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**Toward an inclusive workplace:  
Sexual orientation and gender identity at work**



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# Toward an inclusive workplace: Sexual orientation and gender identity at work

Inaugural speech delivered by

Prof. dr. Jojanneke van der Toorn

at the acceptance of the position of Professor by  
Special Appointment of “LGBT Workplace Inclusion”

at the Faculty of Social Sciences

of Leiden University

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Universiteit  
Leiden



*Mister Rector Magnificus,  
Members of the board of the Workplace Pride Foundation,  
Members of the Curatorium of this special chair,  
Esteemed audience,*

Today I am accepting the position of Professor by Special Appointment of “LGBT Workplace Inclusion”. This chair is “special” in a number of respects. Not only is it the first and only chair in the world with the theme of inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees, it is also a unique partnership between the academic world, civil society actors and the business sector. More specifically, the chair is a joint initiative of Leiden University and the Workplace Pride Foundation, and is funded by the telecom company KPN. This is a very special kind of alliance, of which I hope to see more in the future; because it is becoming increasingly clear that collaboration among several parties is crucial if we are to create links between academia and practice, and find workable solutions for societal challenges.

And for me personally, of course, this inaugural lecture is a special and exciting celebration. I am delighted that you have come here today, to mark this special moment with me.

*Colleagues, friends, and family, I welcome you all.*

To be present here today, you may have registered via the “Events” page on the University website. The registration form asked you for your personal details, including the title that you use. Two options were offered: “Mr” and “Ms”. While all of you are certainly most welcome here at my lecture today, this question gives the impression that you had to make a choice. And this was further reinforced by the red asterisk next to the question, which usually means that you *have* to answer this question before proceeding to the next step on the form. But why do you have to answer this question? Surely the important piece of information is your name? Many of you will simply

have ticked one of the boxes, without giving it much thought. But what if the choice between the two options is actually not so clear? What if you identify with neither “Mr” nor “Ms”? Or if this question reminds you of the specific interpretation that others give to these labels, an interpretation that perhaps leaves no space for your own individual identity. In that case, you were forced to make a choice in order to register. In order to be included.

### **Heteronormativity**

My reason for elaborating on these two response options is that they are a good example of the heteronormativity that characterises our society. The term “heteronormativity” refers to the idea that people can be divided into two genders (masculine and feminine) with their associated natural roles, which are in line with their assigned sex (male or female); and that heterosexuality is a given, rather than one of many possible sexualities (Warner, 1991). The assumption is thus that people are heterosexual, and are therefore attracted to people of the opposite sex, and also that they are “cisgender”, which means that they identify with and behave as the gender assigned to them at birth. There is no place for people who diverge from these heteronormative norms. This can be seen, for example, in the limited response options on the registration form.

Heteronormativity is the lens through which the world is viewed and, more importantly, through which it is evaluated *and* judged (Herek, 2009). This has far-reaching consequences, including in the workplace, where there is still much room for improvement for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees, or L-G-B-Ts. Although this is also a limited number of categories, I will be using these initials often today, because most research has been conducted with people who identify as L, G, B or T. It is important to realise, however, that sexual orientation and gender identity are much more diverse than those four letters might suggest.

## **Overview of the inaugural lecture**

Today I will be talking about the importance of an inclusive workplace, in which there is room for sexual orientation and gender identity. I want to tell you about how research is conducted on this within Social and Organisational Psychology, and what we have learned from it so far. I will look not only at potential obstacles on the path to an inclusive workplace and blind spots in diversity policy, but also at possible solutions and the opportunities that an inclusive workplace offers for organisations and their employees. Finally, I will outline my plans for researching this theme within my chair over the coming years.

## **Specific challenges for LGBTs in the workplace**

As a social and organisational psychologist, I study people in their social contexts. And those contexts, including the workplace, are predominantly heteronormative (Buijs, Hekma, & Duyvendak, 2011; Herek, 2009; Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009). A recent survey of lesbian, gay and bisexual employees conducted by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research revealed that, compared with their heterosexual colleagues, they experience more unwanted sexual attention, intimidation and bullying at work,<sup>1</sup> are less satisfied with their work and report more burnout problems (Kuyper, 2016). Compared with the rest of the Dutch population, transgender individuals have much more difficulty finding work in the first place (Kuyper, 2017) and often experience offensive behaviour at work (such as trite jokes and hurtful remarks by colleagues; Keuzenkamp, 2012; Vennix, 2010).

