

The interSEXion

A Vision for a Queer Progressive Agenda

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This vision is based on the fact that the queer community is a microcosm of humanity, intersecting through the common experiences of the oppression of gender identity and sexual identity, the observation that oppression is rooted in greed and perpetuated by the fear of scarcity, the assertion that no oppression can end without removing the systems that perpetuate it, the recognition that oppression and exploitation are the bases on which current power structures and economies rely, and the observation that because queer liberation requires the end of all forms of oppression and exploitation, the liberation of queer people can be seen as the key to the liberation of humanity itself.

THE ROOT OF QUEER OPPRESSION

Heterosexism is the belief that there are only two genders, and that a sexual relationship between a man and a woman is compulsory for full acceptance into society. It would seem that the root of queer oppression is heterosexism, and so queer folks should work against heterosexism. In order to get into any sort of depth in this work, we would need to know why heterosexism exists in the first place, and we would find that the reason for heterosexism is because it enforces patriarchy, which could lead us to join forces with the women's movement and oppose patriarchy. That venture would expose the fact that the reason patriarchy needs enforcement is because it is essential to capitalism, and that capitalism at its essence relies on greed. Therefore, the root of queer oppression, and in fact, the root of all systemic oppression as it exists in the world today, is unbridled greed.

Capitalism is based in greed, and as it exists today, cannot exist without exploiting labor. One person cannot make a disproportionately large share of profits unless somewhere in the process, another person is making a disproportionately small one. The most basic example of this is in the patriarchal nuclear family, where the man makes profits at the expense of a woman's (and children's) free labor. The people who most benefit from this unbridled greed are the ones who came up with capitalism to begin with: wealthy white men. This is true worldwide; every oppression that is in place exists to ultimately support white male power, and the United States is the clear leader and greatest benefactor of this system.

The main tools used to make an oppressive system work are a defined norm, economic power, and violence. In her book entitled *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*, Suzanne Pharr explains it this way:

To understand the connection among the oppressions, we must examine their common elements. The first is a defined norm, a standard of rightness and often righteousness wherein all others are judged in relation to it. This norm must be backed up

with institutional power, economic power, and both institutional and individual violence In the United States, that norm is male, white, heterosexual, Christian, temporarily able-bodied, youthful, and has access to wealth and resources

In order for these institutions to be controlled by a single group of people, there must be economic power Once economic control is in the hands of the few, all others can be controlled through limiting access to resources, limiting mobility, limiting employment options. People are pitted against one another through the perpetuation of the myth of scarcity which suggests that our resources are limited and blames the poor for using up too much of what little there is to go around The maintenance of societal and individual power and control requires the use of violence and the threat of violence. Institutional violence is sanctioned through the criminal justice system and the threat of the military—for quelling individual or group uprisings.

(1988, 53–56)

The patriarchal nuclear family, living in a single-family house in the suburbs, serves as the building block for capitalism. As the arbitrarily defined norm, it provides the perfect conditions for the oppression of women. Since men earn wage labor, they can easily control women's access to resources, and can easily accuse women of "spending too much" of "their" hard-earned money. By isolating women from each other, the nuclear family provides a safe haven for men to be violent towards women and thus enforce their power.

In relation to institutional power, the isolated nuclear family unit makes it easy for mass media to be the only source of information citizens receive, since people are no longer talking to their neighbors, and ideally, by isolating the male in the household as the only breadwinner, the nuclear family can easily be moved around for the convenience of those who need wage labor. Because each family needs a house, a car, and their own household items, the nuclear family also promotes the wasteful unending consumerism and environmental exploitation required for "economic progress." Irrespective of whether the nuclear family is actually the "norm," as long as this belief is widespread, other types of families can be judged by whether they conform to that structure.

Everyone strives to conform to the nuclear family model, and a false sense of pride and righteousness is evident in those who "make it." That many poor people, people of color, and immigrants do not fit into that kind of family is considered "their fault," and not the result of those in power limiting access to the resources it takes to sustain a nuclear family. When this shame and blame is internalized, those who don't fit the norm fight amongst themselves about why another oppressed group is the "problem with society."

It is not just gender oppression that keeps capitalism in place. It requires the exploitation of the labor of anyone outside the "norm": the white, wealthy, young, temporarily-abled, English-speaking Christian American male citizen. Racism exists to exploit the work of people of color, sexism exists to exploit women's work, xenophobia exists to exploit the "third world," and ageism/ableism devalues those who are assumed "less productive." Many of us experience more than one of these oppressions. In addition to the myth of the nuclear family, patriotism, the illusion of a meritocracy, and religious oppression are the tools used to brainwash one group to look down on another and trust that the system is working for the "believers." The illusion of scarcity and fear of our neighbors keeps us isolated from and fighting with each other. Divide and conquer is the rule. Meanwhile, those in power continue to reap the rewards.

