

# Being queer (in libraries) is political

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**Kurzfassung:** *Queerbrarians* is a German-speaking network of queer librarians and people working or aiming to work in libraries or library institutions that was founded in November 2023. Based upon topics gathered at the first network meeting, this article presents the motivations for the creation of the network as well as its ideas and visions of more queer-friendly libraries. *Queerness* is still an underrepresented topic in libraries in German-speaking countries, whether it's about patrons, about people working in libraries, or about the collections or the catalogs. This needs to change. *Queerbrarians* and this article want to initiate this change, explain why it is important and valuable, and raise awareness for the queer perspective. It is almost inevitable that (library) policy considerations will come into play, because being queer (in libraries) is political.

## Queerness and libraries

Libraries are by the people and for the people and therefore inevitably reflect human realities, human needs, and human knowledge in all its facets through their staff, patrons, services, and collections. This also includes the dimensions of *identity* and *orientation* (Diversity Charter n.d.; Elsheri et al. 2022, Supplement Figure 2; Timmo D. 2022). In German the term „Geschlechtsidentität“ is usually used, which is an insufficient translation of the more accurate English term *gender identity* since English allows us to distinguish between sex and gender while German doesn't. According to the *split-attraction model*, *orientation* can be defined as romantic and sexual orientation (Glass 2022). In this article, we combine all of these aspects under the terms *queerness* and *queer* to refer to people who identify as part of the **LGBTQIA+** community and their lived realities and needs.

We choose *queerness* and *queer* with care and intention not only for this article, but also for *Queerbrarians*, the network of queer people working or aiming to work in libraries that this article is about. The term *queer* is not without controversy and was used as an insult for a long time before the community reclaimed it as a positive term (Diversity Arts Culture n.d.). Today, it is sometimes even used to avoid more detailed labels (Log 2022) or as a synonym for **LGBTQIA+** (Wright 2024). However, not all members of the community use it to identify themselves or accept it

as a superordinate label. Others go so far as to explicitly remove themselves from the community, distancing themselves from it and the term *queer*. There are two recent and well-known examples of this in Germany. Jens Spahn is the former Federal Minister of Health and member of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany who immortalized himself with the words „I'm not queer, I'm gay.“<sup>1</sup> (Achterberg 2023). Alice Weidel is a member of the Bundestag and member of the Alternative for Germany, a right-wing political party, who proclaimed „I'm not queer, I'm married to a woman I've known for twenty years.“<sup>2</sup> (Achterberg 2023). We have no intention of contradicting their refusal to use the term *queer* for themselves, especially since *queer* is a political term and includes the commitment against discrimination and for equal treatment of all members of the LGBTQIA+ community, to which these people don't commit themselves to. So the fact that we use *queer* here and in the network is in itself political.

Some readers might also be irritated by the fact that *we* is being used in this article. This is not always common in journal articles. However, we recognize that our identification as part of the LGBTQIA+ community has an impact on both the perspectives presented here and the visibility of queer voices in the library world. In German-speaking countries, *queerness* is still an underrepresented topic in libraries compared to the US (Gerlach 2023). According to the loop model, there is an interdependency between the self-image of libraries, library science and practice, and the personal positioning of librarians (Gerlach 2023). The underrepresentation mentioned above is therefore also due to the reluctance of queer people involved in research and practice to take a personal stance and voice that they are affected themselves. As part of *Queerbrarians*, we would like to positively reinforce this interdependence both with the contribution we make with this article and with the creation of *Queerbrarians*.<sup>3</sup> We take our cue from those who came before us, who paved the way for us and whose openness made others feel less alone and allowed them to be approached with questions about name changes, advice on coming out to colleagues and much more (Walters 2023).

## Queerbrarians

The idea for *Queerbrarians* was born in a small group during the planning and submission for a hands-on lab for BiblioCon 2024 (Zeuner et al. 2024).<sup>4</sup> The session titled „More Glitter? How To LGBTQIA+ Safe Space for Libraries“ was planned as an open discussion for collectively answering the questions of how one can be a safe person for the LGBTQIA+ community and make the library a safe(r) space (The Roestone Collective 2014; Minkov 2021). It was noted with some frustration that the impetus for the discussion and the design of the hands-on lab was once again in the hands of the community itself.

