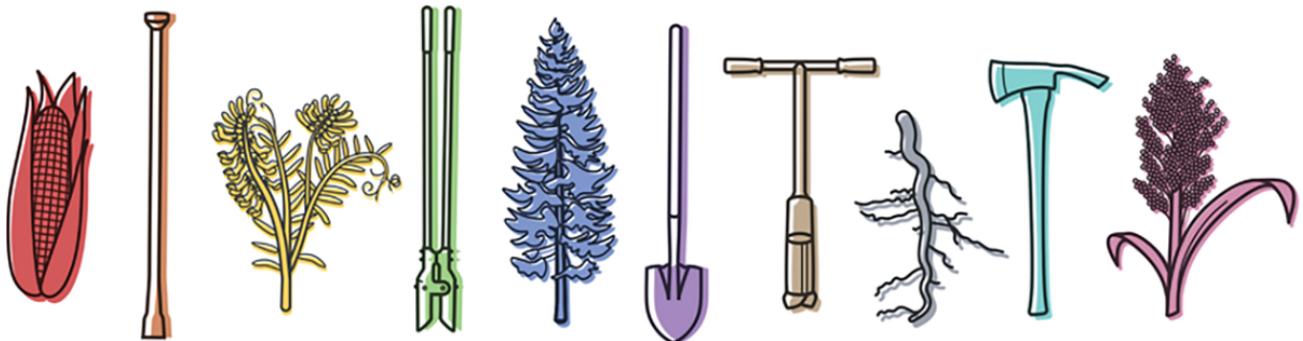




LGBTQ+ Scientists and Allies: Fostering Community and Enacting Change

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LGBTQ+ SCIENTISTS AND ALLIES
ASA-CSSA-SSSA

The LGBTQ+ Scientists and Allies specialty group of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA was founded in 2017 and exists to create visibility and representation for LGBTQ+ issues. The abbreviation LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and the plus

(+) is inclusive of other gender and sexual minority identities, including intersex (I), asexual (A), two-spirit (2S), and non-binary among many others.

Our group has four primary objectives:

1. Fostering a community of LGBTQ+ scientists and providing a space for representation and visibility,
2. Serving as a source of education on issues pertinent to our community,
3. Creating opportunities for networking and mentorship, and
4. Advocating for relevant social and political topics.

Conversations about gender and sexuality are often confined to outside the workplace, making it difficult for members of the LGBTQ+ community to live openly among their colleagues. Many factors can limit these conversations, ranging from a lack of understanding to fears of retaliation, yet we believe that these conversations make a difference. We are working for recognition and respect of LGBTQ+ identities and acknowledgement that the current culture in ASA, CSSA, and SSSA could be more welcoming. You don't have to identify as LGBTQ+ to get involved in our group: allies motivated towards greater inclusivity are encouraged to amplify our voices.

In this article, we provide resources to learn more about the LGBTQ+ community and describe our group's intersectional approach. Additionally, this article highlights harmful behaviors and provides bystander intervention strategies that can be adopted at multiple scales, from the individual to society at large. Lastly, we also describe past and recent initiatives and provide ways to get involved with our group.

The LGBTQ+ Community: Who We Are

Our group aims to place at the forefront the priorities of gender and sexual minorities while remaining open and welcome to all. We think it is important to first introduce

some terms that are common in our community. We want to acknowledge that of these identities are fluid depending on the individual, and the definitions we list here are meant to provide scaffolding for collective understanding and learning. We encourage consulting additional resources that may better encompass the breadth and diversity of our community.