I will speak more about the background of these negative reactions shortly but first I want to explain why more attention needs to be given to sexual orientation and gender identity at work. Why does this special chair focus precisely on the workplace? It is because LGBTs encounter specific challenges there; challenges that stand in the way of inclusion.

## **Relevance of sexual orientation and gender identity for work**

Inclusion at work means that employees feel that they belong and that they can also be themselves (Jansen, Otten, van der Zee, & Jans, 2014). One of the problems encountered by LGBT employees is that people wonder what sexual orientation and gender identity have to do with work. I have been asked this question repeatedly over the last year by journalists. You may perhaps also think, “Well, I don’t actually talk to my colleagues about what happens in my bedroom, so why would other people do that?” Or “Is it really my business that my manager would prefer to be a man? Isn’t it up to her?” What you would then be overlooking is that sexual orientation is not just limited to the bedroom and that gender identity is more than self-image alone. People can only be themselves at work if they can be “out of the closet”, and this is not restricted to a once-only disclosure (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005). Being out of the closet means that LGBTs can speak openly about their personal life. Without even thinking about it, we share a great deal about ourselves at work. During the coffee break, we tell our colleagues how we spent the weekend and with whom, what our holiday plans are, what we find important and what we worry about. This is how we manage our relationships at work. By sharing our personal life with colleagues, we contribute to building trust in one another, which results in better collaboration and teamwork (Offermann & Rosh, 2012). It also has an effect on the “goodwill factor”: we are willing to make just a little more effort for a colleague who is friendly than for one who never wants to have a chat. Therefore, sexual orientation and gender identity in fact are related to work.

## **Invisibility of the stigma**

A second specific challenge encountered by LGBTs at work is the largely invisible nature of the group membership. If you fall outside the heteronormative picture because you are gay or transgender, you have to constantly point this out. After all, the expectation is heteronormative. If other people use the wrong form of address, for example, or ask about your wife,

then you are the one who has to correct them or tell them you have a husband. This has an upside in that the stigma attached to the group membership can be concealed to a certain extent (Herek, 1996). In this respect, it differs from other, more visible forms of stigma, such as those based on skin colour or physical impairments, which are more difficult to hide. If they so wish, many LGBTs can pass as heterosexual or cisgender, by choosing not to explicitly “come out” about their sexual orientation or gender identity. This is often actually seen as an easy solution for avoiding stigmatisation. However, the relative invisibility of the stigma is not necessarily an advantage. Especially at work, where firstly we spend a lot of time and secondly we often come into contact with new people, LGBTs are faced with the choice, time after time, of whether or not to come out of the closet. Both options demand energy.

And indeed, precisely the invisibility of the stigma appears to correlate with negative outcomes. In research that I conducted with Onur Sahin, Wiebren Jansen, Edwin Boezeman and Naomi Ellemers, we made a distinction between people who felt visibly and invisibly dissimilar to their colleagues (2018). The group of participants who felt visibly dissimilar (in terms of features such as age and ethnicity) was about the same size as the group of participants who felt invisibly dissimilar (on the basis of preferences and beliefs). Yet we found that people who felt invisibly dissimilar also felt less that they belonged and could be themselves at work. And this, in turn, was negatively related to their feelings of job satisfaction, their motivation to advance within the organisation, their intention to leave the organisation and their work-related stress. When people feel invisibly different, then, this has adverse consequences not only for themselves but also for the organisation.

### **In or out of the closet?**

Nevertheless, people still have good reasons to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity at work. They do it, for example, because they hope to thus avoid negative reactions

and discriminatory behaviour of colleagues (Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006; Croteau, 1996; Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). And in some respects it is effective. There are indications, for example, that concealing a stigmatised identity does indeed protect people against the negative expectations and prejudices of others (Croteau, 1996). Moreover, it is functional to conceal your group membership if it means you will be given a job or a promotion, or if it means you won't be thrown in jail, which is still a possibility in some countries.

However, there is also a downside: studies have shown that staying in the closet involves serious emotional costs, such as anxiety and depression, and undermines the wellbeing of those who hide their identity (Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006; Newheiser, Barreto, & Tiemersma, 2017). In addition, employees who try to conceal a stigmatised identity are less satisfied with their work, less productive, and feel less closely involved with the organisation (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Powers & Ellis, 1995). Further experimental research identifies the cause and the effect: when participants were randomly asked to conceal rather than reveal a stigmatised identity, they thought that an interaction partner would have a more positive perception of them, but at the same time they experienced more negative emotions and had lower confidence in their own ability (Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006).

