

**In the Shadows and the Spotlight: Exploring Gay and Lesbian Perceptions of Ally
Networks and Identity Disclosure in Chile.**

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a significant gap in research by examining the perceptions of gay and lesbian (G&L) individuals towards ally networks and the interconnectedness with sexual identity disclosure in workplaces, particularly within the context of Chile. Drawing on 20 semi-structured interviews, findings reveal a nuanced triad of perceptions – ally networks are perceived as Beneficial, Unnecessary, or Detrimental. Importantly, the degree of identity disclosure emerges as a key determinant shaping these perspectives. This study contributes empirical evidence to the underexplored landscape of ally networks in a developing nation like Chile, emphasising the need for context-specific considerations in understanding workplace dynamics.

Keywords: Ally Networks, Sexual Identity Disclosure, Gay, Lesbian, Chile.

Track: Identity

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the intersection of sexual identity and workplace dynamics has become an increasingly prominent focus of research, with scholars delving into the nuanced experiences of gay and lesbian (G&L) individuals. The management of identities within the professional sphere, decisions surrounding identity disclosure, and the subsequent consequences of such revelations have emerged as critical areas of exploration in the literature (Claire, Beatty & Maclean 2005; Colgan 2011; King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones & Kendra 2017; Ozturk & Rumens, 2014).

While existing research has made significant strides, it is essential to acknowledge that the majority of studies in this domain have been focused in developed economies, notably the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and various European countries (Clark & Arnold 2017; Gedro, Cervero & Johnson-Bailey 2004; Bowring & Brewis 2009; Wright-Maley, Davis, Gonzalez & Colwell 2016; Willis 2012; Colgan 2011; Stenger & Roulet 2018; Van Laer 2018). Consequently, a notable gap exists in understanding the unique experiences and perceptions of G&L individuals in workplace settings in developing countries.

This paper contributes to this growing body of knowledge by specifically exploring how G&L individuals in Chile perceive ally networks, shedding light on the dynamics of identity disclosure and the reception of ally networks in ways distinct from those observed in developed economies. By directing our attention to this understudied geographical context, this paper aims to broaden the literature on sexual identity and ally networks in the workplace. This paper begins with a brief review of the conditions of LGBT individuals in Chile followed by literature on identity disclosure and employee networks. The next sections describe the methodology followed by findings, discussion and conclusion.

Social conditions for LGBT people in Chile

Chile has enacted several laws to improve the social conditions for LGBT people. In 2012, the Anti-Discrimination Law, known as Ley Zamudio (Ley 20.609), was passed. This law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and race, amongst other characteristics. Its main objective is to establish legal conditions to guarantee the rights of people who are victims of arbitrary discrimination. Following this, in 2015, civil unions between same-sex partners were legalised, eventually leading to the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2022. Similarly, the Gender Identity Law, passed in 2018, allows individuals to change their name and gender marker on legal documents without the need for surgery or medical procedures, impacting individuals seeking to have their gender identity formally recognised. However, despite these legal advancements, LGBT individuals still face challenges in society, particularly in the workplace.

According to the Homosexual Movement of Integration and Liberation (MOVILH), there were 1,597 reported cases of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in 2023, an increase of 53% compared to 2022. Of these cases, 15% affected gay men, 13% affected transgender people, 7% affected lesbians, and 65% affected the LGBTQI+ population as a whole. The report highlights that complaints of discrimination against gay men increased by 26%, while those against lesbians decreased by 16% (MOVILH, 2023). In the workplace, there were 95 reported cases of discrimination in 2023, affecting 54 gay men, 26 lesbians, 8 transgender women, and 7 transgender men. This represents a 22% increase compared to cases

in 2022. Thus, although public attitudes towards LGBT individuals in Chile have been evolving and showing increasing acceptance, as suggested by Barrientos (2015, 2016), traditional and conservative views still influence workplace experiences as portrayed in recent figures highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by LGBT individuals in Chile.

