

Young Men's Rationales for Non-Exclusive Gay Sexualities.

Mark McCormack^a, Ritch Savin-Williams^b

Department of Social Science, University of Roehampton, London, UK^a; College of Human Development, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA^b

Corresponding Author: Mark McCormack Email: markmccormackphd@gmail.com

Abstract

Recent evidence suggests it is useful to distinguish sexual identities among young men at the gay end of the spectrum because of group differences between primarily gay, mostly gay, and gay orientations on several assessed physiological, behavioural and self-report measures. However, little is known about individuals' rationales for choosing sexuality labels beyond traditional gay or bisexual categories. We addressed this issue by interviewing 24 young men with a non-exclusive gay orientation about their sexual desires and histories, drawing on both qualitative and numeric data. Undertaking an inductive analysis, we found four distinct rationales for identification with a sexual orientation label: sexual, romantic, intellectual and internalised homophobia. By examining what young men mean when they classify themselves as primarily gay, mostly gay or bisexual-leaning gay, this article provides data to understand these issues and proposes that greater focus should be placed on sexual identity for non-exclusive gay men. Although the sexual and affectional components of sexual orientation are meaningful, previous research has not sufficiently accounted for the importance of intellectual, cultural, and romantic factors in non-exclusive sexual orientations. To address these issues, the use of in-depth interviews should be incorporated in future studies.

Keywords: men, bisexuality, identity, mostly gay, non-exclusivity, sexual orientation

Introduction

An ongoing debate within sex research concerns how best to understand sexual orientation, defined as an internal mechanism that directs a person's sexual and romantic disposition to males, females, both or neither (LeVay 2016). In addition to sexual desire and arousal, sexual orientation is affected by affectional components such as romantic infatuation, relationships, and emotional attachments. These have been studied by through self-reports of attractions, fantasies, behaviours and identities; physiological responses such as genital arousal, pupil dilation, and neurological activity; and indirect protocols of observed behaviour including gaze direction, viewing time, and implicit attitude tests (e.g. Lippa 2012). Results vary depending on the measure, which strongly suggests that a range of assessments should be used in place of a single measure of sexuality (Korchmaros, Powell and Stevens 2013; Weinrich 2014).

Sexuality has been classified both as a continuum (Savin-Williams 2014, 2016a) and as a categorical schema based on either two (heterosexual and homosexual) or three (heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual) discrete categories (Bailey et al. 2016). In both cases, the Kinsey 7-point scale is regularly used to assess sexuality; however, respondents are then most usually classified into the three sexual categories (Haslam 1997; Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin 1948). Because of this, there is a certain level of slippage between the categorical and continuum approaches—in part, a recognition that same-sex and different-sex desire are independent phenomena that are not reliant on each other (Anderson and McCormack 2016).

Recent research has examined the utility of the 7-point scale at both the heterosexual (Savin-Williams and Vrangalova 2013) and homosexual (Savin-Williams et al. 2017; Semon et al. 2017) ends of the spectrum. Mostly straights (Kinsey 1s) have been shown to have unique physiological, behavioural, and self-report characteristics that warrant them being considered a fourth sexual orientation (Savin-Williams 2017; Thompson and Morgan 2008; Vrangalova and Savin-Williams 2012), different from both heterosexuals and bisexuals. Mostly straights outnumber other sexual-minority categories (Savin-Williams, Joyner and Rieger 2012) and their social and personal characteristics are being increasingly studied (McCormack 2017; Savin-Williams 2017).

Although there has been less focus on the non-exclusive gay end of the spectrum, a nationally representative study of the USA found nearly as many mostly gay men (based on sexual attraction: 0.7%) as male bisexuals (1.0%) (Chandra et al. 2011). It has been argued that mostly gay is also a sexual orientation that mirrors a mostly straight orientation (Vrangalova and Savin-Williams 2012).

In an exploratory study that distinguished between gay, mostly gay and bisexual-leaning gay orientations, Savin-Williams et al. (2017) argued that mostly gay is distinct from gay and bisexual-leaning gay orientations. This study used a combination of measures of sexuality: self-report (sexual identity and sexual and romantic indicators), physiological (pupil dilation), and indirect (viewing time and sexual appeal) measures. Statistically significant differences were found among the three orientations for self-reported sexual attraction. However, while findings comparing bisexual-leaning gays and gays were statistically significant for all measures apart from pupil dilation, comparisons between gay, mostly gay, and bisexual-leaning gay were in the expected direction (i.e., correlating with their appropriate place on the scale). Thus, while results showed a trend in the expected direction,

the group mean differences were not statistically significant in a manner similar to mostly straights. The authors concluded that the lack of statistically significant findings warranted further study, including qualitative understanding of the diverse experiences and sexual identity rationales of men with a non-exclusive gay sexual orientation.

