is what allows for the Latino performer to negotiate a complex and contested agency of artistic output.

Despite their very different aesthetics, the films ultimately regulate the racialized body through various methods. The aesthetics serve to deal with the issue of politics since as I mentioned earlier, the mere presence of Nuyorican queer bodies brings into question the politics involved in their representation. Queer of color scholar Roderick A. Ferguson sees the regulation of racialized bodies as a project that affirms normative history making by painting it as universal, while diminishing the racialized body as “Other.” But as you have noted Holly is white and proud of it. Ferguson pays close attention to the figure of the black prostitute from a historical perspective, which makes his work especially valuable to this analysis given that Sylvia Rivera and Holly Woodlawn both occupy a similar role in their respective films (beside the fact that outside of the films, they both hustled sex for a living at one point or another). Ferguson focuses his reading of the black prostitute on the concept of universalization, a concept that is imperative to my critique of the public gay rights movement. Ferguson argues that,
The universalization of heteropatriarchy produces the prostitute as the other of heteropatriarchal ideals, an other that is simultaneously the effect of racial, gender, sexual, and class discourses...Unmarried and sexually mobile, the prostitute was eccentric to the gendered and sexual ideas of normative (i.e., patriarchal) heterosexuality...Rather than embodying heteropatriarchal ideas, the prostitute was a figure of nonheteronormativity, excluded from the presumed security of heteropatriarchal boundaries. As such, she and others like her were the targets of both liberal and revolutionary regulations. (9-10).

Having already established that the two racialized queer figures in the films exist as an Other to the white protagonist and the white director, I want to further explore how the work of “liberal and revolutionary” artists regulates the Nuyorican queerness and relationship to white, homonormative citizenship of these two figures. Since they pose such a threat to heteronormativity, the question is how the texts and the work surrounding the texts attempt to enact these regulations. At the same time, I am also interested in those moments when the regulation fails and the queens' bad citizenship takes over the discourse.

One of the aspects that becomes significant in the regulation of Woodlawn and Rivera’s form of citizenship is the portrayal of sex and sexuality in each film. The representation of sexuality associated with racialized subjects is a rich intersection to explore questions of citizenship. As Roderick A. Ferguson writes, “the distinction between normative heterosexuality (as the evidence of progress and development) and non-normative gender and sexual practices and identities (as the woeful signs of social lag and dysfunction) has emerged historically from the field of racialized discourse” (6). Therefore, the portrayal of Nuyorican queens as sexual beings in these two films open up sites to think about the visual representation of sexualized Nuyorican cultural citizenship, particularly since both films are preoccupied with the ideas of “progress and
development” as well as “the woeful signs of social lag and dysfunction.” Sexuality then becomes central to the politicization of the Nuyorican body in each movie.

The film’s treatment of Holly as a sexual subject is filled with inconsistencies and a general sense of weirdness, which to me speaks to Morrissey’s own inability to fully regulate Holly. To be clear, Holly’s sexual identity is very much a part of her character; in this way, the film deviates from the sanitized version of queer characters that became de rigueur in queer cinema by the time of Stonewall’s release. In fact, Holly’s sexual dissatisfaction hangs over Joe’s head throughout the narrative, and she complains about his inability to have sex with her in virtually all of their interactions in the movie. The idea of Holly’s sexuality as demanding goes back to the depiction of Nuyoricans as citizens who feel entitled to their pleasure. Thus, the question of rights and citizenship becomes tangled with the sexual performance of the queer Nuyorican body. Of course the scene that most people like to talk about when talking about Trash, and obviously the representation of sex in Trash, is the infamous scene featuring Holly masturbating with a beer bottle as a way to please herself given Joe’s inability to get an erection and have sex with her. Woodlawn writes about this scene in her book, Frances Negrón-Muntaner includes a thorough analysis of this moment, and other critics discuss it as a sort of centerpiece, or climax if you will, of the movie. Negrón-Muntaner reads this scene in relationship to shame, largely because Woodlawn admits that she was hugely embarrassed by being immortalized on camera while masturbating with a beer bottle. Yet, without denying Woodlawn her right to her own shame at the moment and in the future (and again, we really only have access to the representation of the moment rather than the moment itself), I invite a reading of this scene not only in terms of shame...
or exploitation. In fact, the moment plays out as subversive and coy, performative and intimate, extravagant and casual.

The culmination of a long scene featuring Holly and Joe’s home life, the sex encounter begins with Holly asking Joe to let her turn him on while she tells him about her plans to get welfare so they can take care of Holly’s sister’s unborn baby. Holly’s desires are at the forefront of this scene, these desires do not only entail sexual wants, but also include Holly’s desire for legal recognition and state support in the form of welfare as well as her desire to create a family unit with Joe. Thus, the sex act serves to highlight the multiple wants of Holly, wants that she feels she deserves. Unable to turn on Joe, Holly goes on to masturbate with a beer bottle while Joe sits on the bed next to her having a beer on his own with no apparent reaction to Holly’s actions. The stationary camera shoots the scene in mostly a long take, which showcases Woodlawn’s commitment to the scene (she does not miss a beat and gives a performance that is so in the moment it is baffling any critic could claim she has little talent), and keeps the camera from being invasive or exploitative the way it is in the scenes featuring Joe’s sexual encounters. The mis-en-scene of the scene also keeps Holly’s naked body out of sight, again a deviation from other sex scenes in the film.

Despite problematic implications, I see the notorious beer bottle masturbation scene not as a moment of shame but as a moment of agency, an agency tied to Holly’s gender, class, sexual, and racial subjectivity. Of all the women characters in the film, Holly is the only one who takes action when confronted with Joe’s inability to please her sexually. She is not tied by the rules of bourgeois society the way the rich girl or Joe’s yuppy ex-lover are, she is not tied by the rules of white femininity and respectability, and
she is not tied to normative heterosexual expectations. Rather than existing in those realms or outside of those realms, Holly’s role in the film has a disidentificatory relationship with each of them. Consequently, she will not be left dissatisfied; she will get the pleasure she feels she is entitled to, displaying her undeniable ability to survive when she recycles the beer bottle to engender her own orgasm. The last beat of the scene shows the kind of nuance that makes Trash a standout film. Rather than ending with Holly’s orgasm as a celebratory moment or a moment in which Holly “wins” somehow, Morrissey keeps the camera going for another beat that changes the entire tone of the scene. After reaching her orgasm, Holly, in a beautifully delivered line reading from Woodlawn, simply tells Joe or maybe even pleads, “Joe…no more beer bottles.” Woodlawn’s delivery of this line is particularly heartbreaking; in one line, she manages to portray Holly not only as a survivor or as a loud “madwoman” (a loca) the way some white critics would like to see her, but as someone with real needs, someone longing for pleasure as much as she longs for connecting with her lover. Where most depictions of the sassy loud loca in American media portray her as irreverent, this moment of vulnerability that emerges from the (mis)collaboration between Morrissey and Woodlawn creates a much more complex portrayal that speaks to the actual needs of someone like Holly.

Stonewall’s depiction of sex instead reveals the limitations of 1990s queer cinema. These factors all contribute to a sanitized version of Rivera through La Miranda. Mimicking Hollywood romantic comedies like Pretty Woman, the audience is supposed to understand La Miranda is serious about Matty because, to the disbelief of her drag friends who ask her how hung Matty is, she spends the night with Matty but only kisses
him; we know Matty is serious about La Miranda because she doesn’t have sex with her right away and cooks her breakfast the following morning even though they did not sleep together. La Miranda’s friends, queens of color who tend to be associated with the past of the gay rights movement, are depicted as superficial and immature in their assumption that La Miranda had sex with Matty right away. Thinking about the film’s release in 1995, a time when the HIV/AIDS crisis was very much part of the consciousness of gay audiences, the queens’ blasé attitude toward sex could be construed as irresponsible, and definitely further paints them as relics of a romanticized past. By contrast, Matty, with his civilized and romantic approach to La Miranda, represents the present (the present at the time of the film’s release and today) of the gay movement. In turn, the likability of La Miranda as the surrogate of an iconic figure for the gay rights movement depends on moving away from her “bad” citizenship and turning her into a responsible figure that learns about civilized romance from the white protagonist. Hence, this dynamic reflects Ferguson’s earlier connection between normative sexuality and progress and between queer sexuality and social dysfunction. Indeed, in Stonewall adopting a normative heterosexual model for sexual behavior is associated with the future of the movement, whereas the queer form of sexuality is seen as retrograde.

