



# Under the Microscope

Magnifying Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts in BE

**Please enjoy this issue dedicated to...**



## Angie speaks about supporting our transgender community

by Joseph Berleant and Christine Zheng

Transgender Day of Remembrance is observed annually on November 20th, in honor of the transgender people whose lives are lost due to anti-trans violence each year. While this is a day of mourning, it is also a reminder of the importance of celebrating and supporting the trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming members of our communities.

This month, BE Department Head Angie Belcher spoke to us about the importance she places on supporting transgender students in the department. "I want all groups and all students to feel supported in the department and at MIT," she told us. "We really care about the individuals, and our community [and] we want people to feel that they belong."

To better support transgender students in the BE community, Angie has taken a two-pronged approach. First, she has tried to address some concrete practices that marginalize, intentionally or not, transgender people. For example, she is talking to facilities about establishing gender-neutral bathrooms in Buildings 16 and 56, and is trying to remove unnecessary questions about gender from department forms and surveys. Second, she is encouraging more discussions in the department about ways to create a more inclusive environment, for instance by using faculty meetings to share advice on inclusive languages and including MIT resources on our departmental website

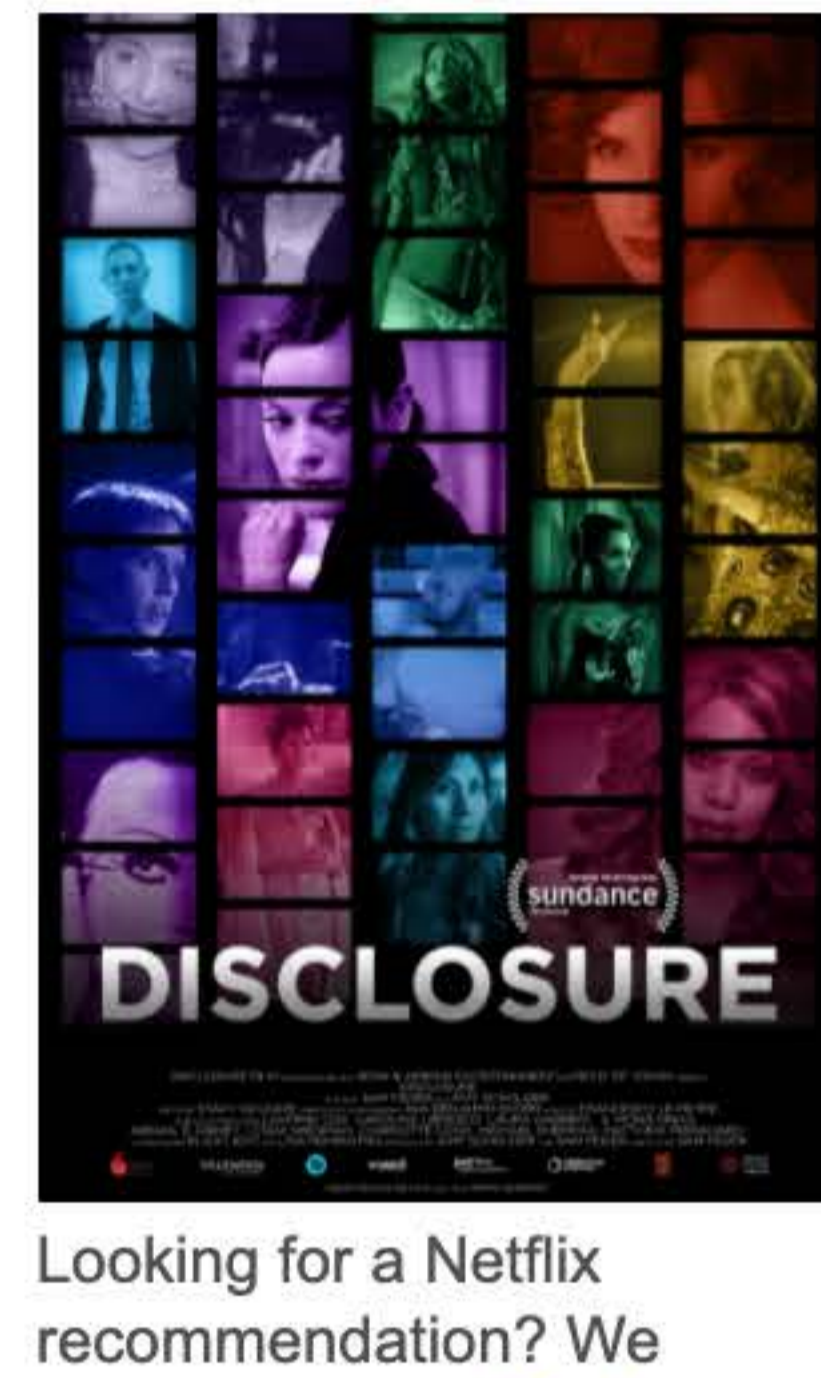
While it is important to celebrate the work that Angie, other faculty, and community members have been doing, Angie emphasized that she recognizes there is work left to do, and that hearing directly from students has helped her understand best what affects students the most. "Listening, learning, sharing information on what can make people feel better and make them feel like they belong – it's a process, we haven't solved it," said Angie. "Being aware, I think, is an important first step."

