Check for updates

Empirical Article

Journal of Adolescent Research
1–54
© The Author(s) 2021
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0743558421000315
journals.sagepub.com/home/jar
SAGE

Gender and Sexual Identity in Adolescence: A Mixed-Methods Study of Labeling in Diverse Community Settings

Phillip L. Hammack[1], Sam D. Hughes[1], Julianne M. Atwood[1], Elliot M. Cohen[1], and Richard C. Clark[2]

Abstract

Understandings of sexual and gender identity have expanded beyond traditional binaries, yet we know little about adolescents' appropriation of identity labels across diverse communities. In a mixed-methods study of adolescents recruited from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) spaces in communities differing in support of sexual and gender diversity, seven patterns emerged: (a) frequent use of nonbinary gender identity labels (23.9% of survey sample), especially in high-support communities; (b) greater comfort among adolescents assigned female at birth (AFAB) with diverse gender expression, which informants attributed to pressures to conform to compulsive masculinity for boys; (c) frequent use of plurisexual (60.8%) and asexual (9.9%) labels, especially among those AFAB, and discussion of online settings as a resource; (d) intersectional patterning of "queer" to describe sexual identity (12.4% of survey sample), with White youth in high-support communities signifying an intellectual/political stance and non-White youth in low-support communities using

[1]University of California, Santa Cruz, USA
[2]The City University of New York, New York City, USA

Corresponding Author:
Phillip L. Hammack, Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1156 High Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95064, USA.
Email: hammack@ucsc.edu

queer as an umbrella term; (e) resistance to labeling and ambivalence about labels due to intra-community dynamics; (f) labeling challenges among boys of color; and (g) challenges with stigma, sexualization, and violence for transgender and nonbinary youth. Findings highlight how contemporary adolescents engage with and challenge received conceptions of gender and sexuality and how this process is shaped by intersectional identities.

Keywords
gender identity, sexual identity, adolescence, masculinity, intersectionality, life course

Danny[1] looked in the mirror with a puzzled glance, not fully recognizing his reflection. "I noticed when I would look to the side, I would see my breasts, and I would just press them down," he said. Danny had been assigned female at birth (AFAB), and as puberty commenced, the disconnect between his body and his sense of gender identity created a challenge—and an opportunity. In high school, Danny began to use the pronoun "he" instead of what had previously been imposed—"she." Yet, Danny's story is not as simple as it might first appear.

Danny was 17 years old at the time of our interview in late 2016 and identified as nonbinary. Danny reported using male pronouns but feeling neither completely male nor female. Some days he felt like a boy, some days not. He reported attraction to boys and identified as "gay" at the time of our interview, but he acknowledged that existing labels did not fully capture his experience. He narrated the experience of turning to online resources like Twitter to "educate" himself and to find support. In sophomore year of high school, Danny cut his hair very short. "That's when it felt right," he said.

We begin with the story of Danny to foreground the lived experience of adolescents in the midst of labeling their gender and sexuality at a time of change in cultural understandings and opportunities for self-understanding in the United States. Danny's story centers our life course approach to the study of adolescent identity development by highlighting his development in historical time and place and situating the adolescents in our study as part of a particular generation-cohort (e.g., Cohler & Hammack, 2007). Although nonbinary experiences of gender and sexuality are not new and have been documented in earlier generations and other cultural contexts (e.g., Bornstein, 1995; Nestle et al., 2002; Vincent & Manzano, 2017), there is increasing visibility for an expanded set of gender and sexual identity labels beyond conventional binaries of "man-woman" and "gay-straight" (e.g., Barker &

Iantaffi, 2019; Mardell, 2016). At the same time, our scientific understanding of the expansion of gender and sexual identity in adolescence is nascent (e.g., Risman, 2018; Russell, 2016; Watson et al., 2019). We know little about the pervasiveness of identity labels among contemporary adolescents, and we have limited knowledge of the ways in which the appropriation of particular labels may diverge across both individual factors (e.g., sex assigned at birth) and contextual factors (e.g., community settings).

Knowledge about identity labeling among contemporary adolescents is vital as scientific understandings of gender, sexuality, and adolescent development shift in light of increased recognition of nonbinary thinking about identity (e.g., Barker & Iantaffi, 2019; Hyde et al., 2019). It is also vital as we reconsider social policies, cultural practices, and institutions which have long assumed binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, thereby obscuring the full range of diversity (e.g., Woolley, 2017). Such knowledge informs, for example, how settings that serve adolescents might best target services and programs for adolescents of particular identities. It also informs sensitivity about curriculum and the material conditions (e.g., bathrooms), policies (policies highlighting "boys" and "girls"), and practices of institutional spaces (e.g., sex segregation) that have historically considered gender and sexuality in binary terms. Understanding the expansion of identity labels among contemporary adolescents works toward social justice and positive development by honoring the ways in which adolescents engage with and challenge existing taxonomies of self-understanding (see Russell, 2016). Armed with new knowledge about identity labeling, the science of adolescent development might grow to better capture the diversity of lived experience of gender and sexuality, offering new perspectives to enhance adolescent development in the process.

This article presents findings from a mixed-methods study of adolescents conducted from 2015 to 2017 in two distinct regions of California known for their historically[2] high (i.e., the San Francisco Bay Area) or low (i.e., the Central Valley) support for sexual and gender diversity. Communities supportive of sexual and gender diversity are characterized by such factors as the presence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ)-supportive businesses and organizations, high proportions of schools with "gay-straight" or "gender-sexuality" alliances (GSAs), more same-sex headed households, and visible rituals such as annual Pride events (e.g., Hatzenbuehler, 2011; Oswald et al., 2010). Our aim was to examine the way in which contemporary adolescents in diverse settings engage with shifting conceptions of gender and sexual identity.

Using a concurrent, equal-status mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2009), we collected both quantitative survey data and qualitative ethnographic and

interview data from adolescent and adult informants affiliated with settings for sexual and gender minority youth (e.g., high school GSAs, community-based organizations, and online settings). Our key questions were as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What labels do contemporary sexual and gender minority adolescents most often employ to describe their identities?
Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does the use of particular labels vary by individual factors (e.g., sex assigned at birth) or contextual factors (e.g., community setting)?
Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do adolescents across diverse settings experience the process of labeling, and what might account for variability of this experience?

Our quantitative survey component was intended to address RQ1 and RQ2, and our qualitative component was intended to address RQ3.

Gender and Sexual Identity Diversity in Adolescence: A Life Course Approach

A life course approach to the study of adolescent sexual and gender diversity recognizes the significance of social and historical context for identity development and emphasizes the role of membership in a generation-cohort in the shaping of development (e.g., Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Hammack & Cohler, 2009; Hammack et al., 2018). Our research design centered the social context of development for our adolescent research participants, who were all born at the turn of the century, and the discourse about sexuality and gender to which they were exposed in the course of their development. Consistent with a social constructionist perspective on sexual and gender identity development (e.g., Yon-Leau & Muñoz-Laboy, 2010), we were interested in the way in which contemporary adolescents appropriate identity labels in dialogue with existing cultural categories.

Figure 1 highlights aspects of the social context of gender and sexual diversity during the lifetime of our participants. Two important larger historical developments occurred during the childhood of this cohort: (a) the marriage equality movement and (b) the emergence of social media. Both of these developments likely played a central role in sexual and gender identity development for this cohort, in potentially both positive and negative ways. Yet, because the labeling and identity development process has been so understudied among adolescents of this generation, we know little about how the historical context has impacted development.

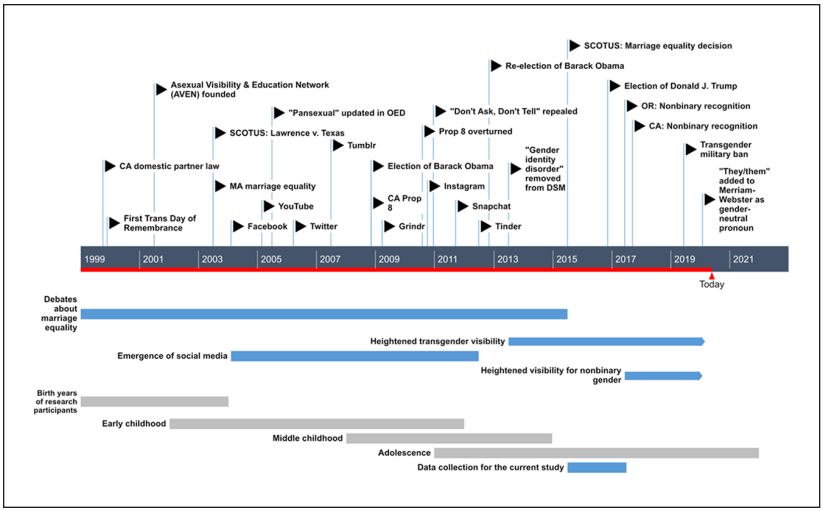

Figure 1. Sexual and gender diversity in the 21st century.
Note. DSM = Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; OED = Oxford English Dictionary; SCOTUS = Supreme Court of the United States; CA = California; MA = Massachusetts; OR = Oregon.

The marriage equality movement involved debates about the legitimacy of same-sex relationships, which likely exposed members of this cohort to a discourse of uncertainty about the rights and recognition of sexual diversity at young ages (e.g., Corvino & Gallagher, 2012). This uncertainty was reflected in policy in California (the site of our study) with the initial passage of Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage, in 2008, and then its 2010 overruling by a federal judge whose decision explicitly invoked the discourse of diversity in nondiscrimination (Hammack & Windell, 2011).

