

## ***It's Complicated***

**A Reflection by Ray Ann Hommeyer**

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"It's complicated," is not a reply I reserve only for describing Unitarian Universalism. When I first came out as queer, people often responded: "Why do you have to make gender so complicated?" *Indeed*, I would look around, thinking, *why does gender have to be so complicated?* You are not alone in believing that gender as a galaxy is complex. But I won't take on the responsibility for making gender or gender-neutral language complicated. I'm not an expert on or the creator of gender.

Hi, I'm Ray and I use they/them pronouns. Including pronouns might be a strange, confusing or even unsettling way of hearing an introduction, let alone being asked to introduce yourself that way. I advocate for gender-neutral pronouns not because I think queer culture is the only way to examine gender, but because I want to share my culture and have my people, queer and trans people, recognized, welcomed and loved.

Still, it's complicated, because there is no perfect translation even within the same language. My first seminary course on the Old(er) Testament emphasizes how important and flawed translation is. Hebrew, I'm learning, has different connotations for gendered terms than English does. Like with everything, the dominant English translations of the Old(er) Testament are a subject of the translator's social location. For example, interpretations I'm reading argue that since *Adam* is derived from the term *adameh (AHda-mah)*, meaning "land" or "earth," a more accurate translation for *Adam* is "the earthling."<sup>1</sup>

As a millennial, a phrase I often use is "Hey guys..." I have been told that I should not use "guys" because it's a gendered word. This has most powerfully struck me in conversations with women older than me. Is my using "guys" as a gender-neutral term a form of internalized patriarchy? However, in my conversations with youth, I predominantly get blank, confused and even snide looks at the idea of "guys" being gendered. Queer and trans youth have told me that "hey guys," especially in comparison with "guys and gals" makes them feel affirmed in their genderqueer/nonbinary identities. I relate, which is why I have a fondness for saying "guys" all the time, but it's been important for me to share with youth that at one point "guys" was used to exclude and make women invisible (which can still happen). I do not want my queer activism and advocacy to be at the expense of women.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh R. Page Jr., *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2010), 72.

Should we adjust to only using “friends”? Are there agreed upon terms that we all find affirming? Should we practice policing our language? Is there space for both the use of “guys” and the use of “gals and guys”? Can we listen to one another across generational translations?

I continue to encourage people to develop the skill of adapting to gender-neutral language, because the need for queer and trans inclusivity is not going away. In my personal experience being asked my pronouns, seeing gender-neutral restroom signs, and hearing “my sisters, brothers and siblings” allows me to trust that I’m being offered a place to belong.

And my experiences have also taught me that belonging won’t truly happen if either of us are unwilling to meet one another as we are. We all need courage to try, humility when it’s hard and grace when we mess up. I’m queer, but more importantly, I’m a whole person, which is so much more than our mutual understanding of what queerness or gender means.