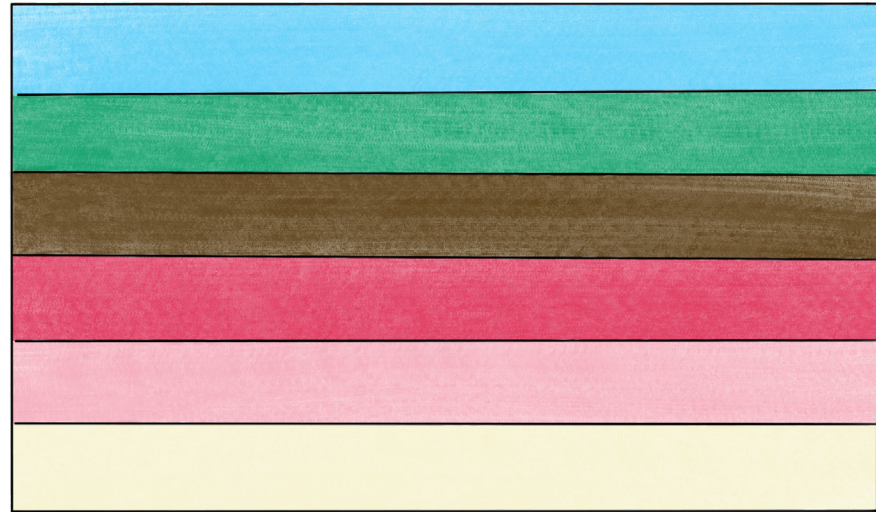


# Rabies Pride:

Queer Micro Communities on the  
Internet as Sites of Liberation

In 2017, Tumblr user dirk-has-rabies created the Rabies Pride Movement for autistic trans individuals who feel like they are treated as less than human or diseased. In July of 2018 a satire account called rabidloving was created that co-opted rabies pride into a joke label about being attracted to people with rabies or the idea of having rabies. Currently the true meaning is virtually impossible to find under associated tags or searches on Tumblr. How does the formation of rabies pride produce insights into the complexities of online queer spaces as sites of liberation and assimilation? Through archival research on TikTok – where I first came across the movement – and Tumblr I seek to contextualize the Rabies Pride Movement and its appropriation within broader narratives around queer liberation and LGBT+ assimilation while disrupting the idea that there is a singular queer mindset in online spaces. I will articulate how rabies pride is an example of smaller communities in queer internet culture that function as sites of liberation through a refusal to be palatable to cis-heteronormative society that are often lost or perpetually rejected by others due to the assimilative nature of jokes other LGBT+ people make around these communities. This understanding helps challenge homogenizing views of online queer spaces, and recontextualize how we interact with the internet while seeking to give understanding to the appropriated movement rabies pride.

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## Timeline

- **2017:** Rabies Pride Movement created by a group of friends in college to conceptualize their experience
- **July 2018:** Randomaesflags created first joke rabies pride flag on Tumblr
- **July 26th 2018:** Rabidrick first posts on Tumblr about rabiosexuality and creates new flag (since original was fake)
- **July 27th 2018:** Rabidrick starts posting as rabidloving
- **July 28th 2018:** Rabidloving makes controversial anti-vaxx post
- **July 28th 2018:** Rabidloving mass reported and moves to account rabidloving-remade
- **August 2nd 2018:** End of rabidloving blogs as Spencer
- **August 13th 2018:** First StrangeÆons video posted
- **August 15th 2018:** Rabidloving-remade posts that it was all fake
- **September 7th 2018:** Last post on rabidloving-remade
- **December 17th 2018:** NSFW banned on Tumblr and multiple accounts/blogs deleted even if not NSFW
- **December 2018:** Dirk-has-rabies original Tumblr account deleted due to the Tumblr Porn Ban
- **Some time in 2018:** Dirk-has-rabies began to post on TikTok about Rabies Pride
- **July 29th 2019:** Second Strange Æons video posted
- **November 25th 2019:** First video still up of dirk\_has\_rabies on TikTok about Rabies Pride
- **April 8th 2020:** Dirk\_has\_rabies posts about original meaning of Rabies Pride on TikTok
- **January 31st 2021:** Dirk-has-rabies posts about Rabies Pride on its Tumblr
- **April 18th 2021:** First video I encountered about original Rabies Pride by dirk\_has\_rabies posted on TikTok