Like in Trash, the sex scene between the white protagonist and the Nuyorican queen does not display nude images of the racialized body even though it is Matty’s request to see La Miranda’s naked body that begins the encounter. The sex scene itself is romantic rather than sexual. The camera is unafraid to show Matty’s body here and in a later sex scene with his white boyfriend Ethan that takes place in a shower and that
features nudity from both actors; for some reason though, the camera shies away from depicting La Miranda’s body as an erotic site, and even the fact that it takes place on as traditional a space as a bed (as opposed to say the shower like in the Ethan/Matty sex scene) hints at some sort of hesitation from the director to overly sexualize La Miranda. Given that “activists who were responsible for much of the success and recognition of the early movement—folks like…Stonewall survivor Sylvia Rivera—were quickly becoming an embarrassment to their own movement” (Wilchins 16), it is no surprise that Stonewall desexualizes La Miranda in an effort to eliminate any signs of the excess that makes someone like Sylvia Rivera, a drug-addicted homeless hustler and prostitute, an embarrassment to the larger gay rights movement.

It seems that Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera can only be of value to the archive of the public gay rights movement once they are refashioned into “good” citizens. A common way to achieve this refashioning is by depicting the two queens in terms of images that are comforting and familiar to the audience: mother figures and sassy friends. In Trash, Holly’s narrative journey becomes more and more related to motherhood as the script progresses. In Stonewall, La Miranda is more sassy describe how than she is difficult; when she challenges the norm, it is in scenarios that speak more to the universality of her experience rather than its specificity, such as the moment when she defies the cops when they catch her wearing women’s clothing or when she shows up to the draft office in drag. These moments are supposed to represent La Miranda as someone who stands up for justice, but whose reasons for being “difficult” are clearly defined so they can be safely admired. Gone are any signs of Rivera’s
entitlement, her fervent criticism of the gay rights movement, and her sometimes-violent behavior.

The criticism of the films also engages in this process of rescuing the Nuyorican queens by civilizing them. Maurice Yacowars, who wrote an entire book attempting to rescue Paul Morrissey, writes of “Holly’s spirit, will, and zany charm mak[ing] this potentially depressing drama an uplifting comedy” (40). Davies sees Holly as a savior and writes that “she is also the only example of stability and security” (78) in the film. Similarly, variations of the word “fierce” come up a lot in reviews and analyses of Holly’s performance, which (depending on context) can fall back on the depiction of Nuyorican queens as safe “sassy” figures. The scholarship on Sylvia Rivera even more consistently paints her as a mother and as a “fierce” fighter. More specifically, Martin Duberman’s book, upon which the film is based almost exclusively, imagines Rivera as a “big sister,” “mother,” or “mother hen” at numerous stages in the book. The locas’ bad citizenship is denied and recycled into something much more easier to associate with the respectable image the contemporary gay rights movement is invested in creating for itself; thus, images of “uplift,” “stability,” protection, family, and motherhood are easy to invoke in projects that seek to archive Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera.

Even through all of these attempts to regulate the body of locas, a bad subject will always be a bad subject at the end of the day. And so Stonewall and Trash encapsulate how the regulation of the Nuyorican body leaves room for avenues of resistance. The moments in the films that most clearly support this claim are those when the Nuyorican queer body comes face to face with public hegemonic structures, thus engaging with the tensions present in the relationship between “bad” subjects and
dominant political bodies. Through these scenes both characters develop a politics of
dignity that offers an alternative to the politics of respectability that define issues of
representation and gay rights today.

For Holly, her main moment of resistance comes in the last scene of the movie
which functions as the narrative climax of the film. It is a testament to Holly’s
performance that in a film about Joe, the climax of the film becomes all about her. To
financially support her sister’s baby and start anew with Joe, Holly devises a plan that
consists of faking a pregnancy to qualify for welfare. Having already screamed, “I want
welfare!” while masturbating with a beer bottle, the audience is very much aware of
Holly’s desire to get welfare at this point. The improvised scene had a simple setup:
Holly and Joe would pretend to be a married couple asking for welfare in the face of
Holly’s pregnancy; professional actor Michael Sklar would play Mr. Michaels, the social
worker assigned to their case who comes visit them and proposes to Holly trading
welfare for her shoes. Yet, in an instance that highlights Woodlawn’s creative input,
when filming the scene Woodlawn refused to give her shoes to Sklar’s Mr. Michaels;
when Morrissey interrupted filming to ask Woodlawn why she was not following the
scene’s outline, according to Negron-Muntaner’s version of events, Woodlawn
responded that she “had dignity” (Negrón-Muntaner 104).

Woodlawn’s ownership of her character’s dignity is firmly rooted in her national
identity. This national identity, tied to a history of shaming the Puerto Rican body for its
financial dependence on U.S. government financial aid, functions as a catalyst for
Woodlawn’s inability to allow her character to give up her property for legal rights. Here,
Woodlawn engages in a political project that not only recognizes but demands her
rights. In *The Alchemy of Race*, black feminist lawyer Patricia Williams argues that for minoritarian subjects “the goal is to find a political mechanism that can confront the denial of need. The argument that rights are disutile, even harmful, trivializes this aspect of black experience specifically, as well as that of any person or group whose vulnerability has been truly protected by rights” (152). Woodlawn’s performance challenges dominant structures by demanding legal recognition without giving up her cultural citizenship.

La Miranda’s confrontation with a larger hegemonic structure consists of her encounter with white gay activism. After staging sit-ins at restaurants to raise awareness about discriminatory laws targeted toward gay people, Matty and his white queer activist friends go to the Stonewall bar to celebrate themselves. At the bar Matty runs into La Miranda, whom he has been dating without telling his friends. One of Matty’s friends comments that they should take La Miranda to their protests to actually look queer, reflecting a certain awareness from the film’s part about the homonormative type of citizenship associated with dominant white queer culture. Through this exchange, Matty seems very embarrassed by La Miranda. At first, La Miranda is genuinely interested in the activists’ work, admiring them for “at least getting something together, right?” keeping in line with the attempts to paint Rivera as less hostile toward white queer activists than she was. However, displaying an expected understanding of Nuyorican queerness as trash and street, another one of Matty’s activist friends asks Matty if he has been doing outreach work, prompting Matty to say La Miranda is his roommate. At this point, La Miranda gets what is going on and angrily asks, “Why don’t you tell your fucking boy I’m your maid?” When Matty’s reply consists of telling La
Miranda it’s not his fault she does not know how to be a man, she calls him a “prick” and leaves the space.

The change from receptivity to anger comes from La Miranda’s gender, class, sexual, and racial subjectivity. This exchange is particularly critical of white queer activists who do not see the queer brown body as capable of doing much for the movement besides validating the value of white queer activism. Beyond adding to their image as “queer” for the purpose of visibility or representing an opportunity for charity, victims in needs of their rescue, La Miranda, as a poor, brown, queer, Nuyorican drag queen, means little else to the dominant gay movement. The film does not merely end with this critique; instead, La Miranda’s realization that her subjectivity as a “bad citizen” engenders an anger in her that demands dignity from the white activists as well as her boyfriend. In the tradition of queer Nuyorican performers, La Miranda recycles the oppression from dominant subjects and turns it into a demand for the dignity she feels she deserves.

**Undoing Locas**

Through my analysis of these films, I continue to highlight the inconsistencies, paradoxes, and tensions that define the texts. I do not necessarily think of this condition as something negative about the films. I think instead of how such complications are generally avoided by critics, and yet these “weird” moments are more often than not present in visual representations of locas. Instead of dismissing these moments, I hope to invite a look into these modes of visual representation from a critical perspective that still finds avenues of resistance. In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler writes,

> I may feel without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. This is the juncture from which critique emerges, where critique is understood as an
interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up
the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate
difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering
and maintaining life that resists modes of assimilation. (4)

The films in this section function as both archive and repertoire of that juncture
that describes the tense relationship between Nuyorican locas and the films that archive
their performances as “bad” citizens in order to use those performances as the central
evidence in narratives which assert particular views of a “history” of proper belonging. It
is my hope that the analysis here provides us with ways of thinking about seeing these
visual archives of queer Nuyorican subjectivity as possible sites that indeed “shelter”
and “maintain” avenues for challenging hegemonic structures that seek to govern the
queer Latino/Rican body.
CHAPTER 5
COVER, GIRL: BRANDING LOCAS IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CULTURE

If "no two other texts made Puerto Ricans [in the 1960s], or have made them since, more available to wide academic and popular knowledge than Oscar Lewis’s…
ethnography, La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York and Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins’ 1961…West Side Story” (Cruz-Malavé, Queer Latino Testimonio 100), then no outlet in popular media, and certainly in popular U.S. gay culture, has more consistently made queer Puerto Rican sexuality more available to those same audiences as RuPaul’s Drag Race. Each season, the show features a variety of number of Puerto Rican and Nuyorican contestants, something that makes it stand out from most popular texts featuring gay characters.

