Disclosing identities at work: employee attitudes toward sharing personal information on sexual orientation and gender identity

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Abstract

Purpose – Organizations committed to nondiscrimination and inclusivity can monitor employee experiences to expose inequalities and develop precise, targeted policies. One approach is to collect and analyze personal data on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, are employees prepared to share such personal information? What are their hesitations, and under what conditions are they willing to disclose? To comprehend the complexities of employees' preferences regarding the disclosure of personal information on sexual orientation and gender identity, our study investigates their attitudes toward collecting such data in the workplace.

Design/methodology/approach – We conducted 23 in-depth semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion.

Findings – We uncovered four factors that shape employees' attitudes toward data collection, including (1) the perceived benefit and relevance of collecting data on sexual orientation and gender identity to the workplace, (2) minority vs. majority group membership, (3) fear of misuse of information and negative career-related consequences, and (4) the risk of ascribed categorization. Additionally, we found four key conditions that influence employees' disclosure preferences, including (1) the transparency of data collection purposes, (2) the accessibility and perceived privacy of data, (3) trust and anonymity issues, and (4) the voluntariness of the data collection process.

Practical implications – By shedding light on employees' attitudes, this research enhances our understanding of workplace disclosure practices, including those of sexual and/or gender minorities, helping to foster more inclusive work environments.

Originality/value – To our knowledge, this is the first empirical study on employees' attitudes toward data collection on sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace.

Keywords LGBTQ+, Sexual orientation, Gender identity, Personal information, Workplace, Discrimination

Paper type Research paper

Creating an inclusive work environment where employees feel a sense of belonging and can be authentic is crucial to the well-being and performance of employees (e.g. Şahin *et al.*, 2019). However, employees that belong to marginalized groups, including people with a non-native cultural-ethnic background or disability and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and otherwise queer (LGBTQ+) individuals, often face negative experiences at work (Clair *et al.*, 2005; Cech and Rothwell, 2020). For instance, research indicates ongoing discrimination and mistreatment toward LGBTQ + employees (Andriessen *et al.*, 2020; Paine *et al.*, 2025; Van der Toorn, 2019). In the United States, about one in three LGBTQ + employees (30%) reported experiencing verbal harassment at work due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Additionally, 22% faced sexual harassment, while 16% encountered physical harassment in the workplace for the same reasons (Sears *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, Dutch studies reveal higher rates of violence and bullying toward bisexual, lesbian, and gay employees in various life domains compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Panteia, Movisie and Ipsos I&O, 2024). Certain subgroups, including transgender and bisexual individuals, as well as LGBTQ + employees of color, appear to face even greater challenges (Cancela *et al.*, 2024; Panteia, Movisie and Ipsos I&O, 2024; Sears *et al.*, 2024). Even seemingly harmless jokes or comments can reinforce inequalities and create an unsafe work environment for LGBTQ + individuals (Colgan *et al.*, 2007; DeSouza *et al.*, 2017; Ward and Winstanley, 2003).

Organizations aiming for nondiscrimination and inclusivity can monitor employee experiences to identify inequalities and develop targeted policies (Van der Toorn *et al.*, 2024). Collecting personal data on sexual orientation and gender identity can inform evidence-based inclusion strategies for LGBTQ + employees, although it also poses challenges such as outing individuals and risking further stigmatization (Van der Toorn *et al.*, 2024). This vulnerability may silence LGBTQ + voices in the workplace (McFadden and Crowley-Henry, 2017). Despite being a significant minority group, LGBTQ + employees are often understudied (Ragins *et al.*, 2007; Öztürk *et al.*, 2015).

Understanding employees' perspectives, especially those within the LGBTQ + community, on data collection related to sexual orientation and gender identity is essential for fostering inclusive workplaces. This study explores factors influencing employees' attitudes toward sharing personal information, particularly concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. Under what conditions are they willing to share such information? Moreover, do these viewpoints vary depending on belonging to sexual and/or gender minority groups? Through semi-structured in-depth interviews and a focus group with (LGBTQ+) employees in the Netherlands, we aim to gain insights into perspectives on sharing personal information at work. By amplifying marginalized voices, we aim to understand their needs and develop effective strategies to address them, ultimately fostering a truly inclusive work environment for all.

Organizational perspectives on DEI policy and data collection

Organizations increasingly adopt Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies to foster the recruitment, selection, promotion and retention of employees with diverse backgrounds and identities, including LGBTQ + individuals (Rostosky and Riggle, 2002; Bachmann and Gooch, 2018; Drydakis, 2015). However, the emphasis often remains on diversity metrics, such as the representation of people from marginalized groups, rather than evaluating to what extent employees feel genuinely included. To address this critical gap, organizations can monitor employees' work experiences, identify inequalities, and accordingly develop targeted DEI policies. Previous research by Klarenaar *et al.* (2022) focused on strategies employed by Human Resources and DEI professionals to assess the needs of LGBTQ + employees, especially those with intersecting identities, and evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies. For instance, employee satisfaction surveys may offer insights into job satisfaction and inclusivity perceptions. However, the utility of these surveys in identifying inequalities is contingent upon their ability to facilitate comparisons between the experiences of different employee groups, such as LGBTQ + versus cisgender heterosexual employees (Van der Toorn

et al., 2024). To achieve this purpose, surveys must actively inquire about employee characteristics, including personal information such as sexual orientation and gender identity.