The second important historical development which occurred during the childhood of this cohort was the emergence of social media (Hur & Gupta, 2013; Manago et al., 2015), which facilitates connection with diverse others unbounded by the constraints of geographic proximity (Michikyan & Suárez-Orozco, 2016) and serves an empowering, protective, and community-building role for adolescents (e.g., Craig & McInroy, 2014; Middaugh et al., 2017; Singh, 2013; Wang & Edwards, 2016). This generation is the first to have exposure to social media at very young ages, during a time in the history of social media when there was less regulation and thus more opportunity for diverse content and interaction among many subcultures. For example, Tumblr and Twitter were launched in 2007, when our research participants

were approximately 8 years old. Instagram was launched in 2010, when our participants were entering early adolescence and experiencing puberty. These and other social media platforms created a new social context for interaction and the formation of communities and subcultures (van Dijck, 2013).

Although the impact of social media for LGBTQ+ youth can also involve heightened risk of bullying (Abreu & Kenny, 2018), such forms of open communication likely played a formidable role in the proliferation of new vocabularies and new taxonomies of gender and sexuality for members of this generation, including adolescents like Danny whose narrative of nonbinary gender identity highlighted engagement with social media. Research suggests that online settings provide sexual and gender minorities with opportunities for exploration with identity presentation (e.g., DeVito et al., 2018) and disclosure (e.g., Haimson et al., 2015) but that the specific affordances of particular settings (e.g., audience management) shapes the experience and the possibilities for development (e.g., Duguay, 2016). In addition, research suggests that the experience of online settings varies across subcommunities of gender and sexual minorities, as some online settings can be spaces in which intra-community stigma is enacted or intra-community tensions exacerbated (e.g., biphobia; Walker & DeVito, 2020).

By the time this cohort entered adolescence, cultural discourse and policy debates had begun to shift toward transgender visibility and recognition of transgender rights and identities (e.g., Hughto et al., 2015; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014a, 2014b; Reisner et al., 2015). Marriage equality was formally achieved nationwide with the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). However, the election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States in 2016 represented a setback in this regard, as the Justice Department under the administration of President Barack Obama had explicitly endorsed transgender rights, but the Trump administration openly opposed transgender rights (e.g., military service). Greater cultural attention has more recently been paid to nonbinary gender identities, with states such as Oregon and California recognizing nonbinary identities in official government documents such as driver licenses. The adolescence of the current cohort has thus been characterized by heightened visibility of both transgender and nonbinary gender identities.

Labeling Gender and Sexual Identity in the 21st Century

In the context of this significant cultural change in the meaning of gender and sexual diversity, surprisingly little research has examined the appropriation of identity labels or the identity development process among adolescents.

The majority of research on this population has examined social and psychological experiences of having a gender or sexual minority status (e.g., Fish & Pasley, 2015; Reisner et al., 2015; Russell & Fish, 2016), without sufficient attention to the nuances of identity and labeling. Interrogating the process and meaning of identity labeling among contemporary sexual and gender minority adolescents is vital to our evolving understanding of adolescent development. The study of identity labeling draws our attention to distinctions within the larger population of sexual and gender minority youth (e.g., between cisgender and transgender youth, between monosexual [e.g., gay] and plurisexual [e.g., bisexual, pansexual] youth, between youth of different racial and ethnic identities; see below) and shifts us away from conflating experience across subcategories of gender and sexual identity. In this section, we review the limited recent research on labeling gender and sexual identity among contemporary adolescents.

While labels like "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual" were once the only common options for sexual minorities and "man" or "woman" the only common options for gender identity, today new taxonomies have emerged or become more widespread and have challenged the notion that either sexual or gender identity are inherently binary (see Barker & Iantaffi, 2019; Mardell, 2016). A distinction is now commonly made between *monosexual* identity labels such as "gay," "lesbian," or "straight," which signify a singular direction in which one's sexual attractions are oriented, and *plurisexual* identity labels such as "bisexual," "pansexual," and "queer," which typically signify attraction to multiple genders when referring to sexual identity (e.g., Galupo et al., 2017; Hammack et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2015). The label "queer" may signify attraction to multiple genders but also may signify a gender identity (see below) or a political or cultural identity intended to challenge sexual or gender normativity (see Hammack et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2016; Morandini et al., 2017).

We now also recognize some sexual identity labels which do not signify the gender(s) to which one is attracted but rather the degree of sexual attraction one experiences. These labels fall under the larger *asexual* umbrella and include labels such as "graysexual" (limited degree of sexual desire) and "demisexual" (sexual desire occurs only in the context of an emotional connection; e.g., Van Houdenhove et al., 2015; Walton et al., 2016).

With regard to gender identity, it is increasingly common to distinguish between *cisgender* (i.e., one's current gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth) and *transgender* identities (i.e., one's current gender identity is different from the sex assigned at birth), as well as to recognize the existence of *nonbinary* or *genderqueer* (i.e., one's gender identity is neither man nor woman) identities and *genderfluid* (i.e., one's gender identity is not

experienced as fixed but rather fluctuates over time) identities (e.g., Hegarty et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2016). Simply put, both sexual and gender identity labels increasingly recognize the full spectrum of diversity beyond traditional taxonomic systems that center attraction to a binary gender identity.

While we know that these newer identities and labels are now in use (Mardell, 2016; Robertson, 2019), we know little about the nuances of the labeling process or the individual factors associated with appropriation of particular labels. Some research has examined the distinction in use of the labels "bisexual" and "pansexual" because both signify an attraction to multiple genders. These studies find similar reports of attraction and indices of sexual orientation for both pansexual and bisexual individuals (e.g., Flanders et al., 2017; Galupo et al., 2017; Morandini et al., 2017), though there appears to be a cohort effect in the distinction between the meaning and appropriation of these labels. Studies suggest that those who adopt pansexual labels are typically younger (Lapointe, 2017) and more likely to be transgender or gender nonconforming (Morandini et al., 2017). Labels such as "queer" (when used as a sexual identity label) and "pansexual" appear to be more common among transgender people and cisgender women (Goldberg et al., 2020; Morandini et al., 2017), which may be related to the way in which male sexuality has historically been framed as binary, and thus plurisexuality viewed as insincere or transitional (Yost & Thomas, 2012). Callis (2014) makes the distinction that many who adopt a pansexual identity do so to signal attraction to transgender, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming people.

The limited research on labeling among contemporary adolescents suggests that youth are creating new identities through new labels and sexual stories (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2017; Lapointe, 2017; White et al., 2018). At the same time, consistent with research with the previous generation of adolescents (e.g., Hammack et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2009), youth continue to identify with binary labels such as "gay" or "lesbian," but they often seek to challenge the stereotypes associated with these labels and express a desire to be seen as "ordinary" adolescents (e.g., Coleman-Fountain, 2014). In a study of 66 sexual and gender minority adolescents recruited through a community-based organization in British Columbia, Eisenberg and colleagues (2017) found that two thirds of participants used "traditional" sexual identity labels like gay, lesbian, or bisexual, while one third used "newer" labels such as pansexual or queer. They found that those who used newer sexual identity labels were also more likely to use newer gender identity labels such as genderqueer or fluid. In a nonprobability sample of more than 19,000 high school students in the United States, White and colleagues (2018) discovered that most youth continue to identify with conventional labels while also selecting new ways to describe their sexual or gender identity.

Among a convenience sample of 175 LGBTQ youth below the age of 25 years in the United States, Bosse and Chiodo (2016) discovered that one third reported a gender identity distinct from their sex assigned at birth, signaling the rise in gender diversity among members of this generation. Importantly, they found that those AFAB were more likely than those assigned male at birth (AMAB) to report gender identities noncongruent with sex assigned at birth, as well as fluid and nonbinary gender identities. They also found that youth who reported gender identities noncongruent with sex assigned at birth were more likely to identify with a newer sexual identity label such as pansexual or queer, compared with more conventional labels such as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The finding that youth who identify as nonbinary are more likely to be AFAB also emerged in the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey, in which 82% of nonbinary youth were AFAB (Clark et al., 2018).

In a large U.S. national sample of gender and sexual minority adolescents (ages 13–17 years), Watson and colleagues (2019) found that 24% identified with nontraditional labels such as pansexual and nonbinary. Appropriation of labels varied by both gender and racial identity groups, revealing considerable heterogeneity within the larger category of sexual and gender minority adolescents. Youth with trans and nonbinary gender identities were less likely than their cisgender peers to identify with a traditional sexual identity label such as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Cisgender girls with multiple ethnic/racial identities were more likely to identify with new labels such as pansexual, queer, and asexual. Confirming the emerging pattern that those AFAB are more likely to be challenging binary conceptions of gender and sexuality, 8% of their sample consisted of transgender boys versus only 1% transgender girls, and 20.9% identified as "nonbinary transmasculine" versus 2.8% "nonbinary transfeminine."

An intersectional approach to the study of gender and sexual identity labeling interrogates the way in which the constellation of identities one inhabits influences lived experience, particularly with regard to privilege and power (e.g., Cole, 2009). Such an approach dismantles uniform notions of LGBTQ identity or experience and considers variability on the basis of multiple category membership, such as distinctions based on race, class, gender, and ability (e.g., Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Hulko & Hovanes, 2018; Singh, 2013; Toft et al., 2020). An intersectional approach has rarely been centered in research on identity labeling among contemporary sexual and gender minority adolescents. A notable exception is the *What's Your Issue?* project, which used critical participatory action research methods to obtain a large, highly diverse national sample of LGBTQ+ adolescents (Fine, Torre, Frost, & Cabana, 2018; Fine, Torre, Frost, Cabana, & Avory, 2018). Survey respondents challenged traditional categories of gender and sexual identity, revealing more

than 34 gender identity labels and even more sexual identity labels (Fine, Torre, Frost, Cabana, & Avory, 2018). They also found that queer and trans youth of color who have less support face more discrimination, which can lead to challenges with mental health and identity development.

