

# How LGBT-Supportive Workplace Policies Shape the Experience of Lesbian, Gay Men, and Bisexual Employees

Anouk Lloren<sup>1</sup> · Lorena Parini<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract** Support for lesbians', gay men's, bisexuals', and transgender people's (LGBT) rights has increased over the last two decades. However, these recent trends hide existing disparities between and within countries. In particular, workplace discrimination is still a relatively widespread phenomenon. Although many countries lack legal provision protecting LGBT employees, numerous organizations have adopted LGBT-supportive policies over the last two decades. Many studies have investigated the business case for diversity arguments and tested whether diversity brings about positive business outcomes. However, few studies have studied their effect on outcomes that do not directly affect employees' productivity. This article aims at filling this gap and examines whether LGBT-supportive policies help (1) to reduce discrimination based on sexual discrimination and (2) to increase LGB employees' well-being and psychological health at work. Results show that diversity management contributes to shaping the experience of LGB employees by reducing discrimination and increasing overall well-being at work. However, LGBT-supportive policies do not influence employees' psychological health outcomes.

**Keywords** LGBT-supportive workplace policies · Well-being and psychological health at work · Workplace discrimination

✉ Anouk Lloren  
anouk.lloren@gmail.com

Lorena Parini  
lorena.parini@unige.ch

<sup>1</sup> Gender Studies Institute, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland

<sup>2</sup> Gender Studies Institute, University of Geneva, 40 Bvd. du Pont d'Arve, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland

Support for lesbians', gay men's, bisexuals', and transgender people's (LGBT) rights worldwide has substantially increased over the last two decades. For instance, data from the World Values Survey indicates that between 1993 and 2006, the proportion of people who consider homosexuality as never justifiable has dropped from an average of 59 to 34 % (World Values Survey 2015). This evolution has been concomitant with increased support for same-sex marriage. Today, 22 countries legally recognize gay unions around the world, from the Netherlands in 2000 to the USA in 2015 (PEW Research Center 2013). However, these recent trends hide existing disparities between and within countries in terms of LGBT rights, such as continued unequal treatment of transgender people in the western world and the strengthening of homophobic laws in places like Russia, Uganda, and Nigeria.

Gay and transgender rights are not particularly well developed in Switzerland: It ranks 31st out of 49 countries with a score of 28 % (100 % indicating full equality) according to a report by ILGA-Europe (2015). By comparison, the UK holds first position in the ranking, Spain is sixth place, and Germany ranks 15th with scores of 86, 69, and 57 %, respectively. While Article 8 of the Swiss Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and one's way of life, there is no law explicitly prohibiting employment discrimination because of sexual orientation or gender identity. This legislative vacuum is surprising given the fact that working adults spend about a third of their time at work. Recent research also indicates that diversity management in the workplace can have positive consequences for both employees and companies (Badgett et al. 2013).

The majority of studies examining workplace discrimination suggest that it is still a relatively widespread phenomenon. Recent research focusing on the LGBT community found that 20 to 50 % of respondents across European countries felt discriminated during their job search and/or at work

(European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2013; ILGA 2015; Kuyper 2015). In the USA, where most studies on the topic have been carried out, findings indicate that between 15 and 66 % of gay men, lesbian, and bisexual employees have experienced sexual orientation discrimination at work (Badgett et al. 2007; Croteau 1996; Katz-Wise and Hyde 2012; Ragins and Cornwell 2007). In particular, activists and scholars report that the debates on gay marriage have triggered a backlash against LGBT equality. For instance, Yohann Rosz ewitch, President of *SOS Homophobie* in France, recently said that “homophobic acts in the workplace are constant over the years, but the debate relating to same-sex marriage has increased homophobic attitudes and behaviors” (Le Breton 2014).

Over the last decade, a growing number of organizations have started to implement LGBT-supportive policies on a voluntary basis. Although they might be driven by ethical motivations, most organizations refer to pragmatic benefits to justify diversity management initiatives. The business case argument states that a diverse workforce brings about benefits for firms: positive business outcomes could be both direct, for example, by increasing an organization’s overall profit, and indirect, for example, by improving employees’ job satisfaction or increasing their job commitment. According to this diversity discourse, the promotion of equality goes hand in hand with business goals. A growing body of literature has investigated whether inclusive workplace policies translate into benefits for companies. The results remain controversial, as they have shown that policies may have large, small, or nonexistent effects on business outcomes and the promotion of equality (Badgett et al. 2013; McFadden 2015). However, little attention has been given to the effect of LGBT-supportive policies on outcomes that do not directly affect employees’ productivity at work.

### Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation at Work

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is still a widespread phenomenon in the workplace (Badgett et al. 2007; Croteau 1996; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2013; Katz-Wise and Hyde 2012; Kuyper 2015; Parini and Lloren 2017; Ragins et al. 2007). Research on workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation has mainly focused on mapping the existing types of discrimination and the consequences of disclosure and outness. While the majority of studies have centered on gay men and lesbian employees, a growing interest in bisexuals and transgender people has recently emerged in the literature. Note that in this article, we exclude transgender people from our analysis since we believe they face distinct patterns of workplace discrimination as compared to gay men, lesbian, and bisexual employees.

Numerous scholars distinguish between two types of discrimination: (1) formal discrimination and (2) informal discrimination (McFadden 2015). The former refers to discrimination in formalized contexts, such as job applications, interviews, promotion, wages, and dismissal. For instance, research has investigated whether gays were less likely to be invited for an interview than heterosexuals (Drydakis 2009; Tilcsik 2011). Informal discrimination relates to “discriminatory incidents on an interpersonal level and may relate to malicious jokes, snubs, exclusion, or harassment” (McFadden 2015). Moreover, informal discrimination can be diffuse (i.e., a generalized heterosexist workplace environment) or direct (i.e., target a particular individual). Various actors in the work environment can potentially discriminate against gay men, lesbian, and bisexual workers, for example, co-workers, superiors, or subordinates.

Guiffre et al. (2008) reveal that discrimination against LGB employees is especially developed in three areas, namely stereotyping, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment. Moreover, lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals experience important career barriers, such as “dissatisfaction with career, sexual orientation discrimination, lack of confidence, multiple role conflict, and difficulty with networking” (Parnell et al. 2012, p. 255). Lesbians and bisexual women are particularly affected by these different forms of workplace discrimination.

Unlike ethnic minorities or obese people whose stigmas are discernable, LGB employees have invisible stigmas and can thus choose to disclose or hide their sexual identity to co-workers, superiors, or subordinates. According to Ragins et al. (2007), the fear associated with disclosing one’s sexual identity might have more importance than the actual decision to disclose it for understanding the experience of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals at work. However, anticipated discrimination (such as exclusion, harassment, career derailment, job loss, etc.) is often not correlated with experienced discrimination following disclosure (Croteau 1996; Ragins et al. 2007). According to Woods (1994), the latter phenomenon is “common” while the former is “epidemic.” Therefore, outness does not automatically increase actual workplace discrimination.

Disclosure is not a one-time decision, but rather is an “on-going process and occurs on a continuum ranging from full disclosure on one end to nondisclosure on the other” (Ragins et al. 2007, p. 1105). The decision to “come out of the closet” is weighted against the more general organizational environment. The environment can appear more or less tolerant toward LGB people, for example, with the presence of LGB work colleagues or supportive heterosexual colleagues. Studies indicate that the majority of LGB employees do not disclose their sexual identity at work (Chamberland et al. 2009; Fidas and Cooper 2015; Falcoz and B ecuwe 2009). Concealment requires a constant effort on behalf of employees and is believed to trigger negative work outcomes by

potentially increasing stress and anxiety. Because individuals can reconcile their private and public identity and focus more effectively on their work tasks, disclosure is expected to increase psychological well-being and positive work attitudes. To a certain extent, coming out can reinforce and reproduce normative systems (Benozzo et al. 2015). Even though research results have been mixed, studies also suggest that openness about being gay is associated with positive psychological health outcomes, well-being at work, job satisfaction, and, to a certain extent, organizational commitment (Badgett et al. 2013; McFadden 2015; Ozeren 2014).

### The Effect of Diversity Management on LGB Employees' Workplace Experience

There is no legal provision against workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation in a vast number of countries: Only 61 countries worldwide explicitly prohibit discrimination against LGBT employees (Itaborahy and Zhu 2014; Catalyst 2015). However, numerous organizations have adopted LGBT-supportive workplace policies over the last two decades. For instance, 91 % of the Fortune 500 firms have implemented policies against sexual orientation discrimination and 57 % have programs explicitly addressing gender identity (Fidas and Cooper 2015). Although the range of LGBT-supportive policies implemented by companies can be very diverse, there is no authoritative typology of LGBT-supportive policies. For instance, Ozeren (2014, p. 1209) notes that “policies range from explicit written rules to prevent sexual orientation discrimination through diversity training programs that emphasize LGBT concerns to domestic partner benefits offered by companies.” Moreover, policies targeted toward the LGBT community can be more or less binding for companies that adopt them.