Identity disclosure

Non-visible aspects of identity such as sexual orientation, often serve as a breeding ground for labelling and stigmatisation when individuals appear different, which is highlighted by Claire et al. (2005) as the underexplored dynamics of non-visible identities within the workplace. Particularly for employees with a non-heterosexual orientation, the ability to conceal this aspect of their lives and navigate their identities to avoid stigmas is a latent option. In this sense, McFadden (2015) highlights that gay and lesbian (G&L) employees, with identities not immediately apparent, confront more social challenges in the workplace than their heterosexual counterparts. Thus, the decision of whether to disclose their sexual orientation at work becomes intricate, involving considerations of when, how, where, and to whom to reveal this information (Goffman 2009).

Claire et al. (2005) considers this decision-making process as part of the strategies G&L individuals employ at work, known as passing or revealing. Passing entails creating the illusion of aligning with the majority or dominant group in order to project a heterosexual appearance. This involves avoiding specific topics, situations, or groups that might expose their invisible identity (Croteau, Anderson & VanderWal 2008; DeJordy 2008). Conversely, revealing is the act of disclosing an identity usually concealed or challenging to be recognised by others, commonly referred to as 'coming out' in popular jargon (Griffith & Hebl 2002; Ragins 2008).

Identity disclosure for sexual minorities, is a personal decision shaped by what Creed and Cooper (2008 p.494) call 'cost-benefit calculations'. As frequent targets of stigmatisation, gay and lesbian employees consistently weigh the advantages and disadvantages of 'coming out' in the workplace, carefully selecting whom to disclose their sexual orientation with. Factors under consideration include the impact on relationships with colleagues (Button 2004), potential workplace support (Ragins, Singh & Cornwell 2007), and the broader influence on workplace policies and narratives (Einarsdottir, Hoel and Lewis 2016). Indeed, without the assurance of a supportive environment, sexual minorities may feel hesitant to disclose their identity, perpetuating the need for them to engage in passing strategies or concealing their true selves to conform to perceived norms (Claire et al. 2005). Research indicates that this disclosure process can adversely affect employees in terms of motivation, performance, health, stress levels, and overall well-being (Holman, Ogolsky & Oswald 2021; Madera 2010; Meyer 2003; Ragins and Cornwell 2001; Velez and Moradi 2012; Ward & Winstanley 2005). In worse scenarios, and considering the absence of adequate support, G&L employees grappling with persistent interactions shaped by oversimplified perceptions of their identities and entrenched stereotypical thinking, may find themselves compelled to leave the organisation (Nishii 2013).

Employee networks

Employee networks, also referred to in the literature as ally networks, employee groups, employee resource groups, or affinity groups (hereafter referred as ally networks), serve as associations designed to facilitate connections among individuals who share common identities and to advocate for organisational change related to the collective interests of the group (Colgan & McKearney 2012). These networks typically bring together individuals based on

race, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. In the context of G&L employees within organisational settings, these networks aim to offer support by enhancing visibility, advocacy, inclusion, and fostering learning, among other activities (Colgan & McKearney 2012; Githens & Aragon 2009; McNulty et al. 2018).

Research on ally networks sheds light on the motivations behind employees choosing to participate in such networks. Some individuals may prioritise the benefits of social support and improved workplace relationships (Clair et al. 2005; Githens & Aragon 2009), utilise the networks as voice mechanisms for social change (Colgan & Ledwith 2000; Colgan & McKearney 2012; McNulty et al. 2018), or seek to enhance visibility for sexual minorities historically marginalised in the workplace (Clair et al. 2005; Humphrey 1999).

While the existing literature emphasises the positive impacts of ally networks and identity disclosure on employees, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all outcomes are uniformly positive. Membership in or association with these networks can expose individuals to risks such as discrimination, stigma, and identity threats (Ozturk 2011; Priola et al. 2014; Willis 2012). Additionally, it is important to recognise the challenges faced by employees who may not be open about their sexual identities or who may choose not to join the network due to some of the aforementioned risks.