In sum, there is compelling evidence that contemporary adolescents in the United States, Canada, and other Anglophone societies are increasingly using an expanded vocabulary to describe their gender and sexual identities. The expansion of labeling options better captures diversity in gender and sexuality and shifts understandings away from traditional binaries which historically obscured the full range of experience. Research has begun to document this cultural phenomenon, though the majority of empirical work with this population continues to focus on factors other than identity development or the labeling process itself. It is vital to understand the way in which the changing cultural landscape for gender and sexual diversity is impacting the discourse adolescents themselves use to describe their identities. Russell (2016) has argued that researchers need to revisit their assumptions about human development as adolescents construct new identities and use new labels and categories. A social justice approach calls researchers to challenge normative concepts such as the ontological stability of social categories related to sexuality and gender (Russell, 2016), and an intersectional approach challenges researchers of gender and sexuality in adolescence to recognize how experience and development varies depending upon unique configurations of identities which confer relative power and privilege (e.g., Santos & Toomey, 2018). In other words, researchers should be open to the way in which social categories are in constant states of creative redefinition from adolescents themselves (Hammack & Toolis, 2015), and they should reject singular approaches that eschew complexity and flatten power dynamics in identity development. The utility and vitality of the knowledge we produce about gender and sexual diversity in adolescence is predicated on an understanding of the shifting language adolescents appropriate to make meaning of their experience of gender and sexual identity.

The Current Study

The current study sought to produce new knowledge about gender and sexual diversity among adolescents in diverse community settings by examining identity labeling in two distinct communities using a concurrent, equal-status mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2009). Using quantitative survey methods, we asked (a) *what identity labels sexual and gender minority adolescents most often employed to describe their identities?* and (b) *whether use of particular labels varied by individual factors (e.g., sex assigned at birth) or*

contextual factors (e.g., community setting)? Using qualitative methods, we asked (c) *how adolescents across diverse settings experienced the process of labeling and what might account for the variability in experience?* Through the triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data, we sought to contribute new knowledge about the identity labeling process for sexual and gender minority adolescents in diverse community settings.

Method

Overview and Researcher Descriptions

The study used a concurrent, equal-status mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2009) involving 20 months of ethnographic fieldwork and a self-report survey administered in communities identified as either historically high (i.e., San Francisco Bay Area) or historically low (i.e., Central Valley) in support of gender and sexual diversity. In this type of design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously over the same approximate period, and their value is weighted equally (Creswell, 2009). In the case of this study, the methods addressed distinct questions about gender and sexual identity labeling, as noted above. All research procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

For reflexivity, we note that the five authors hold diverse configurations of identities of relevance to the project, including cisgender (AFAB and AMAB), genderfluid trans femme (AMAB), gay (AMAB), bisexual (AFAB), straight (AMAB), and queer (AMAB). The authorship team consisted of individuals who identify as White and Black and from diverse social class backgrounds. The researchers were committed to a process of constant reflexivity in which they reflected on the ways in which these identities and the absence of other perspectives on the research team might impact data collection or analysis.

Consistent with guidelines for qualitative and mixed-methods research (Levitt et al., 2018), several procedures were undertaken to integrate considerations of reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis processes. During data collection, regular meetings among the authors included a larger research team with members who held other diverse gender, sexual, and racial identities. The perspectives of the full research team during data collection thus included a broader range of voices, and considerable effort was made to ensure that the research included a diverse representation of participants. During data collection and data analysis, the researchers created reflexivity memos in which they consistently reflected on their own identities and relative positions of power in relation to the research participants. The research team met regularly to discuss these memos. Our constructionist

epistemology recognizes that the knowledge we produce is the result of co-constructed meaning making between us and our participants (Madill et al., 2000). This reflexive process was intended to ensure methodological integrity and fidelity in our interpretive process (Levitt et al., 2017, 2018).

Qualitative Data Collection

We identified our field sites using a method of community climate assessment for support of sexual and gender diversity (see Oswald et al., 2010). Community climate refers to the level of support of a particular context when it comes to sentiments and policies related to gender and sexual diversity. It has been formally operationalized as "the level of community support for [sexual diversity], and indicated by objectively measurable phenomena such as religious and political affiliations, legal rights, workplace opportunities and policies, and the presence of GLBT community members and services" (Oswald et al., 2010, p. 215).

In two regions of California known for their historic high (i.e., the San Francisco Bay Area) or low (i.e., the Central Valley) support for sexual and gender diversity, we randomly selected[3] 10 counties for in-depth analysis using a modified method of community climate assessment (Oswald et al., 2010). This method uses publicly available data such as the number of same-sex headed households in a county, the number of registered democrats, and the proportion of high schools with a GSA to calculate a quantitative index of support for sexual and gender diversity. To maximize our ability to examine the relationship between community climate and social psychological processes, we targeted counties at the two poles of the spectrum of support for sexual and gender diversity. Across the 10 counties, Alameda County (adjacent to San Francisco; population 1.66 million) was determined to be the most supportive. Madera, Kings, and Tulare counties (clustered around Fresno) were determined to be the least supportive and were combined for an analytic focus to include a larger population (combined population: 771,484).

Ethnographic fieldwork. The third and fourth authors served as field researchers based in the Central Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area, respectively. Ethnographic fieldwork occurred over a 20-month period beginning in November, 2015, and ending in July, 2017, and consisted of active participant observation in the counties, including at high schools, community-based organizations, and community rituals for LGBTQ+ youth (e.g., Pride). Field researchers completed ethnographic field notes following procedures outlined by Emerson et al. (2011). The field researchers met weekly via video conferencing with the principal investigator (the first author) and the project coordinators (the second and fifth authors).

Adult informant interviews. In addition to participant observation, ethnographic fieldwork involved semi-structured interviews with adult and youth leaders in the communities who served as informants. Because the larger study sought data about community climate for youth, we wanted to capture the perspectives of not just youth themselves but also adults who work closely with them and could provide a broader historical perspective on the community. This approach to sampling informants was based on our a priori focus on the role of community climate in the identity labeling process and is consistent with established tradition in ethnographic research (e.g., Gold, 1997; Johnson, 1990). We sought informants who were most likely to have cultural expertise on community climate and thus best able to address our research questions.

Adult informants ($N = 24$) were recruited by the field researchers based on two criteria: (a) affiliation with an organization or institution that serves LGBTQ+ youth, and (b) at least 3 years of direct experience with LGBTQ+ youth in some capacity. We sought to ensure a diversity of representation among adult informants interviewed in terms of gender, sexual, and racial/ethnic identities. Following standards in qualitative data collection (e.g., Guest et al., 2006; Levitt et al., 2018), we did not have a target sample size for interviews but rather collected data until the research team agreed we had reached saturation in terms of key themes emerging in the interviews.

Interviews were conducted in a location selected by the interviewee, most commonly in a private office at their place of employment. Field researchers described the project as "looking to better understand what local community contexts are like across California for LGBTQ youth today, . . . what resources exist in local communities as well as the general climate in different communities with regard to sexual and gender identity diversity." All interviewees provided written informed consent.

Interviewees completed a brief demographic form providing information about their age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, pronouns, assigned sex at birth, sexual identity, and length of residence in the community in which the interview was conducted. The interview protocol covered such topics as their perceptions of community climate toward gender and sexual diversity, discrimination/violence incidents, and health and mental health concerns and resources for LGBTQ+ youth. Interviews ranged from approximately 1 to 3 hours ($M = 101$ minutes, $SD = 37$ minutes), were recorded using a digital audio recorder, were transcribed by a professional transcription company, and were uploaded to a secure server with identifying information redacted. Interviewees were provided with a US$20 cash incentive for participation.

Field researchers completed case reports following each interview which served as another source of qualitative data. These reports included

observational data surrounding the interview and provided a space for the field researchers to engage in a reflexivity process in which they considered the role of their configuration of identities and personal reactions in the interview encounter. The reports also provided space for initial reflection on recurring themes, which was used to determine saturation for data collection.

Youth informant interviews. The same informant sampling approach used for adults (Gold, 1997; Johnson, 1990) informed our recruitment of youth interviewees. Because we were guided by the a priori concern with community climate, we sought youth who were most likely to have extensive cultural knowledge of the community by assuming a leadership role. (We note that this sampling approach presents a limitation in that the data are not intended to generalize to all LGBTQ+ youth in the community. See the section "Discussion" for more details.)

Youth informants ($N = 28$) were recruited both through nominations provided by adult informants, as well as through recommendations of field researchers based on participant observation. Youth were eligible to be an informant if they were (a) between the ages of 14 and 21 years, (b) consistently active in LGBTQ+ spaces (e.g., GSAs, community-based organizations), and (c) currently or previously held a leadership role in the community (though they did not need to have an official organizational title or position). Although our focus was on high-school aged adolescents, we expanded eligibility criteria for our sample of youth informants up to age 21 years because most spaces and organizations in the field considered youth programs to serve individuals up to age 21 years. All but two informants were 18 years old or younger, with a median age of 16 years. As we recruited youth informants, we sought representation of a diversity of gender, sexual, and racial/ethnic identities within communities, and we ceased data collection upon saturation.

Interviews were conducted in a location of the interviewee's choice and included public library conference rooms, empty school classrooms, private rooms in community centers, and rented office space. Field researchers described the project using the same language as for the adult interviews, as noted above. A waiver of parental consent was granted by the institutional review board, based on the rationale that the requirement of parental consent for sexual and gender minority youth can represent a high level of risk depending on their disclosure status with parents (Mustanski, 2011). Although we recognized that youth leaders were more likely to be public about their identities and thus at lower risk, we did not want to be limited in our ability to recruit informants and thus sought and received the waiver of parental

consent. Youth interviewees below 18 years provided written assent to participate in the research, and youth 18 years and older provided written consent to participate.

