queer

by UDE queering collective

Abstract:

*Der Begriff 'queer' hat sich über **die Zeit deutlich verändert** und trägt in verschiedenen **sozio-kulturellen Kontexten** unterschiedliche Konnotationen. Ursprünglich vom **deutschen Wort 'quer'** abgeleitet, wurde 'queer' im Englischen zunächst abwertend für **nicht-cis/heteronormative Identitäten**, insbesondere schwule Männer, verwendet. Später wurde der Begriff als **positive**, **inklusive Identität** aufgegriffen und stellt traditionelle Geschlechts- und **Sexualitätsnormen infrage**.*

*Dieser Eintrag untersucht die Bedeutungsverschiebung von 'queer' von einem **diskriminierenden** zu einem **affirmativen Begriff**. Besondere Betrachtung gilt dem deutschen und US-amerikanischen Kontext als Entlehnungsquelle. Der Beitrag beleuchtet die **positive Aneignung** des Begriffs durch queere Menschen und seine **politische Dimension**. Dabei wird 'queer' von Begriffen wie **'LGBT'** durch seine **radikale politische Konnotation** abgegrenzt. Zudem werden **kommunikative Strategien analysiert**, die vorwiegend von der politischen Mitte und rechten Politiker*innen genutzt werden. Exemplarisch werden **AfD**-Politikerin Alice Weidel und **CDU**-Politiker Jens Spahn angeführt, die 'queer' verwenden, um zwischen einer als moderat geltenden Politik der Akzeptanz von Homosexualität und einer abwertend, als 'Gaga-Politik' bezeichneten Unterstützung für **diverse Geschlechtsidentitäten** zu unterscheiden.*

The term '**queer**' has **evolved significantly over time**, holding various meanings and connotations across **socio-cultural contexts**. Originally derived from the German word '**quer**' (meaning 'transverse' or 'oblique'), 'queer' was initially used in English as a **derogatory term** for **non-cisheteronormative identities**, particularly for gay men. However, it has been reclaimed as a **positive** and **inclusive identity** that **challenges traditional norms** of gender and sexuality.

This entry explores how 'queer' shifted **from** a **discriminatory to** an **affirming term**, focusing on its **evolution** in **German** and **U.S. contexts**. It examines the **reclamation process** and its **political dimensions**, particularly its distinction from '**LGBT**' due to **its radical connotation**. Additionally, it highlights **communicative strategies** by centrist and right-wing politicians like ***Alternative für Deutschland*** **(AfD)**'s politician Alice Weidel *and* ***Christichle Demokratische Uniion*** (**CDU)'**s politician Jens Spahn who use 'queer' to **contrast** '**moderate**' **support for homosexuality** with so-called **'gaga' politics** advocating for broader queer visibility.

Etymology:

In the **German context**, the word 'queer' (/kwɪə/ or /kwɪɹ/) is an **umbrella term** for individuals who are **not heterosexual**, **cisgender,** or **do not conform** to a **binary gender understanding** ("Queer", n.d.-b). It functions as an **adjective**, **noun**, and sometimes even a **verb**, referring to people who **diverge from societal gender norms** or **conventional sexual orientations** or to characterize an object that addresses, arises from, or represents such contexts. **Colloquially**, it is often **synonymous** with '**gay**' or '**lesbian**,' but it also **extends** beyond everyday contexts to describe **theories**, **movements**, and an **academic discipline** that particularly focuses on **intersectionality** and **oppression** ("QUEERES ABC,", n.d.).

The term's **semantic expansion** became widely recognized in the **1990s**, borrowing from the English 'queer,' which had been an **insult**, particularly toward **gay men**, in American English since the 1920s ("Queer," n.d.-b) and emerged in **1500** in **Scottish English** as an adjective meaning '**weird**' or 'over the top' ("Queer," n.d.-e). The term is speculated to **originate** from the **German** 'quer,' meaning "**oblique**, **transverse**, and **obstructive**" ("Queer," n.d.-e). Today, the German counterpart is not used in the same way and is often **associated negatively** with people who **challenge established views** (e.g., **'Querdenker'**, Eng.: 'queer thinkers'). For example, the **term** is used **derisively**

in reference to **conspiracy theorists or right-wing extremists** ('Querdenker', n.d.).

There is **no direct German equivalent** of 'queer' since its **reclamation** was unique to **English-speaking contexts**. Attempts to equate it with ‘quer’ can be viewed as euphemistic. Instead, 'queer' aligns more closely with the **German terms** '***andersrum***' [reverse] or '***pervers'*** [perverted], though these lack academic legitimacy (Motschenbacher, 2012, p. 87).

A small number of **German LGBTQIA+ individuals** adopt 'quer' as a **self-label**, though its widespread acceptance is limited. Examples include its use in "***Out und quer***," a 2023 documentary on Hessicher Rundfund and "***Quer!: das Gendermagazin der ASH Berlin***" (HR-Fernsehen, 2023; "*Gendermagazin 'Quer*'," n.d.).