- **Lesbian** and **Gay** refer to women and men who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (PFLAG; GLAAD, [2016](#); HRC, [2011](#)).
- **Bisexual**, commonly referred to as bi or bi+, refers to people who are attracted romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually to those of the same gender and/or to those of another gender (PFLAG, [2021](#); GLAAD, [2016](#)). This term is sometimes, but not always, used interchangeably with pansexual (HRC, [2011](#)).
- **Transgender**, often shortened to trans, is a broad term that includes people who identify as a gender other than the sex assigned to them at birth. It may include people who don't identify as either a man or a woman or people who identify as more than one gender. Medical procedures are not necessary for a person to identify as transgender (PFLAG, [2021](#); GLAAD, [2016](#)). In contrast, cisgender is a person who identifies with the gender that they were assigned at birth. **Non-Binary**, sometimes shortened to enby, is a term related to transgender, referring to people who do not subscribe to the gender binary, potentially existing between or beyond the man–woman dichotomy (PFLAG, [2021](#)). While many non-binary individuals also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do (HRC, [2011](#)).
- **Queer** is often an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities but may mean something different depending on the individual. The term queer has a history of being used in a derogatory manner, but for many people, it has been reclaimed as an identity (PFLAG, [2021](#); HRC, [2011](#)). Its usage is common in academia in the form of “queer studies” or “queer theory.”

- The **plus (+)** refers to all other non-specified sexual and gender minorities. Other abbreviations include identities such as **Intersex (I)**, **Asexual (A)**, and **Two-Spirit (2S)** among others.
 - **Intersex** refers to people who are biologically between the medically expected definitions of male and female through any combination of primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (PFLAG, [2021](#); HRC, [2011](#)).
 - **Asexual** refers to an individual who does not experience sexual attraction or desire. Each asexual person experiences relationships, attraction, and arousal differently (PFLAG, [2021](#); HRC, [2011](#)).
 - **Two-Spirit** is a modern term intended to convey a broad array of Indigenous gender diverse traditions, including the commonly shared notion among many Native American tribes that some individuals naturally possess and manifest both a masculine and feminine spiritual qualities (BAAITS, [2021](#)). Expressions of Two-Spirit identities vary tremendously from tribe to tribe and within each Two-Spirit person (Tribal Information Exchange, [2020](#)). Non-Indigenous people should not use this identity (PFLAG, [2021](#)).
- An **Ally** is a person who does not identify as LGBTQ+ but stands in coalition and advocates for our sociopolitical endeavors (PFLAG, [2021](#)). Allies also include those within the LGBTQ+ community who support each other (HRC, [2011](#)).

Using an Intersectional Approach

To be intersectional means to recognize that the identity of a person cannot be reduced to one single characteristic, such as gender, race, or class, but that all these aspects interact, thus shaping every person and their lived experiences of the world. Intersectionality, which has developed out of Black feminist thought, uncovers societal and institutional power imbalances and shows us how the interactions of the

components of a person's identity impact how they are treated in society (Beal, 1969; Collins, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1979; Crenshaw, 1989; King, 1988). Both the struggles and privileges associated with a person's multiple, intersecting identities are not merely additive but multiplicative. A social understanding of intersectionality is critical for addressing social and systematic oppression.

The LGBTQ+ community represents great diversity across multiple identity markers, and issues facing our community are intertwined with other social movements such as the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements. For this reason, our group strives to embrace intersectionality.

Sharing Stories from the LGBTQ+ Community

There's a lack of awareness and understanding of how hostile environments and microaggressions impact the LGBTQ+ community in the fields of agronomy, crop science, and soil science. For example, many LGBTQ+ scientists must interact with cultures that are unaccepting of our LGBTQ+ identities, which often leads to us being closeted or risking personal safety and/or career success by being openly out (Olcott & Downen 2020; Gibney 2019). Because researchers in STEM fields often view their work as depoliticized and unbiased, inequality among practitioners is viewed as tangential, rather than a central concern (Mattheis et al., 2019; Hughes, 2018; Faulkner, 2000). As many LGBTQ+ professionals either leave the field or hide their identities in response to hostile climates, cycles of harm and underrepresentation can continue, leading to a lack of diverse mentors and mentorship sensitive to different identities (Abernathy et al., 2020; Gibney, 2019; Hughes 2018).

