

(Gender) diversity in research

Experiences from running DEI meetings at my home institution

Tanya Urrutia

MW-GAIA School, July 2023



Leibniz-Institut für
Astrophysik Potsdam

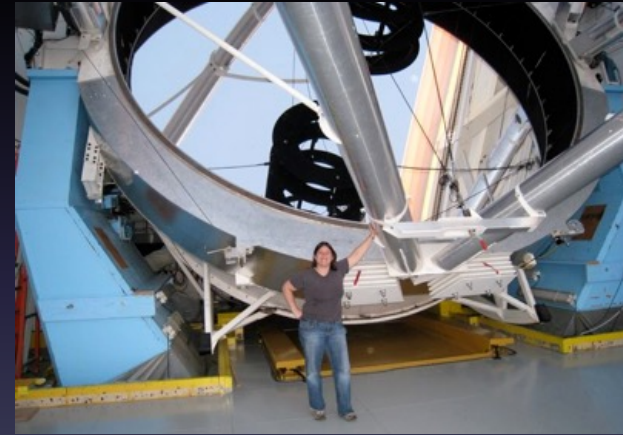


@astrobellatrix



Who am I?

- Born in Guatemala City to a German mother and Guatemalan father. Grew up bilingual in Guatemala
- Study of physics / astronomy in Potsdam, AIP. Diploma 2002.
- 5.5 years PhD in Davis / Livermore, CA. Had baby mid-PhD. PhD 2008.
- 3.5 years first postdoc in IPAC/Caltech Pasadena, CA.
- Since 2011: at AIP Potsdam working mainly on MUSE / BlueMUSE and its scientific applications. Another baby in 2013. Permanent since 2022.



Me at MMT in 2009

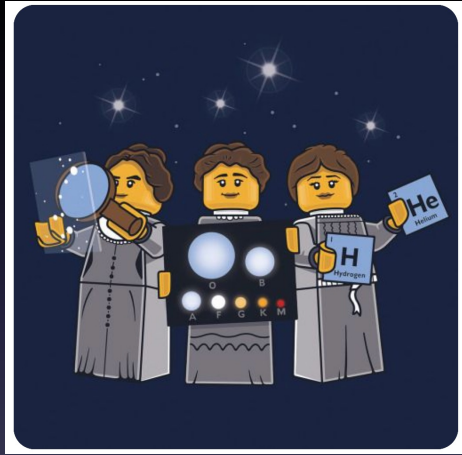
Why even care about diversity?

- In the age of: Gender quotas, DEI statements, code-of-conducts...



Kurt Wüthrich at the 2023 Lindau Nobel Meeting

The 3 giants of the early 20th century



Henrietta Swan Leavitt:
Period-Luminosity-Relation of Cepheids



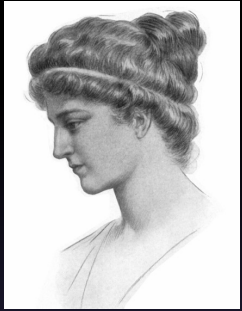
Annie Jump Cannon:
Stellar Classification Scheme



Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin:
Stars are composed mainly of H and He

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Astronomy has been shaped by women!



The history

- After Margaret Burbidge refuses to accept the Cannon Prize (awarded for outstanding female astronomer), a Committee is set up to review the status of Women in Astronomy
- First conference of “Women in Astronomy” in 1992. Impulse for many meetings around the world several years later (e.g IAU).
- The last few years, scope has increased to make astronomy more inclusive not just in gender but in all aspects, e.g. IAU’s “Working Group (WG) on Astronomy for Equity and Inclusion”. In addition to inner values (e.g. gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ...)
 - Impairments, Accessibility
 - Country of Origin (Refugees, Displaced People)
 - Neurodiversity and Mental Health

An evolving landscape (e.g. Germany)

Coded laws that require a gender equity officers for institutions funded by the government

 Bundesministerium der Justiz Bundesamt für Justiz

Gesetz für die Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern in der Bundesverwaltung und in den Gerichten des Bundes (Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz - BGleG)

[Nichtamtliches Inhaltsverzeichnis](#)

BGleG
Ausfertigungsdatum: 24.04.2015
Volltext:

Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz vom 24. April 2015 (BGBl. I S. 642, 643), das zuletzt durch Artikel 2 des Gesetzes vom 7. August 2021 (BGBl. I S. 3311) geändert worden ist

