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LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ is an acronym used to refer to the community of individuals who identify as sexual and gender minorities. “L” stands for lesbian, “G” for gay, “B” for bisexual, “T” for transgender, “Q” for either questioning or queer, and “+” for those who identify within the community but are not represented by the first five letters. LGBTQ+ has generally replaced other acronyms such as GLBT or LGB that were previously used. Aside from the initials used in LGBTQ+, several others are used in various contexts. Other commonly used initials include a second “Q” to represent questioning or queer, “I” for intersex, “A” for asexual or ally, “P” for pansexual, “D” for demisexual, “2-S” or “2S” for two-spirit, “NB” or “N-B” for nonbinary, “S” for skoliosexual, “GNC” for gender nonconforming, “SGL” for same-gender loving, “C” for curious, and an additional “A” for either asexual or ally.

The term “gay” first became slang for men who were sexually attracted to men in the mid-1900s (Chauncey, 1994). As the gay rights movement gained momentum during the 1960s, some began using the term gay to refer to all sexual minorities. Within the early 1970s, the phrase “gay and lesbian” became more prominent as lesbians established a more public profile. During the 1980s, the acronym GLB was often used to refer to those who were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. During the 1990s, the acronym GLBT became more common as individuals who identified as transgender became a more prominent part of the sexual and gender minority community. Within the early 2000s, the G and L began switching places, with LGBT becoming the most commonly used acronym.

As individuals who identified as sexual and/or gender minorities but did not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender became more vocal within the later-2000s and early- to mid-2010s, the acronym underwent several variations. Additional letters were added within

different media in an attempt to incorporate the variety of identities included under the umbrella of sexual and gender minorities. The length and infinite variations of these acronyms became known as alphabet soup and led to some confusion. For example, there has been a great deal of disagreement about what the Q stands for. The 2016 GLAAD Media Reference Guide (2016) states that the preferred acronym is LGBTQ, with the Q representing queer, but others suggest the Q should represent those who are questioning their sexual and/or gender identities. Additionally, some question the using an A to stand for allies, as they feel allies, while important, are not part of the sexual and gender minority community. In order to limit the length of the acronym while remaining inclusive of individuals who identify as any sexual or gender minority, LGBTQ+ has become the most commonly used acronym.

Aside from LGBTQ+, several other acronyms are used in different contexts. Within the social and health sciences, SGM is often used to represent Sexual and Gender Minorities. Alternatively, medical literature commonly uses the acronyms MSM (men who have sex with men) or WSW (women who have sex with women) as their research is more focused on sexual behaviors rather than the personal or social identities of those engaging in the behaviors. Within educational environments, the acronym GSA was originally used to stand for Gay-Straight Alliance, but has often been re-termed as Gender and Sexuality Alliance.

Richard A. Brandon-Friedman

See Also: Sexual Orientation Identity, Sexual Identity, Gender Identity

Further Reading:

Chauncey, G. (1994). *Gay New York*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Faderman, L. (2015). *The gay revolution: The story of struggle*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

GLAAD. (2016). *GLAAD media reference guide* (10th ed.). New York, NY: Author.