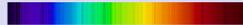




# LGBT Workplace Issues for Astronomers

L. Kay (Barnard College)

with contributions from the GLBTQastro discussion group



ABSTRACT: While state and federal laws offer protection against discrimination on the basis of sex, there are no federal laws to protect lesbian women from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Sexual minority astronomers (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender; LGBT) can face additional challenges at school and work. Diversity and tolerance in the workplace benefits everyone.

## The Issues:

### LGBT Students on many campuses report experiences of harassment<sup>1</sup>

- ★ Including acts of intolerance, fear for their physical safety, or concealment of their sexual orientation/gender identity to avoid intimidation
- ★ Undergraduate students are the most likely to have experienced harassment; both faculty and students say they have concealed to avoid discrimination
- ★ Lack of visible LGBT mentors affects students, postdocs, and junior faculty especially
- ★ Multiple issues for people who are members of multiple minorities

### Federal Equal Employment Opportunity laws and regulations do not provide protection for LGBT people

- ★ Cities, counties, and states may or may not have statutes to protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity or gender expression
- ★ There is wide variation in how states and insurance plans handle legal and medical issues for transgender people<sup>4</sup>

### U.S. Federal law does not acknowledge same-sex partners as family

- ★ People with legal same-sex marriages from other countries or from U. S. states are not considered married by the Federal Government
  - ✦ Govt employees do not get any benefits for partners, including health care & pension benefits
  - ✦ Even people whose institutions offer some domestic partner benefits are not eligible for the federal Family Medical Leave Act to care for sick partners, cannot sponsor their partner for working Visas or immigration, must pay additional taxes on healthcare benefits etc.
  - ✦ State DOMA (defense of marriage act) laws have outlawed Domestic Partner benefits at some public institutions

➡ Astronomers who change schools or institutions may experience significant differences in their legal and marital status

## Some Progress:

### In Industry

- ★ Over half of the Fortune 500 companies offer domestic partner benefits, 95% include sexual orientation in their EEO policy, and ~40% include gender identity<sup>3</sup>

### In Federal Government

- ★ Nondiscrimination statements and more tolerance on security clearance issues

### In Academia

- ★ In a self-reported database, over 550 colleges offer protection against discrimination, including 96 which include gender identity or expression, and >300 provide healthcare benefits to same-sex domestic partners
- ★ Other institutions have non-discrimination clauses in admissions and housing, and offer benefits such as gym and library cards, reduced tuition for partners, inclusive family leave policies, and partner health insurance
- ★ Successful strategies include researching options, collecting data and from other similar institutions, and advocating for a 'plus one' policy which can include an elderly parent, unemployed sibling, or domestic partner.<sup>2</sup>
- ★ More LGBT scientists are out and writing about their issues in science journals.<sup>3,4</sup> (Eg., transgender Stanford neurobiologist Barres' paper on Gender and Science and his earlier experiences as Barbara compared to how he is treated now as Ben.<sup>5</sup>)

## What YOU can do:

- ★ Add inclusive statements to recruitment ads and department websites. Think about whether your Dept is a safe space for LGBT people.
- ★ When recruiting, be prepared to answer questions about workplace climate, partner benefits, etc. (Or at least know who to send people to for answers).
- ★ If you lose existing staff or prospective students or employees over LGBT issues, (especially if they take grant money with them!), notify your top administrators
- ★ Educate yourself about the effects of state and federal DOMA laws.
- ★ If this topic makes you uncomfortable, ask yourself why. It wasn't all that long ago when it was OK for a scientist to say he was personally uncomfortable working with women, or that allowing women at Observatories would be 'too complicated'. Advancing diversity in the workplace should be about everyone.

### Acknowledgments:

- ★ Thanks to the members of the GLBTQastro discussion group for suggestions for this poster.
- ★ Hats off to gay rights pioneer Franklin Kameny, a WWII vet & Harvard Astronomy PhD, who was fired in 1957 from his job as an astronomer in the Army map service for being gay. He took his federal lawsuit as far as the Supreme Court, co-founded one of the first gay rights organizations in the US, and challenged the 'sloppy sleazy science' behind psychiatry's assumption of the psychopathology of homosexuality - back in the 1960s! He received a formal apology on behalf of the US government in June 2009<sup>7</sup>.
- ★ Let us also acknowledge Denice Denton, an invited speaker at the 2003 meetings of the AAS/CSWA in Seattle and Women in Astronomy in Pasadena. She spoke of her work to develop programs to enhance equal opportunity for women in science and engineering. Denice became the first openly gay person to serve as a Chancellor in the UC system in 2005. Her death in 2006 led to much discussion about homophobia in academia, the media, and society<sup>8</sup>.

### References:

- 1) Rankin, Susan R. (2003). *Campus Climate for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People: A National Perspective*. Policy Institute of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force [ <http://bit.ly/1WSQ3E> ]
- 2) Messinger, Lori. (2009). "Creating LGBTQ-Friendly Campuses". *Academe Online* [ <http://bit.ly/3cjQas> ]
- 3) Kurzwell, Jenny. (5 Dec. 2008). "Shattering the Glass Closet". *SCIENCE Career* [ <http://bit.ly/4i55OA> ]
- 4) Nelson, Bryan. (3 July 2008). "Benefits Blues". *NATURE*, 453, 132-133 [ <http://bit.ly/YE50q> ]
- 5) Barres, Ben. (13 July 2006). "Does Gender Matter". *NATURE*, 442, 133-136 [ <http://bit.ly/3674Qd> ]
- 6) 'Tenured Radical' asks in her blog (2 Oct. 2009) why her medical insurance covers treatment for infertility but not for gender reassignment [ <http://bit.ly/od1m3> ]
- 7) Wikipedia entry for Kameny, and refs therein [ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank\\_Kameny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Kameny) ]
- 8) Kapp, Diana. (March 2007). "The Scandal, The Scapegoats, and the Suicide". *San Francisco Magazine*, p53, [ <http://bit.ly/6LzjO> ]

### Astronomy Resources:

- ★ Outlist Webpage: <http://www.physics.ucsb.edu/~blaes/lgbtastro/>
- ★ Yahoo group: [GLBTQastro@yahoo.com](mailto:GLBTQastro@yahoo.com)
- ★ AAS meeting dinners: usually Monday night, check the bulletin boards
- ★ Blog: The Astrodyke: <http://astrodyke.blogspot.com/>
- ★ National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals <http://www.noglstp.org/>
- ★ NASA GSFC (internal access only) <http://glbtac.gsfc.nasa.gov/index.cfm?topic=home>