



▲ 2010



a fabulous attitude

low-income lgbtgnc people surviving & thriving
on love, shelter & knowledge

a participatory action research study
by the welfare warriors research collaborative

people



the welfare warriors research collaborative (wwrc)

dwayne bibb
michelle billies
joseph "aj" briggs
b.b.
elysa fein
sandie green
reina gossett
alyson halpert
juliet johnson
jeannemarie leone
joyce choi won li
sk matsey
kagendo murungi
doyin ola
natalia pabon
chris parker
rachel pugh
la'shaye simmons
jonas siregar
kayla stevens

this document produced by

WWRC co-researchers
report conception & data analysis

dwayne bibb, michelle billies,
reina gossett, alyson halpert,
katie miles, hilary pomerantz,
kayla stevens

contributing writers & designers

michelle billies, alyson halpert,
joyce choi won li
editing

joyce choi won li
graphic design, layout & data design

qej leadership 2010

kenyon farrow
executive director

reina gossett
director, welfare project

rios o'leary-tagiuri
development consultant

jay toole
director, shelter project

qej board

amber hollibaugh, carmelyn p. malalis, jeremy rye, holiday simmons, julia smith,
darlene s. torres, penelope williams, miriam yeung



For our communities & our allies



wwrc mission statement

the **welfare warriors research collaborative** is addressing issues in our community of multiracial, low-income lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming (LGBTGNC) people.

our research will:

- lift up the voices of people who do not have a voice
- document and expose injustice that exists beyond public view
- document the creative ways that people survive, resist, have each others' backs, and foster liberation
- share information with others about how to deal with shelters, housing, public assistance, and the courts, to make the process less hard and isolating
- support social change campaigns

table of contents



	people	i
	dedication	ii
	mission statement	iii
i.	the People's Summary	1
ii.	background: the WWRC	5
iii.	methods & analysis	8
iv.	who filled out The Low Income LGBT and Gender Non-Conforming Peoples' Survey?	12
v.	recognizing our power & interconnectedness	19
vi.	housing, homelessness & shelters	21
vii.	violence & discrimination	27
viii.	gendering & sexuality oppressions	39
ix.	reproductive justice, economic justice & disability justice	47
x.	daily resilience & resistance	51
xi.	avoidance & isolation	55
xii.	what can this knowledge do? inspirations for community-building & social change	57
xiii.	appendices	62

a fabulous attitude:

low-income lgbtgnc people

surviving & thriving with love, shelter & knowledge

We cannot separate our race from class from sex oppression from ethnicity from desire from longing from exile from love because they are experienced simultaneously.

Caitlin Breedlove¹

i. the people's summary

As low-income lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming (LGBTGNC) people, we have real desires for what we bring to our communities and what we want to cultivate within them. Using our aspirations as a guide, and managing the reality that life is hard, we purposefully focus on, in the words of those who contributed to our research, generating love, courage, respect, laughter, hope, belonging, and a fabulous attitude.

We foster these qualities in order to remain resilient despite violent oppression and exile. Many of us have experienced how we can share and grow these qualities with each other. But many of us also navigate isolation as a strategy to protect ourselves from relentless institutional violence, avoiding and divesting from oppressive systems.

The primary purpose of our work has been to document the many ways low-income LGBTGNC people constantly take action in our own lives and on behalf of our communities. We aim to share this information with others to reduce our isolation, to better negotiate the systems we turn to, and to have ideas and resources for fighting back. In the process we are also determined to counteract portrayals of us as victims, as people lacking agency, as problems – or as unworthy of acknowledgment. Finally, we are

¹ Combahee Survival, Movement Revival. Retrieved 1/24/10, <http://combaheesurvival.wordpress.com/about>

deeply invested in learning with each other about what we do and what we need to grow the kind of world we want to live in.

With this report, the Welfare Warriors Research Collaborative (WWRC) brings its research to our communities for the first time, holding our findings of love and belonging, avoidance and isolation, together as a reflection of our realities, to understand where hope thrives and to find the kinds of justice we can and should continue to strive for.

In this report, you will find that queer issues are class issues and as such affect our material conditions. Our lives are as explicitly shaped by class as anyone else's but because we are facing poverty, those shapes challenge us everyday - whether accessing public benefits, navigating homeless shelters, or just moving down the street, we consistently encounter threats to our survival.

From July 2007-May 2009, the WWRC video recorded 10 storytelling interviews and audio recorded hundreds of hours of our research meetings, both of which we analyzed as data for this report. We also crafted a 28-item self-report survey, The Low-Income LGBT and Gender Nonconforming Peoples' Survey.

In March and April 2009, we conducted surveys with 171 low-income LGBTGNC people, gathering information about the economics of peoples' lives, struggles with social services and police, as well as the many ways people generate justice. Some of our findings include the following:

Most of the people who participated in our survey (69%) have been homeless at some point in their lives. The majority of us (58%) currently live in a shelter, on the street or subway, or in temporary living situations.

A great number of survey participants (80%) use need-based public benefits such as food stamps, public assistance and housing assistance. Most participants (70%) use

health-related public benefits like Medicaid, HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA) benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Social Security Disability (SSD).

Many of us (48%) report discrimination in a government or community agency and two-fifths of those were denied services. In many of these situations, the resources and power that we need to make decisions about our own bodies and our own lives are denied to us.

For those of us who are currently homeless, our vulnerability to abuse within government and community agencies is even higher. Many of us who are currently

homeless have been stopped and searched in social service agencies (44%), have been threatened with arrest (57%), and have suffered physical assault (35%).

As these statistics begin to indicate, we show in this report that low-income queer issues are issues of government and nonprofit violence, both inside and outside LGBT organizations. As we will share with you, the struggles we face go beyond making ends meet; violences of poverty, racism, policing, and ablism pervade our lives.

Our focus on surviving and resisting violence has meant that we needed to examine the many ways people are targeted. In our data, members of our communities report being profiled by police based on race as often as sexual orientation (with many other stereotypes, and intersections of those stereotypes, prevalent as well). This finding contributes to the ongoing call for attention to the racialized and classed dimensions of homophobia and transphobia. This is necessary because of the ways LGBT issues continue to be framed primarily in terms of sexuality, and to some extent gender in many political and research agendas, at the expense of intersectional approaches. Further, because low-income LGBTGNC people draw on our identities to survive and resist discriminatory and dehumanizing treatment, it is crucial to see and honor each other as members of multiple communities.

We are not victims. We have found and created many acts of daily resilience and resistance. We argue, complain, file reports, write letters, document hearings, file for fair hearings, sue, call 311, call the police, call people in charge, call the media, scream, intervene in physical situations, fight back with organizations, fight back with friends, do research, sign petitions, force the issues, go to protests, lobby representatives, go to jail, advocate for policies, advocate for ourselves, engage in community education, work street patrols, maintain spirituality, and keep trying.

As you will see in our report, we are part of strong, fierce communities. Though we struggle with a world that seeks to draw the lines of our identities, and thus the boundaries of our lives, we find ways to make our own meanings. We build our own worlds, in our daily realities and in our visions of what is to come.

ii. background: the welfare warriors research collaborative

As a multiracial group of 17 LGBTGNC people, most of whom are or have been low-income, the WWRC came together in July 2007 to investigate how our communities survive daily interpersonal, institutional, and systemic violence. A Ph.D. student who was also a member of QEJ's Welfare Warriors project contributed the resources she was gaining in school to support the Welfare Warriors to develop a participatory action research (PAR) project. PAR is an approach to research that privileges those who experience the issues under study as experts on those experiences.² By using this stance, the WWRC was able to ground our research in the concerns of low-income LGBTGNC people in ways that recognize our well-honed knowledge about the systems of our daily lives.

In our version of PAR, all WWRC co-researchers have participated in every aspect of the research: from defining the issues, to theorizing and designing the project, to constructing the methods and instruments, to gathering the data, to analyzing it, to brainstorming our products, and presenting it publicly. To make this happen, the WWRC has met multiple times per week for more than 2 years, trained each other in PAR and numerous social and movement theories, debated issues, created art together, validated each others' sexual and gender identities, and celebrated our victories. The WWRC is a small, tight "niche of resistance"³ in which we are staking our ground in discussions about who we are and what liberation means to us. Borrowing terminology and practices from liberation psychology and indigenous scholars, we are decolonizing research⁴ by shifting power relations in multiple dimensions of knowledge production simultaneously. We structure our

² Fine, M 2008, In class lecture. Participatory Action Research methods module; Lykes, MB, Terre Blanche, M & Hamber, B 2003 'Narrating survival and change in Guatemala and South Africa: The Politics of representation and a liberatory community psychology.' *American Journal of Community Psychology* vol. 31, no. 1/2, pp. 79-90.

³ Moane, G 2006, 'IX. Exploring activism & change: Feminist psychology, liberation psychology, political psychology', *Feminism & Psychology*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 73-78..

⁴ Martín-Baró, I 1994, *Writings for a liberation psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Smith, LT 2006, 'On Tricky ground: Researching the native in the age of uncertainty', pp. 85-107 in N Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds.) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks.

discussions to diffuse power and democratize the notion of expert,⁵ we recognize that knowledge comes from living and not just books or top-down-led research, and we critique assumptions about how to negotiate the challenges we face.

The WWRC instituted practices early on of what we call “diffused leadership” to manage the power dynamics on our team. We borrowed from Rogers’ concept, “diffusion of innovation,” in which ideas can spread among people in a community as an organic process of sharing.⁶ Undermining the hierarchy many of us fall into easily in groups became a necessary practice in our group while we examined how to resist oppressive power in the larger society. We have pushed ourselves to become a collective where everyone has access to every aspect of our process and everyone’s ideas and skills carry weight. Inspired by many, we are creating methods that put control of our process in everyone’s hands.⁷ We diffuse leadership in many ways: co-researchers plan agendas together and trade facilitation of our meetings, we make all decisions by consensus, we attune our meetings to a pace at which everyone can hear and understand, co-researchers attend and report back on conferences, we “skill-share,” and we bring in readings, theories, films to reflect on them together. This horizontal power structure contributes to raising our collective consciousness as we figure out how to decolonize research and work towards liberation.⁸

⁵ Fine, 2008; Lykes et al, 2003.

⁶ Rogers, E.M. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations*. New York: The Free Press.

⁷ Cahill, C. (2004). Defying gravity? Raising consciousness through collective research. *Children’s Geographies*, 2 (2), 273-286; Fine, M. (2005). Contesting research: Rearticulation and ‘thick democracy’ as political projects of method. In Demetriadis, G., McCarthy, C., and Weis, L. (Eds.) *Ideology, curriculum, and the new sociology of education: Revisiting the work of Michael Apple*. New York: Routledge; Fine, M., Torre, M., Boudin, L. Bowen, I., Clark, J. Hylton, D., Martinez, M., Rivera, M., Roberts, R., Smart, P. Upegui, D. (2004). Participatory action research: From within and beyond prison bars. In Weis, L. and Fine, M. (Eds.). *Working method: Research and social justice*. New York: Routledge. Guishard, M. (in press). ‘The false paths, the endless labors, the turns now this way and now that:’ Participatory action research, mutual vulnerability, and the politics of inquiry. *Urban Review*; Smith, 2006; Torre, M.E. (2005). The alchemy of integrated spaces: Youth participation in research collectives of difference. In L. Weis & M. Fine (Eds.), *Beyond silenced voices*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; Tuck, E., Allen, J., Bacha, M., Morales, A., Quinter, S., Thompson, J., & Tuck, M. (2008). PAR Praxes for now and future change: The Collective of researchers on educational disappointment and desire. In Cammarota, J. and Fine, M. (eds.), *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. New York: Routledge.

⁸ Smith, 2006; Tuck, 2008

Our work has been infused with the politics of many movements, including the Welfare Warriors of the 1960s and 1970s, groups of women on public assistance who agitated for systemic economic transformation, as well as benefits and respect from state welfare offices and who together formed poor peoples' movements.⁹

We inherit ideas and practices from post-colonial, LGBT liberation, and feminist movements, racial justice and immigrant movements, and especially queer people of color, women and trans people of color, and anti-prison industrial complex movements: the Audre Lorde Project (ALP), SistaIIista (SIIS), Southerners on New Ground (SONG), INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (INCITE!), Critical Resistance (CR), and of course, Queers for Economic Justice (QEJ).

The Welfare Warriors Research Collaborative therefore generated both a politics and a theory from our perspective, working to transform not only *what* is known about our communities, but also *how* what is known comes to be known. Our aims were to lift up our voices and the voices of our friends and loved ones to call attention to the daily violence and discrimination we face. We also aimed for people in our communities to have hope, to draw courage from our stories of survival and to gain insider information about how to negotiate the institutions and systems we encounter every day.

By doing so, we are also contributing to and influencing poverty knowledge,¹⁰ de-centering professional and academic expert opinion, and reconsidering the audience – members of our communities – we want to share and engage with. Our work pushes out at the constraining idea that oppression is only damaging and toward the conception of low-income LGBTGNC people as knowledge producers.

⁹ Nadasen, P. (2005). *Welfare warriors: The welfare rights movement in the United States*. New York: Routledge.; Piven, F. and Cloward, R. (1979). *Poor people's movements: Why they succeed, how they fail*. New York: Vintage Books.

¹⁰ Krumer-Nevo, M. & Benjamin, O. (accepted for publication). Critical poverty knowledge: Contesting Othering and social distancing. *Current Sociology*.

iii. methods and analysis

Once we established the collaborative, the WWRC designed a mixed-method approach for collecting data, including participant observation of our meetings, a series of 10 in-depth, videotaped storytelling sessions, and a survey with 202 participants, of whom 171 are or have been low-income.

Our research questions evolved over the course of our work. We began by investigating how people survive and resist violence and discrimination, then revised our focus to the following:

How do we rely on each other for the resources we need to support our daily resilience, to define and fight for justice, and to build community with each other?

