

# LGBT Climate in Physics

BUILDING AN  
INCLUSIVE  
COMMUNITY



AMERICAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY

## APS Ad-Hoc Committee on LGBT Issues

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# A personal note

## APS NEWS

MARCH 1994

THE AMERICAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY

VOLUME 3, NO 3

### APS Council Issues Statement in Response to Colorado

The APS Council approved a statement on protection of its members against discrimination at its November meeting, resolving not to hold Society-sponsored meetings in any state or locality that discriminates or prohibits protection from discrimination of any group. Drafted in response to a state constitutional amendment in Colorado that would deny homosexuals legal protection against discrimination, the statement was endorsed by the APS Executive Board last September and forwarded to Council for final approval.

court-ordered injunction against implementation of the Colorado constitutional amendment remains effective.

"It is tempting to say that this is not an issue for the APS, but we do have homosexual members whose safety and concerns must be taken into account," said Stephen Adler (Institute for Advanced Study), a member last year of the APS Panel on Public Affairs, which drafted the statement in tandem with the Committee on the International Freedom of Scientists. "By scheduling meetings in Colorado, we would

In November of 1992, a majority of voters in Colorado ratified a ballot proposition amending Article II of the State Constitution to prohibit the adoption or enforcement of any law entitling homosexual, lesbian and bisexual persons to minority status or protection from discrimination. Implementation of the amendment was blocked by the Colorado courts, but the test of the amendment's constitutionality is likely to reach the United States Supreme Court.

According to Adler, the amendment

and the American Association for the Advancement of Science canceled its plans to hold its 1999 annual meeting in Denver. The APS statement will be distributed to many of these societies, as well as such organizations as the Colorado Legal Initiatives Project.

The text of the APS statement follows.

*The elected Council of The American Physical Society affirms the commitment of the Society to the protection of the rights of all scientists, including freedom from discrimination based on*

# A personal note

## OPINION

### APS VIEWS

#### Council's Threatened Boycott over Homosexuality Must Be Avoided

The March issue reports Council's November resolution threatening an APS boycott of Colorado and other localities over the homosexual issue. Several APS members resigned immediately upon learning of this.

#### Council Statement Imposes Arbitrary Political Agenda

I am appalled that according to the March 1994 issue of the *APS NEWS*, the APS Council approved a ban on holding meetings in Colorado because of a civil law in that state that does not

#### Physics Community Should Support Council's Action

I am a second-year graduate student at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Today I picked up my copy of the June *APS NEWS* expecting to read about various goings-on in the physics community. I did not expect to find myself compared repeatedly to alco-

holics, pedophiles, and practitioners of bestiality and ritual murder. I had always thought that my life would have a private sphere, and that within the

purely genetic origin, there will continue to be citizens who refuse to classify gays and lesbians as a minority group. To them, the analogy is closer to alcoholism. And **alcoholics**, even within our membership, are not protected from "discrimination" by law if they appear intoxicated in public.

als. Such behavior does not have constitutional protection. What experiment does one perform to determine a person's sexual orientation? How about determining the person's physical, social, financial, artistic, **pedophilic**, or **bestial orientation**? Maybe the subject changed his orientation this morning at 9:46 A.M. If these measurements can-

### Letters *(continued from page 4)*

context of the physics community I would be judged on the merit of my worth and not have to contend with attacks on the most intimate aspects of my life. Now, however, I feel I have no choice but to talk frankly with the members of my professional community in order to explain why I find the remarks made by my colleagues, Robert Amme, Anthony DiStefano and James Felten, both misguided and offensive, and urge the physics community to join with me in supporting the APS Council's decision not to hold conferences in places where I and others like me are obviously unwelcome.

# A personal note

I hope this letter serves to open some people's eyes to what is at stake for the targets of the bigotry expressed in the June issue. And I hope this letter does not interfere with my aspirations in physics, or make me a target for those around me who lack the courage to try to understand me.

