

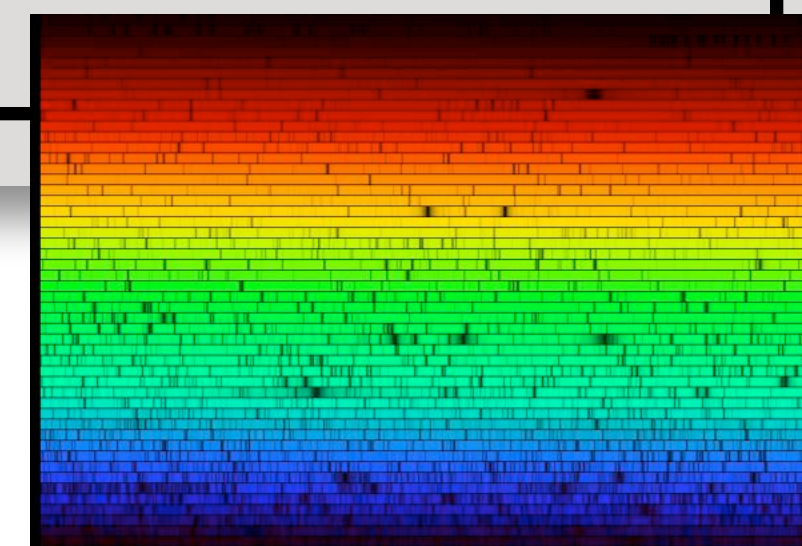
Recent Advances for LGBT Astronomers in the United States

Van Dixon (STScI), Jane Rigby (NASA Goddard), Rebecca Oppenheimer (AMNH), and Jessica Mink (SAO)

Abstract: The legal environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) astronomers in the United States has changed dramatically in recent years. In 2013, the federal government began to recognize same-sex marriages. In 2014, the Department of Justice extended the employment-discrimination protections of Title VII to transgender people, and New York extended access to medical care. Two months ago, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case that could establish nationwide marriage equality. In this poster, we discuss these advances and their implications for the personal and professional lives of LGBT astronomers across the United States.



On the steps of the United States Supreme



WORKING GROUP ON LGBTIQ EQUALITY (WGLE)

The American Astronomical Society (AAS) Working Group on LGBTIQ Equality (WGLE, pronounced "wiggly") is tasked with promoting equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) individuals within the astronomical profession. WGLE provides mentoring and networking for LGBTIQ astronomers, and provides resources to support LGBTIQ inclusion and equality within science.

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Marriage Equality and the End of DOMA



Astronomer Dr. Stefano Meschiarri (right) with his husband Daniel (left), on their wedding day in summer 2013.

In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which had barred the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages, was unconstitutional. This decision particularly affects astronomers, since astronomers in the U.S. are more likely than the general population to be foreign nationals, to have a foreign-born spouse, or to work for the federal government. The court is currently deciding a case that could extend marriage equality to all fifty states.

Stefano's Story

My immigration status was a source of worry, and contributed to the stress of my Ph.D. research! Uncertainty about my future has been a lingering source of worry for me and my husband. After having been together for 8 years, Daniel and I were married in California a few

weeks after the Supreme Court's DOMA decision. The DOMA decision will allow me to apply for a green card. It makes us happier to think that we can finally plan for the long term together.



Astronomer Dr. Scott Gaudi (right) with his partner Martin.

Scott's Story

Because of DOMA, my partner Martin's health insurance benefits were federally taxable income, significantly raising my taxes. The demise of DOMA has significantly changed this situation: we will no longer have to pay these extra federal taxes, provided

Martin and I are married. However, Martin and I are still not able to get married legally in Ohio.

Jane's Story

When I became a NASA employee, my benefits were worse than my co-workers: my moving allowance didn't cover my family, I couldn't get health insurance for my wife, and she wouldn't get survivor payments if I died. When DOMA fell, a benefits counselor called to sign me up for now-equal benefits. Marriage equality at the state level meant that it was no harder for us to adopt a child than a straight couple; federal marriage recognition means that our whole family is now on one



Astronomer Dr. Jane Rigby (right) with her wife Dr. Andrea Leistra and their baby, at the Supreme Court after DOMA was struck down.

Extending Transgender Rights

The term *transgender* is most often used to describe those who feel comfortable in a gender other than the one that they were assigned at birth. Many use the shorthand *trans*. Some trans people change their appearance to feel more comfortable with their bodies; others do not. If someone has started living in their revised gender, they may or may not continue to identify as trans.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate in the employment of an individual "because of such individual's... sex." In 2014, the Attorney General directed the U.S. Department of Justice to take the position in litigation that the protection of Title VII extends to claims of discrimination based on an individual's gender identity, including transgender status. In July 2014, President Obama signed an executive order protecting transgender federal workers from discrimination and prohibiting anti-LGBT discrimination by employers that work for the federal government as contractors or subcontractors. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education in rulings on sexual violence and single-sex classes and sports extended Title IX, a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded education programs and activities explicitly to transgender students.

Because the U.S. does not provide universal health care, most Americans obtain health insurance through their employers. In December of 2014, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that private insurance companies would be required to cover some medically-necessary care for transgender people in the state of New York, making it the ninth state to require this coverage. In June 2014, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management directed insurance carriers to drop exclusions of medically appropriate services, drugs, and supplies regarding a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder / Gender Dysphoria from their policies covering federal employees.

The right to access medical care remains problematic. "Nearly 1 in 5 trans people have been refused care, more than 1 in 4 have been harassed, and just as many have avoided seeking care when sick or injured out of fear of discrimination," according to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. In March 2015, a federal court ruled that Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act prohibits discrimination against a patient based on their gender identity.



Only 17 states have explicit protections against discrimination based on gender identity in public accommodations. Despite the fact that Jessica's and Rebecca's states do not, the cities where they live and work do, so they can drink in peace, and the bartender is willing to take their picture doing it.