A VISION FOR LIBERATION: THE INTERSEXION

It is because the queer community categorically rejects this setup, simply by being who we are, that we are such a threat to those in power. When they call gay marriage a threat to human civilization as we know it, they are referring to the fact that gender oppression in the form of heterosexism is the weapon that keeps them in power, and if those gender "norms" weren't considered essential, there would be no way to enforce that oppression. It is precisely because we live outside the basic unit of the very nuclear family structure that would otherwise permit capitalism to continue unchallenged, and because our community experiences not only queer oppression but all oppressions, that we are most capable of creating an alternative culture outside of the culture of exploitation, resolving it for ourselves so that it can be expanded for those outside of our community.

A defining characteristic of the queer community is that within it is reflected all of the oppressions and privileges in our surrounding geography, and that these oppressions and privileges play out in similar proportions and methods. It is the intersection of every oppression and privilege, and the wholeness of the queer community is its power. There is no better place to understand the intersection of oppressions and figure out how to achieve liberation for all forms of life. Because we are an intersection based on gender identity and sexual identity, we can call ourselves the "interSEXion."

We can start by building a real sense of wholeness within the queer community. While our oppressors would like us to remain separate and at odds with each other, we can use our queer oppression to bind us into making connections and understanding the nature of oppression itself. We can begin by socializing with each other. We can each individually learn about our own oppressions so that we know what we need. We can also learn about our privileges, and use them to end the oppression of others. We can end racism, classism, sexism, and any other oppression within our community. We can create a safety net for ourselves so that we are not reliant on the systems of oppression used against us for our basic needs. We can pass the values of liberation that we create from one generation to the next, without the sense of ownership that is inherited with blood relations, and instead allowing each generation to use its own experience and creativity in the struggle. In this way, we will keep intact within our community what is being used to divide and conquer us elsewhere.

Once we have this safer community, non-reliant on the systems of oppression that keep us divided, we can break the systems of oppression for everyone else. We can use our wholeness as an advantage outside the queer community. As whole people with multiple identities, we can use our non-queer identities as bridges to other oppressed communities. Although it may be true that any oppressed community can build bridges, the queer community is particularly fortunate to have representatives from the actual communities surrounding it. Because the queer identity can many times be made invisible, queer people can have access to those communities in ways that no other oppressed community can.

Currently, the progressive community seems to operate in isolated spaces, divided by our issues and oppressions, with no one group to bind it together. We could use our wholeness and reflection of our geography to ensure our policy would most likely be beneficial for all progressive communities around us, and we can be the glue that binds it together and moves it forward. In many cases, we are leading those "other" progressive movements anyway.

The queer community could have a central "policy group" that would be informed by and be informative to any number of affinity groups. The responsibility of the policy group would be to take in the information from the affinity groups, get resources and create infrastructure to support the groups, and to create an overall policy/strategy/direction for

achieving our goal of ending exploitation and oppression. This policy group would be accountable not only to the affinity groups, but also to individuals in the community, and we can hold community forums to keep a dialogue going with those individuals who may not belong to any group.

Our affinity groups could organize by whatever affinity they chose (geography, race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexuality, age, campaign, cause, . . .), they could be groups that already exist (like AIDS Survival Project, ZAMI, Trikone Atlanta), and they could dissolve if/when they were no longer necessary, like if they were organized around a campaign. The groups could provide safe spaces for people to talk about particular oppressions or issues. People could belong to as many affinity groups as they wanted. The goals for each group for now could be: figuring out the most important issues for a particular affinity group, building a coalition to support the group, and figuring out a proactive strategy to address the group's issues in order to inform the policy group.

If the affinity groups and the queer community make up an "inner circle" around our interSEXion, our allies could form a second circle around the first. Issue or campaign-based affinity groups can access our allies to form coalitions when needed. Our allies would benefit because through the interSEXion, we could be the quickest connection between allies that would form a coalition. Our allies could create connections even further outside our intersection, and reach people who would never associate themselves with a queer agenda, but would work on a particular issue or campaign through our allies.

Positioning our queer community as the interSEXion would not only ensure that we remain at the center of our own liberation, but it would also require us to leave no one behind. Being the interSEXion implies our community's wholeness, and it requires us to be no less than a full human rights movement. It requires us to honor and celebrate the wholeness of each individual in it, and restricts some of us from achieving our goal of liberation unless everyone in our community is free from oppression. It requires us to identify which parts of our community are underrepresented and to nurture those who are most wounded. It means we cannot even start towards a path of liberation until we are on equal footing within our own community. It requires us to walk our talk and liberate ourselves in order to liberate the world around us, and it is the reason why our interSEXion may be the key to the end of exploitation.

Reference

Pharr, S. (1988). *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*. Little Rock: Chardon Press.