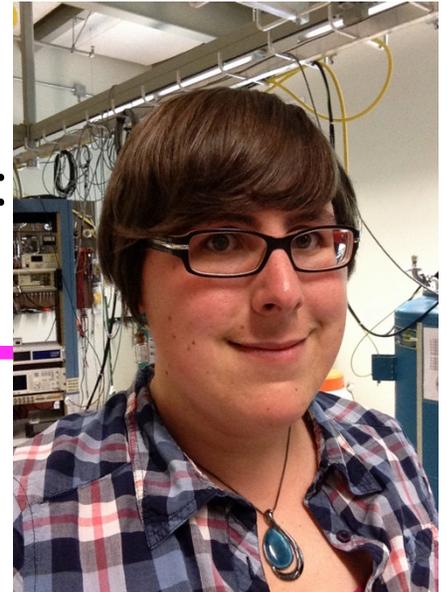
Michael Falk

*Santa Barbara, California*

# lgbt+physicists

## lgbtphysicists.org

- Independent organization arose from work by Elena Long to oppose unequal employment protections in the physics workplace
- Works on employment discrimination, professional networking, mentoring opportunities, lack of access to health care, and a lack of statistics.
- Created "Supporting LGBT+ Physicists and Astronomers: Best Practices for Academic Departments"



700 nm

**lgbt+physicists**

About

About

Events

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OutList

**Mission Statement**

LGBT+ Physicists publicly commit ourselves to building a scientific environment that is free from all forms of prejudice and discrimination. We commit ourselves to ensuring that this basic human right is upheld for members of our community who are also sexual minorities and/or gender minorities.

# 2012 APS March Meeting (Boston)

- Session on "Gender and Sexual Diversity Issues in Physics"
- Four invited talks and a panel discussion.
- Survey of 43 of the approximately 120 participants.
- Results reported in arXiv:1206.4112v1  
Ackerman, Atherton, Deconinck, Falk, Garmon, Henry and Long,  
"Gender and Sexual Diversity Issues in Physics: The Audience Speaks"

# Charge to APS Ad-Hoc Committee on LGBT Issues

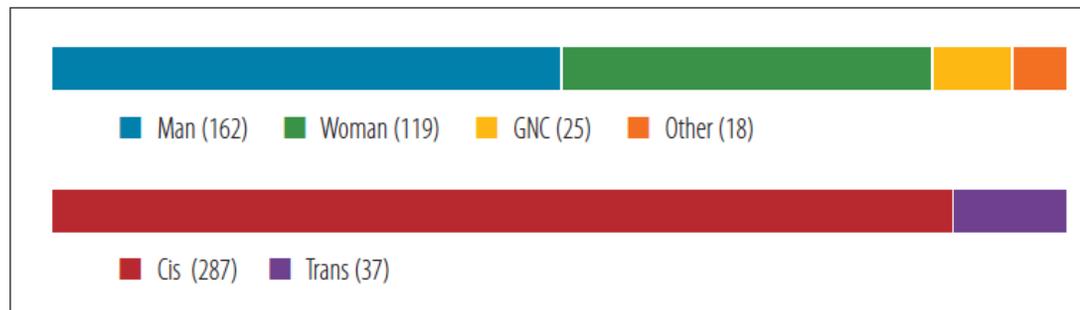
*"...advise the APS on the current status of LGBT issues in physics, provide recommendations for greater inclusion, and engage physicists in laying the foundation for a more inclusive physics community."*



*Kate Kirby,  
Executive Officer of the APS*

# Information Gathering

- **Focus Groups at APS Meetings**
  - 2014 and 2015 at both March and April Meetings
- **Climate Survey of LGBT Physicists (May-June 2015)**
  - Surveyed 324 individuals through snowball sampling.
  - Follow up interviews with 5 survey participants.

