

No Tear,
NO SHADE

New Writings in Black Queer Studies

EDITED BY

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FOR ALL THE QUEER
FOREMOTHERS AND FOREFATHERS

53. George Packer, "Change the World," *New Yorker*, May 27, 2013, e-version.

54. This statement is complicated, but not undermined, by the fact that half of high-tech workers in California are Asian. Asian Americans hold slightly more jobs in the Bay Area. See Dan Nakaso, "Asian-American Citizens Hold Slight Edge over Non-citizen Asians in Bay Area Tech Jobs," *San Jose Mercury News*, December 9, 2012, http://www.mercurynews.com/business/ci_21147394/citizen-asians-hold-slight-edge-over-non-citizen. The presence of people of color in the tech industry does not fundamentally alter the organizing ideologies of Silicon Valley, insofar as the owners, managers, and venture capitalists who shape the industry are overwhelmingly white.

55. See the comment thread in response to Rebecca Bove, "Vanishing City," *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online*, May 21, 2013, <http://www.sfbg.com/2013/05/21/vanishing-city?page=0,0>.

56. Livingston, *Paris Is Burning*.

57. Persia and DADDIES PLASTIK, "Google Google Apps Apps."

58. See the comments section for Persia and DADDIES PLASTIK, "Google Google Apps Apps."

59. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

60. "Black Hole: Wireless Traffic Intercept, Reconstruction and Analysis," *EW A Government Systems*, <http://www.ewa-gsi.com/Fact%20Sheets/Black%20Hole%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>. Electronic Warfare Associates is a leading contractor in the development of new biometric facial recognition technologies.

61. Alexander Galloway, "Networks," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, eds. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 183.

14

Boystown

Gay Neighborhoods, Social Media, and the (Re)production of Racism

ZACHARY BLAIR



IN *BLACK QUEER STUDIES: A CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY*, Charles I. Nero asks the question, "Why are gay ghettos white?" and proposes that the answer to this question has to do with two interdependent areas that have historically reinforced each other: gay strategies that have focused on integrating into the middle classes, and white hostility toward African Americans.¹ Recent studies have expanded Nero's analysis by looking at how various gentrification and antirime projects create exclusionary gay neighborhoods, particularly in New York City.² These studies have looked at urban development, LGBT activism in the streets, and larger political economic factors but have largely ignored the role of digital engagements in the (re)production of the white gay neighborhood. Based on five years of field research and media ethnography on Boystown, a designated gay neighborhood in Chicago, this essay reexamines the question, "Why are gay ghettos white?" and analyzes how neighborhood residents reproduce racism by constructing homonormative urban space through both digital and social neighborhood practices. More specifically, I analyze how digital social networking—a medium that has been regarded as a vehicle to

build community and advance social justice—also functions as a vehicle for segregation and a means of reproducing homonormativity.³ Furthermore, I argue that digital engagements through social networks and cispatial practices “on the ground” are mutually constituted and that to understand why gay ghettos continue to be white we must understand both these practices as a dialectic that shapes the meaning and experience of urban space.

In the context of neighborhood crime, I employ theories on the social production of space to understand how practices in digital, material, and lived spaces concurrently reinforce and reproduce racist, classist, homophobic, and transphobic notions of place and belonging. Specifically, I explore how neighborhood residents collectively criminalized and policed poor queer black and brown youth through digital interactions on Facebook and everyday practices “on the ground” in an effort to secure an exclusive sense of place. I utilize the concept of homonormativity to analyze and expand upon the two areas Nero originally defined, as well as a way of analyzing how racism, sexism, classism, and transphobia operate together to create exclusionary neighborhoods from a political economic perspective.