Interviewees completed a demographic form, providing information on age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, pronouns, assigned sex at birth, sexual identity, and length of residence in the community. The interview protocol consisted of the same content as for adult interviews noted above. Interviews ranged from approximately 1 to 3 hours ($M = 72$ minutes, $SD = 25$ minutes), were recorded using a digital audio recorder, were transcribed by a professional transcription company, and were uploaded to a secure server with identifying information redacted. Interviewees received a US$20 cash incentive for participation. As for the adult interviews, field researchers completed case notes following each youth interview, documenting their overall impressions of the interview, emerging themes, and their own experience of reflexivity and personal reactions.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the first, third, and fourth authors completed "pre-analysis reflexivity memos" which provided space to reflect upon their own gender and sexual identity development, personal connection to sexual and gender diversity, feelings about the research project, expectations of data analysis, and intersectionality (i.e., how the identities we hold or the intersection of our own social identities might impact data analysis). The three coders met several times to discuss these memos, in an effort to create a unified interpretive community, aware of its positionality vis-à-vis the focus of study. This approach was consistent with our interpretive epistemology and was intended to ensure fidelity to the data analytic process (see Levitt et al., 2017, 2018; Madill et al., 2000).

In the second phase of analysis, the three coders established a preliminary codebook based on the main foci of the larger study. Codes were constructed as descriptive and for use in content analysis (e.g., Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For example, we constructed codes about "community climate" to flag any content discussing the community climate toward sexual and gender diversity. In this article, we focus on qualitative data content related to *identity and labeling*, defined as "text related to gender or sexual identities, processes of using labels, or meaning of particular labels." We created a child code to identify content specifically related to *nonbinary gender or sexual identity labels*, defined as "text related to nonbinary gender or sexual identity labels, such as pansexual, queer, nonbinary, genderqueer, etc." We also created a content code for any data related to *gender*, defined as "text related to gender

diversity," with three child codes related to *gender dysphoria, gender presentation/conformity*, and *gender roles/ideology*. Finally, we created a content code for any data related to the *transgender experience*, with child codes related to *distinction from the LGB community, trans-specific resources*, and *transgender identity development*.

In the third phase of analysis, the three coders collaboratively coded a selection of data using Dedoose qualitative analytic software to establish interpretive and technical consistency in the application of content codes. Once we reached a point of consistency, two coders (the third and fourth authors) independently applied codes to the data. The first author then served as an external auditor of the remaining coding, and the fifth author served as an auditor for all coding presented in the article. This general analytic approach is commonly employed in qualitative research on sexual and gender diversity (e.g., Galupo et al., 2019).

Survey Data Collection

Participants and procedure. We used a venue-based purposive sampling strategy to obtain a nonprobability, community-based sample of adolescents residing in the four counties targeted for study. This strategy is considered ideal to capture a diversity of perspectives among those who identify as gender or sexual minorities (see Krueger et al., 2020; Meyer & Wilson, 2009). The survey was conducted from October, 2016, to June, 2017. Respondents were eligible if they were between the ages of 14 and 18 years, had lived in one of the four counties for at least 1 year, and identified as transgender or nonbinary (or any other label associated with nonbinary or fluid gender) and/or lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or any other nonheterosexual identity, or any asexual identity. A target sample of approximately 150 per region was determined following consultation with statisticians about planned quantitative analyses. Respondents received a US$20 gift card to an online retailer as an incentive for their participation.

Sampling venues were selected to ensure a wide diversity of cultural, political, racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual representation within demographics of interest. To avoid sampling bias related to particular venues, we recruited participants from each of the seven following mechanisms: (a) commercial establishments (e.g., coffee shops, book stores), (b) outdoors (e.g., parks, streets), (c) groups (e.g., community-based organizations and groups organized around a variety of activities or interests such as sports, politics, culture, racial, ethnic, or national interests), (d) events (e.g., Gay Pride), (e) schools, (f) online settings (e.g., Instagram, Facebook), and (g) snowball sampling (i.e., referral from other respondents).

Survey respondents consisted of 314 adolescents (aged 14–18 years), who resided in one of the four counties of focused study. Respondents completed the survey online using SurveyGizmo. They first completed an eligibility screener, which determined that respondents met the eligibility criteria related to age (14–18 years old), residence within one of the four target counties for at least 1 year, and identification criteria outlined above.

Measures

Assigned sex at birth. Participants were asked to indicate their assigned sex at birth (female or male) on their original birth certificate.

Gender identity. Following the recommended approach to assess gender identity using two items (Gender Identity in U.S. Surveillance Group, 2014), participants were asked to select among five options any gender identity label(s) that they thought best described them: girl/woman, boy/man, transgender girl or woman/male-to-female (MTF), transgender boy or man/female-to-male (FTM), and nonbinary/genderqueer. They were offered an open-response "other" option if their current gender identity label did not match one of these five.

Sexual identity. Following best practices for the assessment of sexual orientation in survey research (Sexual Minority Assessment Research Team, 2009), participants were asked to select among a list of eight sexual identity labels any terms with which they identified (i.e., they could select more than one): straight/heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual, trans-amorous/trans-attracted, and asexual. They were offered an open-response "other" option where they could include other sexual identity labels not included in our list.

Sexual attraction. Participants were asked to indicate their current sexual attraction on a 3-point scale (1 = *not at all attracted*, 3 = *very attracted*) to the following groups: woman (non-transgender), man (non-transgender), transgender woman, transgender man, and nonbinary/genderqueer.

Racial/ethnic identity. Participants were asked to indicate which race/ethnicity terms applied to them from a list of eight options: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian/Asian American, Black/African American, Biracial/multiracial, Hispanic/Latino or Spanish origin, Middle Eastern/North African, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and White/Caucasian/European American. They could select all that applied. They were offered an open-response

"other" option where they could include a race/ethnicity label not offered on our list.

Parental education. Participants were asked to indicate the highest level of education completed by the parent who went the farthest in school. They were provided with five options: did not finish high school, graduated from high school, attended college but did not complete 4-year degree, graduated from college, don't know.

Analytic Strategy

Our analytic plan to address RQ1 (*What identity labels do sexual and gender minority adolescents employ to describe their identities?*) was to examine frequencies of response for gender and sexual identity labels. To address RQ2 (*Does use of particular labels vary by individual factors or contextual factors?*), we examined proportions of respondents within label categories who possessed the particular individual (i.e., assigned sex, race/ethnicity, parental education) and contextual (i.e., community) characteristics of interest in the study. We computed confidence intervals (CIs) for phi coefficients between each sexual and gender identity label with each of the dichotomous variables (i.e., assigned sex at birth, White vs. non-White race, high-support vs. low-support community). We also computed CIs for point-biserial correlations between each sexual and gender identity label and the ordinal variable (i.e., parental education). Both effect sizes carry similar interpretations to a Pearson correlation.

Results

Our mixed-methods approach integrated qualitative and quantitative data to examine the appropriation of sexual and gender identity labels in diverse community contexts. Addressing RQ1 and RQ2, we used the quantitative survey data to examine the frequency of particular labels across community settings, examining similarities and differences in appropriation of labels by community, sex assigned at birth, race/ethnicity, and parental education. Addressing RQ3, we used the qualitative data to interrogate the meaning and experience of labeling and to provide nuance and understanding beyond the survey data.

Data triangulation occurred among the authors during meetings throughout the data analysis and manuscript preparation phases. This integrative process involved addressing the three research questions by identifying themes that emerged across analyses of the data sets, consistent with triangulation

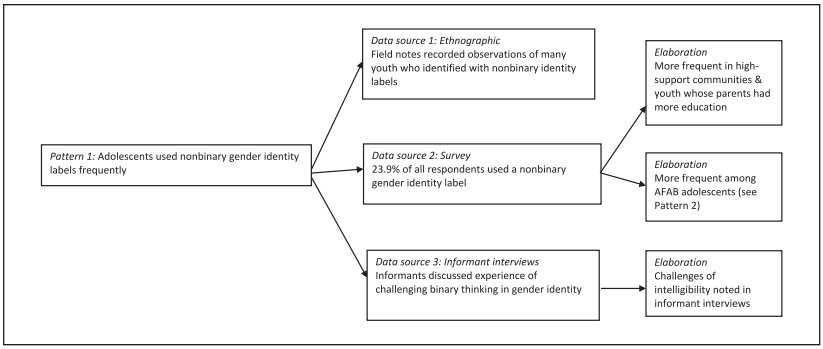

Figure 2. Patterns of findings based on triangulated data sources: Pattern 1.
Note. AFAB = assigned female at birth.

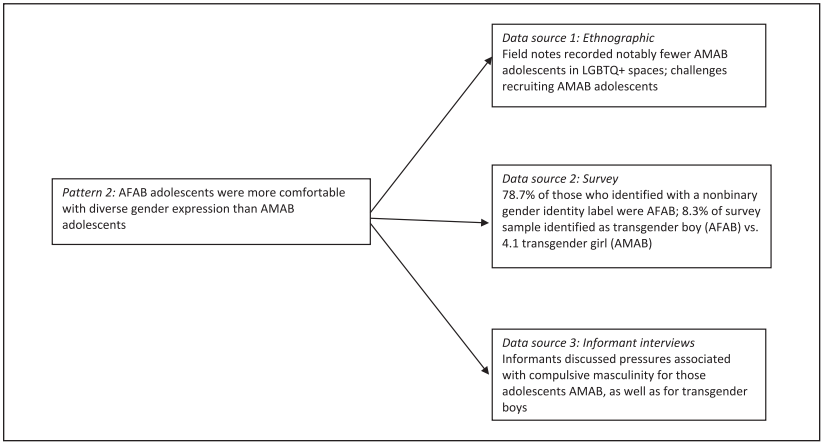

Figure 3. Patterns of findings based on triangulated data sources: Pattern 2.
Note. LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer; AFAB = assigned female at birth; AMAB = assigned male at birth.

procedures for a concurrent, equal-status mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2009). This process resulted in seven patterns of findings which are highlighted in Figures 2 to 6. As indicated in the figures, four of these patterns emerged across the data sources, whereas three emerged solely from analysis of the qualitative data (see Figure 6). We organize the presentation of findings by pattern, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to reflect the principles of our concurrent, equal-status mixed-methods design. For each pattern, we highlight points of elaboration.

