**Taking Back ‘Queer’**

queer |kwi(ə)r|   
adjective   
1 strange; odd : she had a queer feeling that they were being watched.   
• [ predic. ] dated slightly ill.   
2 informal usually offensive (esp. of a man) homosexual.   
noun informal usually offensive   
a homosexual man.

This is the dictionary definition of the word that has such a contentious and emotional past, present, and most likely future for the LGBT community. Obviously, a cold, scientific definition of such a loaded term cannot begin to do the many real meanings justice. So, just what is so controversial about ‘Queer?’

Queer, like so many potential pejoratives, holds far too much emotional weight for far too many people. It was once used to describe homosexuals, particularly of the variety who displayed characteristics that would reveal one to be a homosexual on sight, in the original sense of the word- ie, strange and odd, as the definition above describes. It went further in that direction until it eventually became a hateful, cringe- worthy slur for all people who are non heterosexual. Make no mistake. Words have power. Perhaps this word is representative of the countless days you spent throughout grade school, middle school, and high school as the only out student, or of the painful bashing that could have cost you your life. Yes, words have power.

However, the younger generations of the LGBT community are, slowly but surely, taking away the negative power of this word. Often, a ‘Q’ is added to the end of LGBT, and it can stand for ‘Queer’ or ‘Questioning.’ There are people who do not identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, but are certainly not heterosexual, but simply identify Queer. The newest recognized gender identity is genderqueer, meaning both male and female, neither male nor female. There are countless examples as to how, to many people, this word is no longer the nasty, hurtful slur it once was.

Unfortunately, despite the abovementioned strides in turning ‘Queer’ into the positive we never thought it would be, there are still plenty of people in the LGBT community, particularly of the older generation, who are horrified at its newfound usage. They find it disrespectful and insulting, even coming from their own, and resent the implication that they should have to listen to it, or consider it to be anything besides the hateful, derogatory language it represents to them. This makes this phenomenon a conundrum, because we owe so much to those first crusaders, and who are we to demand they do things our way?

All of that being said, I personally *love* the word ‘Queer.’ It is an all encompassing word for my rather cumbersome load of labels and identities. It is empowering to take something that was once so ugly and turn it into a part of myself that no one can ever take away, an identity I love, that I am proud of. It is even better when it means that I am part of a community, an historic revolution that will go down in history. Yes, this word has power, but we are now giving it a different kind of power. Queer is ours now, and no one can take that away.