The Social Geography of a Gay Neighborhood

Boystown is geographically located in the north side of the most segregated city in the nation.⁴ Before Boystown became a thriving gay neighborhood, it was an area that—like much of the city of Chicago—showed the effects of the geographic restructuring of the economy that began in the 1950s. Postindustrial Chicago was defined by white flight, the development of suburbia, and disinvestments in the urban core.⁵ While it remained a majority white neighborhood, the eastern part of Lakeview where Boystown is now located was home to significant populations of ethnic minorities in its recent history, including Jewish, Japanese, and Latino residents.⁶ During the 1950s and 1960s, Clark Street separated wealthy white lakefront residents from poor Puerto Rican residents to the west, while Irving Park Road separated them from poor Appalachian white and Native American residents to the north.⁷ During the 1970s, the area became known as a center for artistic production and leftist activism.⁸ It soon attracted young urban professionals who were moving back to the city as well as a large number of gay men and lesbians who were brought together socially and politically by a new gay rights movement

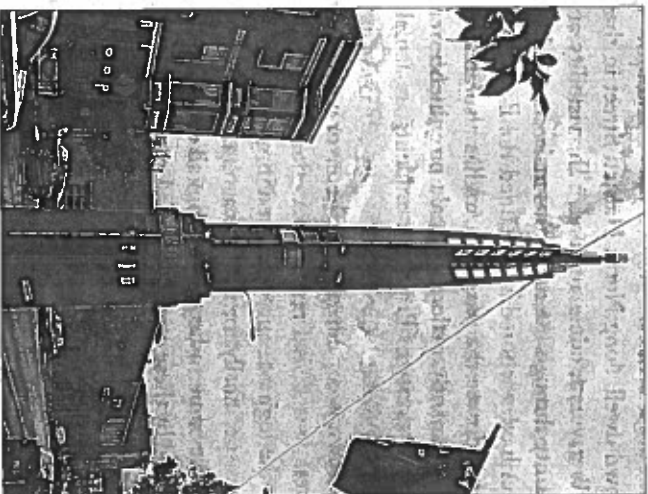


FIG. 14.1. This photograph shows one of the 25-foot-tall art deco rainbow pylons erected as part of the North Halsted Streetscape Project. Twenty of these line North Halsted Street located in the middle of each block. This one stands at 3444 North Halsted Street, south of West Comedia Avenue. This picture is facing southeast. Photo courtesy of Zachary Blair.

and geographically as they were pushed north out of the city center owing to development. By the 1990s, Boystown was a thriving gay entertainment district and residential neighborhood, with numerous gay bars and nightclubs, a bathhouse, gay-owned retail businesses, condominiums, and renovated apartments. On November 15, 1998, Mayor Richard M. Daley officially designated Boystown as a gay neighborhood, with the construction of twenty rainbow-ringed, art deco pylons that still line the North Halsted Streetscape Project and mark the neighborhood as gay.

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2008–2012 American Community Survey shows that decades of segregation and gentrification have continued to keep the majority of neighborhood residents white and middle class.⁹ With available census data, it is difficult to track with any precision the number of gay men (and women) who live in the neighborhood.

However, data suggest that the highest concentration of gay men who live in Boystown dwell along North Halsted Street in the center of the neighborhood's gay entertainment zone.¹⁰ The visibility of gay men and gay male sexuality through the numerous male-centered bars, clubs, and businesses that have anchored and defined the Boystown as Chicago's gay neighborhood over the past 35 years has also created an environment that is dominantly male. This male prominence remains despite the fact that the majority of Boystown residents are actually female and heterosexual.¹¹

While Boystown is considered to be home or a popular nightspot for some, for others it is a vital resource. As the city's gay neighborhood, Boystown has the highest concentration of organizations in the city that provide services specifically for the Chicago's LGBT population. As a result, LGBT people come to Boystown from all over the city to access the resources provided by these organizations. A number of these groups have services designed to meet the specific needs of Chicago's LGBT youth. Most prominent, the Center on Halsted—which in 2012 was the city's newest, largest, and best-funded gay community center—offers a youth program, cultural activities, and free anonymous HIV testing. The Broadway Youth Center continues to be an advocate in the neighborhood for the city's LGBT youth and provides services that include STD testing, workshops and support groups, primary medical care, a GED program, and a violence recovery program. Also, the Night Ministry has a van that parks on the corner of Belmont Avenue and Halsted Street that serves food, distributes personal hygiene products and condoms, and provides HIV testing and support services to homeless LGBT youth. These relatively accessible and abundant resources makes Boystown a crucial destination for LGBT people in need.