Klarenaar *et al.* (2022) found that while employee satisfaction surveys were commonly suggested for understanding employee experiences, organizations rarely probed into employees' sexual orientation and gender identity, limiting their ability to address specific needs and disparities. Additionally, these surveys and other DEI initiatives, including identity-based employee networks, often overlook intersectional identities, limiting their effectiveness in addressing diverse needs and inequalities. Klarenaar *et al.* (2022) identified several practical, socio-cultural and assumption-driven barriers hindering such data collection. Building on their findings and addressing calls for empirical investigations into employee data collection attitudes (e.g. Van der Toorn *et al.*, 2024), our research shifts the focus from identifying organizational challenges to amplifying the voices of employees. In the following sections, we discuss various theoretical perspectives to provide insight into employee's attitudes and preferences regarding the disclosure of personal information, particularly related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Employee perspectives on disclosing personal information in workplace data collection

Majority versus minority perspective

Our study explores the distinction between majority and minority perspectives, aiming to understand varying viewpoints on disclosing personal information based on affiliation with a minoritized group, particularly LGBTQ + individuals. Employees' willingness to share personal information for diversity and inclusion efforts may hinge on their social identity and the increased salience of their minoritized identities (see also Social Identity Theory; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Members of minority groups may be more inclined to support such initiatives, acknowledging their potential to cultivate inclusive work environments vital to their welfare (Avery, 2011). Moreover, as posited by Avery (2011), minority status within an organization may lead individuals to interpret support for diversity as support for themselves, potentially driving greater support for diversity initiatives compared to majority group counterparts.

An identity-conscious approach to data collection, rooted in a multicultural perspective, recognizes the value of demographic diversity (Rattan and Ambady, 2013). As a result, minority group members, including LGBTQ + individuals, may be more likely to support such approaches, seeing them as a means to promote visibility and inclusion. This is particularly relevant to the collection of data on employee identities and demographics, as it can help organizations identify and address disparities. Indeed, Mor *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that both prospective and current LGBTQ + employees favor identity-conscious over identity-blind diversity messaging, suggesting that similar preferences may extend to data collection on sexual orientation and gender identity when it is framed as a tool for fostering a more inclusive work environment.

Alternatively, however, as suggested by Stigma Theory (Crocker *et al.*, 1998; Goffman, 1963) individuals with stigmatized identities may prefer to conceal or disclose certain aspects of their identity to avoid social devaluation or marginalization. While such concerns may not be relevant for majority members, LGBTQ + employees may feel the need to protect themselves from stigma and discrimination by avoiding disclosure or engaging in strategic ambiguity—deliberately maintaining vagueness or withholding explicit disclosure, especially in environments that may not be fully inclusive or supportive of LGBTQ + identities.

Heteroprofessionalism

Heteroprofessionalism should be considered as a potential factor contributing to disparities in considerations and comfort levels between cisgender, heterosexual individuals and LGBTQ + individuals when disclosing personal information in the workplace. The delineation between the "professional" and the "sexual" often limits discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity in work settings, which is reinforced by an idealized

professional image, typically reflecting that of a white, cisgender, heterosexual man (Williams *et al.*, 2022; Cumberbatch, 2021). This phenomenon, termed heteroprofessionalism by Mizzi (2013, p. 1602) and defined as "the pressure to behave in ways that are consistent with the gender/sex binary (i.e. with being cisgender and heterosexual)" (Morgenroth *et al.*, 2024), is reflected in workplace norms that expect employees to maintain a "professional" demeanor by downplaying marginalized aspects of their identity—such as sexual orientation and gender identity—to avoid conflict or reputational risk (Williams *et al.*, 2022).

LGBTQ + individuals may internalize heteroprofessionalism, keeping their sexual orientation and gender identity private to conform to the desired "professional employee" image, unlike their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, who may openly disclose. This perpetuates a workplace environment where hetero- and cisnormativity prevails, inhibiting nonheterosexual, transgender and nonbinary individuals from openly discussing their identities (Mizzi, 2013; Morgenroth *et al.*, 2024; Reingardé, 2010).

Relatedly, homonormativity and transnormativity further shape these dynamics by establishing narrow, socially acceptable ways of being LGBTQ+ in professional settings. Homonormativity privileges LGBTQ + individuals who conform to dominant societal expectations—such as being monogamous, gender-conforming and apolitical—while transnormativity imposes rigid narratives of medical and social transition as prerequisites for legitimacy (Duggan, 2002; Johnson, 2016). Together, these norms reinforce the expectation that LGBTQ + employees must regulate their identities to align with workplace professionalism, further marginalizing those who do not fit these constrained ideals.