While studies in this domain concentrate on ally networks as key groups for visibility, support, and inclusion, it is imperative to consider the perceptions of individuals regarding networks and potential links to identity disclosure as well. Therefore, this research aims to fill a gap in existing literature by delving into the underexplored aspects of perceptions of ally networks and identity disclosure for gay and lesbian individuals in Chile. The scarcity of studies in this context underscores the significance of this investigation, as it seeks to contribute valuable insights and validate or build theoretical foundations. Thus, this study not only expands knowledge but also offers practical implications for both academia and practitioners, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics surrounding sexual identity and ally networks in the unique socio-cultural context of Chilean workplaces.

METHOD

Design and data collection

This article adopts an inductive qualitative methodology (Percy et al., 2015) using an exploratory approach based on a set of 20 semi-structured interviews with 14 men (gay) and 6 women (lesbians) from different job positions and sectors. This allows for the exploration of in-depth descriptions pertaining to the meanings and experiences of participants in their personal stories (Gephart Jr 2004; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin 2003), specifically focusing on gay men and women in Chile. Snowball sampling was used to invite potential participants. This is usually done in this kind of studies (see Atkinson & Flint 2001) as it is hard to recruit participants involving sexual minorities (Browne 2005; Einarsdottir et al. 2016). Thus, it is possible to have access to more people referred from the first recruited participants. Similar approach has been previously used when doing research regarding gay and lesbian employees (McFadden & Crowley-Henry 2017; McPhail et al., 2016; Rumens & Broomfield 2012).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in Chile in 2018 and 2019. This method enabled the gathering of detailed and rich descriptive experiences, facilitating the identification of key contextual nuances (Lamont & Swidler 2014). Initial questions were deliberately open-ended, gauging participants' awareness of ally networks, and subsequent inquiries probed into their experiences as gay individuals in the workplace, including aspects of identity disclosure and encountered challenges. Throughout the interviews, a conversational tone was maintained to foster rapport and encourage participants to share their perspectives freely.

Since the interviews were conducted in Spanish, responses and findings were translated into English for the purposes of this paper. Interviewees voluntarily shared their ideas, perceptions and concerns regarding the investigated topics. No payments or rewards were offered for participation. Anonymity was offered and assured assigning a pseudonym to each interviewee in analysed data set. Also, in accordance with interviewing practice, participants were briefed regarding aims and scope of the study as well as ethical considerations. Written consent was provided prior to proceeding with a tape-recorded interview. Interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes.

Data analysis

The analysis of data involved working with transcripts in their original language (Spanish). Inductive thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2003), was employed utilising NVIVO12 software, a computer-based qualitative research tool. This approach facilitated the systematic identification, classification, and organisation of data, revealing underlying meanings and experiences while discerning patterns (Braun & Clarke 2006). To construct theory, a constant comparative method was used (Gioia et al. 2013), involving an iterative cycle of data collection, coding, and reference to existing theories (Glaser & Strauss 2017). Throughout this process, detailed memos were used to capture overarching insights and emerging patterns (Charmaz 2006), and through an iterative approach incorporating both data and interview notes, various categories were identified and interlinked. Exemplary quotations are included to reinforce the findings.

The analysis started with open coding to systematically categorise incidents or narratives and to extract general insights regarding individuals and networks. Subsequently, individual codes were synthesised to discern how our first-order concepts aligned with broader theoretical categories. This process facilitated the exploration of connections between different concepts that surfaced during open coding through comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss 2017). Concurrently, the existing literature was consulted throughout the analysis to seek potential explanations for the emerging themes. In the final stage, second-order themes were aggregated into dimensions reflecting higher levels of abstraction (Gioia et al. 2013).

