

COLUMN
SECTION NEWS

3 Simple Steps to Create a More Inclusive Work Space for Our LGBTQ+ Community



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I will be sharing some disturbing things I have heard or a colleague of mine has heard in a workplace or conference setting:

- “You like girls too!? That’s hot!”
- “Ugh, I don’t know what’d I’d do if my son ended up being a gay or transgendered.”
- “You’re a lesbian!? You know you’re going to hell right?”

[Sit in this discomfort for a moment. It is ok to feel uncomfortable when discussing these kinds of topics. Getting out of comfort zones is the only way we can make progress.] These were statements made to individuals that identify as LGBTQ+ at their workplace or at a professional scientific society conference. I have heard comments like these throughout my career in fisheries and conservation. I could share more but they only become more and more upsetting. Unfortunately, those that identify as LGBTQ+ still face harassment, discrimination, and hate in our work places and conference spaces—especially transgender and/or non-binary individuals. In order to combat this, I continuously share ways in which we can all help to create a more inclusive work space for our LGTBTQ+ community. This is achieved through awareness, visibility and representation, and then support.

Here are 3 simple steps that everyone can do in their work spaces to create a more inclusive and safe environment:

(1) Share Your Pronouns

Sharing your pronouns can be a little awkward at first. It takes a few tries before it becomes as natural as stating your name when you introduce yourself. Start by saying it out loud to yourself a few times like this: “Hello, my name is Cassidy Miles, I use pronouns she, her, and hers, and I am a streams biologist.” You can also include your pronouns next to your name in email signatures, social media bios, and virtual meeting platforms like zoom! Sharing pronouns helps others feel safe around you and welcome to share their pronouns too. Using a person’s correct pronouns is a form of respect. For more detailed information on why pronouns are important go to: mypronouns.org

(2) Use Gender Neutral Language Instead

Humans have created and used gendered language for quite some time now. Using gender neutral language can be challenging because we are not used to it. Just like with sharing your pronouns, it just takes practice! Personally, I love using **y’all** to address a group of people

because it has the word **all** in it. All are welcome, y’all means all! ☺

Some more examples:

Instead of Using:	Try Using:
His or Hers	Theirs
Ladies and Gentleman	Distinguished Guests
Men or Women	Everyone
Lady or Man	Person
Guys or Girls	Folks



Cassidy works for the Missouri Department of Conservation as a streams biologist for the Stream Team Program. This Program provides an opportunity for the community to get involved in river and stream conservation. Cassidy trains volunteers on how to monitor streams, which includes benthic macroinvertebrate identification. Stream Team volunteers and staff also conduct countless litter pickups to keep Missouri’s water ways clean! Through education, stewardship, and advocacy the Missouri Stream Team Program has created this working partnership among the community to protect Missouri’s streams. For more info go to: mostreamteam.org

(3) Provide more Gender Options on Applications

We fill out hundreds of forms throughout our lives. The gender options on these various types of forms are still usually binary with only a “male” or “female” option. For your job openings, internship opportunities, or scholarship programs include more options for gender.

Here is an example below that the Equal Opportunities Section uses for our Annual Travel Award application:

Gender:

- Female
- Male
- Non-Binary
- Write in Option:

Do you identify as transgender?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

I hear a lot of pushback asking “why should we cater to a few individuals?”—when in reality there are more people in your life than you realize that identify as LGBTQ+ but they may have not come out due to fear of negative treatment from their peers. People do not feel safe in their own work environments to be open about who they really are as individuals. In our professions we regularly share information about our families and lives outside of work with our colleagues. Many times there are work events that you may



Cassidy’s “Outdoors is For Everyone” Logo. This logo was created in collaboration with artist Drew Wilson and is found on various merchandise items available at: <https://www.society6.com/crsmiles>. All profits are donated to the AFS Hutton Program!

bring your spouse or partner to. Those within the LGBTQ+ community may not feel comfortable engaging in these activities due to fear of discrimination and harassment from colleagues.

With patience and empathy we can easily move towards more inclusive work spaces for our LGBTQ+ community. Remember that it is ok to mess up, just keep trying and over time these small changes in language will feel normal to us all. By sharing pronouns, using gender neutral language, and providing more gender options on applications we will create a safer and more inclusive environment for all! 