Consequently, cisgender heterosexual individuals may perceive sexual orientation and gender identity as irrelevant to the workplace and disclosing this information as incongruent with the desired "professional" image. Yet they may feel more comfortable openly sharing personal details because their identities align with prevailing workplace norms. Conversely, LGBTQ + individuals may view personal data collection as more relevant and useful but feel hesitant to be open due to potential risks associated with deviating from the established "professional" image. Their possible reluctance to share personal information, even for inclusive DEI policies, may stem from fears of potential negative repercussions, discrimination or exclusion rooted in societal biases ingrained within organizational norms. Such differences in perspectives illustrate how individuals, depending on their minoritized identities, may or may not confirm their self-concept by aligning or not their social interactions with their personal beliefs. In other words, building upon self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), one can argue that seeking (or not) internal congruence between one's self-image and the way they are perceived may depend on whether individuals feel free or threatened to be one's authentic selves—in this case, in the workplace.

Intersectional dimensions to personal information sharing
Lastly, our study examines employees' perspectives on sexual orientation and gender identity, recognizing how various identities intersect to shape unique experiences and decisions regarding disclosure. The interplay of intersecting identities may significantly impact employees' willingness to disclose personal information at work, shaping perceived risks and potential consequences. Intersectionality, pioneered by feminist legal scholar Crenshaw (1989), highlights the complex interconnectedness of identity aspects like race, gender, and sexuality. Feminist scholars emphasize that these categories cannot be separated, nor can inequalities be explained by a single framework (Valentine, 2007). Employees with intersecting marginalized identities, such as trans women with disabilities or queer people of color, may strategically limit disclosure to protect themselves from multiple forms of workplace discrimination (Colgan *et al.*, 2007). While research on intersecting identities remains limited (Dennissen, 2020; Thomas *et al.*, 2021), an intersectional perspective is crucial for understanding the complexities of personal information disclosure in the workplace.

Method interviews and focus group

Research design

We used a qualitative design, starting with semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees at a large Dutch higher educational institution. This method enabled a nuanced understanding of participants' personal experiences and narratives, fostering an environment conducive to the open sharing of stories, beliefs and feelings.

While our aim was to interview employees with diverse perspectives, only two identified as LGBTQ+. To ensure more inclusive representation, we organized a dedicated focus group for LGBTQ + participants recruited from different organizations. This combination of methods allowed us to balance depth and breadth: the semi-structured interviews provided detailed, individualized accounts, while the focus group fostered dynamic discussions, enabling participants to build on each other's experiences and perspectives. Despite the asymmetry in participant composition, this approach enriched our findings by capturing both personal narratives and collective viewpoints on data collection regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace.

Participants

23 [1] interviews were conducted with employees within a large Dutch higher educational institution with more than 5,000 employees. Participants indicated working at the institution between 1 and 42 years. Two participants indicated identifying as a member of the LGBTQ + community. Six participants indicated having a migration background [2]. Additionally, seven employees from different organizations participated in the focus group session. Focus group participants were recruited with the help of Workplace Pride, an international platform for LGBTIQ + inclusion with over 120 member organizations globally. The organizations participants worked for were large organizations with more than 5,000 employees. Employees were personally invited to participate by the platform's Relationship Managers. All participants indicated identifying with the LGBTQ + community and resided in the Netherlands. One person indicated being transgender. Six participants indicated being a man, and one participant indicated being a woman. Four participants indicated having a migration background.

Procedure

The study underwent ethical review and approval by the university board responsible for overseeing research protocols. Before the start of the interviews, participants read and signed the informed consent form. Interview participants were recruited via the higher educational institution's biweekly newsletter and received online gift vouchers. The semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 and 60 min and took place in December 2022 and January 2023. Two interviews were held online, while 21 were conducted in person. Online interviews were recorded via Microsoft Teams, and in-person interviews were recorded with a voice recorder. The interviewer began by asking the participants to introduce themselves and how they arrived at the organization, followed by questions about their experiences working there. The focus was on creating an inclusive environment and understanding how well supervisors and colleagues are attuned to their needs and experiences. Participants were asked whether they share personal information at work and to consider the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. The discussion extended to the potential benefits of organizations collecting personal data, such as sexual orientation and gender identity, to address group inequalities and respond to employee concerns. Finally, participants were asked about their willingness to share such information with their organization and what assurances they would need to feel comfortable doing so.

The focus group, held at the Workplace Pride office in January 2023, lasted 90 min. Before the start of the session, participants read and signed the informed consent form. The focus group discussion centered on how participants share information about their sexual orientation

and gender identity at work, exploring the relevance, usefulness, and associated risks of collecting such data. Key questions included experiences with sharing their identities, perceptions of data usage, and necessary conditions for data sharing, such as transparency and anonymity. The conversation also addressed structural issues related to data-collection practices within organizations, discussing advantages and disadvantages for both individuals and the organization. Participants reflected on the importance of creating a safe space for open dialogue and the potential role of employee resource groups (ERGs) in promoting inclusive data practices, particularly for those who may feel marginalized or closeted.