I must confess that as a gay Latino male and, perhaps more importantly, an avid fan of RuPaul’s Drag Race, I have been disappointed with the treatment of Puerto Rican queens in the show. For starters, in eight seasons (including the “All-Stars” season), no Puerto Rican or Nuyorican queen has ever won the crown. It seems like just about every season a Puerto Rican queen makes it far in the race, and each season, she loses to a queen the judges generally consider more “cutting edge,” more “sophisticated,” or more “polished.” More significantly, the show—intentionally and unintentionally—positions the Puerto Rican queens’ struggles throughout their journey in specific relation to their race, ethnicity, and nationality; this othering manifests itself in more explicit ways than it does with the other queens, including the non-Latina queens of color and in some cases even the non-Puerto Rican Latina queens. While my initial reaction is to attribute my indignation at the losses of splendid contestants like Nina Flowers and Alexis Mateo to my personal investment in the show, there is something
else lurking behind my disappointment, something that remains well after the queens are done untucking in the (in)famous Interior Illusions lounge.

Given that the previous two chapters have centered on establishing connections between the representation and performance of early 1960s/late 1970s Nuyorican locas and the shortcomings of the contemporary gay rights movement in the U.S., this final body chapter focuses on the reality TV show competition RuPaul’s Drag Race as a way to write about (auto)biographical narratives and visual representation (bringing together the two main topics of the chapters on representations of Woodlawn and Rivera) in the present. Such a turn to the present should not be misinterpreted as an attempt to establish a teleological narrative in which contemporary representations somehow “fix” or “improve” on the politics of representation and performance discussed in earlier chapters. Rather, I understand the historical specificity of RuPaul’s Drag Race as a continuation of the tense history involving the regulation and colonialization of the Nuyorican and Puerto Rican queer male body and the sites of resistance and agency such tensions produce. How is the cultural citizen of Nuyorican and Puerto Rican locas mediated, regulated, expanded, and shaped by contemporary modes of representing queerness?

Focusing on the narrative of the Puerto Rican queens from seasons 1-3, this chapter argues that RuPaul’s Drag Race functions as a mirror of the relationship between the gay mainstream and queer Puerto Rican identity in the United States. Invoking Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé’s take on the phrase “foreign in a domestic sense,” I argue that by mediating the colonial relationship between the U.S. and the Puerto Rican and Nuyorican male body through queer American culture, the show highlights the
tensions between legal citizenship, U.S. national identity, and affective citizenship. In this context, I argue that through their inherently oxymoronic status as “foreign in a domestic sense,” the Nuyorican and Puerto Rican locas are asked to recontextualize their ethnic otherness in relationship to upper-class gay American standards. Zeroing in on this process then reveals hegemonic efforts to commodify and package the queer Nuyorican/Puerto Rican body for dominant white culture; at the same time, I see this process as one that counter intuitively offers site of agency for the Nuyorican/Puerto Rican queens. In my reading, the popularity of the show both complicates and cements the notion of homonormativity and gay cosmopolitanism. As with the case of the texts I discuss in earlier chapters, to unquestionably celebrate the show’s status as the ultimate pinnacle of success for gay and/or trans individuals would not only be misguided, but it would flatten the intricacies inherent in the show. At the same time, to dismiss the show as “problematic” would equally miss the valuable opportunities to explore the relationship between U.S. gay media and representations of queer Puerto Rican/Nuyorican masculinity. In this way, the show shares similarities with the other texts at the center of the project in its unique value as a tool to explore the space of queer Latino, and particularly Puerto Rican and Nuyorican, male bodies in today’s political atmosphere.

This essay focuses on the first three seasons of RuPaul’s Drag Race for both purposes of scope and because these seasons represent the show’s formative years, years that went on to define the show’s DNA. I focus on the Puerto Rican and Nuyorican queens since the show did not feature other Latina queens during these seasons (something that changed in the later years). Their status as Ricans is also
significant to my analysis given the complicated history of colonialism between the United States and Puerto Rico, which I argue highly informs the Puerto Rican contestants’ dynamics with the other contestants, the judges, RuPaul, and the audience. The main queens I discuss here are those who had a difficult time covering, either because of their accent, their skin color, or other features that marked them as Latinas and Puerto Rican: from season 1, Jade; from season 2, Jessica Wild; and from season 3, Alexis Mateo and Yara Sofia. I also bring in season 3 contestant Carmen Carrera, a white-skinned transgender queen of Puerto Rican descent, who built her narrative (and whose narrative was built by the show’s producers) in direct opposition to the raced and/or ethnic performance of fellow contestants Alexis Mateo and Yara Sofia. Throughout my discussion, I avoid and discourage thinking about these queens in terms of binaries (success/failure, good/bad, right/wrong); I am more interested in their liminality and the show’s refusal of easy judgment calls.

“America Lets Me Be Latina”: Contemporary Gay Rights and Rican Queens

The theoretical work of Nuyorican and Puerto Rican queer critics is of extreme value to thinking about locas as sexed, raced, nationalized, gendered, and classed citizens. Nuyorican cultural critic Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé identifies ways in which the gay Puerto Rican and Nuyorican literary tradition post-1960s engages with the sex and cultural citizenship of its subjects. In his essay “The Oxymoron of Sexual Sovereignty: Some Puerto Rican Literary Reflections,” Cruz-Malavé presents a reading of Puerto Rican stories from the post-1960s era, such as René Marqués’ 1970 short story collection *En una ciudad llamada San Juan* and Edgardo Sanabria Santaliz’ 1984 story “1898,” in which he argues that the stories “underscore the impossibility of founding, under colonial conditions, an autonomous, geographically bound, coherent sovereign
community or subject through the privileged trope of sex” (57). Cruz-Malavé notes that, as such, the tendency from critics is to interpret these stories as dismissive of “the sexual trope as counterproductive [and] ineffectual”; however, he believes that such a reading is symptomatic “of the very attempt to produce territorial sovereignty by excising sex, or to cleanse it of its colonial legacy” (57-58). His analysis then gains relevance to my argument for two reasons: 1) It calls attention to the territorial and national liminality and abjection of locas—white hegemonic structures (such as the public gay rights movement or the work of white queer theorists) find no room for their race or national identity, whereas some aspects of the Puerto Rican/Nuyorican literary tradition and literary criticism have figured their body away from sex; 2) It implies that, resisting contemporary trends in the larger discussion of gay rights in the U.S., the affective and legal citizenship of Puerto Rican and Nuyorican subjects cannot be separated from sex.

The show has reached a type of mainstream status that sets it apart from more niche gay cultural artifacts.¹ Of course, the word “mainstream” has to be used with caution here. Indeed, referring to a show about drag queens—some of the most controversial figures in U.S. queer culture—that airs on the self-identified gay network LogoTV seems to reject most understandings of what the mainstream is.² However, the show’s popularity corresponds to the emerging national acceptance of gay men in both popular culture and dominant politics, an acceptance that matches the emergence of a

¹ I’m thinking here of movies like Priscilla, Queen of the Dessert (1994) and To Wong Foo Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar (1995)

² In her essay “Queer Television Studies: Currents, Flows, and (Main)streams,” Lynne Joyrich provides an insightful analysis of the tensions between the mainstream and queerness, particularly in terms of conceptualizing queer television as mainstream.
way of being for gay people in the U.S. that relies on pursuing acceptance into the national discourse by adopting values and behaviors sanctioned by hegemonic cultural standards. The success of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* is very much a part of this trend; in fact, the success of the show can be measured (and has been) in terms of its continued, ever-growing recognition and popularity, not within gay circles, but within the larger general public: recaps of the show can be found along recaps for other reality TV shows (such as Emmy-winning shows like *The Amazing Race* and *Top Chef*) on websites targeted to a large general audience like EW.com (Entertainment Weekly) or TVLine.com (a subsidiary of the hugely popular entertainment media site Deadline.com), clips of the show were constantly featured on the E! Network’s *The Soup*, and various celebrities (gay and straight) have appeared as guest judges. Even phrases from the show have become part of the lexicon: “throwing shade” or “being shady,” and “realness” are all phrases popularized by the show (and rooted in New York drag culture as depicted in Jennie Livingston’s much-written-about documentary *Paris Is Burning*) that are commonly used by non-queer people in the United States.

To further contextualize the show, I return to queer lawyer and scholar Kenji Yoshino and Puerto Rican queer scholar Hiram Perez, who both provide useful ways of critically engaging with the kind of queer texts that have emerged from gay people’s drive toward hegemonic validation today. As I have written in previous chapters, rather than celebrating the newfound visibility heavily pursued by the public gay rights movement, Yoshino refers to “the demand to cover” to address how “gays [in the U.S.] are increasingly permitted to be gay and out so long as we do not ‘flaunt’ our identities” (19). Though such a claim might not at first be so easily applied to *RuPaul’s Drag Race,*
a show that asks its gay male and transgender contestants to constantly “flaunt” their drag queen identity, a closer look at Yoshino’s development of “covering” and the show’s treatment of Latino/a identity highlights the value of the concept of “covering” to an analysis of the series. Anticipating his critics, Yoshino writes,

Some might question whether anyone is imposing a cultural covering demand on gays. Far from forcing gays to mute gay culture, America seems increasingly to ask us to flaunt it […]. The selective uptake of gay culture—gay fashion, yes; gay affection, no—shows that acceptance is driven by the desires of the straight cultural consumer rather than the dignity of the gay person [emphasis mine]. (85)

Yoshino’s work astutely illustrates the process by which “good” gay citizenship is created, not only because he identifies the “good” qualities of an ideal gay citizen in the U.S. and the qualities of a “bad” citizen, qualities he ties to ideas of sex in the form of “gay affection,” but also because he understands the implications in the power relation between non-queer and queer subjects: the straight cultural consumer and the undignified gay person—because the relationship is established as a binary, we can understand the gay “person” as being the gay commodity, that which is consumed.