We are therefore faced with a paradox: by staying in the closet, LGBTs hope to protect themselves, but in fact it results in negative outcomes for themselves and also for their organisation. This is further reinforced because the fear of being unmasked demands mental energy: you need to constantly be careful about what you say, to make sure that your true identity is not exposed (Ellemers & Barreto, 2006). Thus, if employees can't be themselves at work, this has direct consequences for how they feel there and for their performance. And this has an effect on the tasks for which they are there.

What can we conclude, then? In my view, it is not that LGBTs *must* come out of the closet at work. This is an individual choice, which everyone must make for themselves. But it is certainly important to realise that LGBTs experience extra challenges at work, compelling them to weigh up different kinds of costs against each other. Even in countries where they are protected by law. The solution lies in creating a work climate that leaves space for employees' individual preference as to whether or not they share personal information (see also Ellemers & Barreto, 2006). In other words, an inclusive climate where all employees belong and can also be themselves, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

### **The importance of an inclusive climate**

But what exactly does that mean, an inclusive work climate? An inclusive climate is not the same as a diverse workplace. It goes a step further than that, and refers to the extent to which diverse employees feel that their colleagues and managers are open to and value differences between employees (Harquail & Cox, 1993; Jansen, Otten, van der Zee, & Jans, 2014). This means that employees are allowed to be both visibly and invisibly different and that individual differences are seen as positive. An inclusive climate can help people in the workplace to get along with differences. Whether those differences happen to be visible or invisible, and whether they relate to themselves or to others is not really important: our research shows that everyone gains from an inclusive work climate (Sahin, Van der Toorn, Jansen, Boezeman, & Ellemers, 2018).

“Well then,” you will say, “that’s settled!” Unfortunately, however, creating an inclusive climate is more easily said than done. Organisations are increasingly acknowledging the importance of an inclusive workplace and are working hard to achieve it. But an inclusive workplace requires not only changes in policy and activities; it also requires a change in people’s mentality, which extends beyond the walls of the organisation. After all, the organisation is embedded in the heteronormative society. To bring about inclusion of

LGBTs in the workplace, we first need to have insight into the mechanisms that stand in the way of achieving acceptance of LGBTs in a broader social context, the context of society as a whole.

### **Tolerance within limits**

You will now perhaps say: “But that’s not really a problem here, right? The Netherlands is a tolerant country.” Indeed, not every context is equally heteronormative. But how do we determine the level of heteronormativity in a society? From the formal status of LGBTs as laid down in the law? From public opinion about how LGBTs should be permitted to live their lives? Or from the everyday experiences of LGBTs themselves?

It just depends how you look at it. But it certainly makes a difference. Research conducted by Kees Waaldijk shows that the degree of legal recognition of same-sex orientation differs from country to country (Waaldijk, 2011, 2017; Waaldijk & Bonini-Baraldi, 2006). And in this respect, the Netherlands does quite well. We also see considerable international differences in the prevailing opinions about LGBTs (Pew Research Center, 2013). Acceptance of homosexuality is mostly widespread in rich countries where religion plays a less central role; this description fits the Netherlands. In 2014, according to a report by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research, more than nine out of ten Dutch people thought that gay men and lesbian women should be free to live their lives as they wish (Kuyper, 2016). Yet this ostensible acceptance of same-sex orientation is not consistent with other figures. For instance, compared with the rest of the population, LGBTs in the Netherlands are more often confronted with violence, bullying and other negative reactions (Kuyper, 2016, 2017). 32% of the Dutch population think that two men kissing in public is offensive, while only 12% are offended by a kissing opposite-sex couple.

How can these findings be reconciled? How can we on the one hand speak of tolerance, and at the same time see

that LGBTs experience discrimination? An answer can be found in social psychology research, which reveals a multitude of psychological mechanisms that contribute to heteronormativity being maintained in society and in the workplace. I will now discuss the mechanisms on which I intend to focus in my research.

