

ALLIES



“As an ally, I think it’s important to make myself visible to others.”

Julia Brazas

(She/her/hers)

Astronomy & Astrophysics, Staff

As an ally, I think it’s important to make myself visible to others. Being an ally is connected to who I am as a person. I can’t imagine myself any differently.



“Being an ally means being a member of a network of supporters.”

Neli Fanning

(She/her/hers)

Physical Sciences Division, Staff

It is important for marginalized communities to know that they are supported but if the support is not visible, its intended purpose might be missed. Participating in this exhibit displays my support visibly.

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“It’s important for me to be vocal about my support and help create an inclusive climate; silence has worked against the community for way too long.”

Valerie Keller

(She/her/hers)

Chemistry, Senior Lecturer

It is important to me to create an emotionally supportive environment where everyone can be the person they want to be. I feel this is especially important in a teaching and research environment where people spend so much time in close proximity. We all have the responsibility to support each other scientifically, so why not personally as well?



“As an ally, I aim to be a supporter, defender, and advocate of LGBTQ+ persons and rights.”

Andrew Ferguson

(He/him/his)

Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, Faculty

The role of LGBTQ+ members in science and engineering is often an untold story, and I am very excited for this exhibit to highlight the experiences and achievements of this community. As an ally, I aim to be a supporter, defender, and advocate of LGBTQ+ persons and rights.

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“I think being an ally means not just registering support, but also being willing to stand up for people who have more to lose and may not be able to advocate for themselves.”

Erik Shirokoff

(He/him/his)

Astronomy & Astrophysics, Faculty

I grew up with a queer mother and consider many LGBT people family. I think being an ally means not just registering support, but also being willing to stand up for people who have more to lose and may not be able to advocate for themselves when homo/trans-phobic comments are made or heteronormative assumptions are left unexamined.



“It is my hope that by normalizing the idea of living and communicating as an active ally, it will be easier for those who need it to find safe spaces.”

Matt Williams

(He/him/his)

Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, Staff

Being an ally means being available and welcoming—available to those that need a listening ear and those that need a supportive voice and welcoming to all who are trying to live their most authentic lives, even as they work to figure out what that means. Most of all, being an ally is to be in a supporting role for LGBTQ people as they define who they are.

ALLIES



“Being an ally means being a safe harbor.”

Nita Yack

(She/her/hers)

Computer Science, Staff

I have family members who are gay or lesbian and have witnessed first-hand how they are treated differently. Being an ally means being a safe harbor — someone who is there for LGBT people and who supports equal rights.



“As an ally, I want to learn and listen, and encourage others to do the same.”

Kelly Woodward-Miller

(She/her/hers)

Master's Program in Computer Science, Staff

To me, being an ally means supporting those who may be more vulnerable than me. As an ally, I want to learn and listen, and encourage others to do the same. It's important to stand up for the LGBTQ+ community and against discrimination, to help those who are more vulnerable, and to be a friend.

A black and white portrait of Brent Barker, a man with shoulder-length hair and glasses, wearing a patterned polo shirt. The image is partially obscured by a dark purple overlay on the left side where the text is located.

“I aim to take up the same amount of space as I would if I were straight, and advocate for an LGBT-friendly workplace, especially for people of color and transgender folk.”