Looking to move from the commodity to the consumer, certain gay people in the U.S. have made a conscious effort to bridge the gap between the desires of the straight cultural consumer and their own. Hiram Perez accounts for this drive by developing the term “gay cosmopolitanism”; through this term, Perez describes how contemporary dominant gay male culture in the United States has adopted a set of values rooted in “white, urban, leisure-class” masculinity. What is so valuable about Perez’ use of the term “gay cosmopolitanism” is that he consistently conceptualizes it in relation to its origins in “urban whiteness” while simultaneously emphasizing the fact that gay men of color are participants in this culture even if they rarely “emerge unscathed.” Particularly
important to my discussion of the show is Perez’ argument that participants of gay cosmopolitanism,

Can occupy an ambivalent position as both exoticizing/exotic and subject/object in relation to a cosmopolitan gay male desire. His experience of this subjectification can be simultaneously resistant and ecstatic. (76)

Following both Yoshino and Perez’ ideas, I frame drag queen culture as an art, performance, and mode of being that has been historically associated with the demands of dominant audiences, specifically when it concerns drag queens as performers/entertainers. Furthermore, as Yoshino and Perez point out, dignity often takes second place to such demands precisely because those demands tend to require the minoritarian subject to give up her/his dignity. While RuPaul’s Drag Race manages to celebrate the drag queens’ stories and attempts to portray drag as an art form, like most reality TV competitions, its success and entertainment value largely depend on seeing the contestants lose their dignity at various moments in the season for the pleasure of the general audience. This is obvious from the first episode of each season, which tends to involve a photo shoot challenge that consists of the contestants engaging in some sort of difficult and often embarrassing physical act in drag. For example, in season 2, the contestants had to pose for the camera while a wind machine

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3 For example, it is common for gay bars to feature a straight night that features a drag show as the main point of attraction. In Gainesville, FL, where I currently reside, this is a common practice at the only gay club in town, the University Club. The connection to RuPaul’s Drag Race goes beyond drag in general; in fact, this was the club that used to feature season 5 contestant Jade Jolie before she was cast in the show. On an even more personal note, I recently attended a drag dinner show in Ft.Lauderdale, FL—an area known for gay tourism—as part of a bachelorette party and was shocked by the fact I was the only gay man who attended as a customer; the rest of the tables were occupied by seemingly heterosexual women, most of them as part of bachelorette celebrations.
blew air at them at the highest speed/pressure; in season 3, the contestants had to manage a sexy pose while jumping on a trampoline. What exactly these challenges test is unclear, since it is hard to think of a time when a model will ever have to pose under those conditions. The challenges often result in various moments that can be read as embarrassing for the queens: key accessories (like wigs, artificial eyelashes, and non-permanent breast implants) tend to fall off and reveal the contestants as fakes, in addition to the stills or freeze-frames of the contestants’ faces and/or bodies in awkward and unflattering poses that appear on camera. Thus, the show lures audiences at the beginning of each season by presenting the queens as performers willing to give up their dignity. As I will show later this moment gains a larger significance when it comes to the Puerto Rican/Nuyorican queens, in particular, since shame is an affective force that consistently makes its way into the work of queer Rican authors and critics; furthermore, I argue that their Nuyorican/Puerto Rican status gives the Rican queens fewer opportunities to keep their dignity (i.e., they struggle with the language or receive some of the most scathing criticism from the judges).

Before expanding on the issue of shame and Rican culture, I would like to go back to the concept of covering. I believe this term is highly significant when it comes to exploring the relationship between the show, the mainstream, and the queer Puerto Rican contestants. It is in this process of covering through which the most complex tensions surrounding race in the show emerge. I do not think only the Nuyorican/Puerto

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4 When I say reveal them as “fakes,” I mean within the context of the show. Each season, RuPaul and the other judges use the contestants’ ability to pass as a way to measure the success or failure of their drag, as pointed by Edgar in her essay.
Rican queens are subject to this process; for all the queens, covering is necessary in order to adapt themselves to a version of U.S. gay citizenship that is acceptable within the norm. For some of them, like Anglo queen and winner of RuPaul's All Stars Drag Race Chad Michaels, it means they are expert celebrity impersonators (for example, Chad is known, even before the show, as a world-class Cher impersonator); for others, like winner of season 3 (and mixed-race contestant) Raja, it means they are models with bodies and styles worthy of (and emulating) the Parisian runways. Even the “edgier” queens of the later seasons, like Anglo queens and season 4 and 5 winners, respectively, Sharon Needles and Jinxx Monsoon, position themselves as “artists” who represent “artful” counterparts to the more runway-like look and style of the preceding winners. The methods of representation of the most successful queens are varied, but what they share in common is the fact that the queens package themselves in ways that are recognizable to various groups in the population. Contemporary heterosexual and queer audiences alike can easily digest images of drag queens as runway-like models, or as celebrity impersonators, or—to a lesser extent—as performance artists as long as these images abstain to the qualities of “good” citizenship.

To get at the deeper layers of some of the issues with the show, these packages should not go unquestioned. What the queens do, and really what they are forced to do as contestants, is present an illusion, which is apparent in the judging room when the contestants who are criticized are those who failed to achieve the illusion that particular episode: whether an outfit suffers from lack of technical proficiency, the nerves of contestant lead to a botched singing or acting performance, the makeup is poorly rendered, the “female” accessories (such as breast implants or padding) are apparent,
or the tuck is not considered to be up-to-standard, the criticism of the contestants are geared toward pointing the cracks in the illusion. There’s no worse criticism from the judges than, “you look like a man,” cementing the show’s investment in the idea of drag as a type of performance whose success is dependent on maintaining a fantasy. For the audience though, it is important to understand that the contestants’ ability to brand themselves in a certain way is reliant on their particular socioeconomic status. Yet, the show does little to invite the audience to acknowledge the class position that allows Raja to wear the latest runway fashion and look as stunning and “classy” as she does, or the familiarity with American gay icons necessary to make a living as a celebrity impersonator in the U.S. like Chad Michaels, or the knowledge of the English language and professional education required to master acting as skillfully as Sharon Needles and Jinxx Monsoon.

The Puerto Rican and Nuyorican queens in the show have a harder time packaging themselves in such a way that they can meet the demand to cover the way the other queens manage. Rather, for them, the demands associated with covering are different and usually involve performing their Puerto Rican/Nuyorican-ness for the public. Yet, what becomes apparent is that the citizenship of the queens I discuss here, whose performance as drag queens already places them in a liminal state, occupy a state of in-betweenness not only engendered by their complex gender/sexual performance, but further impacted by the legal and social implications of belonging to a nation that is not fully a nation, and by living in a country that they do not fully belong to. Cruz-Malavé invokes the phrase “foreign in a domestic sense” to address this form of citizenship. The phrase is credited to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Edward Douglass
White, who used it during one of the cases that took place between 1901-1922 in which the Courts had to make legal decisions regarding the jurisdiction of the properties the U.S. got as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898 (Cruz-Malavé, “Oxymoron,” 60):

[T]his phrase was meant to decide the specific issue before the Court then: whether Puerto Rico… [was] part of the ‘United States’ and, as such, subject to all the provisions and protections of the Law. More broadly, however, it also set out to conclusively resolve what many considered the ‘paramount issue’ of the day…in essence, whether a nation whose constitutional origins were anticolonial could constitutionally [govern] colonies…And so the Court would have to decide. And when it did, it would do so by claiming that Puerto Rico and the newly acquired territories occupied a status in between a foreign and domestic, or more properly, neither foreign nor domestic, a liminal, oxymoronic space of non-applicability of the Law—sanctioned precisely by the Law. (61)

Throughout this project, I have argued that liminality, an ability (conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, self-imposed or assigned) to occupy a space of in-betweenness exposes the shortcomings of hegemonic structures at the same time as it represents the most valuable property of queer minoritarian subjects who are thought of as “bad citizens.” Muñoz’ theory of disidentification depends on this liminality. Here, Cruz-Malavé historicizes Puerto Rican and Nuyorican’s experience as liminal national subjects in the United States, calling attention to the impossible task of the Puerto Rican and Nuyorican contestants in the show. Legally speaking, the contemporary gay rights movement has little to do with them, since the Law figures them as subjects who are sanctioned by the Law but who are not necessarily protected by it. The parallel then is replicated in their packaging as cultural citizens since they do not have access to the same culture as the U.S. queens; instead, they must fashion an identity of their own that is constituted by the space of nothingness (“neither foreign nor domestic”) that is tied to their national identity.
Examining the series then becomes a reminder of how hard it is to let go of a history of oppression, since as José Esteban Muñoz writes, “understanding that the past has a performative nature […] rather than being static and fixed, the past does things” (28). In this case, Muñoz’s point reminds us of the similarities between the type of mediation in the U.S. media and that of Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera in the works of queer white artists and authors; these similarities serve to complicate the ideas of progress that are so endemic to the rhetoric used by the current public gay rights movement in the U.S. A prime example of this teleological philosophy is the somewhat recent well-intentioned but politically naive “It Gets Better” campaign promoted by author and gay personality Dan Savage and that went on to become the slogan of the larger gay rights movement in the United States. This seemingly harmless phrase encapsulates the roots of the public gay rights movement in teleological values that only address the needs of a specific, dominant group: time will take care of everything.