If the LGBTQIA+ community wants change, it has to create it itself. This is a dilemma because overburdening, i.e. overloading members of the community with additional emotional and actual work around the topic of *queerness* (Heinze 2021), is not to be underestimated as an additional burden to already existing professional activities. This was also discussed at the first *Queerbrarians* meeting: The additional burden of the unintentionally assumed or ascribed role as

<sup>1</sup> „Ich bin nicht queer, ich bin schwul.“

<sup>2</sup> „Ich bin nicht queer, sondern ich bin mit einer Frau verheiratet, die ich seit zwanzig Jahren kenne.“

<sup>3</sup> We are writing here as part of the *Queerbrarians* and not for our institutions and libraries.

<sup>4</sup> The biggest library conference in Germany. <https://2024.bibliocon.de/>

a main contact when dealing with *queerness*, advocating for visibility and against discrimination or by coming out, mixes with the need to finally see change.

Roberto wrote about his experiences as a **trans** man in his library in 2011:

„Accept that you will be That Transgender Library Staffer for a while, just because this may be new and unusual at your work, and because people like to gossip. If you become heavily involved in workplace activism, you may ultimately become That Angry Transgender Library Staffer Who Ruins Everything.“ (Roberto 2011, p. 127)

The fact that even in 2024, people with such a role and commitment to the LGBTQIA+ community are still not always met positively and are rarely appreciated for their efforts is an additional complication. In the end, the joke „Then we might as well set up a network and at least help each other“ became a reality and *Queerbrarians* was founded.

The first meeting with around 60 people took place online on November 21, 2023. This was the overwhelming number of people who responded to the call via the DACH<sup>5</sup> Discord server, TikTok and several German library mailing lists. At this meeting, communication channels through Discord<sup>6</sup> and email<sup>7</sup> were established, further meetings were planned and topics, wishes and concerns were collected. Everything that interests queer library people, on a large and small scale. In the end, the focus was still on networking: Who are you? Where do you work? How are you doing there? What are your pronouns? Is anyone else here **aroace**? No less central was the establishment of certain rules that apply both to the virtual meetings<sup>8</sup> and to Discord (Table 1).

On Discord there are channels on the topic of *Queerbrarianship*, i.e. everything to do with *queerness* and libraries, as well as general interests and the further development of *Queerbrarians* as a network. The next online meetings are also announced on the server, as well as via email and on the website <https://queerbrarians.de/>. The meetings currently consist of a pre-defined thematic part at the beginning, such as queer media tips or everyday life as a queer person in your own library, and an open part for networking and community building at the end. The current aim is to network and support each other professionally and thematically, but also just general community building.

## Queer topics

At the first *Queerbrarians* meeting, a digital pinboard was used to collect topics and concerns that people would like to discuss. Through upvotes, all attendees were also able to indicate which topics interested them as well. In this article, we have compiled the results and divided them into nine thematic blocks. However individual topics may fit several different thematic blocks. We also supplement these with suitable literature and other aspects. It's important to note that the topics included here are not an exhaustive list, but rather a reflection of the concerns that are of particular relevance to *Queerbrarians*.

<sup>5</sup>DACH is an acronym used for the German speaking countries Germany (D), Austria (A) and Switzerland (CH).

<sup>6</sup>Discord (<https://discord.com/>) communication platform on which communities can organize and exchange information on their own servers in voice, video and text channels.

<sup>7</sup>If you are not on Discord but would still like to be informed about meetings, write to [librarians@queerbrarians.de](mailto:librarians@queerbrarians.de) and ask to be added to the email distribution list.

<sup>8</sup><https://queerbrarians.de/naechste-termine/>

Queerbrarians is a safe space for the queer community. To ensure that they remain a safe space, there are a few rules for the Discord server and the meetings.	
1	Respectful and friendly interaction with one another.
2	Respect the pronouns of others (click on the profile picture to see them, otherwise ask).
3	Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual or romantic orientation, religion, nationality, age, heritage, or disability is not tolerated here.
4	Stick to appropriate content.
5	No topics discussed during the meeting or on Discord will be made public in any way unless it has been mutually agreed on beforehand.
6	Nobody is forced to come out. If you're here, it's assumed that you're part of the LGBTQIA+ community and that's all anyone needs to know.
7	TERFs and trans hostile people in general are not tolerated here.
8	The A in LGBTQIA+ does not stand for Ally, but for Asexual, Aromantic and Agender. You are part of the community and therefore part of us.
9	No spamming and no trolling.
10	No inappropriate profiles (user names, avatars, accounts and statuses).
11	Before you send a direct message, please ask the person in question if this is welcome.

Table 1: The rules of *Queerbrarians* (as of February 20, 2024).

