

and words. During the session we discuss historical and modern day variations of the queer community acronym in North America and worldwide. We also discussed and questioned the value and necessity of the acronym. Who created it, who changes it, what's it for, who's it for, and who's it not for? A few notes before listening, remember this was recorded in a live space. Our recording station was located in the children's section of the library and therefore at times our guests will be competing with the very loud (and very adorable) noises of babies, toddlers, and whomever else accessed the library space that day. Also, these are candid conversations between queer folks, mainly youth and elders. Some of what you may hear may shock you and make you laugh and hopefully make you think and feel. Now, without further ado, episode one of The Youth Elders Podcast.

- Speaker 1: [04:47](#) So back in the day, back in the day. So in 1976 when I came out it was only L and B, there was nothing else. Sorry L and G. B wasn't talked about. T wasn't even on the horizon. And I only found out about trans people when I went to the Michigan Women's music festival cause it just wasn't talked about here in Toronto. And the other terms that were used were dyke butch femme, fag. All my gay male friends were fags and then there were the dykes who had to break down into butches or femmes, lesbian was quite common, but I just, I was in Trinidad in February and they use LGBTI.
- Speaker 2: [05:38](#) Which means?
- Speaker 1: [05:39](#) Lesbian bi, trans and intersex. Yeah. So that's their acronym down there. Yeah. Which is totally different. And I'm, I just made a note here that, when we are talking about who is sitting at the table, one of the interesting things that's come up as being discussed is the rainbow flag. So the colours brown and black were added to the flag in Philadelphia this year. And that's caused a huge controversy because how dare we add those colors and it's desecrating the flag.
- Speaker 2: [06:19](#) A sacred piece of fabric.
- Speaker 1: [06:21](#) Yes. So, but the same thing happens with this alphabet soup. who decides which letters to add? And um, my two-spirit friends now and in the indigenous community, we have been asked to put 2S first but that's only here in Canada. They do not use 2S - I just came back from the States. They don't use 2S down there. So they don't even recognize, generally recognize the indigenous people. There's more down there being talked about slavery or what happened with uh, black people who

were brought over as slaves. Nobody talks about indigenous people. Indigenous history is just wiped out. We went looking for that. We couldn't find anything.

Speaker 1: [07:12](#) So we have to keep in mind what's happening here in Canada. It's very centred here in Canada, the 2S and I am finding now with many of the committees that I'm sitting on when I introducing the fact that we need to put 2S first there's pushback, which is really interesting. Why, even in our many queer communities - there's not one community, I keep saying this -there's pushback to put 2S first.

Vanessa Dunn: [07:44](#) And what is that pushback? Like what- where does it come from? What, what, what do they say?

Speaker 1: [07:47](#) So the question is who decides to put 2S first? We decide. If we are paying respect to two spirit people, we have to decide to do that because we have been asked to do that. And if you're looking at the 94 recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that needs to be one of them. If we are being inclusive.

Speaker 1: [08:12](#) So I just find it really sad and disheartening that within the 2S alphabet, that this is happening. To even put 2S first, it has to go to the board it has to be discussed. The organization and the membership has to approve it. Why? Why is that so difficult?

Vanessa Dunn: [08:31](#) Well, it's also so symbolic of, and at least with an organization, it gives us some step- steps in terms of who exactly is authorizing a change to the community acronym, whether it's right or wrong, but as a community, I just wonder why... Going through those steps ultimately then it will, it'll be the ones in power that make the decision. And so I assume the same thing has happened even in the emergence of the beginning of the acronym, which went, it was just probably G at the beginning when you were talking about actually Russell.

Speaker 2: [09:05](#) Yeah.

Vanessa Dunn: [09:06](#) An umbrella term. I was thinking, well, what, it wouldn't have been queer at that time, so it probably would've just been gay.

Speaker 2: [09:13](#) Yeah. And, and it's, you get the tail end of the sixties and, and, and peace and love and the fact that, you know, people down like Harry Hay down in, uh, California and the Sisters and the, and the, and the faeries, the radical faeries. You know, at that point we're saying, okay, queer is a word we need to take back.