Through this philosophy, gayness aligns itself closer to heteronormativity than it does to queerness; buying into the narrative of the American Dream, progress narratives for the U.S. gay community only serve to ignore the intersection between race, gender, class, and sexuality that might keep certain individuals from succeeding more than others. Indeed, the notion of the American Dream looms large on RuPaul’s Drag Race. From its first episode, the show places itself in the context of the American Dream. The episode starts with a quick bio of RuPaul narrated by the mother queen herself; as we see an image of a young, working class black boy on the screen juxtaposed with images of RuPaul’s modeling photos, RuPaul’s voiceover narration talks about going from being a poor black boy to becoming a star. Immediately, the
show frames its contestants as equal pursuers of the American Dream, all able to achieve it with the right combination of what RuPaul refers to a perfect combination of “charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent.” Examining RuPaul’s use of this catchphrase, Ein-Anne Edgar writes, “While on stage, the Queens need to make sure that their C.U.N.Ts are present for the judges to rate” (133, 143-144). This notion haunts all the Puerto Rican contestants, who are then figured as immigrants in search of the American Dream, their narratives of success only conceived in terms of their confirmation of American notions of progress and individuality. Yet, what becomes apparent watching the show is that there are specific challenges that complicate the Puerto Rican queens’ ability to keep their C.U.N.Ts in check, challenges which are tied to their role as ethnic others within the context of the show; thus, their performance in the show suggests that something larger than the individual, like say hegemony, is at work in the journey of these contestants. For example, when Shannel proudly claims that she brought $20’000 worth of costumes and wigs to compete in the show, I find it difficult to ignore the social forces—like race and class—that allow Shannel to spend that much money on costumes and wigs. Meanwhile, judge Santino criticizes Jessica Wild for being “very quinceañera,” adding, “her style is pretty bad”; when I hear this criticism my immediate thought is that perhaps if Jessica had $20,000 just for costumes like Shannel does, she might look more couture. This is just an example of how the fight for the crown is not as equal of a playing field as it might seem at first.

Placing the problem away from institutionalized social inequality and into each individual, the show mirrors how the gay rights movement has failed to question for whom exactly are things more likely to “get better.” Well, evidenced by RuPaul’s Drag
Race, “it” does not always get better: the same history of colonialism and oppression that defines the treatment of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. as well as the history of representation in U.S. popular culture that defined Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera in the Stonewall-era inform the type of behavior that is asked/allowed of the Puerto Rican and Nuyorican queens in the show today; this is the same type of behavior that has historically been asked of Puerto Rican and Nuyorican entertainers from the 1950s (as in the case of Rita Moreno) through the 1990s (as in the case of pop stars and actors Jennifer López and Ricky Martin) and today. For the entertainers who appear as contestants on the show, their success is tied to visibility, and this visibility hinges on creating an image that is marketable to dominant audiences. It is in the queens’ moments of “failures” and “successes” as they try to package themselves for white, dominant audiences that I find valuable avenues to think about the show’s implication in the tension between the cultural and legal citizenship of queer Nuyorican and Puerto Rican locas.

“I Can See Her Rice and Beans”: Performing Puerto Rican Identity

Going back to Hiram Perez’s argument that “the primitive, exotic, or ‘brown’ body [is] commodified by dominant gay male culture” (171), as evidenced by my earlier discussions, this commodification of queer brown bodies has historically been an indelible part of North American gay culture, especially in terms of drag culture. Based on these critiques, I interrogate those moments in the series that recall this oppressive history.

A close look at the challenges in RuPaul’s Drag Race supports the idea that the show is designed for the queens to prove their ability to build a drag persona around the desires, expectations, and experiences of gay cosmopolitan culture. Therefore, the
Puerto Rican queens I discuss here are often unable to get as far as the other queens for reasons that are simply more than individual or private. The area where I see this inequality most pronounced is in the show’s focus on the Puerto Rican queens’ struggles with the English language. Throughout all three seasons I examine in this chapter, there is a large emphasis on the Puerto Rican queens’ difficulties to handle the language during speech-related challenges. Season 2 contestant Jessica Wild’s introductory comments in the season opener are about how the one aspect she is most worried about is the language. In an early episode of that season, when the queens must shoot a scene for a mock sci-fi movie, Mystique—the leader of the group—assigns Jessica Wild what she believes is a small role, telling Jessica, “you can’t speak English.” Jessica’s storyline in the episode is all about her struggle to learn the lines and recite them well, with RuPaul expressing concerns when he checks up on the queens as a mentor. Though Jessica does well in the challenge, she eventually is eliminated for a very speaking-heavy challenge consisting of promoting an autobiography and a vodka brand. Before she is eliminated, the judges make fun of the way she pronounces the title of her book (*Dreams of a Golden Child*) because her accent has the unintentional effect of sounding like she is saying “golden shower” instead of “golden child,” something the judges find even more hilarious when Jessica confesses she does not know what a “golden shower” is. More than anything, I think highlighting their accent serves to both exoticize and diminish the talent of the queens. It frames them as less capable of displaying their abilities as comedians, actresses, and artists, insinuating that their purpose is to look beautiful and be made fun of by their English-speaking counterparts. Curiously enough, as of now, the only queens cast in the show who have
thick accents or struggle with the language are Latina queens (as opposed to Asian
queens or African queens, who are the other most-represented racial/ethnic minorities),
which reinforces the association between gay cosmopolitanism and queer brown
bodies.

Still, the show’s producers, including RuPaul, who is a host, mentor, and judge
as well, work hard to make the Puerto Rican queens palatable to normative audiences.
They mainly do this through cultural signifiers recognizable to North American
audiences. Around fifteen minutes into the first episode, Puerto Rican queen Jade is
being photographed during the first challenge, which consists of posing with the Pit
Crew against a car while being hosed down. As soon as Jade’s photo shoot starts,
photographer Mike Ruiz instructs her, “give me every bit of sex that you have” before
RuPaul yells at her, “give me J.Lo, honey!” Sure, all the queens are asked to perform
according to their looks—at different points in the series, Tyra Sanchez is compared to
Beyonce, Raja to Tyra Banks, and Shannel to Barbra Streisand. These contestants
actively sought those comparisons though, whereas Jade had to do nothing besides
being marked as Puerto Rican to be commanded to act like Jennifer López.

The call to cover is implicit in the employment of Jennifer López as both a model
for the Puerto Rican queens to follow and a measuring stick for them to determine their
level of acceptance by dominant culture. As with the case of the many markers that are
used to other the Puerto Rican and Nuyorican queens, the call to “give J.Lo” is rooted in
a specific historical context. Frances Negrón-Muntaner notably includes a thorough and
insightful analysis of Jennifer López as part of her renowned Boricua Pop. For the
author, López occupies a special place in U.S. popular culture since “in contrast to most
U.S.-born Puerto Rican actresses of the last five decades, Jennifer López has been able to play on the hyphen and come out al otro lado”; basically, according to Negrón-Muntaner, in spite of representing “the ideal boricua beauty,” López’s “Puerto Rican label does not seem to stick to her in the mainstream media” (230). Part of what makes the discussion of López in this chapter of Boricua Pop stand out is the author’s recognition of Jennifer López’s savvy way of creating her brand early on. Taking advantage of the controversy surrounding her casting as a Nuyorican playing iconic late Mexican-American superstar Selena in the film biopic that turned her into a star, Jennifer López chose to focus on what made her similar to Selena, not different, in the eyes of the American public: their experiences as Latina women in the U.S. By presenting herself as Latina and not Nuyorican/Puerto Rican, López shed an identity (boricua) with “less institutional clout” in favor of one (Latina) that allowed her to “expan[d] boricua agency and accru[e] additional [cultural] value” (230). By asking Jade to “give J.Lo,” RuPaul and Ruiz invoke a performer whose career has been characterized by the right combination of commodified exoticism and universal likability, thus reminding Jade, as a boricua queen, of how far she can go if she is smart about the way she brands herself to hegemonic consumers. The show here aligns itself with homonormative values by attempting to package the queens as a product that is recognizable, successful, and palatable for white, normative, middle class audiences.