In **English,** 'queer' can mean **odd**, **strange**, or **unconventional** and historically implied something suspicious or unwell (“Queer”, n.d.-d). Beyond these definitions, it now refers to **individuals identifying outside cis-heteronormative categories**, including homosexual, pansexual, aromantic, transgender, and gender-nonconforming individuals. Additionally, it encompasses **objects and works of art** that address themes beyond traditional binaries (“Queer”, n.d.-d).

Long used as a **derogatory label** for those seen as **diverging from societal norms** in gender expression and sexual orientation, '**queer**' was **reclaimed** in the **1980s by LGBTQIA+ activists**, transforming it into a term of **empowerment**.

The **term’s reclamation** was most prominent in **English-speaking nations** like the U.S., UK, Canada, and Australia, where **LGBTQIA+ movements** demanded rights and recognition of individuals outside of conventional sexuality and gender norms (Barker & Scheele, 2016). These countries soon saw the **rise of queer theory** and the **academic discipline 'Queer Studies'** in 1994 (“Queer”, n.d.-e). Reframed as an **empowering political category**, 'queer' became a **positive self-designation** through **activism**, **research**, and **cultural works**, despite its history as a slur until the 20th century.



Queer Nation activists that were taking a stance for queer rights @ Queer Nation "Take Back the Night" in March of 1990 in New York City. Photograph by Ellen Neipris (Donohue, 2019)

Cultural specificity:

Initially a **highly derogatory term** (as shown in the previous section), '**queer**' has been **reclaimed by political emancipation movements**, shifting from identity politics **to broader alliances** within the LGBTQIA+ community. In the U.S. and many Western countries, 'queer' has been adopted as an **inclusive** and **fluid term** by **activists** and **scholars** and has also been borrowed into other languages. In **German-speaking countries**, 'queer' serves as an umbrella term encompassing lesbian, bisexual, gay, trans*, inter*, and other identities. It also functions as a **self-identification** challenging restrictive categories like 'homo-/heterosexual', 'male/female', and 'cis-/transgender' (“Queer”, n.d.-g). Since the 1990s, the term has been used academically to examine societal norms related to gender and desire (“Queer – ein,” n.d.).

While it functions as a noun or verb in English (Cambridge Dictionary, 'Queer'), in **German** it is primarily used as an **adjective** or in **compound words**, e.g., '***Queerfeminismus***' (“Queer”, n.d.-c).

'Queer' has entered **mainstream German discourse** and is now **more frequently used** than '**LGBT**' or its **German equivalent** '**LSBT**', as indicated by its higher frequency in the DWDS newspaper corpus (Figure 1).

