

TRANSADVOCATE

Libertarian Feminism and trans people

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Abstract

The TransAdvocate recently featured a piece by Radical Women. The group touched on many radical positions on gender and the transgender experience. In this piece, the TransAdvocate interviews Sharon Presley, Executive Director of the Association of Libertarian Feminists (ALF). ALF was formed in 1973 by Toni Nathan, the first woman to have received an electoral [...]

Article

The TransAdvocate recently featured a piece by Radical Women. The group touched on many radical positions on gender and the transgender experience.

In this piece, the TransAdvocate interviews Sharon Presley, Executive Director of the Association of Libertarian Feminists (ALF). ALF was formed in 1973 by Toni Nathan, the first woman to have received an electoral vote in a US Presidential election.

Look for interviews and pieces by various Feminist opinion leaders in the near future!

If you as a Libertarian Feminist opinion leader had one thing to say to the trans population, what would it be?

Libertarians believe that every single person has the same rights as any other individual, that is, the right to do whatever you wish as long as it does not interfere with the same rights of other people. No exceptions. What trans people want to do is their business and no one else's, as long as they are not coercing others.

How do you define and/or relate to feminism overall and how does Libertarian Feminism differ from and/or complement feminism as you described it?

Our definition is no different than the basic definition of other feminists - the advocacy of women's rights in order to achieve political, social, and economic equality to men.

We share many of the same goals as other feminists. The difference is that we are unwilling to use the force of government to achieve what is called "positive freedom" (government welfare, for example) because that means infringing on the rights of those who do not want to contribute to that goal. The only role of government, in our view, is to protect rights, including the rights of trans people. That means that no government agency has any business treating trans people any different than any others. If a government agency is doing so, it is wrong and should be vigorously criticized and challenged till it stops.. However, we believe that private aid and mutual aid are the ways that help people without making them dependent on Big Brother government. A hand up rather than a handout. More efficient than

cumbersome bureaucracies and more psychologically empowering as well.

How might trans people expect to be perceived by Libertarian Feminists and/or the Libertarian Feminists movement?

Libertarian feminists would view them as individuals and accept them as individuals. Their choices may not be conventional but then, neither is libertarian feminism. Most libertarians would be the same. Those who have a problem with this are violating the principle of individualism on which libertarianism is based.

The trans community suffers from a great number of social disparities: half are raped, between 1/4 & 1/3 are beaten. Chronic unemployment and homelessness are significant issues for the trans community. It is common for homeless programs and social service agencies to refuse to serve trans people. How might Libertarian Feminism seek to respond to these issues?

In our libertarian feminist anthology in progress, Nathan Goodman will be discussing this very problem. In our view, it is morally wrong to refuse to serve trans people or to treat them any differently than we might treat any other individuals. Campaigning and protesting such treatment is certainly appropriate. Seeking to develop private alternatives that treat people as individuals would be a good option. Just as feminists had to develop their own ways and services to deal with rape and domestic abuse, the community of trans people (and sympathizers) may be the ones best suited to help other trans people. Depending on distant bureaucracies run by white men who have no understanding has been problematic for women; there is no reason to assume that trans people will be any better served by those bureaucracies.

As a followup to the last question, the trans community suffers a high rate of HIV. For example, the HIV infection rate in sub-Saharan Africa is 5%. The HIV infection rate in trans people is 30%. Those who work with the at-risk trans population have noticed common factors which leads to a high rate of HIV in the trans population. These causal factors generally look like:

employment discrimination -> unemployment -> inability to pay rent -> loss of housing -> encounters housing/social service discrimination -> engages in survival sex work and/or trades sex for housing -> becomes HIV positive

How might Libertarian Feminism seek to respond to the HIV epidemic in the trans community?

A full response is beyond the scope of this survey since it would take a book. The short answer is education and mutual aid. The sad truth is that educating people about those who are different from the norm takes time. Though short term education should be pursued, it may take time to achieve more satisfactory results. Other groups that have been discriminated against have made progress through educating the public. Boycotts and other means of protest may be effective in the short term in some cases.

In the short run, however, we think that mutual aid, (the trans community and those who are sympathetic helping those in need; creating health and work-related groups that people can join at a low or no cost that can help them, etc) may be a better bet. There are actually current examples of such mutual aid groups that are very effective but they receive very little press.

Just two examples: Ithaca Health Alliance is a nonprofit member-owned health security system that has

been in existence since 1997. It provides financial assistance for emergency medical and dental needs; Cooperative Home Care Associates is an employee-owned coop in NYC with jobs for more than 500 African American and Latina women, many of whom were previously on welfare. Following such models may be a way for trans people to help themselves rather than depending on unreliable charity from the government. The motto of the mutual aid community is Solidarity Not Charity. That seems to us to be the best way to go.

Various types of feminism respond to trans people and issues affecting the trans community in different ways. By far, the most vitriolic is a subset of Radical Feminism known as Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism (TERF). Some of the ideas they propagate include:

- Gender doesn't exist, therefore transgender people should not exist: Janice Raymond submitted a plan to both the Carter and Reagan administration to implement a national program of forced reparative therapy for all trans people coupled with administrative restrictions to trans health care. Her plan was carried out by 'family values' lawmakers.
- Biology is destiny: If you're male assigned at birth (MAAB) you are imbued with privilege which can never be overcome, degraded or surrendered.
- The retronym cisgender - a term referencing non-transgender people - is oppressive and indicative of male violence.
- Trans equality initiatives are oppressive and indicative of male violence.
- More about this can be found [here](#).

The Socialist Feminists made a point of commenting on this vehemently anti-trans wing of feminism. Would you comment on how Libertarian Feminism might differ from the TERF perspective?

We would completely disagree with it and be appalled by it! Gender most certainly does exist as any social scientist would tell you. Those social scientists who research the issue of gender do not think anatomy is destiny and we would agree. Furthermore that idea violates the principle of individualism that requires us to judge people on their individual merit, not on their group characteristics.

The idea of forcing anyone to be different from what they are (assuming that they are not coercing others) is completely antithetical to our individualist and libertarian principles. This kind of talk is social fascism and we want no part of it. It is pathological and is the kind of thinking that has caused far too much pain, death and destruction over the centuries. It is no different than racism, sexism, or any other kind of ism that has sought to harm others in the name of some supposed ideal but is really a cover for pathological fear of change. We don't need any more of this kind of crazy talk. As others have said, this is just hate talk and not anything that resembles feminism as we know it.

The Association of Libertarian Feminists shared this newsletter available to our readers as it discusses the concept of mutual aid.

Correction: An earlier version misidentified the above newsletter. TY Sharon!

Suggested citation

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