The order to perform Jennifer López also places Jade within the larger history of the sexualization, consumption, and dissection of Puerto Rican bodies and their body parts. That it happens to Jade foreshadows her ultimate moment of shame later in the season, a moment deeply rooted in this history of objectification. As Frances Negrón-
Muntaner argues, dominant culture has commodified visible mainstream Puerto Rican celebrities like Ricky Martin and Jennifer López through a focus on a specific part of their body—hips in the case of Martin, the butt in the case of López. The author concentrates on this tradition as a way to “highlight how the shame of Puerto Rican identity can lodge itself in specific body parts, even when the bodies displaying it are greatly appreciated cultural commodities showing off pride” (xvii). In the context of a show celebrating gay pride, it is strange that Jade suffers great shame due to a racialized reading of a specific part of her body—her penis.

In the show’s first season, Jade’s penis becomes a major subject of discussion. Jade’s penis becomes a focus in episode 3, when after her runway walk, RuPaul casually says, “interesting to see such a beautiful woman with such a big dick.” I turn to Eir-Anne Edgar’s description of this incident to capture the visual and spoken rhetoric the show employs to address Jade’s penis:

Suddenly, a playback of Jade walking the runway fills the entire television screen with a close-up of her blue panties. While laughter filters through the room, Jade’s voiceover explains the embarrassment she is feeling at that moment […]. The other judges laugh and affirm that they too are able to detect Jade’s penis. In the reunion episode, RuPaul returns to a discussion of Jade’s penis. She asks her how big it really is […]. Noticing Jade’s discomfort, RuPaul asks why it bothers her that she would point out her penis-tucking failure after her performance. Jade responds by stating, “Obviously, when you’re dressed as a woman, you don’t want to be asked about your penis. It’s very embarrassing.” (133, 143-144)

The close-up of Jade’s crotch filling the entire television screen captures the way RuPaul’s Drag Race is designed for the dominant viewer who will find pleasure in mocking Jade, judging Jade, and desiring Jade. Jade figures her embarrassment in terms of drag failure, as does Edgar’s analysis of this particular moment. Indeed, the show’s shaming of Jade largely relies on portraying her penis as an obstacle impossible.
to overcome; as such, her seemingly huge penis (by now imagined not simply as large, but as freakishly large) is figured as an indelible part of her identity that will never allow her to cover. If covering is about maintaining order by not flaunting one’s identity for the world to see, Jade’s penis is unruly and threatening, as such, it must be laughed away, humiliated, and divested from any power.

Following my argument that the show mirrors the actual dynamics between dominant subjects and queer Latino/as, the shaming of Jade eerily resembles an incident that took place at the 2003 Gay Shame conference held at the University of Michigan. At this conference, Ellis Hanson presented on Plato’s *Symposium* while displaying publicity images of an Afro-Latino model called Kiko from the porn film *Learning Latin* as he was presenting. According to Hiram Perez’ account, the images of Kiko’s penis elicited a series of comments from the very established queer scholars in the room; these comments fetishized Kiko’s penis as an extremely “big, purple dick.” Unfortunately, even though this all transpired at a conference titled Gay Shame attended by the biggest name in the field of queer theory (queer of color scholars were in attendance though inexplicably no panel at the conference was dedicated to race), there was “no substantive discussion about the representation of Kiko, about fantasy, about racialized desire […] Kiko’s dick assumed its historical place as the focal point of white fantasy.” Perez concludes that brownness then exists as a way to validate the desires of gay cosmopolitan culture without ever having to worry about the power dynamics at the center of this fantasy (183-186). When Jade is singled out for her big penis, she is being divested of her power as a drag queen, which places her in a position of shame due to her inability to properly tuck; simultaneously, she is also
divested her of the power of masculinity (a sphere where, in the context of U.S. society, large penises symbolize power) by objectifying her penis in such a way that it becomes a fantasy for the viewer, the gazed object rather than the gaze itself. Jade, like Kiko, is relegated to a position of shame that only protects the agency and desires of dominant audiences.

I have deliberately attempted to stay away from notions of shame in as much as possible throughout this project since discussions of shame in relationship to the queer Latino body are so ubiquitous and have the potential of victimizing the body in favor of identifying sites of agency. Having said that, it would be misguided to completely ignore the persistence of shame in the representation of queer Puerto Rican and Nuyorican bodies. For example, *Boricua Pop*, an essential piece that situates various *boricuas* performers within the thick, tense history of colonialism shared by the United States and Puerto Rico, begins with a discussion of shame and Puerto Rican national identity, specifying that what separates *boricua* shame from that which is experienced by other minoritarian groups in the U.S. is that “modern Puerto Rican ethno-national identity has been constituted in shame as a result of a transnational history of colonial domination in the Caribbean and the contradictory ways *boricuas* have negotiated with a metropolis at once contemptuous and ostensibly benevolent” (3). The *boricuas’* relationship with a United States that is both a “contemptuous” and “benevolent” nation recalls Cruz-Malavé’s earlier discussion of the liminality that comes with *boricuas* being “foreign in a domestic sense.” In this way, *RuPaul’s Drag Race* acts as the “contemptuous” and “benevolent” nation where the Nuyorican and Puerto Rican contestants must learn how to negotiate their identity in order to survive.
In fact, Cruz-Malavé’s take on contemporary queer Puerto Rican and Nuyorican fiction praises the work of acclaimed Puerto Rican author Mayra Santos-Febres’s, whose 2000 novel *Sirena, Selena* has been extensively covered in academic circles, for its reconfiguration of *pena* (shame) as an affective force in the lives of queer Puerto Ricans. In doing so, Cruz-Malavé suggests the potential to see the moment of shame and humiliation experienced by Jade (or Kiko) because of her seemingly outrageously large dick as a way to reclaim the shame in terms of agency. Analyzing the drag queen characters in Santos-Febres’s novel, Cruz-Malavé praises the author for creating a “world in which [the drag queen characters] are not only obliged to resignify ‘pena’ in order to reconstitute themselves, but to sell it as well. In a world in which their trauma and abjection have already been commodified and globally marketed, her characters strive…to infiltrate, and reclaim, the existing [utopian circles] in order to expand them” (“Oxymoron” 60). This comment relates to Jade’s moment of shame. As mentioned by Cruz-Malavé, Jade’s shame is indeed “commodified and globally marketed”; acknowledging that process then becomes a platform that gives Jade the chance to disidentify with her own shame, not by rejecting it, but by reclaiming it as her own. This is one of the ways in which “bad citizens” gain cultural power.

The role drag plays in all this represents a missed opportunity to engage with shame and pride, that which can be made public and that which must remain private. Over and over, the queens are asked to perform not just gender but their racial identity as well. Yet, what I found most striking about the constant call for the Puerto Rican queens to perform their Latina/o identity is that drag consists of making public that which is private or even foreign to the gay male body. Drag, at its most pragmatic, is
about adopting an identity that society sees as different from the individual. Moreover, Judith Butler points to the political value of drag by conceiving drag as,

a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the regimes of power that one opposes. (125)

*RuPaul’s Drag Race* divests the Puerto Rican queens from realizing this potential since, when it comes to race, the show does not provide room for the queens to occupy whiteness; instead, they must model themselves after Latina/o cultural markers.

This represents a missed opportunity to encourage the Puerto Rican queens to use drag as a way to call attention to the performativity of “whiteness” much like drag has the potential to highlight the concept of gender as a social construct. Indeed, one of the ways in which drag has been read as politically subversive has been through its ability to call attention to the performativity of whiteness; for example, Ragan Rhyne argues that “camp, as a mode of class performance, is often deployed […] by white drag queens and in fact often subverts naturalized whiteness and renders it marked and visible” (181-184). While white drag queens have the opportunity to “subvert naturalized whiteness” by embodying white femininity, the Puerto Ricans are not given the space to interrogate the category of “whiteness” through their drag performance. Of course, the power dynamics implicated in performing “whiteness” are very different from the power dynamics involving men doing drag. For one, when they impersonate women, men are moving from a position of privilege to a position of social inferiority. Moving down the social ladder, when the possibility of returning to the original dominant role is always available. Historically speaking, men have portrayed females for the purpose of entertainment for centuries, and the popularity of the show proves that 21st-century
audience members are still entertained by this idea. Less acceptable today, though still following a tradition, are performances from either white entertainers as members of another race (i.e., minstrel shows, classic Hollywood movies) or from performers of color embodying a different race—except for whiteness. Thus, the show inadvertently creates a barrier around the type of drag the queens of color can represent. Of course, it is important not to ignore the problematics involved in the Puerto Rican contestants' brown bodies being reconfigured in terms of whiteness, and I do not argue that the show should ask the contestants to embody white drag more often. Rather, I evaluate the show’s persistence on racing the brown, Puerto Rican contestants in such a way that they do not typically have the opportunity to disidentify with whiteness.

