

The Totality of Queerness:
The future is Queer and so am I
By Chelsea Davis

[Forewarning: This is some sappy-as-hell stuff coming at you.]

“I am queer”

I wrote an article a little bit ago reviewing the new romantic-teen-comedy *Love, Simon*. It's your traditional rom-com with a twist – the main character is gay. This movie was backed by a major studio and got a wide-release. It's a huge moment in time and media history for everyone, especially people who fall under the LGBTQ umbrella. As I was writing this article, I started reflecting upon my own experiences and how I personally connected to the film. And when I typed out the words “I'm a queer woman,” I actually began to tear up. Right there. Right at my desk. In front of other humans.

And I'm not going to lie, I felt a few things typing that out just now. It's not like I've hidden this aspect of my life. Almost everyone I know is aware and others that I encounter find out eventually. I'm not shy about it – in fact I'm often quite the opposite. I've been labeled as “aggressively queer” by some of my close friends and I wear it proudly. Most weekend nights you can find me, literally [drunkenly] yelling at people in the street, “Everyone is QUEEEER!” It's a real sight. I'm proud of who I am, and it's taken me a hot second to reach this point. I've toyed with many different iterations of identity, most of which I never dared to say out loud, and mostly because none truly felt right. Although I'm super open about who I am, I never really came out to anyone. It was a slow but steady journey, and one peppered with tons of inward revelations and loads of outward analyzing and discussions. But, no actual coming out - just living comfortably as who I am.

I've finally reached a point in my life where I feel completely comfortable in myself in this way – in a lot of ways, truly. I suspect this comfort and confidence comes with age and a realization of your own self-worth and priorities. But now, I'm more comfortable than ever in the knowledge that my life, my experiences, and my identity is a journey. There is no actual, finite destination; there is only discovery and expression. And part of that expression is my queerness – in fact it might be all of my expression and journey. But I'll get to how I define myself in greater detail...in a moment.

So, as comfortable as I now am with myself and as comfortable as I've been for a while uttering the words “queer” in reference to myself – I've never officially come out to anyone. I've never sat them down, had a heart to heart, told them “hey this is my identity and it veers from the norm.” While that generally feels like a good thing – again I'm not hiding, I'm open about this identity – sometimes it has felt like I missed out on something and like there's a caveat to my queer journey. It just feels like I never had the great, big, come-to-Jesus-moment...but in a gay way.

I never stepped over that metaphorical threshold. I never went from the land of the heteronormative to QueerTown, USA. No. There was never a “this, then that” that I expressed to the world, or really even myself. It was fluid. It just all was and is and always will be. Forever moving. Again, I’m mostly happy for that. I was able to grow and explore myself and come to where I am now. I wasn’t boxed into any identity, even one within the LGBT umbrella. I feel quite unencumbered by the reality of labels and this fixation society puts on us to choose one without fluidity. I don’t feel the need to “come out” to people; I simply feel the need to express and be myself, and be honest with myself and those around me. I do my best to be and live authentically, and to not construct or police my language in an effort to hide my identity (omg I sound like Clark Kent right now), and be forthright when it comes up - when the need arises.

There is just that little part of me that has *all the feels* extra hard when someone comes out to their friends and family in media. Even though I have not, I feel like I’m going through the coming out process vicariously through them. It’s cathartic. Most recently in *Love, Simon* I felt myself *in* Simon when he had to come out over and over – his fear, his anxiety, his relief. I especially felt-the-feels when his mother, played by the luminescent and warm Jennifer Garner, spoke with him. She told him it was ok, he was still himself, and that he could finally breathe. It felt cathartic for me in a sense. Like that’s what I needed to hear, not because I’ve not been accepted or embraced, but just sometimes you need to *hear* those words in addition to the action. Also, my top love language is words of affirmation, so that could have something to do with it. Who knows?

Anyway, back to being queer...