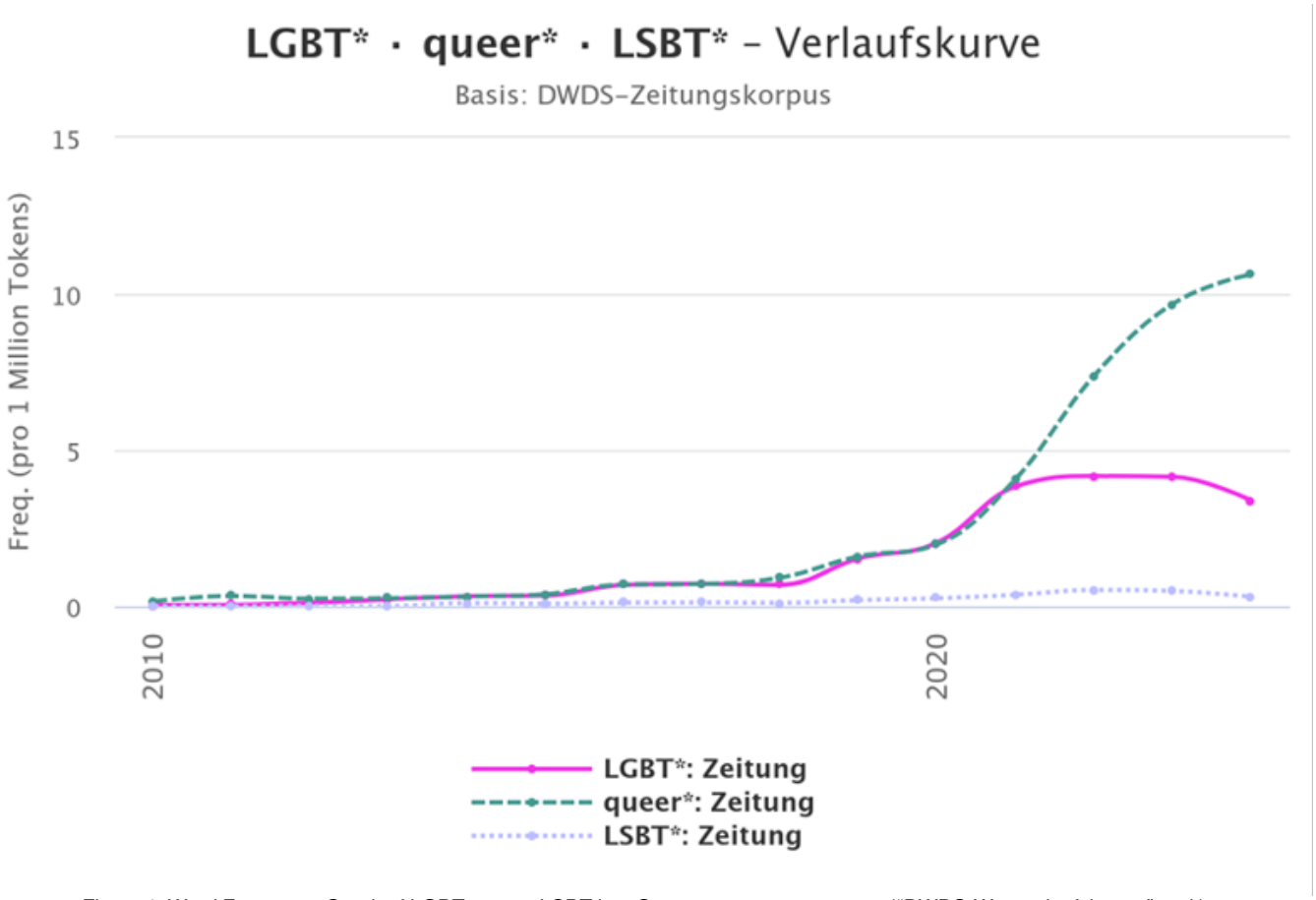


Figure 1: Word Frequency Graph of LGBT, queer, LSBT in a German newspaper corpus (“DWDS-Wortverlaufskurve,”, n.d.)

The **term** is now used both for **self-identification** and in **mainstream discourse** on gender and sexuality, as evidenced by its increasing presence in newspapers (DWDS corpus). Furthermore, it has become part of **official German governmental language**. In 2022, the German government has appointed a queer officer (“***Queer-Beauftragter***”) as part of the **German Federal Ministry** for **Family Affairs**, **Senior Citizens**, **Women** and **Youth** (“**Queerbeauftrager,**” n.d.) and action plans such as “**Queer leben**” [queer living] are implemented by the **same Ministry** (“**Aktionsplan Queer**,” n.d.).

Politically, the term is associated with **progressive policies** aimed at protecting queer rights. Left-wing and center-left parties include 'queer' in their **LGBTQIA+ unions' names** (e.g., ***QueerGrün***, ***SPDQueer***, ***Die Linke: Queer***), whereas the **center-right CDU** uses "**Lesbians and Gays in the Union**" ("***LSU - Lesben und Schwule in der Union***").

Queer is also used as a way of **individually expressing** a sexual or gender identity that does not conform to the heteronormative expectations:

> *So sagt die Anfang zwanzigjährige Studentin Yamuna zum Beispiel: "Also, ich finde queer total schön. Ich benutze das Wort für mich manchmal, wenn ich keine Lust habe, den Leuten alles auf die Nase zu binden. Wenn ich sage, ich bin queer, dann können sie selber drüber nachdenken, ob ich das auf mein Geschlecht oder auf meine Sexualität beziehe oder auf was auch immer".* (Köller & Schautz, 2023)
>
> [For example, Yamuna, a student in her early twenties, says: "Well, I think queer is really nice. I sometimes use the word for myself when I don't feel like telling people everything. If I say I'm queer, then they can think for themselves about whether I'm referring to my gender or my sexuality or whatever".]

Besides functioning as an **umbrella term**, people often refer to its **political connotation**. For many, the use of 'queer' is **politically motivated** and serves to distinguish it from **earlier movements** centered primarily on sexual orientation rather than an **intersectional perspective on discrimination**. On the website of a queer and lesbian **dating app**, it says:

> *Ein häufiger Fehler, den die Menschen machen, ist zu denken, dass diese Bezeichnungen [LGBT und queer] austauschbar sind. Doch obwohl beide Begriffe nicht-heteronormative Identitäten anerkennen, unterscheiden sie sich in ihren Nuancen stark. 'Queer' hat politisches Gewicht; es ist ein Aufruf zur Befreiung von gesellschaftlichen Normen*. (Exton, 2023)
>
> [A common mistake people make is to think that these terms [LGBT and queer] are interchangeable. But although both terms recognize non-heteronormative identities, they are very different in their nuances. 'Queer' carries political weight; it is a call for liberation from societal norms.]

The **preference** for '**queer**' over **LSBT** further illustrates Zieglmeier's argument that **English terms** are **favored** in **German queer communities**, as **English** is associated with **progressive**, **radical politics**, whereas **German** is seen as **outdated** and **heteronormative** (Ziegelmeyer, 2024). Sawall adds that the lack of historical baggage allows German speakers to construct a new meaning unique to the German queer community (Sawall, 2024). It remains unclear to what extent 'queer' has been re-signified in the process of its adoption from English.