Queer togetherness

The topic with the second most upvotes was the stated goal of „making the library world more queer-friendly“ (25 upvotes). At this point, everyone should pause, because this can only be a goal if it is not yet the case. This realization must be internalized by everyone, especially the non-queer members of the library community. Only in this way is change possible. The library world means everything and everyone: employees, patrons, services, and collections.

Libraries cannot be safe(r) spaces for their patrons if they are not safe(r) spaces for their employees. The topic „Queer-hostile workplaces“ was accompanied by the specific questions „How do I deal with queer-hostile colleagues?“ (12 upvotes) and „[W]hat do I do with deadnaming in the workplace [...]?“ (7 upvotes). Deadnaming refers to the use of the name that a trans or **non-binary** person was given at birth, the so-called **deadname**, instead of the chosen name (Sinclair-Palm & Chokly 2023). The extent to which the latter in particular can also put a strain on professional relationships can be seen from the comments on the question, which ask about how to deal with incorrect forms of address in business emails and the limits of cordiality after multiple callouts on the issue. The question of how long one must remain friendly when boundaries are crossed

repeatedly, such as the use of the correct pronouns and form of address, is a punch in the gut of all those who belong to one or more marginalized groups and often experience tone policing.<sup>9</sup>

Another problem is the fact that the deadname cannot be legally changed so easily and therefore still frequently appears on official documents such as employment contracts, and affected people are entirely dependent on the respect and empathy of colleagues and superiors. People who do not use pronouns, neopronouns,<sup>10</sup> or alternate pronouns and forms of address are also dependent on the willingness of their colleagues to learn new things and be flexible. Their only other alternatives are to accept **misgendering** or to remain in the closet and conform to the ideas of others. This can be a painful experience and includes, but is not limited to, people who identify as non-binary, **agender**, **genderqueer** or **genderfluid** (Thorne et al. 2020; Bradford et al. 2020). Guidelines on gender-sensitive language that also include gender identities beyond the binary scheme are a good start (Berufsverband Information Bibliothek 2020; Keite 2024). Unfortunately, integrating and practicing this in collegial communication is still far from the current reality in some places.

Nevertheless, *Queerbrarians* do not think about negative experiences exclusively, but also aim to address constructive issues such as how to „raise colleagues' awareness - for queer topics, problems, etc.“ (15 upvotes). This ranges from recognizing these small forms of everyday discrimination to thinking about non-cis and non-hetero perspectives and actively advocating for the LGBTQIA+ community. One example of this is „[u]npleasant Harry Potter discussions or justifications for why I don't want to do HP events“ (8 upvotes). For all those who don't know why queer people have a very difficult to outright negative relationship with Harry Potter (HP), it's time to find out now by doing your own research (Dias Correia 2023). Researching this yourself and not expecting to have it explained to you by queer people on demand is part of the process, the first step to becoming an **Ally**, and avoids the overburdening which has already been mentioned. Creating awareness for queer issues does not necessarily mean dismissing such an event entirely, but being sensible of the problem, addressing it openly, not following up if someone refuses the assignment and not scheduling one of the openly queer people in the team to host it.

The library community needs to talk about how to create a queer-friendly environment for staff and patrons. Establishing a „Code of Conduct for Events“ (3 upvotes) in our libraries, as is the case with formats such as Jugend hackt<sup>11</sup>, can be a start. Codes of conduct at our conferences and meetings, and in our libraries in general can also help us all to reduce uncertainty and build trust in our interactions with one another. In addition, clear position papers are a tool for libraries to signal to members of the LGBTQIA+ community that their actions will reflect their words. It needs „position papers when things get serious again“ (9 upvotes). The fact that things can get serious is being felt globally and also in German-speaking countries (Siggelkow & Reveland 2023). Libraries should therefore be visible and clear allies for the diversity of all identities and orientations. Equally, this can be understood to mean that *Queerbrarians*, as a communi-

<sup>9</sup>In „tone policing“, the (allegedly inappropriate) tone of voice is criticized without addressing the actual argument or even explicitly rejecting the legitimacy of the argument with reference to the tone of voice, for further explanations see [https://geekfeminism.fandom.com/wiki/Tone\\_argument](https://geekfeminism.fandom.com/wiki/Tone_argument).

<sup>10</sup>Neopronouns in German include „xier“ or „dey“, see <https://www.nonbinary.ch/pronomen-anwendung/>.

