

Our View of Liberation

Queer Ontario (QO) is a liberation-based group. We recognize and support the seeking of equality as a means toward gaining liberation, but this is only the beginning.

Attaining representation in human rights legislation brought us a degree of equality and began to create a level playing field for other work to be done. This is because formal legislative recognition favours those who ascribe to normative modes of being, marginalizing those who do not fit this narrative. For QO, seeking equality is a means to an end, not the end itself.

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, intersex, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) people see achieving equality sufficient as an end in itself. They feel they will be satisfied to assimilate into society as it currently exists. We call this 'assimilation-seeking,' whereas 'liberation-seeking' works toward transforming society to make room for more diverse economic and social justice in our lives, work and play. Heterosexual and cisgendered people are less threatened by LGBTQs who want to be like everybody else than by queers who want to change society. Changing the existing laws to make us equal will not change the attitude of society in general toward us, nor will it protect the most marginalized members of our communities. Laws and other rules of society are set up on basic assumptions which also need to be changed if liberation is to be achieved. For that reason, we initially sought equality but never planned to settle for assimilation. We are critical of simply seeking equality and instead are committed to deeper social changes.

The concepts of power and control underlie the laws, rules, and assumptions used to regulate society and shape social norms. Liberation challenges the authority behind social norms and socialization. Prevailing social norms, and the institutional powers that support them, have long upheld the power and privilege of people who adopt and embrace dominant modes of identity. Usually these people embody and/or perform white, male, cisgendered, adult, middle-class and capitalist/competitive modes of being along with their attendant value systems. Those who have power and control want to keep it and use institutions (religious, educational, health and social service, penal, business, legal and state) to sustain their position. Challenging the status quo threatens the privilege of those who have power and control and is bound to be met with resistance. Those with power and control fear that giving power to others will weaken their own control, undermine their privilege, and may even result in they themselves becoming controlled. As equality is increasingly achieved, our communities have been

divided into 'good gays' and 'bad queers': the 'good' ones assimilating into the status quo and joining in the resistance against the 'bad' ones seeking liberation through change.

Defining Ourselves

Labels are used to classify and categorize people and regulate their meaning. These categories can then be positioned in a hierarchy as a means of social regulation and control. Labels also tend to be internalized and used for self-oppression, as well as label policing within our communities. There is a risk of a labelled group being demonized. Furthermore, there is a danger of some labelled groups having their uniqueness pathologized, as has happened to transsexual and transgender individuals.

People often value their identities and should be free to choose the identities they want without discrimination, or work toward transforming their meaning. They should not have to choose an unwanted identity, have an identity forced upon them, or have a single self-identity trump the others they possess. Self-esteem, wholeness, health and wellbeing only come, in part, if we are at one with ourselves and not restricted by a label.

The individual should be recognized as the basic unit in society. The minute individuals are lumped into a group, be it genetic, racial, sexual, religious, or any other, they have labels attached to them and are subject to being put into categories to be controlled. Individuals, based on their own agency, should have the right to associate, assemble and form social movements.

We need to believe that we have some control over our own lives, that we are not controlled by others. We need to believe that our actions affect our lives, and the lives of others, and to act accordingly. This gives us the ability to determine our own identity and the power to resist coercion. Labels are valuable when they reflect the reality we define for ourselves but not if they become restrictive or dictate how we should behave.

At Queer Ontario we use the term 'queer' as a way to critique foundational norms pertaining to identities and thereby expose the regulatory apparatus that limits possibilities for social change. It is a way of looking at the world through a lens that is decidedly not straight,

traditional or fixed-gendered. Positing such a world view can counter heterosexist, homophobic and cisgendered thinking. This world view can also assist us in advancing our interests in order to serve our broader community needs. We also refer to 'queer' in popular usage as inclusive of a wide range of varying and fluid genders as well as erotic expression. Thus, usage of 'queer' is radical in keeping with a liberationist perspective while simultaneously serving to avoid the LGBT alphabet soup (see Queer Ontario's website for an expanded discussion of what 'queer' includes). Equally, Queer Ontario recognizes the multiplicity of differences within and between these varying identities and respects particularized issues, needs and concerns therein. We may need to join groups as a potential source of power and self-determination, but not at the expense of personal agency.