## Personal Connection

*Looking back at my childhood it is clear that I have always been queer and just didn't want to accept it. It was in middle school when I first made the connection that I could be someone who was gay. I didn't have a "gay awakening" or any particular moment in which I made a realization, but frankly so much was going on at that point in my life that it was nowhere near the top of my list. By high school I was comfortably bisexual until a singular moment in which I questioned if I was a lesbian, for some reason this scared me so much that I just decided to "be straight" and not question it any longer. Amongst all of this I never questioned if I was trans because I must have been a cis, as all of the trans individuals around me weren't exactly like me so it just wouldn't make sense for me to be trans.*

*Part of this general confusion for me I attribute to my lack of involvement in queer online spaces when I was younger. The adults around me instilled such a fear in me that Tumblr was dangerous and full of things I shouldn't see that I never fully immersed myself in it. Because of this I was merely an observer on Tumblr. I looked at posts and threads, but I never followed anyone, liked anything, or made any content of my own. This put me in a position where I only ever saw the popular posts, or those that lacked the nuance I would need to understand myself. It wasn't until I downloaded TikTok that I began to follow other queer people, and with the way the algorithm functions I began to get more tiktoks from trans individuals from all different walks of life with different experiences within their gender. Pretty quickly my niche content lead me to realize that I was nonbinary, and then about 6 months later I finally came to terms with being lesbian. It was through these little niche corners of the internet where I felt like I belonged that I began to understand who I was and what that meant for me. So even though I personally never got the fully immersive exposure to queer internet as a young teen, the availability of niche online spaces to find myself has had an immense impact on my self acceptance and understanding of who and what I can be.*

*I am approaching this work with my personal experience and history as extremely tangible parts of the greater body of my research. Being Queer, Genderqueer, Trans, and a Lesbian all play directly into my place in this writing and how I create my arguments. This personal connection – unlike the beliefs of many academics – further enhances my work and creates, in my opinion, a more personal and nuanced piece than what I would have created if I approached this all from a "neutral" standpoint.*



## Rabies Pride Movement

Rabies Pride originated in 2017 and was created by Tumblr user dirk-has-rabies who currently uses he/it pronouns. The original meaning verbatim from the creators tumblr is “Rabies Pride is for Autistic Trans ppl. It’s for all the people that were treated like animals, treated like they were contagious or had a deadly disease by classmates/siblings/ anyone just for being “too loud” “too hyper” “too close” “too much” due to having autism and being openly trans,” (16).

Dirk-has-rabies created it with his group of friends originally as a movement for people to feel safe and comfortable in themselves, and when joking around they came up with the term rabies to use as many of them were furies. From its origins this movement is solely about a group of people trying to stop feeling ashamed of how they didn’t fit into the molds of a world that is largely unaccepting of trans and autistic people. Currently today the movement still exists and has grown more positive attention through dirk-has-rabies posts on TikTok. As of April 27th Tumblr user neopronouns created a new flag for the rabies pride movement to help it separate itself from the flag and jokes around rabio-sexual (14 & 15).