“When I’m in Drag, I’m a Star”: Survival and Negotiation as Forms of Subversion

Rewatching the first three seasons, it seems like Alexis Mateo was the Puerto Rican queen who was able to navigate the show’s trapping the best. Alexis’ arc in the show points to the tensions that emerge when the minority subject interrogates and critically engages with the mainstream’s demands. I see this discussion as framed by Cruz-Malavé’s analysis of *Sirena, Selena* as a novel that depicts “Puerto Rico’s global peripheral (or modern colonial) urban culture [as] more interested in survival than liberation, more concerned with dignity and respect than radical social transformation” (59). Alexis Mateo exemplifies this form of cultural citizenship. Her work on the show was less about “radical social transformation” (interests that, for better or worse, are more aligned with the goals of someone like Sylvia Rivera) and more about “dignity and respect,” which for a Puerto Rican queer subject like Alexis, represents a form of “liberation” that considers her socioeconomic status, national identity, and
sexual/gender performance more than typical conceptions of political liberation tend to allow for.

When Alexis walks into the workroom for the first time, she is aware she will be marked as Latina. Right away, Manila Luzon says, “We got two big girls, and two Puerto Ricans”; her comment prompts an Alexis confessional in which she responds, “what I hate the most is that people label you the Latin queen. I’m not just the Latin queen; when I’m in drag, I’m a star.” Manila, an ethnic queen herself, soon—either consciously or subconsciously—sets herself apart from the marginalized girls in the group—the Puerto Rican girls and the big girls. Manila’s instant othering of these queens reveals that part of the covering process for queens means embracing hegemonic discourse. Thus, Manila’s own privilege throughout the season comes at the expense of the oppressed groups, something that becomes even more obvious through the challenges in which she personifies a series of negative Asian stereotypes, much to the critique of the othered contestants like Shangela and Alexis. Alexis’ response to Manila’s comment depicts a level of awareness about her subordinate role within U.S. gay culture not as clear in the performance of the other Puerto Rican contestants. She never denies her race and ethnicity, but she tries to develop a sense of identity around stardom and drag taking her race into account without always allowing hegemonic desire to disrupt her agency.

The forms of success Alexis finds on the show, though, rely on how she is able to package her own Latina identity for the judges to consume. Just like Jade was going to be compared to Jennifer López before she even stepped in front of the camera, Alexis was bound to be the Latina queen before she started the competition. However, by the
time “Totally Leotarded” (the fourth episode of season 3) arrives, Alexis has seemingly given up her disdain for being thought of as “just the Latin queen.” In this episode, the main challenge calls for the queens to act in their own workout video. Alexis decides to play up her Puerto Rican identity by exaggerating her accent and wearing a tacky getup; she also acts like the stereotype of the American dumb girl. Yara Sofia chooses a similar approach for her workout video. She comes up with the catchphrase “echa ‘palante’” (a colloquialism that could be translated as “keep moving forward” or “keep going”), wears a short black dress with a flower on her hair, and uses salsa as her background music. While Delta complains that working with Yara feels like she is making a workout video with Charo, the judges praise Alexis for embodying a Puerto Rican Chrissy Snow in her video. Charo is, of course, one of those figures whose shadow looms so large over Latin performers that she seems almost mythical; certainly, the type of loud, dancing, hypersexual Latin femininity she cements is a myth. Chrissy Snow, the famed character from the American sitcom *Three’s Company* (1976-1984), represents a signifier for the naïve, hypersexual American blonde so ubiquitous in U.S. sitcoms; the judges favor Alexis’ adaptation of this stereotype over Yara Sofia’s “Charo performance.” Here we see how Alexis subverts the judges’ expectations, and even insistence, that the Puerto Rican queens personify Latina/o cultural markers; rather, Alexis chooses to package herself as someone who can perform both Puerto Rican and North American ideas of femininity. Playing with both Puerto Rican and white myths of femininity, Alexis Mateo disidentifies with both hegemonic understandings of race and femininity as a way to get ahead in the race, finally emerging as a victor. On the other hand, Yara, who arguably identifies with the stereotype of Charo, is read by Delta and,
more importantly, ultimately loses the challenge. Thus, the results of the challenge highlight the role of disidentification as a form of survival.

I find Muñoz’ concept of great value to address the role of queer Latino/as in the United States because it captures the nuances of those subjects’ search for agency. Disidentification is not a permanent state of being; it is not imagined as a utopian sense of identity. Muñoz writes, “Disidentification is not always an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects […] [at times,] queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere” (5). Conceiving of disidentification as a tool for survival that is not always available to minoritarian subjects moves us away from picturing Alexis’ journey as a Puerto Rican queen solely in terms of a success story. The point I seek to emphasize here is that just because Alexis found a way to disidentify with multiple versions of femininity in the fourth episode, it does not mean she “figured it out” for the rest of the show. A moment where this becomes painfully obvious is in the standup comedy challenge from the episode “Ru Ha Ha.” As part of the challenge, the queens have to work with comedian Rita Rudner to develop a standup routine. Alexis’ first instinct is to talk about coming to the United States, so Rudner’s suggestion is that Alexis opens with a joke about coming here on a raft. Right away, Alexis seems uncomfortable with the joke, and tells Rudner that the word “raft” is difficult for her to pronounce, cuing a displeased reaction from the comedian. At the end, Alexis makes the joke in her standup routine, which bombs. Rudner’s joke fails on multiple levels. Apart from the fact it is simply not a funny joke, it imagines Alexis as Cuban, since Cubans are generally the immigrants who travel here by boat; for Puerto Ricans, migrating to the mainland is
not a question of legality. The show forces Alexis to fully identify with a stereotype that is not even part of her identity; the result is embarrassing for everyone involved.

Moments like these are what make the subversive moments in the show both surprising and exciting, especially when they are so close together. By far, the most complex episode concerning queer Puerto Rican identity in the show’s first three seasons is the episode right after the just-discussed “Ru Ha Ha Ha,” titled “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Style.” The main challenge of the episode finds the queens making a PSA to honor the American troops abroad. Given the complicated history between Puerto Rico and American troops, this episode represents one of the very few cultural artifacts in the history of American television that finds queer Puerto Rican drag queens directly engaging with the notion of American nationalism, American loyalty, and Puerto Rican identity.

Unexpectedly, Alexis and Yara Sofia are a central focus of this episode. Yara Sofia’s issues throughout the episode are highly connected to her identity as a Puerto Rican queen; running her main idea by Alexis, she says: “Right now, I’m wearing no clothes because I don’t want any brand, any stereotype to cover who I am. I don’t want any brand to cover my identity, identity [sic].” Later on, RuPaul asks her if she is going to do any of “that sensual Puerto Rican….” The contrast between Yara’s original plans to not represent any stereotype with RuPaul’s question/suggestion about performing Puerto Rican sensuality encapsulates the show’s back and forth between Puerto Rican desires and the expectations from gay cosmopolitan culture. At the end, Yara decides to play up her Puerto Rican camp identity, which works against her favor; her dress looks tacky, and she has a difficult time delivering her lines during the PSA. Meanwhile, Alexis
wears a stunning jump suit with a print full of United States flags all over; she has officially packaged herself as a patriotic American, but she still speaks Spanish in her PSA and seems to have a lot of fun while doing it. Yara does not even pretend to embrace typical conceptions of American symbols in her runway look; instead, she wears a *bomba*, a traditional Puerto Rican dress, which she then removes to reveal a bathing suit made to look like the Puerto Rican flag. Unlike the workout video challenge, Yara Sofia seems to have more agency in her performance during the runway walk and the PSA challenge. She not only refuses to reject her national identity as a Puerto Rican, she embraces it in a way that is undeniable and even abrasive. In another instance of disidentification proving to be an effective survival strategy, Alexis wins the challenge and Yara Sofia ends up in the bottom two with Carmen, the other remaining Puerto Rican queen of the season.

Carmen Carrera’s own Puerto Rican identity comes into focus during this episode, another example of how the show provides a surprising space to discuss the notion of queer Puerto Rican performativity. As I said earlier, this essay mostly zeroes in on those queens whose journey in the show was defined by their race. Carmen Carrera’s ethnicity is never directly addressed until this episode when Carmen, Shangela, Yara Sofia, and Alexis are talking about the challenge while getting ready for the runway. Carmen says she doesn’t speak Spanish and proudly claims her mom is very “Americanized.” This moment cues a confessional from Yara, where she says she would love to see Carmen embrace her Puerto Rican identity. On the other hand, in her confessional, Carmen says she loves Puerto Rican culture and that it has been a part of her life since she was little, but that Alexis and Yara do not consider her Latina enough.
The underlying tension has to do with Carmen Carrera’s ability to pass as white because of her lack of a Puerto Rican accent, her skin color, and the way she presents herself.

