

**Queer | Inclusive | Badass**

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**lesbians  
WHOTech**  
QUEER | INCLUSIVE | BADASS

**2025 Conference Programming**

NB Inclusion Keynote, *LWT Leader Arlan Hamilton*

Black Trans Lives Finally Matter, *Angelica Ross*

Suzie Wong Actually is a Lesbian, *Nancy Kwan*

Exnomination Has Been Reversed!, *Ann Mei Chang*  
(And Why Business Insider Now Recognizes LGBTQIA BIPOC in Tech)

AI No Longer Misgenders, *Ana Arriola*



<sup>1</sup>The views expressed in this piece do not necessarily reflect the views of my institution.

My relationship with the tech community has been turbulent; the community lacks diversity and even when spaces are created for underrepresented groups, they are largely non-intersectional. Tech corporations pride themselves in LGBTQIA employee resource groups led by white, cis gay men and lesbians who are supposed to serve as role models and representation for me, a non-binary, queer person of color. The epitome of this non-intersectional queer culture in tech is Lesbians Who Tech (LWT). This organization markets itself as queer, inclusive, and badass, but has a history of using non-lesbian queer and trans-exclusive language at conferences and on its website, and lacks POC representation.

I envisioned a 2025 LWT conference and designed its poster, which showcases how LWT, and the broader tech community, have transformed into a space that includes all queer and trans women and non-binary folks and prioritizes intersectional representation, such as that of Black trans women, femme Asian and Asian-American lesbians, and non-binary individuals. Furthermore, the poster highlights how the fairness of machine learning (ML) systems has improved by leaps and bounds. ML systems can strongly reflect human prejudices because of undiverse and unbalanced training data, as well as minimal accountability (Barocas and Hardt, Buolamwini and Gebru). The images of the speakers in my poster are generated by GANs<sup>2</sup> and evidence how ML in 2025 is capable of producing representative, intersectional instances of queer and trans women and non-binary folks. I also predict ML systems will no longer misgender trans and non-binary individuals. Ultimately, employing future ML capabilities and ML-generated artifacts as a proxy, my poster presents how the tech community, by 2025, will prioritize the creation of fair, intersectional, and ethical technology.

In feminist and lesbian spaces in tech, like LWT, racial, non-binary, and bisexual exclusion persist as issues. In large part, this is due to exnomination, that is, the default visual description of lesbians as white, butch cissexual women, which is upheld by LWT leaders who match this description. My conception of the future involves LWT and the broader tech community destabilizing exnomination in tech and ML through more inclusive spaces and greater attention to underrepresented voices.

LWT's language, which has excluded non-lesbian queer and trans individuals in tech, stems from the minority model of activism and a lack of understanding of non-binary identities by mainstream culture. LWT leader Leanne Pittsford has defended the usage of "lesbian" over "queer," citing "Lesbian spaces are dying [...] There have always been fewer lesbian bars than gay bars, fewer lesbian blogs than LGBTQ blogs" (Pittsford). This mirrors how lesbian activists in the late 20th century "felt uneasy about the presence of trans people [...] and] bisexuals" (Serano). To carve out their own space, they rejected any identities that made the boundary between lesbians and straight women murky, thereby erasing bisexual and trans identities. While they feared these identities reinforced stereotypes that sexuality is a choice and lesbian women are men, Pittsford worries that lesbians are being absorbed into the generic category of "queer," which destroys being strictly "gay and female" as an identity; consequently, she yearns to create a space for lesbians in tech at the expense of excluding bi and non-queer trans women, non-binary people, etc. (Pittsford).

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<sup>2</sup>The speakers are not actually generated by GANs. They are real individuals, with potentially [fictional identities and careers](#) (top left to bottom right):

- 1) Ann Mei Chang (she/her/hers) – identifies as lesbian and Asian-American, Chief Innovation Officer for Pete for America, 23 most powerful LGBTQ+ people in tech (LEAN IMPACT)
- 2) Ashley Diamond (she/her/hers) – transgender inmate denied medical attention in prison, [has begun a career in AI research](#) (Luk)
- 3) Ana Arriola (they/she) – identifies as a Queer Latinx Womxn of Trans and Nonbinary Experience, formerly Director of Product Design for AI at Facebook, General Manager & Partner, AI Core Design & Research at Microsoft (Lesbians Who Tech & Allies)
- 4) Angelica Ross (she/her/hers) — identifies as a Black trans woman, self-taught programmer, founder and CEO of TransTech Social Enterprises, helps employ trans individuals in tech (Leskin)
- 5) Arlan Hamilton (she/her/hers) — identifies as an LGBTQ woman of color, founded Backstage Capital while homeless, currently managing partner of Backstage Capital (Díaz)
- 6) Nancy Kwan (she/her/hers) — hyperfeminized Chinese-American actress, [lesbian pioneer of machine learning research](#) (play on title of article "Why Suzie Wong Is Not a Lesbian") (Lee)

