

For celebs like Emma Watson it's 'self-partnering,' for ordinary male divorcees like me, it's Christmas alone

by Michael Rectenwald



By now you may have heard of the term “self-partnering.” It’s a recent addition to the burgeoning lexicon of identity categories. Contrary to its vocal advocates, the coinage is a euphemism at best – for “lonely as hell.”

Self-partnering made its international debut in November – in the [pages of British Vogue](#). Introduced by “actor-activist” Emma Watson, the phrase quickly dotted the landscape of cultural politics. The Lexicographers of New Identity Names extolled the semantic transition from the suddenly pejorative “single” to the self-positive “self-partnered.”

While the former term was consigned to the dustbin of history – abandoned, left alone, and made lonelier than ever – self-partnering joined the exuberant party of proliferating gender identities and sexual orientations – which now number anywhere from [31](#), to [63](#), to [112](#).

In the Twittersphere, the moniker has been met with roughly one part enthusiasm, two parts contempt, and three parts satire. I found a specimen of the latter just hours before writing this: *“Tried to self-partner with myself but I turned me down,”* [tweeted](#) the parodic self-rejecting *“maybe: Dallas.”*

Notice that my listing of the gender tallies above did not include two. Two is a forbidden number – first because it’s the number of sexes long since surpassed by the genders and second because two has replaced one as the loneliest number. Henceforth, partnering with an *“other”* depreciates oneself, confining one to a compromised, unloving, even abusive relationship. The only partner guaranteed to suit oneself is oneself. One wonders what kind of new puritanism is at work here.

Like a Trappist monk, I contemplate the notion of self-partnering – just in time for the holiday. Notice I said holiday, not holidays. Unless one is referring to the shopping season, which is never-ending, the holidays have contracted and become one holiday, then another a week later. The tradition of celebrating serial holidays has all but disappeared in the US, leaving only December 25 and January 1. Christmas and New Year’s Day are singular, standalone, separate holidays. New Year’s is doubly singular – both a one-off and represented by the numeral one. However, in this case, one plus one equals one, not two – both for me and for you.

For the third straight year, I am glad for the singularity of the holiday. I take comfort knowing that I need to find a place to go one day and one day only – Christmas. No one goes anywhere on New Year’s, so neither will I. This is a relief,

because, since becoming unpartnered over three years ago, and not finding myself a suitable partner for myself, I've spent at least two holidays single and alone.

Which brings me to the reason I reject the facile nomenclature swapping on offer. Treating phrases like "*self-partnering*" as if they possess powers to produce substantial changes in a person's "*lived experience*" is the very definition of practicing magic. Those lonely before the name change, all other things remaining the same, will be lonely after it. Whoever puts their faith in these spell-whisperers have forgotten – or more likely never knew – Shakespeare's famous adage on the very point: "*a rose by any other name...*"

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