### **Shift from blatant to subtle prejudice**

A first reason behind the inconsistency between public opinion on LGBTs and the treatment experienced by LGBTs is the changing form of prejudice (Cramwinckel, Scheepers, & Van der Toorn, 2018). In recent decades, at least in Western countries, prejudice has become increasingly subtle. This applies to prejudice in general, and hence also to prejudice relating to LGBTs. Blatant prejudice is characterised by explicit hostility toward LGBTs (e.g., Herek, 1988; Morrison & Morrison, 2003); the kind of behaviour that you can call someone to account for. Subtle prejudice, on the other hand, is characterised rather by feelings of discomfort that make the contact more difficult, and it is harder to pinpoint when it occurs (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson, 2016).

Subtle prejudice is more implicit and possibly more unconscious (Jellison, McConnell, & Gabriel, 2004). Yet it is no less serious than blatant prejudice, and can be manifested both non-verbally and verbally. Examples include avoiding physical contact with LGBTs (Morrison & Morrison, 2003) or expressions like “that is so gay” to indicate that something is negative or silly. Microaggressions of this kind can be occasional and interpersonal, but they can also be structural in character, for instance in a workplace where it is accepted that colleagues make jokes about LGBTs (Woodford, Chonody, Kulick, Brennan, & Renn, 2015). It may seem innocent or even funny, but it is still harmful because microaggressions correlate with psychological stress and health problems (Meyer, 2003).

Another characteristic of subtle prejudice is that it is ambivalent (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2014). People have both

positive and negative opinions at the same time. Although, as I mentioned earlier, the majority of the Dutch population are overtly positive about LGBTs, at the same time many of them are offended by the sight of a gay couple kissing (Kuyper, 2016). We are in favour of same-sex marriage but graffiti is sprayed on bus shelters with a poster of two men kissing. This shows the “informal privileges” enjoyed by members of the majority in heteronormative contexts.

You may now be thinking: “That’s not how I think.” Followed by: “In fact, my best friend is a lesbian.” As I said before, people are only partly aware of their prejudices, which makes it difficult to tackle them. Moreover, prejudiced people prefer to see themselves as unprejudiced (Bodenhausen, Todd, & Richeson, 2009), especially in a society that gives such a high priority to tolerance as the Netherlands. In other words, people can explicitly support equal rights but still be implicitly heteronormative.

People with subtle prejudices mainly express their prejudiced opinions or behaviour if they can justify them on non-prejudiced grounds. A good illustration of this is given in a social psychology study where prejudiced people kept their distance from a gay man or a lesbian as long as they could give a good reason for doing so (Morrison & Morrison, 2003). What was the design of this study? Participants in this experiment could choose between two rooms in which to watch a film. An openly gay man or lesbian woman was already in one of the two rooms, and was going to watch the film there. If the same film was being shown in both rooms, highly prejudiced participants more often chose to watch the film in the same room as the gay man or lesbian woman; presumably because they would find it difficult to justify choosing the other room. However, if a different film was being shown in each room, highly prejudiced participants more often chose to watch the film in the other room; in this situation, they could give an unprejudiced reason for their choice, namely that they preferred to watch the other film.

We also see processes of this kind in the workplace. People will explicitly agree that everyone belongs but if they have a choice, they will still prefer not to admit a transgender colleague to the team. And they will look just slightly more surprised if a male colleague turns up at the Christmas party with his male partner than if a female colleague does the same. These subtle signs of disapproval and discomfort are among the things that make a negative contribution to the experiences of LGBTs at work.

### **Deviating from the norm leads to repercussions**

A second mechanism that contributes to the heteronormative society is that people have difficulty with deviations from the norm and will try in all kinds of ways to maintain the status quo. According to the heteronormative way of thinking, this status quo is firstly that men are masculine and women are feminine; secondly, men are attracted to women, and women to men. LGBTs differ from these prescriptions in several respects. Gay men, for example, are often characterised as feminine. They are therefore not only attracted to someone of the same sex, which conflicts with heteronormative requirements, but are also not even “real” men. And precisely this latter point seems to be important. Various studies indicate that the (apparent) deviation from masculine or feminine gender roles is an important aspect of the negative judgements about LGBTs (Cramwinckel, Scheepers, & Van der Toorn, 2018). This could explain why public opinion on transgender people, who appear to violate the gender norms more emphatically, is much less positive than the opinion on gay men and lesbians. Only 51% of the Dutch population have a positive attitude to transgender people (Kuyper, 2016).