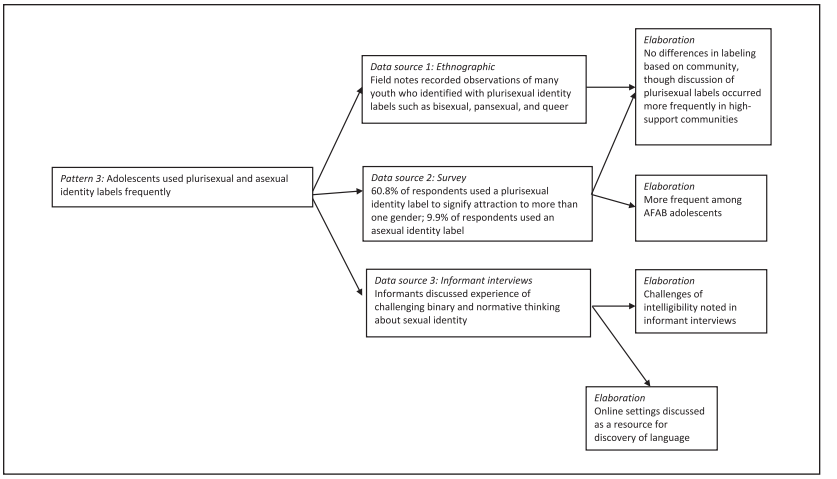

Figure 4. Patterns of findings based on triangulated data sources: Pattern 3.
Note. AFAB = assigned female at birth.

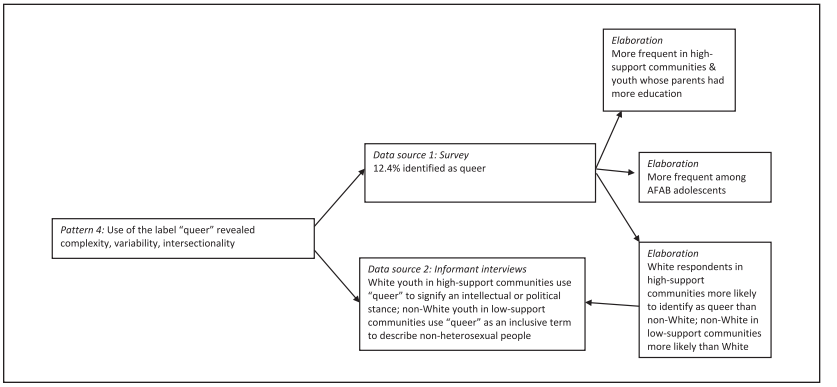

Figure 5. Patterns of findings based on triangulated data sources: Pattern 4.
Note. AFAB = assigned female at birth.

Pattern 1: Nonbinary Gender Identity Labels Used Frequently

The finding that adolescents used nonbinary (i.e., neither man nor woman) gender identity labels frequently emerged from three data sources: (a) ethnographic field notes, (b) survey data, and (c) informant interviews (see Figure 2). Field notes revealed numerous instances of adolescents in

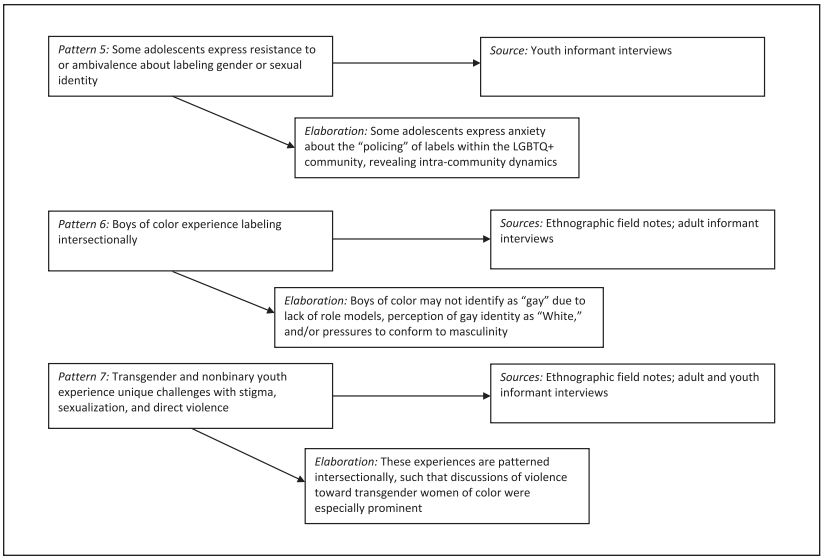

Figure 6. Patterns of findings exclusively from qualitative data sources.
Note. LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer.

LGBTQ+ spaces who identified as nonbinary, genderqueer, or some other nonbinary gender identity label, as well as frequent use of they/them pronouns. Table 1 reports demographics for the survey sample, including frequencies of all gender identity labels. Nearly one quarter of the sample (23.9%, $n = 75$) indicated a nonbinary gender identity by selecting "nonbinary/genderqueer" and/or writing in a label such as "genderfluid" ($n = 5$), "bigender" ($n = 2$), or "demiboy" ($n = 2$).

We discovered two points of elaboration in this pattern. First, those who identified with a nonbinary gender identity label were more likely to be AFAB ($n = 59$, 78.7%) than AMAB, $\varphi = .151$, 95% CI = [.047, .255], $p < .01$. Second, the use of nonbinary gender identity labels was more frequent among youth residing in high-support communities (29.6% in high-support vs. 18.1% in low-support communities, $\varphi = .135$, 95% CI = [.024, .245], $p < .05$) and among youth whose parents had a higher education level, $r_{pb} = .113$, 95% CI = [.002, .219], $p < .05$.

Qualitative data revealed the value and meaning of a nonbinary identity for those adolescents who identified as such. Danny (he/him/his), a 17-year-old Latinx gay nonbinary (AFAB) youth from a low-support community, narrated his experience of coming to identify as nonbinary:

Table 1. Sample Demographics and Survey Findings.

Region	*N*	%
Bay Area	159	50.6
Central Valley	155	49.4
Tulare County	91	29.0
Madera County	35	11.1
Kings County	29	9.2
Gender identity	***N***	**%**
Cisgender boy	81	25.8
Chose "Boy/Man" and "AMAB" only	77	24.5
Chose "Boy/Man," "AMAB," and "Nonbinary/Genderqueer"	2	0.6
Chose "Boy/Man," "AMAB," and other labels	2	0.6
Cisgender girl	136	43.3
Chose "Girl/Woman" and "AFAB" only	127	40.4
Chose "Girl/Woman," "AFAB," and "Nonbinary/Genderqueer"	9	2.9
Transgender boy	26	8.3
Chose "Transgender Boy or Man/FTM" and "AFAB," but not "Boy/Man"	10	3.2
Chose "Boy/Man," "AFAB," and "Transgender Boy or Man/Female-to-Male (FTM)"	6	1.9
Chose "Boy/Man" and "AFAB," but not "Transgender Boy or Man/ Female-to- Male (FTM)"	5	1.6
Chose "Boy/Man," "AFAB," and some nonbinary gender identity (e.g., nonbinary/genderqueer, bigender, genderfluid)	3	1.0
Chose "Boy/Man," "AFAB," "Transgender Boy or Man/Female-to-Male (FTM)," and "Nonbinary/Genderqueer"	1	0.3
Chose "Transgender Boy or Man/Female-to-Male (FTM)," "AMAB," "Nonbinary/Genderqueer," and wrote in "Demiboy"	1	0.3
Transgender girl	13	4.1
Chose "Transgender Girl or Woman/MTF" and "AMAB," but not "Girl/Woman"	8	2.5
Chose "Girl/Woman," "AMAB," and "Transgender Girl or Woman/MTF"	1	0.3
Chose "Girl/Woman" and "AMAB," but not "Transgender Girl or Woman/MTF"	4	1.3
Nonbinary gender identity[a]	75	23.9
Chose "Nonbinary/Genderqueer" and/or wrote in a nonbinary gender ("genderfluid," "bigender," "demiwoman"), and chose "AFAB"	59	18.8
Chose "Nonbinary/Genderqueer" and/or wrote in a nonbinary gender ("demiboy"), and chose "AMAB"	16	5.1