<sup>11</sup>Jugend hackt is a non-profit program of the non-profit associations Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland e.V. and mediale pfade - Verein für Medienbildung e.V. With the motto „Improve the world with code“, it is aimed at young people between the ages of 12 and 18. For the Code of Conduct, see <https://jugendhackt.org/code-of-conduct/>.

ty of queer library people, want to speak out through position papers on queer library issues. Together we can give ourselves a voice.

## Queerness on site

The place in which this togetherness is created is inevitably linked to the concept of safe(r) spaces. In addition to gender-sensitive language and queer-friendly interaction, we also need spaces in which queerness is taken into account. „Unisex toilets in libraries“ (22 upvotes) remain a current and important issue and have been implemented too rarely to this date.<sup>12</sup> Just as we create a safe(r) space in the communicative space through gender-sensitive language in which we include all identities, we can and must also do this in the physical space.

Public libraries in particular create visibility for queer issues by using **pride flags** during Pride Month or permanently to highlight queer literature. While this can be Rainbow-Washing<sup>13</sup> (Fille 2022), it still signals that queer people are welcome. The point of all this is not to be perfect from the start, but to show that the topic is being reflected upon and that one is open to feedback and improvement.

## Queer IT

While we have the opportunity to correct our words and actions in direct conversation, such as when misgendering a person, this is not possible on the website or in registration or similar forms, such as the registration form for new patrons (Frick & Honold 2022). Registration forms can usually still be changed easily, in contrast to the underlying IT systems. Another relevant topic is therefore the connection between „queerness and IT“ (12 upvotes).

The majority of processes in libraries are now handled digitally in predefined workflows. Everything starts with the registration form and adding new patrons into the library's patron administration. When discussing the topic, a uniform picture emerged: gender is queried at these points „because the system asks for it“. The discussion about other reasons for this leads to statistics, on the basis of which literature is purchased and provided. However, this is counteractive to the desire for libraries not to reproduce outdated gender roles and to offer readers what they want to read, regardless of their gender identity (Leyrer 2014).

Adapting or omitting the gender query and changing existing forms and systems makes them more queer-friendly, because non-binary and trans people in particular can be put in awkward situations by such queries. Adjustments of this kind often require major consultations and sometimes a legal push. However, even the current legally prescribed option in Germany *diverse* will not solve this problem, as it is only aimed at **inter\*** people (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des

<sup>12</sup>As a positive example, we would at least like to mention the all-gender toilets in the libraries of Cologne University of Applied Sciences and Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences. Retrieved February 20, 2024, from <https://www.asta.th-koeln.de/ueber-uns/lgbt/> and <https://www.hnu.de/alle-news/detail/2023/11/9/erste-all-gender-toiletten-an-der-hochschule-neu-ulm>.

<sup>13</sup>„Rainbow-washing“ refers to strategies that advertise (alleged) support for the LGBTQIA+ movement in order to appear modern, progressive and tolerant, without actually implementing any measures. See also <https://thisisgendered.org/entry/rainbow-washing/>.



Bundes n.d.). Here too, *Queerbrarians* want to constructively discuss how to initiate change and find solutions, at least in libraries.

In addition to the handling of patron data, there are also discussions about how and whether established software and processes can be redesigned when it comes to employee data. Dealing with „specifications and [overcoming] difficulties in the implementation of e.g. email signatures and the like“ (11 upvotes) is an important aspect. Among other things, this refers to the voluntary inclusion of pronouns in one's own email signature. A step that can theoretically be implemented quickly and leads to the active inclusion of one's own pronouns being normalized, as it takes the focus off those who do so in order to avoid being misgendered (Frick & Honold 2022). It also helps to address others properly and avoids confusion and uncertainty. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to hear reports that such information is not welcome in the signature or even prohibited.

## Queer cataloging

*Queerness* must also be considered in the traditional library field of cataloging. The topic „Queer Cataloging - which subject heading(s) to use for queer literature?“ (17 upvotes) not only came up at the first *Queerbrarians* meeting, but is a regular topic of discussion. For example, it has already been discussed whether the keyword *LGBTQIA+* is sufficient if one medium is actually specifically about bisexuality and another about aromanticism, or whether it is even appropriate to tag media as *diverse* or *queer* (Brown 2020; Drabinski 2013; Wilk & Vincent 2018). The GND<sup>14</sup> catalog for subject headings has some shortcomings when it comes to queer subject headings. Terms such as *cisgender* are not listed, unlike *transgender*. *Gender* as the English term to describe gender identity and not sex assigned at birth has only been implemented recently (Aleksander 2022). The existence or non-existence and the practice of assigning subject headings have not only recently come under criticism (Sparber 2016).