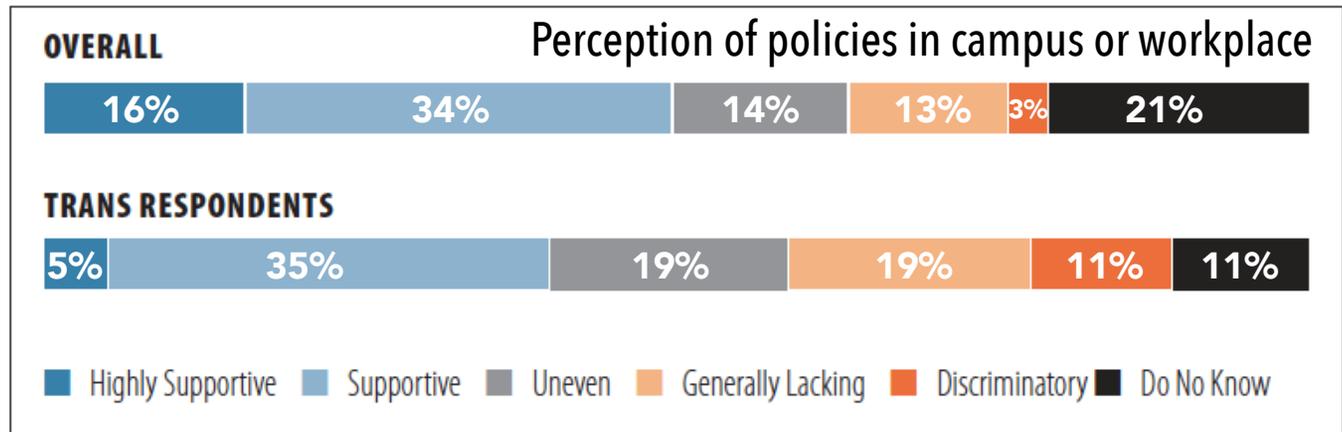


- **APS Membership Survey Question (October 2015)**
  - 2,596 responses of which 2.5% identified as LGBT and 14% preferred not to provide this information.
  - Notably, 16.3% of those 18-25 identified as LGBT.

# Background and Findings 1

## LGBT physicists have faced uneven protection and support from legislation and policies.

Protest against Section 377 in India that criminalizes gay and lesbian sexual relations



U.S.

### South Dakota Bill on Transgender Students' Bathroom Access Draws Ire

By MITCH SMITH FEB. 25, 2016

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SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — For Thomas Lewis, a high school senior who plays trumpet in the marching band and works evenings at a grocery store, South Dakota's contentious debate over transgender rights is personal.

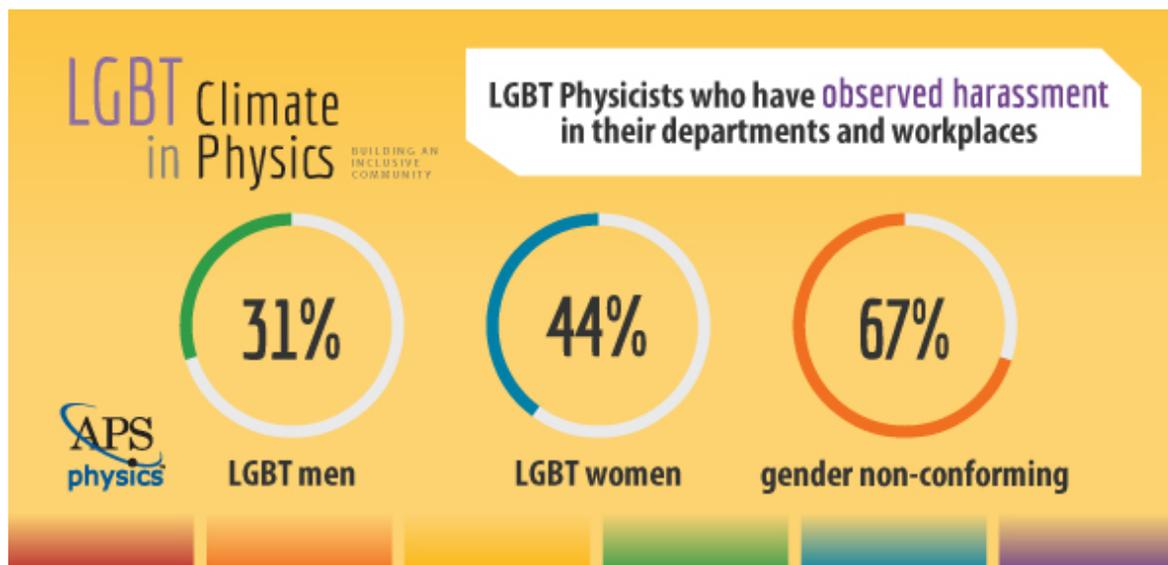
Mr. Lewis, 18, who came out as transgender last year, has been



Thomas Lewis, 18, a transgender man. in

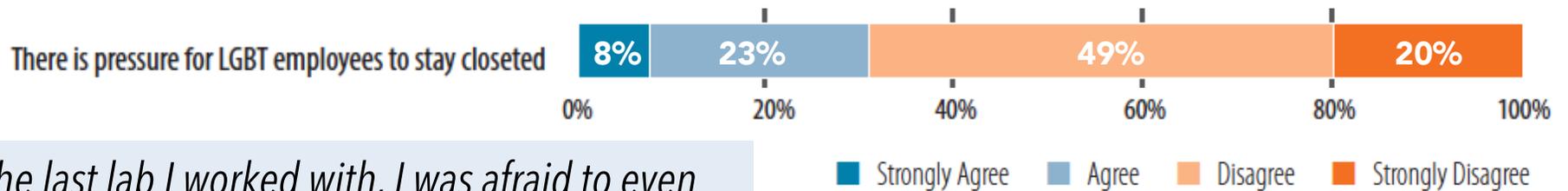
# Background and Findings 2

The overall climate experienced by LGBT physicists was highly variable.