Identity and cultural context

Sexology has long recognised the importance of identity in terms of the way people interpret their sexuality. Identity is distinct from orientation: ‘between an ever-present, invariant, biological and psychological truth (sexual orientation) and a historically and culturally located social construction (sexual identity)’ (Savin-Williams 1998, 3). However, research often focuses on orientation components of sexuality, neglecting identity issues. This includes research on mostly gays and mostly straights, which has neglected studies on sexual identity, stigma, or the processes of identity construction. This omission is serious given that research identifies that men who have sex with men but who do not identify as gay or bisexual, have elevated risk concerning health and safe-sex practices (Mamary, McCright and Roe 2007 Scrimshaw et al. 2014).

Identity is an important component of sexuality, and influences the ways in which study participants report their sexual behaviours, desires, and fantasies. Typologies of sexual identity vary over time and are dependent on the cultural and historical context (Kaufman and Powell 2014). Rubin (2002) warned that social science disciplines have not been sufficiently reflexive in understanding their cultural positioning, particularly with respect to how sexual identity categories are structured and experienced in Western society. This is also true of how sexuality is measured in sexological research (Galupo et al. 2014; Scherrer and Pfeffer 2017). Rubin (2002) cautioned against universalising any typology of sexual identity, and instead called for a richly empirical and contextualised approach to understanding sexual identity in society.

Early research on identity construction among sexual minorities has been critiqued for neglecting the social context of human development (Cohler and Hammack 2009). More recently, however, research on sexual-minority youth has focused on documenting a diverse set of developmental trajectories, and this heterogeneity of lived experience has led to a more sophisticated understanding of gay identities in contemporary Western countries (Hammack et al. 2017; Savin-Williams 2016b). One aspect of this diversification has been research that foregrounded the importance of narratives in how sexual identities are constituted and maintained (Plummer 1995). Cohler and Hammack (2009, 453) argued that narrative is a ‘fundamental analytic tool for the study of sexual lives, for narratives provide access to the meaning-making process as it actively occurs.’ In this context, the focus is on identity as a process of reconciling one’s thoughts, desires, and beliefs through forms of storytelling and the uses of narratives available in the broader culture (Coleman-Fountain 2014; Plummer 1995).

Consequently, it is critical to consider the cultural context in which sexual minorities construct narratives and identities concerning their sexuality. There is considerable debate about how central sexual identities are to young people in contemporary North America and the UK (Ghaziani 2011; McCormack, Wignall and Anderson 2015; Savin-Williams 2005), and the Internet, including social media, has further transformed how sexual identities are

negotiated and named. It has been questioned whether sexual-minority youth are defined by difference (Flowers and Buston 2001), resilience (Russell 2005), or their ordinariness (Savin-Williams 2005, 2016b).

Missing from these arguments is explicit engagement with issues of non-exclusive sexual desires, or the ways in which the dominant typology of sexual identity categories constrain the possible narratives of sexual minorities (Scherrer and Pfeffer 2017). The great majority of research to date has used either binary or tripartite models of sexuality. Data collected have been in quantifiable forms such as Likert scales, numeric data, and physiological responses. Because few studies have used in-depth interviews to obtain narratives and experiences from participants, the importance of identity and context may have been systematically underplayed in research, including research that finds significant differences in physical and psychological health.

Method

This qualitative study examined young adult men's rationales for their self-perceptions as being mostly gay. Data come from 24 in-depth interviews with young men who viewed themselves as gay, but not exclusively gay. Young men who volunteered for research on maintaining non-exclusive sexual orientation identities undertook in-depth interviews with the first author. All participants attended an elite university in the North-eastern USA, and all participants had grown up through their teenage years in the USA.

Sample

Participant recruitment occurred through responses to flyers seeking men for a research project with a focus on non-exclusive sexual orientation. The flyer was posted in various residence halls, academic schools, cafés, social venues, email lists, and Facebook groups. Interviews occurred in a private interview room on campus. Interviews lasted, on average, between 60 and 65 minutes and the men were compensated \$10 for their time. Of the 35 participants, data from 24 of the participants who identified as gay, mostly gay, or bisexual-leaning gay were included in this study. The 11 participants whose data were not used were excluded because they identified as straight, mostly straight or bisexual-leaning straight.

The young men were between 18 and 33 years of age (mean = 21.08). Approximately 70% of participants were white, with one African American, two Asian American and four multiracial individuals. Participants studied a range of majors and, while the elite nature of the university means that students share high educational qualifications, there was a diversity of class backgrounds.