How much depth and range we allow in our subject headings and classifications has an impact both externally and internally. Continuous reflection, taking into account the perspectives of those affected and critically questioning and changing previous practices (Hutchinson & Nakatomi 2023) are a step in the right direction. Homosaurus (<https://homosaurus.org/>) and the Queer Metadata Collective (<https://queermetadatacollective.org/>) are two examples of such initiatives. This is directly followed by considerations on „Naming in the GND“ (8 upvotes). Whether, and if so, how, a person's dead name should be recorded there requires a queer librarian's perspective and a discussion of library ethics on weighing up the wishes of the person, library practice and the sometimes outdated rules and regulations written without a queer perspective. Since German is a very gendered language, job titles are also clearly gendered male or female. This is particularly problematic if they are used in an authority record for a non-binary or agender person (Bargmann 2022).

<sup>14</sup> „The Integrated Authority File (GND) is a service facilitating the collaborative use and administration of authority data.“ [https://www.dnb.de/EN/Professionell/Standardisierung/GND/gnd\\_node.html](https://www.dnb.de/EN/Professionell/Standardisierung/GND/gnd_node.html)

## Queer collections

The collections of libraries reflect the realities of human life, human needs, and human knowledge in all its facets. Each type of library does this in its own unique way, and each library is unique in its own way. From strategic collection management to individual acquisition decisions, many levels can influence the content represented and the respective range and depth. External factors are also increasingly trying to influence library collections. This has been particularly evident in school libraries in the USA since around 2021, where so-called book bans have dramatically expanded the scope of censorship (Orsborn 2022). So far, there is no sign of a decline in the trend; on the contrary, the number of banned and questioned media continues to rise. PEN America observes and documents what is happening and notes that it often affects especially those books that have long had to fight for a place on the shelf: books by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) or members of the LGBTQIA+ community as well as books that address racism, sexuality, gender, and history regardless of the author.<sup>15</sup> Protests by parents or initiatives, administrative decisions, or political pressure lead to restricted access to these books or them disappearing from school libraries altogether. The fact that pressure is also exerted on library collections in German-speaking countries is nothing new (Laudenbach 2023, Mobile Beratung gegen Rechtsextremismus Berlin 2023). *Queerbrarians* would therefore like to address and keep an eye on the „banning of queer books in America - (and Germany? Hopefully not...)“ (8 upvotes), also to support the libraries abroad.

A general discussion about „Queer themes/characters in movies, series, books“ (2 upvotes) can and should also take place. In order to ensure adequate representation of all gender identities and orientations, creative collection development is still required in some cases. For example, self-publishing plays an important role, especially for underrepresented parts of the LGBTQIA+ community (Kennon 2021). „Activist literature and associations“ (2 upvotes) in libraries is also a topic that should be addressed, as well as the „fetishization of BL/GL (in manga)“ (6 upvotes). BL stands for *Boys Love* and GL for *Girls Love*. It was further explained: „Choosing non-fetishizing books is sometimes hard, especially in the mainstream and also because it often just feels like it's the most read material. I like to try and explain why these books/portrayed relationships are problematic, but often find it like pushing a boulder up a hill. Do you have problems like this too?“ *Queerbrarians* want to and should be a place for precisely these kinds of questions, which often go unheard in our own libraries. So it's no wonder that „convincing colleagues to view [and] expand queer collections“ (7 upvotes) is also a topic.

Libraries can „normalize being queer more“ (12 upvotes) through their collections and thus realize a wish expressed by *Queerbrarians*. We do not want to ignore the fact that there are already (albeit not always librarian) role models for libraries and collections with a queer focus. Examples include the Queer Library (<https://queerbib.de/>), the Queerfeminist Library of the General Students' Committee of the FU Berlin (<https://astafu.de/bibliothek>) and the library of the Gay Museum in Berlin (<https://www.schwulesmuseum.de/bibliothek/>).

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<sup>15</sup><https://pen.org/issue/book-bans/>



## Access to queer topics

„Oftentimes, when an individual is discovering and exploring their identity, they will search for mirror characters: examples of themselves in media as a way to understand what it means to identify a particular way.“ (Allen 2022, p. 3).

Young people in particular therefore associate reading with the experience of finding themselves in fictional characters and identifying with them. Accompanying them on their journeys through life, difficult situations and finding their identity can be an integral part of growing up and finding one's own identity. For queer young people in particular, studies show „that LGBTQ+ identity development processes are their primary motivators to read“ (Wexelbaum 2019, p. 115). With a greater range and density of diversity in all media today, it has also become easier for marginalized groups to find stories that reflect them while learning to understand their identity, relationships, and the world around them. However, this is only possible if access to the media is not restricted or prevented altogether by initiatives such as book bans.