Pittsford has also argued, “A lot of allies do not understand the word queer” (Pittsford). This is especially true in the context of non-binary identities, as expressed by “How can a group of people whose genders are largely illegible to the world translate their existence to the men and women around them?” (Rajunov and Duane). Non-binary identities are not necessarily either of, a combination of, or between the binary genders, which makes it difficult for allies to comprehend them; furthermore, the English language, in which the gender binary is deeply-ingrained, constrains non-binary individuals to explain their identities in contrast to the binary. However, a major reason for a lack of education on non-binary identities is “mainstream portrayals of nonbinary people are scarce” (Rajunov and Duane). Hence, Pittsford should use her privilege within the organization and as an individual whose identity neatly fits into the gender and sexuality binaries to represent and amplify the voices of non-binary people, rather than shying away from queer inclusion because of the unintelligibility of the word “queer” to mainstream society.

LWT has also contributed to the exnomination of lesbians in tech as white women. LWT’s leadership noticeably lacks Asian and Asian-American women relative to white women. This is likely due to the “American Orientalist construction of Asian women as [...] subservient, feminine, heterosexual women” (Lee 122). The perception of Asian women in tech as inherently “feminine” and “heterosexual” starkly contrasts with the default image of lesbians as butch and white, and consequently, LWT might minimally engage with Asian women, which implicitly excludes them. Moreover, the view of Asian lesbians within LWT as “subservient” has likely precluded their ascension to leadership roles unlike white lesbians, which, through a positive feedback loop, upholds the exnomination of lesbians in tech. This exnomination is also evident in Business Insider’s “The 23 most powerful LGBTQ+ people in tech;” of the three POC recognized, the only Asian was Ann Mei Chang, a butch lesbian (Leskin). The racial exclusion of Asian women, as well Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women, from queer spaces is a symptom of the neoliberal nature of tech; tech’s non-intersectional view of sexual orientation “only provide[s] access to the sought-after spaces for those who do not have other intervening vectors of marginality,” such as race (Spade 160).

Exnomination has definitely tainted tech products, especially ML systems. There are numerous instances of facial recognition technology incorrectly identifying BIPOC as criminals, which makes them particularly vulnerable to brutality and incarceration. This occurs because ML systems, which are trained using data fraught with biases, limited features for minorities, and massive sample size disparities, reflect the social and systemic exnomination of humans as cis white men<sup>3</sup> and thus only truly works for this segment of the population (Barocas and Hardt, Ko). For the same reason, ML-based binary gender classification systems always misgender non-binary people, thereby erasing their existence. However, ML systems that work for everyone are not necessarily ethical. These systems unfortunately perpetuate the state’s “categorization to sort the population rather than targeting individuals based on behaviors or traits” (Spade 138). Current ML-based classification systems are only capable of discriminating between classes, e.g. documented vs. undocumented, white vs. person of color, etc, and cannot empathize with or causally reason about any individual’s experiences. Thus, it serves the state as a tool of oppression of marginalized groups.

The poster I designed signifies how by 2025, LWT and the broader tech community will have transformed into spaces which truly include queer and trans women and non-binary folk of color and emphasize intersectionality and the destabilization of exnomination. To achieve this, we need to amplify the voices of Black trans women, femme Asian lesbians, and non-binary individuals in particular. Furthermore, by 2025, ML systems and other tech products will represent and work fairly for every segment of the population, thanks to the aforementioned amplification and increased evaluation of the representational and allocational harms they pose (Blodgett). Moreover, ML will not be used by the state as a tool of categorization and oppression, and instead will benefit humanity, maybe through art!

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<sup>3</sup> Syl and Aph Ko, in their book “Aphro-ism,” provide an excellent explanation of the exnomination (i.e. default visual description) of what is “human” in the postcolonial world in which we live. Unfortunately, I don’t have the space here to explore the colonial roots of the “social and systemic exnomination of humans as cis white men.”

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