

My genderqueer manifesto

This *genderqueer* manifesto is something very personal – it does not pretend to be a collective manifesto, the manifesto of a group or movement. It is mine, and mine only, but nevertheless I make it public because I think that the private is political, and even more so when it comes to the issue of gender.

I define myself as *genderqueer*, because the binary gender system which only allows me to define myself as man or woman does not suit me. It is a system that is too narrow and rigid, and which excludes human diversity, and which obliges us to define ourselves in terms that do not represent us.

I also make my manifesto public because I am tired of the obligations and pressure related to masculinities that our society has on offer. To publish my manifesto is also an act of liberation and resistance.

Why *genderqueer*?

Defining myself as *genderqueer* is the result of a process of several years – possibly a process that lasted all my life. Yes, I was born a boy, and was raised and educated as boy/man. And in this process I benefited from the privileges patriarchy provides to boys/men (the “patriarchal dividend”, as Raewyn Connell calls it¹), but I also had a fair share of suffering, and I'm living with my wounds and scars, above all on the emotional level.

Being raised as boy/man meant for me quite some pressure to comply with the expectations of masculinity and heteronormativity: to be “strong”, to hide and suppress my emotions (and it is quite some difficult work to undo this), and the expectation to participate in a sexist system, to speak about and treat “girls” as objects, especially during adolescence. I never really participated in the last bit, not because of feminist consciousness, but because I never felt comfortable doing it.

And I suffered a lot of peer pressure – up to bullying – because of my sexuality, even years before I became myself aware of my homosexuality.

But I think the masculine socialisation didn't work that well. Yes, for sure, in some aspects it did work, but in others not. I remember that years ago a friend of mine told me that I have very little male body language, and in another situation I was told that I am “lacking” aggression (why “lacking”? Is this necessary to be a “man”?). And then that bit about heterosexuality...

Since I came out as gay I identified as a gay man, but always with a lot of difficulties. As I wrote 14 years ago: *“I still have to assign to one of the collective identities „gay“ or „straight“? But aren't these just new norms and therefore limitations to my personal options? Would assigning this identity to myself mean that I accept the norm, wouldn't it mean that I had voluntarily complied with the norm?”*² I do not want to adjust myself to any norm, no matter whether it is a gay or “straight” one!

I am tired of all this. I am tired of being defined as a man, and of the pressure to comply with (or resist) what it means to “be a man” in our society. And while it is very necessary to redefine masculinities in non-patriarchal terms (for those who want to define themselves in these terms), for me, the way I identify myself, this is not sufficient.

I am not rejecting the definition man because I do not want to be identified with the privileges this implies in a patriarchal society. I am very aware of these privileges, and that it is not easy to reject them. But I am also aware of their fragility, that they depend a lot on my submission to the expectations of “being a man”. Enough. I do not want to submit to any gender expectations.

But neither do I identify as *transsexual*. I do not identify as transsexual, because I do not feel trapped in the wrong body. I like my body (well, I could lose some weight...), and I like my penis, which gives me a lot of pleasure (not just my penis – the body has a lot of pleasure zones). And I feel very comfortable with my sexuality, I like giving and receiving a blow job and also (though less so) penetrative sex in “both” positions – being penetrated and penetrating (but sex is not limited to this – there is much more to it).

What I feel harassed by is not my body, but the social definitions of gender³.

1 R. Connell: *Masculinities*. Cambridge, 1995

2 Andreas Speck: *Collective identities: trap or tool for empowerment?* Published in *Peace News* no 2434, June-August 2000, <https://andreasspeck.info/node/20>

3 In reality it is not that clear that sex (understood as a natural, biological category) is that natural, and especially as binary as biologists claim. And why does this need to define my identity? I prefer to say that sex is something I *do* (with a lot of pleasure), and not what I *am*.

Genderqueer as resistance

Defining myself as *genderqueer* is a form of resistance to the binary, a form of breaking the gender norms, of way of creating uncertainties and complexity. The gender binary – the idea that there are only “men” and “women” - is still a system that is very hegemonic, and so it is difficult to escape from it. But at the same time it is a system that is extremely violent, especially because there are quite some people who are not clearly “men” or “women”. The violence against intersex people is nowadays slowly being made visible, but it is up until now only very seldom recognised⁴.

Luckily I did not suffer this violence. Nevertheless, I also do not feel myself represented in the binary gender system, and every time less so.

But it is not easy. It is not easy, because not only I myself define my identity, but I am also being defined in every social relation. And because I have a body of more masculine appearance, I am usually defined as man, with all the benefits this identification carries. But it also depends on the other aspects of my appearance, the way I am dressed, the way I act. And this is often the cause of confusion, of uncertainties, or can be. Suddenly the other person can no longer identify my gender identity, and in reality I often enjoy these moments of confusion, of breaking the certainties of gender binarism.

It is not easy, because we are lacking a non-binary language. We refer to other persons often in binary terms, and how not to if we only have the words man/boy ... women/girl, and the pronouns he or she. In written language it is easier to write gender neutral (but not as he/she), in a way that allows for an indefinite number of gender identities, but how do we do so in spoken language?

It is not easy, also, because of the laws of the states we live in. In almost all states it is an obligation to register the sex (within a binary system) of a newborn – but in some cases this is not clear... And in many countries the name needs to identify the sex of a person, again defined in binary terms (e.g. in Germany until 2008, when the Constitutional Court allowed ambiguous names⁵ – but up to now a name “of the other sex” is not permitted.). Furthermore, the passport includes our sex (or gender?⁶), and in almost all forms we have to fill in we have to identify ourselves in binary terms, be it really necessary or not.

To resist the binary gender system therefore means resistance almost every day, on many different levels.

There are as many genders as people

Kate Bornstein wrote in the book “*My Gender Workbook*”⁷ that there are as many genders as people, and not to recognise this means reducing human diversity to something very limited (and boring, and doing so with a lot of violence). To define myself as *genderqueer* gives me the freedom to define myself every day differently, because my gender identify is nothing fixed (it's not something I *am*, but something I *do*, I construct). It is always in flux, changing in the process of being recreated, and in relationship and exchange with others. In this process I am liberating myself from the limitations of gender, and healing myself from the wounds of the construction of masculinity.

Therefore, while this manifesto is a personal manifesto, I nevertheless want to end with a political call. Not to create a new collective identity – I am very aware of the risks involved in creating new collective identities (and, for being collective, normative) of gender. No, I don't want new norms, new categories of gender.

Let us break the binary gender system.

Everyone has the right to define and change their gender when and how they wish!

Andreas Speck, 27 February 2014

4 Cheryl Chase: *Hermaphroditas con actitud: cartografiando la emergencia del activismo político intersexual*. En: *El eje del mal es heterosexual. Figuraciones, movimientos y practicas feministas queer*. Traficantes de Sueños, 2005

5 BVerfG, stattgebender Kammerbeschluss der Zweiten Kammer des Ersten Senats vom 5. Dezember 2008 – 1 BvR 576/07 – http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/rk20081205_1bvr057607.html.

6 Male, female, or neither? Australian passports offer third gender option. National Post, 15 September 2011, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/09/15/male-female-or-neither-australian-passports-offer-third-gender-option/>

7 Kate Bornstein: *My Gender Workbook*, Routledge, New York 1998