

The (lack of) space between homophobia and transphobia

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Abstract

I asked to cross post this post from Bilerico. It was written by Alex Blaze Through an unlikely chain of blog posts, Waymon's entry about a gender identity inclusive anti-discrimination ordinance in Montgomery County, Maryland, started a discussion that made it halfway across the blogosphere to one of the more popular radical feminist blogs out [...]

Article

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Through an unlikely chain of blog posts, Waymon's entry about a gender identity inclusive anti-discrimination ordinance in Montgomery County, Maryland, started a discussion that made it halfway across the blogosphere to one of the more popular radical feminist blogs out there. Heart, the aforementioned radical feminist blogger, writes about the real transbigotry in an attempt to take advantage of the T-folks' internal disputes to distinguish the good transwomen from the bad ones.

As a queer boy who fully came out among feminists and feminisms (at times misguided), who thought that Judith Butler and Leslie Feinberg were just the bomb, and who saw connections between transgender experiences and oppressions and gay experiences and oppressions as so obvious as to be taken for granted, I was pretty surprised when I was introduced to this (hopefully limited) brand of feminism that characterizes transwomen as men who lived as women part-time just to better oppress them and transmen as nonexistent, and, when they are, see the Gendercator.

The resemblance to homophobia from the Religious Right is striking, and I'm not positing the comparison to say that just because they're similar they're equally bad. (The Nazis liked organic farming, but that doesn't make organic farming anti-semitic.) I am drawing a parallel to show that I can have an investment in this subject.

For me, the reason the T is in the LGBT wasn't even worth questioning. Doctors took one look at our genitalia right after slapping our butts, said a few words ("It's a..."), and everyone started to plan a life for us - school, hetero-marriage, kids, work. We the queers all basically say "no" to that based on something that can't be seen, something that isn't plainly written on our bodies, something that we have to come to ourselves, but something that's still real and powerful. And whatever it is, it's something that will make us different, or queer, for the rest of our lives.

So coming in contact with this type of feminism was a bit of a waking up experience for me. Feminism isn't

always queer-affirming. Feminism doesn't always value a person's autonomy over her body. Feminism sometimes simplifies things so far down that they're absolutely ridiculous (I was reading an essay from one such feminist almost, but not quite, laid out the conclusion that Gwen Araujo was the oppressor and Hillary Clinton was the oppressed). Feminism sometimes devalues people's lived experiences in favor of hyper-theorized dogma.

It's important to remember that Waymon's post was about general anti-discrimination legislation and a specific fear-based appeal from Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America surrogates in Maryland that any trans equality meant men in your daughters' locker rooms. Check your logic at the door, imagine the worst theoretical outcome of such legislation, forget the real people's lives it will improve, and then vote Republican.

Compare that to Heart's statement:

Of course someone who lives as a man most of the time but identifies as a woman should freely stroll in wherever women are dressing, peeing, or showering, and if women have a problem with that, they should get over it.

There really isn't any concern in her post about the transwomen and transmen of Montgomery County and how their jobs may be at risk, how they might be unable to get a hotel room, how landlords might discriminate against them so that they cannot be able to secure safe and affordable housing - it's all about men in dresses taking women's bathrooms by storm!

Underpinning this logic is a bizarre fantasy that "transgender" refers to a bunch of rich, white men who manage sweatshops by day, spend their fortunes by night, and every now and then put on a dress to go oppress women, just for the hell of it. Lost in this fantasy are transmen, transwomen of color, and transpeople of limited means. Oh, and the real-live transwomen, who, since their experiences weren't a factor when this narrative was being written, are effectively rendered invisible.

And that's what this really comes down to - whose experiences are legible and whose are not. The oppression of queer people starts with the basic assumption that gender can predetermine X, Y, and Z about a person and that experiences, desires, and identities that differ from that path can't be respected. Under the queer-phobic mentality, our lives are, at best, misguided political statements, at worst attempts to ruin everyone else's lives by simply existing.

The same writer quoted above pretty much said the same thing last summer:

Critiques of transgender/transsexuality are no more meant as attacks on individual transgender/transsexual persons than critiques of prostituting women are meant as attacks on prostitutes or critiques of pornography are meant as attacks on women in pornography or critiques of motherhood are meant as attacks on mothers or critiques of marriage as an institution are meant as critiques of married women or critiques of high heels are meant as critiques of those who wear them or critiques of lipstick are critiques of those who wear it or critiques of shaving are critiques of those who shave or critiques of boob jobs are critiques of those who have them, and on and on and on, infinity. Some ought to get over themselves and learn the difference between critiques, analysis, opinions, politics and them.

Love the sinner, hate the sin? Even when the sin is an integral part of the sinner's identity? At the heart of the above statement is the same infantilism that the Religious Right uses to render all queer people's experiences non-existent - it attaches a moral value to something that is inherently value-less for the sake of maintaining a clean narrative of what men are and what women are.

And it affects us all, L, G, B, T, or Q, even if some specific writers won't extend it to its logical conclusion. But when an argument is made that the experienced desires of a group of people just don't happen, that their experiences aren't legible under a narrative of what men are and what women are, that no matter what they say they will never convince others that having control over their own bodies, sexualities, relationships, and identities is what's best for them, then we're looking at a mentality that devalues our lives and autonomy, our freedom and equality.

When it comes down to it, people who have an investment in gender roles are going to feel attacked by any sort of queer. But that doesn't mean that queer itself is the attacker, it just means that some people need to make their understanding of the world a bit more complex to take it into account.

I feel like a "We're queer, we're here, get used to it" would be appropriate right about now.

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