In addition to the neighborhood's social services, Boystown also provides a relatively safe space for LGBT people to publicly socialize, which is especially important for those living on the streets. In some cases, the social networks that are created on the streets of Boystown were key resources for survival. While the neighborhood is not free of anti-LGBT violence, it is considerably safer than the south and west sides of the city, which are statistically some of the most violent areas in the country.¹² To escape this geography of violence, many of Boystown's LGBT "street youth" travel around forty-five minutes or more by bus or train to this gay-centric destination with one of the lowest crime rates in the city.¹³ For some LGBT

teenagers who frequent Boystown, being on the streets is safer than being in their homes.

Over the past 10 years, a transient street culture grew among African American and Latino LGBT people in Boystown. The intersection of Belmont Avenue and North Clark Street was the epicenter for this culture, which was most visible during Chicago's warmer months. While neighborhood residents and community organizations referred to this population as the "LGBT street youth," both understood this population to include adults over the age of eighteen. However with many not old enough to be admitted into the neighborhood bars and nightclubs, the social scene was on the streets. On warm summer nights, hundreds of people would gather along Belmont Avenue, for socializing, networking, partying, and dancing. Visting up North Halsted Street or listening to music and talking to friends in the open doors of parked cars were common activities on Friday nights.

Crime Comes to the Neighborhood

On August 3, 2009, two gay men were violently assaulted right in the center of Boystown's entertainment district within two blocks and ten minutes of each other. At around 4:50 a.m., one of the victims was beaten with brass knuckles and a brick, and the other was beaten unconscious and robbed of his cell phone. The perpetrators were described as a group of four young black men, between the ages of twenty and thirty, with one being light skinned and possibly Hispanic.

These two assaults occurred only days after five men were beaten and robbed in neighboring Lincoln Park, all within four days, one of the victims seriously injured with a broken jaw. A media frenzy pursued, in which local headlines reported "spikes in violence" threatening Chicago's North Side and "a wave of violence" that was engulfing North Side neighborhoods.¹⁴ They also occurred less than 48 hours before Bear 233r's monthly Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) meeting. Word quickly spread that this meeting would be the opportunity for residents to confront the police together about controlling Boystown's crime.

On August 5, 2009, over two hundred people crammed into Nookies Tree—a popular restaurant located at 3334 North Halsted Street—to vehemently confront the local police about the neighborhood's crime problem. This was the largest crowd ever to show up to a CAPS meeting

in Boystown, which usually attracts only around a half-dozen people. Resident after resident asked Commander Kathleen Boehmer and the officers who accompanied her how they planned to keep the streets safe. Others shared the stories of their own experiences with assaults and muggings in the neighborhood, most of which were never reported. They were frustrated, angry, and a potential fire hazard, so the meeting was rushed and cut short.

The police assured everyone that they were doing everything possible to find the perpetrators of the muggings and to protect the neighborhood from criminal activity. They also tried to ease worries that the Chicago Police Department was understaffed due to budget cuts resulting from the economic recession and told everyone they had ample resources to keep the streets safe. They pointed to the city's statistics, which showed that (reported) neighborhood crime had gone down from previous years. Still, meeting attendees left unsatisfied with police responses, even more concerned about crime and safety in the neighborhood, and inspired to take it upon themselves to make the neighborhood safe again.

Following the CAPS meeting, residents and business owners met outside of Nookies Tree and began to organize and speak to various news stations that were lined up on the sidewalk outside. An e-mail list was passed around so that residents could start their own meetings, in addition to their own police-led citizen street patrol that would deter crime during peak late-night hours. Another was created for a Facebook page that would allow residents to instantaneously share information about criminal activity going on in the neighborhood—a sort of digital neighborhood watch. Within 48 hours, people were already posting to the Lakeview 9-1-1 Facebook page. In less than a month, there were over thirteen hundred members who contributed to the page's content. It quickly became the central hub for the neighborhood's anticrime movement.

Inspired by the Pink Angels of the early 1990s, the street patrols—dubbed “community walks”—were primarily organized online through the Lakeview 9-1-1 page.⁵ Initially, they were scheduled to take place on Fridays and Saturdays (the busiest nights of the week) at two different times. We were to meet in the parking lot of the 7-Eleven on North Halsted Street and West Roscoe Street. The first one occurred at midnight on August 8, 2009, and over fifty people showed up for it. Although white men and women made up the majority of those in attendance, people of color and varying nonnormative gender identities also participated in the walk to “take back the streets.” A few of the neighborhood's prominent

drag queens even showed up in eye-catching glittering ensembles to support the walks.

