

Queerness

By Simon Pelletier

What exactly are people talking about when they use the word queer these days?

Queer used to be a derogatory word your parents used to describe gay men. Along the way it has changed a couple of times.

In the eighties, with the rise of gay rights, queer became the catch term for other orientations outside of the stereotypical gay/lesbian identities. It mostly covered transsexual individuals and bisexuals.

In the nineties "Queer Theory" began to flourish. It's a form of critical theory that explores gender and sexual orientation outside of heterosexual constructs with the intention of challenging the notion of heterosexual desire being the norm.

The use of the word queer these days is about placing people outside of their gender or sexual orientation. A self described way to explode the heteronormative construct of manwoman, gaylesbian binaries. The gendersex activists would say that the gay rights movement was fundamentally trying to force heterosexual culture to accept them into its construct of compulsory monogamy and nuclear families. Whereas the new pitch is one of complete deconstruction of pair relationships and dual parent with children familial units towards a more fluid set of social circumstances: Communal child rearing, multiplefluid partner (domestic or sexual) arrangements and something akin to community first and *it takes a village to raise a child* type positions.

The easiest way to do this is to reject the whole construct of heterosexuality and parental structure that most of society has been built around.

A trans-activist scholar that I listened to states explicitly that queer doesn't have one definition but is instead a function that can be used with a variety of inputs. For example,

Queer is a statement that you reject the traditional norms surrounding malefemale, manwoman and monogamous partnership that our society has defined as "normal."

So if that is an accurate description of what queer means right now, the next question I'm interested in is, "what happens when we deconstruct heteronormative society?"

This could be a long discussion so I'm going to discuss one positive view and one negative view as a primer for more thinking in the matter.

The positive view of the transition to a queer society is that instead of it being a way to accept the minorities into the "norm" – trans, non-binaries and the like – it's actually a way in which to bring the minorities into the centre (the centre being the heteronormative population) and then to allow the individuals in the centre to be fully liberated from the stereotypes they've been ok with existing within. The cis man is ok with being a little more gender fluid and we all gain from the dropping of toxic masculine behaviour. This kind of thing.

A negative spin of the deconstruction could go like this. Humans are simple beings that follow what has come before them. Heteronormative societal structures come from an evolutionary process that selects for somewhat efficient functioning between sexes and how they relate within society. If we deconstruct the labeling it becomes harder to function in society. Kind of like taking all the food items off the products at the grocery store. Labels are constricting the expression of individual items on the shelves. It might let the lettuce in the vegetable aisle be free but it sure makes it a lot harder for us to have a quick grocery store visit if the lettuce is next to the yogurt in the dairy aisle.

Post Script

In many ways I'm noticing these queer ideas infiltrating my peers. It's becoming harder to put labels on relationships and identities. In general I think these ideas, right now, are in the minority. But I think it's quite likely we shall see them gain significantly more prevalence. I hear anecdotes from friends who have children, about how they are told at school that they can be whatever gender they feel they want to be. I think in ten years queer will be a ubiquitous term used by twenty year olds. And the fluid concepts of gender and sex will come begin to cover relationship constructs as well.

I think my general explanation of what "queer" is trying to do is correct. But I also think it's very hard to actually pin down a specific definition. It's kind of the whole point of queerness really.