Finally, the exploration of perceptions regarding ally networks uncovered distinctive aspects that have been codified into three predominant categories: Ally networks as Beneficial, Unnecessary, and Detrimental, as illustrated in Figure 1. Furthermore, the analysis delved into nuanced aspects across the main categories, which intricately link individuals' perceptions of networks, identity disclosure and their willingness to embrace or reject ally networks as represented in Figure 2.

Insert Fig 1 here

FINDINGS

Making sense of ally networks

Beneficial networks

The perception of ally networks as beneficial is based on the support, acceptance and visibility associated to these groups and the pivotal role in fostering a supportive community for individuals embracing their identities. For G&L individuals, the potential support garnered from networks becomes a cornerstone of their positive perception as they can provide a space where individuals can share experiences, seek guidance, and find understanding from like-minded colleagues.

“I think the LGBTQI community needs these networks. We need to create these support networks to have some help and support with workplace issues because there is no other group that support us with gay issues like discrimination at work” (P2)

Support under a beneficial view of networks also place emphasis on removing barriers for inclusion put in place based on stereotyped images of gay and lesbian individuals:

“This is important since people think that gays and lesbians are the stereotypes they see on TV. And the reality is not like that!” (P3)

“Since some people don't know many gay people, they let themselves be carried away by ignorance, because of what they hear or see on the internet or on TV, but they don't know other gay people like me” (P7)

Similarly, participants consider how an ally network could provide a tailored support not only in terms of engagement, inclusion, or to tackle discrimination issues. There is also support to tackle the anxiety and stress individuals may experience based on the constant pressure to hide or even disclose their identities. The acknowledgment of a positive impact reinforces the perception of ally networks as beneficial for individuals, as they find acceptance not only within their immediate work teams but also within the broader organisational context.

“It would be great to have a support network. In that way I wouldn't feel so alone and I would have someone to talk to about the same issues. It would be emotional support. We would form a group, we would have more power at work, and we could tell the other people not to discriminate or how they should treat gays and lesbians” (P19)

This support is also mentioned in terms of visibility at work as networks offer a platform for individuals to become visible advocates, promoting diversity and inclusion. This visibility not

only benefits the individuals by fostering a sense of pride but also contributes to the broader organisational culture, fostering awareness and understanding.

“I think that organisations are very focused on heterosexual issues. They don't see beyond the problems of straight men and women. I think they should educate and ensure that they are the ones who should be respectful of those who are different, that they should accept gays and lesbians” (P3)

“These networks would help normalise the life of gays and lesbians, so that there is more respect and tolerance. It helps make the community visible, and visibility creates reality in people. makes us present” (P18)

These perceptions are consistent with research on stigma theory which states that individuals facing social stigma seek support from fellow group members to cope with the stress, rejection, and isolation resulting from their stigmatised identities (Miller & Major 2000). Consequently, when individuals with non-normative sexual orientations, such as gays and lesbians, interact and share experiences with others who share similar identities, it serves as a protective barrier against negative perceptions from dominant groups (Frable, Platt & Hoey 1998).

Unnecessary networks

While acknowledging the potential benefits of ally networks in the workplace, some participants highlighted that, despite good intentions, such networks may be unnecessary. This perception is often linked to the belief that employees should maintain a professional demeanour at work, effectively delineating boundaries between their personal and professional lives. These individuals may prefer to be recognised and valued for their professional contributions rather than their sexual identity. The decision to keep personal aspects private may stem from a belief that one's sexual identity should not influence professional interactions.

“In my work I have always separated my personal and work life. Everyone knows that I am gay, but I don't expose my personal life in the office. I don't mix things up. They may know that I am gay but they also know that I am responsible, a good worker. I have earned respect for my professionalism in my work. If you do your job and you do it well, it doesn't matter if you are gay, lesbian or whatever. Those are two different things” (P10)

“I am a professional individual first, and then am gay man. I am not the gay engineer, I am an engineer that turn out to be gay. But being gay is secondary and not relevant to my professional career” (P16)

Consequently, the argument is made that workplace groups or ally networks would be not required if individuals adhere to societal and professional expectations regarding a hetero-normative behaviour.