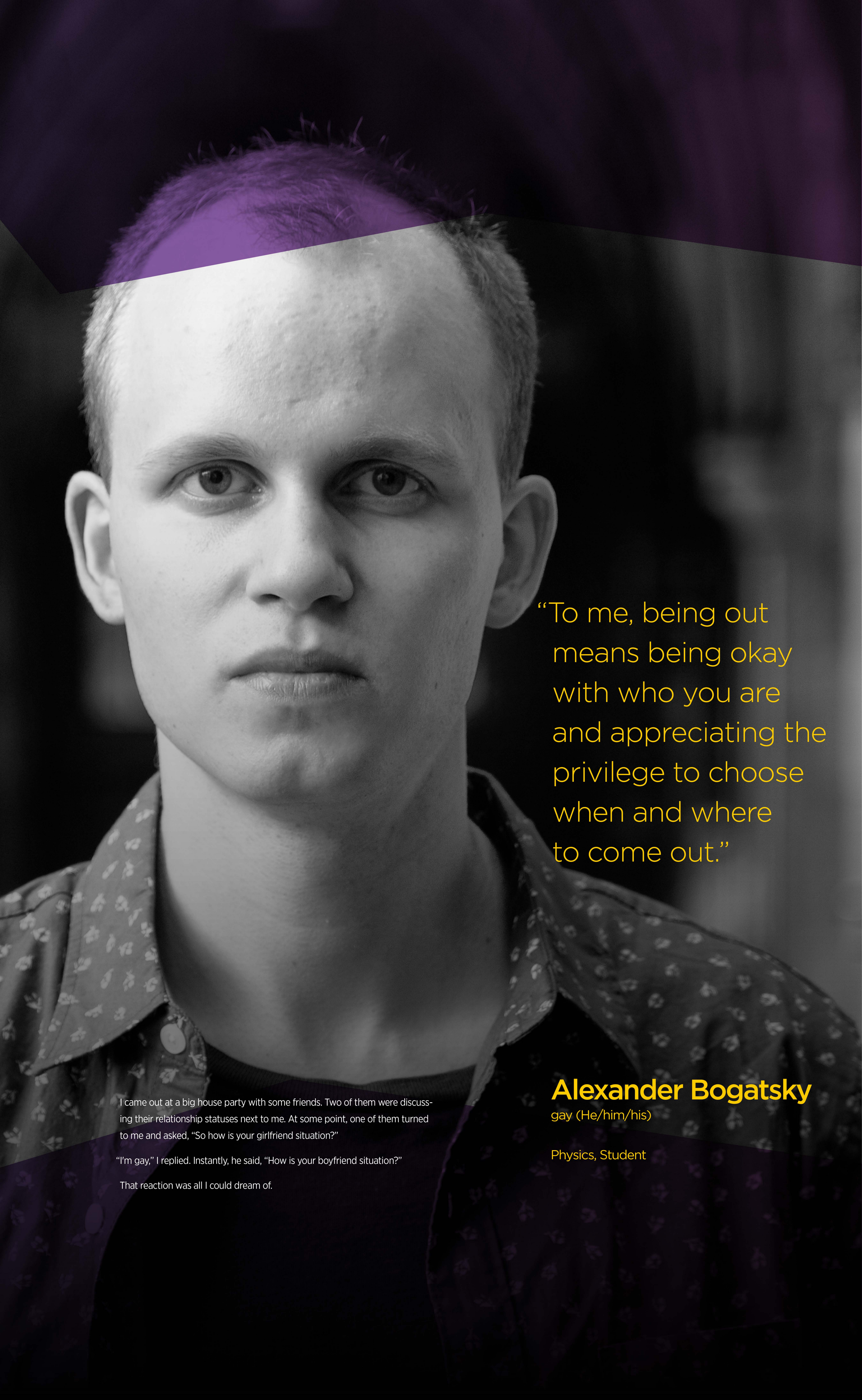
Brent Barker

bisexual, gender questioning (They/them/theirs)

Astronomy & Astrophysics,
Geophysical Sciences, Staff

I aim to take up the same amount of space as I would if I were straight. If it would be natural to mention my partners in conversation, then I try to use their pronouns and labels, even when it would out me. I also try to be a visible ally, with a rainbow flag on my office door and a role advocating for an LGBT-friendly culture and structure.

It has taken a while for me to fully acknowledge my queerness to myself, and to think that I am “queer enough” to identify as such and to come out to others. The process of deciding to include myself in this exhibit was daunting. Am I queer enough? What if I’m still questioning things? Wow, this might be the most public way I’ve come out! And in a work context to people I don’t know? I feel vulnerable and exposed doing so, but I feel like it’s important enough to do it. The support of my colleagues here has helped me feel safe enough to do so.



“To me, being out means being okay with who you are and appreciating the privilege to choose when and where to come out.”

Alexander Bogatsky


gay (He/him/his)

Physics, Student

I came out at a big house party with some friends. Two of them were discussing their relationship statuses next to me. At some point, one of them turned to me and asked, “So how is your girlfriend situation?”

“I’m gay,” I replied. Instantly, he said, “How is your boyfriend situation?”

That reaction was all I could dream of.



“Being out as a scientist means that I will not hide myself in a scientific setting; I will be who I am and will take up a space that is mine regardless of what people expect from me.”


Jake Higgins

bisexual (He/they)

Chemistry, Student

I am proud of who I am and wouldn't change it if I could, but I still struggle every day with fear—fear of judgment from others, fear of being mistreated or taken advantage of, fear of what it means to be something different from societal norms. It affects a lot of my thoughts and behaviors.

As I've gotten more involved with graduate student activism, I've come out to audiences and in meetings composed of people I don't know. It amazes me that I've become so comfortable with people when such a short time ago I only shared this part of me with people I really trusted.



“Being out in the scientific community means scientists can be openly identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community in the presence of other scientists, collaborators, and sponsors. That must not change potential opportunities for funding and for collaboration.”

Thankfully, I was always surrounded by people who were supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, my family included. Therefore, when I came out, not only did I receive appreciation, but family and friends were also willing to learn about the realities other members of the LGBTQ+ community may face.