Since there were so many of us, we were split up into two groups. There was an overall sense of excitement because so many neighbors showed up to work together for a good cause—to make the neighborhood a safer place. People were meeting their neighbors for the first time. As we walked down the crowded North Halsted Street, people exchanged stories about the crimes in the neighborhood they had personally witnessed or had been victim to.

By the time the walking group passed the nightclub Spin at the intersection of Belmont Avenue and North Halsted Street, it had transformed. We walked right through the center of the neighborhood's dominantly African American LGB street culture, which during the warmer months was at the strip of Belmont Avenue between North Halsted Street and Clark Street. Smartphones, which up until this point had been used primarily to exchange contact information, quickly became cameras photographing the LGB people of color hanging out in the street. People were running away from the walking group, with their hands covering their faces. “Don't photograph us!” someone shouted at a fifty-five-year-old gay white man who jumped up on a lamppost with his large Nikon camera to get a better shot. “This is a public space!” he angrily shouted back. “If you do not like being photographed, then leave and go someplace private.” Afterward, he told me he used to work for a couple of the local gay news publications and was completely knowledgeable about the laws for taking photographs in public. Jason, a twenty-three-year-old gay white man who moved to Boystown from Indiana, was walking next to me and turned and said, “These stupid niggers. We should shoot them all.”

After that, I stayed back to observe how the entire walking group interacted with those on the streets. Most of them were telling people to keep walking and that they were not allowed to loiter in the streets. I noticed that surrounding restaurants that were closed for the night had poured ice over their doorsteps to prevent those out in the street from sitting down in front of their businesses.

We turned down an alley that was behind one of the neighborhood's larger, newer condominium buildings. Jonathan, a forty-eight-year-old white man who was resident there, told the crowd, “Now be careful. There are people here at all hours of the day and night, all doing drugs and prostituting. I know because my apartment is right there, so this is my view

every night. I won't even come back here by myself because it just isn't safe, and the smell of urine is overwhelming."

As we walked a little further we interrupted an African American transgender sex worker performing oral sex on one of her customers in the alley. The police officer who was with us stopped her and asked for her ID as her client walked toward Clark Street. While some of the walking group continued forward, most stood there and watched like they were watching a television show, with numerous people in the group photographing and filming the incident. After a short and inaudible conversation between the woman and the officer, she walked away. "See, this is what I'm talking about," Jonathan said, as the rest of the walking group continued their way back to the 7-Eleven.

It was clear that Boystown residents and business owners had named the neighborhood's LGBT street youth and transgender women of color (presumed to be engaged in prostitution) as the problem behind the neighborhood's violent crime. Within hours, photographs from the walk were showing up on blogs, residents' personal Facebook pages, and Lakeview 9-1-1. Boystown residents and business owners were soon assembling an online spectacle, where LGBT youth and transgender women of color were disproportionately represented, making them symbols of crime, undesirable behavior, and violence.

Pictures were posted of LGBT street youth of color fighting with each other on neighborhood streets, with people calling them "delinquent troublemakers" and "future murders." Coded in the language of anti-violence, postings expanded to include nonviolent "crime" like loitering, noise pollution, defiling public and private property, drug dealing, and prostitution. A white condo owner posted a video of African American LGBT street youth voguing up and down the streets late at night, loudly laughing and encouraging one another to strike the best pose. People responded to the post, calling them "gagglers of hoodlums" and talking about how they are unable to sleep at night because of them. Jonathan from the community walk posted a series of photos of a homeless transgender woman going through garbage cans in the alley. People responded in posts calling her a "useless nigger," "tranny hooker," and "filthy and nasty."

With so many residents armed with smartphones and instant access to cameras, pictures and videos were constantly being added to Lakeview 9-1-1 and personal Facebook pages as well. A Boystown resident and prominent white drag queen posted a video of African Americans hanging outside the neighborhood's late-night Subway sandwich shop across

the street from his apartment and wrote, "Garbage ghetto Whores... allowed to litter up our neighborhood. I wonder if the press would be interested? What is so great about subway? This is EVERY NIGHT... GO HOME. It's raining you loud mouthed idiots." Absent were videos of drunk white bar patrons screaming outside of Hydrate, which happens at least on a weekly basis. There were no photographs of the well-known white drug dealers who stroll up and down North Halsted Street or hang out in front of the businesses on Belmont Avenue.