## Rabies Pride Flag Meaning

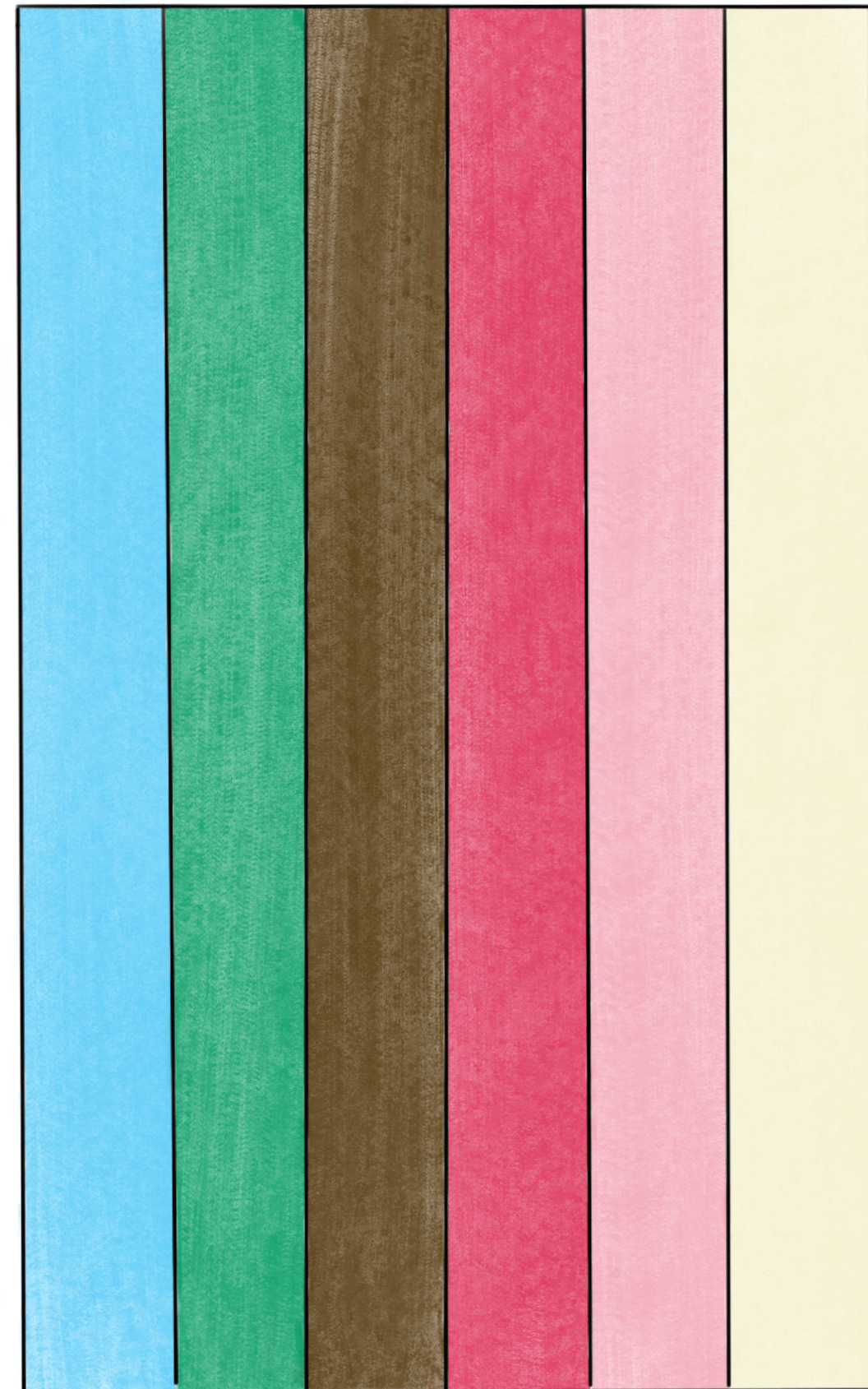
**Blue, Pink, Yellow:** represent the trans aspect of rabies pride (blue for male/masc/etc. trans people, pink for female/fem/etc. trans people, yellow for nonbinary/neutral/etc. trans people)

**Red, Pink, Yellow:** represent actual rabies (red for blood, pink and yellow to represent someone foaming at the mouth)

**Blue, Green, Brown:** represent nature, both because rabid animals come from nature and to represent that neurodivergencies and trans identities are natural (blue for the sky, green for plants, brown for dirt and fur)

**Green, Red, Yellow:** represent the neurodivergent aspect of rabies pride (red comes directly from my neurodivergent flag, green and yellow are different shades in this flag but are also featured in that flag, and you can check that link to see their meanings in the nd flag)

**Brown:** represents neurodivergent trans people of color, as they’re subject to more frequent and more dangerous stereotypes, and thus their experience of rabies pride may distinctly feature a reclamation of that. The specific shade of brown I used is a blend of the black and brown stripes from the philadelphia pride flag. (6)