Measures

In addition to undergoing a detailed life-history interview, participants completed a questionnaire with three items. One requested participants to choose the one point that most accurately reflected their current, perceived future and ideal understanding of their sexual orientation. We added two points to the original 7-point Kinsey Scale to create a 9-point scale: between Kinsey 0 (exclusively heterosexual) and 1 (mostly heterosexual) and between Kinsey

5 (mostly homosexual) and 6 (exclusively homosexual). The latter resulted in a point that was labelled 'primarily gay', and could be considered 'Kinsey 5.5': 'Gay, nearly always sexually attracted to the same sex and rarely attracted to the opposite sex'.

The second item assessed romantic orientation; the same as the first questionnaire apart from 'romantically' was substituted for 'sexually' throughout. Participants were eligible for the study if they selected one of three non-exclusive same-sex points on either the sexual or romantic orientation questionnaires: bisexual-leaning gay (Kinsey 4), mostly gay (Kinsey 5), or primarily gay (Kinsey 5.5).

The third item asked participants to indicate the percentage of their sexual attraction, sexual fantasy, genital contact, infatuation, and romantic relationship is directed to males and to females. Theoretically, the total for each indicator should equal 100%; however, several young men deviated from this pattern by summing their total to above or below 100%. Three participants failed to fully complete the form.

The questionnaires were administered at the start of the interview. They were used to confirm eligibility criteria as discussed. The questionnaires were then used at relevant points in the interview to stimulate discussion, including asking participants to expand on their answers in the surveys. The interviews were semi-structured and examined participants' sexual histories, including: their first recollection of sexual thoughts; their sexual practices and identity; and their romantic relationships, among several other issues. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, a range of follow up questions were asked that varied between interviews.

Analysis

A modified inductive approach to data analysis was undertaken (Charmaz 2014), using constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to identify key themes. These themes were then compared to the existing literature before a further round of focussed coding. This led to a theory that is grounded in the data and engaged with existing academic debates (McCormack and Wignall 2017; Urquhart 2013). It is through this process of coding and abstraction that rigour is assured and a contribution to knowledge is made (Charmaz 2014).

Initial coding focused on rationales for defining sexuality from participants' narratives. These emerging codes were compared to the literature, using existing categories of 'sexual' and 'affectional' (emotional). We coded as sexual those data referencing sexual acts, fantasies, and desires, and as affectional data referencing relationship ideation, crushes, and other forms of emotional bonding. There were several codes that did not fit this description, and we used 'cultural' as a code when participants discussed intellectual reasons for a particular identification that did not relate to sexual or affectional reasons. Through iterative coding, this developed into two themes of internalised homophobia and intellectual reasons.

Ethics

Ethical approval was gained from Durham University, where the first author was employed at the time of data collection, and was accepted by the university at which data were collected. All participants signed consent sheets prior to the interview and the ethical procedures of the

American Psychological Association were followed. In order to preserve anonymity, participants were assigned a unique number. For this article, we have assigned them a pseudonym.

Results

Numeric data

Seven young men selected the option 'primarily gay' and recognised having a degree of non-exclusive sexuality on one of their Kinsey-type 9-point scale forms. Their stated attraction for women ranged from 0% to 5%. Ten participants chose the option 'mostly gay.' Their percentage of attractions to women ranged from 2% to 25%. Seven participants chose 'bisexual-leaning gay.' Their attraction for women ranged from 10% to 60%. All young men discussed characteristics of non-exclusivity in their interviews. See Table 1 for the numeric data obtained from the surveys.

Rationales

Our analysis of interview data found four primary reasons why the young men classified themselves as non-exclusive. We coded these as sexual, romantic, internalised homophobia, and intellectual. Although it was rare for a participant to give only one reason, usually combining aspects of various rationales, the great majority had one of the themes as their primary motivating reason for identifying their sexuality. These reasons occurred across those who identified as primarily gay, mostly gay and bisexual-leaning gay.

Sexual reasons

Sexual reasons were most common for those who identified as bisexual-leaning gay, having the highest levels of sexual desire to their non-preferred sex (females). Referring to his sexual desires, Rory, aged 18, stated, 'I definitely know that I like women and men, but I often find myself more attracted to a man than I might be to a woman.' Similarly, Felix, aged 22, reported being attracted to both sexes, but his desires for men were 'stronger.' He elaborated on the difference in attraction between men and women: 'That always feels really tangible to me. You look at a guy and you get aroused but you look at a girl and think "you're really pretty but I'm not super interested in that way.'" He also reflected on the ongoing process of understanding his sexual desires, 'Over the summer I was like "maybe I am just gay." Then a girl kissed me and it made more sense to my mouth than ever kissing guys. Every time I try to label it, I always find something that shakes it up.' It was the combination of sexual desires and behaviours that consolidated his sexual identity.