The multi-faceted meaning thus seems to be transported through loaning - **'*queer is used to:***

1. express **non-cis/heteronormative gender identities** and **sexualities** (cf. "*15 queere Jugendliche* (lesbisch-schwul, trans*, bi & inter) aus Dortmund" [*15 queer teenagers* (lesbian-gay, trans*, bi & inter) from Dortmund] (DWDS, "queer");
2. signify a **political stance**.

While 'queer' has a more **positive connotation** in **German** than in **English,** some **individuals**, such as **Alice Weidel**, **reject the term** and do not identify with it. This **resistance** reflects a **reluctance** to align with **activist groups.** In contrast, in English-speaking contexts, **older generations** who **experienced** '**queer**' as a **slur** may hesitate to use it, while **younger generations embrace** its **subversive potential** (Jagose, 1996). The **term's transformation** reflects **broader shifts** in societal attitudes toward LGBTQ/queer identities.

Problematization:

'Queer' functions as an **umbrella term** encompassing various identities and orientations, signifying sexual diversity beyond non-heteronormative identities. It represents a subversive challenge to societal norms on gender and sexuality.

Additionally, '**queer-coded behaviors** — characteristics perceived as queer without explicit identification — further complicate its definition. However, **tensions** remain between **individual identity** and **collective labels**. While 'queer' seeks **inclusivity**, not everyone within the **LGBTQIA+ community** feels represented by it. This is evident in the cases of the beforementioned German politicians **Alice Weidel** and **Jens Spahn**, **who** publicly **reject** the l**abel**. As members of the **political establishment**, their **distancing** from 'queer' could reflect a desire to **avoid being associated** with what they might perceive as an **activist identity**, which could go against their political agendas. This highlights the **broader intersection** of **language**, **identity politics**, and **mainstream discourse**.

In **media**, **activism**, and **academia**, '**queer**' has become a **multifaceted label,** often used **interchangeably** with '**gay and lesbian**' or **LGBTQIA+**. This mainstreaming can be **controversial**, as it risks overlooking the term's deeper meanings. While inherently **broad** and **inclusive**, this expansiveness can sometimes lead to a **loss of specificity**, prompting some to prefer **more precise labels** like 'gay' or 'lesbian' over the **more ambiguous term** 'queer'. Moreover, as mentioned above, the **perception** of 'queer' **differs** across **generations** and **cultures**. While younger people embrace it as inclusive, older individuals, especially in English-speaking contexts where it was once a slur, may remain resistant despite its 1980s–1990s reclamation.

Queer representation has also been critiqued for its **commercialization** and **assimilation** into **mainstream culture**, as exemplified by **Pride parades**. This perception reflects concerns about **assimilationist tendencies** within the **LGBTQIA+ movement**, evoking the critique that the focus has shifted from radical change to acceptance within existing oppressive structures. **Maggie Nelson**, in *The Argonauts*, formulates an **existing paradox**: "There's something truly strange about living in a historical moment in which the **conservative anxiety** and despair **about queers** bringing down civilization and its institutions (marriage, most notably) is met by the **anxiety** and despair so **many queers feel** about the failure or incapacity of queerness to bring down civilization and its institutions, and their frustration with the **assimilationist**, unthinkingly neoliberal bent of the mainstream GLTBQ+ movement" (Nelson, 2015, p. 32). Nelson's commentary serves as a crucial reminder that the **essence** of **queerness** extends **transformative effort** to **challenge** and **reimagine societal structures**.



Frau mit Protestschild der politischen Gemeinschaft *DIE LINKE.queer* zum IDAHOBIT 2020
[Queer emancipation is social - or it is nothing].
Fotografiert von Ben Gross Photography (Bache, D., Jahn., K. & Laubenburg, F., 2020)

Despite these critiques, 'queer' retains a largely **positive connotation** beyond activist and academic circles. Its presence in **marketing** and **media** suggests **broad social acceptance**.

All in all, the **problematization** of the term 'queer' lies in **balancing** its **mainstream acceptance** with its **radical roots** and **potential** for **genuine societal change.** This **balance** is **crucial** to maintaining the **term's transformative power** while ensuring it remains inclusive and representative of the **diverse experiences** within the **queer community**.

Communication strategies:

Both in the English and German context, '**queer'** stands for **diversity**, for the courage to embrace individual differences; it is a reclaimed word that unites and celebrates people beyond normative categories of gender and sexuality - or is it? The term still carries **stigma**, evident in how politicians employ it. **Alice Weidel**, the lesbian national spokesperson for the **right-wing populist AfD**, rejected the self-descriptive term 'queer' in a 2023 ARD summer interview. Representing a party flagged for right-wing extremism by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Oberverwaltungsgericht Münster,* 2024), she responded to a queer viewer's concerns by saying: "*Ich bin nicht queer, sondern ich bin mit einer Frau verheiratet, die ich seit 20 Jahren kenne"* [I'm not queer, I'm married to a woman I've known for 20 years], (Düker, 2023).