For the WWRC, “survival” describes both a mode of living and a way of negotiating particular incidents. It encompasses independent and collective strategies for meeting one’s basic needs in an ongoing way, getting through situations, and taking action to resist unjust treatment interpersonally and systemically. We also draw from a comprehensive understanding of resistance: “to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression.”¹¹ This expansive definition supported our grounded theorizing about survival and resistance in general, and how we might see them as part of our efforts to fight for justice and build community.

the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming peoples’ survey

Over the course of 8 months, the WWRC slowly and deliberately constructed a survey that could capture the range of experiences we wanted to document. Together we cycled through many versions of the research question and survey items, creating and borrowing

¹¹ Wade, A. (1997) Small acts of living: Everyday resistance to violence and other forms of oppression. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, Vol 19(1), pp. 23-39

scales from others, adding places for survey takers to draw their responses in pictures, and working out our politics of whether and how to gather demographic data. We also spent time thinking about accessibility – both language and form – riffing off of the zine/journal used by the Young Women’s Empowerment project by hand-making over 200 folders, each with multiple digital images of our members, an introduction sheet to the survey, consent forms, and copies of our resource guide. Over the course of our survey development, one co-researcher copied and hand-wrote lists of resources for a 20-page guide we wanted and needed survey takers to have in case they wanted support for the issues we raised in our survey or wanted to get connected with others taking action. The guide is currently on the QEJ website.

Finally, in the Spring of 2009, 9 WWRC co-researchers conducted 202 community surveys with other low-income LGBTGNC people in our neighborhoods, HIV/AIDS service organizations, LGBT people of color organizations, medical centers, homeless shelters, and on the Internet. We offered survey takers a one-day Metrocard (subway card) in thanks. The survey looks into how low-income LGBTGNC people contribute to community groups, keep themselves safe, respond to violence, deal with discrimination from the police and social services, and imagine justice.

Since then, we have engaged in over 40 hours of collective data analysis, looking at the data closely for patterns and resonance with our own lives and those around us.

storytelling

The WWRC draws from the work of women of color feminists and others who recognize that personal narratives have and continue to be an important tool for people, “particularly when there is a lack of representation or misrepresentations within the dominant culture.”¹² Our in-depth interviewing component focused heavily on storytelling.

¹² Jacob, K & Licona, A 2005 ‘Writing the waves: A Dialogue on the tools, tactics, and tensions of feminisms and feminist practices over time and place.’ *NWSA Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 197-205

We envisioned it as a kindred approach to oral history, where a person's story is both their own and part of their communities' experiences over time.

This has also allowed us to emphasize the ways in which each storyteller has a right to represent themselves. One member, a filmmaker, taught us digital filmmaking and interviewing, and together, we came up with the questions we would ask, and invented methods for conducting the storytelling that worked for us. We then gathered stories from each other.

Usually many members took part in storytelling sessions, often pairing up to ask questions that made the person telling their story feel safe. The camera could be turned off at anytime. Afterwards, when we learned to log the videos and analyze them, co-researchers chose what parts of their videos the group would see.

The filmmaker on our team has produced a documentary based on our work. We also see our stories as data, and use them to better understand low-income LGBTGNC issues.

We analyzed our stories in four steps: first we reviewed videos as a group, coding them based on what we thought and felt, what we could relate to, and what stood out to us. Second, we reviewed the codes to identify themes. Third, we theorized together, identifying the conditions that keep negative themes in place. Finally, the academic co-researcher further analyzed three individual transcripts.

Our collective analysis method is based on Cahill's "collective praxis approach," which she and the Fed-Up Honeys, a PAR group of young women on the Lower East Side, used to critique changes in their neighborhood. Borrowing from them, analysis for us became a way of social theorizing, where we come to see individual experiences as "shared and social."¹³

¹³ Cahill, C. (2007a). Repositioning ethical commitments: Participatory action research as relational praxis of social change. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6 (3), 360-373.

triangulating the data

We also analyzed notes and transcriptions of our meetings to triangulate the data. Triangulating data means bringing together different kinds of information that we gathered through research to illuminate the issues.

iv. who filled out

The Low-Income LGBT and Gender Nonconforming Peoples' Survey?

202 people took the survey in their neighborhoods, shelters, LGBT organizations, HIV organizations, at QEJ, and over the Internet. Of these, 171 are currently or formerly low-income, according to our thinking. (See the section, "How do survey takers support themselves and what does it mean to be low-income?")

In describing who we are and who took our survey, it is important to us to challenge typical social identity categories as fixed or natural. In our identity-related questions, responders could check as many options as they wanted. At the same time, these categories are political; they come from how the state responds to people and how people define themselves. Our survey offered some ideas for responses in the form of boxes and always included a line for people to describe themselves and a box called "prefer not to answer." Some graphs that describe different ways our communities identify are located in the Appendix.

a note on our percentages and statistics

All data in this report is based on the 171 low-income survey takers. Where possible we have included the N for each statistic we provide. N means "number" and it stands for the number of people who answered that question.

where do survey takers live?

The people who took our survey are primarily from the New York City area. Fifty-five percent of them live in Manhattan, a quarter from Brooklyn, a fifth from the Bronx and a tenth live elsewhere (Long Island, Queens, etc.).

Within those areas, the majority of our respondents live in a shelter, on the street or subway, or in temporary living situations (58%). Some of them live in their own apartments, and some of them live with friends and relatives.

A majority of people who filled out our survey (69%) have been homeless at some point (N=147). In addition, the number of people who have ever been homeless was calculated differently from the report of the kind of living situation survey takers are in:

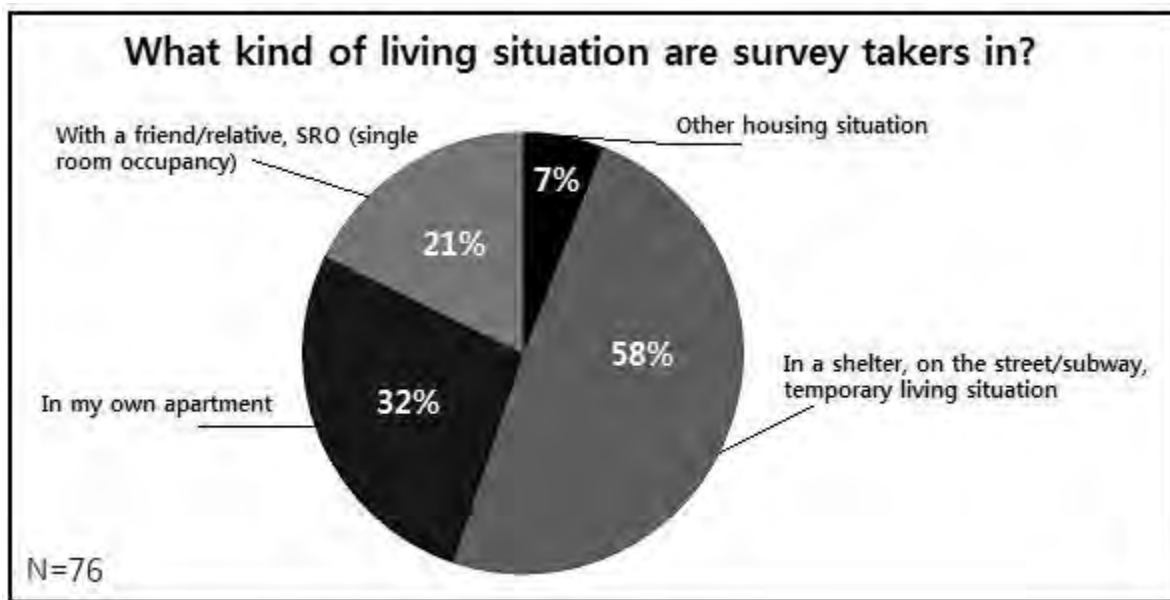


Table 1: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming peoples' survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

how do survey takers identify their...

...gender? And sexual identity?

Our respondents were made up of people with many different sexual identities (N=169). About a quarter of them identify as gay, and another quarter as lesbian. People who identify as straight make up 21%. Over 15% identify as bisexual, and 10% as queer. 5% of them define their sexual identities as Two Spirit, and another 5% define their sexual

identities as transgender. A few of them aren't sure, or are questioning. Still others identify as pansexual, and same-gender loving. 10% selected multiple identities.

In analyzing our statistics, one co-researcher had questions about why we had people who identified their sexual identity as "transgender." She had this to say: "So I just noticed that I thought we discussed this issue a lot of times, the fact that gender and sexuality are different, so I thought we had removed transgender [as a choice] from a sexual identity and so I am surprised. How did it come back in?"

Having calculated this statistic, a co-researcher replied, "It came back in because people wrote in their own [self-definitions], and there were so many people that wrote in on their own. We did put Two Spirit in there [as a choice], and Two Spirit is gender and sexuality."

Respondents' gender identities were as diverse as their sexual identities (N=171). Almost half identify as female, and over a third as male. About a fifth identify as transgender and others as Two Spirit. Some also identify as gender non-conforming or genderqueer. And many of them identified with more than one gender description or self-described their genders.

straight members of LGBTGNC communities

Of the 40 times people chose heterosexuality to describe themselves, 54% also checked female as their gender identity. 29% of those identifying as straight also checked Transgender MTF, 20% also checked male, 3% also checked Transgender FTM, and 3% also described their gender identities using their own terms.

What this says to us is that members of low-income LGBTGNC communities can and do identify as straight. We join with others who understand that this has important implications for social justice and for research. Our research challenges approaches that do not recognize that those who check "female" may have a trans history but not identify

as trans, that those who identify as male may also identify as genderqueer, that those who respond to a questionnaire on any particular day may have gender identities not captured by a one-time survey. It may also be that those who critique the concept of gender itself may not use gender to describe themselves – they may select categories playfully or in ways that oppose how others might categorize them.

There are at least two important critiques of our survey regarding gender and sexuality. One, we did not offer "transsexual" as a possibility. While some participants wrote this in, we may be underrepresenting the number of responders who identify as transsexual. Also, because we did not specifically ask survey takers whether they consider themselves members of LGBTGNC communities, we have included those who would may not.

...race/ethnicity?

A large majority of the people who filled out our survey (85%) identify as people of color. Survey takers identify as black and African American (about 40%), Caribbean, Latino and Latina (about 33%); they identify as multiracial, Asian/Pacific Islander, and as American Indian/indigenous and about a sixth also identify as white. Survey takers could also choose as many identities as applied and almost 20% self-described their racial identities by writing in their own responses (N=170).

...age?

Something exciting about our survey is how well people of different ages are represented. One third of survey takers are between the ages of 18-25. The remaining third are split evenly between ages 25-44, and 44-70 years old, respectively (N=170).

The Welfare Warriors believe that highlighting survey respondents' ages is important. Often, when people at Queens for Economic Justice explain what they do – working to achieve economic justice for low-income LGBTGNC people – listeners usually jump to the

conclusion, without prompting, that the organization centers on LGBTGNC homeless youth. We value and encourage work and organizing around LGBTGNC youth issues, but we call to attention the fact that low-income LGBTGNC people are represented at all ages. Not only do homeless LGBTGNC youth remain homeless or low-income into adulthood, but also, social and structural factors continually cast people of all ages into poverty and homelessness.

how do survey takers support ourselves, and what does it mean to be low-income?

The Welfare Warriors thought about the following questions: what does “low-income” mean? Who is low-income? How should we define this in our report? The United States government bases aid off of the federal poverty guideline. In a single-person household, that’s less than \$10,830/year. However, the federal poverty line is widely regarded as an antiquated model, and it is evident that the aid given by the government in correspondence with that poverty guideline makes little sense. One Welfare Warrior explains why:

Say for instance the amount of money that I get for SSI [Supplemental Security Income]... they think the amount of money they’re giving me could keep me on my feet for the whole month, right? And it’s not. I paid my rent and I paid my bills along with other things that food stamps cannot pay for, like the bus, [but] the month isn’t over yet.

Because of this, the Welfare Warriors let survey takers choose for themselves whether they identified as low-income. At the same time, not everyone who faces constant problems making ends meeting uses the term “low-income”. In this report, data about low-income people includes those who self-identified as such, currently or in the past, those who reported that they rely on some sort of need-based public benefits (food stamps), public assistance, or housing assistance, and those who have experienced homelessness.

Although media rarely portrays LGBTGNC people, and their issues are not often discussed even by LGBTGNC organizations, many LGBTGNC people are low-income. According to a study by the Williams Institute, bisexual, lesbian and gay same-sex individuals and couples are “more likely to receive government cash supports for poor and low-income families” than heterosexual couples. The few studies available about low-income transgender people show that large percentages of the transgender population are unemployed, or earn less than \$25,000 per year.^{14,15}

Low-income LGBTGNC people support themselves financially in many different ways. According to our survey, more than 80% of individuals use need-based public benefits such as food stamps, public assistance and housing assistance. 70% of individuals said they use health and need-based public benefits such as Medicaid, HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA) benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Social Security Disability (SSD). 60% of individuals survive on income that is on and off the books, from employment, tips, a stipend, and for close to 10% of respondents sex for money (N=169).

¹⁴ The Williams Institute, February 2009. Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community.

¹⁵ The Williams Institute, June 2007. Bias in the Workplace: Consistent Evidence of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Discrimination.

How do low income LGBTGNC people support themselves financially?