Bisexual-leaning gay participants differed among themselves regarding the importance of sexual rationales. Though Andy, aged 19, was somewhat confused labelling himself as bisexual-leaning gay, his reason for his identification differed from Felix:

It's kind of confusing. I definitely like guys. I like guys more. But it's not like I'm not attracted to women. It's not that I don't want to have sex with them, it's just not as

strong. A percentage of sexual attraction would be 75% men, 25% women. I think it's more usually I think about guys, but sometimes I will see a girl and be like 'whoa, shit.'

Two primarily gay participants had sexual reasons for their identification. Jack, aged 23, was the only primarily gay participant who spoke about maintaining sexual desire for women, although this was closely connected to the affectional. '[My sexual desire] is for specific women that I know who I'm sexually attracted to. I can't think of a famous woman I find hot.' He added, 'It's about seven percent attraction. I had a girlfriend and I was attracted to her, but now I'm at college and I see all these hot guys around, my focus is on guys right now.'

Aged 24, Joe's desires were not based on specific attraction for women but on sexual interest in kinky activities. He was sexually aroused by the thought of being dominated by muscular trans people that meant, 'I can't say I'm exclusively gay because of that.' His narrative also highlighted the complexity of his non-exclusive gay identity as his sexual desires intersected with other components:

I've often been emotionally attracted to women and I've been sexually attracted to very masculine female-to-male trans people before. Generally, though, I am attracted to guys.... Attraction is the body, personality. The people I know who are f-to-m trans, they're cocky, sporty, witty, funny.

Though their sexual identification was an important component of life for many young men, it was not the primary reason for mostly gays. Most said their identity was a combination of sexual desires linked to romantic or cultural rationales. Even so, two men named sexual attraction as the primary reason. Dan, aged 22, had a concise rationale: 'I base it on what I see as the proportion of my attractions to male versus female. It is certainly context dependent but, in general, I would say that's about the breakdown, and I'm more attracted to males.' Similarly, for Jose, aged 19, 'It's mostly the fact that while I'm primarily attracted to men, I do have sexual attraction to women. It's more for men, and those desires are more intense, but I am sometimes attracted to women in a similar way.'

Two other mostly gay participants not only spoke of sexual desires as the primary reason but also claimed that these were linked with romantic indicators. Ben, aged 19, had a '90% attraction to men, 10% to women,' and added, 'My sexual desires for women are more with women I'm romantically attracted to, but it's definitely sexual as well.' Later, he noted, 'I came out about 10 months ago. It's not that the attractions have gone down since coming out, it's just now I have been seeing men more because that was never a thing before.' Similarly, Phil, aged 22, stated:

It's primarily desires for men, but occasionally it's for women. [For women], it normally starts with an emotional attraction, and becomes sexual and then complete infatuation... With a guy I can see them on the street and think I want to fuck them, but with a girl you have to know them really well and it's not too much physical, it's more attraction to the whole package.

He added, 'I have been attracted to girls before. It's happened in the past and I'm sure it'll happen in the future. I could still maybe fall in love and marry a woman. I don't know if it is likely, but I am open to that possibility.' For these young men, sexual desire was important but it was only for individuals with whom they had strong emotional or romantic connections.

Romantic reasons

The second rationale participants provided for a non-exclusive orientation was emotional and romantic reasons. Though some mostly gay young men found romantic and sexual indicators to be difficult to distinguish, two rejected the exclusively gay category because of affectional ties. For Zach, aged 20, 'There have been some occasions where I felt some attraction towards the opposite sex,' but added, 'It's only with really close friends, and the attraction is really emotional. There's sometimes sexual desire, but it's that emotional connection.' This was qualitatively different from Ben and Phil who focused on the sexual component within a romantic context. They talked about maintaining sexual desire for those they had emotional bonds with, whereas participants in this section were primarily referencing emotional connections with the sexual component significantly downplayed.

Zach's experiences were rooted in his adolescence when he had had limited sexual feelings for women he was emotionally close to:

When I was very young I had attraction towards girls only. Middle school is when the attraction towards men started and from then on it's been very strong. Recently I've thought 'okay, I know I am homosexual,' but these occasional attractions make me question what I am and make me unsure if I fall under a certain category... I think most of the women that I have been attracted to are people that I have built a strong relationship to...They're usually people who I have become really close friends to.

