



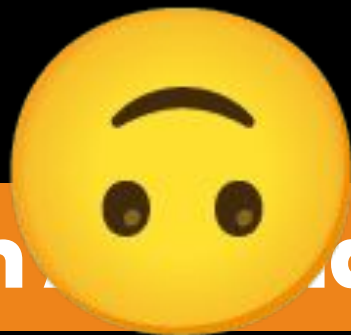
# Mental health and queerness in Berlin



Finding queer joy in the loneliest city in the world



# Hi



**I am Alexandra**

(but my friends call me Ale)

she/her

The background of the image features a series of thick, parallel diagonal stripes in the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. These stripes are set against a solid black background and extend from the top-left corner towards the bottom-right.

**This is a talk about  
Berlin's Queer  
community and  
mental health**

# Trigger warnings

- Strong language
- Depression/suicidal ideation
- Substance abuse
- Queerphobic incidents

**But also (hopefully) hope**

# My origin



I am a Mexico City girl that grew up in Tijuana

*“Growing up queer in homophobic societies either makes you want to hide in the shadows or become an overachiever to prove your worth in society”*





# Berlin and me

- Tech changed my life forever and gave me social movement
- In 2019, I fell in love in Berlin and with Berlin
- This city is the love of my life, here I found belonging. I am able to be different, weird, queer and be amongst other different weird queers in a sea of more tolerance and colours than elsewhere

# QUEER HISTORY OF BERLIN

**1897**

## Beginnings

The Scientific-Humanitarian Committee is founded

**20's**

## Weimar Republic

Those roaring 20s, Eldorado, gay and lesbian clubs

**30's**

## Queer culture

First ever lesbian novel written by a Berliner, as well as the first ever gay film. A travel guide for lesbians (!!!)

**40's**

## Nazi times

It wasn't good for the queers...

**70's**

## The cold war

Schöneberg blooms again, although there is segregation

**2017**

## Same-sex marriage

Same sex marriage is finally legal in Germany

Proportion of LGBTQI\* people with mental and physical illnesses much higher than in the remaining population



of LGBTQI\* people, two and a half times as many as in the rest of the population, have had a depressive illness at some time.



of LGBTQI\* people, significantly more than in the rest of the population, suffer from chronic back pain.



The offer of "safer places" should be increased and homophobia and transphobia be combated more strongly by law.





# Our mental health...

- A 2021 study from the German Institute for Economic research shows that queer people are more prone to:
  - Heart diseases
  - Anxiety disorders
  - Depression
  - Migraines
  - Trans people are particularly suffering more:
    - \* 39% suffer from anxiety disorders
- This is a consequence of generations of queer shame, bullying, stigma, marginalization, violence, religious shame, racism, heteropatriarchy



# My own Berlin journey

- Berlin has tested me more than any other lover
- Immigration + language barrier + shock of cultural values
- Being queer already had isolated me from my family
- 2022 was the year of collapse: friends straying away, heartbreak, social structure changing, tech layoffs..
- But Berlin's "hedonism" and its happy brain chemicals were there
- Loneliness + lack of purpose + turning 37
- Kept finding out that rock bottom had more and more basements



# Healing

- My community and chosen family have kept me here <3
- Therapy makes a fucking difference
- Appreciating the beauty and possibilities of harm reduction
- Riding my bicycle, taking photos, the little things
- Wanting to rebuild my self-image
- Not wanting to be yet another Berlin cautionary tale
- Looking for queer joy



# The dark side of a dreamy city

- Berlin is known as the capital of loneliness. Feeling alone in a city of 3.5million people, worsened by the pandemic
- A cultural war between “true Berliners” and “entitled Expats”
- Dating while being queer, while sexual liberation is beautiful, romance and emotional availability are fading away
- Mental health and how hard it is to find a therapist
- Night life and the possibilities of substance abuse
- The cruel winters



# Partying: Awareness and Harm Reduction

- This talk does not endorse the use of any illegal substances. But this is Berlin
- The only way to heal from depression that has included night time partying as a coping mechanism is not to stop partying
- Dance floors can be safe spaces, places to build communities, and beautiful canvases for expansion and radical self expression– Their beauty must be microdosed to avoid burning out
- Look up for organizations into harm reduction:
  - Lecken's guide on harm reduction
  - Sonar Berlin (Safer Nightlife) for substance checking, training, awareness, advice and resources
  - Let's Talk About Drugs, a bimonthly sharing circle