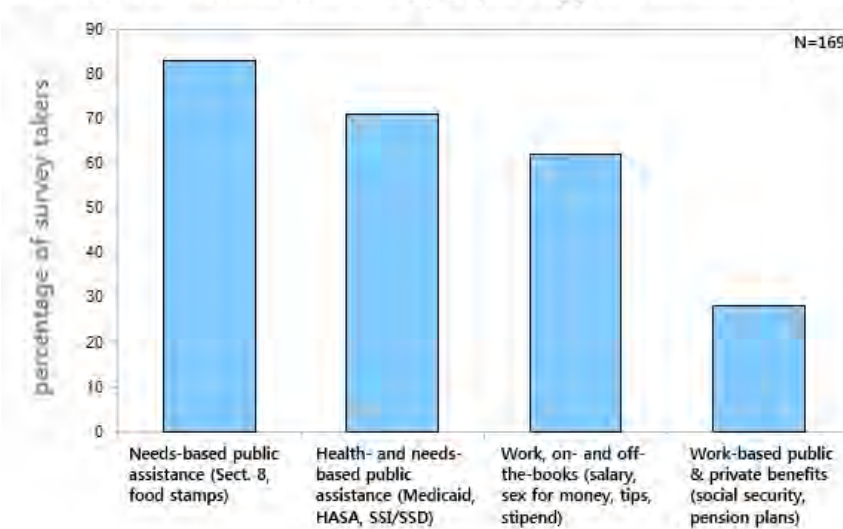


Table II: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming peoples' survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

Sometimes, survey takers weren't sure where their income would come from or how much it would be. 13 out of the 139 people who responded to this question said their income fluctuated, or that they had no idea what it would be. 10 respondents said that they had no income at all. 21 made less than \$1,000/year, and 46 respondents had an income lower than \$5,000/year. 110 were below the official federal poverty line (\$10,830/year).

v. recognizing our power and interconnectedness

A major goal of our study was to document the many ways people respond proactively to the challenges we face. We also wanted to offset a pervasive narrative that defines groups of people by our challenges, in order to create an image that represents poor queer people more holistically. We hoped to portray our engagement with families and communities, our aspirations and talents, and our knowledge and our strengths. In our responses, low-income LGBTGNC people shared not only the ways we advocate for social change and support each other, but also the beautiful, rich sense of community we intentionally create.

In response to the question, what groups do you invest time and energy in, 113 people shared that they engage with over 271 groups in their lives, ranging from families and friends, to churches, LGBT organizations, people of color queer organizations, art groups, health and healing groups, organizations in their local communities, 12-step and support groups, youth and elder groups, and activist groups (see table on following page).

Survey respondents find meaning in the sense of being with others, attending, participating, developing relationships, being among “like-minded” people as well as those they can learn from, and being in spaces of acceptance. Within the WWRC, people often speak about the importance of the accepting, nonjudgmental space we are creating. Issues of class are a significant part of that acceptance. Here is one co-researcher's story about her participation in a group “helping other homeless:”

These groups give me emotional support more than anything and share similar experience so I don't have to feel left out around money stuff – something I find hard to come by.

Survey respondents spend time in groups that provide places where people can get concrete help with shelter, finding jobs, and medical concerns. They are also spaces where people can talk about their lives, get and give support, express themselves and

“keep themselves grounded.” These are also spaces where people can discuss issues and ideas, organize community events, and advocate for change. They invest in these groups their leadership, their time and labor, artistic skills when producing plays, singing and dancing, and their leadership.

Still, 18 people (14%) explicitly said that they have no involvement with groups of any kind. We will say more about later in this report, high proportions of low-income LGBTGNC people are not involved in a community or engaged, isolate themselves as a way to stay safe from police violence and other kinds of violence, and rely solely on themselves when they have problems in their lives.

What groups do survey takers invest their time & energy in?

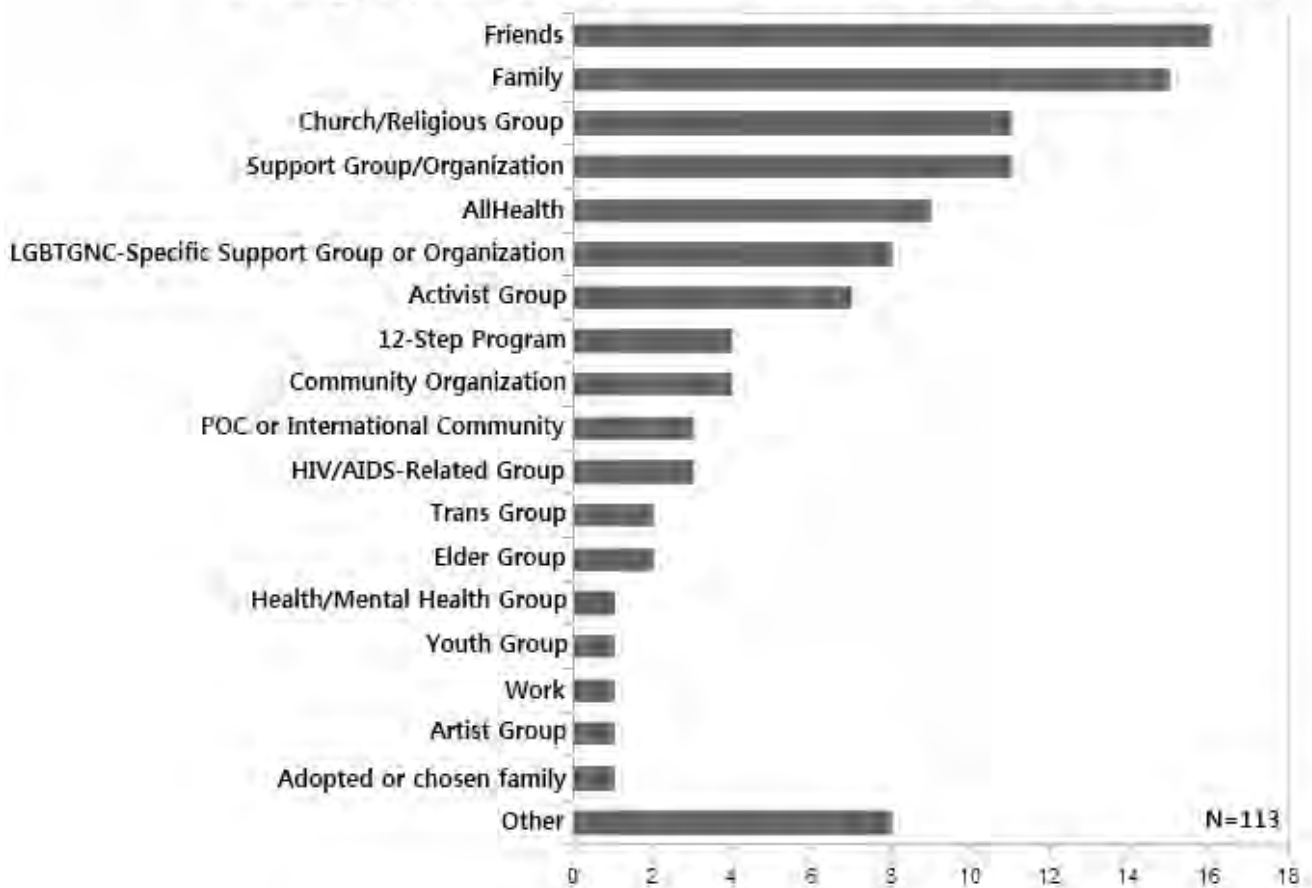


Table iii: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming peoples' survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

vi. housing, homelessness & shelters

A key concern of the WWRC has been the issues people face in housing and shelter systems and the ways they manage them. Survey takers contend with harassment from landlords, evictions, and egregious conditions in shelters. LGBTGNC people who are homeless negotiate unprofessional, discriminatory, and dangerous treatment in many vital social service agencies, including being denied services, falsely arrested, and physically and sexually assaulted.

What is happening in our communities reflects a larger backdrop of housing instability. During the past city fiscal year (2009) an all-time high of 76,555 different people slept in the NYC adult shelter system, almost 50% more than in 2002.¹⁶ Our analysis not only critiques what low-income LGBTGNC communities are going through. We also suggest that what our communities face reflects racist and coercive, gendering and sexualization ideologies and practices that implicate everyone. These mechanisms are used in the process of continually denying housing to many overlapping communities.

In what follows, we show that homelessness is an LGBTGNC issue, that shelters are sites where systemic practices leave residents unsafe and underserved, and that those low-income LGBTGNC people who are currently homeless face high rates of policing, discrimination, and violence in government and nonprofit agencies. We also show the various ways that low-income and homeless LGBTGNC people resist violence and create safer communities and places to live.

acknowledging the issues: a dearth of academic data

Research regarding the extent of housing instability among LGBTGNC adults is shockingly absent. While the number of studies regarding the serious and related problem of

¹⁶ Coalition for the Homeless (January 2010). Basic Facts about New York City Homelessness. Retrieved May 23, 2010 from <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/pages/basic-facts>.

homelessness among LGBTQ youth has been increasing very recently, little research is attending to homelessness as a systemic issue that affects LGBTGNC people at every age.¹⁷ This means that this problem is under-documented and under-theorized.

The few studies that are available provide important information on transgender peoples' lives, for example. In one study, 41% of 194 transgender people in San Francisco reported living in an unstable situation such as being homeless or staying with friends without paying rent¹⁸ and in another, 19% of 252 transgender and gender variant people were without their own living space for economic and discriminatory reasons.¹⁹ In this research, housing was reported as one of the three most important needs. Some HIV-related studies also document extreme levels of homelessness, although this is considered a risk factor rather than its own issue. In research with 722 men who have sex with men in Los Angeles, for example, 50% were reported to be homeless.²⁰

WWRC's findings further fill this gap and demonstrate that shelter and housing assistance needs to extend to LGBTGNC people above 18 years old in NYC:

- **The 69% of survey takers who have ever been homeless identify across a range of sexualities and genders. Those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, two spirit, queer, pansexual, and same gender loving, as well as those who identify as genderqueer and gender nonconforming, as having a trans history, as transgender women and transgender men, as Two Spirit, who identify as female and male, and those who have self-descriptions or prefer not to answer how they identify all are among those low-**

¹⁷ In a literature search in major academic journal databases, including Academic Search Complete, Project MUSE, PsychInfo, SAGE Sociology Collection, Social Science Abstracts, and Sociological Abstracts, as well as journals of social work, sexuality, gender, and public health, fewer than 10 qualitative and quantitative research articles were found using search terms including "homeless and LGBT, gay, transgender, or lesbian" that were not specifically focused on youth.

¹⁸ Transgender Law Center and The San Francisco Bay Guardian (2006). Good Jobs NOW!: A Snapshot of the Economic Health of San Francisco's Transgender Communities. Retrieved May 23, 2010 from <http://www.transgenderlawcenter.org/pdf/Good%20Jobs%20NOW%20report.pdf>.

¹⁹ Xavier, J. (2000) The Washington DC Transgender Needs Assessment Survey. Final Report: Phase Two. Us Helping Us, People into Living, Inc. Retrieved May 23, 2010 from <http://www.gender.org/resources/dge/gea01011.pdf>.

²⁰ Shoptaw, S, Weiss, R, Munjas, B, Hucks-Ortiz, C, Young, S, Larkins, S, Victorianne, G, Gorbach, P. (2009) Homonegativity, Substance Use, Sexual Risk Behaviors, and HIV Status in Poor and Ethnic Men Who Have Sex with Men in Los Angeles. *Journal of Urban Health*, 86, pp 77-92.

income folks who have been homeless at some time.

- The 16% of survey takers who currently receive government housing benefits also identify across a range of sexualities and genders. Those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, Two Spirit, queer and same gender loving as well as those who identify as trans, transgender women, Two Spirit, male, and female, as well as those who describe their gender identity in some other way are among those who receive housing assistance.

shelters

In January 2006, the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) began implementing a pilot policy that the Shelter Organizing Project of QJ had been instrumental in achieving. For years, transgender shelter residents had been reporting regular violence as well as inappropriate and discriminatory treatment by shelter staff, especially when placed in the wrong shelter for their gender. The policy now states that residents are able to self-identify their gender, rather than having it identified for them, in determining whether they will be placed in a men's or women's shelter. This policy has yet to become permanent, however, which speaks to the precarious nature of safety and stability for gendervariant people.

Shelters are frequently settings for dehumanization. As one WWRC co-researcher who had lived in shelters and was formerly incarcerated states, "it's like prison except you get to leave during the day." Her statement is backed by in-depth interviews and participant observations and the following represents a compilation of participant reports from various shelters: DHS police officers accompany staff each morning, banging on residents' doors and ordering them to leave by exit time at 9 am. One officer shoved a door open so hard that he broke a resident's foot. Residents lack access to their rooms and belongings from 9am-1pm and 2pm-5pm every weekday and have a 10pm curfew. Residents say living there is like getting treated "like a barcode;" they are provided

inadequate medical and social services and food (especially for those with diabetes or other health conditions). Residential Aides (direct service staff that are commonly referred to as “guards” by residents) hand out prescription medications without training or supervision. Social workers provide little access to resources. LGBTGNC residents face homophobia and transphobia, and even risk being kicked out, as one participant states, for being “bi, gay or lesbian – which I am.” Residents who attempt to file grievances are retaliated against, transferred arbitrarily to another shelter or called down for inspections in the middle of the night.

Further, shelter security guards often take no action when altercations take place between residents and even encourage fighting. One former resident shared that one time she was on the verge of having a knife fight with another resident who had stolen her things. Rather than handling the situation safely and professionally, however, shelter guards set up a street fight between them and placed bets on the fight.

