

Statement on PFC Event Inclusivity

January 27, 2023

The Pittsburgh Freethought Community has always strived to be a welcoming community for anyone in the greater Pittsburgh area who shares our commitment to science, reason, and humanist values. Freethought isn't always easy. The PFC had a Women's Discussion Group that was recently changed into the Women-only Discussion Group with a narrow definition of woman and an LGBTQIA+ Discussion Group that changed to an LGBT-only Discussion Group. These changes were implemented by the now former team leader without consulting with the Board of Directors or the broader PFC community. While we respect the right of individuals to have differing opinions and we understand that some communities may prefer to have a "safe space" where attendance is restricted to only members of that community, the PFC as a whole would rather err on the side of inclusivity rather than exclusivity. Such explicitly "only" events are not the current policy of the PFC, and the groups have been returned to their former status with non-exclusive names. This does not preclude the possibility of future safe space events with explicitly closed attendance, but it is not something we are pursuing at this time. If this changes, we would strive to do so more thoughtfully.

In practice, attendance at a Women's Discussion Group tends to be self-selective to those who identify as women. LGBTQIA+ events are also typically self-selective to the community, but there may be events that could and should be open to members of the LGBTQIA+ community and to those that love them. Political advocacy of LGBTQIA+ issues and Pride events are two such examples. We have a code of conduct that states "All participants are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is respectful of other participants and that encourages open dialogue and free inquiry. Passion, disagreement, and well-reasoned arguments are expected and welcomed, but rudeness, disrespect, and hostility are not." Those who are unwilling or unable to comply will not be welcomed.

As a further comment, we apologize to PFC members and to the broader community who were made to feel unwelcome during our brief period of exclusive events. We particularly wish to thank those who so clearly and eloquently raised their concerns to the PFC Board of Directors so that we can remedy. Rejection is always hard, particularly when it was by a community that claimed to welcome you. If you can find it in your heart to forgive us, please know that we would love to have you back.