Despite these trends, diversity management targeted toward LGBT employees remains, on average, rather low compared to other groups such as women or ethnic minorities, which were the first targets of diversity management in the 1980s (Badgett et al. 2013; Society for Human Resource Management 2009, p. 13). Raeburns (2004) has examined the context in which firms have adopted LGBT-supportive policies in the US external and internal pressures, such as lawsuits from present or past employees, activism from LGBT employees within companies, pressure from labor unions, and boycotts by the public, which have been important factors for the adoption of LGBT-supportive policies. But many companies have actually chosen to implement such policies on a voluntary basis and frequently argue that diversity is good for business.

Whether diversity management actually brings about positive benefits for LGB employees on the one hand, and for companies on the other, has sparked great interest

from academic scholars, human resource professionals, and management practitioners alike. Broadly speaking, empirical findings testing the business case for diversity are mixed. In their meta-analysis reviewing 36 studies, Badgett et al. (2013) reveal that most studies find a positive relationship between LGBT-supportive policies and individual- and organizational-level business outcomes. However, some find negative or nonexistent associations. Research has mainly analyzed how diversity management affects individual outcomes that potentially increase employees' productivity at work, such as their organizational commitment. There are few studies that examine the link between LGBT-supportive policies and workplace discrimination, and findings from this field are inconclusive. On the one hand, LGBT-supportive policies are said to reduce discrimination at work. Ragins and Cornwell (2007), for example, provide evidence that organizations with a gay-friendly workplace culture are more successful at reducing perceived workplace discrimination than state-level legislations barring discrimination against lesbian, gay men, and bisexual employees. Moreover, Button (2001, p. 17) shows that “the more prevalent these [LGBT] policies are within an organization, the less likely sexual minority members are to experience treatment discrimination.” On the other hand, other studies fail to find that diversity management decreases discrimination. A survey conducted in the USA by Human Rights Campaign [HCR] (2009) highlights that LGBT-supportive workplace policies have limited influence in changing hostile work environments toward LGB employees. This finding is in accordance with research focusing on other dimensions of diversity management. For instance, Ashley (2010) reveals that the “diversity discourse” is not able to change organizational cultures and effectively widen access to top law firms on the basis of social class. Moreover, workplace policies focusing on sexual orientation can also potentially trigger backlash against LGB employees. Tejada (2006) finds that employees are more likely to report workplace hostility in organizations that have corporate LGB policies, and Kaplan (2006), who focuses on training programs, discusses how the promotion of LGBT rights within firms can collide with the views of conservatives and religious workers.

With regard to psychological health and well-being outcomes, several studies find that both a supportive workplace climate and the implementation of LGBT-supportive policies tend to improve the experience of homosexual and bisexual employees (Badgett et al. 2013). Employees working for companies implementing such policies and providing domestic partner benefits tend to be less depressed, distracted, exhausted, and stressed at work (Day and Schoenrade 2000; Human Rights Campaign [HCR] 2009). Waldo (1999) shows that heterosexist work environments have negative consequences for the psychological well-being of LGB workers. Research also indicates that LGBT-supportive policies help

homosexual employees to reconcile their private and public life and, therefore, lead to fewer work-home conflicts (Day and Schoenrade 2000).

However, the positive relationship between psychological health and well-being outcomes on the one hand and LGBT-supportive workplace policies on the other hand could actually be mediated by outness at work, i.e., whether an employee is out or not with his/her colleagues, superiors, and subordinates. Along these lines, studies have shown that being open about one's sexual identity decreases depression, distraction, exhaustion, stress, and anxiety at work (Badgett et al. 2013; Human Rights Campaign [HCR] 2009; Sandford, Bos, and Vet 2006). Likewise, improved well-being and mental health could also be explained by the fact that diversity management helps decrease (the fear of) workplace discrimination, which can trigger stress, anxiety, and depression (Waldo 1999; Sandfort et al. 2006; Smith and Ingram 2004).

Most research on the experience of gay men, lesbian, and bisexual employees has focused on the USA. More recently, an increasing number of studies has centered on EU countries and has led to the publication of both case studies and comparative studies. To our knowledge, there are no studies examining how LGBT-supportive workplace policies mediate the experience of LGB employees in Switzerland. The Swiss case is especially interesting because gay rights are not particularly developed there. Building on the literature discussed above, this study examines whether LGBT-supportive workplace policies bring about positive benefits for lesbian, gay men, and bisexual employees. It assesses the effect of LGBT-supportive policies on individual outcomes that do not directly affect employees' productivity at work, namely (1) discrimination, (2) well-being, and (3) psychological health outcomes.