Queer is a word that needs to be disempowered. And we need now to start speaking the word queer, with our own lips, and I can remember literally you know around a pitcher of beer, going. Oh No, we can't own that word because it is indeed derogatory. You know, it's, it is, it's a word that has been hurled at us. It's, you know, it's the, in schoolyards you're the- You know, I can remember being the queer little sissy boy. And again, I don't know how many other people like, oh wait a minute they, they had the label for me before I had it and it's, it's being thrown at me like a brick.

- Speaker 2: [10:07](#) And I was like, how do you know? Cause I don't know yet that I'm, you know, and yeah, so again, it's that sort of thing where, there's this- in San Francisco and possibly in New York, there was this understanding that we need to retake the word queer. And that would be the radical faeries. That would be the sisters of perpetual indulgence. That would be, you know, that would be a bit of the Mattachine society, you know, would that be the language of ACT UP? Would that be, you know, and you know, like you saying, you know, we have to decide it's like Whoa, what's the official who's the, who's the committee, the committee that's in charge of, you know, what we call ourselves and also is that- okay, that's, that's a government body saying, "well now we say this" and when does that trickle down to... we actually use that language in the sheets and on the streets?
- Vanessa Dunn: [11:14](#) Okay. What is the difference? What's the difference between agender and non-binary?
- Speaker 3: [11:21](#) Um, well I think it's a personal thing perhaps. I mean, uh, often times it's a separation, I think between. Uh, non binary usually... I mean it's hard for me to speak for an entire group. I think everyone certainly relates to it in different ways. I'll speak then about agender, 'cause agender for me anyways is- is. Oftentimes non-binary. I think it's both. And agender is usually neither, neither male or female. And choosing not to associate with either of the gender identities.
- Speaker 4: [12:00](#) I think... Yeah, I feel like maybe it's sort of like a thing of that non-binary still has the connotation of like having a gender versus agender is like you don't have at all.
- Speaker 3: [12:11](#) You can almost call yourself an "it".
- Speaker 4: [12:15](#) Some people do. Some people use it pronouns for themselves.

Speaker 3: [12:22](#) But for myself, that's how I identify. However, it's as much as a - for me - a political statement as it is an identity.

Vanessa Dunn: [12:31](#) Agender?

Speaker 3: [12:33](#) Yes, yes. Yeah.

Vanessa Dunn: [12:35](#) So That's interesting. We talked a lot about that, is some of these identities, whether they're, whether they're, um, associated with sexuality, which I think they've always been. That was the dominant, that was sort of the foundation I think, or does it get into different identities that you hold.

Speaker 1: [12:54](#) But, to go back to the 2S there's two spirit and then the second S is for straight.

Speaker 4: [13:02](#) Wait what? [Laughter].

Speaker 1: [13:07](#) Because we added the S because straight had to be in there as a...

Speaker 2: [13:12](#) Why? Who says?

Speaker 1: [13:13](#) No, I'm saying it was added as a sex... uality because other people, if you left straight out it meant that we were abnormal, and they were normal.

Speaker 2: [13:26](#) So they're- they're part of the spectrum.

Speaker 1: [13:28](#) Yes. So I just did a workshop on Thursday where we talked about people being straight as the S and one woman was very offended. "Why would I be on your, with all your terms? Because I'm not like you."

Speaker 4: [13:44](#) "I'm not straight. I'm just normal."

Speaker 1: [13:48](#) Yeah, that's exactly what she said. "I'm not straight. I'm normal." Yeah. So why would you, why would you break down straight as part of this?

Speaker 4: [13:58](#) Like we're the weirdos with all the different words for what we are? Yeah.

Speaker 2: [14:01](#) Yeah, exactly. You.

Speaker 5: [14:02](#) Yeah likes cis, kind of.

Speaker 2: [14:04](#) Yeah. And it happens. It happens all the time when we do these workshops that they get really offended. Say they're straight [laughter].