Angie's goals, while aspirational, are clear: "I want students to have the best possible experience." Creating an inclusive environment for transgender people in particular is an ongoing but critical goal. We hope all members of our community will join us in commemorating this important day of remembrance.

Nov.

20

The Education working group has a blog! Visit [deimitbe.wordpress.com](https://deimitbe.wordpress.com) for recommended readings and highlights of anti-oppressive work in the MIT community. In this month's update, Owen Leddy provides a review of Medical Apartheid, discusses Jackie Valeri's feature on Shelbi Parker's podcast focusing on chronic illnesses, and gives an overview of the MIT Black History Project.



Looking for a Netflix recommendation? We suggest the film [Disclosure](#), a documentary examining the depiction of transgender people in film.



Want to learn more about the incredible work that has been done by a trans scientist from MIT? Ben Barres was an MIT alum and Stanford Neuroscience Professor who pioneered glia research. Beyond his incredible scientific accomplishments, he used his platform to serve as a supportive mentor and advocate. Check out this video of him discussing the [beauty of science](#) or his book [The Autobiography of a Transgender Scientist](#).

## Expanding All-gender Restroom Access at MIT

by Miranda Dawson

What is the farthest you have had to go to use the restroom at MIT? Down the hall? Another floor? Another building? For those who are cisgender (meaning your gender identity matches your sex assigned at birth), it is unlikely you have ever had to leave your building to use the bathroom. However, for far too many at MIT, this is not the case. In particular, trans and gender-nonconforming students remain limited in their access to gender neutral bathroom spaces at MIT.

Currently, there are around 80 all-gender restrooms across 190 MIT buildings. This means that, for many members of our community, using the restroom requires a trek—to a hidden corner in the basement, to another building on campus, it may even require crossing the street multiple times a day. The impact of this cannot be understated. For instance, an undergraduate student shared that while they were transitioning, they often had to miss significant class time to use the bathroom, as the facility nearest to their lecture was two buildings away. Furthermore, locating an all-gender restroom is a task in and of itself. A list of the all gender restrooms on campus [does exist](#), but it is terribly outdated. A fellow graduate student told me they were excited when they saw their lab's building, E19, had multiple all-gender facilities, but it turned out that they were utility closets.

Clearly, this disparity needs to be addressed. To this, many people say "Just slap a sign on the door that says gender-neutral!" But in reality, it is not that simple. For instance, all single-stall restrooms assigned to the Department of Facilities should be designated as all-gender by signage outside of the door. This has been happening slowly but surely; however, the process becomes more complicated when a bathroom is instead "owned" by a department, lab, or center. In that case, local building leadership influences the signage change.

