

Is 'How gay is that?' going to be out of fashion someday?

SEVERAL months ago, I was wearing a pink T-shirt with Bruce Lee's face, and my pre-teen niece asked me, "Are you a real man?"

She was referring to the color of my shirt. At first, I was offended, but then I took into account her age. I felt I needed to explain to her that it was okay for a man to wear pink and that various "masculine" celebrities, such as Kanye West, Jeremy Piven, Pharrell and most probably David Beckham, have sported the color.

She then asked, "Who is David Beckham?" But that's beside the point.

In the uber-diverse Bay Area, I was shocked that something as slight as a T-shirt color could cause such a remark — and from a 12-year-old.

In another instance, I was having casual conversation with my friends and we were talking about shopping. The term, "That's so gay" was said at least a half a dozen times by guys and girls. Even though the modern male has been injected with a style vaccine, it's interesting to see how the term "gay" has evolved within the world of men's fashion. More than that, when someone uses the phrase "that's so gay" in regard



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to fashion, or in any scenario for that matter, I am not 100 percent clear.

I tried to contact various professors specializing in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies from Bay Area universities about my confusion about the phrase. I even used the power of social networking by posting a bulletin on Myspace and an ad on Craigslist to solicit the point of view of the general public.

I only got one response from a professor who wanted to help, but after replying to her reply, I never got her scholarly insight. She probably had something better to do — like educate young college co-eds.

Is the use of the word "gay" derogatory? Is it a compliment? The phrase has been tossed around so much that we've become jaded about its usage. I

figured I was the one really intrigued by its flippant use — especially regarding fashion.

On occasion, I have heard this phrase directed at me from strangers, loving family, friends and of course, 12-year-old girls. Is this because of my slim-cut jeans? Or is it because I like to wear jewelry? Or maybe it's because I like to make a fool out of myself when I dance.

In the past, for a man to sport a sleek suit with a crisp pink shirt, a vibrantly printed coordinating tie and equally eccentric socks, he would probably have been heckled. This was not socially acceptable.

Real men were expected to wear lumberjack flannels whilst hammering sheet rock and grunting with masculine pride — not really, but you get the picture.

It is no mystery that the gay community has a strong presence in the world of fashion. Openly gay designers such as Tom Ford, John Galliano and Zac Posen are just a few fashionists who are purveyors of style for the fashion industry. More than that, if you go to any major metropolitan area, you will find some of the best, albeit most expensive, shopping in the predominantly gay neighborhoods of the city: Chelsea in

New York, Montrose in Houston and of course San Francisco's Castro district.

This made me think that when someone uses the "gay" catch phrase, that it was a compliment. If the gay community holds the gold medal in the world of fashion, then the phrase has to be the equivalent of Paris saying, "That's hot!"

But then you have to factor in the tone of the way someone says the phrase. More often than not, it's said in a degrading manner, which makes me believe that it's said to offend and in turn, degrade homosexuals.

When the term "metrosexual" was introduced to the world, it was a whole new ballgame. It basically referred to a man who was heterosexual but had a cosmopolitan taste for luxury and style.

Thanks to my good friend Wikipedia, I found out that the term was first coined in 1994 via Mark Simpson's article "Here come the mirror men" in the British daily newspaper "The Independent."

The word then surfaced in the mainstream thanks to the Bravo Network's Fab Five from "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy."

Many men started to em-

brace their inner fashionisto and exchanged their Osh Kosh B'gosh overalls for tailored suits, threw away their harsh bars of soap for Kiehl's facial washes and began buying Gucci loafers that were worth more than their monthly rent.

Even though metrosexuals march around the world in their luxe, deconstructed denim and vintage fit T-shirts, it still doesn't answer my question. In fact, the word "metrosexual" seems like another way of saying "that's so gay."

To settle this argument, I turned to Carson Kressley's (fashion guru of the Fab Five) book, "Off the Cuff: The Guys' Guide to Looking Good" (Plume, \$16).

According to Kressley, it really has nothing to do with what you wear — it's what you do. Grooming duties such as manicures, moisturizing and waxing your eyebrows don't make you gay. On the other hand, taking an all-male cruise to Latin America, giving other people highlights and wearing wigs do make you gay.

While I was flipping through Kressley's in-depth dissertation, I didn't find any mention of what makes clothes gay. But I did see some clothes that I wouldn't mind buying.

My mission of deciphering "that's so gay" has not been completely fulfilled. From my research and social observation, it can be defined as "having disregard to one's own sexuality and/or gender" or "having a great sense of style." I have also noticed that it can be a synonym for "uncool."

Before we know it, the word "gay" will be like an iPod. It will be used for everything and anything.

For example, in a couple of years, I might say something like, "I am going to wear my gay coat because it is so gay outside. I need to go to the gaycery store and get some gay food to make for my gay dinner party. It's going to be the gayest."

Translation: "I am going to wear my stylish coat because it's so cold outside. I need to go to Whole Foods to get some tasty food for my fabulous dinner party. It's going to be the greatest."

My personal conundrum with the word may never be solved. Until it is, I open my inbox for all of your insight.

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