“I don't need a label saying I am a lesbian or telling everyone in the office about my private life. Heterosexuals do not have a label nor do they go around saying they are heterosexual. My role is to work, do my job well and develop in my professional career. The rest does not matter” (P4)

Some participants remained sceptical about the necessity for these networks. This scepticism stems from various perspectives, with some employees questioning the allocation of time and resources by the company for what they perceive as catering to the needs of a small minority.

“We don’t need a pink or rainbow union” (P16)

“The company is not very interested in these issues. They are indifferent, it is not an issue for them. I don't think they see it as a necessity to implement networks or even policies aimed at gay people. I think that the company would not take the trouble to support a group or initiative for gays or lesbians since there are very few of us. Doing so much work to create an initiative for a couple of people? I don't believe the company should be do it” (P3)

Additionally, a subset of participants adopts a more personal stance, assuming that since they do not personally feel the need for such networks, they doubt others would need them too. This doubtfulness often reflects a lack of perceived broader significance or purpose for these networks, leading to questioning of their genuine necessity in the workplace.

“In my work I don't think there are major problems so I don't think networks are needed. I haven't had any problems so I don't think it's necessary. Don't know other people with problems” (P7)

Participants also restrict the perceived need for ally networks to a limited scope. For some, these networks are viewed exclusively as resources tailored for the support of gay and lesbian employees, often associated solely with addressing issues of discrimination. This restricted viewpoint overlooks the broader potential of ally networks, neglecting other positive aspects and benefits that extend beyond resources for support and challenges. This limited view highlights the importance of exploring and expanding the narrative surrounding ally networks to ensure a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to workplace support and collaboration.

“I don't see feasible to have networks or groups in my work. Maybe, if there are problems in the company such as discrimination or something like that, then yes. So, in those cases it would be ideal. But we don't have problems between gays and the rest of the workers, so I don't see it as necessary” (P11)

Detrimental networks

Participants who perceive networks as detrimental, formulate rationalisations to criticise the notion of networks in the workplace and its negative impact not just to them (gays and lesbians) but also to the rest of the employees. They may fear that being associated with an ally network could lead to biased judgments or hinder professional advancement. Thus, criticisms arise when networks are linked to potential damaging impacts on careers as the association to them can downplay perceived professionalism by others. This perception may result from a cautious approach to avoid any negative repercussions related to their identities

“I am afraid of exposing my private life because as a woman it is difficult to advance in your career, and even more so as a lesbian, it is even more complicated. It would affect my colleagues' way of relating to me, and my career.

[...] In the company they say that they value you as a professional but the minute you declare that you are gay, things change, the perception of your peers and managers changes. You need to focus on growing within the company and not taking risks” (P4)

The fear of negative impacts extends beyond concerns about professional career development. Employees may grapple with the apprehension of being rejected by their co-workers and the looming threat of discrimination. There is a fear of unveiling personal aspects of one's identity due to the association with these networks, and this stems from the worry that such disclosure could lead to isolation or prejudice within the workplace. This apprehension may arise from real or perceived biases within the organisational culture.

“At work you must take care of yourself, you have to behave. Otherwise, they will judge you, they will discriminate against you. For the same reason, you need to be careful. You must take care that others do not know that you are gay since it would not be well regarded” (P20)

The fear of identity exposure is a significant factor influencing individuals to perceive ally networks as detrimental. The potential risk of being involuntarily outed and facing consequences, whether personally or professionally, may deter individuals from engaging with these networks. Participants also highlight that their affiliation with an ally network may inadvertently signal or draw attention to characteristics they may not be ready to share openly. This exposure can make employees vulnerable to targeting or signalling within the workplace, subjecting them to unwarranted attention or assumptions about their personal life.