Even perpetrators of anti-gay violence often say that they agree with equal rights for gay men and lesbians (Buijs, Hekma, & Duyvendak, 2011). So why do they attack men walking hand-in-hand, when they encounter them? Because at the same time they adhere to traditional norms about gender and sexuality. And if they are confronted with examples that contravene

these norms, they react with violence. In short, what we are seeing is a *bounded tolerance*. People are tolerant in the abstract but feel uncomfortable when sexual and gender diversity becomes specific and visible. You can be gay as long as you just act “normally”.

### **The need to justify the system**

My personal interest in this topic arises from, among other things, observations of this apparent need for what is “normal”. When an acquaintance made a comment about which of two lesbian partners was “the man” and which one “the woman” in the relationship, it started me thinking. Where does this search for complementary gender roles come from? Was it not just a way to make the relationship heteronormative? Research that I conducted together with Jaime Napier and Henny Bos does indeed seem to suggest this (Van der Toorn & Napier, 2018; Van der Toorn, Bos, & Napier, 2012). It was the participants who had difficulty with visible expressions of homosexuality who tried to identify a masculine and feminine partner in same-sex relationships.

But why do we feel so uncomfortable when people deviate from this heteronormative norm? An important psychological theory that gives insight into this is system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Van der Toorn, 2012). Briefly, this theory states that people are motivated to see the world in which they live (*the system*) as fair and equitable, because this gives them a sense of security, safety and stability. Although this may sound quite innocent, in fact it has its disadvantages. For instance, this motivation can lead people to disapprove of deviations from the norm and to justify – and sometimes even deem desirable – the less pleasant aspects of a society, such as inequality between groups. Which means that very little changes.

System justification also plays a part in maintaining the heteronormative society. This can be seen from, for example, research in which I and my colleagues tried to clarify the

association between religiosity and opposition to same-sex marriage (Van der Toorn, Jost, Packer, Noorbaloochi, & Van Bavel, 2017). The intolerance toward homosexuality that characterises many religions seems to be at odds with the value they attach to compassion and universal love. In our study, we found that religious people's opposition to opening up marriage to same-sex couples is indeed explained by antipathy toward gay men and lesbians. Yet that antipathy, which clearly is not consistent with the ideal of universal love, was found to stem from a preference for tradition. Because religious people attach more value to tradition, they have a negative attitude toward people who deviate from the tradition. Their opposition to same-sex marriage therefore had less to do with a lack of compassion and more with resistance to change.

Now you may wonder whether extending an institution such as marriage is actually a sign of progress. It is inspired by the wish to give same-sex couples the same rights and obligations as opposite-sex couples. Yet you could also argue that supporting same-sex marriage is, in itself, heteronormative. As Judith Butler (2000) reasons in her essay "Competing Universalities", the attempt to gain a right to same-sex marriage is an attempt that ultimately serves the dominant social order. It legitimises the institution of marriage, she argues, at the expense of other forms of partnership and alliance. And that is precisely the problem with heteronormativity. It is not only in our heads, but is also anchored in our social system, with all its institutions (Herek, 2009). Because LGBTs are part of that same system, it is difficult for them to avoid it. Just like other people, they have been heteronormatively socialised.

### **Internalised homonegativity**

It is therefore not surprising that, on implicit measures, gay men and lesbians show a less strong preference for their own group than heterosexuals do (Jellison, McConnell, & Gabriel, 2004; Jost, Nosek, & Banaji, 2004). And that they sometimes even agree with the negative opinions that society has about their group. This so-called internalised homonegativity (Herek,

Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Mayfield, 2001) is a third mechanism that contributes to the obstinate heteronormative society.

I have done various studies on the ways in which gay men and lesbians adapt themselves to heteronormative norms and thus, paradoxically enough, maintain the system that labels them as inferior (Napier, Vial, & Van der Toorn, 2018; Pacilli, Jost, Taurino, & Van der Toorn, 2011; Suppes, Napier, & Van der Toorn, in press). An example is a study that I conducted together with Jaime Napier and Andrea Vial on gay men's desired ideal partner (Napier, Vial, & Van der Toorn, 2018). In this experiment, we found an interesting pattern among participants who felt uncomfortable about their own sexuality. The ones who attributed masculine traits to themselves preferred a partner who does the stereotypically feminine household tasks (such as washing clothes), while the ones who attributed feminine traits to themselves preferred a partner who does the masculine tasks (such as DIY). These men were therefore aiming for a complementary division of gender roles in their ideal romantic relationship. We did not, however, find this pattern among participants who had no difficulty with their sexuality, or among participants who were first provided with a positive norm by suggesting that social acceptance of gay men and lesbians is increasing. So, participants only wanted a complementary partner if they had difficulty with their own sexuality and if society appeared to disapprove of homosexuality. The desire for a complementary partner thus seemed to be motivated by feelings of discomfort and threat. This study therefore illustrates the strength of the heteronormative norm and how important it is to break through this norm.