Like I mentioned earlier, queerness for me is my identity. The fullness of it and yet I’m so much more than my queerness...and *yet again*, it influences everything about me. For me I’ve realized that being Queer is much more than who I’m attracted to and how I express my gender. It is everything. It is nothing. It’s the presence of all that is and the absence of any defining quality. It is me, it is everyone else. It’s a journey and an experience. *The journey. The experience.*

I often reference the “totality of queerness” when I discuss queerness, specifically my relationship with it. At its core and simplest form, it’s rejection of the status quo, the rigidity of society, through the expression of self. At its most well-known, it encompasses sexuality and gender. Who are you attracted to and how do you express or define your gender? Generally, when someone chooses queer (or queer chooses them) as their identifying label it’s because their sexuality and/or gender couldn’t be defined or confined to the binary - man and woman.

I initially found the term in college. I’d known for a while that I wasn’t straight and that I also didn’t fully fit society’s version of what a “woman” is. (Although I *do* identify as a woman...more on that in a minute.) However, I wasn’t sure what I was. Nothing seemed to fit or make sense. I knew I wasn’t a lesbian because I still liked men. But that distinction, and subsequently bisexual, didn’t feel right either. It felt too constricting, too binary, too rigid. But again, I didn’t know what else there was, and so I said nothing. I didn’t want to say anything before I was 100-percent

sure. I didn't want to "change my life" for an identity that didn't feel correct or more importantly, like mine. None of those other labels seemed to belong to me and I didn't know if it would change as I continued on my journey. I wasn't about to mislabel myself or constrict myself in some way, when all I wanted - and still want - is ever-expanding freedom.

Although I wasn't identifying as a member of the community, I was still actively involved *in* the LGBTQ community – just as an ally. A strong ally, but still ferociously making that distinction. It wasn't until I was taking a Queer Media class in my senior year of college when I really, truly heard the term queer presented to me in a different light; as its own identity separate from a blanket term for the whole LGBTQIA community. It was presented to me in a way that was still all encompassing, but also one that encompassed ferocious and strong allies to the community.

I decided "Oh, well that's me. Because I'm not gay. Nope. No sir-eee. But I do love me some gays." (Ok, girl...) I tried that one on. I tested it out. I even began to tell people, casually, that I'd heard this term used this way and thought it was applicable to my life. No one argued with me...and I think some were silently pushing me to fully accept it as more than what I was. Which, again, I was actively rejecting my deviation from hetero-normalcy at the time.

As I went through the rest of college I wore that identity proudly, but always with a caveat – I'm still just an ally. Even when thoughts or experiences of non-heteronormativity would creep up, I'd choose to put them in the back of my mind. It wasn't until the end of my college career that I began to embrace the complexities of my sexuality. I had a friend – very, very good friend, my best friend – propose that we try dating. We'd been friends for ages, and I'd gone through their sexuality journey, and later gender-journey, with them.

We'd seen the happiness a former classmate had found in her own, somewhat surprising, lesbian relationship and my friend casually mentioned that we should try it out. We were, and still are, extremely close - it seemed like an easy jump to make. But when my friend asked me this, I got scared. I got scared and told them that it was because I didn't want to lose them as a friend, which was only partially true. I was more scared because although I'd started to slide into a non-hetero way of life, I was *not* fully embracing it. I felt like they'd discovered a huge secret about me - again, even though I'd told them about my same-sex attraction - and thrown it in my face. Like if I actually explored this beyond little things with random undergrads, it would make it all too real. Too real: what if something happened and I *had* to then tell people. I wasn't ready.

I never mentioned the trepidation with so fully embracing this identity to my friend, I only told them of my fear for the future of our friendship, should this not work out. Through soft, soft sobs we discussed and realized that we were much better as friends - soul sisters - and that in reality we were more like one another's platonic life mates. It was a really wonderful and eye-opening realization on many levels: friendship, romance, sexuality and the many types of love out there. While we wouldn't be roaming the streets as the new Ellen and Portia it was a step in the right direction, for me, in terms of accepting different aspects of my life, including queerness, but *also* different forms, relationships, and expressions of love.

