

# **Making Astronomy more LGBTQ-friendly**

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Sexual-Orientation and  
Gender Minorities in  
Astronomy

# Why Bother?

- Science advances fastest when the best scientists are free to apply their intelligence and imagination to the exploration of the universe without limits and without fear. Sometimes, the best scientists are LGBT+.
- Institutions that are viewed as unfriendly to LGBT+ people quickly find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. When LGBT+ scientists leave our departments to work at other institutions, our students, our scholarly communities, and our own research suffer.
- A more inclusive workplace has advantages for all of us: greater flexibility to perform our work, greater support for work/life issues, and greater freedom to be ourselves.

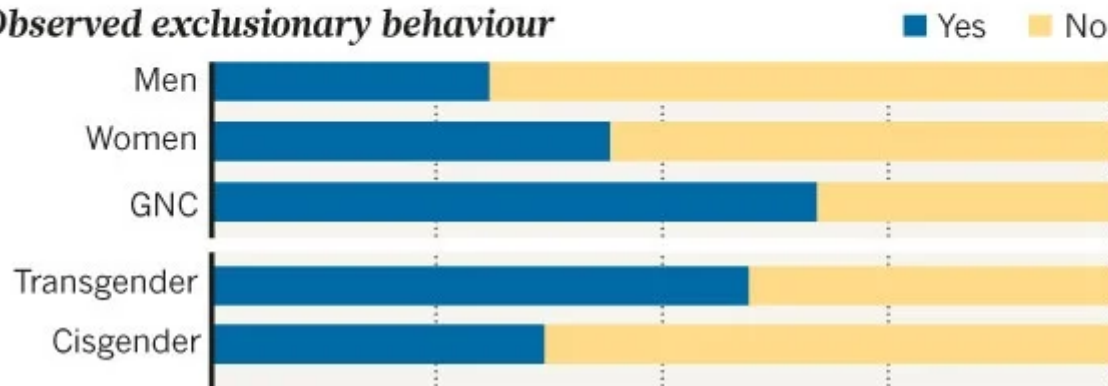


# Why Bother?

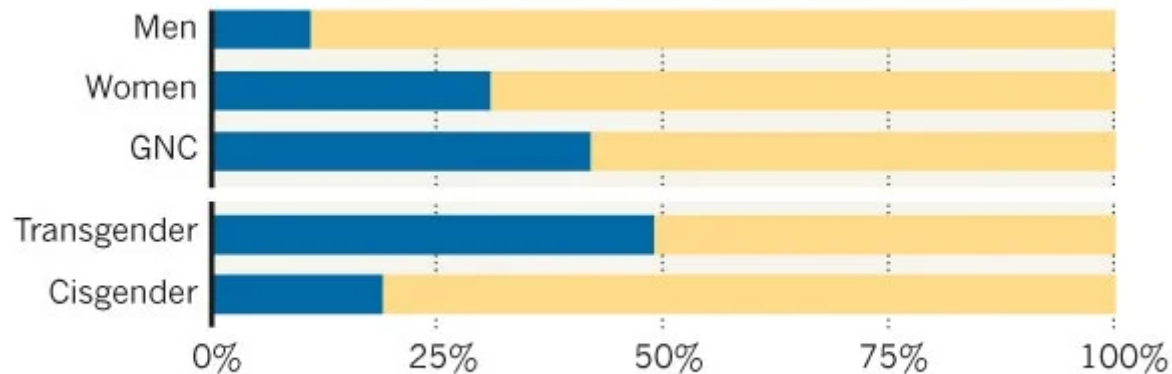
## PHYSICS STRUGGLES WITH INCLUSIVITY

People from sexual or gender minorities (LGBT) continue to face exclusionary behaviour in the physics community.

### *Observed exclusionary behaviour*



### *Experienced exclusionary behaviour*



GNC, gender non-conforming.

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# **What we are doing to make Astronomy more LGBTQ-friendly**

## **Two tracks**

### **Outside**

**Inclusive Astronomy Conference in 2015 including all under-represented groups in the profession: Women, LGBTQ, Racial and Ethnic Minorities, Astronomers with Disabilities**

### **Inside**

**American Astronomical Society SGMA Committee to advise the officers (along with CSWA, CSMA, DWG)**

# Inclusive Astronomy 2015

## An Intersectional Approach

- Different forms of discrimination or oppression intersect for people with multiple marginalized identities.
- Racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, and ableism are often linked and so should solutions be linked
  - e.g. that women of color are faced with the intersection of racism and sexism
  - e.g. benefits packages and policies should specifically include LGBTIQ\* and disabled astronomers
- Presentations, recommendations came from research, personal experiences of attendees, and previous sets of recommendations

# The Nashville Recommendations

## **Four Themes:**

- Removing Barriers to Access
- Creating Inclusive Climates
- Improving Inclusion and Access to Policy, Power, and Leadership
- Establishing a Community of Inclusive Practice

## **Three timescales of implementation:**

- Short term: 1 - 3 years
- Medium term: 3 - 5 years
- Long term: > 5 years

# Barriers to Access

## Summary

- Make graduate admissions fair.
- Eliminate barriers in pre-/early-college access to astronomy.
- Eliminate practices in hiring and promotion that are discriminatory.
- Ensure that astronomical institutions, facilities and data are accessible to all.

