

On Writing While Gay, Part 2

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One of the knotty problems inherent in writing while gay, is that by doing that I'm not writing while 'queer'. This would be more fashionable, but it's a label I don't like.

Several gay people I know who are older than I am just can't accept that *queer* is a term capable of re-appropriation. For them, it is forever a term of abuse, of unwanted and marginalised difference, of hierarchy and shame. Although I've rarely been called queer with that intent, I respect their position, and would never use it to describe them, or a group in which they are part.

But that needn't apply to my own writing, or my own sense of identity. So my non-use of the term must, and does, have other origins.

Before proceeding, I want to acknowledge that I do think 'queer' has value as an umbrella term to denote a variety of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities and orientations and avoid the whole LGBTQIQ+ never-ending acronym mess. I do use it in that way sometimes, although ideally I think we should invent an alternative portmanteau descriptor out of courtesy to those who don't see themselves reflected in 'queer'. *Rainbow* might work. The flag is already a badge of identity, and the whole imagery of different stripes in one beautiful gestalt is helpful. But maybe that's just my pipe-dream.

I also want to make it absolutely clear that I want everyone to have language to describe themselves, and their identity, that they feel happy with. If you want to call yourself 'genderqueer' or 'a queer woman', or whatever, go for it. I'll support you. And I'll be delighted to use the label you want when I refer to you.

But I also want the freedom to call myself 'gay', because that is who I have always felt I am. My sexual orientation is not fluid – I have no sense that I am really bisexual, as some/most advocates of queer identity maintain. Nor do I see myself as having any kind of gender dysphoria that inclines me to see myself as fluid in that way. I am entirely happy as a cisgender man, and to declare that I love my *anima* – that part of the man's psyche that Jung called female, as a counterpart to the *animus*, the male part of a woman's psyche, and I don't suppress it. I may not 'do masculinity' in all or many of the ways that our culture currently seems to privilege, but I have not felt any less of a man for that since I was a shy and untried teenager.

Maybe 'gay' is obsolescent. I have my doubts, not least because in the days before 'queer' happened we knew all about the differences in worldview, practice, and aesthetics between the L and G communities. True, we bemoaned it as often as we cherished it. Organising even the most innocent university social event as a joint enterprise between the Gay Society and Lesbian Group was a fraught endeavour, let me tell you. But they were there, those differences, even if they were generalisations rather than universals.

And these differences came from the inside-out, rather than being imposed by others in the quest for filthy lucre. That came later with the greater commercialisation of the LGBT+ scene. Maybe with increasing civil rights and acceptance of diversity, even active welcoming

of it, we will find that 'gay' loses its value as a label, and the ways of seeing or being that many of us consider inherently gay will morph into something new or become more widely shared. But even if so, 'gay' has a history and a resonance for hundreds of thousands of men that deserves respect and recognition. And I did not march, and organise, and volunteer, and come out in public risking injury as well as rejection and legally-approved discrimination to give that identity up now.