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Increasing LGBTQ+ inclusion at UU, HU, and UMC-U

Policy brief,
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KEY POINTS

We found that the rainbow bike path, a symbol of our institutions' commitment to increased LGBTQ+ inclusion, was generally well-liked. To further support the LGBTQ+ community, we need policy-makers to:

- Pay **attention** to gender minorities' needs, by installing more all-gender toilets and making gender registration more inclusive
- **Amplify** the voices of LGBTQ+ staff and students at our institutions, by creating safe spaces and increasing visibility of existing LGBTQ+ networks
- Raise **awareness** of existing initiatives that support LGBTQ+ people, and our institutions' diversity goals

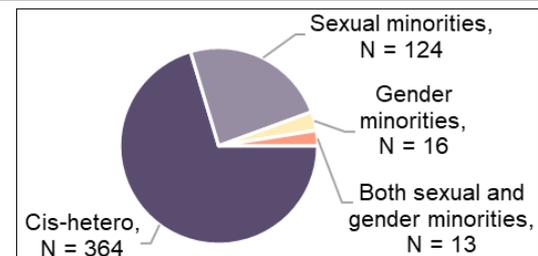
INTRODUCTION

The rainbow bike path was opened on Coming Out Day 2021, as a collaboration between Utrecht University (UU), the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (HU) and UMC Utrecht (UMC-U). A year later, we reflect on its symbolism and what is needed on our path towards greater LGBTQ+ inclusion at our three institutions. To do so, we use the findings of an online survey among UU, HU and UMC-U students and staff.

THE SURVEY

PARTICIPANTS

- 323 staff, 183 students¹
- Good distribution among different faculties
- Good representation of LGBTQ+ participants (see pie chart)²



GENERAL ATTITUDES ABOUT BIKE PATH

When asked how they felt, on a scale of 1 to 7, about the rainbow bike path, participants were overall very positive (mean = 5.66).

Similarly, people agreed that the bike path symbolises our commitment to, contributes to, and raises awareness for LGBTQ+ inclusion.

5.66

¹ There was a large overrepresentation of UU participants. We found no differences between participants from different institutions. We thus generalize findings across institutions.

² We differentiate between sexual minorities (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual), gender minorities (e.g., transgender, non-binary), and people who are both (e.g., non-binary and bisexual). Cis-hetero participants are both cisgender (they identify with their sex assigned at birth) and heterosexual.

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THE TRIPLE-A APPROACH TO INCREASING LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

While many participants agreed that the bike path was a symbol of inclusion, and were generally mostly positive about it, various findings point to the need for more direct action. Based on key findings, we have devised the Triple-A approach to increasing LGBTQ+ inclusion: Attention, Amplification, and Awareness.



More attention towards gender minorities' needs

A NEED FOR MORE ALL-GENDER TOILETS AND INCLUSIVE GENDER REGISTRATION POLICIES

A striking finding was that gender minorities consistently reported feeling less included at our institutions than sexual minorities. For example, they reported feeling like they were treated differently because their identity, and like they do not belong at our institutions. Participants who are both sexual and gender minorities felt even less included (see Fig 1).³

When we asked participants for suggestions (open question), the most highly requested change (12% of sample) was more gender-inclusivity, in terms of more all-gender toilets and more inclusive gender and sex registration policies.⁴ This was requested by LGBTQ+ as well as cis-hetero participants, showing that participants across the board were aware of this need.

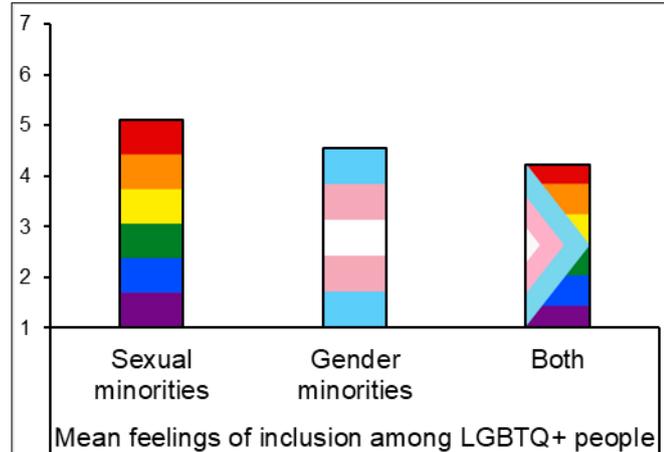
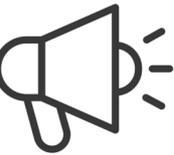


Fig 1. LGBTQ+ participants were asked to rate, on various items (scales 1-7), how included they felt within their institution.