For years, residents continued to monitor, racialize, and criminalize the neighborhood's LGBT street youth and transgender women of color by posting degrading, racializing, and criminalizing photographs, videos, and comments online. The owner of the Lakeview 9-1-1 page tried to censor racist content, but there was so much content that one person alone could not manage the page. In 2011, it was succeeded by the Take Back Boystown page, which functioned as the similar platform for perpetuating racism, homonormativity, and Boystown's exclusivity through social media. As of September 2012, the page had 4,219 followers.

Lived Experiences of Racism in Boystown

A week after the Boystown attacks that changed the course of the neighborhood, Katrina got off at the Belmont Red Line stop as she did nearly every weekday during the warmer months. She was making her trek from her part-time retail job downtown to her apartment at North Pine Grove Avenue and West Sheridan Road. It would be more convenient for her to get off at Addison Street, but during the spring and summer months when crowds of Cubs fans and Wrigleyville patrons pack the Addison stop, she felt safer getting off at Belmont. This way, she would avoid hearing the usual comments white women made to their boyfriends or husbands: "Is that a man or a woman?"; the sexual advances of drunken straight guys leaving the game, "Hey! Wanna suck my dick?"; or the physical threats of violence shouted from across the street, "I'll beat your ass tranny whore." However, on this Monday, August 10, 2009, she did not feel any better off as she made her way up North Halsted Street through the gay neighborhood.

What was usually a pleasant experience for Katrina, where familiar and smiling faces greeted her outside different businesses as she walked past, was an unusually hostile one. Just as she passed Steamworks—the neighborhood's gay bathhouse—a car full of white gay men headed southbound

shouted "Go back to your own neighborhood, nigger!" as they drove past her. She recognized one man from Cocktail, her favorite bar on the North Halsted Strip. She continued her walk. As she approached the intersection of North Halsted Street and Addison Street, she had to stop at the crosswalk in front of the Shell station until it was safe for her to cross. While she stood there waiting, another car passed by with a white male in the passenger side screaming "Tranny nigger!" as it drove toward the lake. Rather than give these men a reaction, she ignored her antagonizers and continued her walk home. When she got there, she took off her heels, grabbed two Pond's makeup removal wipes off her bathroom countertop, wiped down her face, and hopped into bed—a queen-size mattress laid on the floor.

What Katina experienced on her walk home that day was not something new to her, but it felt out of the norm—especially for Boystown. Katina never felt such intense hostility within the borders of her own neighborhood. Discrimination and threats of violence were not foreign to her. Katina was someone who naturally stood out in a crowd and she knew it, especially growing up in North Dakota and serving time in the United States Army. She was, as she described herself, "in the middle of her transition." Over six feet tall, with a large athletic build, she had a deep skin tone that she would often refer to as "dark chocolate."

"I'm used to gays saying things under their breath when I walk by or maybe to their friends when I leave the room, but never with such hostility and screaming out in public like that. That stuff usually only happens when I am outside of Boystown. Whenever I'm downtown or on the West Side, that kind of stuff is normal and expected. I can usually pass as a natural female, but when I'm in Boystown I guess people just assume that I'm trans because of my size. Still, it's crazy that it happened to me twice, within 10 minutes and on Halsted Street of all places. Boystown is supposed to be welcoming and diverse and safe, and it's my neighborhood too. Like they think it's okay to do that. Like they ain't gonna see me this weekend at the bars. Like I'm not gonna see them. Girl, please."

A few days later, on August 13, 2009, I had a follow-up conversation with Katina and her friend Shauna at my apartment. Shauna, who self-identified as black and trans, was an undergraduate student at DePaul University, said, "The fear and the hatred in the air is so thick now, you can cut it with a knife. It never used to be like this. We aren't scared, but all these white people walking around here sure as hell are. They don't know what to do. They need to just go home and lock their doors."

The next day, I sat at Caribou Coffee on Cornelia Avenue and North Halsted Street—affectionately nicknamed "Cruise-a-boo" and "Care-a-boy," depending on whom you talk to. I was reviewing my interview notes and preparing for an interview I had later that evening at the Center on Halsted. On my table I had a book about conspiracy theories that a boyfriend of mine was obsessed with.

