



## Shared Traits: Entomologists and LGBTQ+ Folks

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Like many of you, I was the kid on the playground who was a little too into bugs, which quickly awarded me the label of “weird.” I could say it didn’t bother me, but I’d be lying. It’s hard to be cast out of the community or seen as strange, unapproachable, or misunderstood. As I grew older and learned that entomology was not only a hobby, but a potential career, I was blown away and knew this was my path. But an even bigger surprise came once I started my graduate program in entomology and learned that there were many entomologists who, like me, identified as LGBTQ+ ... like, *a lot*. Finding this very specific subcommunity of queer entomologists seemed like an impossible dream, but upon reflection, I realize that there is a lot of overlap in experience between LGBTQ+ folks and entomologists. Some of us know early in our lives that we love insects, and some of us know early in life that we are queer. For others, it is an understanding that develops over time and education. Whether entomologists, queer, or both, we’ve all probably been labeled as weird at some point. Because of this, I think entomologists are a particularly accepting group,

especially of the LGBTQ community.

In my experience, there are many similarities across these two groups that I think allow us to be supportive and understanding across cultural differences. Both entomology and LGBTQ+ issues have really specific language. I’ve found that folks who are willing to learn and pronounce words like “hamuli,” “Malpighian,” and “subimago” are already primed to learn and pronounce words like “demisexual,” “non-binary,” and “Mx.” Entomologists are already familiar with concepts like gynandromorphy in insects, and so can understand gender fluidity in humans a little more easily than non-entomologists. Entomologists understand hierarchical identifying characteristics and the unique traits beneath the umbrellas—a certain set of traits assigns a given insect to a certain order, and below that further specific traits assign that insect to family, genus, and species. This same relationship exists within the LGBTQ+ community as the largest umbrella, but other qualities contained in a queer person could allow them to identify as gay, lesbian, asexual, transgender, non-binary, and many other identities.

To me, the affinity we entomologists feel when we meet a fellow entomologist who shares our organism of interest or similar study system feels very similar to the affection I feel the first time I meet someone else in the LGBTQ+ community. Regardless of specific research project or queer identity, you know you have some shared interest and will be able to find something to talk about. You know you have found someone with whom you can mull over ideas about experimental design, or about how to dress professionally for the next Entomological Society of America meeting while staying true to your gender identity.

Being judged for who you are is tough and sometimes traumatic, but it also teaches us the importance of being compassionate. I believe this is why entomologists and LGBTQ+ communities share a strong desire to empathize and respect diversity. I am proud to share one or both identities with you. Let’s continue to embrace—not squish—the things and people we see as different.

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