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Sexual identity	*N*	%
Asexual spectrum identity	31	9.9
Chose "Asexual" only	14	4.5
Chose "Asexual" with other sexual identity labels	14	4.5
Wrote in one or more asexual spectrum labels but did not choose "Asexual" (e.g., demisexual, graysexual)	3	1.0
Bisexual	121	38.5
Chose "Bisexual" only	88	28.0
Chose "Bisexual" with other sexual identity labels	32	10.2
Wrote in "Bicurious"	1	0.3
Gay	68	21.7
Cis or trans boy who chose "Gay" only	45	14.3
Cis or trans boy who chose "Gay" with other labels to signify plurisexual attraction (e.g., bisexual, pansexual)	15	4.8
Cis or trans boy who chose "Gay" and wrote in "Transgender" for sexual identity and reported plurisexual attraction pattern	1	0.3
Cis or trans girl who chose "Gay" only	2	0.6
Cis or trans girl who chose "Gay" and "Lesbian"	3	1.0
Nonbinary who chose "Gay" only and reported plurisexual attraction pattern	2	0.6
Lesbian	41	13.1
Chose "Lesbian" only	28	8.9
Chose "Lesbian" with other sexual identity labels to signify plurisexual attraction (e.g., bisexual, pansexual)	9	2.9
Chose "Lesbian" and "Gay"	3	1.0
Chose "Lesbian" with an asexual spectrum identity and indicated plurisexual attraction pattern	1	0.3
Pansexual	69	22.0
Chose "Pansexual" only	46	14.6
Chose "Pansexual" with other sexual identity labels to signify plurisexual attraction (e.g., bisexual)	15	4.8
Chose "Pansexual" with an asexual spectrum identity	6	1.9
Wrote "Polysexual"	2	0.1

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Sexual identity	*N*	%
Queer	39	12.4
Chose "Queer" only	14	4.5
Chose only "Queer" and had plurisexual attraction pattern[b]	10	3.2
Chose only "Queer" but reported monosexual attraction[b]	1	0.3
Chose only "Queer" but attraction patterns did not indicate plurisexuality or monosexuality[b]	3	1.0
Chose "Queer" with other sexual identity labels to signify plurisexual attraction (e.g., bisexual, pansexual)	16	5.1
Chose "Queer" with "Gay" or "Lesbian"[c]	11	3.5
Chose "Queer" with an asexual spectrum identity[c]	4	1.3
Straight	15	4.8
Chose "Straight" only	12	3.8
Chose "Straight" with other sexual identity labels to signify plurisexual attraction (e.g., bisexual, pansexual)	1	0.3
Chose "Straight" with an asexual spectrum identity	2	0.6
Transamorous	1	0.3
Chose "Transamorous" only	0	0
Chose "Transamorous" with "Bisexual," "Gay," "Pansexual," and "Queer"	1	0.3
Educational attainment of most educated parent	***N***	**%**
Did not finish high school	59	18.8
Graduated from high school	46	14.6
Attended college but did not complete 4 years	54	17.2
Graduated from college	71	22.6
Attended graduate school or advanced degree	9	2.9
Graduated from advanced degree program	74	23.6
No response	1	0.3

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Race/ethnicity	*N*	%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	23	7.3
Asian/Asian American	55	17.5
Biracial or Multiracial[d]	36	11.5
Black/African American	10	3.2
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	121	38.5
Middle Eastern/North African	6	1.9
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	11	3.5
White/Caucasian/European American	146	46.5

Note. AMAB = assigned male at birth; AFAB = assigned female at birth; FTM = female-to-male; MTF = male-to-female.
[a]This category includes participants who selected "Nonbinary/Genderqueer" and/or wrote in nonbinary labels such as bigender, genderfluid, demiboy, or demiwoman. [b]Among participants identifying only as "Queer," these categories were determined by looking at the extent to which participants reported they were sexually attracted to three groups: (a) men (cis and/or trans), (b) women (cis and/or trans), and (c) nonbinary people. Participants indicating they were somewhat or very attracted to two or more of these three groups were considered to have a plurisexual attraction pattern. Indicating attraction to just one of the three groups suggested a monosexual attraction pattern, and indicating attraction to none of the three groups was considered to have neither a plurisexual nor monosexual attraction pattern. [c]A small number of participants in these categories also indicated a plurisexual identity label, so this grouping totals more than 100%. [d]This category only includes people who explicitly identified as Biracial or Multiracial. Participants who identified with multiple racial groups, but did not identify as Biracial or Multiracial are not included here.

> . . . When I got [to] high school, when I started learning more about these terms that I didn't really know of, like nonbinary, or being trans, in general. Because I knew that I didn't feel all the way like a boy. I did feel like a boy, but I didn't at the same time. I was always, like, I don't know what it is. When I finally cut my hair when I was around sophomore year, that's when it felt right. That's when it was like, okay, this feels a lot better.

Adolescents like Danny revealed the value of expanded language and opportunities to identify beyond traditional binaries of "man" and "woman," often accompanied by shifts in gender presentation to embody a nonbinary identity.

While both our quantitative and qualitative data revealed a prominent level of visibility for adolescents who identified as nonbinary, our qualitative data also revealed challenges related to intelligibility. Marina (she/her/hers, they/them/their), a 17-year-old Latinx gay genderqueer (AFAB) youth from a low-support community, narrated this challenge:

> I just don't wanna have to explain myself, I guess. When you say you're gay, people know what gay means. People don't know what genderqueer means. There's so many different genders. People think sexuality is complicated. Gender is 10 times more complicated than sexuality is, in my opinion. I feel like it's such—it's different for anyone. My definition of genderqueer can be somebody else's definition of genderqueer. I don't want to be like, "I'm this way," and have to explain myself and my interpretation of gender. I don't really think of it as gender. I think of it as more of a feeling. If I look at [a form] where I have to fill out a gender, I'm not like, "I should've picked male. I should've picked female." I'm automatically gonna pick female. I feel genderqueer, but I don't wanna change my name and stuff like that. It's just different for anyone. I don't talk about it a lot, because I just don't wanna have to explain myself.

Marina's narrative revealed the way in which youth experience gender in myriad ways that may not be easily subsumed within a single category of "nonbinary" or "genderqueer," as they acknowledged their own experience of gender is unique. Furthermore, they illustrated the potential exhaustion and stress those who identify with nonbinary gender labels may experience at having to educate or explain their identities in every interaction.

Pattern 2: AFAB Adolescents More Comfortable With Diverse Gender Expression; AMAB Adolescents Experience Pressures to Conform to Compulsive Masculinity

The second pattern to emerge across multiple data sources concerned the distinction of experience between AFAB and AMAB adolescents in gender

identity labeling and gender expression more broadly (see Figure 3). Ethnographic field notes consistently revealed the predominance of AFAB adolescents in LGBTQ+ spaces such as GSAs and community-based organizations. Across communities, field notes described challenges to recruit AMAB adolescents for both the survey and informant interviews. Considerable effort was undertaken to obtain adequate representation of AMAB adolescents in those data sources, and our concurrent design allowed us to integrate questions about the reduced visibility of AMAB adolescents, especially in our informant interviews.

As indicated, the vast majority of survey respondents who identified with a nonbinary gender identity label were AFAB (78.7%). Notably more survey respondents could be classified as a transgender boy ($n = 26$, 8.3%) than a transgender girl ($n = 13$, 4.1%) based on their responses (see Table 1). These quantitative findings suggested greater comfort with gender diversity and fluidity among AFAB adolescents in our sample.

Qualitative data obtained in informant interviews affirmed this pattern and provided elaboration on experiences related to gender socialization which may explain the distinction between AFAB and AMAB adolescents. Dalton (he/him/his), a 27-year-old cisgender gay White male (AMAB) adult informant from a high-support community, shared his impressions of this phenomenon based on his extensive work with LGBTQ+ youth:

> I do think it's a trend that female-identified folks or even female-presenting folks oftentimes feel less pressure to choose a label. In my experience, female-identified or female-presenting folks say, "Well, I don't know what my gender is," or, "I don't really know what my sexuality is. I may be just queer. I don't know. My gender is just whatever it is right now." There is a fluidity to it. There is an uncertainty to it. I do not see that—I rarely see that—in male-identified and male-presenting folks . . . Folks who are [assigned] female at birth and who are cultured to be female, have more—it's safer for them. It's perceived as safer for them to be flexible, to be flexible in their sexuality, in their gender identity, in their gender expression. Whatever it is, it's safer for them to be flexible. Whereas boys don't feel safe being flexible. They don't feel safe. I think they feel less safe changing, being flexible, or choosing something outside of the norm and sticking to it. They feel less safe either way, but they feel definitely less safe just being flexible, being undecided, being questioning. I think that that is, yeah, internalized belief about how they're supposed to behave. That's ingrained into them from a very young age.

Dalton attributed the higher proportion of nonbinary and transgender youth assigned female at least in part to gender socialization—the idea that those assigned female feel safer and more comfortable with flexibility and fluidity

in the identity development process than those assigned male. The language of "safety" seems especially important in Dalton's narrative, as it indicates the fear of violence that those AMAB experience for gender nonconformity or diverse gender expression.

In our survey data, we noted the relatively lower proportion of boys who could be classified as cisgender ($n = 81$, 25.8%) compared with cisgender girls ($n = 136$, 43.3%) affiliating with LGBTQ+ spaces, further suggesting greater comfort with gender and sexual diversity among those AFAB. Qualitative data revealed the way in which cisgender boys experienced pressures related to compulsive masculinity (Pascoe, 2007) that discouraged them from being visible. The narrative of John (he/him/his), a 16-year-old multiracial gay boy (AMAB) from a high-support community, illustrated as follows:

> Masculinity, especially at my school, is very important. I feel like a lot of guys, when it comes to if they want to name call or something like that, usually attacks masculinity, attacks their manhood.

In his interview, John narrated the experience of feeling constrained by pressures to conform to a masculine standard, and he and others in our ethnographic work credited the lower visibility of cisgender boys in LGBTQ+ spaces to this issue.

Jade (she/her/hers), a 16-year-old White queer female (AFAB) from a high-support community, echoed the sentiments of boys like John:

> Many more female-identified people are out than male-identified people at this school. I think, as a guy in high school, it's a lot harder to come out cause masculinity's just a crap shoot.

Jade noted particularly her impression of a rise in transgender visibility at her school, while suggesting greater challenges for trans girls:

> More trans people have been coming out the past year. [One of our teachers], he's trans. I have trans friends here. If you look at—so, we have an independent study section. The number of trans students in independent study, the percentage of the total, and the number of trans students percentage of the total, and the regular school, is a huge disparity there. Because trans students don't feel safe here, especially [trans girls].

