

# GENDER IN POLAR RESEARCH

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On March 30 2020, IASC ([iasc.info](http://iasc.info)) and IASSA Working Group Gender in the Arctic ([gender-arctic.jimdofree.com](http://gender-arctic.jimdofree.com)) hosted a cross-disciplinary workshop on "Gender in Polar Research", as part of the 2020 Arctic Science Summit Week. Over 85 participants from around the world joined this online event to discuss and reflect on the gendered nature of polar research.

Presenters shared research and experiences based on three broad themes:

- Conducting research in ways that depart from the ubiquitous image of heroic masculinity
- Disadvantages to career prospects and field research activities for women and LGBTQIA+
- How research is shaped by the composition of researcher genders and gendered spaces

The workshop brought up stories and experiences that are often unspoken and dismissed in the polar research community as a whole. What emerged were both shortcomings of current practices and pathways to producing equitable and inclusive polar science.



Meeting of the Rutgers Firn Core Team to discuss the fieldwork code of conduct before setting off to the field site outside of Kangerlussuaq, Greenland



Women of the Arctic meeting in Helsinki 2018



The Rutgers and UCLA Arctic Hydroclimatology Team celebrating successful fieldwork at the Rio Behar supraglacial river in southwest Greenland



**Hanna Resvoll Holmsen** (1873–1943), Norwegian botanist and nature conservation pioneer working on Svalbard 1907 and 1908



**Nina P. Demme** (1902–1977), Russian/Soviet ornithologist with expeditions to Franz Josef Land and – as the leader – to Kamenev Islands (Severnaya Zemlya) in the 1930s

## CALL FOR ACTION: ADVANCEMENT OF GENDER DIMENSIONS IN POLAR RESEARCH

- Broaden knowledge & understanding of non-binary gender among researchers and communities where research occurs
- Introduce and bolster equity, inclusion, and bias training for all employees in polar research institutions
- Implement non-discrimination guidelines and provide access to independent complaint procedures & contact persons
- Support research on female and non-binary persons in polar regions
- Support comprehensive collection of statistical data on discrimination
- Address intersecting categories of identity & overlapping barriers (gender intersecting with sexuality, race, ethnicity, social-economic status, disability, career stage, etc.)
- Recognize and nominate women and non-binary scientists for polar awards

## GET INVOLVED

To stay up-to-date on research and discussions related to Gender in Polar Research, feel free to register for the IASSA Working Group Gender in the Arctic [gender-arctic.jimdofree.com](http://gender-arctic.jimdofree.com) mailing list via: [lists.univie.ac.at/mailman/listinfo/gender-arctic](mailto:lists.univie.ac.at/mailman/listinfo/gender-arctic)

### DIMENSIONS OF HARASSMENT IN POLAR FIELDWORK

Statistics on gender-related discrimination and sexual harassment in scientific field research show a clear and bleak picture (Clancy et al., 2014). The workshop elicited that this applies to Polar field contexts in particular. Nash and co-authors presented the results of their study of women in Australian Antarctic fieldwork. 60% of women in their study had been sexually harassed in the field; however, most of those incidents of harassment went unreported, indicating weaknesses in institutional reporting structures (Nash et al., 2019). Open discrimination in polar science disproportionately impacts those with intersecting identities of minoritized gender, sexuality, and/or ethnicity (Seag et al., 2019).

### LGBTQIA+ IN POLAR RESEARCH

The situation of individuals who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, or asexual/ally) was discussed in the overall context of gender-specific biases in polar research. Some participants remarked how difficult they find the effects of "coming out" in their academic work environment, yet also in field research. Stereotypes about sexual and gender minorities still exert a strong influence when it comes to employing an openly lesbian, gay, queer, or gender non-conforming person for a PhD or a post-doc position in STEM disciplines but also in social sciences. Representation of marginalized identities as working professionals in polar science can help facilitate strategies of inclusion. Beyond supporting, connecting, and raising the visibility of LGBTQIA+ members of our community, groups like Pride in Polar Research (PiPR) also produce resources intended to transcend intersectional barriers and improve equity, diversity, and inclusion within polar research.

### TOWARDS A NON-DISCRIMINATORY CULTURE

Members of the polar research community have become aware of discriminatory practices and seek to establish a non-discriminatory field-research culture. Widespread adoption of clear guidelines for fieldwork conduct would be beneficial for all in the Polar research community. APECS Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Project Group is currently developing Inclusive Codes and guidelines for diversity, equity, and inclusion during fieldwork in polar regions ([apecs.is/career-resources/diversity-equity-inclusion.html](http://apecs.is/career-resources/diversity-equity-inclusion.html)). In addition, formal processes for reporting discrimination are required.

### GETTING ALL THE BEST MINDS INCLUDED INTO POLAR RESEARCH

An inclusive culture benefits the scientific community by attracting the best minds regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, appearance, ethnicity or other aspects of personal background and identity (Hoogensen, 2017). Moreover, diversity at large within research organizations is vital to innovative research outcomes and finding sustainable solutions to the complexities of present societal challenges due to climate change (Natcher et al., 2020). It is essential to build a community where every researcher can thrive. An inclusive culture also improves the effectiveness of formal non-discrimination processes, which are often hampered by the legitimate fear of retribution and retaliation felt by those who experience discrimination. Informal support networks and contact persons can contribute substantially to the safety and well-being of vulnerable persons.



#### REFERENCES

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