## Methods

### Study Participants

This study was conducted using a national survey throughout Switzerland in 2014. Respondents were recruited using a convenience sample by asking 40 Swiss LGBT cantonal and national organizations to distribute the survey electronically via e-mail lists and links on their website. It included 77 questions (5 binary "yes/no" questions; 36 Likert scale questions; 36 multiple choice questions). The survey was accessible for 3 months. Inclusion criteria included self-identified LGB persons aged 16 or older who were currently working or had worked in the last 3 years. The survey aimed at capturing perceived workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. It asked respondents to recall their work experience over the last 3 years and to share their feelings about specific work events. In addition, the survey solicited information on respondents' socio-demographic background and work

environment (professional sector, company size, public or private sector, etc.). A series of questions at the end of the survey gathered information on whether firms implemented LGBT-supportive workplace policies and how the interviewees evaluated these policies. Some of the questions used in our survey are drawn from the survey carried out by Chamberland et al. (2009) and were adapted to the Swiss case. The survey was validated using a snowball sample of 15 LGBT employees. Overall, more than 1065 participants completed the survey on the Internet. Our analysis is based on 952 responses (485 gay men, 369 lesbians, 66 bisexual women, and 32 bisexual men). Exclusion criteria included those that self-identified as transgender.

## Measures

**Verbal Stigmatization** To measure whether verbal stigmatization against LGB people is widespread, we created an additive index using three questions on the frequency of use of derogatory and offensive language at work for which respondents could answer very often, often, rarely, or never. Respondents' answers were coded as 1 (=very often, often or rarely) or 0 (=never). The verbal stigmatization scale displays a relatively good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.77.

**Exclusion** We measured exclusion with an additive index based on three questions asking respondents whether they felt excluded from their work team, interesting work projects, or social events and informal gatherings for which survey participants could answer very often, often, rarely, or never. Answers were coded as 1 (=very often, often, or rarely) or 0 (=never). The exclusion scale has a relatively good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79).

**Harassment** We measured harassment using two questions asking respondents whether they experienced moral and physical harassment at work for which they could answer very often, often, rarely, or never. Answers were coded as 1 (=very often, often, or rarely) or 0 (=never). The harassment scale has a reasonably strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.59.

**Well-Being** Well-being at work was measured using a single item, which assessed how respondents feel in the workplace. Survey participants could answer that they felt very well, well, relatively well, relatively bad, bad, or very bad at work. Answers were coded as 1 (=very well, well, or relatively well) or 0 (=relatively bad, bad, or very bad).

**Psychological Health Problems** Psychological health outcomes were measured using four questions asking respondents



whether they experienced job anxiety, were feeling depressed, were having suicidal thoughts, and whether they thought their general mental health had deteriorated over the last 3 years. For each question, respondents could answer very often, often, rarely, or never. Answers were coded as 1 (=very often, often, or rarely) or 0 (=never). This scale has a relatively strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.71).

**LGBT-Supportive Workplace Policies** This variable was measured using a question asking respondents whether their companies adopted the following policies: (1) a written nondiscrimination article regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in the firm's charter; (2) health insurance coverage for employees' same-sex domestic partners; (3) a warning system and (4) disciplinary measures to prevent homophobia; (5) mentoring and training programs on LGBT equality and inclusion; recognition and support of (6) an LGBT network/group or (7) an LGBT contact person within the company. Respondents could select multiple items. Answers were coded as 1 (=the company has adopted at least one of the abovementioned policies) and 0 (=the company has not adopted any policy).

**Gender** We controlled for gender as lesbian and bisexual women tend to report more workplace discrimination than gay and bisexual men. The variable was coded 1 (=women) and 0 (=men).

**Age** We controlled for respondents' age since research suggests that young employees are less tolerant toward homophobic behavior in the workplace. Respondents' answers were coded 1 (=16–24 years), 2 (=25–34 years), 3 (=35–44 years), 4 (=45–54 years), and 5 (=55 and older).

**Outness** Research shows that being out at work can affect workplace experiences. Therefore, our models control for outness. Respondents were asked whether they revealed their sexual orientation at work. Survey participants could answer “everyone knows,” “only my hierarchical managers know,” “my hierarchical managers and colleagues know,” “my colleagues know, but not my hierarchical managers,” “some colleagues know,” “my colleagues and those I supervise know,” “only those I supervise know,” and “no one knows.” Answers were recoded as 1 (=respondents revealed their sexual orientation to their hierarchical managers, colleagues, or subordinates) and 0 (=no one knows).

