



Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations

By Jane Ward

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For three years the author did participant-observation at three nationally prominent queer organizations in Los Angeles-Christopher Street West, which produces L.A.'s queer pride festival; the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, a 37-year-old multi-site organization; and Bienestar, an HIV services organization for gay Latinos. Ward documents the evolution of these organizations, including class and race conflicts within them, but she especially focuses on the misuses of diversity culture.

Respectably Queer reveals how neoliberal ideas about difference are becoming embedded in the daily life of a progressive movement and producing frequent conflicts over the meaning of "diversity." The author shows how queer activists are learning from the corporate model to leverage their differences to compete with other non-profit groups, enhance their public reputation or moral standing, and establish their diversity-related expertise. Ward argues that this instrumentalization of diversity has increased the demand for predictable and easily measurable forms of difference, a trend at odds with queer resistance.

Ward traces the standoff between the respectable world of "diversity awareness" and the often vulgar, sexualized, and historically unprofessional world of queer pride festivals. She spotlights dissenting voices in a queer organization where diversity has become synonymous with tedious and superficial workplace training. And she shows how activists fight back when prevailing diversity discourses-the ones that "diverse" people are compelled to use in order to receive funding-simply don't fit.

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