# Healing trauma through kink and BDSM

- Berlin is a city that loves kink and BDSM
- The wonders of BDSM as part of a self-awareness and queer joy journey:
  - Communication
  - Boundary setting
  - Permission to feel pleasure
  - Turning trauma into something that can be in your hands
  - Restraint
  - Power shifts
- Kink promotes radical healing and liberation
- Engaging on them can be considered an act of resistance
- An intentional disruption of cisheteronormativity in a context of safety, care and trust
- Curious? Visit Karada House





# Queer kinship and chosen families

- The one thing that has saved my mental health, and life, is my chosen family
- Most of us have faced rejection, abuse and neglect at the hands of a biological family member or have been estranged from them
- The trauma of coming out, if there was one, can affect us differently
- Queer kinship then becomes a matter of survival and love. It's a bond that doesn't required to be recognized by law to be real
- I have found sisters, brothers, siblings in Berlin, family that goes beyond romance, or romance that ends the way it is but the family bond remains
- We can care for each other and be there for each other even if we aren't tied by birth.



# Re-thinking love

*“Queer people are the pioneers of reshaping” – Adam Munnings*

- Berlin forces you to rethink love sometimes – it requires unlearning, and at least a bit of criticism of the cis-tems in place
- Self-awareness and therapy are key in order to understand trauma, observe behavioural patterns and understand the way we give and receive love
- Are “healing” and romance really incompatible?
- Relational love helps us make sense of our own selves, makes us stronger
- Love and relationships can be freeing, healing and liberating under the right conditions
- Chosen families can be life changing – find communities, continue showing up. We are open, we are here, we are listening, we need you





# Coping mechanisms

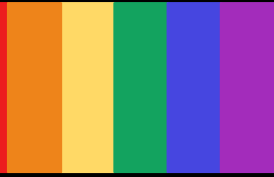
- Living with pride
- Looking for belonging
- Inner peace above all
- Accepting reality
- Meditating
- One thing, one person, one conversation at a time
- Taking a non-judgemental stance whenever possible
- Not letting sexual tastes be the filter by which you allow people into your life
- Take care of each other
- Keep your inner circle sacred and safe
- Be compassionate about your healing journey
- Talk to each other. Be a present friend that listens
- Create queer joy



# On creating queer joy

- Acknowledge that our community has lived through generational trauma
- We can make space for that individually and collectively while supporting each other through dark moments
- Support the right fights, no one is free until all of us are free 🦊🇺🇦
- We can only really be strong for each other if we make space for embracing all the positive, ecstatic, collective joy that our queer communities produce
- This city is holding many revolutions at a time
- Sometimes it's found when we meet by the canal and decide to blast Robyn's Dancing On My Own with a radler, a cigarette and a smile in our faces while we look at the sunrise waiting for the next winter

# In-conclusion



- If you find yourself going through a dark moment, reach out to a friend, get help, find a therapist, seek a help line. You're never a burden, reach out even if to a stranger on the internet
- How can you help people?
  - Listening helps
  - It is ok to not be ok
  - Just because queers in the past had it better it doesn't mean we cannot feel bad
  - Your suffering is valid
- I'm still figuring out many answers to many questions about:
  - My own mental health
  - My career
  - How to give back to the city that has given me so much
  - How to build safer spaces
  - How to uplift people going through dark days
  - How to birth a better future for others so we can give what we never had





# THANKS!

**Let me know your comments**

@alxsavage

All photos were taken by me

# I WISH YOU QUEER JOY

**CREDITS:** This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**

# Resources

- Directory of helplines and mental health support in Berlin, All services are confidential
- Gegen's directory of resources
- <https://www.instagram.com/letstalkaboutsexanddrugs/>
- Harm reduction guide by lecken
- Casa Kuá <https://www.frauenzentrum-schokofabrik.de/unterm-schokodach/casa-kua>
- Karada House <https://karada-house.de/event/>
- L-Night Meetup Community <https://www.l-night.com/>
- If you're feeling lonely and wanna meet people, ask me for an invite to our Berlin Social Club Discord Server, where I've found most of my close circle