"Did you read that book yet?" I heard someone say to me. I looked in the direction of the voice, and someone standing in line to get a coffee was analyzing the papers on my desk. "I was just at the Center, reading all about the illuminati on their little computers. That shit is crazy. Look, I have printouts." She handed me a pile of papers about different conspiracies: reptilians, the illuminati, and the hollow earth theory. "You can go ahead and look at my research, just give it back to me before you leave. They control the world. That's why it's going to shit. I'm Shaadi, by the way."

During the three-hour-long conversation that ensued, I learned that Shaadi was a Chicago native from a suburb on the South Side. She identified as trans but never fully transitioned. She was black and homeless and had been living on and off the streets for the past three years. Once I told her about my project, all she could talk about was how different Boystown was now, compared with the early 1990s. In her nostalgic recollection, she made it clear that she preferred the Boystown from a decade ago, but she also discussed how her experiences in and of the neighborhood have changed in the past week.

"I'm only here temporarily this time—for a couple of months. I don't want to be here any longer than that. People used to be so friendly. When I would go to a coffee shop back then, people would love to socialize and talk to each other. Now look at them," she paused and pointed to the customers sitting in Caribou Coffee. "Everyone is looking down on their laptops and their phones. They do not even want to talk. Especially to someone like me. I think they are afraid I'm going to mug them or something. I don't get it. I don't want anything they got. And it has only gotten worse in the past week since these crimes happened, people have gotten so uptight and on edge. They are turning against each other."

Digital Subjectivities and the Social Construction of Urban Space

The experiences of Katina, Shauna, and Shaadi portray the tension, violence, and racist practices that erupted in the summer of 2009. The shift that they experienced on the streets was a direct result of the hostility toward

people of color that was being structurally (re)produced in Boystown following the crimes of August 3, 2009, in both physical and digital neighborhood spaces. The community walls and digital interactions like those on Lakeview 9-1-1 and Take Back Boystown legitimized racism by providing Boystown residents and business owners with social experiences that supported degrading and criminalizing people of color. All three of these black transwomen felt a shift in neighborhood race relations that occurred after the crimes were committed and that only worsened after subsequent violent crimes were committed within the boundaries of Boystown. As Facebook users, they were constantly bombarded with their neighbors' racist interactions and practices.

As products of the sociospatial practices of neighborhood residents, the digital photographs, videos, and dialogues that were posted to Lakeview 9-1-1 and Take Back Boystown provided Boystown residents with evidence and a sense of common ground that supported problematic efforts to curtail crime, like video surveillance, community walks, and even efforts to shut down youth services provided by local LGBT organizations. Through these digital practices and engagements, primarily white Boystown residents redefined crime and criminalized the unwanted population of people of color. Noise ordinances and nonexistent loitering laws were often cited to support blaming Boystown's minority street population for neighborhood crimes and to justify the surveillance and policing of people of color. As such, Boystown residents produced and practiced race-based, class-inflected, gendered, and age-specific methods of social control.

Not only did Lakeview 9-1-1 and Take Back Boystown become platforms and conduits for residents to engage in attempts at social control, but they also created spaces where socially unacceptable, racist views could be voiced, shared, and legitimized. The digital spaces of Lakeview 9-1-1 and Take Back Boystown allowed residents to publicly produce and engage with bigoted attitudes, ideologies, and discourses through photographs, videos, and concurrent threaded comments. As a result, Boystown was transformed into an environment where the racist, classist, and transphobic subjectivities that proliferated online could be easily reproduced and publicly displayed.

In "Regarding the Torture of Others," Susan Sontag wrote about the photographs of torture in Abu Ghraib that surfaced in 2004. In this essay, she made the point that photographs are becoming less objects to be saved than messages to be disseminated. According to Sontag, the digital dissemination of photographs marks a shift in the ways people publicly

organize their subjectivities vis-à-vis the struggles and suffering of others. When this idea is combined with Setha M. Low's theoretical use of the social construction of space, we can see how space is actually transformed through social exchanges, images, and the daily use of the material setting—into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning and experience.¹⁶