These experiences raise the serious question of what institutional arrangements enable such behavior. It also calls into question whether low-income LGBTGNC people – and shelter residents more generally – are being provided with the right to shelter constitutionally guaranteed in New York State. Do such violent conditions constitute shelter?

housing status and rates of discrimination in government and community agencies

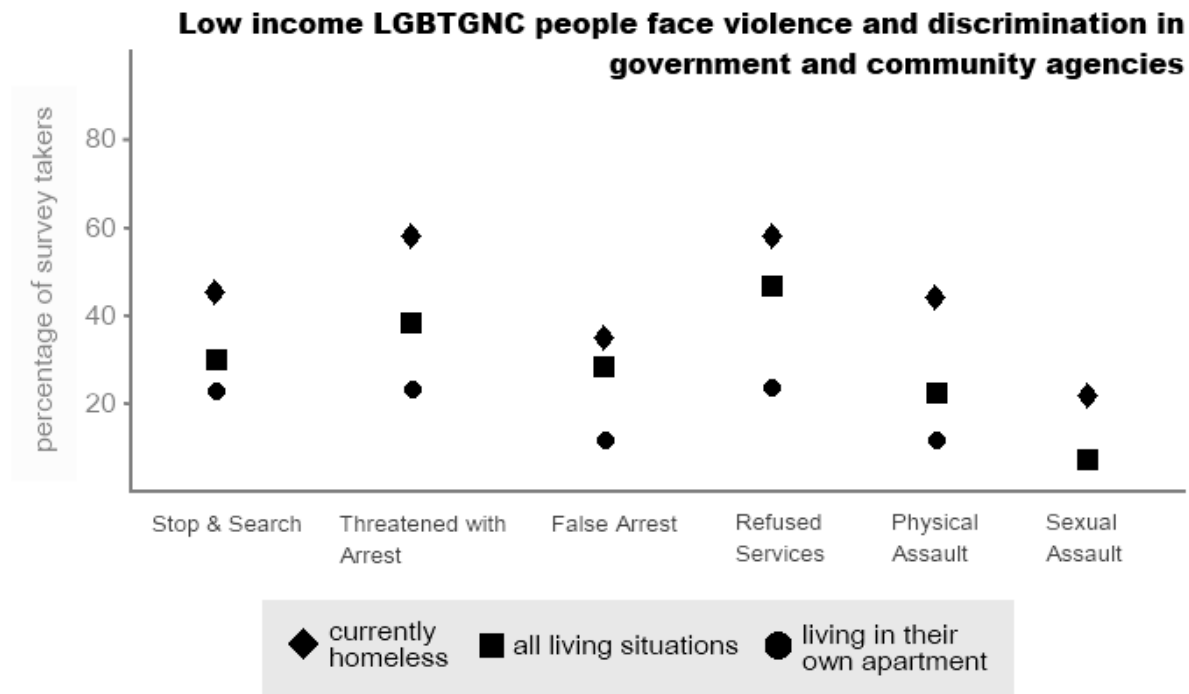


Table IV: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming people's survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

In this chart we show that while large proportions of low-income LGBTGNC people in our survey face discrimination and violence, being homeless means a drastically different level of exposure (N=116). Nearly half of currently homeless folks have been stopped and searched (44%), which is almost 1.5 times more than the community as a whole (30%). Almost 1/3 fewer of those who live in apartments have been stopped (22%). The story is very similar whether looking at the kinds of interactions participants have had with police and guards (threatened with arrest, false arrest) or at the varying unprofessional and brutal forms discrimination takes (refused services, physical assault, sexual assault): those who are currently homeless report problems in agencies at rates 1.5 to 2 times higher than the community overall.

housing justice

It is no surprise to us that people facing this onslaught take steps to survive and fight back in innumerable ways. As we describe more broadly later in this report, LGBTGNC people with unstable housing or discrimination claims engage lawyers, request fair hearings, write letters to their landlords, successfully fight evictions, join housing justice movements, and keep at it despite setbacks. As one survey taker said, “I sued HRA [Human Resources Administration, the New York City public assistance agency] and DHS for a living.”

What may be a little surprising, however, is the way in which some residents turn shelters and other housing situations into sites for sexual and gender liberation. By making the shelter a place where gender expression and gender identity are respected, low-income LGBTGNC people make the shelter safer and more accepting for everyone. One co-researcher, for example, began to express her gender more openly by wearing an earring in the men’s shelter she was assigned to, after living with family for years, where she was required to be closeted in order to maintain her housing. Another co-researcher, stepping in where shelter staff could have, shared knowledge of the pilot shelter policy to inform a transgender woman in a men’s shelter about her right to stay in a women’s shelter. She subsequently transferred. Low-income LGBTGNC people are taking action even in the highly policed and violent space of the shelter to assert their right to make these spaces their own.

Our research shows that as important as they may be, problems faced by homeless LGBT people cannot be solved by anti-discrimination policies and LGBT-sensitive services alone. Homelessness among LGBTGNC people and discrimination of LGBTGNC homeless people will continue as long as housing itself remains a scarce commodity rather than a lived reality for anyone. We also believe that addressing housing instability requires the knowledge, creativity, and strength of all the communities that are affected.

vii. violence & discrimination

Whether they are singled out for their perceived race, sexuality, gender identity, and/or class status, or affected by systemic forces that do not require such individualized practices for their dehumanizing effects, people in our communities must negotiate socially sanctioned, punitive interactions that restrict their access to community resources on a daily basis. Basic forms of stability such as a home, an income, and safety in neighborhoods and at work – not to mention a sense of belonging in the larger community – are repeatedly threatened by harassment, discrimination, and violence, too often at the hands of public authorities and employees. At the same time, the extent and nature of violence against specifically low-income, racially and ethnically diverse LGBT people is not well known. One study found that 43% of 252 transgender people had experienced violence or crime (60% of whom reported incomes of less than \$10,000).²¹ Low-income LGBTGNC people often face violence, and the kinds of violence, frequency of violence, and systemic nature of this violence very often goes unacknowledged or is minimized. Race, for example, can be suppressed in discussions of transphobia and homophobia.²² In our analysis we incorporate a comprehensive critique that incorporates race and class with sexuality and gender.

violence

Information available through the WWRC suggests that the problem of violence and discrimination is widespread; incidents of police harassment, street attacks, and mistreatment by social service personnel, employers, and landlords are recounted continually. Our data about violence in the WWRC's research comes from storytelling interviews, WWRC meetings, and survey research. According to our reading, such violence is severe and pervasive.

²¹ Xavier, J. (2000). 'Final report of the Washington transgender needs assessment survey.' Administration for HIV and AIDS, Department of Health of the District of Columbia, Washington.

²² Lamble, S 2008 Retelling racialized violence, remaking white innocence: The Politics of interlocking oppressions in Transgender Days of Remembrance Sexuality research & social policy, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 24-42; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. (2006). Color of violence. Boston: South End Press.

We gathered 70 small violence stories, and analyzed 20 of these, which described health issues including comas, seizures, and brain surgery; intimate partner violence requiring hospitalization; verbal harassment including being cursed, mocked, and threatened; physical assaults and injury including beatings, stabbings, theft, and death, including murder. Interpersonal and structural violences often combined. Intermittent and chronic violence took place within institutions like prisons, hospitals, and homeless shelters.

Results from our survey question about discrimination in government and community agencies reveal intense levels of violence in the form of physical and sexual assault, false arrest, and threats of assault and arrest, and other forms such as being searched and verbally harassed. (See the following chart)

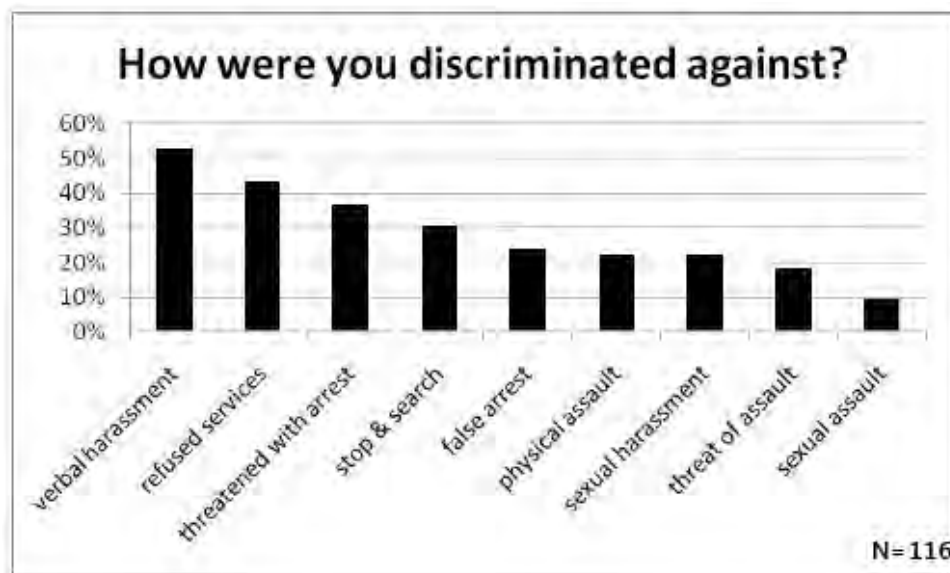


Table V: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming peoples' survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

who commits violence and discrimination

An annual nationwide anti-LGBT violence report found that in 2007, a third of anti-LGBT offenders were law enforcement, service providers, security people, landlords, or bosses.²³ In our research, staff or employees were involved in over 50% of discrimination incidents and guards were involved in 20%. The police were reported to be involved in over 40% of discrimination incidents.

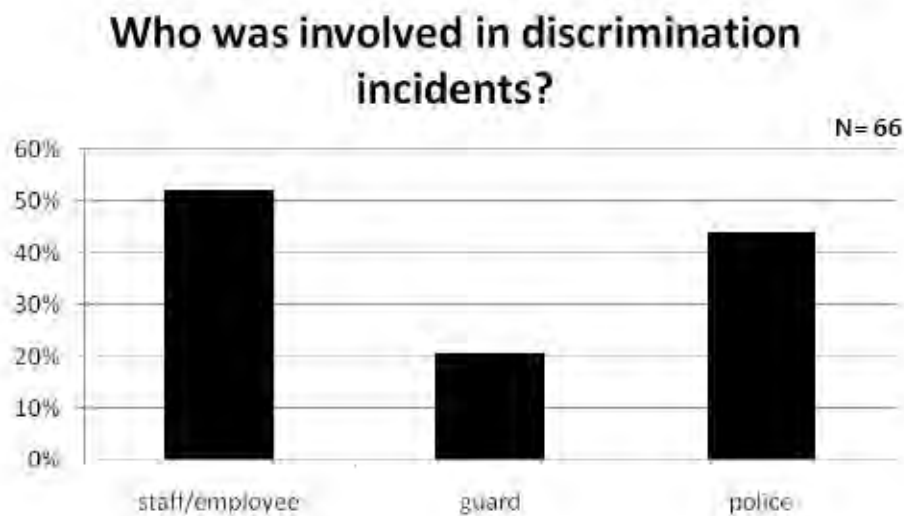


Table VI: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming peoples' survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

In fact, police departments often do not help, but instead exacerbate situations. "The average police response...is often cited...as a re-victimizing experience."²⁴ Of the 133 reports to the New York City Police Department in 2007, eighteen to twenty-four percent were not accepted. Further, in 71 cases across the country, the person identifying as the victim was arrested.²⁵

²³ National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 2008. Anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender violence in 2007. <www.avp.org> downloaded 2/5/09.

²⁴ *ibid*, p.42

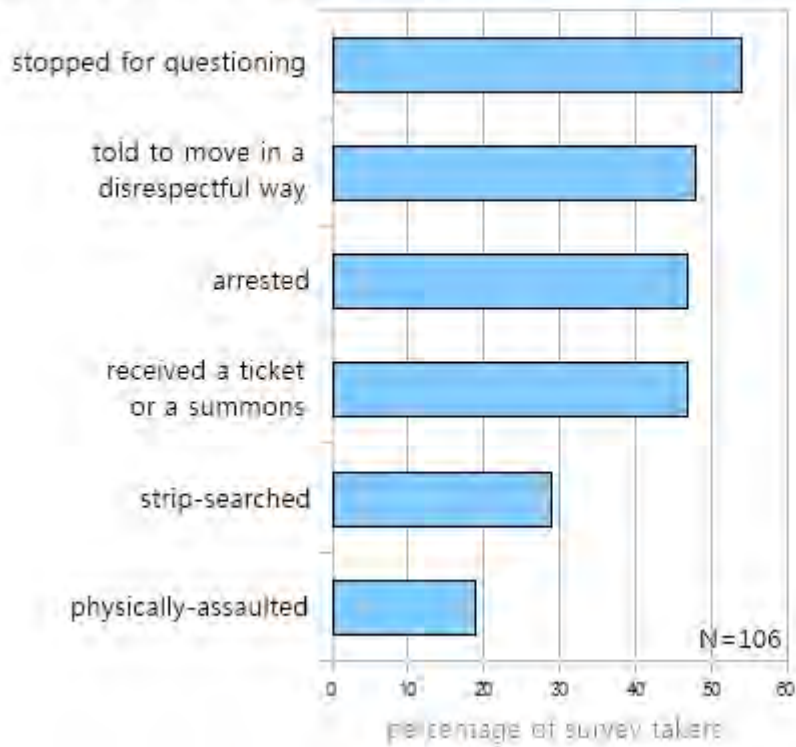
²⁵ *ibid*.

Our research confirms this finding; we have repeatedly heard stories of the police arresting the victims of, and witnesses to, violence. This is an important form of knowledge among low-income LGBTGNC people, showing how the criminal justice system does not appear as an answer to the problems they face. B.B. echoes the experiences of many when she speaks about what she would do if she heard someone being beaten in her building: “[I would] investigate before I call the cops. Because I feel if you call the cops, the cops are going to think you are the criminal [when] they come.”

Someone responding in our survey relayed an example: “I called the police because a female was being beaten on the street and called police. When they arrived, I explained that I called them. They tried to arrest me for calling them and said to me I was interfering in government business.”

Another shared: “A friend and I were fighting over a boy and they out-ed me as being a female impersonator and they charged me with assault when I was the victim.” In fact, almost half of survey respondents reported having been arrested in the last two years. And being arrested is just one form of negative interactions with the police; 29% have been strip-searched and 19% have been physically assaulted. On top of this, about half have gotten tickets or summons, been stopped for questioning, or been told to move in a disrespectful way.

Low-income LGBTGNC people experienced these actions from the police



Ta

ble VI: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming peoples' survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

"Police target me based on their stereotypes of..."