People who feel they belong to the LGBTQIA+ community experience more bullying, sexual violence, and mental health problems (Orsborn 2022). It is therefore all the more important that libraries act as safe(r) public spaces and give queer people the opportunity to inform themselves, exchange ideas, and develop in a protected environment (Wright 2024). This can be essential, especially for people with underrepresented identities and orientations:

„The validation and affirmation of **asexuality** as an orientation and the equitable recognition of the full spectrum of asexuality are particularly significant for questioning, **ace**, and **acespec** young readers seeking representation and who might not have encountered inclusive and respectful stories about their experiences and identities.“ (Kennon 2021, p. 19; links added by the authors)

On the occasion of Christopher Street Day (CSD), the German name for Pride parades, in the year 2022, Hanover City Library displayed information flyers on the topic of **binding** and **tuck-ing** (Becker 2023). The outrage on social media was huge „and the first reaction was to simply put the flyers away“, said Tom Becker, Head of Hanover City Library (Mobile Beratung gegen Rechtsextremismus 2023, p. 37). Instead, he sums up: „We need to become more resilient here - even when it comes to issues that are not always immediately obvious to our employees.“ (Mobile Beratung gegen Rechtsextremismus 2023, p. 37) This is how normalization of access to queer and especially health-related queer topics works. Libraries can make a significant contribution to the health education and safety of queer young people, especially by displaying such flyers. The LGBTQIA+ community has a lot of experience in organizing and providing health information independently, which grew out of the sad reality of necessity, and focuses on the collective knowledge and experiences of its members (Kitzie et al. 2023). Public library initiatives should therefore work with the community, as Hanover City Library has done, and not give in to pushbacks.

The event „Wir lesen euch die Welt, wie sie euch gefällt“<sup>16</sup> organized by Munich City Library in June 2023 (Heudorfer 2023) also sparked heated discussions and demonstrations. This was a reading in which a **drag queen** and a **drag king** read from children's books and did educational work. The stories were about overcoming gender stereotypes (Miebach 2023) and discovering

<sup>16</sup> „We read the world to you as you'd like it to be.“

one's own independent development (Heizereder 2023). This reading was not the first of its kind in this library, but it was the first with election-related and media-effective dissenting voices from all directions. For example, the CSU (Christian Social Union in Bavaria) spoke of „woke early sexualization“ (Miebach 2023) and someone commented in a *letter to the editor* for the professional journal of Berufsverband Information Bibliothek (BuB) that „libraries should not overload their programmes with social messages“ (Werner 2024, p. 21). Ackermann, the director of Munich City Library, emphasized the opposite: „We need role models who show us that it is okay to be different“ (Miebach 2023).

In order to avoid the impression that access to queer topics is only relevant for public libraries, we would like to highlight that a strong academic library with extensive and diverse collections, supportive and helpful staff, and relevant services in cooperation and exchange with queer networks on campus can greatly contribute to making the campus more inclusive for students from the LGBTQIA+ community (Clarke 2011, Wright 2024). In addition, prospective and current librarians also need access to queer issues. How often these topics arise and are dealt with in professional and higher education institutions can only be speculated upon. The choice of queer topics for theses and their publication can be an indication and at least signals openness in university settings to the outside world. The same applies to student projects (Berends et al. 2023, 2024). We must not underestimate how important the visibility of *queerness* in our professional field can be for those interested in training and studying. Where we do not see *queerness*, we cannot be sure that our *queerness* is welcome. But *queerness* can and should also be a regular topic in training and studies. Mehra already described possible approaches in 2011. In addition to formal representation, such as through working groups and networks, official contacts and workshops to raise awareness can not only be signals, but can also make our colleagues more sensitive or even more diverse (Mehra 2011, Table 1).