Positionality statement
The author team consists of researchers who bring diverse perspectives shaped by their backgrounds in gender studies, social and organizational psychology, sociology, migration studies, cognitive psychology, and cultural history. They also represent a diverse group of researchers considering their gender identity and sexual orientation and international backgrounds. Moreover, at the time of the research, they were all employed in an internationally oriented higher education institution, which makes it easier for them to relate to the discussions that were had both during the in-depth interviews and the focus group interview. Throughout the project, the researchers engaged in regular discussions to ensure consistency and rigor.

Analysis
After the interviews, we first transcribed and anonymized them. Analysis was conducted by the first author, using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. Thematic analysis employed the constant comparative method, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss, which involved a structured, iterative process across three key steps: (1) Open coding, where researchers carefully reviewed the transcripts to identify and delineate meaningful segments of text, allowing for the initial generation of codes that capture significant concepts; (2) Axial coding, where these initial codes were systematically categorized to identify relationships and connections among them, refining the codes into broader categories; and (3) Selective coding, which involved pinpointing core themes that reflect the diverse content categories and encapsulate the main narratives within the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Transcripts were also reviewed by the other authors to identify missing themes and check codings and connections. Drawing on insights from the literature review facilitated the systematic identification of recurring themes and patterns in the collected data. This iterative coding and categorization process allowed for the emergence of key themes that provided a comprehensive understanding of participants' narratives, experiences and perspectives. Additionally, the researchers utilized member checking, where participants were invited to review the findings to confirm that the themes accurately represented their views, further enhancing the credibility and validity of the analysis.

Results
Factors shaping attitudes toward sharing personal information
Perceived benefit and relevance. The interviews with employees revealed a prevailing belief that sexual orientation and gender identity are distinct from one's professional identity and activities and belongs to the private sphere, echoing the concept of heteroprofessionalism (Mizzi, 2013; Morgenroth *et al.*, 2024). Several interview participants mentioned they did not see the benefit of collecting such personal information and deemed these identity aspects irrelevant to the workplace. For example, one employee mentioned:

> [. . .] I'm not in a minority [. . .] I mean, why the [educational institution] should know my sexuality, for instance. I don't get the point. [. . .] I mean, what is work related should be work related. I don't think sexuality and ethnicity are work related. (Participant 22, migration background, cis hetero man).

In one instance, openness about sexual orientation seemed to be conflated with pursuing sexual relations in the workplace: *"Also because I don't think it's the intention that we start sexual relationships. So yeah, that's again, yeah, I think something that fits better in the private sphere."* (Participant 17, no migration background, cis hetero woman).

However, other interview participants disagreed, emphasizing the importance and potential benefits of sharing personal data with the organization. They highlighted its role in shaping targeted initiatives focused on social safety and fostering inclusivity, as well as facilitating open discussions on topics like gender identity and sexual orientation. They, therefore, were willing to share this information. Several participants furthermore highlighted the general significance of sharing personal information with coworkers and supervisors, emphasizing its role as a social lubricant within workplace interactions.

Similarly, focus group participants, all of whom identified as LGBTQ+, highlighted the benefit and relevance of data collection for fostering inclusivity. Notably, as members of marginalized groups, they advocated for personal data collection to facilitate targeted diversity and inclusion efforts, particularly benefiting LGBTQ + individuals. This suggests that positive attitudes toward data collection may arise from perceived self- and group interests (Avery, 2011; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). As one participant explained:

> [. . .] because for me, it's kind of obvious that this data could be used in a good way, also to measure underrepresented groups, but also to understand how ERGs [employment resource groups] can spend the budget, or where to target certain actions. (Participant 7, migration background, cis gay man)

One participant in the focus group noted that while having the data is valuable, it doesn't necessarily provide clear guidance on what steps to take next.

Minority vs. majority perspective. Several interviewed employees who did not identify themselves as part of a minority group expressed feeling comfortable sharing personal information due to a perceived lack of identity-related risks, believing their privileged position shielded them. This confidence stemmed from a belief that the organization harbored no bias, prejudice, or discriminatory practices against them. For example, one interviewee, acknowledging his relative ease in disclosing sexual orientation and gender identity, compared his situation favorably to that of marginalized colleagues:

> [. . .] I'm also a very boring person. Heterosexual, white man, Dutch, with a good background. "Good background" sounds a bit odd, but it means having parents who have enough finances to always support me. [. . .] And from a perspective of, well, I would say, privilege, it's difficult to judge whether something is interesting or not. Because if I list these things to someone, it's just like: "Okay, sure, that's almost everyone". So, I don't have any issues sharing those kinds of things myself. [. . .] You can't use it against me, so to speak. But I can imagine that for other people, it's a much more sensitive matter. (Participant 15, no migration background, cis hetero man).