Vanessa Dunn: [14:13](#) But straight was never a part of the acronym is it, but it... it was?

Speaker 6: [14:17](#) There's 2SSIAA*+.

Speaker 1: [14:23](#) Two Ss.

Speaker 5: [14:24](#) I've never heard that straight was part of it, though.

Speaker 4: [14:26](#) Yeah. I never heard it included in the acronym like that.

Speaker 2: [14:30](#) But interestingly, why not? Because part of this is, you know, the sexuality and gender spectrum there are indeed straight [inaudible].

Speaker 4: [14:42](#) Yeah, no, I mean with this conversation, my main question is always like, what is the purpose of inclusivity? And like what is the purpose of being specific about it?

Speaker 3: [15:00](#) For me, sorry. Yeah,

Speaker 4: [15:01](#) Go for it. Yeah.

Speaker 3: [15:03](#) For me, like, it's all about, um, I sort of changed my identity cause I grew up in small town. The only thing we have is gay. And I like, okay. I guess that's what I, yeah. Even though I didn't, I've never felt like something I connected to. And it wasn't until I did my own research and went out into the wider world and also, uh, other identities became more visible that I was sort of like, oh okay, like there's actually more, there was a lot of power and strength in identity and being able to fixate on something to say "this is the most, this feels the most like what I am." And getting very specific about it, you know, rather than from what's- from what was available, uh, gave a lot of power. Um, but it's, to me it's also very, it's conflicting, right? Because the more you create unification, you do have power. However, and this is just my understanding and how I interpret queerness, in quotations. Um, that to me, queerness, the essence of queerness is being able to, it's the difference between fixed and fluid identities. And, uh, like for myself, I feel like my own identity is in transition and being able to change at any point I think is, is important, I think, as well. Uh, but, um, but at the same time, that's difficult, especially living in an environment

that we are in that has been shaped by colonialism. And that sort of is, to me, is the cause that has erased all of these identities. And is sort of why we're sort of reclaiming these terms, but they, in a way, they sort of have to be so varied because they have to represent what the essence of queerness is for us. And if you can, and it, it's, it becomes even more broad for me because this is just how we interpret our lives in the western world where like... Recently I've been doing a lot of research on hijras, which are like, the oldest transgender community in uh, Southeast Asia. And their interpretation of the role is completely different and the terms that they have and how that role has been passed on through their societies and through their systems, completely different. So it's, it's sort of, I often wonder like, what are we really trying to capture, and, yeah, sorry. But yeah, and it doesn't surprise me that a lot of straight people are calling themselves queer and are sort of, it's, do you know what I mean? It's sort of, it's...

Speaker 2: [18:01](#)

Well you have a conversation with somebody who, you know, ostensibly is heterosexual but they're kinky, right? Right. You know, they're, they're, they're BDSM, you know, they're a dom and a sub and you know, what world do they belong in, where, you know, do they identify more with, you know, the sexual outlaws, which, you know, which would- Again, let's go back to the 70s where, you know, we're the sexual outlaws we're the outsiders and you know, I have conversations with, with heterosexual kinky folks who say, "Oh wow, you know, there's some places where we don't feel we belong. We're not made to feel welcome in kink spaces because, you know, we're male and female couples." And again, you know, it's like a new conversation or different conversation or concept that's new to me.

Vanessa Dunn: [19:00](#)

I guess with that then the ar- it still puts sort of emphasis on sex and sexuality and that. And that's where sometimes I struggle with the ally... Incorporating allies, straight, heterosexual people that enjoy kink. Because my understanding growing up was that this ac- this community acronym was for the communities within the queer community and that, so that argument of adding straight to, to make, you know, I don't think that we can get away from the fact that heterosexuals have the power in society. They just are the majority. They harbor a lot more power than other, you know, communities. And so this was set up as you know, in contrast to the dominant form, which was heterosexual. So to then be inclusive to them like am I not generous? [laughter] But really, I'm like, but, you have everything else.

