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

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Introduction & Hypotheses

Introduction
- Both popular media and social science research suggest that gender/sexual identities and roles that have dominated western society are being challenged (Budgeon, 2014)
- 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
- How this increased flexibility affects well-being, however, is not yet understood
- 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)
  
  - Mean age: 19.24 years (SD = 1.49)
  - Primarily White (82%), Hispanic (5%), Asian-American (4%), African-American (2%), Native American (1%), Pacific Islander (1%), Other (5%)

Procedure & Measures
- 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)
  - e.g., “I am satisfied with my life.”
  
  **8 Subscales**
  - General (α = .92)
  - Social Life (α = .97)
  - Physical Appearance (α = .93)
  - Sex Life (α = .97)
  - Self (α = .94)
  - Family (α = .97)
  - Relationship Present (α = .95)
  - Relationship Past (α = .96)

**Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG; Klein, 1978)**
- Assessed current sexual orientation (0 = Heterosexual Only to 6=Homosexual Only)
  
  - 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)
  
  - e.g., “Hiding part of your life from other people”
  
  **9 Subscales**
  - Gender Expression (α = .84)
  - Parenting (α = .61)
  - Vigilance (α = .78)
  - Discrimination/Harassment (α = .76)
  - Victimization (α = .87)
  - Isolation (α = .72)

Results

- All but one of the participants who reported an “unlabeled” sexual orientation indicated that their birth sex was female and none identified as male
- “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)
- There were no differences between “unlabeled” and other GSRM participants on reported minority stress and all other EWSLS scales

Conclusion
- 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
- 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 merits further study

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