Conversely, focus group participants contemplated the risks associated with disclosing sexual orientation and gender identity. As members of the LGBTQ + community and a minority group, they expressed heightened concerns, fearing potential negative consequences if they were to disclose such personal information to the organization. One participant in the focus group articulated this sentiment:

> But being trans, being part of a super small minority, [. . .] you stand out. People will remember me, which can be a good thing. There's no such thing as bad PR, they say, but it can also definitely hinder you. If you get a bit of negativity around you, then people will easily remember that. So there's definitely always a risk of standing out, being unique, if you will, in an organization. (Participant 5, no migration background, trans woman)

Yet, one focus group participant noted colleagues without minority identities harbored negative views on data collection concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. Their apprehension stemmed from a fear of potential unequal treatment, as they believed that underrepresented groups in the organization might receive preferential treatment or advantages at their expense.

[. . .] I had my white, heteronormative colleagues saying that they don't want it, because right now, it's all about gender, about women, about underrepresented groups. So they are afraid that right now, they will never be able to get promotion because what's going on? All of the corporations are trying to go with equity and trying to push underrepresented groups. (Participant 7, migration background, cis gay man).

This observation again points at the potential role of self- and group interest in suggesting that individuals in majority groups may develop negative attitudes toward organizational diversity and inclusivity policies if they perceive these policies as not benefiting them. Still, it is important to note that opinions varied, and interviewees did not only express motives that could be considered stemming from self- or group interest but also reflected a concern for others and a willingness to share personal information toward workplace inclusivity. This aligns with findings by Broekstra *et al.* (2020), who found that a desire to help others was the most important motive of people contributing personal health data to a biobank.

Fear of misuse of information and negative career-related consequences. Several interview participants expressed concerns about the collection of personal information at work, fearing potential misuse by the institution in career-related decisions. For example, one LGBTQ + participant expressed her fear of potential dismissal if she were open about her identity: *"I think one fear that's like definitely deep down and not something that I don't actually think about is like: what if they fire me, you know, and things like that."* (Participant 20, migration background, cis lesbian woman).

Focus group participants also cited career-related consequences as a factor influencing their level of openness about sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, one participant mentioned he was explicitly told that being gay would not benefit his career *"And then five years ago I joined [organization] in the Netherlands, and I've heard from someone from the leadership team that being gay will not help me with my career at [organization]."* (Participant 7, migration background, cis gay man). Depending on the context, sharing personal information may be perceived differently in terms of career consequences. For instance, another focus group participant felt comfortable mentioning his partner during a job interview and didn't believe it would affect his hiring process: *"When I was hired with my current employer, [. . .] the interview was so comfortable that I mentioned about my partner and [. . .] I didn't even think that would hinder my hiring process."* (Participant 6, migration background, cis gay man). However, he also acknowledged withholding this information in certain organizational contexts out of concern for its impact on his career path: *"I realized that how does that VP think about this topic? Will that be a negative note for my progression in the company? It's still there because some high levels do not show the sincere, they speak the management talk, but I don't feel connected in their story."* Several interview and focus group participants furthermore underscored the significance of national context in their disclosure decisions. They expressed a greater reluctance to be open in countries less supportive of LGBTQ + rights.

Risk of ascribed categorization. Several interview and focus group participants mentioned the risk of categorizing (or labeling) people based on parts of their identity, and these concerns were often related to concerns about merit. For example, one interview participant mentioned: *"But then I think, you shouldn't put a woman in a position just because she's a woman, but you should simply put the best person there. And if that happens to be a woman, that's good. But if it's a man, that's also good. That's where they go overboard again."* (Participant 6, no migration background, cis hetero woman). Similarly, one focus group participant mentioned: *"[. . .] how do you avoid the trap of: I need to meet my quota, so let's hire a woman. And great if she's a woman of color, and if she's a woman of color, and she's lesbian, like, triple win. [. . .] Because you don't want to get into tick boxes, which ultimately could even do damage if you over-promote someone, and then they're not set up for success and they fail. And then it sets people back."* (Participant 3, no migration background, cis gay man). In addition, another focus group participant reflected on the possible consequences of categorization and expressed occasional uncertainty about whether she received opportunities based on her identity or her competencies:

> Am I getting these opportunities to talk to certain people or, because of who I am or what I can do? Luckily for me, I think it's mainly because of what I can do, and the effect it had. But it's a real concern. And the more you measure, and the more you write down, we're going to look for … the HR recruitment is saying: "We're going to look for such and such a profile and such and such an intersectionality". But then you get the feeling of, are you now hiring me for what I can do or who I am? (Participant 5, no migration background, trans woman).

Focus group participants emphasized the vital importance of recognizing the intersections of identities when collecting personal information, particularly regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. One participant in the focus group further stressed the need to prioritize intersectional identities to foster a more nuanced understanding and prevent oversimplified categorizations:

> I think that the power is in the intersections because we cannot put ourselves in the boxes. [. . .] So I think that we always have to think, come back, step out of our comfort zone and think also about different dimensions of diversity. (Participant 3, no migration background, cis gay man).