# Creating Inclusive Climates

## Summary

- Provide a welcoming, inclusive and healthy climate:
  - End harassment
  - Ensure access to quality, affordable health care
  - Work-life balance and welcoming environment
- Enact policies that are friendly to all families.
- Provide effective mentoring and networking opportunities.
- Adopt teaching practices that support marginalized students.



# Inclusive Practice

## Summary

- Recognize societal boundary conditions and large-scale power imbalances.
- Respect the rights and cultural values of Native and indigenous peoples when developing astronomical facilities.
- Practice active allyship.
- Learn and use best practices for discussing racism and its intersections.
- Implement accountability procedures.

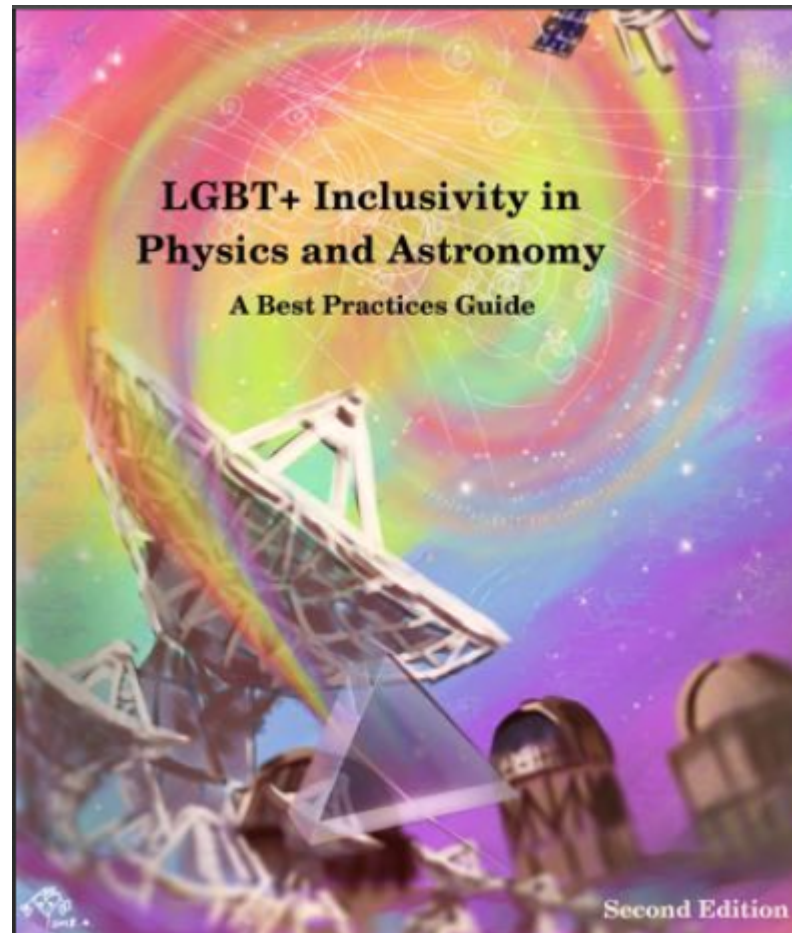


Sexual-Orientation and  
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# **LGBT+ Inclusivity in Physics and Astronomy: A Best Practices Guide (2017)**

LGBT+ Physicists ([lgbtphysicists.org](http://lgbtphysicists.org))

AAS Committee on Sexual-Orientation and Gender Minorities in Astronomy



CfA EIJC July 27, 2020



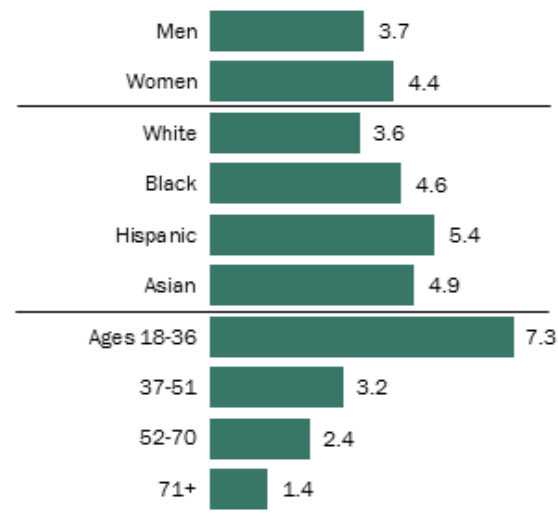
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# Improving Departmental Climate Today