But that is far from easy. Heteronormativity is so interwoven in the structure of society that solutions require far-reaching changes in the system. My dissertation research showed that people who experience a low sense of power are more inclined to rationalise inequality than people with a high sense of power, presumably because legitimising the system, even

though it is unequal, at least gives them a sense of security (Van der Toorn, Feinberg, Jost, Kay, Tyler, Willer, & Wilmoth, 2015). This could explain why LGBTs do not always rebel against unequal treatment or tend to downplay discrimination against their group. They too, like everyone else, have a need for security and stability, and will be motivated to justify the system to a certain extent.

Research that I conducted together with Lexi Suppes and Jaime Napier demonstrated the advantages of this. LGBTs who downplayed the degree of social discrimination against their group, instead of acknowledging it, scored higher on all kinds of measures of mental and physical wellbeing (Suppes, Napier, & Van der Toorn, in press). Thus, LGBTs have good reasons for remaining invisible at work, adapting to the heteronormative norm or downplaying discrimination against their group: it results in individual advantages, at least in the short term. The downside is, however, that the heteronormative system stays firmly in place.

Esteemed audience, what can we conclude from my lecture? I argued that the obstinate character of heteronormativity in society has to do with various, related, psychological mechanisms. The subtle and partly unconscious nature of prejudice makes it hard to recognise and hence more difficult to tackle (Barreto & Ellemers, 2015). This prejudice arises from, among other things, people's need to maintain the status quo because it gives them a sense of security and predictability. They consequently have little motivation to change it, and even LGBTs are inclined to adapt themselves to the heteronormative norm. All these processes also play a role in the workplace and thus contribute to the lower inclusion of LGBTs at work.

### **Conclusion: both challenges and opportunities**

As you will have realised, creating an inclusive workplace is a massive task, because of the specific challenges faced by LGBTs at work and in society. But it is well worth the effort to tackle those problems, because an inclusive work climate

also offers opportunities, both for the individual and for the organisation. An inclusive climate improves the wellbeing of employees and increases their productivity and their loyalty to the organisation. This applies for both minority and majority group members. So everyone stands to gain here!

### **Evidence-based work**

I am therefore optimistic about the feasibility of an inclusive workplace. But it requires an approach in which organisations and academic researchers work together (Ellemers, Sahin, Van der Toorn, & Jansen, 2018). A growing number of organisations are genuinely interested in practical solutions, and there is much experimentation. Yet often we don't really know whether diversity policy works or not. Many well-meaning interventions are based on common sense and on the assumption that even if they don't do any good, they won't do any harm. However, social psychology research shows that interventions do not always have the desired effects, and the outcome is sometimes precisely the opposite of what was intended (Moss-Racusin, Van der Toorn, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2014). Some training sessions designed to reduce prejudice among employees turn out, ironically enough, to lead instead to more prejudice (e.g., Legault, 2011). How can this happen? Because not enough account is taken of people's psychology. And that is not always in line with common sense. If subtle prejudice and resistance to system change are not taken into account, people will perhaps *say* that they have nothing against LGBTs, but nothing will really change.

If we want to create an inclusive workplace, an evidence-based approach is needed (Ellemers, Sahin, Van der Toorn, & Jansen, 2018). We can only make a difference for LGBTs in the workplace if we understand which social psychological mechanisms underlie their exclusion; because to determine *what* works, we need to know *why* something does or doesn't work. This is the added value of a scientific approach.

### **Current and future research**

In what remains of this lecture, I would like to tell you how, within this chair, I will contribute to knowledge in this area by interlinking fundamental research with applied research. I will do this on the basis of a combination of questionnaire research, interviews and experiments in the lab and in the field. In all cases, I will give attention to the role played by majority and minority groups. I will now highlight a number of projects I am working on.