One focus group participant furthermore acknowledged the difficulty of capturing the fluidity of the disclosure process:

> And for me, going back and thinking about what it really means for us to ask people to disclose, are we asking them at one specific point? Are we understanding that this isn't just a pinpoint, that it's an ongoing process? And how do we want to capture that? How do we capture it? But how do we do right by those people, by our fellow queers in capturing that in a responsible way? (Participant 2, no migration background, cis gay man).

Conditions of sharing information with the organization
Employees consider multiple conditions when sharing personal information with the organization. Based on the analysis of the interviews and focus group, we derived four conditions, including the transparency of purpose, accessibility and privacy, trust and anonymity, and voluntariness.

Transparency of purpose. Both interview and focus group participants showed a strong preference for understanding the purpose behind data collection. As one interview participant noted: *"I would like to know what the purpose of the data is."* (Participant 2, no migration background, cis hetero man). Many mentioned being hesitant to share if the purpose was unclear, underscoring the importance of clarity in communicating the purpose of data collection. Similarly, a focus group participant stated that she would not disclose her trans identity unless the purpose of data collection was clear: "*So even if there would be a survey that asks me: 'What's your gender identity?', unless I specifically know [what] it is being used for, for good purposes, I would say woman. Female, simple as that.*" (Participant 5, no migration background, trans woman). Another participant in the focus group emphasized that clear communication regarding the purpose of data collection would bolster trust in the process:

> [. . .] It's a process. You have to build up trust, a safe space. [. . .] So yeah, transparency is key and that's what I think that's kind of my thing with it, if I believe that it's transparent and honest. (Participant 4, migration background, cis gay man).

Furthermore, interview participants emphasized the importance of communicating about the use of data to map workplace statistics on sexual and gender minorities for inclusion efforts. One participant stated: *"If it's very clear to me that: We're mapping this out because we want to understand how things look here [. . .] then I would think: 'Oh, fantastic, great, go for it.' But if it's just about: 'We want to know your sexual orientation', then frankly, I would think, well, that's none of your business."* (Participant 18, no migration background, cis-hetero woman). Similarly, a focus group participant echoed this sentiment, stressing the importance of collecting data with a clear purpose rather than merely accumulating it:

I think, coming from my perspective as a data scientist, as a psychologist, you know, measurement, I think one of the big issues here is a lot of times, this is seen as measurement for measurement's sake. And we don't really know . . . like you guys are saying, you have a research question, you know what you want to find out, I think some of the issue is that sometimes this data may just, or it may be perceived that this data is just being gathered for collection sake. (Participant 2, no migration background, cis gay man).

Furthermore, several focus group participants emphasized the importance of clearly communicating to employees the specific actions taken with the collected data and how this data is utilized positively. For example, one participant mentioned:

I sense that there is a fear of negative use of this data [. . .] So, then, I think the question is, why does this data need to be collected, needs to be crystal clear. [. . .] If you don't show the effect of that data being used in a positive way, people will no longer want to do that. (Participant 6, migration background, cis gay man).

Accessibility and privacy of data. Many interview participants mentioned they would consider which people or departments would have access to the data. Some interview participants mentioned they would prefer if the personal data would not be distributed among people within the department but rather stay with the head of the department. For example, one interview participant, who identified as LGBTQ+, mentioned:

If the people who work in my department have access to data about people in that department . . . I would think like: "Okay, are they going to come here, and say like": "Oh hi so you're gay". But if it's for research like this, then I don't care if it's for like the head of the department. I don't care then, they can have all my data. (Participant 20, migration background, cis lesbian woman).

Similarly, another interview participant mentioned the importance of knowing who has access to the data and, consequently, to what extent it may have consequences:

Will it be shared with third parties? And also, with whom of your department will it be shared? [. . .] If a research agency has that kind of data, then I know, okay, but they don't have any personal connection with me. So, they don't look at me in a particular way either. Or they don't take that into account in their other considerations. If my direct manager has this information, it will be different. (Participant 17, no migration background, cis hetero woman).

These responses highlight that employees prefer organizational-level access to data, ensuring it's used in ways that won't harm them professionally. They seek assurance against discrimination or negative work impacts, safeguarding privacy and well-being.

One focus group participant pointed out the organizational benefit of linking personal data to HR systems, as it allows for insights into employees' career trajectories, and facilitates the identification of potential group disparities, such as in promotions: "[. . .] *so basically, it's very important to see how people, you know, couple that to the HR system, so you can actually make some real trends, and real insights about what's happening.*" (Participant 1, migration background, cis gay man). However, linking personal information to HR systems also poses challenges regarding privacy: "*And of course, there is a lot of issue with data privacy there. And who's the data controller for that? And who's the data controller for these other things that we're looking at?*" (Participant 2, no migration background, cis gay man).

Trust and anonymity-related issues. Several employees expressed they would weigh their trust in the organization or department before sharing personal information. Some expressed confidence in the organization, exhibiting a willingness to share personal details, while others were cautious due to uncertainty about the department's reliability. Trust levels often stem from past experiences with data handling. For instance, incidents of data and privacy issues within the institution or department can heighten employees' discretion in sharing personal information. An interviewee underscored trust's significance in this context, noting:

And now we also know more about how [educational institute] handles data. We just had a data leak, which is still ongoing. Then you start thinking differently about how it's handled. Because you always

had the feeling like, okay, it's safe, and no data is shared with third parties or whatever. And then it turns out that has indeed been the case. And, well, you start handling it more carefully. (Participant 17, no migration background, cis hetero woman).