But how is it possible that two expressions that can, in theory, be used interchangeably can be made to sound contradictory? Is it possible **to be lesbian** but not **queer**? If you listen more attentively, you will notice that it is not just the **self-identifier** that she rejects: during the interview she also **distances** herself from the **rainbow flag** affiliated with the **LGBTQIA+ community**, speaks of a so-called 'trans pop culture' (**ARD-Sommerinterview**, 2023). While the **AfD** has a history of **provocative stances**, its rhetoric on LGBTQIA+ issues remains a point of concern. Statements from **party members**, such as Andreas Gehlmann's 2016 suggestion that **homosexuals** should be **imprisoned**, underline this observation (*Sachsen-Anhalt*, 2016).

Similarly, **CDU** politician **Jens Spahn** rejected the term 'queer' in a 2023 interview with the right-wing media portal NiUS:

> *Ich bin nicht queer, ich bin schwul.* [...] *Ich bin so. Ich bin ja nicht morgens wach geworden und hab mir gesagt: 'Ich will jetzt schwul sein.' Ich bin's einfach. Und deswegen kann ich mit diesem 'Ich identifizier' mich jetzt mal als dies oder jenes' – so als allgemeiner Ansatz des Denkens – wenig anfangen* (Achterberg, 2023)
>
> [I'm not queer, I'm gay. [...] I am like this. I didn't wake up in the morning and say to myself: 'I want to be gay now.' I just am. And that's why I can't really understand this 'I identify as this or that' - as a general approach to thinking.]

The **CDU** has faced accusations of **homophobia**, particularly as only 30.5% of its MPs supported same-sex marriage in 2017 (*Ehe für Alle*, n.d.) (*Pressemitteilung* Nr. 34/17, 2017). Some **CDU members**, like Sascha Ott, have publicly **dismissed gender diversity**, calling it a joke (*CDU-Politiker Ott*, 2020). However, unlike the AfD, the CDU publicly presents itself as LGBTQ-friendly. Its website reinforces this stance with the following headline: "*Klare Kante gegen Homophobie*" ("A clear stance against homophobia") ("Klare Kante gegen," 2021).

Yet, this **contrast** between **public positioning** and **individual statements** raises questions. Why does Spahn reject the label? Why does Weidel, despite being in a same-sex relationship, distance herself from the rainbow community? The following sections explore **four rhetorical strategies** that may explain these contradictions.

1. Die da oben… / The establishment - Exploitation of the discontent of the general population

Many German citizens feel **powerless** due to **economic instability, rising rents**, and **job insecurity**, particularly post-pandemic: every seventh German child is at risk of poverty, and a fifth of the population faces social exclusion (*Einkommen, Konsum*, 2024). This **existential anxiety** often fuels the **search** for **scapegoats**, such as **immigrants**, **political adversaries, refugees**, or **queer individuals**. The **Center for Liberal Modernity** warns against reducing complex realities to a simplistic 'us vs. them' dualism, which fosters the perception of a powerful elite imposing its worldview on ordinary people (*Behauptungen*, n.d.).

Alice Weidel exemplifies this rhetoric. Her party, the **AfD**, thrives on **public discontent**, branding political opponents as "those up there." She claims the AfD seeks to save Germany from "these idiots" ("*diesen Idioten"*) ruining the country (*Tagesschau*, 2023-b, 04:55). Weidel **dismisses gender policies** as "**gender nonsense**" ("*Genderquark*"), reinforcing a **populist divide** between the people and an overbearing elite (*ARD-Sommerinterview*, 2023). The Federal Agency for Civic Education (BPD) classifies such rhetoric as populist, depicting the AfD as a savior against deceptive elites (Diehl, 2017).

A **similar strategy** is evident in **CDU** politician **Jens Spahn's** 2023 *NiUS* interview. He rejects the label 'queer' and opposes the **Self-Determination Act** (*Selbstbestimmungsgesetz*), which allows trans people to change their gender entry by self-declaration rather than through costly medical assessments. He argues, "*Die große Mehrheit will das nicht*" [The vast majority does not want this] (*NiUS*, 2023). By framing opposition as a unified mass, Spahn **dismisses** the **complexity** of the issue (Gilles, 2023).

When asked whether "a small radical minority has hijacked the federal government?" ("*Hat eine kleine radikale Minderheit die Bundesregierung gekapert?*"), **Spahn does not distance** himself from the **dehumanizing phrasing** or recontextualize his statement "If you look at it as a normal person" ("*Wenn man als normaler Mensch darauf schaut*"). Instead, he reinforces the idea, adopting the term 'minority' himself (*Spaltung?*, 2023).

Despite being homosexual, both **Alice Weidel** and **Jens Spahn** reject 'queer' and **employ populist rhetoric** against what they depict as left-wing ideology. Their language frames **queer activism** as a **radical force**. This creates a **harmful binary** between 'normal' and 'queer', **legitimizing exclusionary narratives**.