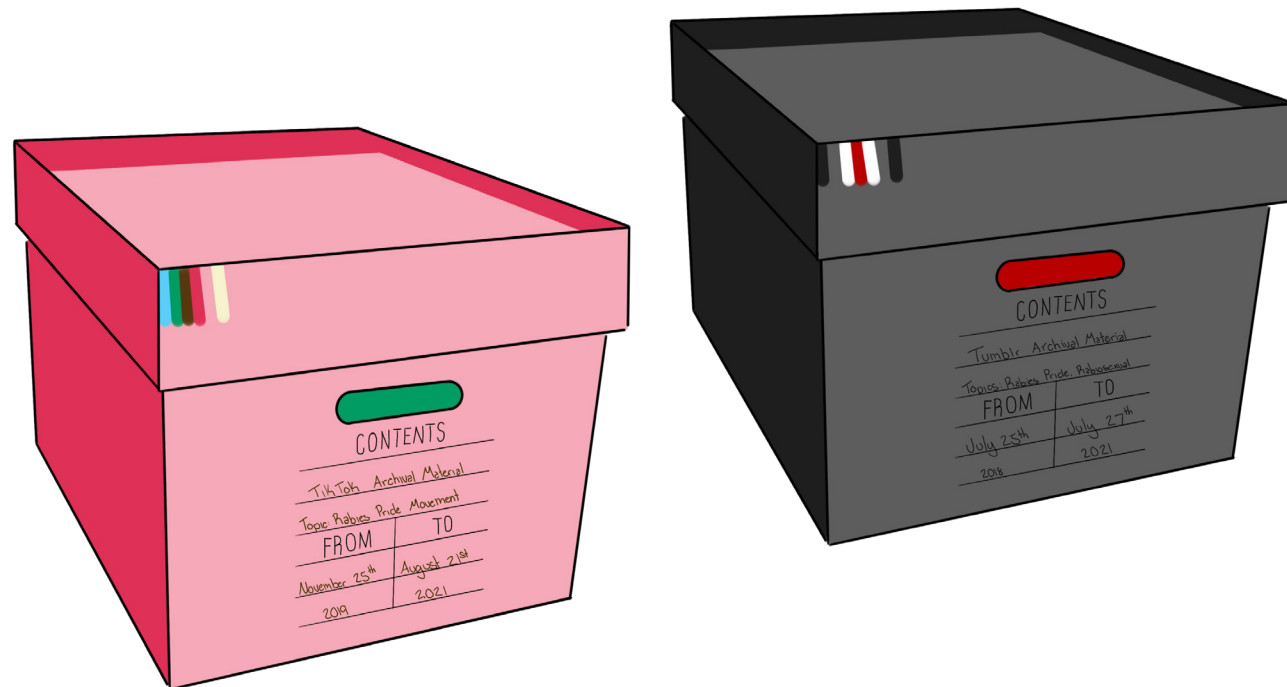






## TikTok as an Archive

My first encounter with the original Rabies Pride was through a tiktok from dirk\_has\_rabies (he/it) about how it created the movement rabies pride, which led me to explore it's page and learn more about the original context of the term before it was appropriated. The ability of me to get this tiktok connects to many factors of my own personal interests and how TikTok functions as an app and an archive. TikTok's algorithm for the For You page – main page of TikTok where you see all the tiktoks that are curated for you – tracks which videos you interact with (like/comment/share), stay on the longest, and if you go to the creators profile or follow them to choose other videos to put on your For You page they think you will like (13). With this algorithm function, and the fact that I am a trans individual with an interest in trans topics I tend to get videos surrounding transness, and so the likelihood of me getting the tiktok I got by dirk\_has\_rabies increased through this interest that the app noted. The ability to do further research into the topic on the app further lays in the fact that TikTok is a newer app and became TikTok after the rabidloving incident which is described later in this piece. This lack of content from 2017 and 2018 makes TikTok a newer archive for Rabies Pride. As a newer archive it holds more content related to the original meaning as the creator is a user of the app with a decent presence. This understanding of how TikTok functions as an archive is important as it contextualized how my ability to find this video mainly rested on my interest in the topic and TikTok catering to this interest.



