

## ACAF Training Series Glossary of Terms

**Ally:** A person who is not LGBTQ but shows support for LGBTQ people and promotes equality in a variety of ways.

**Androgynous:** A term used to describe someone who identifies and/or presents as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

**Asexual:** A term used to describe a person who does not experience sexual attraction.

**Biphobia:** Prejudice, fear or hatred directed toward bisexual people.

**Bisexual:** A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

**Butch:** Commonly used to refer to masculinity displayed by a female but can also refer to masculinity displayed by a male.

**Cisgender:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with that typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Closeted:** A term used to describe an LGBTQ person who has not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Coming Out:** The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts, and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to disclose that identity to others. The concept is used more in relationship to sexual orientation but can be applied to gender identity - though the process differs significantly between SO and GI.

**Cultural Competence:** The ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Culturally competent organizations should have a defined set of values and principles and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.

**Femme:** A term used to describe someone who exhibits notably feminine traits, most often (but not always) referring to a lesbian, bisexual or queer woman.

**Gay:** A term used to describe a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people of the same gender.

**Gender Binary:** A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.

**Gender Dysphoria:** Describes the distress that a person may experience when perceived as a gender that does not match their gender identity, or from physical characteristics that don't match their gender identity. Many transgender people experience gender dysphoria at some point in their lives, although taking steps to affirm one's gender identity can reduce or eliminate it. In the most recent version of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), Gender Dysphoria is also the formal diagnosis applied to transgender people seeking mental health support for their transition.

**Gender-Expansive:** A term that conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the gender binary system. Sometimes used to describe young people who are comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and don't conform to stereotypes that people hold for their sex.

**Gender Expression:** External appearance of one's gender, usually shown through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

**Gender History:** Information related to a transgender or non-binary person's sex, name and pronouns assigned at birth, as well as aspects of their past social, legal and/or medical transitions.

**Gender Identity:** One's internal sense of being male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

**Gender Role:** This is the set of expectations and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Every culture and community has its own expectations about how men/boys and women/girls should behave, and these expectations often shift over time.

**Gender Non-Conforming:** A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that aligns to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

**Gender Fluid:** Refers to being unconfined by one single gender identity and able to identify with neither, both and/or other gender(s) (in regards to the masculine/feminine gender binary), at different points in time.

**Genderqueer:** Genderqueer people typically reject static categories of gender and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

**Gender Transition:** The process by which some people strive to more closely align their gender identity with their outward appearance. Some people *socially* transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo *medical* transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions. There are also *legal* aspects to transitioning (e.g., changing gender marker on birth certificate).

**Heterosexism:** The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid sexual orientation. Often takes the form of ignoring LGBTQ people. For example: a form that only lists “mother” and “father.”

**Heterosexual:** A term used to describe people whose emotional, romantic or sexual attractions are to people of another gender. Also: straight

**Homophobia:** The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who are attracted to people of the same gender.

**Homosexual:** Outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay people. “Gay” and/or “lesbian” are more commonly accepted terms to describe people who are attracted to members of the same gender.

**Internalized Homophobia:** Negative attitudes that a lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer person may adopt about their own sexual orientation after receiving stigmatizing messages from their culture.

**Intersex:** An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. In some cases, these traits are visible at birth while in others, they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal variations of this type may not be physically apparent at all.

**Lesbian:** A term used to describe a woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted primarily to other women.

**LGBTQ:** An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning.

**Lifestyle:** Inaccurate term that many LGBTQ people find offensive. Avoid using this term because just as there is no one “straight” or “non-LGBTQ” lifestyle, there is no one LGBTQ lifestyle.

**Living Openly:** A state in which LGBTQ people are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or transgender status – where and when it feels appropriate to them.

**Non-Binary:** An adjective referring to any person whose gender identity is neither male nor female.

**Outing:** Exposing someone's LGBTQ identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious community and family relationships.

**Pansexual:** Describes someone who has the potential for sexual attraction to people of any gender.

**Queer:** This term can be used as an umbrella term for "LGBT," to express a rejection of other gender and sexual orientation labels, or to describe sexual attraction to people of more than one gender. Historically "queer" has been used as a negative term for LGBTQ people. Some people still find the term offensive while others have embraced the term. It should be used carefully.

**Questioning:** A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

**Same-Gender Loving:** A term some prefer to use instead of LGBQ to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender. This term is especially common among African Americans.

**Sex:** A category, usually either male or female, assigned based on physiological characteristics including chromosomes, sex hormone levels, and genitalia.

**Sexual Identity:** This is how we perceive and what we call ourselves. Such labels include "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "bi," "queer," "questioning," "heterosexual," "straight," and others. Sexual identity (how we define ourselves) and sexual behavior can be chosen, unlike sexual orientation which cannot.

**Sexual Orientation:** A person's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people.

**Sexual Preference:** A term sometimes used to mean the same thing as "sexual orientation." Many LGBQ people find this term to be offensive because it implies that their sexual orientation is a choice.

**Sexuality:** How one experiences and expresses one's self as a sexual being.

**Transgender:** A term used to describe people whose gender identity does not match expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. A transgender experience does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, trans people may be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc.

**Transphobia:** The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people.

**Transsexual:** A term used to describe people whose gender identity does not conform to their sex assigned at birth and who often seek medical treatment to bring their body and gender identity into alignment. In most cases, the term transgender is more appropriate.