Ersetzt G 205-2 v. 30.11.2001 | 3234 (BGleG) Rahmen

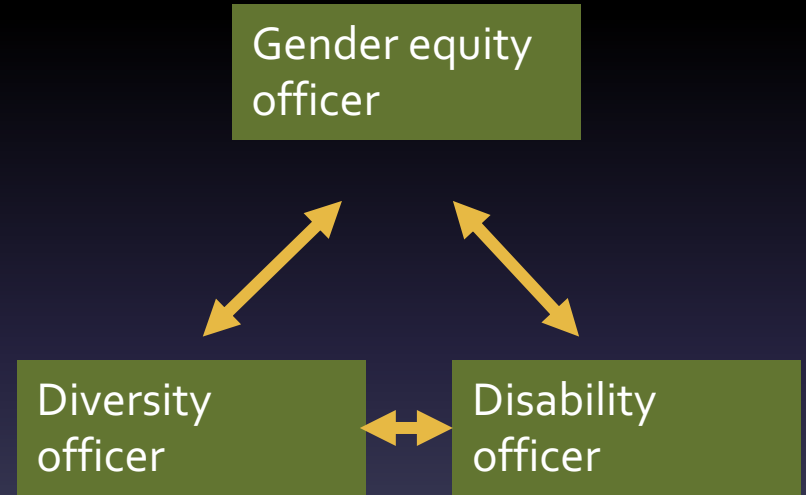
Stand: Zuletzt geändert durch Art. 2 G v. 7.8.2021 | 3311

Näheres zur Standangabe finden Sie im Menü unter [Hinweise](#)

Fußnote

**** Textarchivabr. 1.5.-2015 ****
**** Zur Anwendung vgl. §§ 5, 37 ****


Das G wurde als Artikel 2 des G v. 24.4.2015 | 642 vom Bundestag beschlossen. Es ist gem. Art. 24 Abs. 2 Satz 1 dieses G am 1.5.2015 in Kraft getreten.
Überschrift, Bezeichnung idF d. Art. 2 Nr. 1 G v. 7.8.2021 | 3311 mWV-12.8.2021
[Nichtamtliches Inhaltsverzeichnis](#)




But coded law is still a ways to go (besides §3 Gleichstellungsgesetz)

Gender and DEI meetings at AIP









While there have always been initiatives / meetings to increase gender diversity at the AIP, Andrea Kunder along with 3 other women in 2015 starts the gender equity lunches.

From Andrea Kunder <akunder@aip.de> 

To all@aip.de 

Subject AIP: Equity and Inclusion in Astronomy

14.07.15, 14:05

 Reply  Reply List  Forward  Archive  Junk  Delete  More 

Dear All,

Please join our first Equity and Inclusion in Astronomy lunch meeting on Wednesday, July 22, from 12:30 – 1:30 PM. We will be hearing the presentation that was given by Else Starkenburg at the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting entitled: “The postdoc: The leakiest part of the academic pipeline (for women)”. There will be plenty of time for discussion. An accompanying light reading material regarding the New Horizons mission that we can also discuss is found here:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/07/women-rule-pluto/398396/>

Equity and Inclusion in Astronomy lunch meetings are aimed to share articles, insights, events, resources and experiences relevant to promoting equity and diversity. This lunch group is set up to be a place to find others that care about these issues, to learn from them, and to establish a community of allies for equality and diversity. We will meet once a month.

The plan is to eat lunch together in the Leibniz House Seminar room. Either bring your own food, or let me know by Wednesday July 22 at 11:00 AM what you want to eat off the attached menu, and I’ll order the food.

Hope to see you there!

LESSON LEARNED

MAKE IT AS INCLUSIVE AS POSSIBLE
AND KEEP HAMMERING THAT POINT
HOME. THIS IS NOT A "GIRLS ONLY
LUNCH"

Meetings can often be quite intense as they challenge the status quo!

- Geoffrey Marcy sexual harassment, Marcella Carollo student abuse, student-advisor relationship as “gig economy”,...
- Gender quotas, professorships for women, self-imposement on gender goals, evaluation reports, ...
- Discussion of racism in Germany, cultural differences get the most pushback!
- Science discussions, e.g. gendered time allocation statistics or double blind proposal evaluations, ironically get the least controversy.