## Tumblr as an Archive

Much of the research for this project was done on Tumblr as it was the main site of the incident with Rabies Pride. For this reason Tumblr functions as the main archive of my research, and in itself is a complicated aspect of the project. The Tumblr porn ban in December of 2018 further fragmented Tumblr as an archive and increased the complexity of using it for research. Through this ban of NSFW content many posts, and therefore accounts, were flagged and deleted for their explicit content.



*NSFW stands for not safe for work and is used to describe content that is not something most people would view in public (most often used for nudity or explicit language on tumblr)*

Even beyond this the algorithm used by the app to delete blogs was faulty and many accounts were deleted that contained no NSFW content. In this ban, dirk-has-rabies original account was deleted and since it was not saved on the wayback machine, any content before December 2018 associated with him is unavailable to me.

*The wayback machine a site on the internet which stores old urls that it has taken snapshots of that no longer exist*



Beyond this many people also personally deleted their blogs from when they were younger that could be traced to them out of a fear of anyone finding out or a desire to not be connected to it anymore. With these two common situations that exist on Tumblr much of what I would research has been “lost to the internet.” I use this term to refer to the fact that there is a small possibility that with extensive research I would be able to find a trace of these accounts, but it is all virtually impossible for anyone to find. With this much of what I am able to find is centered around a few key accounts that still exist, and second-hand sources like reference posts, reposts, and tagging. Due to this Tumblr functions as an incomplete archive in my research full of holes, uncertainty, and the very real possibility that some details are incorrect. With this knowledge the overarching reality of what has happened with Rabies Pride is very real, but minute details of it all are blurry like a low pixel image.

## Rabidloving: The Appropriation of Rabies Pride

The first joke made around rabies pride that garnered attention was a joke flag post from July of 2018 in which someone made a rabies pride flag for for “lgbt+ people with rabies” (3 & 11). After this an account was created entitled rabidrick which posted seemingly seriously about wanting rabies and created their own rabies pride flag as the original was intentionally a joke (9). It is possible that this account had connection to or a knowledge of the original movement as they were mutuals with dirk-has-rabies (16). Soon after the account changed to rabidloving, and on the account the creator called themselves Spencer. Spencer was supposedly the host of a DID (dissociative identity disorder) system in an abusive relationship with a man named Anthony. He was really obsessed with the idea of getting rabies and believing one could live with or be born with it, for which the term rabies pride was used and through his blog people began to use the terms rabiosexual/rabioromantic.



**Rabies Pride Flag**  
Created by  
*randomaesflags*  
on Tumblr

On this account Spencer talked all about having and getting rabies and even shared a photo of a bite from a raccoon – a fake one – that he got to get rabies (7). The account blew up originally due to an anti-vaxx post about Spencer’s anger that he was vaccinated for rabies, and then continued to gain a following due to people’s amusement or concerns with Spencer’s living situation and goal to get rabies (5). This original account is the most full of Spencer’s claims around rabies and the overall extremely damaging posts around the creation of the term rabiosexual (7). The account switched to rabidloving-remade on July 28th of 2018 as the original one got deleted due to mass reporting. On the second account more alters – individuals in a DID system who aren’t the host – were revealed, and it was filled with more of Spencer’s ‘recovery’ from wanting to get rabies. The blog stopped on August second soon after the supposed death of his boyfriend Anthony, and by the eighteenth the creator came back and explained how it was all a scam.

He claimed it started as a satirical account that he got too into trying to make sound real after it blew up (8). Despite this account being extremely short lived the impact it had fully changed the face of rabies pride on Tumblr and virtually erased the origins of Rabies Pride until recently. Multiple flags were made for this version of rabies pride that centered the idea of wanting rabies or being into rabies, and within the month there were already multiple meme accounts around the topic. Due to many peoples views of the movement originating with rabidloving, many of the original members and creators of the movement ended up leaving after relentless harassment and death threats due to the memes around rabiosexuality (14).