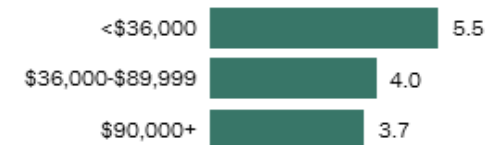
1. Use gender-neutral and inclusive language
2. Do not tolerate offensive language
3. Include everyone in social events
4. Invite LGBT+ speakers to campus
5. Pay attention to course climate
6. Discuss climate with faculty
7. Discuss climate with advisees

## Older Americans much less likely to identify as LGBT

*% of each group identifying as LGBT*



*Annual household income*



Note: Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Gallup Daily tracking survey, 2016.

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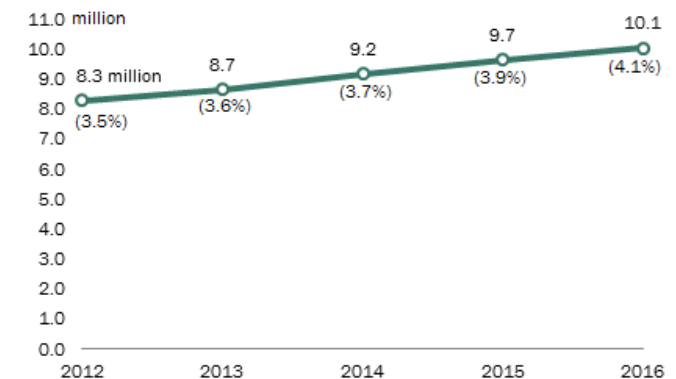
# Improving Departmental Climate Tomorrow

8. Increase LGBT+ visibility within the department
9. Recognize and award significant achievements
10. Include LGBT+ people in positions of power
11. Create safe spaces within the department
12. Encourage faculty and staff to receive diversity training
13. Actively recruit LGBT+ students
14. Increase networking opportunities
15. Consider LGBT+ persons when developing family-friendly policies

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## The number of Americans identifying as LGBT is rising

*Number (and %) of U.S. adults identifying as LGBT*



Source: Gallup Daily tracking survey.

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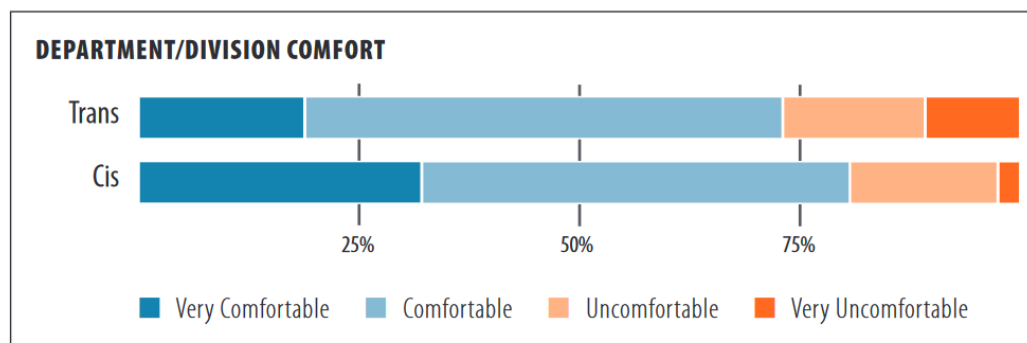
# Recruitment and Personnel Issues

16. Include non-discrimination statements in job announcements
17. Allow name changes on departmental records

## Advocacy at the Institutional Level

18. Become an advocate
19. Identify your LGBT+ students
20. Address the needs of trans folk

FIG 7. Climate for trans and cis respondents. Cis respondents include all those who did not identify as trans; it should be emphasized that most of these cis individuals identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer.





## 20. Address the needs of trans folk

- **Remove the transgender exclusion from your institution’s health plan.**  
Many health plans exclude “procedures related to being transgender.” This exclusion has been applied to both medical services related to the transitioning process and unrelated problems, such as the flu or a broken arm. Massachusetts health plans are required to cover trans health care, and government plans do, too, but this is not as true everywhere, both in the US and elsewhere.
- **Express a clear policy that each person may use any restroom appropriate to their gender identity.**
- **Designate some restrooms as all-gender.**  
Usually, all-gender restrooms are single-stall; new ones may be added in a building renovation or existing ones may be re-labeled with an inclusive sign. These restrooms provide critical infrastructure for people with disabilities, family needs, and people with privacy or medical concerns.



## 20. Address the needs of trans folk

- **Help trans students deal with Selective Service**

People who were assigned male at birth are required to register with the Selective Service System within thirty days of their eighteenth birthday. People who were assigned female at birth are not required to register regardless of their current gender or transition status. Trans students may thus have difficulty providing proof of registration.

