

TERMINOLOGY

A starter on understanding the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+

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How do we unpack the acronym commonly associated with Pride? While it would be easy to simply look up the definitions of each letter, this resource aims instead to help faith communities understand the differences while keeping them in relation to each other. Although it might feel more helpful to have easy headings to browse or skip down to, you are encouraged instead to read this whole document, allowing for better understanding of the ways in which Pride is an expression of a fullness of relationship among peoples who share a common margin in society. This resource therefore hopes to put the various identities in relation with each other. You will also find links for some terms, to help develop further understanding.

Sexual orientation and gender are two completely separate entities, which can be combined in any number of ways. In the early days of the rights movement, and as that movement continued to grow, it became helpful for those experiencing injustice due to gender and sexual orientation to try to come together. This has now become the community of the 2SLGBTQIA+.

For many decades, “LGB” was a common short form for those who are not heterosexual. As people gained courage to speak from their own realities, however, the acronym was expanded to try to include them. Gender identity became increasingly significant, particularly for those who did not identify within the perceived normative binary definitions of “man” and “woman” that society had understood. [Transgender](#), the “T” in 2SLGBTQIA+ was the first among the gender identities to enter the acronym. A Transgender person is someone who identifies in a gender identity that is different in some way from the gender they were assigned at birth. Some Transgender (“Trans”) folks keep this reality hidden. Others choose to express their identity in clothing and body art or jewellery. Some Trans people choose to enter into surgeries that help their bodies reflect outwardly what is known inwardly. Some do not. All of these are Transgender.

Being Trans is not the same as doing Drag. Both are expressing a deeply understood identity. A Trans person lives their identity permanently in whatever way they have chosen. Drag artists may sometimes present a different gender expression in their daily lives. Anyone of any gender can do Drag, which involves presenting (often for performance) a different gender identity,

heightened for enjoyment by audiences and Drag artists alike. A Drag artist may wear clothing, body art and jewellery commonly associated with a gender other than their own, while still identifying with the gender they were assigned at birth. Drag artists are sometimes known as Drag Queens. Drag Queens were fundamentally important to the early Pride movement. Then and now, Drag Queens and Kings have helped to make the outward non-conforming expression of gender identity accessible and understood. Drag Queens have an essential role in Pride culture. However, there is no specific letter designated for them in the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym.

Because Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people were among the first to become the focus of the Pride movement, their letters are at the front of the acronym — however, they are no less important than anyone else. Recently, many have chosen to put “2S” in front of the acronym, as part of a journey toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. “2S” refers to those who identify as [“Two-Spirited.”](#) Although essentially referring to people who identify as both male and female, Two-Spirit people may also hold any number of identities within the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym.

In 2023, there is an abundance of gender identification. It is important to remember that these identities have always existed, but have only more recently become publicly understood, identified and more widely talked about. Over the past few decades, as people have had the courage to name openly what has always been true for them, letters have been added to the acronym. The “Q”, which stands for “Queer and/or Questioning” can also include other aspects of the acronym. “Queer” can be simply used for someone who is not heterosexual or comfortable in the gender they were assigned at birth. Some people prefer to identify as Queer to show solidarity with others in the acronym. “Questioning” is a term for those who are trying to understand who they are and seeking support. Increasingly, “Queer” has also been used to indicate a disruption, or intentional contradiction to publicly understood norms. Someone who disrupts normatively expected practices and routines can be said to be “queering” them.

The word [Intersex](#) is implicit in the “I” letter in the acronym. Intersex people are those whose physical anatomy has not formed in a way that is more traditionally understood on the binary scale of “male” and “female.” Sometimes this lived reality does not manifest itself until puberty or adulthood, when the natural changes in the body evolve in unexpected ways. Intersex should not be confused with Non-binary. [Non-binary people](#) do not identify with any specific gender. They may identify with no specific gender at all, or with masculine and feminine genders.

It can be harmful to assume that somebody who is Non-Binary is automatically Gay or to assume that somebody who is Gay is automatically non-traditional in their gender identity. God

is abundant in God's ability to make extraordinarily diverse creatures, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people are no exception. While it might feel uncomfortable to “not know” how someone identifies when first meeting them, it is not the job of anyone in the acronym to disclose who they are to anyone else. Our need for definition can sometimes challenge us to want to ask for clarity in order to make ourselves feel more comfortable. This can lead, however unintentionally, to an “othering” of the one asked. By making the inquiry, they are being set apart as a subject of interest, rather than a person.

The acronym is already long and has grown over the years with more letters and combinations of letters, but “Non-Binary” is a good example of the significant amount of identity that exists in the “+.” The Plus was originally meant to include or suggest all those who belong to the Queer community who have not been specifically named. But as we become more aware of the fullness of identity, some of these will start to become more important to our conversations in the church. In fact, one of the recommendations coming to the 2023 National Convention of the ELCIC from the Task force addressing Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in the church is to encourage the ELCIC to create national resources which would support listening, safe conversation, and discernment at all levels of the church around healthy, consensual relationships, including ethical non-monogamous relationships.

It is important to remember that each and every one of these letters in the acronym represents an individual human being, made in the image of God and loved by God. The acronym describes human lives which are being lived among us all the time. Many people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ will seek to make others feel comfortable and mask their identity in many ways. This can lead to a cisgender (comfortable with assigned gender) heteronormative (heterosexually oriented) belief that no such people exist, because they are so well hidden. When those who have been hiding finally reject this notion for themselves, they sometimes “come out” strong, expressing their identity in ways that may feel surprising or inconsistent with who they have previously seemed to be. Remember that they have always been this person, but have not felt able to express it.

When we are able to experience the acronym as a community of the beloved of God, we become less concerned with specific identities and orientations. How can these notes help you to reflect on the rich diversity of God’s human family? How will you seek to help make the church a safer place for 2SLGBTQIA+ people?

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