**Rabiosexual / Rabies Pride Flag**  
Created by *rabidrick*  
on Tumblr



**Black:** Represents death, something a lot of rabiosexuals struggle with the thought of.  
**Grey:** Represents decaying meat and rot, as well as the animal most typically associated with rabies (raccoons).  
**White:** Represents teeth and biting. The white also symbolizes how anyone can be rabiosexual, and rabies can affect all genders.  
**Red:** Blood, disease, and the transmission of the disease. It’s red like a tongue since rabies is passed through saliva. It’s also the opposite of blue which is the color of water, something a lot of rabios are afraid of. The white and red are also placed in such a way that it looks like a set of teeth and the inside of a mouth!

(9)





## Humor as an Aspect of Assimilation

In Michael Warner's book *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* he challenged the mainstream gay movement towards same-sex marriage and the repercussions it could have for less normative queers. Within this Warner situates the Good Gay in contrast to the Bad Queer, and that for their to be a Good Gay in the eyes of broader society there must also be "its shadow in mind – the Bad Queer," (pg. 114, 18). Within this analysis the Bad Queer is someone who fits less into cisheteronormative society, and is not willing or able to assimilate into a more 'normative' existence. The Bad Queer ends up in the negative side of the "trap of ambivalence" in which they become hated by Good Gays for being unassimilable (4). Through this many of these Good Gays turn towards assimilative jokes around the Bad Queers and paint themselves in contrast and opposition to the queers that society will not accept. This can often be seen with the jokes made in media around feminine queer men, Butch lesbians, and trans women – most often Black trans women (4). Within these jokes the feminine gay is irrational, the trans woman is 'actually a man,' and the Butch is only palatable to men as a punchline. More often than not these jokes present themselves in real world interactions as well, and most prominently on social media where people can hide behind a screen. These jokes have also developed on Tumblr and then further onto other sites to target any label that marks someone a 'Bad Queer.'

It is common in many online spaces for someone to share an experience they had or explain how an identity they hold is important to them and have their experience or identity turned into a joke. Someone will say this is who I am and this is how I feel and the majority will respond with a simple "there is no way you think that's actually real." Through this process real people have the comfort and safety they feel being online taken away from them due to other people's inability to conceptualize a reality beyond their own world view. This is seen in the case of Rabies Pride through the joke flags created for "rabiosexual" people or "LGBT+ people with rabies" and the continuing trend of people editing characters in front of the flag as a display of humor around the subject. Through the lack of research done in these spaces – specifically here Tumblr and TikTok – individuals end up causing harm to more marginalized members of a "community" they are a part of, or towards someone less accepted than them. Though there is a difficulty to this research, the fact that people lean into humor around something they do not understand or that has very little background to it is also important to analyze. This willingness to make fun of an identity or difficulty in someone's life because it doesn't seem real can be connected to assimilationist views of moving forward for queer individuals.