**Size of the Department** Size matters as employees working in small departments might face more scrutiny and feel more pressured by colleagues and superiors. We gathered information on the size of the department by asking a question on the number of employees working in the respondent's department. Survey participants could answer “0 to 10,”

“11 to 20,” “21 to 50,” or “more than 51 employees.” Answers were recoded as 1 (=more than 50 employees) and 0 (=less 50 employees).

**Employment Status** Research suggests that employees who hold low hierarchical positions are more likely to have negative work experiences because of their sexual orientation. We measured employment status with a question asking respondents about their hierarchical level within the company to which they could answer “apprentice,” “intern,” “short-term employee,” “regular employee,” “manager,” or “director.” Answers were recoded as 1 (=apprentice, intern, or short-term employee), 2 (=employee), and 3 (=manager or director).

**Internal Communication** Awareness of LGBT-supportive policies might affect employees' individual work outcomes. We measured internal communication with a question asking respondents whether the company for which they worked communicated internally about LGBT-supportive policies. Answers were coded 1 (=internal communication) and 0 (=no internal communication).

## Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded by estimating a series of multiple logistic regression models. We regressed our main variable of interests (LGBT-supportive policies) and our controls on our five dependent variables. Significance was measured at  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ , and  $p < .001$ . We ran our models using STATA.

## Results

Table 1 provides the socio-demographic characteristics of our survey respondents. There were 952 respondents in total. The majority of respondents were between 25 and 54 years old. Approximately 46 % of survey participants were female, 87 % were out at work, and 85 % worked in departments with less than 50 employees. With regard to respondents' employment status, 16 % were short-term employees or interns, 49 % were regular employees, and 35 % held a director or manager position. Sixty-five percent of survey participants worked in a company that implemented LGBT-supportive policies. However, only 5 % of respondents believed that their company internally communicated about those policies. Note that our sample is not representative of the linguistic regions of Switzerland. The majority of respondents were drawn from the French-speaking region (57 %), while 38 % of respondents came from the German-speaking region, and 5 % from the Italian-speaking region.

In terms of how many respondents experienced workplace discrimination, the sample varied in the type of perceived

**Table 1** Socio-demographic characteristics of survey participants

Variables	Total (N)	Lesbians (N)	Gay men (N)	Bisexuals (N)
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	46 % (435)	43 % (369)	–	67 % (66)
Male	54 % (517)	–	57 % (485)	33 % (32)
<b>Age</b>				
16–24 years	11 % (104)	16 % (59)	7 % (32)	13 % (13)
25–34 years	33 % (317)	35 % (128)	31 % (148)	42 % (41)
35–44 years	28 % (266)	30 % (109)	28 % (135)	23 % (22)
45–54 years	21 % (198)	16 % (59)	26 % (127)	12 % (12)
<b>Linguistic region</b>				
French-speaking	58 % (543)	61 % (224)	52 % (254)	65 % (65)
German-speaking	38 % (363)	33 % (124)	43 % (208)	32 % (31)
Italian-speaking	5 % (45)	6 % (21)	5 % (22)	2 % (2)
<b>Out at work</b>				
Everyone knows	42 % (404)	40 % (148)	49 % (236)	19 % (19)
Only my hierarchical managers know	1 (9)	1 % (2)	1 % (5)	2 % (2)
My hierarchical managers and colleagues know	14 % (130)	14 % (52)	13 % (61)	17 % (17)
My colleagues know, but not my hierarchical managers	6 % (57)	8 % (29)	5 % (25)	3 % (3)
Some colleagues know	23 % (216)	24 % (88)	20 % (98)	31 % (30)
My colleagues and those I supervise know	2 % (15)	2 % (7)	1 (7)	1 % (1)
Only those I supervise know	0.2 % (2)	0.2 % (1)	0.2 (1)	0 % (0)
No one knows	13 % (120)	11 % (42)	11 % (52)	27 % (26)
<b>Department size</b>				
0 to 10 employees	40 % (377)	42 % (155)	36 % (176)	46 % (45)
11 to 20 employees	26 % (248)	25 % (93)	26 % (125)	31 % (30)
20 to 50 employees	19 % (182)	17 % (62)	22 % (109)	11 % (11)
More than 50 employees	15 % (146)	16 % (59)	15 % (75)	12 % (12)
<b>Employment status</b>				
Short-term employee/intern	16 % (152)	20 % (75)	11 % (55)	22 % (22)
Employee	49 % (462)	51 % (189)	46 % (222)	52 % (51)
Director	35 % (337)	28 % (105)	43 % (207)	26 % (25)
Internal communication	5 % (45)	2 % (6)	7 % (34)	5 % (5)

discrimination reported (Table 2). Approximately 43 % of survey participants reported experiencing verbal stigmatization, 26 % reported feeling excluded from their work team, interesting work projects, or social events, 29 % reported experiencing moral and physical harassment, and 20 % reported that their psychological health deteriorated because of their sexual orientation. Despite these numbers, about 93 % of survey participants reported feeling well at work. In general, lesbians perceived discrimination more often than gay men, followed by bisexuals. For the latter category, there were no substantial differences in the answers reported by women and men.

