



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%)

Method

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*)
 o e.g., "I am satisfied with my life."

8 Subscales

- General ($\alpha = .92$)
- Social Life ($\alpha = .97$)
- Physical Appearance ($\alpha = .93$)
- Sex Life ($\alpha = .97$)
- Self ($\alpha = .94$)
- Family ($\alpha = .97$)
- Relationship - Present ($\alpha = .95$)
- Relationship - Past ($\alpha = .96$)

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*)

- e.g., "Hiding part of your life from other people"

9 Subscales

- Gender Expression ($\alpha = .84$)
- Parenting ($\alpha = .61$)
- Vigilance ($\alpha = .78$)
- Discrimination/Harassment ($\alpha = .76$)
- Vicarious ($\alpha = .80$)
- Family of Origin ($\alpha = .78$)
- HIV/AIDS ($\alpha = .76$)
- Victimization ($\alpha = .87$)
- Isolation ($\alpha = .72$)

Results

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

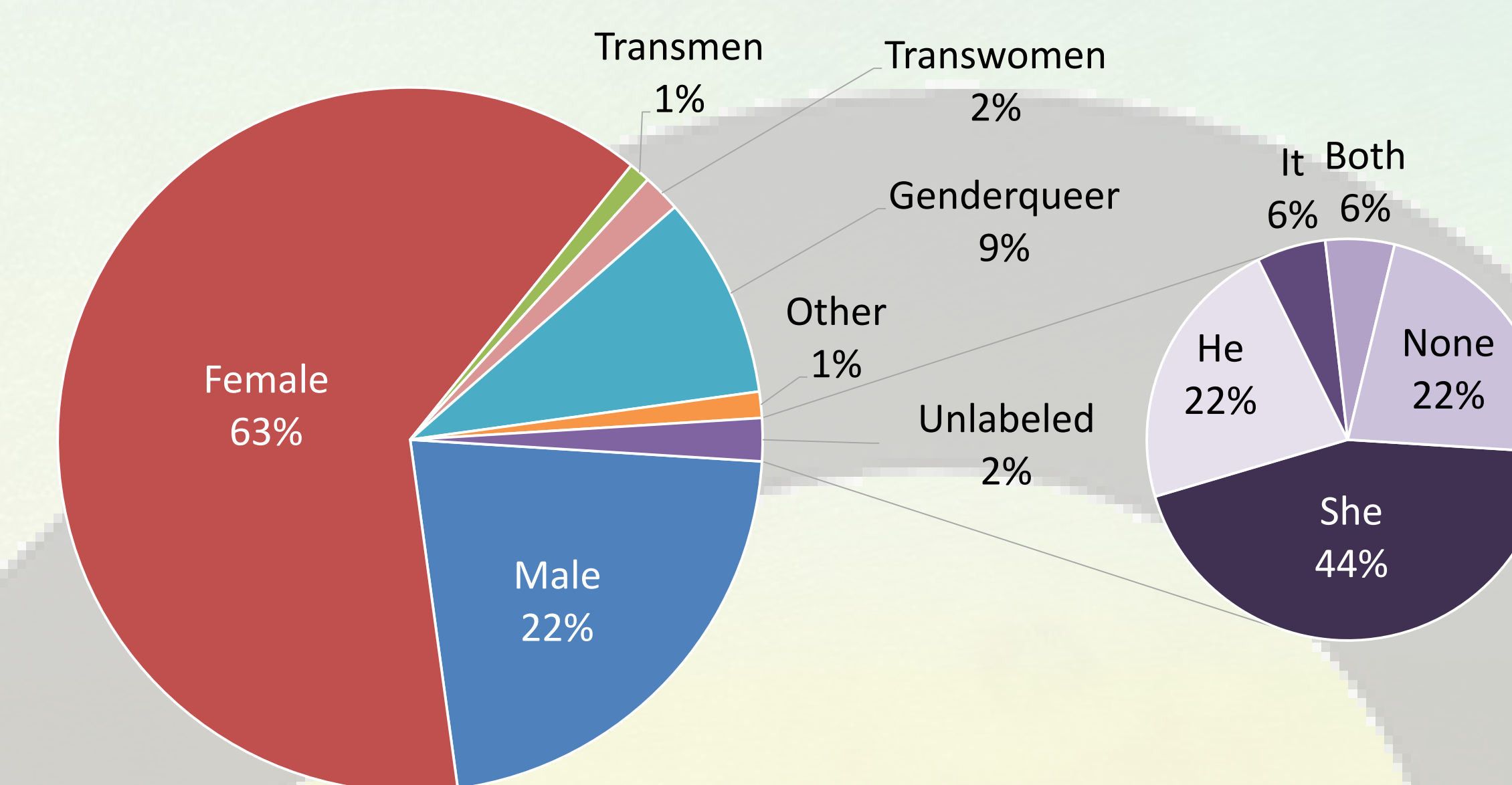


Table 1
Gender Identity and Life Satisfaction