- Speaker 4: [20:09](#) I think that is where it gets a bit tricky for me and those sort of like endless inclusivity thing because it gets very like what is like, what are we, what's the purpose of this community now? Like it's not, if it's not based around, I don't know, like even beyond like shared experience like activism or like a shared purpose or a shared like... Yeah... I don't know, yeah.
- Speaker 1: [20:47](#) We also have to be careful about who is deciding on the acronym and where it's centered because it's centered in North America, this is not happening outside of North America where people are sitting around talking about- it's not happening in the Caribbean. The only reason they came up with LGBTI was because they had to for the NGOs to get the funding. They don't use acronyms, they don't use labels. So when I was in Trinidad and I tried to find lesbians who were age 50 plus, they said, well, you're not going to find anybody who's identifying as a lesbian. It's women loving women. That's how they identify. And I wanted to bring us back to queer. So I was talking to this Black guy from the States last year, and I said, "I now identify as a queer dyke". And the reason I identify as a queer dyke is coming out of YEP. Because I kept saying I was a dyke and I said, it's a political term. And they didn't get it. The youth, most of the youth didn't get it. But when I say I'm a queer dyke, they get queer. Right? So I'm saying, "oh, yes. I'm a queer dyke." And he says, "oh, that's interesting when did Canada's start using quare?". So I said, "well, we've been using it for years.", He says, "no, not queer, quare". So I said, "is it my accent?" So he said "Q-U-A-R-E is what African, Black, uh, African Americans are now using queers that's, they've come- they have come up with that term Q-U-A-R-E to separate themselves out from white queers. Yes.
- Speaker 2: [22:28](#) Separate themselves out.
- Speaker 1: [22:32](#) Yeah, because they don't face, they face different struggles being queer and Black than other people face being queer. And that's why I keep saying it's not, it's not one community 'cause if you had a group of Caribbean people sitting here or African people or Syrian or from any other country, we would not be having the same conversation.
- Vanessa Dunn: [22:59](#) So I think it brings us back to the question of what is the purpose and function of this? If it is more divisive than it is inclusive, which sometimes it feels like it is, in terms of people saying, you know, yes, I'm queer, but I'm not that queer. Because that would be based in cis white, queer normativity.
- Speaker 2: [23:26](#) Male, cis white male.

Vanessa Dunn: [23:28](#) Yes. Um, and so let's create something else. Then, is it that we just need a ground- a grounding of understanding?

Speaker 1: [23:39](#) Yeah, You need something to hold on to. We all want something to hold on to to hold us together.

Vanessa Dunn: [23:54](#) That was from our September 15th live recording entitled "The Gay Alphabet, the power of identity and words." The next recording is from a speed history session. This is where we pair a youth or a pair of youth with an elder and give them a topic to discuss for 15 minutes. Once that 15 minutes is up, they switch partners and discuss a new topic. It's a great exercise for youth and elders to connect in a more in depth and intimate way. The topic of conversation you'll hear now between two youth and an elder is sex and dating. A note, you'll hear one of the participants reference Oasis, which is a sex positive spa slash bathhouse located in Toronto. Also, Goldstar which refers to a queer woman-identified person who has never slept with a cis man.

Speaker 7: [24:43](#) Well, my family, like didn't talk about sex period, like let alone gay, anything gay or lesbian cause I grew up in like this really fun family, but they were like Catholic. And Irish Catholic, which means go and down party, have a lot, but don't ever talk about anything serious. Like just suck it up, keep it to yourself. So I didn't know about sex period and I was petrified when I was like, I didn't, um, I had boyfriends in high school and I was like, ah, no. Um, did you have boyfriends?

Speaker 8: [25:13](#) I had a boyfriend. Yeah. Yes.

Speaker 7: [25:15](#) And in high school or after?

Speaker 8: [25:16](#) It was in high school, I was just like, I was like, it was this weird period where I was like, decided to date this person just because I wanted to, you know, it was not like a love. Yeah. Um, and then I was like, he, how can I say it? He tried to dom me and I was like, "this is not gonna work for us, honey." He tried to dom me. He tried to be the top.