# Background and Findings 3

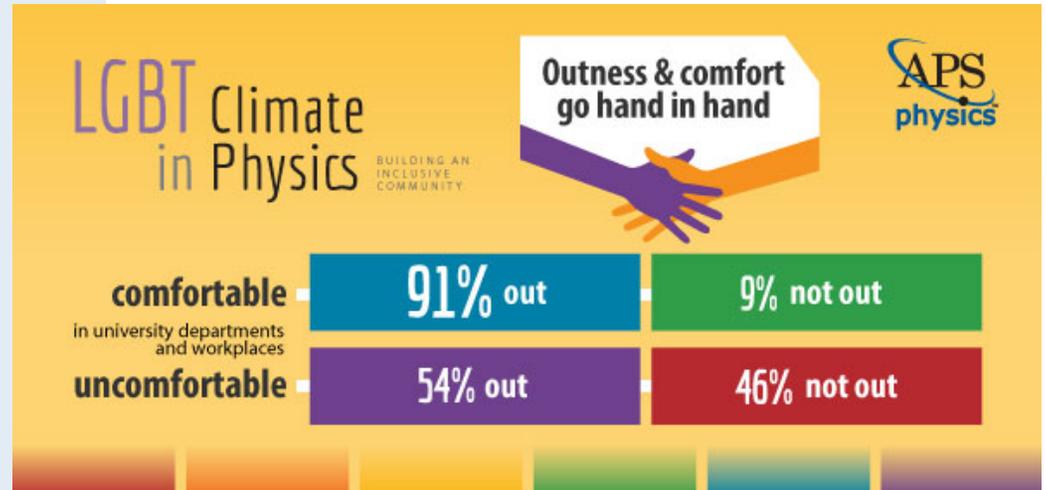
## In many physics environments, social norms establish expectations of closeted behavior.



*"In the last lab I worked with, I was afraid to even mention that I might be gay. They were all very traditional sort of people."*

*"Because I am in the closet about my identity, and I pass just fine as a result, I am actually quite comfortable in these areas. What people don't know can't hurt me!"*

*"I don't know of any other 'out' physics grad students. I know that a lot of them are very conservative. And I feel like they respect me right now. But I don't know that they would respect me if I came out to them."*



## Background and Findings 4

### Isolation was a common theme for many LGBT physicists.

*"It's 'don't ask don't tell,' [which leads to a] hard time networking because [my] mostly male colleagues [are] uncomfortable to invite [a] gay couple for outings etc. It's a subtle form of discrimination. Inability to network makes it difficult to join group grant proposals."*

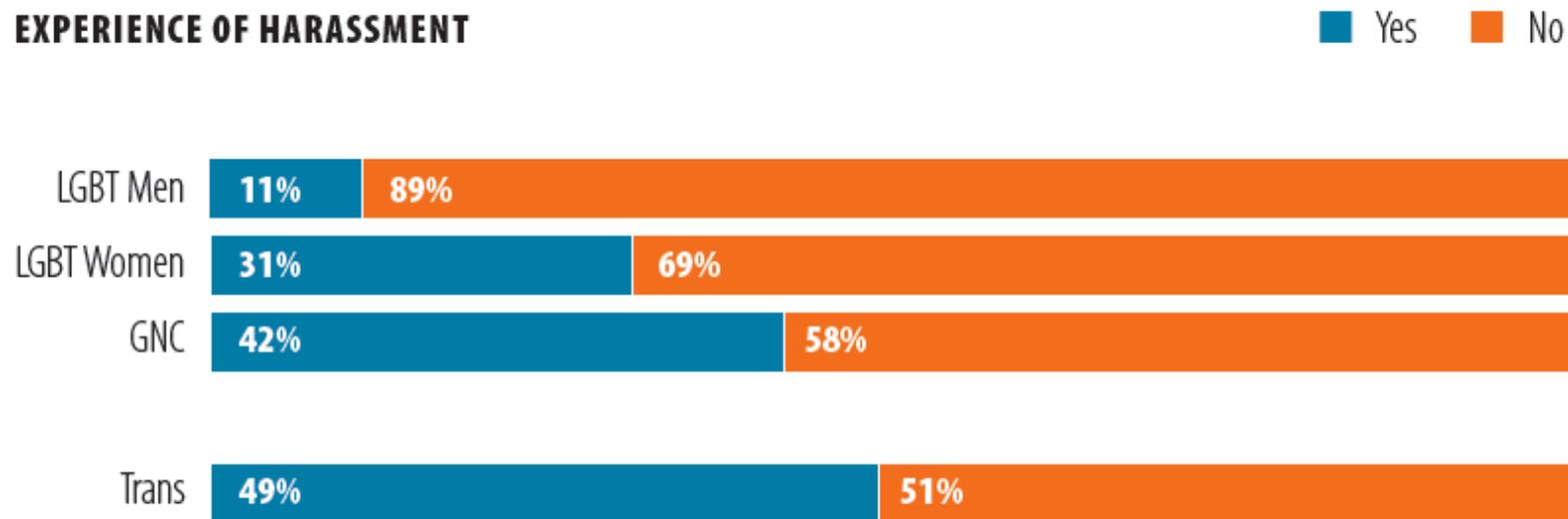
*"I am not really out at work because I don't feel comfortable outing myself in the environment. There are no other out LGBT+ individuals in my department."*

