

1. HOW WE SEE IT

Queer Ontario (QO) is a liberation-based group. We recognize and support the seeking of equality as a means toward gaining liberation. Equality in human rights legislation was one of the battles our predecessor, the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario [CLGRO], undertook in previous liberation work. This involved the battle to include 'sexual orientation' in the Ontario Human Rights Code, which makes it easier for people to come out and helps to create a level playing field for other work to be done. For QO, seeking equality is a means to an end, not the end itself. In spite of the legalization of same-sex marriage, Canada remains an inequitable place for queers unwilling or unable to fit within a legalized equality model. It is necessary to determine the next steps toward liberation. Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, 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,' as opposed to 'liberation-seeking.' 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. At best, we can hope some attitudes will evolve over a period of co-existence. 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. Today we are critical of simply seeking equality and instead are committed to moving on to other 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 embrace and adopt 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 (heterosexual, white, middle-class, cisgender, males) want to keep it and use institutions (churches, schools, governments) to enforce 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 lesbians and gays have achieved equality, our communities have begun to be divided into 'good lesbians and 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. Determining the next steps toward change and liberation is the purpose of this pamphlet.

2. WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

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.

When LGBTQs secure equal rights and become assimilated they cease to exist as LGBTQ! They lose their identity and sense of self-affirmation and self-determination; some labels are lost while others are applied. 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. 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 collective 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. Queer people include, but are not limited to, two-spirited, agender, ambigender, androgynous, asexual, bigender, bisexual, cross-dresser, drag queen, drag king, fluid, gay, gender fluid, genderqueer, intergender, intersex, intrasex, kink, lesbian, non-gendered, omnisexual, pangender, pansexual, polysexual, transgender, transsexual, and transvestite individuals. Thus, usage of 'queer' is radical in keeping with a liberationist perspective while simultaneously serving to avoid the LGBT alphabet soup. Equally, Queer Ontario recognizes the multiplicity of differences within and between these varying identities and respects particularized issues, needs and concerns therein.

To exercise influence over our environment, we need to see groups as a potential source of power and control which we can use to supplement our internal resources, rather than as collectives to which we must give up our personal assets.

Laws should be in place to protect the individual from being exploited by others who are more powerful. They should not be there to force individuals to conform to the arbitrary rules of those in power.

3. WHAT DO WE WANT?

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. For example, the current laws about marriage should be changed so that it is the individual (rather than the state) that determines the nature of personal relationships.

This would create a strong transition between the old objective of equality (which simply assimilates same-sex partners into the same structured, hierarchal, heterosexual marital system) and the goal of liberation, where people would be free to define for themselves the nature of their relationships.

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 toward cisgendered, heteronormative socialization and conditioning – to looking and behaving like straight people in order to gain acceptance and respectability. Challenged are the hegemonic notions that heterosexuality and traditional gender identities and roles are the norm. For queers, con-torting 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.

Some other areas where rules need to be reviewed and changed are:

- the education system, at all levels (including the need for students to be aware of the choices available to them and their right to make their own informed choices [i.e. Gay Straight Alliances]);
- 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 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 or, as in the case of women and trans people, in a less privileged position; building the confidence of 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.
- 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-determi-

nation 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.

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 think outside the box seeking 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, it may require a compromise that is disingenuous. 'Equality' in and of itself can be troubling.

So we need to find out exactly what is needed by 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 an end to prejudice so that we do not suffer for telling our stories. Then we need to be heard and encouraged to participate in shaping the structures of society that affect us.

You can help! Look critically at what you're 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!

**GET INVOLVED
HAVE A SAY
TAKE ACTION**



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**QUEER
LIBERATION
IN THE 2010s**

CHALLENGE

