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 (GSRMs) 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) by completing the following scales:

- Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale (ESWLS; Alfonso, Allison, Rader and Gorman, 1996)
- Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG; Klein, 1978)
- Daily Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (DHEQ; Balsam, 2013)

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)
  - Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG; Klein, 1978)
  - Daily Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (DHEQ; Balsam, 2013)

50 items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree)

- "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)

Poster Available Online

tinyurl.com/APS2015genderPRISM

Results

Table 1: Gender Identity and Life Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Trans</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Unlabeled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Non-Conformity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Female</td>
<td>24.64</td>
<td>25.57</td>
<td>24.36</td>
<td>24.70</td>
<td>24.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Male</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>7.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Non-Conformity</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Gender Non-Conformity</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Female</td>
<td>25.75</td>
<td>23.77</td>
<td>25.37</td>
<td>24.57</td>
<td>25.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Male</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>20.32</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>8.66</td>
<td>7.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- 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 GSRMs on reported minority stress and all other ESWLS scales

Table 2: Sexual Orientation and Life Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Straight</th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
<th>Gay/Lesbian</th>
<th>Unlabeled</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>25.29</td>
<td>20.75</td>
<td>25.29</td>
<td>22.66</td>
<td>21.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Note. Within rows, means which do not share superscripts differ according to Scheffe post-hoc tests: p < .05; * p < .001

- 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 "she/everyone" (18%)
- 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)
- "Unlabeled" were similar to other GSRMs on reported levels of minority stress and all other ESWLS subscales
- Explaining their "unlabeled" status, participants described their primary identification as human, expressed discomfort with gender-based assumptions and rejected constrictions of the gender binary

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 meriting further study