# Background and Findings 5

## A significant fraction of LGBT physicists have experienced or observed exclusionary behavior.

Experience of exclusionary behavior broken down by gender and separately for trans respondents.

### EXPERIENCE OF HARASSMENT



LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender as well as other sexual and gender minorities

GNC = gender-nonconforming

## Background and Findings 6

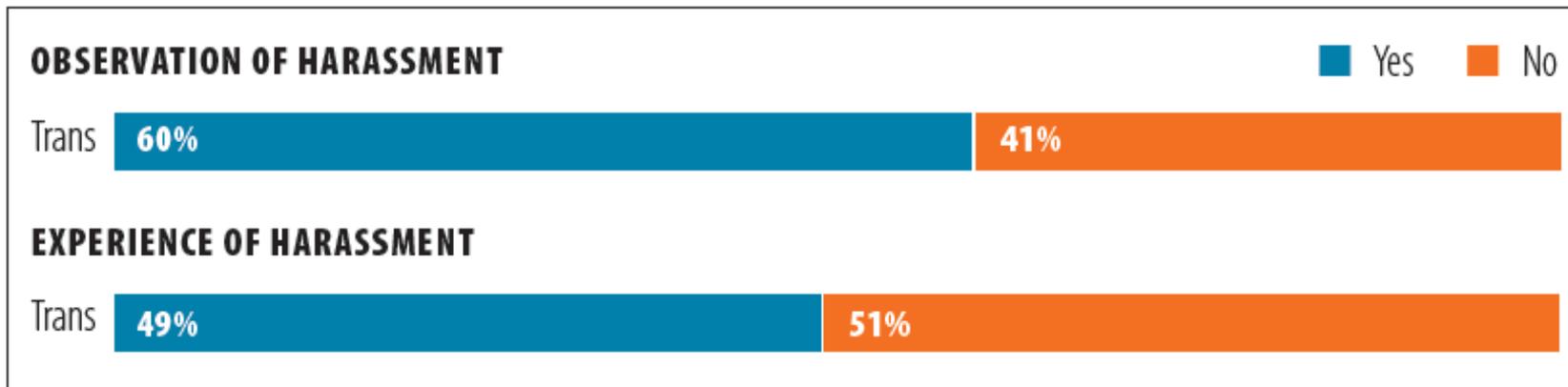
### **LGBT physicists with additional marginalized identities faced greater levels of discrimination.**

*“Things I have personally experienced within my physics department: Sexual harassment, sexist jokes directed at me (e.g. being told that I would not be using experimental apparatus in a lab except for personal grooming), sexist assumptions directed at me (e.g. being told that I only received the position due to my gender), sexualization and tokenization of my orientation (e.g. male physicists showing pictures of conventionally attractive females to me, because they think that ‘lesbians are hot’).”*

*“It is my impression that faculty are intolerant and silent bystanders towards LGBTQ students. Upon hearing comments made by faculty I know there are negative attitudes and stereotypes towards LGBTQ people and people of color.”*

## Background and Findings 7

### Transgender and gender-nonconforming physicists encountered the most hostile environments



*"I deal with not having my choice of pronoun respected every day. Sometimes these situations affect me deeply on an emotional level, and affect my ability to work for several hours."*

*"I was harassed by a professor while going into the bathroom like the first week that I was on campus."*