## Out in work, training and study

At the first meeting of *Queerbrarians*, the question of who is out at work was asked at one point in casual conversation. The result was very mixed. At this point, it is often argued that cis and hetero people are not out at work or do not show off their identity and orientation. However, we live in a cis- and heteronormative world. Many people are apparently not aware that the male perceived colleague who talks about the weekend with his wife and children does not necessarily have to be cis and hetero. The male perceived colleague who talks about the weekend with his husband and children however automatically outs himself as at least not hetero, although he does nothing different from the colleague before: talking about his weekend with his family. A non-binary person who does not want to come out at work is inevitably misgendered because the prevailing German language still prefers binary forms, meaning that people primarily use male or female pronouns and forms to address others and choose which ones to use based on their perception of the person. If the person also has a chosen name that they do not use in order to avoid coming out, this results in deadnaming. The opposite can also be the case: If a non-binary or trans person has chosen a name that others feel does not match their perceived gender, this person is often forced to come out, justify their choice of name or sometimes have unpleasant discussions on the subject. This is particularly the case if the deadname still appears in official correspondence, i.e. their own email address or in other places. It still has to be legally

stated everywhere, and administration and IT do not have to make any adjustments without a legal change.

„Out at work, yes[,] no? How? Dealing with a lack of understanding and prejudice“ (14 upvotes) is therefore a key aspect for the well-being and impartiality of queer people in the workplace (Riggle et al. 2017). According to a study from 2020, 31 % of respondents in Germany are not open about their *queerness* in the workplace (Vries et al. 2020). At this point, it must be recognized that there are significant differences within the LGBTQIA+ community. According to a study conducted by the British government in 2018, 29 % of cis people and 38 % of trans people surveyed were not out to anyone at work (Government Equalities Office 2018, p. 139 and p. 142). These figures vary greatly depending on sexual orientation. While only 18 % of cis people who identify as gay or lesbian have not come out to anyone at work, 77 % of cis people who identify as asexual have not. For trans people, these figures are 27 % for trans people who identify as gay or lesbian and 57 % for trans people who identify as asexual. With regard to school, training, and studies, it can be seen that 10 % of both cis and trans respondents are not out to their classmates or fellow students (Government Equalities Office 2018, p. 111 and p. 113). The differences depending on sexual orientation are significantly smaller in these groups of people, but still exist. There are no studies with this level of detail in Germany to date.

For those that are out of the closet outside of work, training, or studies, but not within, find themselves constantly on guard: „I was female-identified at work, and some flavor of transgender almost everywhere else; as I've never really been able to completely separate my personal and professional lives, this was incredibly difficult to do.“ (Roberto 2011, p. 124) This costs energy and puts a strain on mental health.

The desire and need for more visibility and representation must be met with structural and community changes. This task should not be put upon the members of the LGBTQIA+ community and certainly not be defined as their individual responsibility. Being open about one's *queerness* still has negative consequences. „One student was told by a senior lecturer that talking about their asexuality in their work would limit their career.“ (Benoit & de Santos 2023, p. 13). It is just as unacceptable that people cannot come out because they fear repercussions as it is unacceptable to expect people to come out in order to make *queerness* more visible and normalize it. We are talking about very personal and individual choices here, as well as personal safety and visibility, and all options are legitimate and to be supported.<sup>17</sup> This also means that no one should ever out another person.

Libraries need to create an atmosphere in which all members of the LGBTQIA+ community feel safe enough to freely decide whether or not to come out. Employees should feel free to bring their authentic selves to the workplace (Wright 2024). In an ideal world, if we can dream here, no one would assume anything about another person's identity and orientation, thus no one or everyone would need to ‚come out‘. However, our cis- and heteronormative world is not there yet. *Queerbrarians* therefore also want to „normalize being queer more“ (12 upvotes) by standing together and thus being visible as a group and not necessarily as individuals.

<sup>17</sup>For this reason, we have decided to collectively refrain from using our pronouns in order to protect the privacy of the individual participants.

## Queer personnel development

For those who are out at work, the topic of *queerness* in their professional life quickly becomes a matter of the heart. In many cases, this leads to queer issues and development processes getting stuck with these people and quickly resulting in overburdening. To ensure that this does not happen and that the necessary efforts can be spread across many shoulders, there must be more training opportunities and educational work on diversity, which includes *queerness* among many other topics. The need to talk about „raise colleagues’ awareness - for queer topics, problems, etc.“ (15 upvotes) reflects this desire. On the other hand, there is the problem that many employees see no need for further training in this area (Mefebue 2016). There may be no malicious intent behind this. „[the] workplace [is] not queer-hostile at all, but still very heteronormative“ (19 upvotes). However, ignorance on the part of non-queer, and in some cases queer, employees means that issues that need to be addressed are not seen and therefore not addressed. This is where further training measures and increasing the attractiveness of libraries as a workplace for queer people can come in.