Interview participants also stressed the significance of anonymity when deciding to share personal information with the organization. Some noted a greater willingness to share when data collection ensures anonymity. Concerns were raised about the potential identification of individuals through a combination of survey responses, including details like faculty, role, and gender. One participant even recounted an instance where she ceased to fill out an employee satisfaction survey due to such anonymity worries:

> But what I didn't appreciate when I also had a survey about how you find working at the [organization], then I need to, of course, choose a range of my age or my gender or even if I am from the EU countries or not. Like then I was just like, OK, I'm who I am. It's very clear for you. You write your department, you write your position. [...] I just stopped the survey there. (Participant 16, migration background, cis hetero woman).

Similarly, an interview participant noted that one's minority status makes them more easily identifiable: "So if you're transgender, we have one transgender person in our service, then everyone knows what it's about." (Participant 18, no migration background, cis-hetero woman). This concern with identifiability may be more pronounced for individuals with intersecting marginalized identities, as their minority status often renders them more conspicuous and vulnerable to scrutiny.

Several focus group participants mentioned working on collecting data outside the HR system. For example, one participant indicated that within his organization, employees can voluntarily register their personal information in a separate system, unlinked to HR metrics. This approach was chosen to create an anonymous and safe space for employees: *"So I completely understand with the point why we chose at [name organization] to do the separate system outside is to give them more a sense of anonymity and that they feel safe, that it's just not anywhere."* (Participant 4, migration background, cis gay man).

Voluntariness of disclosure. Many interview participants expressed the belief that personal information should be collected or shared voluntarily. For instance, one employee emphasized the importance of everyone having the option not to share information with the organization: *"Well see, if you are this person and you won't tell it, I think, you have the right to not have to tell private stuff at work. And that is allowed, and there should be room for that."* (Participant 7, no migration background, cis-hetero woman). Similarly, another interview participant suggested that if an organization collects data, the option "prefer not to share" should be available: *"I think, if you would ask it, I would definitely leave the option open that people can also say, you know, not ... prefer not to share."* (Participant 21, no migration background, cis-hetero woman).

Relatedly, one interview participant (participant 17, no migration background, cis-hetero woman) expressed concern that if personal information were requested during the application process, applicants might feel pressured to divulge it to avoid jeopardizing their chances of securing the job. Power relations should thus be considered. In addition, focus group participants recognized the importance of individuals being able to modify or remove their personal details, especially during events like a name change to honor their privacy and identity. Failing to facilitate these adjustments may result in retaining outdated or sensitive data, risking privacy issues or misrepresentation for those involved. One focus group participant highlighted the possibility of individuals wanting to delete personal information from HR systems, especially when it concerns sensitive information like a "dead name," but noted the resistance they face due to legal reasons.

Discussion and conclusion

Our study delved into employees' perspectives on personal data collection, specifically regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. In contrast to Klarenaar *et al.*'s (2022)

organizational viewpoint, we shifted the focus to employees' attitudes toward sharing personal information and explored the conditions that either impede or facilitate their decision to share such details. This highlights the importance of distinguishing between conceptual factors shaping attitudes toward data collection and practical conditions that organizations need to consider during the collection process.

Our findings highlight the complex factors shaping attitudes toward personal data collection. These include the perceived benefit and relevance of gathering personal information, the employee's group affiliation (majority or minority), apprehensions about misuse of data and negative career consequences, and concerns about categorization risks. The interviews and focus group revealed a prevalent perception that sexual orientation and gender identity are often viewed as distinct from one's professional identity and not relevant to the workplace, aligning with the concept of heteroprofessionalism (Mizzi, 2013; Morgenroth et al., 2024). This viewpoint, and the related perspective that sexual orientation and gender identity should be excluded from data collection efforts, was predominantly expressed by majority group employees. Some majority group members, however, indicated a willingness to disclose this information, either due to a sense of security stemming from their privileged position or a belief that sharing could contribute to inclusivity for others. In contrast, the interviewed minority group employees generally expressed support for inclusivity efforts through data collection but were more likely to express concerns about potential negative career-related consequences. Interestingly, some majority group employees also exhibited reluctance toward data collection, citing fears of unfavorable career-related outcomes. Additionally, concerns about the risks of categorization stemming from personal data collection were voiced across groups, highlighting the necessity of an intersectional perspective to understand disclosure complexities without oversimplification.