## Queer Microlabeling for Liberation

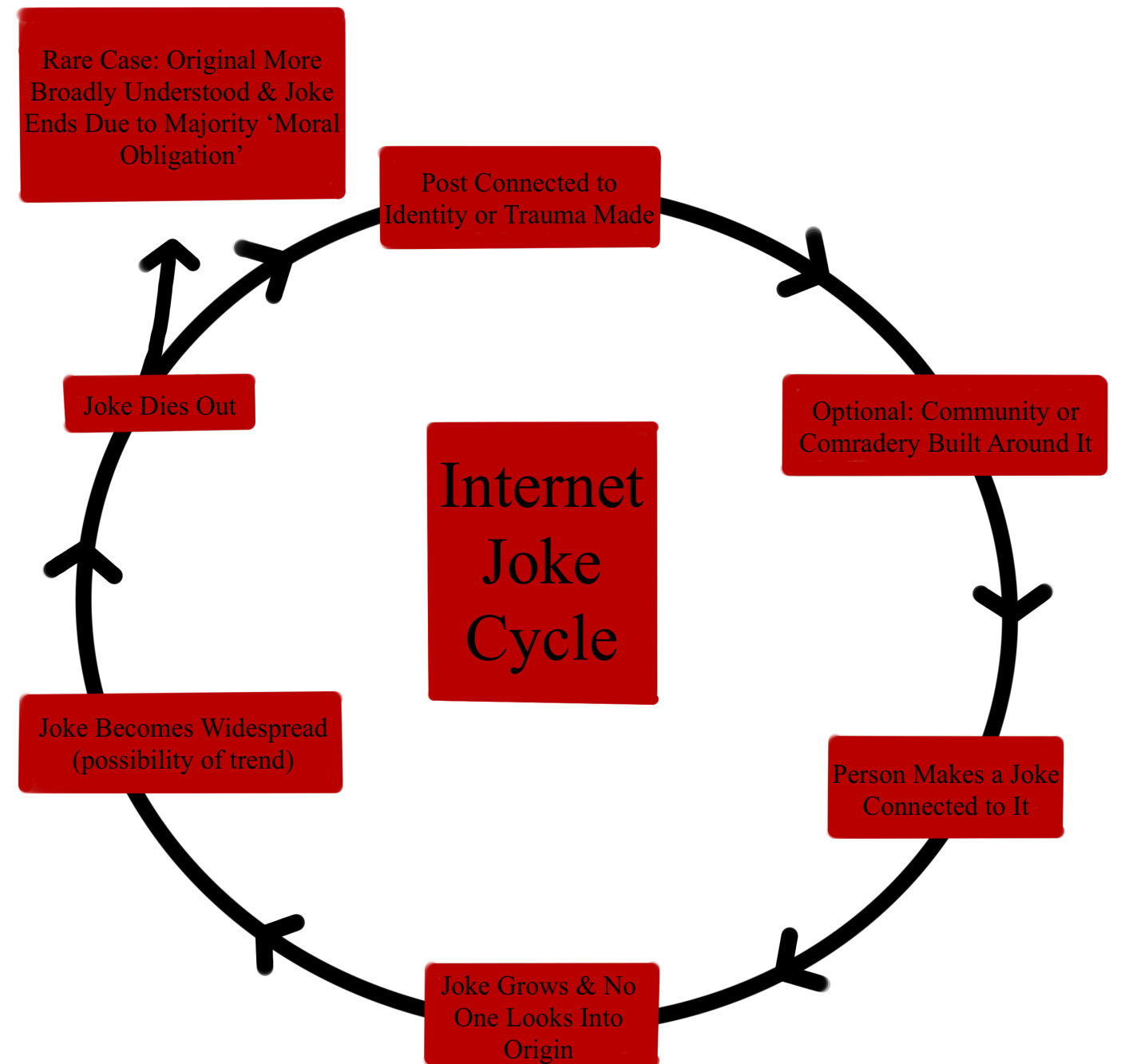
Many newer labels that people use to describe themselves are coined through the internet and are often un-assimilative in their nature as they reject the idea of trying to seem more normative. These labels are created to explain one's connection to their gender, sexuality, and/or other identities in a way that makes the most sense to them, not in a way that makes them palatable to cishet people. Often people also form communities around these micro labels that become micro communities of people who understand and accept each other. This contextualizes people's queerness politically through a refusal to try to make oneself easier to understand through a non-queer lens, and therefore a refusal to be easily assimilated. Rabies Pride, though explicitly a movement and not an identity label, actively exemplifies this through the fact that it uses the term for a dangerous and unhuman disease in its name and is based around accepting the you society doesn't approve of.

Often more assimilationist queer people reject these identities as they don't fit into the goals of their 'post-gay' society. Commonly you will hear people say they are "trenders" or "holding us back" when referring to anyone who identifies with a micro label or does not present in a way that is palliative to normative society.



*Trender is a shorting of the also commonly used term of trans-trender which is used to claim a trans person is just faking it for attention because they don't seem "really trans"*

Instead of this I argue that they are in fact not holding us back, but helping queerness move forward in conceptualizations of liberation. A willingness to identify in such a way that cishet society will not accept or see as valid can connect to a willingness to view a future when one's happiness is not based upon this acceptance. Instead a mindset towards acceptance of all queer people no matter the identity label they choose (unless it is in fact offensive as a few are) moves queer people towards connecting with other liberationist movements with a goal of making a world more accepting of all individuals which will not exist under the current systems in which mainstream queer people are attempting to assimilate into.