ChristopherStreetDay Deutschland e.V., criticizes this rhetoric for **dividing society** into '**right**' ('we') and '**wrong**' ('the others'/'those up there') (*Spaltung?*, 2023). Discrimination and minority stress have severe mental and **physical health impacts**, as noted by the ***Lesbian and Gay Association*** ("*Schlechtere Gesundheit*," n.d.).

2. "Denkt denn niemand an die Kinder?"/ "What about the children?" - Recycling of outdated homophobic stereotypes

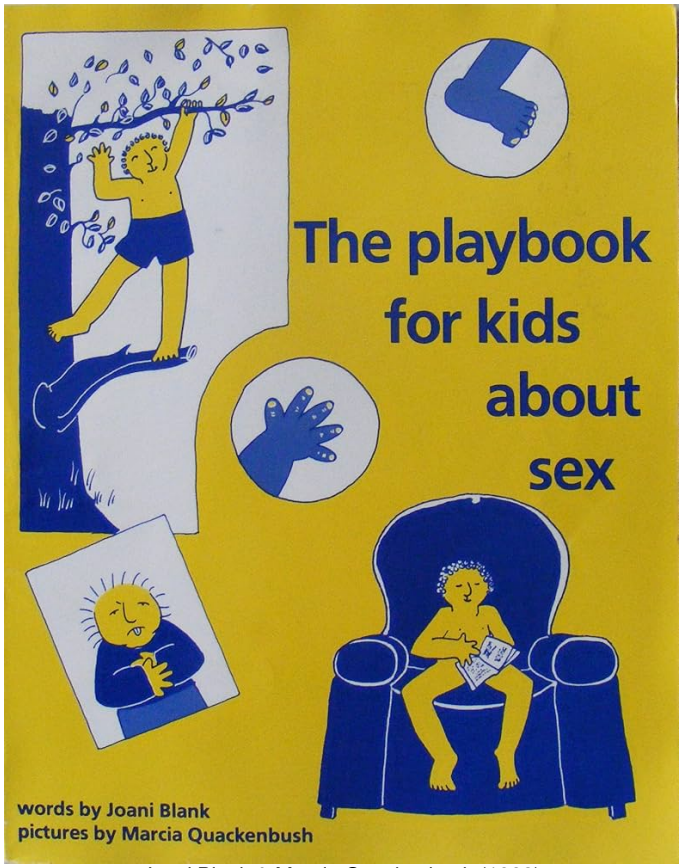
Not only in the two exemplary interviews, but also in **current debates** concerning **public readings** by **drag queens** for **children** (Heudorfer et. al., 2023) or when it comes to **educating children** about the lives of queer people in the classroom, the very same fear is being proclaimed over and over again: **more visibility** and rights for LGBTQIA+ people **might misguide kids** and endanger them in the process of self-discovery. This rhetoric **mirrors past homophobic strategies** portraying **queerness** as a **threat**. AfD politician Tomasz Froelich exemplifies this, advocating for a Germany where "children enjoy proper education instead of being exposed to rainbow terror" (*Tagesschau*, 2023-b, 18:34). His framing aligns queer representation with a fabricated threat to children.

Similarly, **Alice Weidel** warns against a "**trans pop culture of a minority**", which young people have to be protected from (*Tagesschau*, 2023-b, 19:57).

Jens Spahn echoes this fear, warning that **society** encourages **adolescents** to **question their gender**, reinforcing doubts "where many doctors say: 'this is going completely in the wrong direction'" ("*und im Zweifel dann bestärkt, wo viele Mediziner sagen: "dass geht grad hier völlig in die falsche Richtung*") (*NiUS*, 2023, 37:04). These **claims** revive the **outdated trope** that LGBTQIA+ identities are imposed rather than inherent.

This **fear-driven discourse** has historical precedent. The **1978 Briggs Initiative** sought to fire teachers suspected of promoting homosexuality, and the **UK's Section 28** (1988) banned schools from discussing same-sex

relationships, framing education as indoctrination (Iglikowski-Broad, n.d.). Even the 1981 children's book *The Playbook for Kids About Sex*, which provided factual, inclusive education, was falsely labeled corrupt and pornographic (Iglikowski-Broad, n.d.).



Joani Blank & Marcia Quackenbush (1982)

Today, **misinformation** about **gender-affirming care** fuels similar anxieties. Critics claim **trans education** rushes youth into **medical treatments**, yet hormone blockers are reversible and available only from age 16, while surgeries are considered only after long-term therapy (*Transgender*, 2023).

(**Please note**: for further **references** on **supporting interventions**, **risks**, and **standards of care** (SOC) please refer to the **guidelines** of ***The World Professional Association for Transgender Health*** (WPATH): hhtps://wpath.org).

The **rejection** of 'queer' and **alarmist rhetoric** about **gender ideology** mirror **past homophobic narratives**, seeking to justify exclusion and discrimination. While **LGBTQIA+ individuals** demand **recognition**, **legal protection**, and **social inclusion**, their **opponents** recycle the same **fear-based arguments** used to resist gay rights, perpetuating marginalization and misinformation.