Anyway, post-that incident I began using the word queer more and more, and this time without any “well-buts.” When people would then ask “Well, what does ~queer~ mean? Why not just say bisexual?” I felt perfectly comfortable and confident in saying that bisexual didn’t feel right because it felt too binary. That I was attracted to men, women, and everyone else. However someone identified, I was more attracted to the person than to what society said they were. It felt really awesome. It felt extremely freeing. And I will even admit, it made me feel slightly superior. Like, FINALLY I’d embraced myself and sexuality and I wanted to not only flaunt it around but lord my progressiveness and openness over others; my freedom. It was a short-lived moment of superiority, though, and I finally calmed down and came back to the reality of just living my life and being me. Being my lil’ queer ol’ self.

You might be thinking, “Well, Chels, that sounds more like pansexuality to me.” And you’re not entirely wrong, friend, it does share many if not all of the same qualities of pansexuality. However, that term just didn’t feel right. I wouldn’t know it when I first began wearing the term queer, but queerness became so much more than sexuality to me as I continued to discover parts of myself and expression. So, without fully knowing it at the time, queer found me because it knew I needed it. The universe knew that I couldn’t be boxed in. I couldn’t, if you will, be tamed.

I’m feeling queerer, Tony...

One might think that’d be the end of my journey. I’ve discovered and embraced the fluidity of [my] sexuality and I should be good to go, right? But, oh no. As I sat in this new identity and really soaked up what it meant to me and my place in the community, I began to feel a shift. A shift away from the comfort and contentment, or rather, complacency of my identity. The sexuality part still fit, but it started to make sense to tell people that Queer was what felt right because the non-binary-of-it-all kind of fit me too...not just the people I was attracted to.

Again, like I said earlier, I am a woman and I identify as such. I use she/her pronouns. I don’t have gender dysmorphia, I don’t feel like I was born in the wrong body, I don’t feel like a man in any way. *But* as I’ve grown, aged, learned, and experienced, I’ve settled into the knowledge that gender is nothing. It’s an illusion, a social construct that actually doesn’t mean anything. It’s ever-changing – these rules for gender and how we express or present ourselves. Gender is society telling you what job you should have and what color you should like based solely on what genitalia you were born with. WHICH isn’t always correct for people. So although I identify as a woman...what is that, really?

I began to realize that while I knew I was a “woman” I also wasn’t quite sure what that was. I knew I didn’t always feel super feminine or feel like how I think society wanted me to feel and express. I didn’t want to dress or behave in certain ways because that’s what a “lady” was supposed to do. It didn’t feel right. None of it. It felt like a sham and I began to feel like everything I did was a performance – in good ways and bad ways. Every outfit I put on, every action I took, I was assuming a different persona or faction of my own personality. I began to

fully embrace RuPaul's quote of "We're all born naked and the rest is drag." I mean it made and continues to make so much sense. We're all just performing different things and trying on different personas. We're all in some type of drag all the time. I began to realize and fully embrace this idea of living beyond the binary for myself. Being non-binary but still feeling fine, comfortable and confident calling myself a "woman." Again, whatever that fucking means.

This realization was powerful. Perhaps even more powerful than when I began to discover and embrace the sexuality aspect of myself and my queerness. Because it felt more insular. More inward and for myself, than for the world. It didn't rely on someone else - an outward attraction. It was between me and myself, and really *for* me and myself; it was beautiful and transcendent. It really catapulted me to start exploring more: myself, my mind, my identity, but also my community, my country, other communities, the world around me. How do I express and perceive, but also how do others?

The future is queer

Since THAT realization, my identity has remained relatively the same. I recognize I'm attracted to all humans. I recognize that while I may say I'm a woman and ~feel~ like a woman, that statement is vague and unstructured, and ultimately without solid meaning. However, my identity is fluid and constantly shifting. I've recognized, and been embraced and exalted by the fact that my identity – who I am and how I express – is not set in stone. It will be different from day to day.