## Strange Æons Review

Strange Æons is a youtuber with nearly 1 million followers who creates content connected to many spaces of internet culture, included within that is deep dive videos on different corners of the infamous Tumblr. Due to their popularity amongst younger queer individuals, especially those on/viously on sites like Tumblr, their account can functionally help popularize information amongst the same populations who spread the rabies pride jokes. Coincidentally they have made two deep dive videos on the topic of rabies pride and rabiosexuality. The first video in this series has amassed 2.1 million views within the past 3 years since it was uploaded. Key to this video is Strange Æons claim that this is the most research they have ever done for a video, and therefore has some claim to being a comprehensive look into the history of this identity (1). This is significant as content wise there isn't much to the video that one could not find themselves from basic searching around the topic on Tumblr. The second video created in July of 2019 does not have much of a unique update in comparison to the original video. It touches on the fact that rabidloving was a fake page and that many people have continued on to make fake (or possibly real) accounts and discord servers about being rabiosexual, beyond this it is mainly just another video with minimal research on the topic (2). Within both these videos the main focus is on entertainment and humor around this "new identity" – as is common with youtube videos – which ends up trivializing the harassment the creators of Rabies Pride have gone through and furthers the message that this issue is all a joke. Though Strange Æons very likely had no clue of the origins of rabies pride, their large scale videos and claims to extensive research added to the negative impacts of the jokes around rabies pride.

## Queering Space

The Rabies Pride Movement and many similar movements and identities queer Tumblr, TikTok, and other online spaces. In this instance I am connecting queering space to Sara Ahmed's theories around Queer Phenomenology. In the most baseline sense she discusses straight space and the fact that queer people must realign themselves to fit in them to have a place into broader society. Yet, only some queer people can let go of their queerness to align, and the rest that are not able to align with straight space are the ones that are visibly queer. These spaces that are queered are not inherently straight spaces, as the process of queering a space to make it more free can also be applied to queer spaces themselves. Tumblr is viewed by many as a queer space itself, yet it too can be queered to provide more for those that may be ostracized in the stricter lines of queer space (17).

This queering of space in the context of these online spaces relates to the mere ability of people to hold the identities and participate in the movements that feel most comfortable to them. To participate in these spaces there is no requirement beyond a baseline acceptance of the fact that people will hold identities which may not make sense to you but may provide the world to them. In connecting more broadly, Rabies Pride actively fits into queer politics around making space for queer people where they do not need to fit into arbitrary standards enforced by assimilation or other queer spaces. These assimilationist views are often more popular or accepted in larger internet spaces which prioritize white cis gay individuals and promote the idea that any identity that isn't "normal" enough to align must not be valid because it will make cis society view "us" as a joke. In fighting against this, movements and identities like Rabies Pride participate in queering space to make it easier for people to freely find themselves without having to force any set standards on their being. These spaces continue to be important for ostracized individuals in the more mainstream movements, and for many young people social media sites like Tumblr and TikTok are the only places they can find them. Rabies Pride is only one example of how these unique corners on the internet can function as sites of liberation that are important to consider in analysis of modern queer politics and false views of a homogenous online queer space.

## Rabies Pride Today

My ability to find Rabies Pride highlights the fact that other people have found it as some of dirk\_has\_rabies videos on the topic have gone semi viral in certain sectors of queer TikTok spaces – which led me to seeing them. This has helped bring light to the true origins of the movement for many people, and gives more hope to the fact that Rabies Pride can still grow and give support and understanding to more and more people. Every few days I see a new person comment on one of dirk\_has\_rabies's videos or with the new flag in their bio showing how the movement is going on the more positive spin of the Internet Joke Cycle, even if it is 3 years later. This potential for a movement or identity to get the positive support it deserves is very real – as seen here – and very important in building hope for the future of these movements and an ability to move past the assimilationist nature many queer people have.

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