In addition to these perspectives, considerable work has been done on how social media and digital visual rhetoric work in tandem to shape lives in the physical world. Political movements in Colombia, protests in Iran, the Arab Spring, and Egypt's Revolution of 2011 have led scholars to investigate and debate the role of social media in communication, collective action, and political change.¹⁷ From large collective social movements to personal relationships, the digital sphere and social networks have been shown to play an increasing role in shaping our daily lives.¹⁸ As a largely visual social experience, when social networking sites and digital culture are considered in conjunction with perspectives from media studies, we can investigate how imagery is an integral component of the digital social experience. There are numerous studies across disciplines in the social sciences that look at how media produces, constructs, and perpetuates racism and other forms of bigotry, as well as identity politics in general, and how portrayals of ethnicity, gender, and race relations correlate with intergroup conflict and power clashes.¹⁹

The photographs and videos posted to Lakeview 9-1-1 and Take Back Boystown were taken in a range of neighborhood settings—from late-night community walks down crowded streets to private condominium balconies that provided a bird's-eye view of the neighborhood. However, it was through their dissemination on Facebook that they became instruments for reproducing racism and transforming the neighborhood. It was through both the neighborhood experiences and the digital engagements around these experiences that Boystown became constructed as a space of violence, division, and fear—even while city statistics and reports showed that crime was statistically lower than in previous years.

The visibility of these subjectivities exacerbated social tensions in Boystown and fortified the neighborhood as the site of multiple conflicts over difference.²⁰ Residents across racial identities became increasingly afraid of LGBT racial minorities like Katrina, Shauna, and Shaadi, not just in terms of physical safety but also in terms of economic security. Specifically, they feared that the presence of "these transies and their Homey G's" would lower property value and drive down business for making the neighborhood appear "ghetto and unsafe" to visitors. What was earlier in

the year seen as a booming neighborhood whose rising rent prices would displace the neighborhood's middle-class LGBT population became constructed as a neighborhood in decline caused by an unruly population of African American and Latino LGBT "street youth." The effects of the Great Recession (2007 to 2009 in the United States), which wreaked havoc on the local economy, were forgotten, and blame for decreased profits was pushed onto Boystown's vulnerable street population.

Karina, Shauna, and Shaadi were not the only people to experience this change in the neighborhood. One hundred and twenty-three people I interviewed or surveyed after August 1, 2009, talked about or mentioned how the neighborhood's racial tensions had increased and how Boystown had become increasingly racist. This does not suggest that racism was previously unknown to Boystown. Each of these women (and many other participants) experienced racism in Boystown prior to the antiracism movements of 2009. There is also a recorded history of neighborhood bars and businesses being boycotted or singled out in local media outlets for racist practices.²¹ Rather, these violent attacks and subsequent neighborhood crime had an effect on the social dynamics of the neighborhood in a way that racism and transphobia began to be expressed and (re)produced in new and intense ways, highlighting the fragility of the veneer of racial equality.

The racism experienced by all three women during this time influenced their decision to leave Boystown, showing how these practices work to exclude people of color, transgender women, and the poor. Karina moved north to Rogers Park. She still socializes in the neighborhood but consciously avoids the Belmont strip and only associates with the neighborhood's hippest bars and clubs. Now, she uses only the Addison Street Red Line stop when visiting Boystown's North Halsted Street strip. Shauna moved to San Francisco and never plans on coming back to Chicago. Shaadi headed back to the South Side in November 2009 and moved in with friends of hers. I lost contact with her after she left the neighborhood.

Boystown's neighborhood-based digital practices on Facebook and neighborhood sociospatial practices (that is, community walks to curtail crime) not only constitute each other but also together create an exclusionary heteronormative environment where racism can flourish. Embedded within these practices are gay strategies that have focused on integrating into the middle classes and white hostility toward African Americans. It is through these mutually constitutive social practices that gay neighbor-

hoods remain white.²² If we are to combat racism, segregation, gender inequality, class inequality, identity-based discrimination, and homophobia, we must attend to both digital engagements and practices "on the ground." If we are to create neighborhoods that are inclusive, diverse, and indiscriminate, then we must be actively antiracist in both digital and real environments.

NOTES

1. Charles I. Nero, "Why Are Gay Chettos White?" *In Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, 228–45 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
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10. Data used to estimate a gay/lesbian sexual identity is typically inferred from U.S. census data on same-sex cohabitating couples. U.S. Census Bureau, 2008–2012 American Community Survey.
11. U.S. Census Bureau, 2008–2012 American Community Survey.
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