### **Motives for resisting diversity policy and invisibility at work**

First, I want to gain more insight into how various groups of employees, perhaps unconsciously and unintentionally, contribute to a heteronormative workplace. For this purpose, one of my projects is aimed at gaining insight into the motivations that underlie resistance to diversity policy, which is one of the approaches used by organisations in actively trying to create an inclusive workplace. But policy is only effective if it has a high level of support among employees (Avery, 2011). In a first set of studies, I investigated the role of self-interest and system justification (Van der Toorn, 2018), and found that both motives play a role. The introduction of gender-inclusive toilets at work, for example, received less support when participants regarded this initiative as less in the interests of themselves or their group and when they scored higher on system justification. In follow-up research, I will look more closely at these two motives and also make a distinction between members of minority and majority groups.

In a second project I want to examine in greater depth the role played by internalised homonegativity in invisibility at work. What is its influence on the wish of LGBT employees to stay in the closet? On their willingness to serve as a role model? And on their support for LGBT-specific diversity policy? Together with Kyra van Hinsberg, I am currently conducting research within an LGBT employee network of a large organisation. We are investigating the motivations of the members for being active (or not) within the network, and examining the role

of internalised homonegativity. I hope to further extend this research in the coming years, to gain more insight into the social psychological obstacles to an inclusive workplace.

### **The effective ingredients of diversity policy**

However, I want to look not only at the challenges but also at the opportunities. In a second line of research I will therefore focus on the effective ingredients of diversity management. I will do this in collaboration with the Workplace Pride Foundation, which conducts a benchmark survey of its members every year, to gain a picture of their LGBT policy. We will supplement this policy survey with an employee questionnaire to measure, among other things, the extent to which employees feel included. This will give us insight into which specific policy initiatives make a difference in the workplace. And not only in the Netherlands but also in the other countries where the participating organisations operate; because, depending on the context, the challenges are different in every case. In this research, we will be guided both by questions posed by organisations themselves and by scientific knowledge of the psychological mechanisms. An example is the subtle prejudices that, as I mentioned earlier, form a serious obstacle to inclusion of LGBTs at work. How can these prejudices be influenced? Together with Florian Cramwinckel and Daan Scheepers, I have inventorised what we can deduce about this from the social psychological literature (Cramwinckel, Scheepers, & Van der Toorn, 2018). The most important conclusion? That as yet we don't have any ready-made solutions. Information alone seems in any case insufficient, and can sometimes actually increase prejudice against LGBTs. Contact interventions seem to do rather better, especially if the contact generates empathy for LGBTs. In the coming years, we aim to test such findings in relation to practice in organisations. For example, do employee networks – contexts *par excellence* where employees can come into contact with LGBTs – contribute to an inclusive workplace? We will be working on questions of this kind with future PhD candidates.

In addition, experimental research is needed to determine more precisely how organisations can promote a sense of inclusion among employees. For example, in how they communicate about their diversity policy. One study on this is the PhD research of Onur Sahin, which I am supervising together with Naomi Ellemers. As I said, inclusion means that employees feel that they belong and that they can also be themselves at work. To achieve both of these aspects, organisations need to find a balance between acknowledging differences and at the same time emphasising similarities between employees. We will research, among other things, how organisations can do this in their policy communication.

### **The business case for an inclusive workplace?**

In a third line of research, I am looking together with Wiebren Jansen at the motives of organisations in introducing diversity policy. I spoke earlier about the advantages of an inclusive workplace for employees and organisations. Employees feel more comfortable about themselves and organisations reap the benefits of this. An inclusive work climate is thus a *business case*. This business case is often used to persuade not only the company management but also employees that diversity policy is a good idea. All kinds of calculations are unleashed, to translate the outcomes of diversity and inclusion into the financial bottom line. What return does it give us? But why is the business case so attractive for organisations? In fact, a *moral case* can also be made. That we should try to achieve an inclusive workplace because it is quite simply the *right thing* to do, regardless of whether it yields any return or not. For example, on the basis of corporate social responsibility for underrepresented groups. These moral arguments are used as well, but rarely without instrumental arguments being given at the same time. But is the business case indeed more persuasive than the moral case? Or does it depend on the kind of organisation? And what effect do the two arguments have on majority and minority group members? This is what we will research in the coming years. Because how organisations communicate about their motives also has consequences for

employees' sense of inclusion. LGBTs will presumably feel more included if they are allowed to participate because the organisation sees it as fair, rather than because the organisation is aiming to make more profit.