Jade's awareness of the high proportion of trans peers in independent study (i.e., out of the classroom), and particularly her claim that these are mainly trans girls, speaks to the heightened sensitivity of gender expression and the denigration of feminine expression or embodiment for those AMAB.

Marina reflected on the challenges of visibility and disclosure for those AMAB and diverse in their gender or sexual identities:

> I believe it all has to do with gender norms and stuff, and stereotypes. Males have to be masculine. When you think of gay, you think of feminine. You think gay equates femini[nity] . . . I feel like it all has to do with masculinity and stuff like that. For a girl, it's easy. You always have guy friends. Guys always have their guy friends who will be afraid of the whole like if you're gonna do something . . . Even for transgender people, I feel like it's easier to go from female to male than from male to female, because it's so much easier to portray a guy, I guess. Because when you have to portray female, it's really hard to do that. You have to have the hair, the body, the makeup. It's just a female structure is so much harder. For me, I just cut my hair off, and everybody thinks I'm a boy. It's just easier. [*Chuckles*] In all aspects. It's hard to just portray femini[nity]. Guys, I just think guys have it harder.

Marina noted that those AMAB struggle more with compulsory notions of masculinity and suggested a kind of openness within femininity that facilitates visibility for those AFAB in the LGBTQ+ community.

Dalton, the adult informant from a high-support community, linked these compulsory notions of masculinity to fear, offering a reflection based on his work with youth in the community:

> I think [young] men are much more . . . afraid of the process of figuring out what's going on in them. They're very nervous about the process itself, what's gonna happen on the other side of that process, what's it gonna tell them about themselves, all this stuff. I don't see that fear in the women that come to group or the young women that come to group or the young female-identified folks that come to group.

Dalton's narrative revealed the way in which those assigned male undergo a process characterized by more fear and anxiety about the implications of their identity development process for how they are treated by peers and in society. Taken together, these narratives reveal the psychological injustice of compulsive masculinity—the fear of direct violence that emerges from boys' concerns about gender nonconformity and diverse gender expression.

JB (they/them/their), a 26-year-old Black queer transgender male (AFAB) adult informant from a high-support community, spoke directly about the lower visibility of cisgender boys in LGBTQ+ spaces:

> I think that it's just really due to—at least for our young men, it's not something that's accepted in their schools. I mean you can just get your ass beat for being feminine or gay or . . . I think it makes it harder to wanna come out, and if you

> fear that, that's gonna be the reaction. I think that's the general part of just a lack of safety and fear of either violence or retaliation. Every once in a while, I have a boy or two that's just . . . it will be so obvious to me that it's a queer kid, and—but he won't identify that way.

JB provided greater specificity about the source of fear for many boys: the fear of direct violence on account of gender nonconformity or sexual minority status.

These sentiments about the way in which compulsive notions of masculinity impact cisgender nonheterosexual boys were echoed by Thomas (he/him/his), a 52-year-old Chicano gay male (AMAB) adult informant in a high-support community:

> I guess in a larger way, the way that society polices masculinity along heteronormative lines and cisnormative lines, if you see that as being a particular struggle that might inhibit or make it harder for LGBTQ boys and men . . . I think when they feel—from listening to these young gay men, it's when their male friends, when their straight male friend's masculinity feels threatened is when they feel uncomfortable.

Thomas shared his experience of young gay boys referencing themselves to their straight male peers, perhaps more than to peers in the larger LGBTQ community. This observation is consistent with our ethnographic fieldwork, in which we found a lower proportion of cisgender gay boys engaging in LGBTQ spaces.

Thomas added a further layer of reflection on the experience of gay boys rooted in his age and membership in a cohort of gay men decimated by the AIDS epidemic:

> . . . My generation, those of us who are in our late 40s and 50s, we're not as present because of this gap that was created by the [AIDS] pandemic because they were busy fighting for their lives for those of us who had come out either right before or during the cocktails. It changed everything in terms of what that meant in terms of getting positive . . . There's very few of us, that's why I said there's very few of us that are in the schools doing the work in the community doing this kind of work because we were somewhat involved in that as well back in the 90s when we were in our 20s.

Thomas attributed the struggle of some contemporary cisgender gay boys to see themselves in the LGBTQ community to the lower visibility of cisgender gay men in leadership positions. He especially noted the invisibility of adult men of color in these spaces, saying, "[Young people will say,]

'I have to have someone that looks like me, someone who I see as a peer, as a role model, as a mentor, and they're just not there.' They're just not there." It is noteworthy that this pattern did not emerge in our ethnographic work in the Central Valley, where adult male leaders were present in community spaces, though less commonly in GSAs and in high schools in general.

Thomas and other adult informants suggested that many cisgender gay boys congregated in spaces focused on sexual health and HIV prevention rather than general community spaces, but he and others expressed concerns about reliance on these types of spaces:

> . . . You have to have a specifically identified group where cisgender gay men can feel comfortable getting support. I don't think they're getting it. I don't see that space for them, and I haven't seen that space in a very long time outside of [HIV] prevention. That's the only space I see it for them is prevention, which then, now you pathologize them, say you're at risk, this perpetuation that you're at risk for HIV.

Thomas expressed concern that the primary spaces where young cisgender gay boys tend to gather are those focused on HIV prevention because these spaces often bring with them a discourse of "risk" and behavioral surveillance associated with sexual health. Thomas also noted the use of social media dating and hookup apps (intended for adult use) among gay boys with whom he works, expressing concern that these online spaces do not necessarily serve a community support function.

There was evidence in our qualitative data that not just cisgender boys but also transgender boys struggled as they engaged with compulsory notions of masculinity. Rob (he/him/his), a 14-year-old Black transgender boy (AFAB) who identified as gay and was from a high-support community, narrated his initial reluctance to identify as a man due to perceived lack of conformity with masculinity:

Rob: I wanna say three years ago I kind of started exploring what that would mean [to identify as a trans guy], but I thought it was nonbinary. Because I didn't really know if I can be—call myself a trans guy and be not necessarily super masculine. I thought nonbinary made sense, but I know it definitely isn't what I am, so.

Interviewer: That's really interesting, so what—you thought that if you were to identify as male you would have to embody certain ideas of masculinity? Like what?

Rob: Mm-hmm. I don't know, just like I guess also it would make sense if—I was born female of course, people don't see me and read me as

> male. I guess it's like I should, I try to identify how people read me, but that doesn't like necessarily mean anything, how people read you.

In this excerpt, Rob revealed the way in which he initially was reluctant to identify as a boy because of how others might perceive his "credibility" as male, given some of the ways in which he wanted to present (e.g., his desire to wear makeup) his own sense that he is not "masculine enough."

Pattern 3: Adolescents Used Plurisexual and Asexual Identity Labels Frequently

The third pattern of findings which emerged across multiple data sources concerned the relative frequency of both plurisexual and asexual identity labels among adolescents across communities (see Figure 4). Ethnographic field notes revealed observations of frequent use of identity labels such as bisexual, pansexual, and queer, though these observations were more common in high-support communities. Reference to asexual identity labels was infrequent in ethnographic field notes across communities but notable in the survey data.

Table 1 reports frequencies of sexual identity labels among the entire sample. One quarter ($n = 78$, 24.8%) of the sample identified exclusively with a monosexual gay or lesbian identity label (i.e., they selected "gay" or "lesbian" with no other labels that might signify plurisexual attraction). Noteworthy was the preponderance of plurisexual identity labels among adolescents: 38.5% ($n = 121$) identified as bisexual, 22% ($n = 69$) as pansexual, and 12.4% ($n = 39$) as queer. When removing those who identified as queer but did not report plurisexual attraction, the total proportion of the sample reporting a plurisexual identity label to signify attraction to more than one gender was 60.8% ($n = 191$).

Plurisexual identity labels were especially common among participants who were AFAB (78%), when compared with participants identifying with a monosexual label (42.9% AFAB), $\varphi = .352$, 95% CI = [.229, .474], $p < .001$. There were no differences in the use of plurisexual identity labels across community types in the survey data, although discussion of plurisexual identities emerged more often in qualitative data in high-support communities. This pattern of findings suggested that there is perhaps greater open dialogue about plurisexual labels in high-support communities but that adolescents are still exposed to plurisexuality in low-support communities, typically through social media.

Survey data revealed a notable proportion of adolescents using labels associated with asexuality ($n = 31$, 9.9%; see Table 1). Discussion of asexual

identities emerged infrequently in the qualitative data. Loretta (she/her/hers), a 39-year-old Hispanic straight cisgender female (AFAB) adult informant from a low-support community, discussed the challenges she observed with one adolescent she worked with who identified as asexual:

> I had one girl who was asexual. She was just like, "I don't like being touched. I don't like being hugged. People think that there's something wrong with me. I'm assuming that there is something wrong with me because that's not normal." I'm just like, "Your normal is normal. Everybody has a different normal." She went through a long sad phase.

Loretta's encounter with this student revealed the way in which, although more youth may be identifying as asexual, they continue to engage with dominant narratives of sexuality and intimacy that denigrate asexuality.