At the 2020 ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting, we presented a poster sharing stories of hostility in our professional spaces, collected from our group's members compiled by themes drawn from Marin-Spiotta et al. (2020): a culture of impunity,

sense of exclusion, power dynamics, invisibility and lack of representation, and the sense that “what happens in the field, stays in the field.” For more details on these stories, please refer to our poster (Bybee-Finley et al., 2020). We also provided a summary of bystander interventions that can be adopted at scales ranging from the individual to the society (Figure 1). Importantly, each one of us has a role in supporting one another and disrupting hostile climates.

Our Current Work

Annual Meeting

Building on our involvement at the 2020 Annual Meeting, at the 2021 Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, we have events to improve representation and build community.

- **Visibility**—We are convening a panel of LGBTQ+ community members and allies to discuss their experiences and thoughts about the future of LGBTQ+ professionals in science. We hope this conversation will bring visibility to our community and start much needed conversations across the Societies and in our fields.
- **Get Involved**—The Annual Meeting also serves as a time for our membership to gather and learn how they can get involved throughout the year. We hold a General Body Meeting where the next year's leadership is announced and we can fill vacant positions and encourage folks to get involved by joining a standing committee.
- **Learn and Build Community**—In addition to our panel listed above, our group is co-hosting a poster session with the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Diversity in Agronomy, Crops, Soils, and Environmental Sciences Committee, showcasing groups from across our Societies working to advance JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion) in our fields.

INDIVIDUAL

- **The small stuff adds up.** Microaggressions are the most common form of discrimination. Speak about how they make you feel. Criticize the microaggression, not the person (Clay et al. 2017).
- **Bystanders can play a role.** Develop ready-responses so you can react and support in a timely manner (Vasquez 2016).
- **Leaders have a much larger responsibility to intervene.** Social status is important. Bosses, advisors, and chairs play a large role in setting organizational and academic culture norms.

TEAM

- **Amplify voices.** Prioritize voices of marginalized people and encourage open conversations (Abernathy et al. 2020)
- **Support representation.** Recruit and mentor people from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds (Abernathy et al. 2020, Naiman et al. 2019). Provide and support LGBTQ+ specific mentoring relationships (Atherton et al. 2016).
- **Integrate a DEI agenda.** Plan and promote events focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Increase education and training opportunities (Atherton et al. 2016).
- **Recognize our work.** Consider how awards, speaking slots, and invitations to serve on committees and speak to media are given (Abernathy et al. 2020).

INSTITUTION

- **Count us.** Include LGBTQ+ identities on policies and surveys. Provide space for preferred names/pronouns on society documents (Atherton et al. 2016).
- **Protect us.** Remove barriers & increase inclusivity in codes of conduct. Provide clear reporting mechanisms for microaggressions, harassment, discrimination (Atherton et al. 2016).
- **Talk with us.** Facilitate dialogue between society leaders and general members (Abernathy et al. 2020, Atherton et al. 2016). Provide updates on diversity/inclusion efforts and initiatives.
- **Be intentional** about inviting diverse scholars to speak about their identity and their science.

LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program

We have recently initiated a targeted mentorship program, recruiting both mentors and mentees for participation. The Annual Meeting will serve as a space for participants to meet and make initial connections.

Educational Materials

We regularly share newsletters with our members about topics relevant to LGBTQ+ issues and events. All of our previous newsletters are archived in our specialty group's Discussion Board (access by visiting www.agronomy.org/discussion-boards) and on our website (<https://lgbtqscientists.wordpress.com/contact>).

Survey of LGBTQ+ Scientists

Expanding on our past work, we are currently developing one of the first surveys to assess the experiences of LGBTQ+ scientists in the fields of agronomy, crop science, and soil science. We hope to gain insight about factors that make people feel safe or excluded in their institutional cultures and work. We also aim to evaluate existing recommendations for bystander interventions across scales.

How to Get Involved and Hear More from Us

Any Society member is welcome to join our group, and we welcome members of the LGBTQ+ community and Allies. We hold regular meetings to plan and organize events and programs, culminating in our programming at the Annual Meeting. Was there something in this article that was not clear or that you would like to expand or comment on? Please reach out to us through our website to continue this conversation: <https://lgbtqscientists.wordpress.com/contact>.

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