**Jonathan
Salmeron-Hernandez**
gay (He/him/his)

Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, Student



“We need to work even harder to ensure the concerns and voices of underrepresented minorities (e.g. trans, people of color) within the LGBTQ+ community are also being heard and included.”

Lamont Samuels

gay (He/him/his)

Computer Science, Faculty

I know this isn't the case for everyone but I've been very fortunate to have friends and family that were very supportive of me when I came out to them. My best friend was the first person I ever came out to and she was so supportive and loving that it made it even easier. What was truly impactful from that experience was the overwhelming relief and happiness I felt afterwards. It made me realize that I'm stronger than I realize and I don't have to be afraid of who I am.



“As both a trans woman and a lesbian, I don’t see many people like me in science. I think it’s important for me to be visible so future trans students can see that they belong in the community.”

Danielle Scheff

trans, lesbian (She/her/hers)

Physics, Student

As a visibly trans woman, coming out isn’t much of a choice. Therefore, being out is a core part of my identity. It means getting to wear the clothes I like and that I’m comfortable in and using names and pronouns that don’t make me cringe. But it also means whenever I meet someone in person for the first time, I worry about how they’ll react.

It can be isolating being the only visibly LGBTQ person in a group and not knowing if anyone else identifies as part of the community. Additionally, when trans issues, especially medical ones, affect my work, I’ve had problems finding advice and support because I don’t know other trans scientists. Mostly, I’ve found myself seeking outside communities where I can interact regularly with other trans people.

A black and white portrait of a man with short hair, a mustache, and glasses, wearing a patterned shirt. The image is partially obscured by a dark purple geometric shape in the top right corner and a dark purple floral pattern in the bottom left corner.


“Being out in science is one way to reincorporate personal identities and inclusiveness into scientific narratives.”

Ben Slaw

gay (He/him/his/they/them/theirs)

Chemistry, Student

I think it's important to have a visible LGBTQIA+ community within STEM fields to encourage and empower future LGBTQIA+-identified persons in STEM. Being out is a divergence from the traditional idea that scientists have to separate themselves from their science; we're supposed to produce, publish, and speak in such a way that the science stands on its own. Being out in science is one way to reincorporate personal identities and inclusiveness into scientific narratives.

A black and white portrait of Borja Sotomayor, a man with a beard and glasses, smiling. The top of his head is highlighted with a purple-to-pink gradient. The background is dark and textured.

“It is important for LGBTQ individuals, especially students, to know they are not alone in the PSD, and that there are others like them, including in teaching and leadership positions.”

Borja Sotomayor


gay (He/him/his)

Computer Science, Senior Lecturer

My most impactful coming out experience was, interestingly, not the first person I came out to or even when I came out to my parents, who were simultaneously welcoming and unfazed — probably the best combination you can hope for. It was the second person I came out to: my best friend in college. He was very religious, and I was genuinely concerned that coming out to him would drive a wedge between us.

When I came out to him, he seemed really shaken but, once he gathered his thoughts, he said something I did not expect: “I’m going to need your help.” I replied, “*You’re* going to need *my* help?” and he said, “You’re literally the first gay person I’ve ever met. I honestly don’t know how to react to this. I don’t know what it means to be gay or what you must have gone through, and whether I’ve said or will say things that are hurtful to you. I need you to help me be the friend you need right now.”

This was uncharted territory for him but, instead of reacting with fear, he offered me unconditional empathy and support, while acknowledging that it would not be an easy process. The fact that he reacted this way reaffirmed to me that coming out to my friends was the right thing to do. Coming out didn’t drive a wedge between us and, instead, made us even closer. To this day, he is still one of my very best friends.

A black and white portrait of Samantha Usman, a young woman with short, curly hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a light-colored shirt with a pattern of watermelon slices. The background is dark and out of focus.

“Being out means being open about your sexuality in your community and, if possible, participating in events like this to foster a community for LGBT-in-STEM folk.”

Samantha Usman

bisexual (She/her/hers)

Astronomy & Astrophysics, Student

I came out to my mom accidentally. Last year, at the university where I did my master's degree, I organized an event for International LGBT-in-STEM day. While I was getting ready for it, my mom asked, “But you don't know anybody like that, do you?” and I said, “Sure! One of my coworkers is trans, and another one of my friends is non-binary, and another friend of mine is pansexual...” My mom continued, “But YOU'RE not like that, are you?” “Well, yeah, I identify as bi.” I thought she'd already known! I'd talked about having crushes on women before, after all...

I had a mock interview at my undergrad university while I was still closeted. One of the interviewers asked me what I'd read recently, and I'd mentioned *The Crimson Petal* and *The White* by Michael Faber. The interviewer pointed out that there were lots of LGBT themes in Michael Faber, and asked if I was LGBT (which the real interviewers aren't allowed to do!). Since I was still questioning my own sexuality, I spent the next minute sputtering and stammering, extremely uncomfortable. The whole experience was mortifying.

