

# Professor investigates gender-inclusive housing and friendships

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Traci Gillig. Credit: WSU

Gender-inclusive spaces may help young people develop friendships across gender identities, according to a new study by a Washington State University researcher.

The study is among the first to investigate the role of emerging gender-inclusive spaces in adolescent friendship network patterns. It was published this week in the *International Journal of Communication*.

Traci Gillig, assistant professor in the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication, and Leila Bighash, assistant professor at the University of Arizona, set out to address prior work that has shown a tendency for youth to develop friendships with same-gender peers.

Whether this tendency is due to a preference for same-gender friends or is an outcome from [communication](#) constraints from gender-segregated physical spaces and social practices (e.g., school [housing](#), single-sex schools, bathrooms, locker rooms, sports teams) is unclear.

Gillig and Bighash used social network analysis techniques to examine a network of 111 LGBTQ youth interacting in a summer camp featuring gender-inclusive housing and facilities. Results showed that campers were six times more likely to be friends with peers in their assigned, gender-inclusive cabins, while [gender identity](#) and birth sex had no significant influence on friendship patterns, in contrast to prior studies. The findings highlight the potential for emerging gender-inclusive spaces to integrate youth [friendships](#) across gender identities.

"As we note in our study, more broadly, our findings illustrate how opportunities to socialize with individuals representing diverse identities, even in the short term, matter," Gillig said. "Creating spaces that promote intergroup contact, without forcing people into relationships, can help people avoid the usual fallback of seeking out 'similar others.'"

Gillig and Bighash aim to contribute to current conversations and debates surrounding gender-segregated spaces and young transgender and nonbinary people, such as conversations about gender-inclusive camp housing.

According to the latest statistics from Google Scholar, the *International Journal of Communication* ranks second among all Humanities, Literature & Arts journals and fourth among Communication journals.

Provided by Washington State University

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