Similarly, Ryan, aged 19, noted, 'I sometimes have an attraction towards girls but it's not as sexual as much as emotional... Emotional crush is a better way to put it. I was attracted to famous people as well - I would watch High School Musical because I liked the actors.'

One bisexual-leaning gay young man discussed having more emotional desires toward women and more sexual desires for men, demonstrating the importance of the sexual over the affectional components for his definition of his sexuality. P7 was 'sexually driven toward guys and personality driven toward girls.' He also noted fluidity in his desires: 'I feel like it might be 70:30 men to women I think. It was probably more equal before. I feel like in high school it was more equal, and then more gay earlier this year. It's gone towards men and now it's going back to equal.'

The influence of the romantic component was present even for men who did not specify romance as a determinant of their sexual identity. Joe, who identified as primarily gay because of his kinky desires, said, 'There has been times where I wish I could date a woman, because it would be easier or I was emotionally connected to the woman.' However, 'There hasn't been a physical attraction to have sex with a woman, so I wouldn't define myself that way.'

Gareth, aged 21, identified as non-exclusive (bisexual-leaning gay) because of a disjuncture between his sexual and romantic attractions. He maintained exclusive sexual desires for men yet, despite having no personal homophobia and growing up in a progressive

family, he had exclusive affectional desires for women. He described himself as having sexual intercourse with his long-term girlfriend, who he loves, but 'goes in [his] head' and thinks of men immediately prior to climaxing:

I'm sexually attracted to guys pretty much, but I am romantically attracted to women. As far as sexual desires go, I probably started a little after puberty and didn't really realise it until junior/senior year of high school. I was probably 15/16. Then that kind of transformed to being sexually attracted to older guys 40-50 upwards, maybe about 18 years old. I was also having this big problem because I wasn't romantically attracted to guys. I am only romantically attracted to girls.

Gareth also spoke about how he learned to enjoy sexual activities with his girlfriend even though his sexual desires were oriented toward men:

We have a really healthy sex life and I am totally able to finish. I sometimes need to go in my head and think about other things while we're having sex but she knows about me. I have told her about it... when I go in my head, I'm either imagining giving head or receiving it, but when I am in the dynamic with my girlfriend. It's important that I cum inside her. I haven't told her to the level of detail of where I go in my head, which is fair because I don't want to take her out of the moment, but for our dynamic it's important.

Though Gareth is unusual because of the complete disconnect between the sexual and the romantic, his story reveals the importance of considering both romantic and sexual components in determining sexual identity.

Internalised homophobia

The third rationale for a non-exclusive gay sexuality was provided by young men who had experienced considerable homophobia in their childhood or adolescence (see Newcomb and Mustanski 2010). Zeke, aged 19 and mostly gay, grew up in an orthodox Jewish family and thus expected he would remain closeted throughout his life, either having 'a wife and kids' or a 'male partner, but he would know that it would just be between the two of us.' Zeke's non-exclusive categorisation can be attributed in part to a cultural context of homophobic and religious social norms, though he has had sex with women. 'I enjoy sex with women. It's just in terms of raw genetics. I believe I am attracted to the same sex. I wouldn't do it in a percentage way. Physiologically speaking I am gay, but it happens that I can be attracted to women.' He attributed this to his high sex-drive and lack of repulsion, rather than an active desire for women.

Two primarily gay young men recognised their sexual desire for women in the past but now confessed that this had occurred in an extremely homophobic context. Matt, aged 33, rejected being exclusively gay because, 'I want a family and marriage, and you really should do that with a woman.' He added, 'I think my curiosity is slightly intellectual because I've never had a physical reaction to a woman.' Seth, aged 18, also detailed his homophobic upbringing.

It may have been suppressed until tenth grade. I didn't want to acknowledge them. They made me feel disgusting. I grew up in a Christian house in Southern California, near Palm Springs. I told my parents and they put me through reparative therapy. So, I thought 'oh it's not an actual thing, it will just go away.' I didn't label it as anything.

The covert reparative therapy his parents sent him to was illegal in California at the time.

Seth's desire for women was primarily emotional. Talking about a girlfriend from high school, 'I made out with her because I was attracted to her emotionally. Physically, a lot less,' adding, 'I was hoping for her to annoy my parents but it didn't work.' This same participant viewed his sexual desire as in a state of flux, 'It's been a transition from middle school. I was like 50:50 and have transitioned to like, mostly gay. It's now almost exclusively guys now, so I feel like it will eventually go all gay.'

I think I'll be just exclusively gay in the future because I think that's the direction. I think that's where it's going to. I notice women a lot less now. In the past, I would think women are hot. And hot for me for a girl—I guess a lot of people get affected by childhood movies, so a lot of people are 'Emma Watson' amazing, my favourite is the woman from Lord of the Rings—the dark-haired elf. Very feminine.