Speaker 7: [25:41](#) So you knew right from the beginning what you wanted.

Speaker 8: [25:42](#) Yeah. I was just like, this is not happening like that. So it was just like, mmm... he was like not a good person. He was just like not a good person.

Speaker 9: [25:50](#) That's something that you've touched and for me is really interesting. I always think like sex is like, it's a power weird dynamic.

Speaker 7: [25:58](#) Can be, yeah.

Speaker 9: [25:59](#) And that I was like, cause I remember when I started, cause I, I just, there was a period that I was like, I love porn. Porn is so nice. And I found pegging. Have you ever seen pegging?

Speaker 8: [26:09](#) What is pegging? I heard about it.

Speaker 9: [26:11](#) Is like mostly when, when women uh, fuck a like cisgender man or I think whoever, with strap-ons.

Speaker 8: [26:21](#) Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2: [26:21](#) And that for me I was like, "what is this?" But I love it cause it was such a like- seeing those women being like, "I'll fuck you!"

Speaker 9: [26:29](#) I was like-

Speaker 7: [26:30](#) "I'll peg you", basically that was the idea?

Speaker 2: [26:33](#) That's the hottest thing I've seen. I was like that power of like I am going to make you feel all these things. I was like.

Speaker 7: [26:40](#) it's actually kind of exciting. Yeah. When you think about it.

Speaker 8: [26:43](#) And there's like, but there's, there's also like a lot of like things around like sub that are like, "subs are like less powerful" when it's like, "honey, that's, that's not true." What I've realized is like strong people that I meet in real life that are like, you respect them, you're like, they're like tops in the world are the subbiest. Exactly. And then the people that are like the nicest, you know, they're like so sweet and angel, they're like, they're going to fuck you. Right.

Speaker 9: [27:07](#) I love that.

Speaker 7: [27:10](#) But, you know, um, it's funny that you're talking about that because, uh, when, uh, uh, I was like, I what they call me a "gold star lesbian" cause I never actually had intercourse cause I knew very early when teenager that I want to be with a woman. So it was like one of those things. But um, but I had great boyfriends, they were great, but they all end up being gay.

- Speaker 8: [27:31](#) Well that's, like, so nice.
- Speaker 7: [27:35](#) But yeah, when, you know, when I was first sort of exploring and being with women, you know, I was like 19, 20 years old, I kept, I was in the theatre scene and I was actually with- worked with Sky Gilbert and Buddies way before the building happened and I was meeting all these people that were in the, you know, S/M scene and, and you know, talking to them about that and I'm just like, uh, it was interesting to learn about that at the very beginning and hear about that kind of power thing. And, and I actually found it quite intriguing, dabbled a bit but didn't like, it was like, okay, um, but wasn't like, you know, living the whole lifestyle thing, but that's how I learned about sex. Like hearing about these people, you know, and uh, like toys and everything right from the get go. Right. And that was a big shift for me going from like this sheltered, like Catholic girl to that. Right. I was like crazy. But the fact that there was so much like open dialogue in the gay scene, you know, about sex was really healthy. It was really good because I got, I got over my shyness really quickly. You know,
- Speaker 9: [28:41](#) That was I the first time I went to Oasis, the women and Trans women night that they have.
- Speaker 8: [28:47](#) Yeah, on Thursdays? Or Sundays?
- Speaker 9: [28:49](#) But it's like once a month sometimes it, right. I remember the first time I went, it was, I made a random new friend who, she was also from Mexico. I met her like at Inside Out a random night. And then I was like, "let's hang out before you go back" because she lives in Montreal and she's like, "Oh I only have one night off and like free and I'm going to this place." And I'm like, "What? cause , all my friends were couples. They were like, "Go cause nobody's going to go with you. So go with your new friend." And I was like, okay. And I remember I went and I felt I was, I I felt so shy cause people were just like naked and I think I put even more clothes on. I think people were like, "The managers here." I was like so bad. But for me it was like I will come back one year and be more free. But for me what it impact me was like the freedom all these people had in that space. I was like, never in my life. I thought I would see like women just sitting to watch another woman, like-
- Speaker 7: [29:46](#) Yeah.
- Speaker 9: [29:46](#) On the thing that's like a mechanic bull. Yeah. Yeah. I was so surprised about that and how chill everything was. I was like, I

felt really jealous of everybody's like confidence on their own like sexuality that I was like, "One day I'll probably..."