Going Forward

A mission of liberation is to identify and change the laws and social rules that focus on controlling people rather than giving control to the individual. A critical queer liberation perspective engages in a process of questioning, resisting and challenging. A questioning of the status quo that has been and continues to be dominated by heterosexuality and rigidly defined gender roles allows for a deconstruction of such cisgendered and heteronormative social norms, practices and structures. Our resistance is against cisgendered, heteronormative socialization and conditioning – to looking and behaving like straight people in order to gain acceptance and respectability. We challenge the hegemonic notions that heterosexuality and traditional gender identities and roles are the norm. For queers, contorting ourselves to meet these expectations is not only a false endeavour but an insult to our personal integrity. Queer liberationists assert ourselves by defining what is important to us based on our own needs.

Areas for social change include:

- ◆ The health system (including gender and sexually diverse knowledge and sensitivity training for staff, and research on the health needs of LGBTQs, which are different from those of cis heterosexuals);
- ◆ The welfare system (this should include a more evenly applied redistribution of wealth that does not label, punish or stigmatize individuals, but provides them with security to take chances such as a guaranteed minimum income; this should also include systemic recognition of the various disabilities and social obstacles faced by members of queer communities);

◆ Policing (law officers need to understand the differences in our lives and the communities we live in, especially where straight and gay behaviours differ);

◆ Oppressive laws to do with sex (bawdy house laws, porn laws, censorship laws, criminalization of HIV and STI non-disclosures);

◆ Employment laws and practices (employment equity, ending discrimination in the workplace; people from all classes having a chance at income and promotion); promoting more democratic workplace and community focused decision-making practices;

◆ Protecting the interests and rights of those who are in a minority (racialized, trans people) or dis-enfranchised (women); extending resources to the underprivileged and improving their impact on society;

◆ Separation of church and state so that laws and morals are not driven by religious communities (even on those occasions when they agree!); this separation does not mean that we see queerness and faith as mutually exclusive, as we celebrate both those members of our communities who faithfully practice their religions as well as those who identify with no religion;

◆ The prison system and its inherent biases against racialized and Indigenous peoples, mistreatment of trans people as well as its questionable means of reform; recognizing living arrangements in which the individual is the core unit: the choice to live independently or create family structures would be such that adults choose the meaning of their relationships whether biologically related, conjugal or not: within such family structures young people, whatever their sexual orientation, have greater self-determination and freedom to decide on matters that are important to them; thus implies a corresponding change in how adults and parents (both heterosexual and queer) view their roles and personal practices in the culture.

it may require a compromise that is disingenuous. ‘Equality’ in and of itself can be troubling.

We need to listen to those who are not in positions of power in society. LGBTQs must be able to speak out and “tell it like it is.” For this to happen, we need to stand up to prejudice without fear of telling our stories. We then need to be empowered to challenge the existing structures of society and reshape them to be more inclusive and freeing.

You can help! Look critically at what you are told is normal. Think whether it makes sense to you. Look at laws, rules, and conventions to see who they benefit, and perhaps more importantly, who they ignore. Speak out when you hear prejudice and discrimination. Listen to what people tell you about the lives they live - and tell them about yours. Most importantly, we then need to urge freedoms in our society to live our lives as we choose!

Get Involved Have A Say Take Action

VISIT: queerontario.org

E-MAIL: info@queerontario.org

TWITTER: @queerontario

FACE BOOK: Queer Ontario

IDEAS: thinktank.queerontario.org

QUEER LIBERATION IN THE 2020s

CHALLENGE

There is a fundamental difference between the often recognized calls for ‘equality’ and the notion of ‘equity’. When equal treatment is applied across the board it has a differential impact: that is to say, it does not affect people equally unless those people are all the same. Queer Ontario argues for equity, as it recognizes that we are a diverse society made up of different people (such as queers) who need to be differently recognized according to our varied realities. Queer liberationists seek creative ways of living that are not necessarily defined by societal norms and mores. Critical queer liberationists trouble the concept of ‘equality’ for at the personal and societal level of integrity,

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Pamphlet prepared by Queer Ontario, October 2019
Adapted from the pamphlet Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Liberation in the 2000s by the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario, November 2004, revised by Queer Ontario in June 2014.