Mostly gay participants Edward, aged 20, and Samuel, aged 25, experienced intense homophobia from their family throughout adolescence. Samuel was raised in a fundamentalist Christian environment and presented himself in the image of heterosexuality until he came out at age 23.

I grew up in a super conservative Christian house, I worked in the church, I went to Bible School so it's pretty looked down upon to have same sex attractions so you just need to ignore those. The last girlfriend I had; I tried to be a good Christian guy and not watch porn while dating my girlfriend. I said to myself, 'I won't watch straight porn. I'll just watch gay porn because I'm not cheating on her at all, it's just other guys.' Then I realised I liked that so much more than straight porn and thought, 'Oh no this isn't good.'

He now identifies as mostly gay because 'I don't want to undermine the feelings that I had for the girls I did date.'

Edward's fantasies and attractions are solely about men but, 'before I climax, I think about women who I have emotional connections with.' Highlighting the homophobia in his family, 'I think the most important people for me to tell would be family, but I don't think I ever could.'

Among those who marked bisexual-leaning gay, James, aged 21, most felt a cultural influence on his sexuality. Though he labelled himself as more bisexual, 'People insinuated I was gay ... I think the way society pushes you in either way, I'm going to get pulled to the gay side.' He had a greater sexual desire for men and affectional desire for women; however, he also attributed this in part to his upbringing as an orthodox Jew, and thus felt 'compelled' to date girls.

Intellectual reasons

A small number of participants identified as non-exclusive, not because of any particular sexual or romantic experiences or desires but because of the intellectual positions they held about sexual identity. Demonstrating an intellectual perspective, Luis (primarily gay), aged 21, explained, 'I am deep within queer studies and that has influenced me... I've had certain sexual experiences with men and have had feelings for women but never felt the need to act on them, never have and not sure if I ever will ...It is not really sexual.'

Two mostly gay participants, Andrew, aged 22, and Lyle, aged 20, had similar perspectives. Most explicit, was Andrew:

Mostly I think I want to stay open. I hate the idea of committing to something exclusively. I feel that obviously in the future I would like to get a significant other, but saying that the person is definitely going to be a guy. Most likely that's what it will be but something about saying that I definitively know that know doesn't feel right.

Lyle maintained a small degree of sexual desire for women but this was primarily within the context of close emotional relationships and was instigated by feminist courses: 'I used to always believe that I was exclusively gay, but after studying feminism, gender, sexualities for a year and a half, I have developed a different understanding and an admiration of the female body. Not that I would want to have physical encounters with another woman, but the idea of the beauty of the female body has slowly started to develop.'

Although also related to sexual desires, Steve, aged 18, identified as a non-exclusive bisexual-leaning gay in part because of intellectual reasoning.

I am probably a little bit more attracted to males than females.... I guess you can say I'm post-structuralist. I don't really like labels. I feel fitting people into categories, there is always somebody who is an outlier or something that never fits the description. I would for the sake of conversation, it would probably be bisexual.

Intellectual reasoning was important for only a few participants, but it was critical for them to understand their sexual and romantic selves.

Non-exclusiveness and identity labels

In addition to their rationales for classifying themselves as non-exclusive, young men also discussed ways in which they struggled with their sexual identities. Similar to bisexuals of older generations (Anderson and McCormack 2016), several young men found their friends and family did not understand their sexuality—particularly without reference to standard sexual identity labels.

Many bisexual-leaning gay participants reported that it was easiest to describe themselves as bisexual. Rory concluded, 'For the convenience of others, I tell them I'm bisexual. If they ask for more details, I will go into the breakdown of how I feel about women versus how I feel about men.' Similarly, Andy said, 'my friends I'm bisexual, but that's not really it. I don't really like labels at all honestly, I would rather just do what I want.' Zeke

settled on bisexual as the easiest way to describe himself: 'When people ask me I will say that, but I don't think people have enough appreciation of how fluid the spectrum is. There is way more in between those three.'

Other young men reported no difficulties with their sexual identities. Jack said, 'My friends are fine with it. They know I'm gay but like some women...When I told them I was attracted to this girl Kate, they chanted "straight for Kate."' At a party in which Ben was quite intoxicated, 'I was going round screaming, making out with at least nine girls and shouting, "Guys, it's okay. I'm 90% gay.'" However, he added, 'This idea of fluid sexuality is harder for people to understand. That's why I use 90% gay because it clicks better for people. I do think of myself as bisexual, but 90% gay is fine.'

