

“Lesbian Erasure” as Code Talk for Trans Bashing

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Published May 29, 2012

https://www.transadvocate.com/lesbian-erasure-as-code-talk-for-trans-bashing_n_6309.htm

Abstract

On WMST-L (a large Women’s Studies Listserv with over 5,000 members from around the Globe) there has been a thread with quite a few responses about the so-called issue of “lesbian erasure.” Apparently, some radical lesbian feminists feel that their work and legacy has been erased and nobody wants to talk about their 1970s and [...]

Article

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Apparently, some radical lesbian feminists feel that their work and legacy has been erased and nobody wants to talk about their 1970s and 1980s tomes any more.

What this is REALLY about, of course, is hatred: hatred for trans women, hatred for sex workers, hatred for third wave feminists, and hatred for sex-positive and sex-radical feminists. We have, it seems, stolen their thunder, and they are very, very bitter about it. One of the transphobic and whorephobic ideologues to weigh in is Sheila “Joy” Jeffries. I always laugh when I hear/read the “joy” part, because there is absolutely nothing joyful about Sheila “Joy” Jeffries:

“There are no women’s spaces for younger lesbians now. One result of the loss of lesbian feminism is the fact that we now have the phenomenon of lesbians being transgendered into a simulacrum of men, something that lesbian feminists would have, and why do they not still, have understood as violence against and the disappearance of lesbians. “

A little context: Jeffries intentionally uses the term “transgenderED” even though the “ED” is clearly extraneous because she sees the term as analogous to “prostitutED” women. We are transgenderED into compliance with patriarchal gender norms by the male medical establishment and their handmaidens. Like sex workers, we have, of course, absolutely no agency of our own. We are tragic victims who both succumb to the big, bad patriarchy and collude with our own oppression by engaging in transactional sex or gender transition. While there have been a few people calling out her hatred and bigotry, there have also been multiple people defending it, which shows how much vitriol remains in feminism against transgender and transsexual women.

Sadly, my comments remains in “moderation” because I have been placed in “moderation” for many years now.* This was because I dared to speak up against another transphobe, Alice Dreger, when she publicly

trashed me because of a CFP I put out on the site. Apparently, a free thinking trans woman is not allowed to have unfettered access to speak her mind, and thus I need to be muzzled. As others have pointed out, having your comments placed in "moderation" before, or if, they are published, is both censorious and has a tremendously chilling impact on freedom of speech, academic freedom, and freedom of expression. This is especially egregious when it is done to oppressed minority groups, who have a long history of being silenced by white, cis feminists. I rarely contribute to WMSTL because of this punitive limbo land that forecloses the possibility of open dialogue and free exchange.

Here is my comment, for those who are interested in reading it:

"Often when I hear about purported lesbian (feminist) invisibility, it is really a coded way of attacking queer theory, transgenderism, sex-positive feminism and third wave feminism. There is a seeming resurgence of radical lesbian feminism on the Internet and in the blogosphere, and much of it is devoted to inciting hatred against transgender women and sex workers, as well as third wave and pro-sex feminists, who are often derided as 'fun fems'. Although often misleadingly termed 'trans critical' it is really just anti-trans hatred and prejudice that deviates little from Jan Raymond's 1979 hate screed The Transsexual Empire. So, if we are going to talk about the history of lesbian feminism, let us not forget the histories of virulent racism and exclusion, rabid anti-trans hatred, and rigid policing of women's sexuality, among other serious problems. Queer is not a "milder word" but a revolutionary concept that exposes both hetero- and homonormativity and creates greater inclusion and flexibility through refusing exact definition, and opening up a space of radical possibility. As a Third Wave, Queer, Transgender Feminist, I have found these terms to be empowering and rich in their complexity, diversity and inclusiveness."

One of the good things about wading through the attacks waged by "rad fems", lesbian feminists, and other caught in a 1970s time-warp, is that it has greatly solidified my own subject position as a Third-Wave, Transgender Feminist who values sexual freedom and intersectional analyses. The anti-sex worker, anti-sexual freedom, anti-trans, and anti-butch/femme, anti-bisexual bigots who believe that gender is the basis of all forms of oppression and that "sex roles" are the most pervasive and systemic form of oppression is something I want to explicitly distance myself from. I think it is vital that Third Wave, Pro-Sex/Sex-Positive/Sex-Radical, Trans, and Queer Feminists continue to come out and proclaim their identities with pride as we continue to see assaults on our work and activism by those committed to a vision of totalitarian "feminism" or fauxminism. It is also vital that we also continue our intersectional work that brings in multiple identities and oppressions and not listen to those who would assert that this "waters down" feminism because of our attention to interlocking systems of domination.

One of the sad things about this issue is that Jeffreys and her ilk clearly see identity politics as a zero sum game: lesbians "lose out" because of the (specious) notion of trans or queer ascendancy. Identities, politics and cultures change; they are never static. Some will continue to assemble under the moniker "lesbian" and others will utilize different terms and differing ways of organizing community and activism. I do not believe that lesbian and trans should be in opposition to each other, nor can they be, since there are many folks who identify as both. However, the venom that is continuously pumped out from their side will only cause further polarization and factionalization. Until their trans-exterminationist rhetoric ceases once and for all, I will call them out and many other people will

call them out. The "die cis scum" rhetoric that some are using now is directly caused by their hatred. Their efforts will continue to radicalize a new generation of trans-feminist theorists and activists. And how is that for some irony?

* UPDATE: The Moderator of WMST-L claims they never received my comment. I re-sent it and it was finally published on the Listserv. What I would really like to know is how long I will remain in "moderation" (it has been years) before I once again have unfettered access to the List.

Suggested citation

Joelle. "'Lesbian Erasure' as Code Talk for Trans Bashing." TransAdvocate, May 29, 2012.
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