

History Byte: The history of the word 'queer' is long and convoluted. The first written evidence of the word goes all the way back to 1508 from a poem titled "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy". Dunbar and Kennedy were Scottish nobles that faced off in an epic medieval Rap Battle that both insulted each other and entertained the court! The word queer was clearly a pejorative, but seemed to have no significance with regard to sexuality.

Though the word remained in the English language as an insult, it was vague and had many definitions. In 1785, *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* defines it as: roguish, bad, crooked, puzzling, and ignorant. 100 years later, the word was used for the first time as a homophobic slur when the 9th Marquess of Queensbury fired it off as an insult against a Lord that he believed was having a romantic relationship with Queensbury's son. Ironically, he was writing this lament to his other son, whose lover, Oscar Wilde, he would later imprison!

In the 1980's and 90's, the word queer was on the periphery of positive reclamation. In 1990, a leaflet titled, *Queers Read This*, was distributed at New York Pride. It addressed the history of the word saying, "we've chosen to call ourselves queer. Using queer is a way to remind us how we are perceived by the rest of the world. It is a way of telling ourselves that we don't have to be witty and charming people who keep our lives discreet and marginalized in the straight world."

Recently, the usage of the term has increased exponentially and has expanded to include even more marginalized groups and identities. It is the umbrella that includes non-conforming genders and identities, handily excluding problematic binary markers. The generalization and inclusivity of the word has become common to address Queer Community as a whole.