As the Professor by Special Appointment of "LGBT Workplace Inclusion", I hope that in the coming years this research programme will generate both important theoretical knowledge and knowledge that can be applied in practice, in the area of inclusion at work. This will require close cooperation with civil society, the public sector and the business sector. I am very thankful for the collaborations that I have already established, and hope to be able to add yet more, perhaps inspired by what I have said today.

### **Words of thanks**

Having now reached the end of my inaugural lecture, I would like to express my thanks to a few people.

First of all, I want to thank those who made this appointment possible: in particular, the Workplace Pride Foundation, the Executive Board, the Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences and KPN. And also the members of the Curatorium and Eric van Dijk, the chair of our research unit. Many thanks to you all for your encouragement and confidence.

It is a real privilege to hold this chair at this university. Within higher education, Leiden University is a pioneer in the area of diversity and inclusion, and in many respects this is thanks to Simone Buitendijk, the former Vice-Rector Magnificus of our university, and also the Diversity Office, headed by Isabel Hoving. I am most grateful for all the work they do in this area.

Two people have played a crucial role in my career. The first is John Jost, who was my PhD advisor in New York. He taught me the importance of a good theory and that an advisor can be a mentor for life. The second decisive person is Naomi Ellemers,

who gave me the opportunity to return to the Netherlands – something that involved a certain amount of risk, because my theoretical framework was not the same as hers (!) Yet it has turned out to be an excellent match. I am tremendously proud of what we have already established together, in Leiden and in Utrecht, and I hope that we will continue to work together for many years.

I would also like to thank my colleagues. First, my colleagues in the Social and Organisational Psychology Unit in Leiden. Even with my 0.2 FTE, you give me the feeling that I belong and can be myself. In particular, I want to mention Lotte and Gert-Jan, my unofficial paranymphs. We have never actually done research together, but you are the best collaborators I could ever wish for. And also my colleagues in Utrecht, where I so quickly felt at home: thank you for your support and enthusiasm.

The research that I described today was conducted not just by me alone, but together with various fellow researchers and students within and outside the Netherlands. These are the personal contacts that inspire me each and every day. I want to thank you all, and hope that we will work together even more intensively on this theme in the coming years.

In the personal sphere, I would first like to thank my parents, sister and brother, for their love and support. You are the strong base from which I could spread my wings, and the main reason that I returned home after so many years abroad. It is wonderful to be able to see you so often now.

And then the people with whom my psychology career began, many years ago, at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Dear Daphne, Iris, Selma, Juke, Maarten and Esther. How nice to see you sitting here together again in the “lecture hall”.

Also my other dear friends and family members, who in so many ways are an inspiration for me and my work. Thank you

for coming. I hope that you now understand a little of where my passion for research comes from.

And then, of course, Niall, Sine and Lugh - my home - who constantly remind me of what is really important. Thank you so much for embarking on the adventure with me, every day anew.

But how different our life could have been, if our love and our family had not fitted within society’s heteronormative image. And we had been condemned by others for this. How would I feel in my workplace? What would I think when I registered for my own inaugural lecture? This chair is for all those people who do not fit the heterosexual, cisgender norm. It is an acknowledgement that they are important and are entitled to equal treatment, also at work. And not only the L-G-B-Ts, but all those who do not identify with any of the standard pigeonholes. I sincerely hope that my research can contribute to a workplace where all employees feel that they belong and can be themselves.

This is what I strive towards, together with my students and fellow researchers, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, with the Workplace Pride Foundation, civil society organisations, the public sector and the business sector. Onward, to an inclusive workplace!

*I have spoken.*

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#### Noten

- 1 The higher levels of experienced harassment apply for gay men and for bisexual men and women, but not for lesbian women (Kuyper, 2016).

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Organisations are increasingly acknowledging the importance of an inclusive workplace, which has room for sexual orientation and gender identity. Yet this is difficult to achieve, given that even an apparently tolerant climate is in fact rather less than tolerant. People who are in favour of equal rights can still disapprove of a transgender colleague or make (unconsciously) hurtful remarks about homosexuality. How can we explain this paradox? If the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees (LGBTs) at work is to be improved, we need insight into the social psychological mechanisms that underlie their stigmatisation; because to determine what works, we need to know why something does or doesn't work. This is the added value of a scientific approach. Jojanneke van der Toorn discusses the psychological processes that stand in the way of achieving a truly inclusive workplace for LGBTs, and what we can learn from them in order to find practical solutions. Because inclusivity offers opportunities for both employees and organisations.



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