## Background and Findings 8

**Many LGBT physicists are at risk for leaving their workplace or school.**

**36%**

**Considered leaving their workplace or school in the prior year**



*"Just you not being able to figure me out doesn't really need to qualify whether I can be educated here.."*

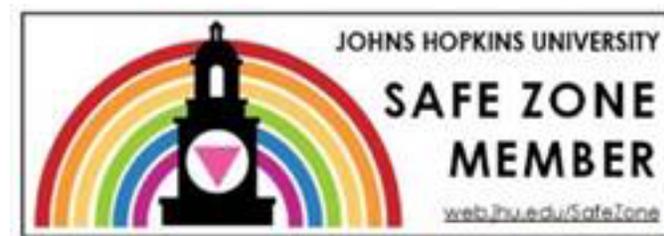
*"... And the outlook for me in terms of getting a Ph.D., which is what I'm kind of debating whether or not I want to do, is really contingent upon whether or not I have the right type of support system around me to be able to facilitate my success."*

## Background and Findings 9

### LGBT physicists report trouble identifying allies to help mitigate isolation, exclusion or marginalization.



*"I've identified two professors at [University] who are okay working with queer, LGBTQ people and one of them was actually my thesis advisor. And the reason I was able to identify him was because he had a little rainbow sticker on his window. And I would kind of see some of these... and that was kind of a cue for me to be a little more comfortable around him in terms of just talking about my family life or just opening up in general..."*



## Recommendation 1

### Ensure a safe and welcoming environment at APS meetings.

- APS should establish written best practices for APS meetings that support inclusion and attend to issues particular to LGBT physicists for dissemination to conference organizing committees and meetings staff.
- APS should implement the Code of Conduct with thorough and careful regard to informing members and responding to reports of infractions.



## Recommendation 2

### Address the need to systematically accommodate name changes in publication records.

- APS should work to improve electronic journal records and publication procedures so that transgender physicists who change their names will have their full publication records visible and, at the same time, will not be outed by their publication record. This issue is also of significance to those who experience a name change due to changing marital status or other reasons.

**Publication 1:** **Joshua Smith**

**Publication 2:** **Joshua Smith**

**Publication 3:** **Joshua Smith**

**Publication 4:** **Rebecca Smith**

**Publication 5:** **Rebecca Smith**

**Publication 6:** **Rebecca Smith**

## Recommendation 3

### **Develop advocacy efforts that support LGBT equity and inclusion.**

- APS should issue a statement on the inclusion and fair treatment of LGBT people in physics that supports workplace non-discrimination policies and legislation, among other actions.
- APS should update existing APS policies and statements to be inclusive of LGBT physicists.
- APS should advocate in the international physics community for the inclusion and fair treatment of LGBT people.
- APS should lobby federal funding agencies to include LGBT demographics in STEM education and workforce surveys and to acknowledge a pressing need to address climate issues for LGBT people in STEM fields.

## Recommendation 4

### Promote LGBT-inclusive practices in academia, national labs, and industry.

- APS should publicize, disseminate, and encourage the use of the Best Practices Guide developed by lgbt+physicists.



- APS should develop a training program on inclusive workplace and mentorship practices for physicists in academia, national labs, and industry that incorporates the needs of LGBT physicists and aims at the recruiting of active allies.

- APS should provide physics departments and national labs with feedback on LGBT inclusion as part of the site visit program organized by CSWP and COM.

# Recommendation 5

## Implement LGBT-inclusive mentoring programs.

- APS should establish written best practices for mentoring programs to be inclusive of LGBT physicists, disseminate these to program leaders, and discuss their implementation.

- APS should create a professional network of LGBT mentors and mentees. In addition APS should sponsor LGBT networking events that support the development of mentoring relationships.



## Recommendation 6

# Support the establishment of a Forum on Diversity and Inclusion.

- APS should support the establishment of a new APS Forum that works to build a more inclusive, diverse and equitable society for all physicists, including those who identify as LGBT, women, racial or ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and others.

## APS Forum on Diversity and Inclusion

POC Physicists

Women Physicists

LGBT Physicists

Physicists with  
disabilities

Full report at: [go.aps.org/lgbtphysics](http://go.aps.org/lgbtphysics)

Diversity Networking Reception

Weds, March 16, 7-8:30pm

Hilton Peale Room

LGBTQ Physicist Meetup

Weds, March 16, 8:45pm

Flavor, 15 East Center Street

# LGBT Climate in Physics

BUILDING AN  
INCLUSIVE  
COMMUNITY