Table 3 provides information on how survey participants evaluated diversity management. Respondents answered a question asking them to gauge the effectiveness of LGBT-supportive policies implemented by the company for which

they worked. Despite the low response rate (approximately 34 % of survey participants answered this question), results indicate that respondents had a positive overall opinion about LGBT-supportive workplace policies. Among those who responded to this question, almost 75 % considered diversity management to be effective. These figures remain similar for lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, and bisexual men. On the other hand, about 25 % of respondents believed that LGBT-supportive policies are ineffective. An open-ended question gave the opportunity for survey participants to develop their opinion. The most recurrent answer given by respondents states that LGBT-supportive policies are only rhetorical and therefore have no real impact on workplace dynamics. For example, one respondent said that policies are ineffective “because they are empty promises, involving those who are directly affected at the top but not the other workers”; another

**Table 2** Survey participants' perceptions of workplace discrimination, sense of well-being and psychological health

Variables	Total (N)	Lesbians (N)	Gay men (N)	Bisexuals (N)
Stigmatization	43 % (411)	50 % (185)	37 % (181)	46 % (45)
Exclusion	26 % (245)	30 % (111)	22 % (107)	28 % (27)
Harassment	29 % (279)	35 % (128)	23 % (112)	40 % (39)
Well-being	93 % (883)	92 % (339)	93 % (452)	94 % (92)
Psychological health	20 % (193)	22 % (82)	19 % (91)	20 % (20)

survey participant stated that “diversity management only serves the company’s public relations interests, and does not affect the employees.”

Table 4 presents the results of our logistic regression models. The analysis focuses on the effect of LGBT-supportive policies on five individual work-level outcomes. The first column of Table 4 reports the results of our analysis for verbal stigmatization against LGB workers. The coefficient for policies is negative and fails to reach the conventional level of significance ( $\beta = -0.26$ , n.s.), indicating that, in our sample, LGBT-supportive policies did not contribute to lowering the level of derogatory and offensive language used against LGB employees because of their sexual orientation. However, our analysis indicates that lesbians and bisexual women were more likely to experience verbal stigmatization at work than gay and bisexual men ( $\beta = 0.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Age also matters for understanding when verbal stigmatization occurs in the workplace. Results show that older workers were more likely to face verbal discrimination compared to younger ones ( $\beta = -0.68$ ,  $p < .01$  for the 25–34 age group;  $\beta = -0.85$ ,  $p < .01$  for the 35–44 age group;  $\beta = -1.02$ ,  $p < .001$  for the 45–54 age group;  $\beta = -1.28$ ,  $p < .001$  for the 55 and older age group; the reference category being the 16–24 age group). On the other hand, neither respondents’ employment status nor firms’ department size affected whether LGB employees experienced verbal stigmatization. Finally, our analysis shows that firms that communicated internally about LGBT-supportive policies were not able to reduce verbal discrimination more than firms that did not.

The second column of Table 4 reports whether diversity management contributed to reducing employees’ exclusion from work teams, interesting work projects, and social events. The coefficient for policies is negative and statistically significant, indicating that LGB employees felt less isolated because of their sexual orientation in companies having adopted LGBT-supportive policies ( $\beta = -0.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise,

the third column of Table 4 demonstrates that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals reported lower rates of moral and sexual harassment when companies implemented such policies ( $\beta = -0.42$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In both cases (Table 4, columns 2 and 3), the results show that female workers were more likely to report discrimination than male workers (respectively,  $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, the other control variables included in our models are not statistically significant, meaning that age, employment status, department size, and firms’ internal communication strategy had no influence on the occurrence of exclusion and harassment as indicators of workplace discrimination.

With regard to the effect of diversity management on well-being at work, results indicate that respondents that worked for companies implementing LGBT-supportive policies felt better at work than respondents employed in companies that did not implement any such policies ( $\beta = 0.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, our analysis shows that the oldest categories of LGB employees felt less well at work than their younger counterparts ( $\beta = -1.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). All the other control variables included in our model failed to reach statistical significance.