In addition to the personal development of employees, change must also take place at the institutional level if the situation is to change in the long term:

„We must put our money where our mouths are. We must have leadership that is willing to engage in brave, difficult conversations that interrogate the hiring practices of their organizations, as well as how to retain talented people from underrepresented backgrounds“ (Stringer-Stanback & Jackson 2023, p. 463).

One person reported that their own library is currently working on drawing up an „equality plan“ (6 upvotes). Suggestions and ideas for queer measures that could be included in this plan were collected on the Discord server. Such initiatives are one of many cornerstones for the future-oriented development of libraries and their employees, in which everyone is considered and involved.

## Queer network

„In my working life as a library technician [...], being trans has led to hilarious and awkward conversations with colleagues, moments of genuine connection, and exciting professional development. I’ve also felt the impact and toll when transgender issues enter workplace discussions. My experience of being a trans library technician has been positive overall, but there is always fear.“ (Nault 2023, p. 46)

In the network, *Queerbrarians* want to share positive and negative experiences with each other to support one another in order to not feel alone. At the same time, this creates connections and synergies that can create something new, like this article. It is therefore not surprising that „Get to know new people“ (28 upvotes) had the most upvotes. But other networking activities also came up, such as mutual „book tips, queer novels, good picture books, gender-sensitive sex education books etc.“ (11 upvotes), the „collection of all academic work from the network [...] on the topic - e.g. articles, bachelor theses, dissertations...“ (6 upvotes) as an open Zotero group and an examination of differences in the community itself, such as the „age gap between different

LGBTQIA/**FLINTA**<sup>18</sup> generations“ (7 upvotes). These were all ideas that came up at the first meeting and are currently being addressed by the network. In all of this, it resonates that change can best be achieved as a team and that *Queerbrarians* offer a possible framework for this.

## Queer future

The representation of *queerness* in libraries in German-speaking countries, whether it's for patrons, people working in libraries, in collections or catalogs, is still not sufficient to support queer people and give them enough security to exist and develop freely. Based on the experiences and wishes gathered from *Queerbrarians*, and the literature cited, we identify the still insufficient awareness of these issues and queer lived realities in the library community as one of the main causes. We recognize that for some it is still unusual to think about non-cis and non-hetero perspectives, but at the same time queer people always think about cis and hetero perspectives and cannot be solely responsible for ensuring that queer realities are represented and supported in library work. This is a joint mission that must not fail due to a lack of willingness on the part of non-queer employees and superiors.

Arguments that present the topic as a marginal issue fail to recognize the library's mission and the fact that inclusion is always important, even if it only affects one person. If libraries want to be open to all realities of life, queer people must be included, regardless of whether they are patrons or library staff. *Queerness* should not be pushed out of the conversation due to a lack of awareness or by right-wing movements. Queer people are part of our patrons and part of the library community. No person working in a library should have to realize „how deeply alienating and dehumanizing it is to always be thinking about how to better serve a community when it's politically toxic to even acknowledge that you and people like you are part of that community.“ (Baker 2023, p. 158) We would therefore prefer not to argue with statistics at this point, but since some people need them, we would like to point out that according to the Ipsos survey on LGBT+ Pride 2023, 13 % of the population surveyed in Switzerland and 11 % in Germany identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community (Ipsos 2023). The fact that libraries should contribute to the normalization of queer realities cannot be argued away.

*Queerbrarians* would like to actively work on formulating what queer-friendly libraries can look like for staff and patrons and how this can be implemented in library policy, organize training courses and lectures, and offer open meetings for all library staff and those working in library institutions, including non-queer people. At the same time, we recognize our own bias as a predominantly white network — an overrepresentation that the entire library community must also become aware of in order to eliminate it. Intersectional perspectives need more space and visibility. We need more understanding for each other. We need more knowledge about queer issues. We need more knowledge about romantic and sexual orientations. „Wir brauchen mehr Wissen über geschlechtliche Vielfalt, mehr Informationsmöglichkeiten und eine ehrliche Auseinandersetzung.“<sup>19</sup> (Lieb 2023, p. 88)

<sup>18</sup>FLINTA is used in German to refer to female, lesbian, inter\*, non-binary, trans and agender people.

<sup>19</sup>„We need more knowledge about gender diversity, more information options and an honest debate.“



## English translation

Please note that this is a translation of a German text that reflects the cultural context of Central Europe and is limited to the latter.

This English translation was partially carried out by using the website DeepL (<https://www.deepl.com/translator>) to create a basis to work off and to speed up the translation process. The automatic translation was checked and revised by some of the original authors, to assure its integrity and to ensure that the message we are trying to convey did not get lost.

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