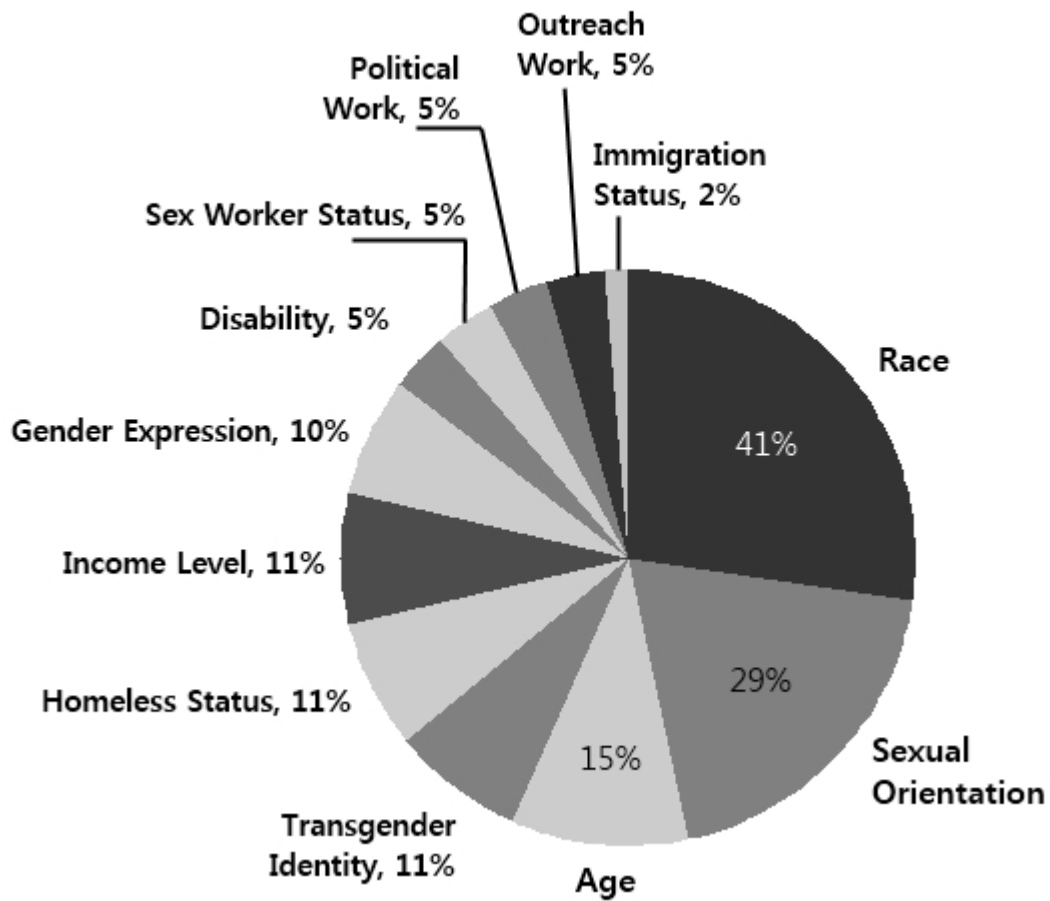


Table VIII: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming people's survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

Another important dimension of WWRC's research is our documentation of the multiple ways people are targeted by the police. The challenges we face cannot be condensed into sexuality issues or gender issues alone; they are always intersected by race, class and other dimensions of our experiences and identities. In a question in which people could respond in as many ways as felt relevant to them, survey takers compiled the ways they are stereotyped by police:

Our analysis also speaks to the ways different sections of our community have similar experiences, which can lay the groundwork for coalition building and the development of political agendas. For instance, in the two charts that follow, it is helpful to compare them as pictures first, to notice their similarities. While large portions of low-income LGBTGNC communities are facing many problems with the police, some are even more likely to confront such challenges. On the next page, we show how people who identify as transgender and Two Spirit have been given tickets, arrested, and physically assaulted at alarming rates similar to those who are currently and who have ever been homeless. Note that "received sexual attention" points to a range of law enforcement involving sexual misconduct and assault.

Police Targeting of Gender

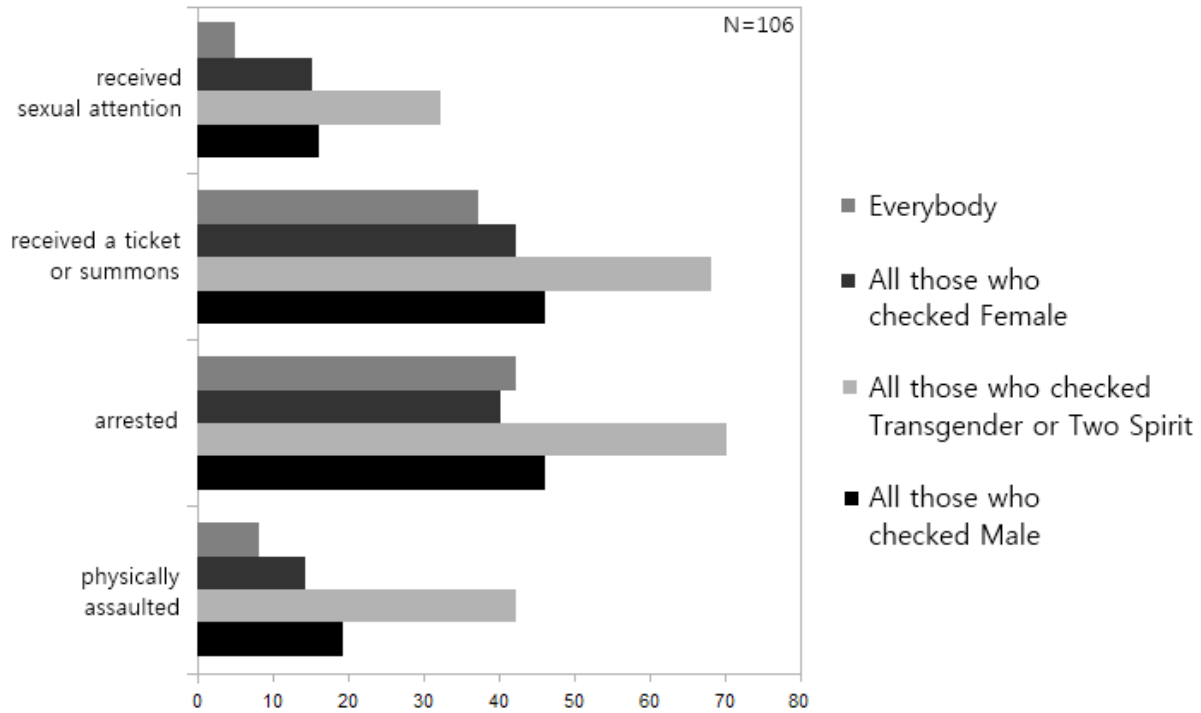


Table IX: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming peoples' survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

Police Targeting by Housing Status

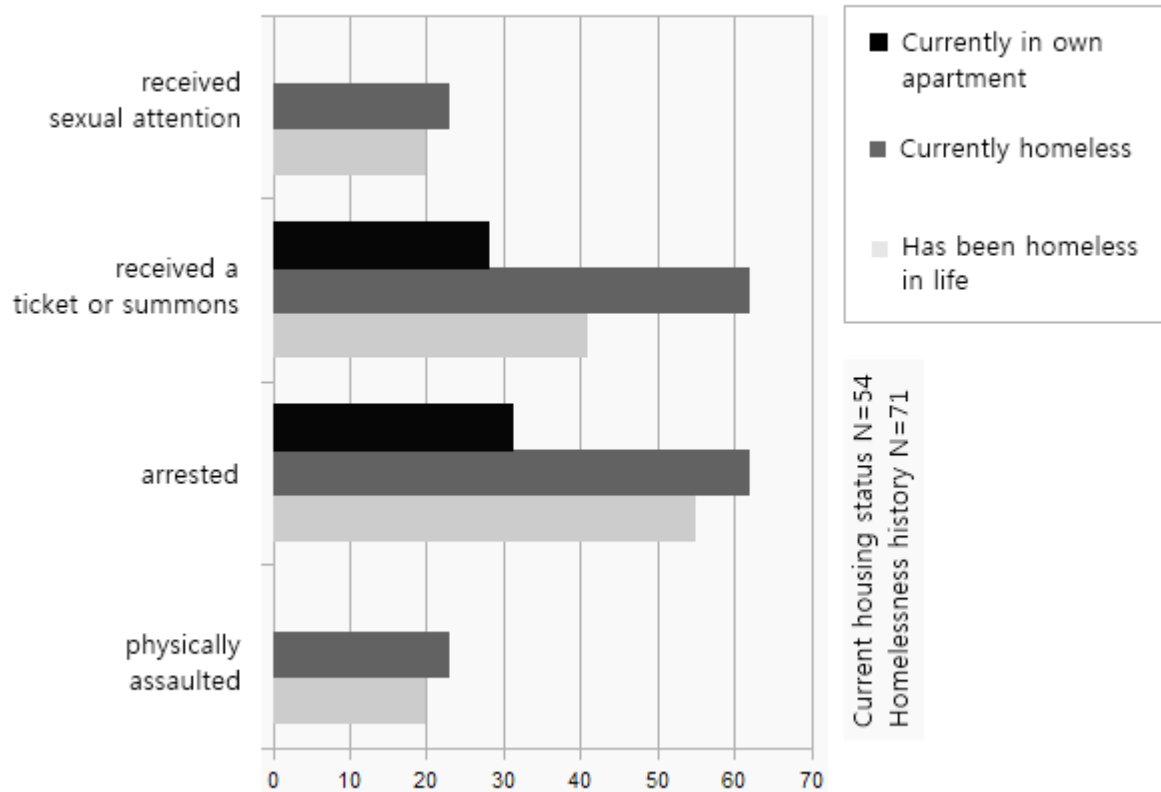


Table X: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming people's survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

When police weren't involved in instigating the violence or discrimination, they often did not help or made the situation worse. The WWRC found that individual violence against low-income LGBTGNC is often enhanced by institutional violence. For instance, one survey respondent said:

I was punched in the face [at a NYC hospital dental clinic]. The employees did not call the police. I had to dial 911 on my own - demand the police and file a report which the officer WOULD NOT list [as] assault. Staff who witnessed the assault protected the identity of the violator and did nothing.

Note that this example reveals the ways in which police and health services can entwine, leaving a low-income LGBTGNC person to manage violence on their own and push for appropriate intervention themselves.

One co-researcher said they could relate to survey findings about peoples' experiences with the police, and had a conversation with another co-researcher about it:

Co-Researcher 1: I believe they are stopped for questioning - because I've been, plenty of times.

Co-Researcher 2: What happens when you get stopped?...Like are they polite, are they hostile...

1: Some of them are... They try to play mind games with you. "What's you doing now," not believing what you say, trying to tell you what you're doing.

2: What do you do?

1: I'm good at not paying attention. I'm a good actor. I hate when people try to give you their answer.

2: Why do you think they are doing that? Why would they have police all over, giving people a hard time?

1: Trying to show they have the power - their little badge or their gun and stuff. Stopping you just to stop you. Nothing better to do, hoping to find somebody to meet their quotas.

2: Why are people stopping people for quotas?

(Rubs their fingers together as a sign of money)

1: Who is making money off it?

2: Not us.

The question of why police violence happens is a powerful one guiding our research and emerging from it. Theorists and researchers have begun to address links between national security, neo-liberal globalization, sexuality, queerness, gender, and race²⁶ in part because the idea that the U.S. is becoming more accepting and tolerant of gay people poses a

²⁶ Cruz-Malavé, A. and Manalansan, M. (2002) *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. New York: NYU Press; Puar, J. (2007) *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Durham, NC, Duke University Press; Women's Studies Quarterly: WSQ (2008) Trans 36 (3/4).

large contradiction to the reality of many peoples' lives. Addressing historic political and economic forces under contemporary conditions creates a powerful analytical tool we have for making sense of why such intense levels of violence and discrimination are taking place. One perspective from movements for the abolition of the prison industrial complex argues that police treatment of people on the street is one element in a network of legal and carceral institutions including courts, prison guards, correctional companies, detention centers, juvenile centers, etc., designed to make a profit and generate its own survival through logics of insecurity and fear. The WWRC is developing its understanding and politics of the relationship to incessant instances on the ground and systemic forces at many levels.

The WWRC is also documenting violence and discrimination while questioning the frameworks that construct them as phenomena. We are concerned with assumptions embedded in violence discourse, such as the belief that people are necessarily damaged by it. We want to know if there is a way to see resistance as persistent? Is it possible to talk about violence without reproducing victim narratives?

We are studying and challenging a two-sided notion of violence that depicts a dominant power and a reacting community. Because we find dualistic concepts of oppression inadequate, we are conducting "double(d) research,"²⁷ investigating peoples' experiences while critiquing the foundations of how we are studying them. The structures and content of our survey and this report reflect this ongoing effort to interrogate how to acknowledge the very serious issues people face without defining them by those issues or giving even more time and energy to the systems that create havoc in the first place.

As we describe more below, police violence and harassment does not stop people from going about their lives; we often use our experiences to inform us of how to be prepared and what to do. As two co-researchers noted, discussing this data,

²⁷ Lather, P 2007 *Getting lost: Feminist efforts toward a double(d) science*. Albany, NY, SUNY Press.

Co-Researcher 1: The thing is, you can't not do things, out of like fear.

Co-Researcher 2: Yeah.

1: I mean, though I got profiled the night before election day, that doesn't stop me from still coming into doing this, coming to QEJ or coming to the research collaborative and not coming home at night because I'm afraid they're gonna stab me then. You cannot not do things out of fear.

discrimination

The WWRC found discrimination and obstacles throughout the organizations to which our low-income LGBTGNC communities turn for support. 36% reported "problems getting services" from hospitals, LGBT centers, shelters, subway stations, police stations, and welfare agencies (such as having their cases closed repeatedly) and 48% report "discrimination" in a government or community agency.

Denial of services is a pervasive experience: over 40% of the 56 respondents in our study who said they had faced discrimination reported that they were refused services. In struggling to access the services they qualify for, one survey taker explained,

Public Assistance REPEATEDLY closes my Temporary Assistance, Food Stamps and/or Medicaid case (for alleged infractions). I have to request a Fair Hearing before an Administrative Law Judge every time. The vast majority of the time, the City withdraws their case against me at the hearing and my benefits are restored retroactively. The City counts on people not advocating for themselves through the Fair Hearing process to remove people from HRA assistance.