Unlike the type of reconstitution of shame that I associate with Alexis Mateo, and to some extent, Yara Sofia, Carmen’s Puerto Rican shame drives her to counteridentify with Puerto Rican ethno-national identity. This claim is not completely accurate; unable to escape the liminality associated with boricua subjects, Carmen has a complex relationship with her ethnicity and race: She wants to be thought of as American and relishes in the fact that her family has shed associations with their immigrant past. That Carmen mentions her happiness at her Puerto Rican mother being “Americanized,” she unintentionally evokes 1960s discourse pertaining to Puerto Rican femininity, discourse that most likely applied to Carmen’s mother. Puerto Rican femininity was thought to be “unbridled” and “the regulation of the bodies of women was deemed of paramount importance in order to eradicate poverty and foment modernization” (Cruz-Malavé, *Queer Latino Testimonio* 100-101). The connection among poverty, modernization, and the perceived threat of unregulated female sexuality to the future of the nation accounts for Carmen’s pride at her mother’s ability to move beyond poverty and messy sexuality into a normalized American citizenship.

At the same time, Carmen’s desire to pass as white, only acknowledging her Puerto Rican identity when it gives her the chance to victimize herself and paint competitors she disliked in a bad light, seems to be rooted in this type of historical repudiation of Puerto Rican sexual identity. Carmen spends the entire season as part of “the Heathers,” a group of contestants that, because of their self-ascribed aesthetic
capital based on the values of gay cosmopolitanism, decided to form a clique. Calling themselves “the Heathers” (a reference to the 1988 cult film *Heathers* in which the three most popular and beautiful girls in school are all named Heather), Carmen’s clique decided to call a group consisting of African-American and *boricua* queens, “The Boogers” since they deemed them ugly, tacky, and unpolished. Similar to Holly Woodlawn, who referred to Nuyorican queens of color as “psycho bitches,” largely because of her ability to pass as white and female, Carmen Carrera (who was always praised for her skinny, cys female-like body and features) used her liminal identity to escape the shame and labels that she knew are assigned to Puerto Rican and Nuyorican queens who do not pass. In terms of survival strategies, Carmen Carrera has figured hers out; that it happens at the expense of shaming and invoking oppressive conceptions of *boricua* cultural citizenship speaks to Hiram Perez’s point that queers of color are indeed willing participants in gay cosmopolitanism. Going back to my discussion of progressive narratives, Carmen’s choice of survival seems to be more aligned with the individualistic rhetoric that defines typical notions of the American Dream as opposed to the strategies employed by contestants like Alexis Mateo and Yara Sofia, which take into account their communities and historical realities.

**Responsitranity**

Analyzing the issue of minority representation in dominant forms of popular media, queer film scholar Richard Dyer writes,

> How social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life [...]. How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in
society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens. Equally re-presentation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. (1)

Dyer’s take on cultural representation assigns responsibility to dominant avenues for their depiction of minority subjects. Based on the ideas he presents, I argue that *RuPaul’s Drag Race* is a highly important and valuable site to discuss the commodification, oppression, eroticization, and shaming of queer Puerto Rican subjects. Aligning itself with the politics characteristic of hegemonic conceptions of queerness and Puerto Rican identity, the show is fully implicated in the losses of its Puerto Rican contestants. And yet, those conditions produce a series of moments that allow for sites of resistance, subversion, and survival, suggesting that the nexus between queer Puerto Rican identity and gay cosmopolitanism is filled with potentiality, a potentiality that must not go untapped. Just like RuPaul reminds his audience of their “responsitranity,” she, her producers, and her girls should be aware of their own “responsitranity” to those whose voices, while as loud as the rest, have yet to be fully given an honorable place within the show.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION: IMAGINING A QUEER LATINA/O UTOPIA

In his book *Cruising Utopia*, Jose Esteban Muñoz theorizes the concepts of queer utopia and queer potentiality from a queer Latino perspective. Responding to both the anti-future motif that runs through current white queer theory and to the normative agenda of mainstream gay rights, Muñoz writes,

> Utopia lets us imagine a space outside of heteronormativity. It permits us to conceptualize new worlds and realities that are not irrevocably constrained by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and institutionalized state homophobia. More important, utopia offers us a critique of the present, of what is, by casting a picture of what can and perhaps will be. (35)

I argue Sylvia Rivera, Holly Woodlawn, and the Puerto Rican contestants in RuPaul’s drag race have fashioned personas that allow for an understanding and criticism of the constricting contemporary political climate, while opening up a space to imagine valuable tools to survive within and subvert that system. This is the political value of *loca*, not as a set group of behaviors or characteristics that form an identity, but as a malleable term used to indicate and explore the political value of in-betweeness.

The tendency might be to celebrate and romanticize this in-betweeness. For example, self-identified *loca* Pedro Lemebel sees *locas* as “an escape from normativizing codes,” “a symbol of the freed sexuality that the dominant gay model attempts to exclude,” and as “the only remaining nonconformist and radical homosexual identity, one that remains outside the negotiable circle of gay identity” (Palaversich 111). This view places an enormous burden on *locas* by depicting them as *the only remaining* form of queerness able to challenge the system. *Locas* are too often given the role of martyrs, mother figures, and caretakers who must sacrifice for the betterment of others; I find this type of thinking removes agency and complexity from *locas*. Furthermore, as I
have argued here, I do not believe that *locas* are able to “escape normatizing codes” or to “remain outside the negotiable circle of gay identity,” nor do I think their sexuality is “freed.” As the stories and histories of Holly and Sylvia indicate, sometimes *locas* represent, highlight or help cement some of the scariest aspects of dominant culture (gender constraints, sexual shaming, race/class inequality). They do not need to exist outside of the system, and they are not capable of doing so either; if they did, they would be outside and no longer in-between, and the specificity that fills certain moments with subversive potential would be gone.

Through my analysis of these texts, I continue to highlight the inconsistencies, paradoxes, and tensions that define them. I do not necessarily think of this condition as something negative about the texts. I think instead of how such complications are generally avoided by critics, and yet these “weird” moments are more often than not present in representations of *locas*. Instead of dismissing these moments, I hope to invite a look into these modes of visual representation from a critical perspective that still finds avenues of resistance. The works here function as an archive and repertoire of that juncture that describes the tense relationship between queer Nuyorican queens and the texts that archive their form of citizenship. It is my hope that the analysis here provides us with ways of thinking about seeing these archives of queer Nuyorican subjectivity as possible sites that indeed “shelter” and “maintain” avenues for challenging hegemonic structures that seek to govern the brown queer body.

I do present an image of *locas* as subjects who, at one point or another, threaten the call to cover so engrained in contemporary conceptions of gay masculinity in the United States. Their version of citizenship does not align with the ubiquitous image of
the model gay male citizen. The dominant discourses of the past and future of contemporary queer culture do not reflect a desire or willingness to expand—and necessarily transform—the concept of citizenship to include *locas*; instead, we have used *locas* to write a history tailored to shape and reinforce hegemonic values. Academic queer scholarship has tried to move away from useful approaches to theorize gay Latino citizenship (the disdain from white queer scholars toward race as a valid or useful way to talk about queerness is equally surprising and disappointing), and the goals of the movement have been outlined without considering the needs of minoritarian subjects. In my analysis of Holly Woodlawn and Sylvia Rivera I present not just an alternative to current ways of thinking about citizenship for gay men and women, but also two examples of individuals whose movement has left them behind even as it tries to commemorate them. Subjects like Rivera and Woodlawn must no longer be used to celebrate or advance the same ideological practices that kept them from gaining political, social and economic power; their legacy must not consist of a movement that sees them as embarrassments, museum pieces, or martyrs. Ultimately, their narratives should do more than challenge hegemony, at their most realized, those challenges should turn into an attempt, even if unsuccessful, and to fulfill the rich, varied potential which disenfranchised queer Latinos can offer.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

R. Gabriel Mayora was born in Caracas, Venezuela and grew up in Miami, FL. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from the Department of English at the University of Florida in the fall of 2007 and the fall of 2010, respectively. During his graduate studies, Gabriel focused on the intersections between queerness and U.S. Latino/a representation and performance in popular culture. His dissertation was awarded the Delores Auzenne Dissertation Award by the Office of Graduate Minority Programs. At the University of Florida, he taught for the Department of English and University Writing Program for seven years. He was awarded the Mentor of the Year Award in 2014 by the University Writing Program in recognition of his work mentoring and collaborating with first-year graduate students. His essay “Cover, Girl: Branding Puerto Rican Drag in 21st-Century U.S. Popular Culture” was published as part of MacFarland’s collection *RuPaul’s Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality TV* in 2014. In 2015, he was an invited guest panelist at the Queer Latinidades Symposium at Northwestern University. His entry on Stonewall veteran Marsha P. Johnson was added to Oxford University Press’s *Online National African American Biography* in 2016. He obtained his Ph.D. from the Department of English at the University of Florida in the spring of 2016.