“The problem is that if I propose creating a network or support group for gays and lesbians, they will immediately classify me as a lesbian, even if I am not. To anyone related to that. They would you ask why she is interested in that or why is she promoting that? Is she a lesbian?” (P4)

Some individuals disclose a form of resistance or rejection to the notion of joining a network or support group due to the perception that it brings an unwanted form of privilege. For some, being part of a marginalised group does not necessarily translate to a desire for special treatment or attention. They may resist the idea of being associated with a support group because they wish to be recognised and treated based on their professional merits rather than their sexual identity.

“I don't think we should get things or opportunities or a better position at work because we're gay. I do not find it necessary, and a special group or organisation would send that message. It would be like saying oh look poor thing, let's help them because they are gay. You can achieve that by being professional, by working hard, and not because you are gay, not because you are part of the 10%. That bothers me” (P10)

Degree of identity disclosure and attitudes towards networks

Based on the analysis, individuals perceive networks as beneficial, unnecessary or detrimental. However, this is also associated with individuals' identity disclosure or 'degree of outness' in the workplace. Those who are 'openly out' at work may find ally networks as beneficial

valuable sources of support, understanding, and camaraderie. For them, networks can serve as platforms to gain visibility to freely celebrate their identities, and a sense of community to advocate for inclusivity. Consequently, they show a positive and embracing attitude towards these networks.

“These networks are necessary especially for people who need support. It would be a kind of message to tell them that being gay or lesbian is not an issue. You are not sick. It would be like a message to say don't be afraid, be yourself” (P1)

However, despite recognising the potential benefits of ally networks, individuals who are not ‘out of the closet’ may choose to disregard these initiatives due to a persistent fear of sexual identity exposure. The perceived risk of unintentional disclosure and the associated potential consequences, such as discrimination or unwanted attention, may outweigh the perceived benefits, leading to a deliberate disengagement. Also, whether they see the networks as beneficial or unnecessary, they may feel that engaging with these initiatives blurs the line between personal and professional life, a distinction they are keen on upholding.

“I think it would be great to have a support network or support group but at the same time it would be bad since it would expose you. The rest of the people would say there are the weird ones, there are the gays or lesbians grouped together” (P20)

Findings also suggest that regardless of the ‘degree of outness’, participants might fear that engagement in these networks could lead to negative outcomes, such as career stagnation or strained professional relationships based on a change in the way they are perceived by colleagues or superiors, potentially leading to rejection or isolation. This concern about unintended consequences can drive individuals to reject ally networks. They might prefer to navigate their careers independently without relying on identity-based support structures. This rejection is driven by a preference for self-reliance and a belief in the ability to address challenges without external networks.

“People are afraid of having a homophobic boss and losing their job so they prefer not to say that they are gay. It will affect your job, your career. So I think people would prefer not to relate to that network. They would not join initiatives that highlight or emphasise that they are gay. It would be something good for the company, positive, even good marketing, but also very risky for us” (P3)

Insert Fig 2 here

DISCUSSION

This study has delved into the nuances of how ally networks are perceived by employees in a developing country like Chile, emphasising the impact of identity disclosure on attitudes towards these networks. The existing literature on ally networks has shed light on their significance in providing visibility and support for minorities, particularly those navigating issues related to sexual identity (Colgan and McKearney, 2012; McNulty et al., 2018). However, through inductive analysis, it has been revealed that while individuals perceive ally

networks as beneficial tools for fostering inclusivity and support in the workplace, the research also uncovers a spectrum of perceptions, with some employees considering these networks unnecessary or even detrimental for gay and lesbian individuals within organisations.

One crucial factor influencing attitudes towards ally networks is the degree of identity disclosure or "outness" of employees in the workplace. The study found a positive association between the openness of individuals about their sexual identities and an accepting attitude towards ally networks. This positivity can be attributed to the belief that these networks contribute significantly to increasing education, visibility, awareness, and acceptance of gays and lesbians in the workplace. Being open about their sexual identities allow these employees to openly embrace and welcome the work of ally networks, recognising their role in fostering a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

However, contrary to the anticipated positive perceptions towards ally networks, a noteworthy finding emerges in some individuals who regardless of whether they have fully disclosed their sexual identity or chosen to remain private, expresses reluctance and negative attitudes towards these networks. This unique scenario adds layers of complexity to our understanding of how ally networks are perceived within the workplace. The reluctance to comfortably interact or participate in ally networks, as expressed by some participants, suggests potential challenges in the alignment of these networks with the needs and expectations of the workforce.

