Non-binary Living in a Binary World: The Unlabeled Experience

Sawyer D. Piwetz, Katricia D.F. Stewart, Yanna J. Weisberg, & Tanya L. Tompkins
Linfield College

Introduction & Hypotheses

Introduction

o Both popular media and social science research suggest that gender/sexual identities and roles that have dominated western society are being challenged (Budgeon, 2014)

o Heteronormative assumptions and the gender binary are rapidly evolving to capture experiences that reflect greater diversity (Diamond, 2005; Nagoshi et al., 2012), including those that extend beyond labels

o How this increased flexibility affects well-being, however, is not yet understood

o The current study seeks to advance our understanding of this diversity among gender, sexual and romantic minorities (GSRM) by answering the following questions:

   Question 1: With regard to gender identity and sexual orientation, what are the experiences of unlabeled individuals in their communities? Why do unlabeled individuals choose to be unlabeled?

   Question 2: Is unlabeled status associated with minority stress and well-being?

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from a range of sources (students, LGBTQ organization, and social media targeting GSRMs)

o Mean age: 19.24 years (SD = 1.49)

o Primarily White (82%), Hispanic (5%), Asian-American (4%), African-American (2%), Native American (1%), Pacific Islander (1%), Other (5%)

Poster Available Online
tinyurl.com/APS2015genderPRISM

Method

Procedure & Measures

o As a part of a larger battery of measures, participants completed the following scales:

Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (ESWLS; Alfonso, Allison, Rader and Gorman, 1996)

50 items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)
o e.g., "I am satisfied with my life."

8 Subscales
o General (α = .92)
o Social Life (α = .97)
o Physical Appearance (α = .93)
o Sex Life (α = .97)
o Self (α = .94)
o Family (α = .97)
o Relationship - Present (α = .95)
o Relationship - Past (α = .96)

Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG; Klein, 1978)

Assessed current sexual orientation (0 = Heterosexual Only to 6=Homosexual Only)
o e.g., "How do you label or identify yourself?"

Daily Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (DHEQ; Balsam, 2013)

50-items (0 = Did not happen/NA to 5 = It happened, and it bothered me extremely)
o e.g., "Hiding part of your life from other people"

9 Subscales
o Gender Expression (α = .84)
o Parenting (α = .61)
o Vigilance (α = .78)
o Discrimination/Harassment (α = .76)
o Vicarious (α = .80)
o Family of Origin (α = .78)
o HIV/AIDS (α = .76)
o Victimization (α = .87)
o Isolation (α = .72)

Results

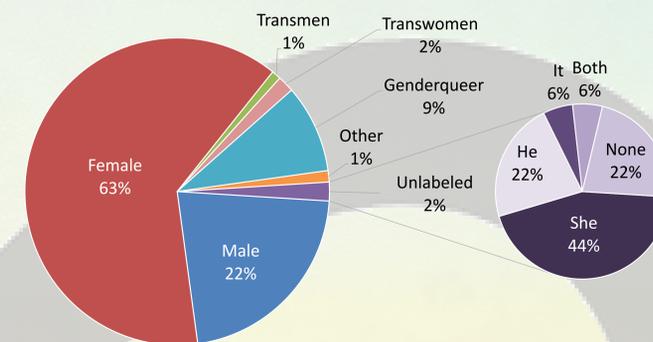Fig. 1. Gender identity and unlabeled pronoun usage of participants (N = 915)

Fig. 2. Sexual identity of participants (N = 623)

Table 1
Gender Identity and Life Satisfaction

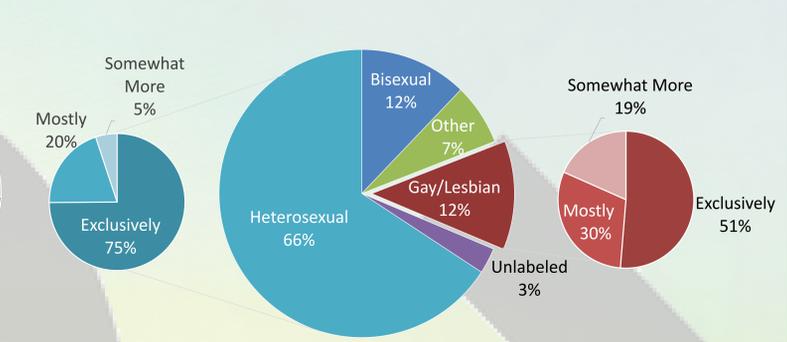|	Men		Women		Trans		Other		Unlabeled		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F
General	24.64[a]	7.16	24.57[a]	6.46	15.92[b]	8.73	20.01[ab]	8.48	16.24[b]	6.33	15.71**
Family	24.40[a]	9.39	24.79[a]	8.62	20.08[b]	7.90	18.32[ab]	9.13	17.24[b]	7.50	10.50**
Social Life	23.36[a]	7.77	22.57[ab]	7.64	20.92[b]	7.30	19.60[ab]	8.12	16.94[b]	8.93	4.83**

Note. Within rows, means which do not share superscripts differ according to Scheffe post-hoc tests.
*p <.05. **p < .001.

o The majority (82%) of participants who reported an "unlabeled" gender identity were assigned female at birth and reported being gendered in public as "she" (65%) or both "s/he equally" (18%)

o In general, "unlabeled" participants reported lower overall and family life satisfaction compared to cisgendered, and lower social life satisfaction compared to men (see Table 1)

o "Unlabeled" were similar to other GSRMs on reported levels of minority stress and all other ESWLS subscales

o Explaining their "unlabeled" status, participants described their primary identification as human, expressed discomfort with gender-based assumptions and rejected constrictions of the gender binary

o All but one of the participants who reported an "unlabeled" sexual orientation indicated that their birth sex was female and none identified as male

o "Unlabeled" participants reported lower overall life satisfaction than did straight and gay/lesbian participants and lower family life satisfaction in comparison to straight participants (see Table 2)

o There were no differences between "unlabeled" and other GSRM participants on reported minority stress and all other ESWLS scales

Table 2
Sexual Orientation and Life Satisfaction

	Straight		Bisexual		Gay/Lesbian		Other		Unlabeled		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F
General	25.20[a]	6.29	20.79[ab]	7.35	22.68[a]	8.51	21.58[ab]	7.37	17.76[b]	7.29	12.85**
Family	25.93[a]	8.25	20.47[ab]	8.75	20.11[b]	9.53	19.70[b]	9.04	17.65[b]	9.66	17.33**

Note. Within rows, means which do not share superscripts differ according to Scheffe post-hoc tests.
*p <.05. **p < .001.

Conclusion

o This study represents one of the first attempts to understand the experience of those who describe themselves as "unlabeled" and how they compare to other GSRMs on measures of well-being and minority stress

o Although a range of explanations for eschewing labels existed among a small number of participants, lower life satisfaction suggests that this may be an at-risk population meriting further study