

Milo Art

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The Harm in 'Reclaiming Queer'

Both readings make it a point to compare queer politics to the LGBT movement. Both readings basically say that the LGBT movement is simpling by fighting for things that Cohen, Bassichis, Lee, and Spade perceive as unimportant. The movement is also criticized because they believe it works within the current system instead of trying to destroy it. The readings seem to believe that yelling in the streets is the only way to protest. They seem to believe that if LGBT+ people aren't doing it like queer politics, then they aren't queer enough. Considering LGBT+ people have an oppressive history involving the term queer, this belief may be true. Maybe they aren't queer enough because they do not want to be "queer." In this essay, I explore the idea that the LGBT movement is too assimilated to do any good for queer people. Then, I will argue for one of the reasons why queer is a term that should not be used within the political realm, especially when talking about LGBT+ people.

Cohen writes directly about LGBT assimilation. She makes statements that say the movement is replicating dominant institutions, "de-gaying" AIDS, and making the status quo only accessible for the privileged members of marginalized groups. These statements are valid. However, the connotations placed on them is invalid. She makes it clear that these are perceived and interpreted facts. For example, she writes that a new generation of activists are "frustrated with what perceived to be the de-gaying and assimilationist tendencies of AIDS activism, with their invisibility." Another illuminating example is when she interprets LGBT+

people saying “that’s just the way I am” to “I’d be straight if I could.” Though AIDS activists may simply be trying to expand AIDS resources to straight, cis infected people, Cohen says that the new generation of activists perceives it, instead, to make LGBT+ people invisible. Similarly, though “that’s just the way I am” could be interpreted as “It is not my choice whether I am born either straight or gay.” Cohen adds an undertone to interpret it as if there is devastation that they cannot choose.

The piece “Captive Genders” is less explicit about the assimilation of the LGBT movement, in that they do not come out and say, “they are assimilated.” However, there are clear signs that point to the same conclusion as Cohen’s. The piece quickly contends that the movement has LGBT+ people involving caps in parades. This tells me that they think the movement is replicating or meshing with dominant institutions. The piece also uses quotation marks anytime it mentions the LGBT community or the LGBT movement. It does not use quotation marks when talking about trans and queer politics. There could be a few literary purposes to do this (skepticism, unfamiliarity, and distancing the concept) all of which tell me that they perceive the LGBT community, and its movement, as completely disjointed from queer politics.

If the LGBT movement members are assimilated and privileged, and they are also separate from queer politics, then queer politics are not for LGBT+ people. It could be said that queer politics is simply not for white LGBT+ people, but even then, it would come down to race rather than sexuality and/or gender. According to these readings, queer politics is race-based politics.

Intersectionality entailing a benefit for non-white, non-straight, non-cis people is only valid when we consider all possibilities. In other words, we cannot study intersectionality (a) and expect it to help *all* non-white people (b) and non-cis, straight people(c). B and c do not follow from a. Only a, which is the combination of b and c, can follow a. Because, b is not necessarily a part of a, and same for c. Therefore, parts of b and parts of c is still not being helped. A is only helping a.

Alternatively, if we study all three (a, b, and c) we can most certainly help a. In this case, we are studying not only the intersection of b and c, but we are also studying and considering the limits of this intersection and all of its potential barriers. Race, sexuality, and gender can certainly overlap, but they are not the same things. It is impossible to create a political movement to help all of them unless we take into consideration all their needs. Similarly, we cannot help those who do intersect without take into consideration all the individual aspects which are intersecting.

So, I have now demonstrated how Cohen, Bassichis, Lee, and Spade are using queer politics to push racial politics, accurately, because they only apply to LGBT people who are not privileged. In this society, that would mean not white, not cis, not straight, and not man. This makes sense too because both readings talk about how queer politics is intersectional politics. It is used for LGBT+ people who are also a second minority group member.

I have also demonstrated how this is not actually helpful for either LGBT+ community or non-white communities. If we are to help all minority groups, as Cohen, Bassichis, Lee, and Spade desire to do, we must instead combine queer politics with the LGBT movement and

explicit racial politics. This covers all possible issues and the only way to help all sexualities, genders, and marginalized ethnicities.

However, to do this, we must consider the LGBT movement's needs as well as the others. One of which would be to stop using labels that have historically been used during the acts of raping, beating, and imprisoning LGBT+ people. If we want to help all marginalized communities, we must respect the fact that "queer" is offensive. Otherwise, valuable members of the LGBT+ group will be too traumatized to join arms with "queer politics."