And, in an example of fighting back, one person relayed,

Oh when I went to get some medical help and the lady at the desk wouldn't help me because I didn't have money, vouchers or a credit card. I had to make an issue of how sick I was and how I was going to die at their door steps. I was taken in and given a little help to keep me going for a few days. I had a bad infection.

viii. gendering & sexuality oppressions

As we negotiate social spaces, government agencies and our identities on a daily basis, we witness how *all* people are gendered both institutionally and relationally. In particular, we experience and know how low-income LGBTGNC communities must navigate and resist criminalizing forms of gendering while we powerfully self-determine our own genders.

Our research findings disrupt dominant narratives that reduce gender to solely an identity category or a source of stereotypes. Rather, our findings show that gender is a sociopolitical site of both violence and resistance for low-income LGBTGNC people. One's gender and how it is perceived affects low-income LGBTGNC people's access to benefits and housing and our likelihood to be targeted by police and institutional violence. Still, gender is a site of resistance as we claim our gender identities as our own and negotiate gender binaries and stereotypes applied to us, as well as negative reactions to our gender identities and expressions.

WWRC co-researcher and storyteller B.B. presents a powerful counternarrative in her analysis of identification documents in her life and of gendered harassment on the street. She shows that gender is about more than personal identity and more than women and transgender people. The challenges she faces trying to gain access to the benefits of legal documents and safe passage down city streets are emblematic of struggles faced by low-income people of all genders.

She also expresses a strong sense of self that also contradicts assumptions about power and victimization, psychologically buffering herself by drawing on her personal and group identities. B.B. shows how in similar moments, low-income LGBTGNC people construct political analyses across identities, and share knowledge as groups.

Low-income LGBTGNC people find ourselves in struggles over our genders in many institutions in our daily lives. How gender is defined and who defines it is highly contested: it is a site of violence and resistance in struggles for gender liberation.²⁸ This section traces four moments in which gender destabilizes and becomes a site for violence and mobilized resistance:

- a) **transphobia and transgender identity**
- b) **sexism across female identities**
- c) **every day sexual violence: strip search as violent sexism and transmisogyny**
- d) **unwanted attention to gender across gender identities**

transphobia and transgender identity

In her story interview of attempting to change the gender designation on her SSI documents, one co-researcher references herself, her gender, and her identity, claiming them as part of herself that she will not give up. She says,

So I'm gonna go and try because they sent me my birth certificate back and they took it back because they put the wrong gender on it. So I'm trying to wait for that to come back to me before I start it again. But I'm not going to give up! I'm not going to give up though. Because this is mine, this is me. This is who I am. This is my gender. This is my identity.

She refuses to be worn down by the process and re-energizes by getting back in touch with her sense of self and what is so important to her. Her gender is a source of self-esteem as she wrestles with the SSI office. She persists with an obstructing bureaucracy to claim her legally-defined gender in order to claim her legal right to benefits. She also transacts her personal identity, ushering it into being by psychologically buffering herself. She recognizes gender injustice in the SSI office, strategically manages the situation, and maintains hope in the face of the staff person's consistent refusals.

²⁸ Spade, D (2006) 'Compliance is gendered: Struggling for gender self-determination in a hostile economy', pp. 217-241 in P Currah, R J Juang, & SP Minter (eds.) *Transgender rights*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota.

sexism across female identities

Another statement by the same co-researcher shows a different side of gender-based harassment. Trans-phobia is not the only way she is disrespected as a woman and, as she describes how she resists sexism, she links her experience to another trans woman and a nontrans woman:

So I've been called so many names...If I'm walking down Nostrand Avenue and I'm going to see some people that I know in the area, I perpetrate on my phone walking down the block because if, if they say "What's up dred?" or something like that and I don't respond back to them, I'll be called every [inaudible] name in the book. And sometime they don't even know my tea, you understand? But it's just disrespectful... because I don't say hi to you, you want to call me all out my name. So I understand where she's coming from and she's²⁹ is coming from, you know what I'm saying? It's women, period. Why should we have to be disrespected like that?

She talks about how getting disrespectful male attention is not dependent on whether men perceive her "tea" – slang for news or personal information, which in this case meant perceiving her as transgender. Her knowledge of the distinctions between sexist and transphobic behavior informs her analysis and the kind of alliances she can forge with other women. Cole calls this political intersectionality, an analysis that identifies similarities across seemingly different groups "based on shared relationships to power."³⁰ To understand how gender is a site of resistance, this co-researcher shows how a sophisticated critique does not reduce people to a singular identity but instead takes multiple systems of power into account.

every day sexual violence: strip search as violent sexism and transmisogyny

In developing our critique of sexism in low-income LGBTGNC communities based on survey takers' experiences, the WWRC is working with the definitions of transgender

²⁹ Two co-researchers

³⁰ Cole, E 2008 'Coalitions as a Model for intersectionality: From practice to theory.' *Sex Roles*, 59 (5/6), 443-453.

activist Julia Serano:

traditional sexism

Sexism that is rooted in the presumption that femaleness and femininity are inferior to (and only exist for the sexual benefit of) maleness and masculinity. It targets those who are female as well as those who are feminine (regardless of their sex).

oppositional sexism

Sexism that is rooted in the presumption that female and male are rigid, mutually exclusive, “opposite” sexes, each possessing a unique and non-overlapping set of attributes, aptitudes, abilities, and desires. It targets those who do not conform to oppositional gender norms. A number of previously described categories of sexism (e.g., transphobia, homophobia and cissexism) fall under the umbrella of oppositional sexism.

trans-misogyny

Sexism that specifically targets those on the trans female/trans feminine spectrums. It arises out of a synergetic interaction between oppositional and traditional sexism. It accounts for why MTF spectrum trans people tend to be more regularly demonized and ridiculed than their FTM spectrum counterparts, and why trans women face certain forms of sexualization and misogyny that are rarely (if ever) applied to non-trans women.³¹

Everyday sexual violence (which includes sexual attention, strip searches and other forms of inappropriate touches) that low-income lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming people resist and survive, represents multiple forms of sexism and misogyny, including trans-misogyny, a form of sexism that “specifically targets those on the trans/female feminine spectrum.”³²

As activist Angela Davis explains, radical feminist movements understand strip searches and cavity searches performed by police or prison guards as a form of sexual violence. She states: “if uniforms are replaced with civilian clothes –the guard’s and the prisoner’s – then the act of strip searching would look exactly like the sexual violence that is

³¹ Serano, J. Retrieved May 21, 2010 from <http://www.juliaserano.com/>

³² Ibid.

experienced by the prisoner who is ordered to remove her clothing, stoop, and spread her buttocks. In the case of vaginal and rectal searches, routinely performed on women prisoners in the US, this continuum of sexual violence is even more obvious.”³³

The WWRC has documented these forms of sexual violence that our community members have survived.

To do so, we thought first about how people are perceived by the police, rather than participants’ identities per se. Our community understands that our sexual identities, transgender identities, gender expressions and sex worker status are targeted and criminalized by police and the state. We also argue that how police target people – how they sexualize them, racialize them, age them, etc. – may not have anything to do with how people self-identify. Our identities are not the cause of police violence.

To think about these violent sexualizing and gendering processes, we wanted to know whether those who report being targeted based on police perceptions of sexuality, gender expression, gender identity, and sex work had been strip searched. They suggest a disturbing dynamic of sexual violence toward people who are perceived to fall outside of sexuality and gender norms.

7 people report that police stereotype and target them based on sex worker status, of these 7 people, 71.4% (5 out of 7) have been strip searched at least once.

9 people report that police stereotype and target them based on gender expression, of the 9 people, 55.6% (5 out of 9) have been strip searched at least once.

13 people report that police stereotype and target them based on transgender identity, of these 13 people, 53.8% (7 out of the 13) have been strip searched at least once

30 people report that police stereotype and target them based on sexual identity, and of these 30 people, 40% (14 out of the 30) have been strip searched at least once.

³³ Davis, A. (2005) *Abolition Democracy: Prison, Democracy and Empire*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Our research also recognizes that violence, especially perpetrated by agents of the state, seeks to perform control on the body. These methods of control are inherently linked to sexualization of the body, whether it purports or appears to be related to sexual, trans, and gender identity, and sex worker status, or not.

Because of the overwhelming role that violence plays in police interactions with low-income lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non conforming people, any resistance and response to police violence needs to take that into account. Creating space for healing and emotional support has been an important part of our political work in the WWRC meetings, knowing that these forms of police violence, especially sexual violence, affect all of us and in multiple ways: emotionally, physically and materially.

unwanted attention to gender across genders and sexualities

Gender is not only a source and site of resistance for transgender people and nontrans women. One co-researcher explored the ways gender manifests in relation to race, economics, and geography. She explains how the criminalization of people genders *everyone* involved:

[The comment] I was going to make is that um it's about those overlaps. Because I was thinking, close to where we work, the train tracks on park avenue, and it's 131st so the projects within a ten block radius there's at least four different projects and so right at park between 130th and 132nd is a place where trans working girls come out every night and every morning, it's a place where there's all kinds of police surveillance of trans women of color and also men of color, like you know, they criminalize for a lot of reasons or just for being of color or low-income or being trans, basically. So it's like those kind of overlapping similarities make me wonder what kind of story we tell about gender and race and income. And how people are gendered, like the cismales of color in that context, how are they being gendered, how are the police being gendered, how are the working girls being gendered, and also how is income playing into it along with the concentration of low-income people in one place that the police can handle, harass and intimidate people all day if they feel like it, or whenever.

In our participant observation data among members of the research team, we find that transphobia can apply to anyone who transgresses gender norms. At a meeting discussing gender and sexuality theory, a debate started when one co-researcher said she wanted to grow her hair in order to avoid being called "he." Another co-researcher told her that she shouldn't change for anybody. This generated a lot of heat, the outcome of which was a typology of responses to unwanted attention to gender. Such attention includes being profiled, having the wrong gender attributed to you, being questioned, and being subjected to violence, discrimination, or harassment for being perceived as stepping outside one's assumed gender role.

One co-researcher interpreted these responses as other peoples' "bizarre reactions" to gender, turning the tables on a framework that typically casts the gender nonconforming person as odd. Bizarre reactions implies that it is the larger culture's negative attention to gender that is socially inappropriate.

Negotiating bizarre reactions to gender takes creativity, perseverance, and humor. One transgender co-researcher who identifies as a feminine woman shook up her co-worker who was questioning her gender by using a deep "male" voice. Another transgender member dresses in male drag and uses her male name with her family to be able to maintain their housing. Strategies for managing unwanted attention to gender include:

- **Talk back – get back in their face**
- **Always be in control - restore positive self-talk**
- **Tell them how you identify**
- **Dress in the drag of the gender you were raised in**
- **Change how you look**
- **Do not change for anybody**
- **Play with your gender to your advantage**
- **Make jokes**
- **Teach each other**

In sum, our research shows that gender must be understood not only as an identity or source of stereotypes but a sociopolitical category that works and is made to work on behalf of dominant and transformative justice agendas.

ix. reproductive justice, economic justice & disability justice

This is the year strip searches
and forced sterilization become sorrows of our past,
that doctors and warden
find their own forgiveness enough
to imagine reparation for this war
on baby's breath
-Vanessa Huang (excerpt from "prayer for angels")

Autonomy and self determination over our bodies is vital for low-income queer and trans people and is constantly threatened by the institutions we access for basic needs such as food, safe housing or shelter, unemployment benefits, and wellness services.

Health, reproductive justice, and increasingly disability and ablism, are issues the Welfare Warriors Research Collaborative has been engaging with and about which we are asking crucial questions. How these issues affect our ability to access government benefits like food stamps, cash assistance or residence in a shelter – *which we need to access in order to survive* – are of particular relevance to low-income queer people in general and particularly the low-income LGBTGNC people who responded to the survey.

48% of people responding say they relied on a government office for help with health insurance issues (N=107) and 42% of people responding say they relied on a government office for help with medical issues (N=117). In the United States, the link between poverty, ablism and disability is strong and multi-directional. We know that when the Human Resources Administration (HRA) or the Social Security Administration (SSA) is violently transphobic to us when we are trying to access food stamps or disability benefits, they are

threatening our very survival. And we know this is a reproductive justice issue, a disability justice issue as well as an economic justice issue.

34.5% of low-income LGBTGNC people responding to our survey said they accessed HIV benefits, Social Security Income or Social Security Disability. We know that queer and trans people accessing these or other benefits within the welfare system face routine sexual violence and are often forced to give up their ability to reproduce.

As the QEJ publication "Connecting Communities" describes transgender women and gender non-conforming people are required by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to "prove" that they have undergone sexual reassignment surgery (which in most cases prevents trans women in particular from biologically reproducing in the future) in order to change their sex on their Social Security Card. This is a form of institutionally-sanctioned reproductive injustice *regardless of whether or not that person ever intended to have children or a family*. Not having an accurate Social Security card can result in the denial of public assistance benefits or being outed as transgender when applying for jobs or in an emergency room.

Therefore, requiring that trans women decide between a surgery that may not be right for them and that leaves them sterilized or the danger of having to use an inaccurate Social Security card is a grave form of government-sponsored eugenics against transgender women. Additionally, not all trans people choose treatments that give up the physical ability to reproduce. Even if we as queer or trans people never intend to have children, coercive sterilizations, eugenicist SSA policies and other reproductive violence perpetrated within the welfare system and prisons threaten our ability to self-determine the course of our lives. In addition we must realize that systemic reproductive violence doesn't just affect a few unfortunate individuals; rather, these unjust policies marginalize us all by increasing the power the state has to police how we use or do not use our bodies.

The Welfare Warriors Research Collaborative also began to examine links between mass incarceration, policing and self determination over our ability to reproduce. As "Connecting Communities" notes, not only are prisons unsafe for queer and gender self-determining people but they also prevent us from earning sufficient money or accessing full benefits for our families while incarcerated. Incarceration physically stops queer and trans people from having additional children with non-incarcerated partners. In this way, prisons, police, detention facilities and hospitals manages to control our physical/laboring bodies and affect the ability to physically reproduce of transgender folks, queer folks, communities of color, immigrant communities, disabled people and low-income people.

