

An increasing number of people now describe themselves as non-binary, genderqueer, or some other variation of an essentially anti-gender impulse. For the gender abolitionist, this is an encouraging development, but it is also a potentially dangerous one...

**Representation is dreadfully incapable of telling the gender abolitionist who can be called a friend.**

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## *Who is the Gender Abolitionist?*

*L. T.*

Dear friend,

I was surprised to hear from you today given how busy we both have become, but I am grateful for your letter. I have no doubt you've heard me mention the person you are inquiring after from across the room or have seen their text on occasion across the various social media platforms. I openly acknowledge the enigma surrounding the person you're looking for. It seems they are too-often explained in only the fuzziest usages of language, and so this begs your question: who is the gender abolitionist?

It is probably best to begin by pointing out who the gender abolitionist cannot be. They are not a feminist, for what they strive for is neither the *equality* of gendered bodies nor the *liberation* of *women* from *men*. This latter point is important, because while the gender abolitionist admits openly that the millennia-old subjugation of women's bodies is the root of

immense and ongoing global catastrophe, they do not see the continuing existence of these bodies as possible after that patriarchy has been truly dissolved. The culmination of a global, years-long campaign to eliminate all misogynistic practices only arrives for the gender abolitionist when women and men have been rendered so materially indifferent to one another that the distinction between the two is decided to be eliminated. I will return to this point later.

The gender abolitionist is, similarly, not one who tolerates the crux of performative accounts of gender such as those advanced by scholars such as Judith Butler. Certainly, transgressions against norms of gendered practices are punished, but this does not reduce the vast structural forces that enforce those norms to the role of policing one's appearance alone. It is true that trans women faces misogyny in-so-far as they attempt integrating into what is conceived as a normative womanhood, and that trans men may, conversely, reap social and political benefits. Yet we should not forget that it is equally true violence against a trans woman stems from their body's challenges to a coercive and mandatory practice of strictly gendered sexuality; a body may be altered or disguised, but so long as these two methods by which one pursues performance lies strictly

My friend, I am sincerely sorry for the length of this reply; I do hope it goes some way in prompting even more questions about this topic that we can discuss next time we sit down over a meal.

Yrs.,

L. T.

own whiteness. The gender abolitionist would, I think, hold that this logic extends to gender, ham-fisted of an analogy though it may be. It is not enough for those who refuse the constraints of gender to be not men or neither woman nor man. Those who go about their lives being systematically recognized as a part of manhood must seek to be anti-men; not just among their fellow radicals, but everywhere they go. This is not a process that can leave any stragglers: trans men and non-binary people cannot abdicate their practical complicities in the subjugation of women due to a misguided belief that it is only the binary or the binary's lack of inner mobility which is the fundamental problem. Such a belief reeks of all the mistaken judgements that characterize the white person who is racially "moderate" and believes the simple construction of a black middle class will soothe all the ills of society.

Ultimately, the gender abolitionist is the one who asks everyone to take up the practices of leveling gender just as readily as they would ask them to be anti-capitalist and anti-racist, because it is only via this leveling that gender's horrors will be forced to exit from our collective history. Forcing some to give up their real or desired power over others will never be a peaceful or comfortable process, but it is a necessary one.

within the structure of gendered discourses, the gender abolitionist must reject them.

If the preceding two approaches do not set out satisfactory practices for the gender abolitionist, what does? I am not sure I can answer this question on every gender abolitionist's behalf, but I will try my best to at least elucidate what I consider the most important points.

First, to return to a previous point: the gender abolitionist sees *patriarchy*, and not *gender binarism*, as the root of the gendered conundrum humanity has found itself in. This is a not unimportant distinction. To decry gender binarism as too limited a model for the possibilities of gendered expression is entirely anti-ethical to the understanding that it is the oppression of one class (women) by another (men) that gives rise to gender in the first instance. By shifting rhetoric from patriarchy to gender binarism, the critics of gender abolitionism immediately give up the ghost of any potential for revolutionary change, and instead embrace a comfort-oriented politics aimed at a mere expansion of terms for those beings men will ultimately, and usually already do, work to subjugate. As I'm sure you are already aware, the historical struggles of black anti-racists have shown

us there is no room for the inaction of moderates who prioritize their personal comforts over substantive change during revolutionary struggle.

This is not to say that those who feel as if they need to step outside of gendered terms in order to describe their way-of-being are at any fault for recent rhetorical shifts. Obviously, the constraints of gender have been felt by much of humanity for many thousands of years, and those who protest these limitations to their desires have always existed. Yet the ways in which this problem has been addressed have been historically unsatisfactory, often leading (if they lead anywhere at all) to the creation of new social roles which are still uniformly constrained but can function as a release valve for the pressures of ongoing, patriarchal oppression. For the gender abolitionist, the various alternatives to what is merely gender binarism, and not gender itself, are not satisfactory in a post-colonial world.

More contemporarily, an increasing number of people now describe themselves as non-binary, genderqueer, or some other variation of an essentially anti-gender impulse. For the gender abolitionist, this is an encouraging development, but it is also a potentially dangerous one. These anti-gender identities are not themselves revolutionary in content;

this is all the more apparent to the gender abolitionist who, as I have already pointed out, rejects performativity as an accurate accounting of gender. On one hand, this allows the gender abolitionist to correctly locate the root of anti-gender identities and acknowledge them in their friends as something not based within performativity-based practices such as “passing”; on the other hand, the gender abolitionist recognizes that anti-gender identified friends who fall short of practicing a politics that centers the destruction of patriarchy are not yet themselves gender abolitionists. The non-binary person who still reproduces patriarchy by refusing women dialogue, by not acting in *direct opposition* to legislation targeting women, and by not even disputing gender directly outside their own self-affirmation cannot be recognized by the gender abolitionist as a comrade in pursuit of gender’s systematic destruction.

All of this to say: representation is dreadfully incapable of telling the gender abolitionist who can be called a friend.

As you know, it is not enough, nor has it ever *been* enough, for white people (myself especially) to simply call ourselves “not racist.” We long ago agreed that every white person worth their salt in a fight carries out anti-racist practices in order to not just abolish race, but specifically their