Once while I was in college, my roommate's friend mentioned how she didn't understand bisexual people. I mentioned that I was bisexual, and then she proceeded to ask “How do you choose? When you get married, how do you pick?” She fundamentally did not understand what bisexuality really is and reminded me that being bi is apparently not normal.

The American and UChicago Gay Rights Movement: A Timeline

The Society for Human Rights in Chicago becomes the country's earliest known gay rights organization.

1924

The world's first transgender organization, the National Transsexual Counseling Unit, was established in San Francisco.

1966

The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders.

1973

About 75,000 people participated in the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Washington, D.C., in October. It was the largest political gathering in support of LGBT rights to date.

1979

The University of Chicago becomes one of the first schools to offer domestic partnership benefits to gay and lesbian couples.

1992

On May 17, same-sex marriages become legal in Massachusetts.

2004

In November, the House of Representatives approves a bill ensuring equal rights in the workplace for gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals.

2007

The LGBT Alumni Network for the University is established.

2009

The University launches the Preferred Name Policy, allowing students to choose their preferred name.

2013

June 26, The U.S. Supreme Court ruled, 5-4, in Obergefell v. Hodges that same-sex couples have the fundamental right to marry and that states cannot say that marriage is reserved for heterosexual couples. "Under the Constitution, same-sex couples seek in marriage the same legal treatment as opposite-sex couples, and it would disparage their choices and diminish their personhood to deny them this right," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in the majority opinion.

2015

1962

Illinois becomes the first state in the U.S. to decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adults in private.

1969

Students founded the University of Chicago Gay Liberation Front, the City of Chicago's first gay liberation organization.

1978

On January 8, Harvey Milk makes national news when he is sworn in as a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, becoming the first openly gay person to be elected into a public office in California.

1982

Wisconsin becomes the first state to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

1998

The University of Chicago adds sexual orientation to its non-discrimination policy.

2006

The University of Chicago adds gender identity to its non-discrimination policy.

2008

5710 S. Woodlawn opens with offices for the Office of LGBTQ Student Life and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, as well as a new LGBTQ Lounge. The University of Chicago adopts the gender-neutral Open Housing policy.

2010

On Dec. 18, President Obama officially repeals the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy.

2014

LGBTQ Student Life begins offering the Safe Space program, creating an ally development training for university community members.

LGBTQ+ Terms and Definitions

LGBTQIA

An acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual.”

Ally

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

Androgynous

Identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

Asexual

The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people.

Biphobia

Prejudice, fear or hatred directed toward bisexual people.

Bisexual

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

Cisgender

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

Closeted

Describes 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 his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Gay

A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Gender dysphoria

Clinically significant distress caused when a person’s assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. According to the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the term - which replaces Gender Identity Disorder — “is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults.”

Gender-expansive

Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

Gender expression

External appearance of one’s gender identity, usually expressed 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 identity

One’s innermost concept of self as 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 non-conforming

A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

Genderqueer

Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity 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 internal knowledge of gender with its 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 physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions.

Heterosexual

An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also straight.

Homophobia

The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Homosexual

Outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay and lesbian people. The Associated Press, New York Times and Washington Post restrict usage of the term. Gay and/or lesbian accurately describe those who are attracted to people of the same sex.

Lesbian

A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

Living openly

A state in which LGBTQ people are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or gender identity — where and when it feels appropriate to them.

Outing

Exposing someone’s lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity to others without their permission.

Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

Pansexuality

The sexual, romantic or emotional attraction towards people regardless of their sex or gender identity. Pansexual people may refer to themselves as gender-blind, asserting that gender and sex are not determining factors in their romantic or sexual attraction to others.

Queer

A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. Often used interchangeably with “LGBTQ.”

Questioning

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

Same-gender loving

A term some prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

Sexual orientation

An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.

Transgender

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Transphobia

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

Transsexual

A person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex.

Terms and Definitions from:
Human Rights Campaign website
<http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

OUT

IN
THE PSD
& PME

Celebrating the voices of LGBTQ+
people and allies in STEM.

I want to own
my truth...no one else
should tell my story
but me.

— Michael Sam

Throughout the years, deliberate acts of inclusion have defined our past and shaped our history. **The Out in the PSD & PME** exhibit is an intentional display of support and awareness of a community whose resilience is admirable.

We applaud the bravery and willingness of the featured community members who opted to share how their identity impacts working within the STEM field as well as crucial moments and insight surrounding the often life-long process of coming out.

National Coming Out Day is October 11, 2019.
Please consider adding your name to the existing PSD OUTList, which features community members and allies.

OUT
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& PME