Some individuals may view ally networks as unnecessary, questioning the boundaries in addressing issues related to sexual identity in work settings. This perception could stem from a belief that workplaces are not the place for expressions of sexual identity and a lack of a broader view regarding the scope and objectives of these networks. Thus, we extend research on ally networks by addressing the way identity disclosure may influence perceptions and attitudes towards these networks, addressing an important research gap in a country like Chile.

Findings regarding a beneficial perception of ally networks are in line with existent literature (Clair et al. 2005; Humphrey 1999; McNulty et al. 2018). However, this analysis also sheds light on the degree of identity disclosure affecting perceptions, suggesting that regardless of the degree of disclosure, a perception of 'no-need' for such networks, and even an adverse or detrimental impact on gay and lesbian individuals. Unlike Mcfadden and Crowley-Henry (2017), findings suggest that participants to some extent, have a negative perception of networks (unnecessary - detrimental), rejecting the idea of ally networks in the workplace. The underlying assumption is that these networks will draw negative attention, and the perception of gay and lesbians as 'special people', something they do not want. The suggestion is that a 'pink network' will change the way straight people look at them, making them feel sorry for gay and lesbian individuals, instead of be seen as equals. This might stigmatise them even more because of the perception of pushing a sort of 'secret gay agenda' in a 'private club' demanding special considerations. Taken together, these findings suggest that the perceptions and attitudes towards ally networks in Chile is a complex exercise for support and inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals at work, where the degree of identity disclosure plays an important part in the perceptions, acceptance or rejection of these networks. Recognising and understanding these sentiments is crucial for organisations seeking to create truly inclusive environments in a country like Chile.

CONCLUSION

In response to the gap in research investigating the intricate connection between individuals' perceptions of ally networks and the interplay with identity disclosure in workplace contexts, this study has sought to address this crucial intersection within the unique setting of Chile. By providing empirical insights into the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals, our findings have contributed valuable nuance to the broader discourse surrounding sexual identity in the workplace.

The study reveals a multifaceted landscape of perceptions towards ally networks, highlighting three distinct categories of appraisal: beneficial, unnecessary, and detrimental. Unravelling the diversity within these perspectives offers a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding perceptions of ally networks in Chile. This underscores the importance of acknowledging and addressing the varied attitudes held by gay and lesbian employees.

The degree of identity disclosure emerges as a pivotal factor influencing these perceptions, shaping individuals' attitudes towards ally networks. This connection unveils a dynamic interplay where the level of openness about one's sexual identity at work significantly impacts how individuals interpret ally networks. This insight underscores the interconnected nature of identity disclosure and perceptions of support systems, signalling the need for organisations to consider these factors holistically in their efforts to create inclusive work environments.

As the study encapsulates the diverse ways in which gay and lesbian individuals in Chile perceive ally networks, it serves as a call to action for future research to delve deeper into the intricacies of workplace dynamics across various cultural and societal contexts. The findings presented here not only contribute to the academic understanding of sexual identity in the workplace but also offer practical implications for organisations striving to enhance the effectiveness of ally networks in supporting their diverse workforce. Thus, this study provides a crucial foundation for further exploration, emphasising the importance of context-specific considerations in understanding the dynamics of ally networks and identity disclosure. By acknowledging the threefold categorisation of perceptions and recognising the influence of identity disclosure, this research contributes to a more comprehensive approach to fostering workplace inclusivity for gays and lesbians in Chile.

