



Excerpts from:

**Open Hearts,
Resources for Affirming Ministries
in the
United Church of Canada**

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Pages 3-5 (About Language)

About Language

Language constantly changes. It also has a powerful impact on how we live with respect to God's creation. The aim of Open Hearts is, as its title suggests, to open people's hearts and minds. We hope you will find this document useful in advancing your ministry's discussions about gender and sexuality, which the United Church believes are God's gifts—with all persons being made in the image of God. While this resource has been revised and updated since its initial inception, no perfect or fully up-to-date version of this resource is possible.

By the time this resource is written, certain terms will have gained currency over others. Some may have acquired different nuances or completely new meanings. Furthermore, some people choose words to describe themselves or their relationships that others do not feel comfortable with. Differences in language may be generational, contextual, or a matter of personal preference. If in doubt, ask people what words they prefer to use to describe themselves and their experience.

Affirm United/S' affirmer Ensemble is committed to using the language of sexual orientation(s) and gender identity(ies) to go beyond the use of specific labels and to include all people on the continuum of human sexuality. However, in this resource the term LGBTQIA2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer, intersex, asexual, and Two-Spirit people) is often used as an abbreviation. While the term is more expansive than the older abbreviation of LGBT, it is nevertheless imperfect. But since many sexual minority justice and advocacy organizations use this term (or a version thereof) and for the sake of brevity, we use it, occasionally, to refer to people whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual and/or whose gender identity does not conform to binary male/female categories. The list of terms below is by no means exhaustive.

Gender is what a person lives or experiences themselves to be in society (woman, man, girl, boy, androgynous, etc.). **Gender Identity** is an individual's self-conception as being male, female, both or neither as distinguished from actual biological sex. **Gender Non-Conforming** refers to those whose gender expression does not conform to prevailing gender norms. Homosexual is used in a formal sense. Many people do not use the term to describe themselves, preferring words such as gay (men who love men) or lesbian (women who love women).

Questioning is a word often used by youth who are in the process of coming out or are still discerning their sexuality, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Sex as an adjective (in reference to someone's sex) usually refers to body and biology, as in male, female, intersex. Sexuality or sexual orientation refers to a person's sexual desire, love interest, or affiliation—heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual.

Asexual refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction or desire. The person may or may not have spiritual and emotional attraction to others.

Bisexual refers to someone whose sexual and/or romantic attraction is to both males and females. A bisexual person may not be attracted equally to both sexes—people who are primarily attracted to one sex may still describe themselves as bisexual. Bisexuality is a description of sexual orientation and does not imply that the person engages in sexual behaviour with one or both sexes. Some people continue to use the term bisexual to describe themselves. Others are more comfortable with terms such as pansexual, omnisexual, or queer.

Cisgender refers to someone whose gender identity conforms with the one that they were assigned at birth.

Gay usually refers to men who have relationships with other men. It is sometimes used as a generic term for men and women; some women who love women call themselves gay while others prefer the term lesbian.

Genderfluid refers to those whose gender identity and expression are fluid and change depending on personal circumstance or desire.

Trans and transgender are those whose assigned sex at birth is different from their gender identity or gender expression. Some cross-dressers and many intersex people identify as trans. Transsexual is sometimes used to refer to someone who is transitioning from male to female or female to male, or someone whose biological sex does not match their felt or lived gender. For many people in the transgender community, however, it is seen as an outdated term, and primarily a medical term that pertains to genderconfirming surgery and/or hormone replacement therapy. Some transgender people do not want to be included with LGB because they see themselves simply as male or female, not of a different orientation.

Intersex refers to people who may have atypical combinations of physical features that usually distinguish female from male—for example, someone with an XY chromosome who appears physically female, XX-male, genital ambiguity, or sex developmental differences. An intersex individual may have biological characteristics of both the male and female sexes.

Intersexuality is a medical term introduced in the 20th century to refer to people who cannot be classified as clearly male or female. The term **intersex** is now preferred over the word hermaphrodite. In biology, hermaphrodite refers to plants or animals that have reproductive organs normally associated with male and female sexes. Many animal species do not have separate sexes—in sexual reproduction, both partners can act as either male or female. Most plants are also hermaphrodites. Historically, the word hermaphrodite was used for people whose biological sex could not be classified as clearly male or female. When referring to people, the term hermaphrodite is considered misleading, derogatory, and outdated.

Non-binary is an umbrella term used by those who do not identify as a man or a woman. Non-binary genders can be understood in a variety of ways. For some, their gender may feel like a combination of man and woman. Others have a sense of their gender being beyond the categories of man or woman. Still others may feel as though they do not identify with any gender at all. Non-binary may also refer to gender categories that are specific to a culture that recognizes more than two genders.

Pansexual is a term used to describe those who are sexually or romantically attracted to people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Pansexual people may perceive themselves as gender-blind, meaning that gender and sexuality are not factors that determine their attraction to others. Considered as a subset of bisexuality and sometimes as a sexual identity in its own right, pansexuality refuses the logic of the gender binary.

Queer used to be a derogatory term, but this word is used, often in academic settings, to refer to those who do not conform to traditional gender and sexual stereotypes, constructs, or roles—for example, - queer studies programs in universities, or queer theology. Young LGBTQIA+ folk may often refer to themselves as queer. Queer can sometimes be an affectionate term between LGBTQIA+ people, although it can still be a derogatory term when directed against people.

Two-Spirit came from the 1990 Native American/First Nations gay and lesbian conference in Winnipeg and refers to First Nations people who fulfill one of many mixed or cross-gender roles found traditionally among many Indigenous groups. A direct translation of the Ojibwe term Niizh manidoowag, —Two-Spirited or Two-Spirit is usually used to indicate a person whose body simultaneously houses a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit. Many First Nations or Aboriginal people are not comfortable using this term, however. The term is not interchangeable with gay, lesbian, or other terms in the LGBTQIA+ initialism, nor is it appropriate for non-Indigenous people to use this word to describe themselves.

Film:

For the Bible Tells Me So

- How has the Bible been used to harm or justify hurting people who are LGBTQIA2S+?
- What did you learn or discover that was new for you?
- Which parts of the film troubled you?
- What questions or concerns did this film raise for you?
- How do you feel called to respond to this film?
- How might the Bible be used for healing or justice?