3. "Ich gehöre nicht zu Denen!" / "I am not one of them!" - The construction of the 'other' and the problem with pseudo-heteronormativity

The **legal status** and **public acceptance of homosexuality** has improved. However, discrimination persists. A **2024 survey** by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found that **54% of LGBTIQIA+** individuals in the EU reported **verbal harassment** or **threats** in the past year, a 19% increase since 2019 (*54 Prozent betroffen*, 2024).

The **AfD's party manifesto opposes LGBTQIA+ rights**, branding non-heteronormative families as deviations from the "traditional family" (*Die Homophobie,* n.d.). Political scientist **Henrik Düker** warns that **Alice Weidel** serves as a **token** to **attract conservative queer voters** while shielding the party from anti-queer accusations (Düker, 2023).

Jens Spahn, a publicly **gay politician** from a Christian party, employs a **similar strategy.** Discussing the Self-Determination Act, he states, "You and I are relatively unaffected" ("*Sie und ich, wir sind da ja relativ unbetroffen*") (*NiUS,* 2023, 37:29), **aligning himself** with **cisgender men**. He dismisses trans rights as outside his concern, as he is **gay**, **not queer,** and therefore **not** the **target** of **leftist ideological politics**.

Both **Weidel** and **Spahn** frame queer identity as radical and **distance themselves** from it, **reinforcing** a **binary** between '**normal**' and '**other**'. The **CSD Deutschland** e.V. criticizes this **divide**, warning that it legitimizes right-wing narratives of queer exclusion (*Spaltung?*, 2023). By rejecting the broader LGBTQIA+ community, they **obscure shared struggles** and contribute to the **marginalization** of **trans** and **non-binary individuals**. Historically, it was drag queens, non-binary people, and trans activists like Marsha P. Johnson who led the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights (Caldart, 2022). **Rejecting queer solidarity** undermines **collective progress** toward **legal** and **social recognition** for all non-cisheteronormative identities.

4. LGBTQIA+ (but the (B)TQIA+ is silent) - How transphobia is hiding under the umbrella

Weidel and **Spahn** use 'queer' differently from its broad, **inclusive meaning**. While commonly an umbrella term for diverse gender and sexual identities, they reject it, implicitly associating it with non-cisgender identities and **opposing its use** as a **synonym** for 'gay" or 'lesbian'.

However, Weidel and Spahn's **rejection** of 'queer' **is not neutral**. They frame 'queer' as **radical**, promoting a narrative that **gender identities** are **arbitrary choices**. Weidel questions: "You're supposed to be able to choose your gender once a year. Male, female or even diverse. I mean, what's the point?" ("*Man soll sich jetzt einmal im Jahr irgendwie das Geschlecht aussuchen können. Männlein, Weiblein oder auch divers. Ich meine, was soll das?*") (*Tagesschau*, 2023-a, 17:52). Spahn claims he did not "wake up one morning" and decide to be gay, implying **trans identities lack legitimacy** (*NiUS*, 2023). Both reinforce misconceptions that **disregard** the **scientific basis** of **gender identity** and perpetuate the stereotype that **queer individuals** arbitrarily change their gender label, destabilizing existing social structures.

Trans individuals face significantly **higher rates** of **mental health challenges** due to societal stigma rather than inherent pathology (Schreiber, 2016). The removal of Germany's Transsexuals Act reflected its unconstitutional nature and the need for self-determination ("*Aktionsplan Queer*," n.d.). Prior to reform, **trans people** endured **invasive**, **costly legal processes**, including inappropriate questioning. As an example, a transgender Reddit user on the **German Reddit forum r/trans** created a trigger-warning post titled "**Best of stupid questions** I had to answer for my TSG trial", with questions such as "Would you like to practice anal sex?", "Would that sexually arouse you if you imagined having sex with an animal?" and also "Do you feel sexually aroused by the fantasy of naked children?" being just a few of the **intrusive** and **accusatory line** of questioning as part of the government-required process ([shenens], 2022). **Misrepresenting self-identification** as an assault on women's spaces - e.g., when **transphobic individuals deny trans women** the access to **women's toilets** - further marginalizes trans individuals instead of addressing real social issues.

Subversion:

Empirical studies indicate that '**queer**' is increasingly accepted among **younger LGBTQIA+ individuals**, reflecting a shift toward **fluid** and **inclusive identities** (Jones & Harris, 2021). Once a **slur,** the term has been reclaimed, now frequently **associated** with **empowerment** and **resilience**. The concept of '**queer joy**' counters negative representations in media and public discourse, emphasizing **self-affirmation** while acknowledging **ongoing struggles** (Morris et al., 2021; Oxfam, 2022). The term **queer** is used to **subvert** the **discriminatory** and **pejorative**

meaning by pairing it with **positive** and **self-empowering aspects** and claiming it as one's own as for example this sign in a **queer club** in Boise, Idaho shows:



Photograph of a neon sign in a gay bar in Boise, Idaho. Photo by UDE Queering Collective

Beyond identity, 'queer' functions as a **political statement**. The **German magazine *Queerulant_in*** exemplifies this, blending '***Querulant***' (troublemaker) with 'queer' to signify **radical critique** and **defiance** of **normative structures**. Its reclaimed use underscores the term's evolving connotations (***Queerulant_in***, 2014).