Even after being released, formerly-incarcerated folks cannot always access some public assistance benefits, such as housing. Without housing and safe places for our families to live, formerly-incarcerated queer and trans people are at increased risk for losing custody, being unemployed, homelessness and potentially returning to prison. This cycle illustrates why Reproductive Justice for incarcerated queer and trans communities is about more than just our right to reproduce. It is about ensuring we have what we need to survive and to live dignified lives of our choosing. Therefore, affordable housing must be viewed as a reproductive justice issue for our community, as is ensuring access to public assistance benefits like food stamps, cash assistance, Medicaid and Medicare.

According to the US Census Bureau, 54.4 million people in the US live with disabilities. A recent study by the Center for Economic and Poverty Research found that half the range of adults who experience poverty live with a disability, and our communities' responses in our survey reflect this as well here.³⁴ A substantial number of low-income queer people who answered our survey said they were targeted for police violence because of the NYPD's prejudice against disabled people. In fact, the percentage of people who felt targeted by the NYPD because of prejudice towards disability was the same as the

³⁴ Tidal Wave: LGBT Poverty and Hardship in a Time of Economic Crisis (2009). Queers for Economic Justice. Retrieved from <http://www.q4ej.org/Documents/qejtidalwave.pdf> on June 8, 2010.

percentage of people who felt targeted because of the NYPD's prejudice against sex workers. As documented in "Tidal Wave," a publication written by Queers for Economic Justice, ablism can cause poverty by preventing the full participation of people with disabilities in the economic and social life of our communities. Isolation from community is an overwhelming issue faced by all low-income LGBTGNC people needing help with health issues: 39% of survey takers said they relied on no one or themselves alone dealing with medical issues. 36% of people responding say they relied on no one or themselves for help with health insurance issues.

As one survey respondent wrote:

[I] found it very hard to get housing from the government or social services or community based programs and had to go through the NYC SHELTER system to get the housing in Manhattan I have today. I guess I was lucky and found a disabled friendly shelter so I was able to get out of the shelter within a 2 yr period.

But our community members are not victims; rather, we are decision-makers when it comes to our lives. While facing the violence of poverty, isolation, ablism and reproductive injustice, our very survival is an act of resistance and a sign of the depths of our resilience. But it does not end there, as 9% of the groups survey takers engage with are related to health and well-being: 12-step groups, mental health support and activism, day programs, HIV support and activist organizations, and, for one, a traditional healing community. New movements for reproductive justice are also growing, making links between eugenicist policies that affect low-income LGBTGNC people, disabled people and people of color.

x. daily resilience and resistance:

The knowledge people have from wrestling with unjust systems day and night is a vital resource for understanding the kinds of worlds people are up against and the kinds of worlds they want to live in. Our survey covered violence and discrimination enacted against research participants, problems they face accessing services, and the ways in which people were able to fight back and build with each other.

Faced with a barrage of unnecessary and infuriating obstacles, 58% of low-income people who took our survey report having challenged people and institutions either by themselves or with others against institutions like shelters, a workplace, a pharmacy, or the police, with their mothers, their friends, other shelter residents, and with organizations.

In their 141 write-in responses describing ways they took action, people described an empowering-ly long list of actions they have taken in to deal with discrimination and violence from government agencies, nonprofits, shelters, and police. Low-income LGBTGNC people:

- Argued
- Complained
- Filed reports
- Wrote letters
- Documented incidents
- Filed for fair hearings
- Sued
- Called 311
- Called the police
- Called people in charge
- Called the media

Screamed
Intervened in physical situations
Fought back with organizations
Fought back with friends
Did research
Signed petitions
Forced the issues
Went to protests
Lobbied representatives
Went to Jail
Advocated for policies
Advocated for themselves
Engaged in community education
Worked street patrols
Maintained spirituality
Kept trying

In addition to resisting negative forces, we wanted to know what our communities do to generate safety for ourselves and others. We asked survey takers to write in responses about both a) how they stay safe from police violence and other forms of violence and b) how they try to make it safer for themselves or others where they live. Some responses were very similar: in both situations about 20% reported taking precautions and being aware of their surroundings and about 10% reported taking preparatory and responsive steps such as knowing their rights, filing reports, and attending protests. One person manages violence "by being polite but assertive if necessary." Some also reported simply living their lives, caring for their families, and staying busy.

safety where they live

To make it safer where they live, a third of our communities build relationships with those around them. They intentionally greet their neighbors and talk with them, help elders and other shelter residents, make suggestions about how to travel on foot and in public transportation, stay around people, and educate others on their rights. Still, 30% keep to themselves in order to maintain their safety in their neighborhoods and shelters.

safety from police violence and other forms of violence

In trying to avoid police violence, 20% of survey takers actively avoid the police themselves. About a third also steer clear of trouble and “do what’s right,” and 6% take steps to “pass”, “blend”, and look “normal.” However, the WWRC is concerned that a major strategy for people is to try to protect themselves from police violence by changing what they do personally, as if police violence happens because someone did something wrong. The risk of police violence can be extremely intense. One survey taker described their attempt to intervene when police officers were physically assaulting someone: “I tried to stop them from hitting an older male and was than hit myself about my body.”

Therefore, it is not surprising that 44% of community members who took our survey use avoidance and isolation as a primary means of keeping themselves safe from police and other kinds of violence.

daily practices

Assuming people took steps to prepare themselves for their days, we asked how they prepare for the day and end the day. Among their daily rituals were: prayer, encouraging self talk, smoking, and taking care of morning and evening routines, one person responded, “I sing (especially folk songs) and play the piano (mostly classical music) at home.”

healing

114 community members who filled out our survey let us know the many ways they heal from discrimination and violence. They talk to others about what happened (61%) and talk to them about other things (54%), they write in journals (40%) and have fun (35%), they exercise (30%) and meditate (31%), they make art (25%) and they pray (58%).

It can be interesting to pause and reflect on the fact that a quarter of low-income LGBTGNC people make art as a way to heal from injustice. A number of people wrote in responses that described them playing the piano and singing, writing songs, and dancing, listening to music, writing poetry and drawing. Among many other beautiful, and in some cases painful responses, people said they realized it would pass and searched online to find appropriate places for grievances, ignored stupidity and held it in, and many said they cry as a way to release their feelings. One survey taker added that they like rubbing their cat.

xi. avoidance & isolation

Our survey results depict a resourceful, self-protective, active community. At the same time, the systemic and institutional challenges people face have created a situation where large portions of our communities practice isolation and disconnection to avoid harm. Many also rely on themselves solely for help with important life issues. Still others are not aware of their options when faced with injustice and don't know what to do.

Nearly a third to half of survey takers report sticking to themselves in order to manage.

- In the last two years, a significant percentage of survey takers relied on themselves alone when facing legal (45%), financial (44%), medical (39%) and emotional (28%) issues. They took care of legal, financial, and emotional issues on their own more often than turning to any of the following: family, friends, government, community-based organizations, or healing and spiritual communities (the other options we offered).
- When facing immigration issues, 71% of the 34 respondents relied solely on themselves.
- 42% of those in our survey say they have never fought back, either alone or with others.
- As noted above, 30% keep to themselves in order to stay safe in their neighborhoods.
- Also as noted above, 44% use avoidance to reduce the risk of police violence or other forms of violence.

These numbers are deeply troubling. How might our communities share and generate ideas to increase a sense of safety and connection? What kind of politics would we need to assert to ensure that everyone has freedom of movement and “psychological shelter” as one co-researcher described?

Those who use avoidance and isolation as methods to negotiate risks to their safety, problems with basic needs, and injustice have crucial stories to tell about how they have managed. It may be that they themselves do not recognize what they do as positive interventions in their own lives. One of the questions this research leaves us with, then, is,

what knowledge of systems do these folks have that has not been channeled into, or recognized as, resistance and resilience?

As a team our research collaborative spent time exploring what one survey taker might have meant when they said "stay quiet" as a way to manage the possibility of violence. Here is part of our dialogue, with each line representing a comment from a different co-researcher:

Now, [the response] "stay quiet as much as you can." Now what's that? I don't understand that. What do they mean by that?

Probably they don't talk, they don't associate with anybody.

Stay away.

Keep to myself.

People who stay to themselves in cities.

I just don't tell anybody when I'm home, they can't tell when I'm home or not, that's how quiet I am.

Right and so my response to that is not speaking up. Staying quiet means not confronting the police.

I remember they have an old saying, "I didn't see nothing, I didn't hear nothing." You know, even though they saw it and they heard it. So they say, "Don't come asking me nothing 'cause I didn't see nothing and I ain't hearing nothing." So I know that's an old saying. So I feel that person is probably practicing that still.

Avoid.

Some [responders] say "avoid the police," some say "avoid the areas, the settings," Right?

Some say "avoid being around people who do drugs" and the other one said "alcohol," right? So it's a bunch of different things to avoid.

Stay away from things that are going to bring unnecessary attention to yourself.

Our observations take a small step toward making sense of what may be happening for people who are isolating and can serve to inform next steps.

xii. what can this knowledge do?

This Brick Is Heavy.... Hi let me give you a hand!

- (one survey taker's idea for building community...)

Compelling much of WWRC's research is our belief in a transformative justice that recognizes the power of communities to renew themselves without relying on state systems. As we have seen in our findings, low-income LGBTGNC people actively and joyfully contribute to their communities, rely on each other, families, friends, and themselves, and generate creative solutions to their struggles without turning to government and nonprofit systems. At the same time, the WWRC recognizes how deeply peoples' lives are interconnected, and dependent upon the state. Our data reflects survey takers' insistence that social systems and institutions be held accountable and be made to change.

Low-income LGBTGNC people have many ideas about the kinds of communities they want to grow. In their open-ended responses, survey takers want – and help create – safe spaces where many people can come together, express themselves freely, socialize, and build strength. They also had clear ideas about the kinds of ethics such communities should practice, and they thought education could be a way to increase understanding. Here is a small selection about how people imagine building community and making things better (note: we transcribed the word choice, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization that each person used):

community building, large & small
I would like to see homo men and women of color getting together working to build a stronger community
We need to create and maintain spaces for people to come together to talk about their experiences in a non-judgmental and supportive way.
Making It A Place To Meet Friends To Socialize, Play Games & Have Breakfast, Lunch &

Dinner. Also Have A Social Worker That Understands The Situation That We Live in Well!
I produced Poly Pride Weekend in Oct. '09; we brought together speakers, performers, and leaders to help gather resources and provide safe space for like-minded people, unity, praying
I want to live in a community where there's no more killings where everybody love's each other, I want to live where there's no Judging people for there personal lifestyles
Co-living with people of different income
community ethics
Respect for People
look out for each other
Things are best when people help each other out without regards to rewards, just to be nice to each other.
the generous, peaceful resolution of different varied truths
A Loving community
education for institutions & our own communities
Exposure and Education. Get to know each other and explore difference and similarities. in the end people are people.
I think education on LGBT issues need to be provided to all institutions

Low-income LGBTGNC communities also want to live in a world where justice is possible, where fairness and equality are made real, and where people unite to make the world "livable for all." Survey takers want to end the use of the law against our communities, to come together for access to housing, jobs, services, institutions, and opportunities; to be treated respectfully, and to hold government officials and each other accountable. Here is a list of what justice means to survey takers (note: we transcribed the word choice, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization the person used):

end the use of the law against our communities
Where I wouldn't get arrested for stepping between a racist and the Indian woman being called "dirty."
Where I could love who I want, as I want, without legal repercussion.
A positive outcome from a wrong done, whether fought in a court or through political influence and demonstration.
Make rules and follow them. Leave me alone unless I'm doing something wrong. Let me have my life back and let your selves. care for your own lives. It's my life
uniting for distributive justice (fair & equal access to resources)
Uniting in legal battles against our landlord.
Housing laws for low-income and low middle income people.
More affordable housing and jobs.
See local communities more involved in changing the homeless climate in the United States.
EQUAL access to services, facilities and opportunity.
being given the opportunities afforded the most privileged of people
One where everyone has an equal chance to have a good life. Not a community where some are very wealthy and others have nothing!
opportunities for access to the basic necessities of life are granted
Justice means living simply so others can simply live, where all families and individuals have "enough" to live full, empowered lives.
taking action together
Stop the violence against gays and transgenders w/protests and marches.
I would imagine people coming together and taking action.

Getting together and making a plan to stop certain things.
Fight back.
respectful, fair treatment
Justice should be a thing where people are treated fairly, even if they are poor or in desperate need of help.
Where working people and educated people are treated with respect by the powerful and privileged.
accountability
The elected officials of our community need to do the work they promised to do, the police department needs to be held accountable for the systematic terrorization of our urban neighborhoods.
Hope in the new presidential administration that they will hear our plight and care.
Communities of color need to take responsibility for some of the issues that plague our community, issues that cannot always be directly related to Euro-centrism.

Finally, the WWRC has been considering how to keep presenting the information in this report in ways that support community growth and policy change. We are finishing our 30 minute documentary depicting strengths and issues in our communities; we will be developing a plan for how to use our video to generate dialogues and support social justice agendas. We have considered creating a zine as part of a community teach-in, hosting town halls to discuss and learn about findings, and to participate in campaigns such as the work of QEJ's shelter organizing project.

In January 2006, the NYC shelter system initiated a pilot program that allows residents, rather than shelter staff or administrators, to identify their gender and therefore reside in the shelter in which they feel safest. We envision contributing to the work of turning the pilot program into permanent policy.

We also envision supporting the ongoing work to challenge mistreatment by the Human Resources Administration (HRA), which recently resulted in a major victory. After a five-

year campaign, the Welfare Justice coalition, made up of community-based LGBTGNC organizations, forced the HRA to address rampant transphobia and discrimination that happens in their offices by passing a new procedure for serving transgender and gender non conforming clients.