More amplification of LGBT+ voices

A NEED FOR SAFE SPACES AND MORE VISIBILITY OF LGBTQ+ NETWORKS

The second most frequent request (7% of the sample) was for more representation of LGBTQ+ voices within our institutions. Participants suggested forming a panel of LGBTQ+ staff and students who have a say in diversity & inclusion initiatives for the LGBTQ+ community. Participants also expressed the need for safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people to discuss issues and connect with one another.⁵ These findings also highlight the need for more visibility of existing LGBTQ+ networks, such as the 'Rainbow Network', the Employee Resource Group for LGBTQ+ staff at Utrecht University, which many participants did not seem to be aware of.⁶

Cis-hetero participants often stated that they should not be asked about how to better include the LGBTQ+ community, and thus highlighted the need to amplify LGBTQ+ voices when talking about matters concerning the LGBTQ+ community.



More awareness of existing initiatives and goals

A NEED FOR MORE VISIBILITY OF THE EDI OFFICE'S ACTIONS AND DIVERSITY GOALS

A striking finding was that LGBTQ+ participants (especially gender minorities) questioned the sincerity of their institution's goals to increase LGBTQ+ inclusion (see Fig 2). In a multiple choice question, 65% of LGBTQ+ participants reported thinking that the bike path was placed to improve their institution's image.

The rainbow bike path is part of an ongoing action plan, which the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) office is working on. When asked whether they knew about this action plan, most participants reported being unaware of it, and unaware the EDI office's existence. They requested increased visibility of the EDI office and their existing initiatives. We believe that this will also help to highlight the sincerity of our institutions' goals.⁷

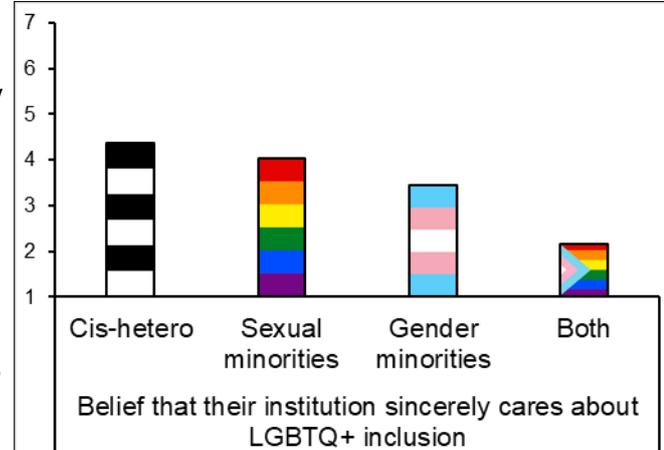


Fig 2. On a scale of 1-7, participants rated how much they believed that their institution sincerely cared about LGBTQ+ inclusion.

³ This finding is in line with the "intersectionality" literature, which shows that when several minority identities intersect, people often feel less included than when they 'only' have one minority identity.

⁴ These types of initiatives have been shown to affirm non-binary people's identities and increase their feelings of inclusion.

⁵ Safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people on a campus have been shown to increase LGBTQ+ people's comfort levels, as well as increase visibility of the community.

⁶ Studies show that solely the presence of one's minority group increases identity safety for minority group members, highlighting the importance of visibility of minority communities. Furthermore, hearing first-hand from a minority community allows (in this case, cis-hetero) people to emotionally connect with their struggles and enact systemic change.

⁷ Implementation of more directly beneficial, rather than symbolic, initiatives has been found to increase perceived sincerity of an organisation, and in turn the effectiveness of the initiative. Research shows symbolic initiatives are perceived as advertisement, which decreases perceived sincerity of an organisation.