Despite its broad adoption, **some** within the **LGBTQIA+ community reject** 'queer' due to its **historical baggage** or **political associations**. Resistance to its meaning shift is visible in **activist responses**, such as a **protest sign** at **Cologne Pride 2024**, mocking **Alice Weidel's self-distancing** from 'queer' with satirical elements. The sign, styled in a popular meme format, highlights how **humor** and **irony** expose **contradictions** in **anti-queer rhetoric** (Verspottender, n.d.).



Protest sign depicting one of Alice Weidel's comments from their ARD Interview
[I am not queer, I am married to a woman I, uhm, have known for 20 years]
@ Cologne Pride 2024. Photograph by UDE Queering Collective.

Language is **dynamic**, shaped by **societal struggles**. Attempts to weaponize terms like "**Stolzmonat**" (a **right-wing nationalist response** to **Pride Month**) illustrate this. Originally an attempt to undermine LGBTQIA+ visibility, the term was **reclaimed** by **activists** like **Fabian Grischkat**, who registered it as a trademark and **redirected** its **use** to **benefit** the **queer community** (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2024; "Pride Month," 2024).

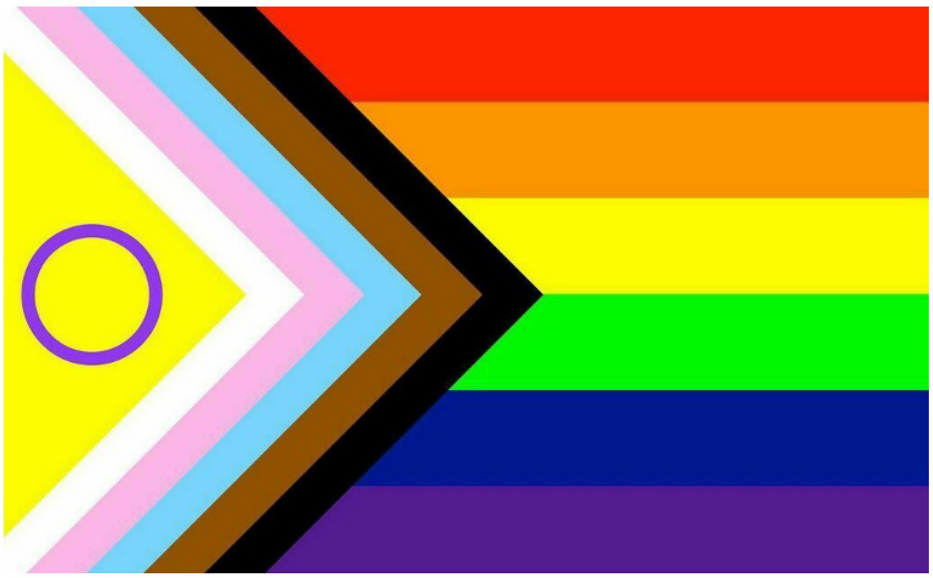
It can be concluded that even a **single voice** against **discrimination** can have a **big impact** and set an example **against social injustice** and **hatred of minorities**. Whether it is a **provocative neon light** in a gay bar, a **self-ironic** playful **magazine title,** a **satirical demonstration sign** or the securing of an **online domain**, a variety of ways **can promote** the **rights** of **queer people** and put queer-hostile ideas back in the closet.

Queer people seek dignity, **legal protection**, and **acknowledgment** of **their identities**. While personal identification with 'queer' varies, its derogatory use to erase parts of the LGBTQIA+ community must be scrutinized. **Marginalization** is not exclusive to queerness — many have experienced **exclusion** due to **migration**, **poverty**, or **faith**. Rather than fearing the unknown, **collective advocacy** can **strengthen rights for all**.



Basel, Swizerland. May 1st March, 2024. Photo by Alex Steiner.

After all, the **rainbow** is only half as beautiful if it glows only in red, yellow, and orange.



https://dmh.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/progress-pride-2021.jpg

Discussion:

- How is the term 'queer' used in your culture/country? Is the connotation rather positive or negative? Are there notable differences in the acceptance and usage of these terms compared to gay, lesbian, etc.?
- Does it help to establish further identities and orientations that challenge normativity (e.g. trans, asexual, ...)?
- How does the term 'queer' intersect with other aspects of identity (e.g. ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status)?
- How is the term 'queer' recognized in legal frameworks and policies in different countries? What impact does this (or its absence) have on the rights of the queer community?
- What term do you use more frequently (queer or other identity descriptors) and how do you feel about each term?

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