Some days I feel more actively "queer" than other days. Some days I feel more masculine than feminine and vice versa. Some days I feel like a passively queer lady who's scamming on some men a bit more fervently and some days I feel like super gay - G-A-Y - human/boi; there's a difference, and it's nuanced, and I'm happy to discuss. Some days...all I want is to where a blazer and look at no one except myself. It's an ever-changing landscape of emotions, thoughts, feelings, desires, proclivities, and inward and outward expressions. It's exciting and wonderful; I love it. Who I am today might be completely different from who I evolve into, but at my core I am who I am. I've discovered and feel confident in who I am. I am me. I always have been and always will be ... me. And I'm still QUEER. Forever.

Queerness, to me, transcends these parameters we've put on ourselves, our community, and our world. Queerness is a full identity. It is me and influences me in every way, and yet I live beyond that. I am more than my queerness – I'm a writer, a sibling, a child, a friend, a lover, a traveler, an advocate, a media buff, an adventurer, an over-analyzer, and so, so much more. And yet, concurrently, I am fully my queerness and it is fully me. Because it's more than what we think it is. It's more than what I thought it was when I first plucked it up and pinned on my jacket.

The beauty of QUEER is simply this: I was able to identify myself as something other than cis-heteronormative, while still exploring the complexities, intricacies, and nuances of my own individual identity. I was able to make that step towards self-discovery without feeling boxed in. Without feeling like I was going from one box, or closet, to another. I was able to embrace and

be embraced by a community (LGBTQIA) while still finding my exact place in said community and world. I was able to do all of this and avoid miscommunication, mislabeling, and multiple comings out...which leads to trying to re-explain who you are, even to people who are members of your progressive community. They don't always get it.

Hopefully people will start to understand the complexities (and yet simplicities) and nuances of life, expression, and identity. I think we're starting to and I have hope that one day labels will be irrelevant. Like a friend once said, "We'll just be those old queens, watching the children grow, sipping our Mai Tai's. The Gay Dream." I'm fine with that. I'm fine with being a small instrument in ushering in that change, by simply being myself and expressing that to the world around me.

It's also a great time to be queer, people! It's literally the Year Of The Queer, 20GAYTEEN. I am overjoyed at the bevy of people in the world who are embracing their little queer selves, especially these people of note, power, and fame. They not only embraced their identities but are sharing it with the world, and are currently using their platforms as vehicles for awareness, representation and change. There have been so many actors, athletes, etc. who have come out as members of the LGBTQ community. They've shown bravery and courage, and have been welcomed, accepted and loved by their friends, coworkers, and fans.

AND there are so many people who are coming out as specifically *queer* or a non-label identity, opening that conversation of fluidity to the masses. Amandla Stenberg (*The Hunger Games, Everything, Everything*), Stephanie Beatriz (Diaz in *Brooklyn, Nine-Nine*), Ezra Miller (The Flash in the live action *Justice League*), Keiynan Lonsdale (Kid Flash on CW's *The Flash* and Bram in *Love, Simon*), Kevin McHale (*Glee, NLT*), Evan Rachel Wood (*Westworld, 13, my dreams*), and many, many more. It's not a career-killer like it was once thought. For most who come out today, this announcement has been indifferent to their career trajectory, and in some cases, it's actually caused an uptick to their careers. Who knows exactly why, but you know it could have something to do with just being happy and confident in who you are. Who knew fully embracing and expressing who you are and sharing it with the world could be so rewarding in so many ways? It's heartwarming, comforting, and inspiring.

At the end of the day, I'm just a human who loves other humans. I express and I love in many different forms, and in ways that change and grow and flow. I'm a fluid being who just wants to embrace life, love, and community. I want to attract and collect experiences, memories, and people to share them with.

At the end of day I would opt not to label myself, but I also know the power of labels and community, and I also know society isn't *quite there* yet. We like to categorize, it helps us understand. So, I slap on the Queer label. I wear it proudly and embrace it fully. I educate others on what it means in the world-at-large and what it means to me...and what it could mean for them. It's really all about embracing yourself and opening your heart and mind to all of life's possibilities. The Totality of Queerness. Queerness is the journey, the experience - not the end result. It's not the final destination. There isn't one, it's just life.

My name is Chelsea. I am queer, and I am proud. And I guess I just ~kind of~ *publicly* came out.
Thanks.