

Breaking down the acronym: Q

So far, we have defined the four major identities in the LGBT+ acronym: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Although many may think that the acronym stops there, there are actually three more major identities that are commonly included in the acronym, especially when cited by fellow LGBT+ people: queer, intersex, and asexual. These three were only added to the acronym in the 80s-90s, though they existed long before then. This month, we will be talking about Q for queer.

Today, Queer is generally used as an umbrella term for any and every sexuality and gender minority—otherwise known as everyone who is not cisgender or heterosexual. In essence, the term “queer” can be used as a self-descriptor by anyone within the LGBT+ community, and is also often used interchangeably with “LGBT+”. If someone refers to “the queer community,” “queer people,” etc., you can rest assured that they are referring to all LGBT+ people.

Of course, it's no secret that “queer” was once—and is sometimes still—used as a slur against the LGBT+ community. What most people don't know, however, is that “queer” was originally a term gay men used to identify themselves in the 1920s. Only in the wake of World War II did it shift from an identity to a slur; at that time, the younger generation of gay people started calling themselves “gay” instead and belligerent homophobes decided to start using the older term to taunt them. After years of having their own term used against them, queer organizations and publications started the movement to reclaim “queer” in the '90s as a response to the push for LGBT+ assimilation into cisgender, straight society. Building on LGBT+ involvement in the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war movement, the queer movement of the 90s was especially against US imperialism.

Because of these origins, usage of “queer” is highly controversial in the LGBT+ community today. Some see it as a leftist political statement due to its activist branches in the '90s, some dislike it because they consider it offensive and derogatory (as there are homophobes who still use it as a slur to this day), and others see it as more inclusive and all-encompassing than “LGBT+” because it doesn't have the limitations and restrictions of a list. With so many different feelings and contexts regarding queerness within the community, it's best to simply listen to our LGBT+ neighbors and friends when it comes to using the term around them or about them. Remember: while one person might not want to be called queer, another might embrace it and call themselves queer all on their own. Neither of these people are incorrect and their preferences should be equally respected.

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