Discussion

When considering non-exclusive sexual and romantic orientations, research has focused on bisexuality and, more recently, mostly heterosexuality. The possibility that other points along the sexual continuum exist, including towards the gay end of the spectrum, has received only limited attention (Savin-Williams et al. 2017). The exploratory qualitative data provided by the participants in this study of their sexual and romantic attractions, behaviours, and identities addressed one gap in this literature. In their interviews, 24 young gay men gave rationales for not being exclusively gay that we coded as sexual, affectional, cultural and intellectual.

The sexual and affectional components of sexuality assessed were consistent with existing academic literature (Rieger et al. 2015; Savin-Williams 2014; Weinrich et al. 1993). For example, when considering sexual desire as central to self-definition, a previous exploratory quantitative study found it was greater physiological arousal to the less preferred sex (females) that was critical for distinguishing sexual orientation identities on the gay end of the spectrum (Savin-Williams et al. 2017).

Although the primacy of sexual arousal to the non-preferred sex is supported in this study, this was true only for some of the non-exclusive men; others had affectional rationales for their identification. Several participants combined affectional with sexual components and others had solely affectional rationales as their primary reason for their identity. For these young men, emotional infatuation or romantic attraction was the reason they did not identify as exclusively gay despite exclusively gay sexual attraction. This supported previous research that found sexual and romantic attractions are closely correlated but distinct phenomena (Hatfield and Rapson 2009; Savin-Williams 2014).

Similarly, although the relevance of cultural issues in understanding sexual identities is known, particularly in the social sciences, it has not been fully recognised in contemporary sex research (Plummer 1995; Rubin 2002). This exploratory study makes an important contribution to this debate by highlighting the ways in which cultural experiences influence identity on the gay side of the sexuality spectrum, including the difficulty experienced by the young men in disclosing their nonexclusive desires using any term other than the label 'bisexual.' It is plausible that some individuals with non-exclusive desires modify their self-report information to fit culturally dominant typologies of sexuality (Cohler and Hammack 2009). Further research needs to consider this cultural component to assess whether

significant differences remain for this cohort when only sexual and affectional rather than identity measures are considered.

This study points to the need to provide a greater account of sexual identity, especially regarding how individuals develop narratives about their sexual orientations when they do not conform to dominant cultural typologies (Coleman-Fountain 2014; Hammack and Cohler 2009). Research on mostly gays and mostly straights has tended to focus on issues of orientation and health effects. The use of survey techniques alongside physiological data collection likely downplays the centrality of identity and identifications (Plummer 1995). By using participant narratives, we developed a more holistic approach to understanding mostly gay sexual orientations and highlighted the complexity of identity within this context.

An important component of these results is that several young men whose rationales were at least partly cultural appeared to be in transition to being exclusively gay. For example, Seth, who identified as primarily gay but had been forced to undergo reparative therapy for his same-sex desires, thought he would likely become exclusively gay in the future (see Savin-Williams 2016b). Identifying as mostly gay, both Edward and Samuel spoke of their desires for women primarily in the past tense, with little sense that similar desires would exist in the future. In these cases, the cultural component was of childhood homophobia rather than a recent intellectual position (e.g., taking a queer studies course). Thus, it is possible that if they were interviewed at a later date, they would identify as exclusively gay. This connects with research that shows a certain level of exploration of sexuality among young and emerging adults (Morgan 2013). It may be that some participants' sexual identities are not stable. Interview data can provide reasons for potential changes in sexual fluidity. While longitudinal data remains key in identifying fluidity, our data show that qualitative interviews may help reveal potential fluidity in a way that non-longitudinal survey data cannot.

Fluidity does not solely relate to change over time in what one finds erotic. It also includes an increased capacity for erotic responses to one's non-preferred sex and erotic responses that are dependent on context (Savin-Williams 2017). On these measures, women have previously been shown to be more sexually fluid than men, yet research on mostly gays and mostly straights challenges this perspective (Diamond 2016). Many participants reported an increased capacity for erotic response to women and this erotic response depended on context, such as romantic attraction or intellectual position (Savin-Williams 2017). As such, this research is part of a broader challenge to gender essentialised notions of sexual fluidity that hold that flexibility is only relevant to women.

It might be expected that the numeric data for participants with primarily cultural rationales would differ from those with sexual and affectional (e.g. lower level of same-sex sexuality). Although the qualitative accounts of participants' identities yielded disparities, there was no discernible trend in the numeric data. However, those with cultural rationales tended to diverge in their numeric data compared to their own narratives—with interview responses not corresponding precisely with their questionnaire data. For example, Edward had 25% desires for women, yet his interview data reported marginal sexual attraction for women.

