For many of us, the term "queer" is one that belongs in the "bad old days" – a word that we perceived to be a derogatory term … one often used as an epithet against persons of other than "usual" heterosexual orientation. In more recent times, the word "queer" has come to be claimed by the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community as its own. It is seen by many as a wide-ranging, all inclusive term. But despite this claiming of the word "queer" by those against whom it had been used, some allies, as well as some in the GTBQL community itself are still not comfortable hearing, saying or using the word queer. So the following is a primer on current thinking (2013) about the proper (and improper) uses of the word "queer."   This primer may be useful in helping us to educate ourselves and to come to a common understanding.   (It is provided with permission of the Unitarian Universalist Association.)

Queer 101: Identity, Inclusion, and Resources

Over the last 50 years, language around sexuality and gender has shifted and changed in incredible ways. New words have been born; other words have changed meanings and usages. One of the more complex of these words is *queer,* a word that entered the language of sexuality and gender as a derogatory term but is now worn and embraced with pride by many.

Defining Queer

Queer is a multi-faceted word that is used in different ways and means different things to different people. Here are some ways that queer is used today:

1. **Queer (adj.): attracted to people of many genders**
   Although dominant culture tends to dictate that there are only two genders, gender is actually far more complex. *Queer* can be a label claimed by a person who is attracted to men, women, genderqueer people, and/or other gender nonconforming people.
2. **Queer (adj.): not fitting cultural norms around sexuality and/or gender identity/expression**
   Similarly to the above, *queer* can be a label claimed by a person who feels that they personally don't fit into dominant norms, due to their own gender identity/expression, their sexual practices, their relationship style, etc.
3. **Queer (adj.): non-heterosexual**
   Queer is sometimes used as an umbrella term to refer to all people with non-heterosexual sexual orientations or all people who are marginalized on the basis of sexual orientation.
4. **Queer (adj.): transgressive, revolutionary, anti-assimilation, challenging of the status quo**
   Many people claim the label *queer* as a badge of honor that has a radical, political edge. UU seminarian Elizabeth Nguyen has preached: "Queer, for many folks, is about resistance—resisting dominant culture's ideas of 'normal,' rejoicing in transgression, celebrating the margins, reveling in difference, blessing ourselves."
5. **Queer (n.): an epithet or slur for someone perceived to be gay or lesbian**
   Queer is still sometimes used as a derogatory term. Many people who have had the word *queer* used against them are understandably very uncomfortable with the word.

10 Ways to be More Welcoming and Inclusive of Queer People

1. Respect *queer* as a valid sexual orientation and identity label.
2. If you personally have negative associations with the word *queer,* find ways to open yourself to new understandings of the word. Do personal, gentle, deep work in order to honor and respect those who use *queer* to describe themselves.
3. Include the word *queer* in the language you use to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity: "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer" or "LGBTQ."
4. Avoid making assumptions based on your perceptions of a person's gender or the gender of the people they partner with—open yourself to the possibility that any person, of any age, might identify as queer.
5. Learn more about queer identity on your own. You might start by reading at least two articles or books that increase your understanding of queer identity.
6. Dominant culture teaches us to depend on dualisms; challenge yourself to eradicate dualisms from your language and your understanding of the world. Gay and straight, masculine and feminine, black and white: all dualisms obscure so many shades of grey, shades of queer, shades of androgyny and fluidity. Open yourself to this infinite variety.
7. Use terms that encompass all genders rather than only two (e.g., "children" instead of "boys and girls"; "people" instead of "women and men"; "siblings," "kindred," or "brothers and sisters and siblings of all genders" instead of "brothers and sisters").
8. Expand the ways that sexual orientation is understood and discussed in your congregation beyond the idea that sexual orientation is a born-in, static trait. Although many people believe themselves to have been born lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or straight, others experience sexuality as fluid and changing throughout their lifetime. Honor this diversity of experience through the ways you talk and teach about sexual orientation.
9. Do continuing education for your congregation at large on bisexual and queer issues. See below for resource suggestions.
10. Queerness is often located at the margins. Consider how your congregation's welcome, advocacy, witness, and/or service around LGBTQ issues can be more grounded in the experiences and needs of those who are most marginalized, such as queer and trans youth, queer and trans people of color, and undocumented queer and trans immigrants.