On the other hand, with regard to psychological health outcomes, adopting LGBT-supportive policies did not bring about increased mental health benefits for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals ( $\beta = -0.19$ , n.s.). Interestingly, our analysis indicates that being out at work was negatively related to increased psychological health problems ( $\beta = -1.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In general, older workers were less likely to declare psychological health problems than younger workers ( $\beta = -0.80$ ,  $p < .01$  for the 35–44 age group;  $\beta = -0.89$ ,  $p < .01$  for the 45–54 age group; the reference category being the 16–24 age group). Results also show that employment status influenced psychological health outcomes since directors and regular employees were less likely to report mental health problems than workers holding lower ranking

**Table 3** How survey respondents rated LGBT supportive policies

	Total (N)	Lesbians (N)	Gay men (N)	Bisexuals (N)
Effective	74.69 % (242)	73.91 % (85)	73.41 % (127)	83.33 % (30)
Ineffective	25.31 % (82)	26.09 % (30)	26.59 % (46)	16.67 % (6)
Total	100 % (324)	100 % (115)	100 % (173)	100 % (36)

**Table 4** Logistic regression on the effect of LGB-supportive policies on LGB employees' work experience

	(1) Stigmatization	(2) Exclusion	(3) Harassment	(4) Well-being	(5) Psychological health problems
Women	0.40** (0.14)	0.39* (0.16)	0.41** (0.15)	-0.07 (0.27)	-0.11 (0.18)
Age					
16–24 years	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
25–34 years	-0.68** (0.25)	-0.03 (0.28)	-0.13 (0.25)	0.37 (0.44)	-0.52 (0.27)
35–44 years	-0.85** (0.26)	0.14 (0.30)	-0.33 (0.28)	0.13 (0.48)	-0.80** (0.30)
45–54 years	-1.02*** (0.28)	0.27 (0.31)	-0.28 (0.29)	-0.21 (0.50)	-0.89** (0.33)
55 and older	-1.28*** (0.36)	0.62 (0.38)	0.19 (0.37)	-1.18* (0.54)	-0.79 (0.43)
Out at work	-0.17 (0.21)	-0.13 (0.22)	-0.13 (0.22)	0.47 (0.33)	-1.15*** (0.22)
Department size	-0.14 (0.19)	-0.10 (0.22)	0.12 (0.20)	0.26 (0.40)	-0.00 (0.25)
Employment status					
Intern/short-term employee	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Employee	-0.28 (0.21)	-0.33 (0.23)	-0.15 (0.21)	0.18 (0.37)	-0.48* (0.23)
Director	0.10 (0.23)	0.02 (0.25)	-0.15 (0.24)	0.42 (0.43)	-0.60* (0.27)
Internal communication	0.12 (0.32)	-0.21 (0.41)	-0.39 (0.40)	0.90 (1.03)	-0.50 (0.50)
Policies	-0.26 (0.15)	-0.64*** (0.16)	-0.42** (0.16)	0.76** (0.27)	-0.19 (0.18)
Constant	0.73* (0.29)	-0.70* (0.31)	-0.40 (0.30)	1.51** (0.46)	0.81** (0.31)
N	950	950	949	950	950
Pseudo $R^2$	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.07

The table reports the coefficient estimates in log odds and not as beta coefficients; standard errors in parentheses

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

hierarchical positions in the company (respectively,  $\beta = -0.48$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $\beta = -0.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ; the reference category being apprentice, intern, or short-term employee).

## Discussion

This article focused on the impact of LGBT-supportive policies on individual work-level outcomes, namely discrimination, well-being, and psychological health. Although these dimensions do not directly concern employees' productivity, they can indirectly affect companies' economic performance, for example, by increasing workers' organizational commitment or their performance at work.

In line with previous research (see Badgett et al. 2013), our findings suggest that LGBT-supportive policies contribute to improving workplace dynamics for LGB people. The results showed that companies that implement LGBT-supportive policies tend to display lower levels of workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. Likewise, LGB employees that worked for firms implementing such policies were more likely to feel good at work. However, our results were inconclusive with regard to psychological health outcomes in the workplace.

Our study also indicates that there are gender differences in perceived workplace discrimination: Women employees were more likely than men to report discriminatory practices at work. This result confirms previous findings, which showed that gender and sexual discrimination often reinforce each



other and can create specific career barriers that should be examined separately (Parnell et al. 2012).