- Speaker 7: [30:03](#) To me it was, I went to lot of stuff like that too and it was like very theatrical almost, you know, because I grew up in the theatre and I was like, it's like another form of like theatre, but it's like really showing your other side. And I did find that a lot of these, like people who were like, there was this one guy I'll never forget, he was dressed in Saran wrap and like nothing but his penis hanging out of the Saran wrap. And I was like, "You go like how? That's so cool that you can do that." And then. And then I look at them, I go, "I wonder what they do in their day job." Right. Like he's probably like this really like conservative, you know, CEO, or something. It's always like the opposite of what, you know. It was interesting. You know, cause it's all psychological, just like sex is so psychological.
- Speaker 9: [30:48](#) I think that's, I remember once I moved here I and I start to hear more about sex workers and dominators and I was like, "That job is so important." Like and also for me, I always wanted like maybe in the future I'll do this too is like hire a sex worker. Cause I was like I want to, if I want to have like if I'm going to pay for sex, I feel like they know their shit, and it's going to be like the best sex ever.
- Speaker 7: [31:10](#) I think I have to say. I think that's would be a really interesting thing to hire a prostitute. I think that'd be really interesting. I said before I die, I said maybe I should put that on my bucket list. It's just for like, I think it'd be a cool experience cause they're there just for you. Actually that's how relationships should be, but it never works out that way.
- Speaker 9: [31:30](#) But I think that's amazing. And then the knowledge they, the knowledge they have. I'm, I was just like want to say to me like tell me cause like yeah cause something I thought I used to be a gold star lesbian. Well one time I was like I want to try- cause I want- I tried one time with a cisgender man, which was horrible cause.
- Speaker 7: [31:50](#) Yeah, sometimes I think that would be interesting to try and I'm like nah, I don't have a burning desire-
- Speaker 9: [31:55](#) I don't even sometimes count it because it literally was like, I think it was one second that I was with that person. I was like, "Oh no," he's like, "What?" And I'm like, oh I thought for one, for one minute I was like, I should just hire like a professional male prostitute. Like if I wanted to have that experience, why didn't I give myself the best?

Speaker 8: [32:16](#) Yeah.

Vanessa Dunn: [32:25](#) I hope you enjoyed the first episode of The Youth Elders Podcast. This has been a production of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, the world's largest and longest-running queer theatre company. We want to thank all of the amazing participants who are featured today and those who came out to the live recording sessions last year and share their lives with us. I also want to thank our incredible YEP team, Daniel Carter, LeZlie Lee Kam and Aidan Morishita-Miki. Special thanks to our sound engineer Jessie Tollefsen, who not only recorded and edited each episode but also created our theme song. Thank you to artistic director, Evalyn Parry and the entire family at Buddies. Special thanks to the Toronto Arts Council and Lana and her team at the Oakwood Village Library for their support. And finally, thank you for tuning in and supporting the Youth Elders Podcast. Please feel free to find us on social media as Buddies in Bad Times Theatre or @buddiesTO and online on the Buddies in Bad Times theatre website buddiesinbadtimes.com/yep. There you can find out about upcoming episodes, featured guests and links to episode notes and community resources. The Youth Elders Podcast was recorded on the traditional lands of the Mississauga of the credit, the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosonee, and the Huron Wendat. On the next episode of the Youth Elders Podcast, we discuss queer social movements then and now have we really come as far as we think. Tune in next month; until then, be well.