- **Help them find peer support**

Most campuses have LGBT organizations which welcome students and staff

Most cities have transgender support organizations which can be very helpful.

**Transtronomers** is a small-but-totally-awesome community of trans astro folks on Facebook which provides an open discussion forum and mutual support for astronomers who happen to be transgender. As this is a secret group, membership and in-group activity is confidential, and new members have to be recommended by a current member.



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## Advising the AAS Council

**After I wrote our Women in Astronomy blog post in January, 2017 entitled [Thinking About Boycotts](#)”, SGMA drafted this safe meeting policy in March:**

**In the absence of a nationwide anti-discrimination law covering sexual orientation and gender expression, it is the policy of the AAS to locate its meetings in cities where all LGBTQIA attendees are welcomed and accommodated. If laws change after contracts are signed, the AAS will do everything that it can to enable those discriminated against to participate fully in the conference.**



# Thoughts for Discussion:

## ROLE PLAY #1

### Scene:

You are a resident assistant and one day Bo comes to you in tears. Bo is rooming with the same roommate she had last year because they used to get along so well. This fall though, Bo's roommate told her that she is a lesbian. Bo didn't think that this would be a problem or change anything about their friendship, but now her roommate has been having her partner stay over on the weekends. Bo feels like their relationship has changed and doesn't understand why her roommate has to "throw her sexuality in my face." Bo is extremely uncomfortable with the situation and even talks about always making sure to change clothes in a locked bathroom so that her roommate doesn't hit on her. Bo wants you to move her into a new housing unit.

# Thoughts for Discussion:

## ROLE PLAY #2

### Scene:

You are a well-liked faculty member on campus; you often build strong relationships with your students. One day, during your office hours, a student you are close to comes to visit, Alex. Alex comes to say goodbye because he has withdrawn from his classes. When you ask why, Alex tells you that he came out to his parents over the weekend and now they are refusing to pay his tuition. Alex plans on leaving school and getting a job in the area since his parents also refuse to let him move back home.

# Thoughts for Discussion:

## **QUESTION #1**

What are the most important steps for you personally to take as an educator or an ally to help protect LGBTQI people and other marginalized communities?

## **QUESTION #2:**

How would you react if one of your closest colleagues revealed themselves to be transgender and about to transition to a different gender?

## **QUESTION #3:**

How would you react if one of your colleagues or students announced that they were non-binary and no longer wished to be thought of or referred to in a gendered way?

# LGBTQI+ in Science Resources

- “5 key findings about LGBT Americans”,  
by Anna Brown, June 13, 2017, Pew Research Center  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/13/5-key-findings-about-lgbt-americans/>
- “A Survey of LGBT Americans”, Pew Research Center, June 13, 2013  
<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans/>
- “LGBT Data & Demographics”, UCLA School of Law Williams Institute  
<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#density>
- “LGBT Climate in Physics: Building an Inclusive Community”  
American Physical Society, March 2016.  
<https://www.aps.org/programs/lgbt/upload/LGBTClimateinPhysicsReport.pdf>
- “LGBT Physicists Face Discrimination, Exclusion, Intimidation”,  
by Elizabeth Gibney, Nature, March 22, 2016  
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/lgbt-physicists-face-discrimination-exclusion-intimidation/>
- “LGBT+ Inclusivity in Physics and Astronomy Best Practices Guide”,  
LGBT+ Physicists and The AAS Committee for Sexual and Gender Minorities in Astronomy  
[https://aas.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/LGBTInclusivityPhysicsAstronomy-BestPracticesGuide2ndEdn\\_small.pdf](https://aas.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/LGBTInclusivityPhysicsAstronomy-BestPracticesGuide2ndEdn_small.pdf)
- Committee for Sexual-Orientation & Gender Minorities in Astronomy (SGMA)  
<https://aas.org/comms/sgma/news>
- National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals.  
<https://www.noglstp.org/>

# More Resources

- “Inclusive Astronomy 2015 The Nashville Recommendations”,  
[https://tiki.aas.org/tiki-index.php?page=Inclusive\\_Astronomy\\_The\\_Nashville\\_Recommendations](https://tiki.aas.org/tiki-index.php?page=Inclusive_Astronomy_The_Nashville_Recommendations)
- Inclusive Astronomy 2015: Women in Astronomy blog post  
<https://womeninastronomy.blogspot.com/2016/07/the-nashville-recommendations-for.html>
- “Publishers: let transgender scholars correct their names”,  
Nature, July 22, 2020  
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02145-3>
- NPR's Youth Health podcast on the mental health of LGBTQI youth (~5 min)  
<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/07/24/893869207/thoughts-of-suicide-other-mental-health-struggles-still-high-for-lgbtq-youth>