LESSON LEARNED

NEED TRAINING ON HOW TO ORGANIZE
AND MODERATE SUCH DEI MEETINGS AND
INITIATIVES

Total E-quality certificate

Self-imposed guidelines on how to improve (gender) diversity at the institute ranging from management, hiring practices to scientific principles and even language guides.



Meeting organizers want to keep "Equity and Inclusion" lunch meetings informal and non-institutionalized

Meetings wane...

- Only 3-4 meetings from end of 2017 – beginning 2020. Original organizers either have left the AIP or are disillusioned.
- Lack of progress in implementation of guidelines, lack of interest of scientists at AIP.

Diversity fatigue

LESSON LEARNED

DON'T BECOME CYNICAL!
EQUITY WORK IS A MARATHON AND
NOT A RACE.
SETBACKS WILL BE NUMEROUS!

New start in 2021

- After the worst pandemic period a strong will by everybody to restart the DEI Meetings.
- Meetings are called "DEI Journal Club". Preserves the science character. I.e., we are coming to discuss a paper, this is not a "complain circle".
- 20 minute presentation +40 minute discussion format. Sometimes, you do need that long time to get the discussion going.
- Invite experts in the field, ideally the people that have authored "the paper" we are discussing.
- <https://www.aip.de/en/career/gender-equality-inclusion-and-family/equity-inclusion-journal-club/>

LESSON LEARNED

NEW /YOUNG PEOPLE BRING NEW IDEAS

FORMALIZATION OF PROCEDURES WHILE
KEEPING AN OPEN ATMOSPHERE

Beyond the “Equity and Inclusion Journal Club”

- I feel privileged, that I get to shape many discussions on equity in astronomy beyond the lunch club including: AG, Leibniz, ombudswoman, etc.
- In constant contact between leadership and more junior scientists, e.g. Tim de Zeeuw situation. Unfortunately, this implies also the carrying around of the “rumor mill”.
- General interest, e.g. attend IDEEA (Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity in European Astronomy) every month. Organization of meetings goes well beyond the ones that go on bi-monthly.
- Plus, I get to talk to you today 😊

However, not always successful...



LESSON LEARNED

YOU WILL MAKE MISTAKES IN DEI
WORK. ACKNOWLEDGE THEM AND
LEARN TO APOLOGIZE PROPERLY

A few more things

- Sometimes small complaints dominate. To do the job well, sweat the small stuff (broken windows theory).
- Problems are intersectional, this is often a challenge as everyone has their own agenda.
- Direction is (thankfully) changing from only gender inclusivity to general inclusivity.
- Equity is unintuitive, we've ingrained equality, (see recent decision in US to get rid of affirmative action). Getting rid of systemic barriers is even more unintuitive.

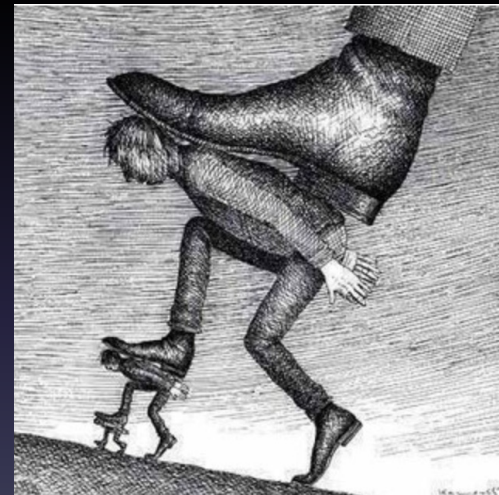


How the meetings have affected my research

- Mentoring: try to act as a role model, lived experience in research, e.g. respect of working hours, scientific credit and attribution.
- Group meetings: always be on the lookout on who speaks first, junior scientists MUST come first!
- Hiring practices, shortlists, interviews: always think of dimensions of discrimination, same interview questions, always!
- I have inherent biases: take the implicit bias test (e.g. apparently I think old people are bad with technology), but don't take it as an excuse for your own behaviour.

Advice? Perhaps a bit controversial

- Be the opposite of a cyclist - (kick down, buck up)!
- Work within the system! Despite change being slow, it works! Most senior people want to be known as great champions of minorities (as long as they don't feel threatened).
- Focus on the science publicly! It is often tempting to complain about faced inequalities on social media and other public channels.



DISCUSSION

WHAT DOES DEI MEAN TO YOU?