Study findings underscore the importance of using multiple measures to understand sexuality. Although the majority of participants identified primarily because of sexual desires, nearly half of the participants stated that affectional components were important in understanding their sexual identity. Similarly, several young men emphasised the role of

cultural aspects in their identifications. Relying on sexual measures alone is thus problematic, particularly for the latter young men. Indeed, this study demonstrates the importance of narratives in developing a more holistic understanding of sexuality (Plummer 1995). We believe in-depth interviews need to be consistently integrated into research design to ensure that a sufficient breadth and depth of data are collected.

Questions pertaining to mental and physical health remain for non-exclusive gay sexualities. Although research shows that those with substantial bisexual interests are at higher risk than heterosexuals on multiple negative health outcomes, there is sparse empirical research in this area (Vrangalova and Savin-Williams 2014). While health was not a prominent issue for participants in interviews, this is best interpreted as an absence of evidence rather than evidence of absence. Given this, we restrict our claims related to health in this study, and support Hammack et al.'s (2017, 11) contention that research must 'interrogate the historical variability that characterises gay men's evolving subjectivities and practices in matters of health and identity development'. From our study, one future area of research would be to investigate health disparities between those with internalised homophobia rationales from the other rationales (Newcomb and Mustanski 2010; Petrou and Lemke 2017).

Finally, several limitations of this research are apparent. First, given the convenience sample and the nature of qualitative data, results cannot be generalised to other populations. Ethical approval did not include the collection of physiological data, and future research comparing life history approaches with such data would be useful additional information. The data is limited to self-report data and the absence of physiological measures of arousal is a limitation that should be addressed in future research. Longitudinal data with participants would also enhance knowledge by enabling a consideration of whether sexual and romantic fluidity may be more apparent with participants with cultural rationales for their identifications. Even with these limitations, this exploratory study enhances understanding of gay, mostly gay, and bisexual-leaning gay sexual identities by providing participants' rationales for their identification and highlighting the importance of in-depth interviews as a method in sex research.

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Table 1: Numeric Data, where 5 = bisexual, 6 = bisexual-leaning gay, 7 = mostly gay, 8 = gay, 9 = exclusively gay

Number	Age	<u>Sexual Orientation</u>			<u>Romantic Orientation</u>			<u>Sexual Attraction</u>		<u>Genital Contact</u>		<u>Infatuation</u>		<u>Sexual Fantasy</u>		<u>Romantic Relationship</u>	
		Present	Future	Ideal	Present	Future	Ideal	% ♂	% ♀	% ♂	% ♀	% ♂	% ♀	% ♂	% ♀	% ♂	% ♀
John	19	5	5	5	4	5	5										
Felix	22	5	5	5	5	5	4	80	20	77	?	75	15	80	20	60	40
Rory	18	5	5	4	3	5	4	60	40	60	40	30	70	55	45	40	60
Steve	18	5	4	5	3	4	4	80	60	100	0	20	30	60	40	60	80
James	21	5	6	5	3	4	4	65	35	75	25	40	60	80	20	55	45
Gareth	21	5	5	0	0	0	0	95	25	80-100	80	0	100	80	20	0	100
Will	19	6	4	3	3	4	6	90	10	0	0	40	60	95	5	0	100
Edward	20	5	4		3	3	3	75	25	10	0	70	30	70	30	30	70
Dan	22	6	6	4	6	6	4										
Ben	19	6	6	6	4	5	5	85	15	90	10	60	40	90	10	50	50
Chris	22	6	3	0	5	3	0	85	15	50	50?	55	45	40	60	50?	50
Phil	22	6	6	6	7	5	5	97	3	92	8	85	15	99.9	0.1	100	0
Jose	19	6	5	4	6	7	4	80	20	100	0	50	50	75	25	10	90
Zeke	19	6	7	0	4	5	0	95	5	85	15	80	20	90	10	55	45
Samuel	25	6	7	7	6	7	7	98	2	100	0	60	40	90	10	80	20
Andrew	22	6	6	7	6			90	10	100	0	80	20	85	15	95	5
Lyle	20	6	6	6	6	7	7	90	10	100	0	75	25	90	10	80	20
Joe	24	7	7	4	5	4	4	95	1 [FTM: 4%]	100	0	90	10	90	2 [FTM: 8%]	87	13
Seth	18	7	8	8	7	8	8	95	5	100	0	80	20	90	10	90	10
Zach	20	7	8	8	7	7	8	99	1	100	0	99	1	100	1	0	0
Luis	21	7	7	7	8	7	7	70	2	90	10	90	1	100	0	80	2
Matt	33	8	7	7	8	7	7	98	2	100	0	95	5	100	0	100	0