We further see how our work can contribute to a crucial critique of hate crimes legislation. While real access to civil rights at the local, state, and federal level can make a tremendous difference in LGBTGNC lives; we understand the investment in militarism and policing marked by hate crimes law as being at cross purposes with racial, sexual, and gender liberation.³⁵ Sentencing enhancement laws like hate crimes legislation have become a "central 'remedy' for bias-related crimes, despite the reality that the criminal justice system is generally biased against poor people, people of color and immigrants."³⁶ Not only does sentencing enhancement contribute to the problem of violence in many communities by adding bodies and years to incarceration rates, but most advocacy discourses keep discussions of hate crimes and state violence distinct.³⁷

Lastly, we will be exploring ways to continue having discussions within and among our communities to foster our creativity and to share and generate the ideas we need to survive and thrive.

³⁵ Whitlock (no date). *Corrupting Justice: A Primer for LGBT Communities on Racism, Violence, Human Degradation & the Prison Industrial Complex*. Justice Visions Publication, American Friends Service Committee. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (2006), *The Color of violence*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

³⁶ NGLTF, 2009, Overview: Task Force's long history of working to secure hate crimes protections for LGBT people, Retrieved 2.2.10, http://www.thetaskforce.org/issues/hate_crimes_main_page/overview.

³⁷ INCITE! 2006

appendix A:

more details about who was involved with our research

the welfare warriors research collaborative

Of 19 co-researchers who participated,

Gender: About a third of team members identify as genderqueer or use multiple pronouns to refer to themselves (male, female, 'they,' etc.); about a third identify as women of transgender experience; one person identifies as trans intersex; finally, a third identify as nontrans or cisgendered women.

Sexuality: Co-researchers identify as lesbians, bisexual, queer, gay, pansexual and heterosexual.

Class: most co-researchers identify as being or having been low-income during their lifetime; for at least a quarter of co-researchers, this has included being homeless.

Race, Ethnicity, Nationality, Immigration History & Status: Co-researchers identify as African, African American, Dominican & Cherokee, Chinese American, Filipino American, Puerto Rican, Black, and West Indian; approximately a quarter of co-researchers identify as white; one-sixth of co-researchers are first generation immigrants.

Age: Two-fifths of co-researchers are in their 20s, a quarter are in their 30s, and a third are in their 40s.

the survey takers

Percentage of survey takers who report these genders
(can check more than one)

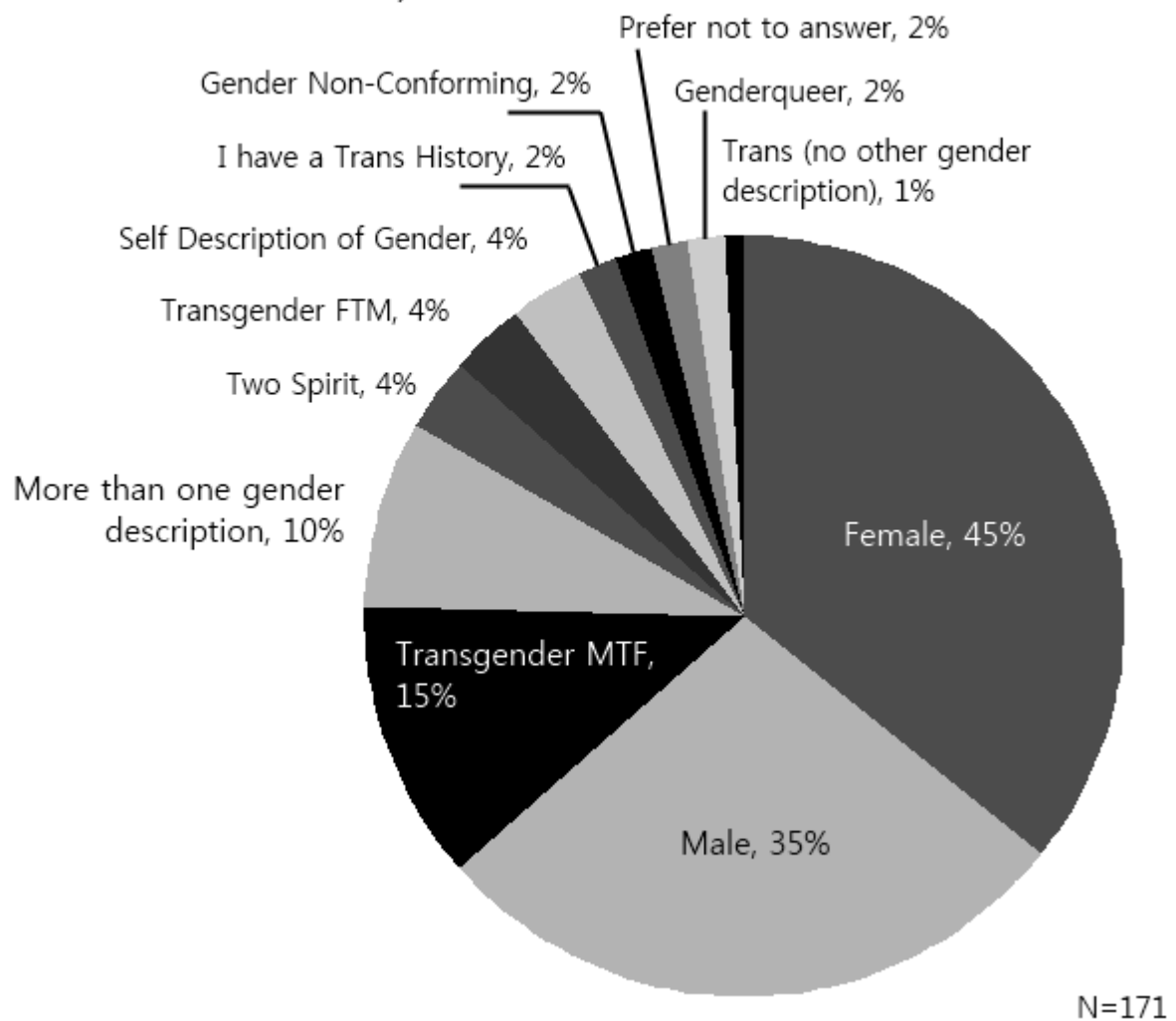
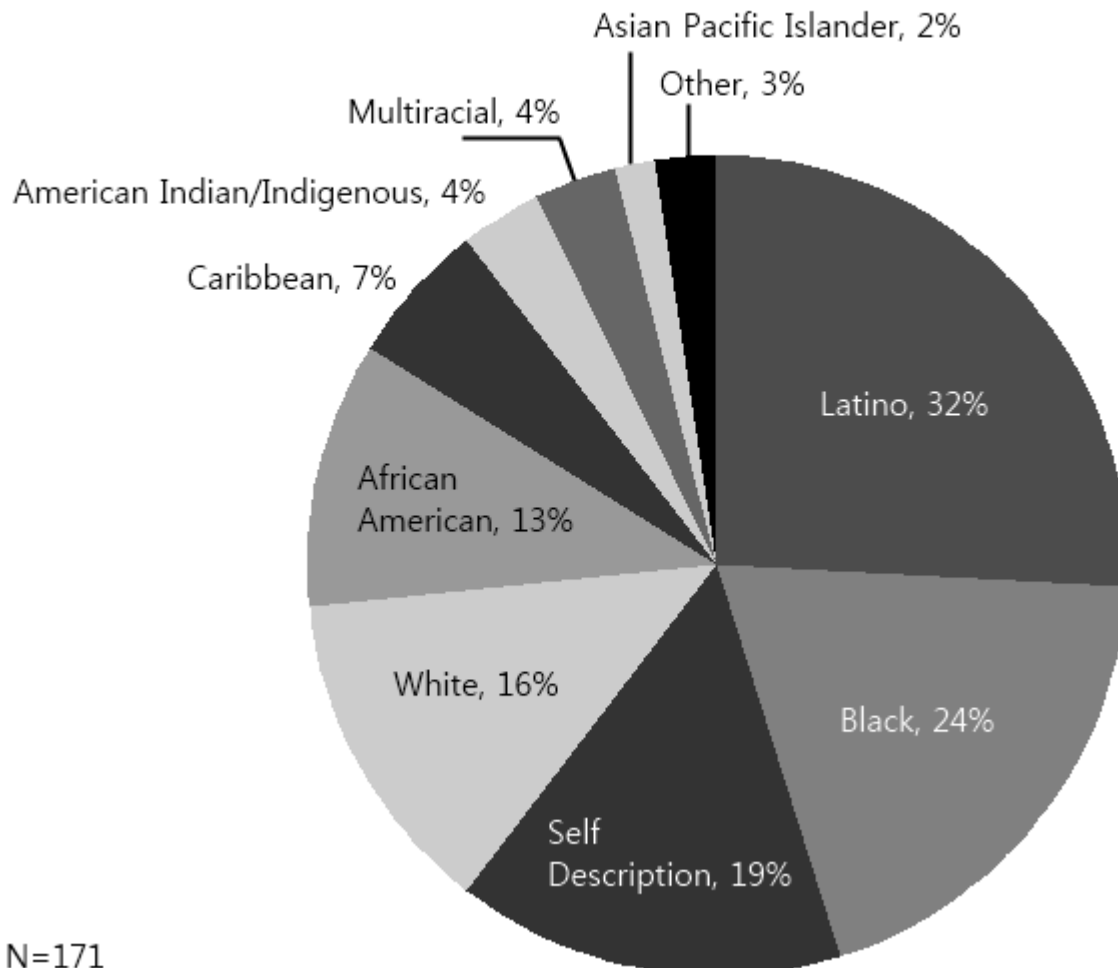


Table XI: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming people's survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

How survey takers describe their race or ethnicity (can check more than one)



N=171

Table XII: data from the low-income lgbt and gender nonconforming people's survey 2009, welfare warriors research collaborative

appendix B:

reflections on the research

We asked survey participants what they thought of the survey and whether we missed anything. Many responders appreciated the issues we addressed, 76 thought the survey was good, interesting, cool, helpful, thorough, or necessary and most thought we did not miss anything. Some were grateful to know others cared and that the information would be useful for advocacy (note: we transcribed the word choice, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization the person used).

For the most part, it seemed to include a lot of important points. There is so much work to be done. Thank you!

I thought the survey was different from the rest. I like that it asked to draw.

It was a good survey. It hit good topic's on different situation's that goes on in Life.

it was interesting to think that people are trying to find out about us, It makes me believe that people somewhere acknowledge us and recognize the fact that we exist. Thanks 4 trying to help!

15 responders offered important critiques, the most common of which was that the survey was too long. Others, however, thought our questions were leading and biased:

I felt there was an anti-police bias, and unfortunately I know too many people who steal and cheat from their own community, and bitch about the injustices of the police. The left needs a litmus test to determine who is at fault, and what prompted the police response, before labeling an act discriminatory

stupid. some questions warranted an explanation for the response. can tell what the survey was geared for - should not have been directed for particular responses

Lastly, other critiques included the need to address homophobia and transgenderphobia in communities of color, as well as discrimination within and among LGBT communities.

appendix c:

presentations, publications & actions

presentations

"Media Strategies for Surviving Poverty-Related Violence and Creating Self-Determined Communities: Lessons from New York," Dwayne Bibb, Reina Gossett, Kagendo Murungi, *Allied Media Conference*, June 2010.

Welfare Warriors Research Collaborative Release and Revolution Party. New York City LGBT Center, June 17, 2010.

Research in Queer Organizing. Michelle Billies, Dwayne Bibb, Kagendo Murungi. Act Queer! Teleconference, Queers for Economic Justice, May 2010.

"Spatialized and Embodied Threat: Queer Negotiations of Homonormativity," Michelle Billies and Colin Ashley. *Association of American Geographers Annual Conference*, Washington, DC, April 2010.

"On the Piers and In the Shelters: Queer People of Color, Public Space, and Managing Homonationalism," Michelle Billies. *Reinstating Transgression Conference*, American University, Washington, DC, April 2010.

"Welfare Warriors: Surviving Violence, Fighting Injustice and Building Community," Reina Gossett and Dwayne Bibb. *Creating Change Conference*, February 2010.

Guest Lecturers: Politics of Sexuality course. LaGuardia College of the City University of New York. Dwayne Bibb, Michelle Billies, Reina Gossett. November 2009.

"low-income LGBTGNC People Building Community, Resisting Discrimination and Violence," and "Gendered Identity Documents and Other low-income LGBTGNC Struggles," Michelle Billies. *American Psychological Association Convention*, Toronto, Canada, August 2009.

"Gendered Identity Documents and Other Struggles in the Lives of Low-Income LGBTGNC People," Michelle Billies. *International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry*, May 2009.

"Participatory Action Research: Low-Income, Multiracial LGBTGNC People Rely on Each Other to Survive, Resist, and Build," Dwayne Bibb and Jonas Siregar. *Creating Change Conference*, February 2009.

"Psychological Buffering in Low-Income LGBTGNC Research on Surviving Violence," Michelle Billies. *Second Year Research Project Festival, Social-Personality Psychology, Graduate Center of CUNY*, October 2008.

"Girl I'll House You: Gender, Culture, and Healing in Struggles for LGBT Economic Justice," Michelle Billies and Kagendo Murungi. *Winter Roundtable on Cultural Psychology and Education*, January 2008.

publications

"PAR Method: Journey to a Participatory Conscientization," Michelle Billies. *International Review of Qualitative Research*. Co-Editor. *Accepted for publication*.

"Naming Our Reality: Low-Income LGBT People Documenting Violence, Discrimination, and Assertions of Justice," Michelle Billies, Juliet Johnson, Kagendo Murungi, & Rachel Pugh. (2009) *Feminism & Psychology*, 19 (3), 375-380

actions

Queers for Economic Justice Day of Action. Welfare Warriors Research Collaborative. April 2008. Organized day and conducted *Surviving and Thriving Tic-Tac-Toe* Data Game

the welfare warriors research collaborative
is a project of



32 west 32nd street
new york, ny 10001
www.q4ej.org