Our study underscores the importance of specific conditions to foster a sense of security and safety among (LGBTQ+) employees when sharing personal information. Transparency of purpose, accessibility and privacy of data, trust and anonymity, and voluntariness of disclosure emerged as pivotal considerations requiring explicit attention from organizations. Firstly, employees strongly emphasized the need to comprehend the purpose behind data collection, expressing reluctance when it was unclear. This underscores the necessity of transparent communication, as clarity was deemed crucial for building trust in the process. Secondly, many participants stressed consideration of who within the organization or department would have access to the collected data. Thirdly, trust in the organization or department played a significant role in employees' willingness to share personal information. While some expressed confidence in their employer and were open to disclosure, others remained cautious due to uncertainties regarding data handling. Trust levels were often shaped by past experiences. Additionally, participants indicated that the degree of anonymity significantly impacts their willingness to share personal information, with some favoring anonymous data collection. Finally, a recurring theme among interview participants was the preference for voluntary rather than mandatory disclosure of personal information.

Our findings align with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) in suggesting that employees' disclosure preferences are influenced by their identification with either a majority or minority group. For LGBTQ + employees, concerns about ingroup/outgroup dynamics and stigma shape their willingness to disclose identity information. Similarly, stigma theory (Crocker et al., 1998; Goffman, 1963) illuminates the fear of discrimination and negative career consequences that employees associate with disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity, further complicating their decisions. As Crocker et al. (1998) suggest, individuals develop coping strategies like strategic ambiguity to avoid prejudice, aligning the concerns we identified in our study, particularly regarding fear of misuse of information, negative career consequences, and the risk of categorization. While self- and group-interest appeared to influence support for diversity policies, particularly among those facing marginalization (Avery, 2011), motivations did not strictly align with these factors alone. Concerns for others and a commitment to workplace inclusivity also played a role.

Our findings parallel previous work on identity-conscious approaches showing that minority group members are more likely than majority members to prefer identity-consciousness (i.e. multiculturalism; Rattan and Ambady, 2013), while Mor *et al.* (2024) found that LGBTQ + employees favor identity-conscious over identity-blind diversity messaging. Similarly, LGBTQ + participants in our study expressed stronger support for sexual orientation and gender identity data collection, seeing it as a tool for inclusion, though their support was contingent on safeguards like anonymity and transparency. As we referred to in our theory section, these nuances in perspectives and variations in considerations between the participants can be further explored by diving deeper into the potential interacting effects of individuals' stigmatized identities, salience of gender identity and sexual orientation as well as perceived risks and benefits of self-verification.

In this study, we employed semi-structured interviews and a focus group, each with its own strengths and limitations. The qualitative approach provided rich insights into individual perspectives, but recruiting a diverse range of participants—particularly those with minority identities—proved challenging in the interviews. To address this, we conducted a dedicated focus group with LGBTQ + employees, fostering meaningful representation and in-depth discussion. However, this introduced an asymmetry in participant composition, as the interviews primarily included Dutch nationals, while the focus group featured an international panel. Moreover, several focus group participants held positions related to implementing self-identification (self-ID) within their organization. While they participated in the focus group as employees, their roles might have influenced their opinions and experiences regarding sharing personal information to some degree. Consequently, caution is warranted when interpreting the findings. It's important to note that the insights and observations from these interviews and focus groups may not be universally applicable to all employees who identify with a minority group.

Future research has the potential to delve into the intricate dynamics between the work environment and personal information sharing, providing insights into how an inclusive workplace fosters trust and encourages employees to disclose personal data. This exploration includes investigating whether an organization's initiatives to promote an inclusive work climate impact employees' decision-making process, shaping their attitudes and willingness to share data with the organization. Another avenue for future research lies in delving deeper into the impact of intersectionality on employees' attitudes toward personal data collection. This research could investigate how intersecting identities, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, shape individuals' willingness to share personal information within various organizational contexts. Addressing these research directions will advance the understanding of the complexities surrounding personal data collection, informing the development of inclusive and trustworthy data collection practices in workplace settings.

In sum, our research highlights both shared and distinct factors influencing personal data disclosure among majority and minority (LGBTQ+) employees. While members of both groups emphasize the importance of transparency, trust, and voluntariness in data collection, LGBTQ + employees more frequently stress the necessity of anonymity and privacy due to heightened concerns about workplace stigma and discrimination. Majority group employees, on the other hand, are more likely to perceive sexual orientation and gender identity as unrelated to professional life, aligning with heteroprofessionalism, and may either question the relevance of data collection or feel secure enough to disclose without fear of repercussions. In contrast, LGBTQ + employees often see data collection as a potential tool for fostering inclusivity but remain cautious, balancing the desire for representation with concerns about how their information will be used. These differences underscore the role of agency, risk perception and organizational expectations in shaping disclosure decisions, with majority employees generally facing fewer constraints and lower perceived risks, while minority employees navigate more complex considerations tied to their identity and organizational trust. By identifying these overlapping and diverging factors, our study provides a nuanced understanding of the factors that influence disclosure attitudes, and the organizational safeguards needed to foster a secure and inclusive workplace for all employees.

Notes

1. One of the participants wanted to be withdrawn from the study. These data were removed.

2. Participants were asked whether they belonged to a minority group. The personal characteristics mentioned in this manuscript are based on their responses to this question, as well as any spontaneous disclosures made during the interview.

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