	Men		Women		Trans		Other		Unlabeled		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
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 ^{ab}	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 ^{ab}	7.30	19.60 ^{ab}	8.12	16.94 ^b	8.93	4.83**

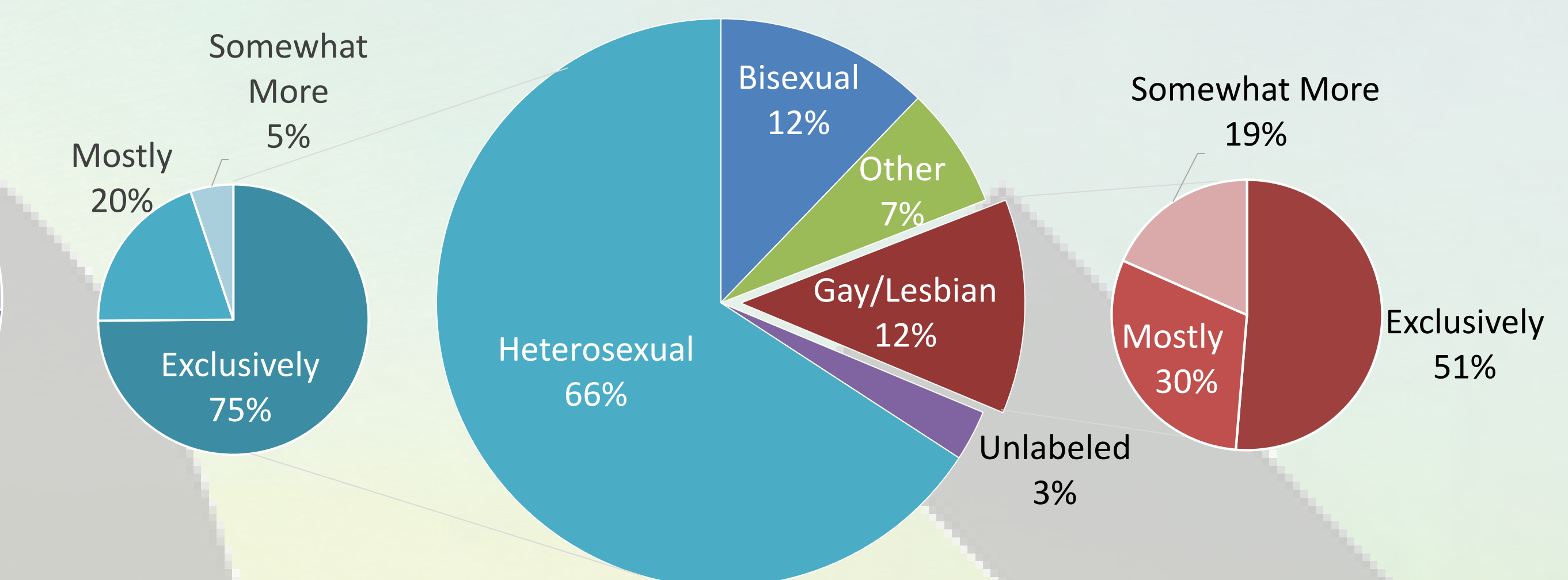
Note. Within rows, means which do not share superscripts differ according to Scheffe post-hoc tests. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

- 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%)
- 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

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



- 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 ESWLS scales

Table 2
Sexual Orientation and Life Satisfaction

	Straight		Bisexual		Gay/Lesbian		Other		Unlabeled		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
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. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.



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