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Figure 1: Data coding structure

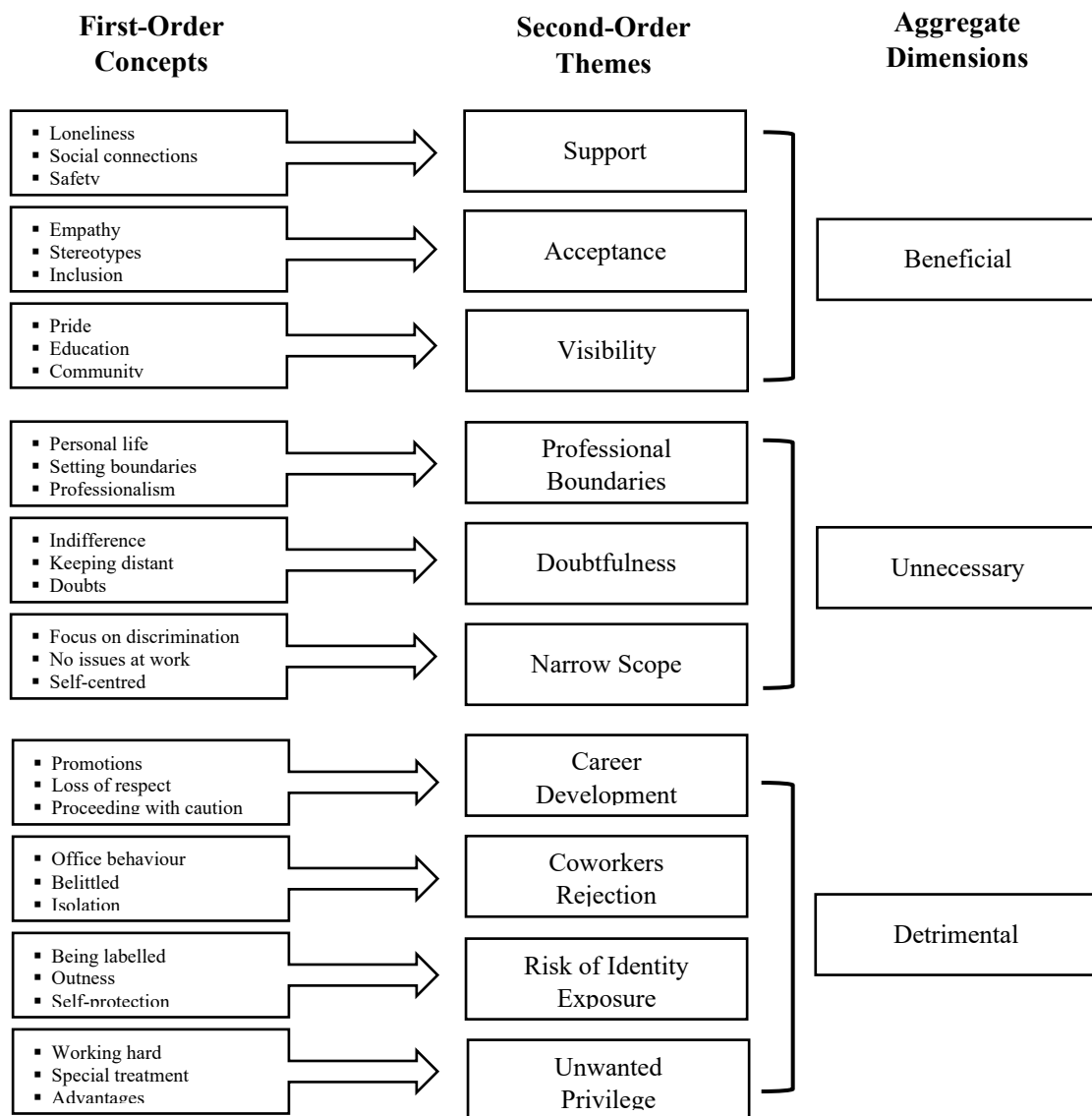


Figure 2: Degree of identity disclosure, perceptions, and attitudes towards ally networks

