

SKEV

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THE SWEDISH TERM *skev*, meaning roughly warped, lop-sided or crooked, is a Scandinavian translation of queer, which has become a variation of the term in its own right. Since it was coined, it has been used in different ways and today has its very own possibilities and limitations. Originally, queer was translated into *skeiv* in Norwegian and used primarily as an expression for an identity, for example in the name of Skeiv ungdom [*Skeiv* youth], an organisation for LGBTQ+ youth.¹ There are also early examples of uses of *skeiv* in Norwegian research, as demonstrated by Mia Franck (2009, 25) and Martin Berg and Jan Wickman (2010, 90). This inspired a group of Swedish literary scholars, who used the Swedish version of the term as a theme for an issue of the national journal for comparative literature studies *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap* (2005), precisely with the intention of testing which uses of the term are possible. Their point of departure is that queer has lost its original connotations in a Scandinavian language context, whereas *skev* is an established word with its own usage in everyday language (Heggestad et al. 2005, 3). Furthermore, *skev* does not only refer to something that is literally crooked, but the term has also been used directly as slang for homosexual people and it resembles other, similar expressions, at least during early 20th century in Sweden (Nilsson 1998; Österholm 2012, 54; Borgström 2016, 124–5).

In the aforementioned issue of *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap*, *skev* is used in a number of ways, for example for characters who deviate from

several norms that are not only connected to gender and sexuality (Sarimo 2005), as a synonym to intersectional (Munck 2005), as a synonym to queer that is used alongside queer (Borgström 2005), and finally as a way of defining the ambivalence of pornography (Ullén 2005). This became the starting point for a gradually widespread use of *skév* as an analytical term in Swedish-language queer research, both in Sweden and Finland, mainly in the humanities and especially in literature studies. Two important researchers in this development are literature scholars Mia Franck (2009) and Maria Margareta Österholm (2012), who use *skév* as a central concept in their respective doctoral dissertations. It is worth noting that both Franck and Österholm explore depictions of young people and furthermore, in Franck's case, young adult literature. They both use the term *skév* instead of queer as to not water the latter one down, as they do not focus on sexuality solely, and also to address deviations that still are, or might be, heterosexual. Furthermore, they use the term as both theory and method; as an analytical term as well as a specific way of reading, which they call *skév*, that is a variation of a queer reading (Franck 2009, 25–6; Österholm 2012, 91). Österholm (2012, 297–8) even writes in what she calls a *skév* way when she tries to use the same language as the girl characters that she explores.

Franck's and Österholm's dissertations have inspired several Swedish scholars to use *skév* (e.g., Jonsson 2012; Nilson 2012; Öhrn 2013). They were both important for my own employment of *skév* in my dissertation about the Swedish author Agnes von Krusenstjerna (Jakobsson 2018). I explore Krusenstjerna's depictions of how girls become – or do not become – women in encountering love and sexuality. In my dissertation, I primarily explore heterosexuality and use *skév* for deviations, which are still heterosexual. I also pair *skév* with queer temporality theory. Thus, I discuss the theme of what I call *skév* ageing, of which *skév* becoming a woman is a part, that is not wanting and/or not being able to become a woman in the expected sense. Instead, in Krusenstjerna's novels, the becoming – or rather “unbecoming” – a woman is looping and never reaches an end-point. I also use *skév* to denominate a type of narrative, which is characterised by absences, silences, and anti-climaxes.

In the early stages of my work it was not evident that I was going to use *skev* as an analytical term but it gradually proved to be more useful than queer because of its plasticity, as demonstrated by Franck and Österholm. Through Franck and Österholm, both prominent in the Swedish-language field of girlhood studies, *skev* has become connected to the intersection of gender and age. My dissertation demonstrates the value of using a word with spatial dimensions, of something being bent instead of straight, when discussing the “life schedule” or “lifeline” from a queer temporality perspective (Halberstam 2005, 2; Ahmed 2006, 17–8). Thus, it becomes possible to elaborate on how a *skev* lifeline, as opposed to a straight one, might appear – but also to get a closer look on the latter.

Because of the term’s connotations to something crooked, it also lends itself well to discuss narratives, which deviate from what is expected. One example is the type of narrative that Jack Halberstam (2011, 2–3, 53–86) argues are permeated by “unmaking, undoing, unbecoming,” and “not knowing,” narratives in which no development can occur in a way that questions heteronormativity (cf., Österholm 2012, 284–6; Jakobsson 2018, 173–8). The term can be used for both *skev* narratives, of this sort, and researchers’ *skev* readings of them, as well as their own *skev* writing.

Skev has connotations of something, which is warped, lop-sided, and crooked in a sense that is hard to define but evokes a chafing, scraping, and galling feeling. Therefore, it can be used for that, which disturbs heteronormativity, regardless of it having to do with LGB, T, or heterosexuality. Accordingly, *skev* is a useful term for the 2020s.

The term offers obvious problems when it comes to usage in English-language contexts. I propose two possible translations: “skew” and “bent.” They both have meanings similar to *skev*. Skew sounds and looks like *skev* and is possible to translate into for example Österholm’s (2012) term for writing in a *skev* language, *skeviska* – “skew-ish.” Bent has similar connotations as *skev* of something, which is crooked and lop-sided as well as a homosexual person (Oxford English Dictionary 2000). The spatial connotations of bent makes it suitable for discussing the life schedule in terms of, for example, a bent lifeline.

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NOTE

1. <https://skeivungdom.no>.