

The Digital Queer Gap

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The Digital Queer Gap (DQG) is a subform of the Digital Gender Gap, and refers to the difference and inequality in the access to and use of digital technologies. The key difference however, is that the DQG does not only refer to the difference between men and women, but takes into account the entire LGBTIQ+ society. Most importantly, the Digital Queer Gap is also used to describe the injustice faced by members of the LGBTIQ+ community (DiGiacomo, 2021). LGBTIQ+ is an acronym for the corresponding sexualities and gender identities. The individual letters stand for the following: L stands for Lesbian (women attracted to women), G stands for Gay (men attracted to men), B stands for Bisexual (no preference for a particular gender), T stands for Transgender (gender identity is different from that determined and established at birth), I stands for Intersexual (people, who have physical sex characteristics that are not exclusively male or female) and Q stands for Queer (a collective term for people who are not cisgender, that is, people for whom the subjective gender coincides with the biological gender, or heterosexual) or Questioning (a term for people who are unsure of their sexuality and identity). The plus denotes all other sexualities and identities (Cherry, 2020).

Older LGBTQ+ people in particular have problems affording digital technologies and the Internet. Above all, low income and pension might prevent them from taking advantage of the many opportunities to get in touch with like-minded people through digital media and spaces. There are now many companies and organizations that want to enhance access to the digital world for people from the LGBTIQ+ community and thereby reduce the DQG. One of these organizations is SAGE (DiGiacomo, 2021). SAGE is a New York-based organization that aims to help older LGBTIQ+ people. SAGE provides service and programs through which LGBTIQ+ individuals can seek help to better engage with and use digital media (SAGE, 2022). Another program is the Bohnett Foundation's Cyber Center. This program has approximately 60 locations in cities and at universities. Here students and young adults can seek information about LGBTIQ+, learn about this topic, and also talk to other people about it. This is especially important for people who feel uncomfortable at home and are afraid of being "discovered" because they have not yet come out, or do not want to come out at all (DiGiacomo, 2021).

The Internet has played an important role in the development of LGBTIQ+ communities. It is a tool that helps connect people, to build and join networks, to acquire information and

knowledge about LGBTIQ+ issues, as well as health and politics. Moreover, especially in recent years, it has become an important weapon in the political struggle to express, spread, and strengthen demands (Edri, 2019). However, LGBTIQ+ members also face problems online. For instance, it is difficult to express one's sexuality and desired identity online, both in the sense of standing up for oneself and one's intimate preference and choice, but also in terms of informing about LGBTIQ+ issues and encouraging other people to stand up for themselves. There are many standards and guidelines within social media that restrict or prohibit these activities. Additionally, posts in which LGBTIQ+ people are supported are often reported and subsequently deleted, whereas homophobic, sexual, and transphobic posts remain online. The algorithm is often responsible for this injustice, as it cannot adequately distinguish between positive and negative posts and therefore often excludes LGBTIQ+ members. For transgender people another problem has become apparent, especially in recent years, being that when registering on a social network, a real name is required. This is verified by means of documents, which one must upload. As long as transgender people have not officially changed their name and gender, they must provide their birth name, with which they no longer use to identify themselves with. However, if they indicate their new identity, the accounts will be blocked after a short time and they will lose any possibility of contact with new acquaintances. Another black spot on the internet is that it is increasingly common for people to create a fake profile in order to use it to track down people with a particular sexual orientation. This was the case in Egypt for example, where people were found who had a sexuality that did not conform to the norm and were then tortured and murdered. In order to prevent this, there are now specific apps and websites which were created only for homosexual people. There are also demands from the LGBTIQ+ community to be included in the production of apps and related policies (Edri, 2019).

Another example of discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community, specifically queer men, can be seen in India. India was a British colonial territory and therefore the British colonial penal code prevailed there, which states that any sexual acts defined as unnatural are punishable by life imprisonment. This means, among other things, that homosexuality is prohibited. This law was passed by the Court on September 6th, 2018. (Kolmannskog, 2018). Despite these legal conditions, the topic of LGBTIQ+ and especially being queer, is discussed in the print media and in films as well as TV shows in India (Dasgupta, 2017).

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