Beyond this, there is an even more arduous, bureaucratic process to designate multi-stall facilities as all-gender. This is in part thanks to the Massachusetts Board of State Examiners of Plumbers and Gas Fitters. In short, building a multi-stall all-gender restroom requires a variance from the City of Cambridge/Massachusetts as well as a request filed with the Committee for Renovation and Space Planning (CRSP). Despite the complexity of this process, multi-stall all-gender restrooms have been implemented on campus thanks to an all-gender restroom pilot project that was championed by campus advocates [between 2016 and 2019](#). However, the project ended after the implementation of four pilot restrooms.

To address all these complexities, Jason McKnight in the Institute Community and Equity Office (ICEO) (someone many of us in BE know) convened the All Gender Restroom Working Group (AGR WG) this Fall with the goal of improving access to all-gender restrooms at MIT. The working group has three aims within this broader goal:

1. Enhance current wayfinding and update listings of all-gender restrooms on the MIT Cambridge campus.
2. Assist in the Inclusive Restroom study championed by the Office of Campus Planning and ICEO (set to occur in Spring 2022).
3. Work to change local building codes to allow for all-gender multi-fixture restrooms without the need of a variance, in accordance with recently adopted international building codes.

HOWEVER, this working group alone is not enough to address our problem of restroom disparity. It requires that communities across campus engage and demonstrate that there is broad support across MIT for these changes. If enough departments, labs, and centers submit CRSP requests, there is a compelling case for MIT as an institution to push for broader change across campus. Here is a list of ways you can help:

1. If there is a single-stall restroom without an all-gender restroom sign, contact facilities. If there is a single-stall restroom that does not have an all-gender restroom sign, it may be assigned to 'owned' by the department, lab, or center, or has just not yet been changed. A signage change can be requested through the existing process. Please note that the signage change, once approved, will take 8-10 weeks to process.
2. Work with leaders in your building to discuss where an all gender restroom could be implemented and submit a joint Committee for Renovation and Space Planning (CRSP) request. More specifically, you can reach out to Morgan Pinney ([mpinney@mit.edu](mailto:mpinney@mit.edu)) in the Office of Campus Planning stating your intention to file a request. She has been acting as a consultant in navigating this pipeline.
3. If you want to be involved in broader campus efforts, reach out to the All-Gender Restroom Working Group. Specifically, co-chair Nina Harris ([nnharris@mit.edu](mailto:nnharris@mit.edu)) or your local graduate student representative from BE, Miranda Dawson ([miranda2@mit.edu](mailto:miranda2@mit.edu)).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the experience of being trans or gender-nonconforming on campus is multi-faceted. This experience cannot be reduced to bathroom access alone. However, implementing accessible space is an important step to take, and is something everyone in the community can engage in ensuring.

If you are seeking out more resources on this topic, I suggest the following:

[The gender-neutral bathroom: a new frame and some nudges](#)

[What it's like to use a public bathroom while trans](#)

[Violent cistems: Trans experiences of bathroom space](#)

## Upcoming Events

**School of Engineering DEI Committee Talk Series – Nov. 30th, 1-2pm**

President of Olin College of Engineering, Gilda A. Barabino will present: Engineering for Everyone: Centering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

**Hybrid Open Doc Lab Talk — Nov. 30th, 12-1:30pm**

MIT Campus, Wiesner Building, 20 Ames Street, 3rd Floor, Cambridge MA 02142, E15-318  
Register [here](#)

**Identity + Inclusion Series: Fireside Chat with Deans of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion — Dec. 1st, 7:30-9pm**

Register [here](#)

**Black December — Dec. 3rd, 12-2pm**

142 Memorial Dr, Cambridge, MA 02142, Walker Memorial  
RSVP [here](#)

## Contact Us

Feedback? Upcoming events? Want to get involved?

Get in touch at: [be-dei-comms@mit.edu](mailto:be-dei-comms@mit.edu)

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