Interestingly, being out at work turned out to be negatively related to employees' reporting of psychological health problems. While some previous research has indicated that disclosure can sometimes trigger backlash from work colleagues (Chamberland et al. 2009), our result confirms the growing number of studies showing that outness tends to benefit psychological health for LGB employees. One possible explanation for this positive relationship could be that employees that disclose their sexual orientation at work are able to reconcile their private and public identity and are thus less stressed and anxious about being outed (McFadden 2015; Ozeren 2014).

Age also matters to understand workplace dynamics. With each increase in age group there was an increased perceived sense of verbal stigmatization. This finding suggests that different generations might understand derogatory language differently as older individuals may be more traditional and younger people may be more tolerant and have a more liberal understanding of offensive language in general.

With regard to employment status, our study showed that hierarchical position in the workplace only affected mental health outcomes but not discrimination and well-being. This result suggests that psychological health is mainly driven by one's position of power and influence within the company. Alternatively, it is also possible that homophobic environments are less widespread in upper management positions. Indeed, employees working in upper management tend to be more educated, and more education is related to less homophobic tendencies (Wright et al. 1999).

Note that the variance explained by our regression models is relatively low and ranges from 4 to 7 %. This is not surprising and suggests that there may be other factors accounting for variance in these models that are not captured here: Diversity management does influence LGB employees' workplace experiences, but LGBT-supportive policies are not the only—nor the most important—factors explaining lesbians', gay men's, and bisexuals' experience in terms of discrimination, well-being, and mental health at work.

Our study has several limitations. The most important limitation pertains to the survey sample we used. Because lesbian, gay men, and bisexual workers are a difficult group to measure, we recruited survey participants using a nationwide convenience sample. However, convenience samples can potentially lead to bias in the population of respondents. In our specific case, relying on LGBT associations to distribute the survey might potentially result in an over-representation of highly-educated and high-income LGB respondents. Moreover, our sample might include a higher proportion of politically active people than is the case in the broader LGB population. However, given the fact that no studies exist, to our knowledge, on discrimination based on sexual orientation at work in Switzerland, we believe that our data provides

essential information for our understanding of workplace dynamics of LGB employees.

A second limitation of our study is that it excluded transgender respondents from our analysis. Because transgender rights are far less developed than gay rights in Switzerland, transgender people might face specific discrimination patterns and career barriers. Therefore, our results are not able to shed light on the experience of Swiss transgender employees. Since there is very little research on the workplace experiences of transgender people, this topic should be explored in future research.

In addition, the survey did not capture ethnicity. In Switzerland, ethnicity has not, historically, been a salient issue. It is typically absent from survey questionnaires. However, it is likely that employees who are immigrants or who have been naturalized as Swiss citizens, especially if they belong to marginalized groups such as people (originally) from Turkey or former Yugoslavia, experience more discriminatory behavior. Because we cannot determine whether our sample is homogeneous in terms of ethnic background, our results cannot be applied to all employees throughout Switzerland or neighboring European countries.

More importantly, there is a risk that some of our survey questions may have been leading respondents' answers or misunderstood. Concretely, these problems can arise when the answer choices are limited or do not have a "no answer" option. For example, the instrument we used to measure which LGBT-supportive workplace policies were implemented did not provide respondents the opportunity to simply acknowledge their ignorance on their companies' practices. This might skew our data in a certain direction since respondents might have falsely answered due to social desirability effects. Another concern pertains to how our questions capture the concepts we want to measure. Well-being at work, for instance, is a complex concept to measure since it is highly subjective and might have required more than one survey instrument in our questionnaire.

A fifth shortcoming relates to the limited information we possess about the implementation of LGBT-supportive policies. For instance, this study does not disentangle the effect that different types of policies have on workplace discrimination, well-being, and psychological health. Although it is likely that different types of policies, such as anti-discrimination policies or employee resource groups, have different effects on lesbians', gay men's, and bisexuals' experience at work, there is little research on this topic. Future research should investigate how different types of policies contribute to eradicating discrimination based on sexual orientation and, more broadly, changing workplace culture. The impact of the same type of policies might also differ depending on the social and political context examined. This area of investigation might prove particularly promising as it might help us explain the contradictory results of studies about the impact of diversity management.

Finally, we lack concrete knowledge on the content and execution of LGBT-supportive workplace policies. Based on interviews with employees, human resource professionals, and union representatives, future avenues of research could explore tensions that arise from implementing LGBT-supportive policies. A comparison between different dimensions of diversity management, such as LGBT, gender, age, social class, ethnicity, and disability, could potentially help us uncover interesting patterns, especially with regard to how workplace policies contribute to changing or maintaining existing power relations in the workplace.

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#### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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