We found that adolescents AFAB constituted a high proportion of those who identified as asexual (67.7%), bisexual (70.2%), pansexual (87%), and queer (87.2%). The narrative of Gene (they/them/their), a 16-year-old White nonbinary (AFAB) youth informant from a high-support community, illustrated the vocabulary related to asexuality accessible to this cohort of adolescents:

> **Interviewer:** You indicated that you identify as demiromantic, panromantic and ace flux. Can you tell me a little bit more about coming to identify with those labels?
>
> **Gene:** Yeah, . . . having two moms made the whole coming out as pan thing not a huge deal. I don't know. With my friends and stuff, it's more of an issue [of] defining it, cause a lotta people don't—some people know of bisexuality, but pan is, "What does that even mean?" Just being like, "Gender doesn't matter, basically." Just defining that. Yeah. I'm pretty comfortable when it comes to sexuality and stuff, because I've grown up in such a queer community, that I'm very comfortable being, like, "I'm gay." Or just saying whatever. Because I also can use gay interchangeably for pan. I don't know. It works for me. Yeah, that's always been fairly simple. Coming out hasn't been hard for that, cause I'm so casual about it. With being ace or demi, again, it's more of an issue of defining it. Because a lot of people don't know what it is. Then yeah, that's mostly. Then again, just explaining. It'd be like, "I just don't have crushes all that often. Or I have an emotional connection before I feel attracted to someone." Yeah . . . Yeah, especially with labels and stuff. I find them fascinating. The reason why I'm like, "Here's 20 labels that all fit me," is because I've spent so

> much time researching the different terms and the different subcategories . . . of all the different sexualities, cause there are so many now. I just find them super interesting . . .

Raised by a lesbian couple in a community supportive of sexual and gender diversity, Gene felt emboldened to explore labels related to the direction of their desire (i.e., to multiple genders, "panromantic"), the conditions in which they experience desire (i.e., only in the context of a strong emotional connection, "demiromantic"), and the extent to which they experience desire (i.e., less frequently but fluctuating, "ace flux"). Furthermore, Gene is explicit about their identity labels as signifying *romantic*, rather than *sexual*, identity—signaling a distinction more frequently being made in people's intimate lives (e.g., Fine, Torre, Frost, Cabana, & Avory, 2018; Mardell, 2016) but rarely acknowledged in research on sexual diversity (cf. Diamond, 2003, 2004).

As indicated in Figure 4, qualitative data from informant interviews revealed the experience of challenging binary and normative thinking in sexual identity for those adolescents who identified with plurisexual identity labels. Tiana (she/her/hers), a 17-year-old African American cisgender pansexual female (AFAB) informant from a high-support community, narrated her experience of coming to identify as pansexual:

> I guess it's a long story but when I was 12, I know I didn't really—you're not really ready for a relationship of any kind at a young age, so I just identified myself as asexual . . . I guess as I grew older I noticed that dating a man, or dating a woman, or dating a transgender—dating a transgender my first year of high school is the same for me, it's just based on people that I meet and how I interact with you spiritual level I feel with you.

Tiana described a process of sexual identity development that began with an identification as asexual in her early adolescence, revealing both the availability of this vocabulary for adolescents but also that Tiana felt sufficiently self-aware of her sexuality to need to claim an identity at a young age. She ultimately came to select "pansexual" as her dating experiences revealed that she was attracted to individuals who may assume any variety of cisgender or transgender identities.

Some youth narrated challenges related to the intelligibility of newer labels such as pansexual among their non-LGBTQ peers and community members. Sue (she/her/hers), a 17-year-old cisgender pansexual Asian girl (AFAB) from a high-support community, explained this experience:

> When it does come up, I usually am faced with just confusion about, "What does that word mean?" I'm not usually fond of explaining it, but I do. Usually, to avoid that, I end up having to say that I'm queer or say that I'm gay, even though that's not the word that I usually most closely identify with. In terms of people accepting it, yeah, I don't get a lot of . . . hate for it or anything. I get a lot of tolerance and confusion.

Sue's narrative revealed the exhaustion that many who hold diverse gender or sexual identities experience at having to regularly educate others about the meaning of their particular label.

It is noteworthy that youth narrated the discovery of language to more authentically describe their sexual identities in online spaces. For example, Sue learned about the meaning of "pansexual" through her exploration of online spaces:

> I was about 12 years old, I think. It wasn't like a person in particular. It was more a realization of gender doesn't really define anything other than gender. That doesn't define any of the things I care about, like personality . . . The way I found the label was the Internet, which is really helpful, actually. [*Laughter*] I spent a lot of time online, messed around with a couple of labels until I found one that I felt fit me cause gender wasn't the thing that I cared about.

Through her engagement in online communities, Sue came to fit her experience of gender and sexual attraction with the label pansexual, revealing the way in which the labeling process occurs in a larger context of immersion in online communities for this generation of adolescents.

Pattern 4: Use of "Queer" Revealed Complexity, Variability, and Intersectionality

Across survey and qualitative interview data sources, the use of the label "queer" revealed complexity, variability, and intersectionality among adolescents (see Figure 5). As indicated in Table 1, among the 39 survey respondents who described their sexual identity as "queer," 26 (66.7%) reported plurisexual attraction or also selected a plurisexual identity label such as "bisexual" or "pansexual." The remaining third reported monosexual attraction or also identified with a gay, lesbian, or asexual spectrum identity (and not a plurisexual identity label). This pattern suggests that some identify as queer to signify plurisexual attraction, while others may use queer as an umbrella community term or possibly an intellectual or political term. This interpretation was supported by our qualitative data and is discussed below.

Respondents who identified as queer in our survey (12.4% of total sample) were more likely to be AFAB (16.4% AFAB vs. 4.7% AMAB, $\varphi = .169$, 95% CI = [.068, .270], $p < .01$), more likely to reside in a high-support community (18.2% in a high-support community vs. 6.5% in a low-support community, $\varphi = .179$, 95% CI = [.064, .294], $p < .01$), and more likely to report higher parental education, $r_{pb} = .172$, 95% CI = [.056, .281], $p < .05$. White respondents in high-support communities were more likely to identify as queer than non-White respondents (24.7% of White respondents in a high-support community vs. 9.1% of non-White respondents), whereas non-White respondents in low-support communities were more likely to identify as queer than White respondents (8.8% of non-White respondents vs. 1.9% of White respondents in a low-support community, $\varphi = .217$, 95% CI = [.084, .351], $p < .01$).

The narrative of Ethan (she/her/hers), a 19-year-old White nonbinary (AMAB) queer youth informant in a high-support community, illustrated the way in which some adolescents come to appropriate the label "queer":

> I took a sociology class in community college, which had a big, big impact. It made a big difference. I just started reading a lot of stuff online, and so probably 14 is around when I became aware of the political history of the word queer. When I took it on, I definitely took it on as what I would say is the old-school definition of it. I'm not a super big fan of using queer as an umbrella term for not straight. I'm not gonna complain about it. I mean I will complain about it. I'm not gonna get at anybody about it because it's a word. Do what you will with it. I definitely adopt the older version because I think being queer, it's about not being able to be described by one label, like bi or gay. I think it also necessitates a departure from heteropatriarchal norm. I think that there is an aspect of gender nonconformity, whether you label that or not. I think not conforming to heteropatriarchy also means not conforming to the binary. Okay. Only it's not a binary, but gay, bi, straight, just fitting into one of those three categories. I feel like being somewhere in between or somewhere outside of it is a different state of being.
>
> . . . The queer political identity I think in one way being like a fuck you to a lot of respectability politics, pointing out that you're beyond the typical labels that are formed under heteropatriarchy. Also, the community aspect of it, like the queer community being a larger thing with people who are connected by a shared political and cultural history. That's really what I mean when I take on that label. I feel like it's losing it, but I wish it wasn't, but hey.

Ethan's narrative of coming to identify as queer revealed an underlying intellectual and political stance rooted in a history of the reclamation of the term in the 1980s and 1990s (see Barker & Scheele, 2016), as well as an embodied

resistance to current norms. She expressed ambivalence about the common practice to use queer as an all-inclusive term.

Interestingly, it was precisely this broader usage of "queer" that appealed to some youth in low-support communities. The narrative of Annalisa (she/her/hers), a 17-year-old Chicana queer female (AFAB) from a low-support community, illustrated as follows:

> I decided that the word . . . queer, that it's, I feel like it's kind of an umbrella term that anybody who is LGBT could kind of fit to them because I see a lot of people that I associated with just be like, "Oh yeah, well, I'm a queer person." I kind of found comfort in that instead of being still black and white with like a lesbian title. I thought that the [label] queer would be more accessible to nonbinary people if I would ever find attraction to them.

Many youth endorsed plurisexual labels such as queer to signal a more fluid approach to sexual attraction and to express an affiliation to a larger community of those diverse in gender and sexual identity. The contrasting narratives of Ethan and Annalisa revealed the way in which "queer" may be used in different ways among youth in different community contexts, where local discourses may diverge. While "queer" was more common among White youth in high-support communities and took on more intellectual and political meaning, non-White youth in low-support communities saw the term as more inclusive of other options.

Pattern 5: Resistance, Ambivalence, and Intra-Community Dynamics in the Labeling Process

In mixed-method designs, findings may emerge from the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data or from a single data source (Levitt et al., 2018). As indicated in Figure 6, three of the seven patterns of findings emerged solely from analysis of the qualitative data. One of these three patterns focused on resistance to the idea of labels themselves and ambivalence about the labeling process among adolescents based on intra-community dynamics. This pattern emerged in some youth informant interviews.

Maddy (she/her/hers), a 17-year-old cisgender female (AFAB) informant from a high-support community who described her sexual identity as "not exclusively heterosexual" and her ethnic identity as "Chinese/Asian," openly derided the need for labels:

> I guess [there needs to be] less categorizing, or labeling. I think that labels suck. It's just—I think the labels are a way that society categorize people. I think that it forces people to think that they need a label. As I said, I don't really identify

> as exclusively heterosexual, but I think that having labels forces people to choose. If they're in the middle, then they're stuck. I don't—it just creates a lot of pressure, which I don't think people need. I don't think people need pressure. I think that, like, just having gender-neutral bathrooms is a way of filling that need.

Maddy's narrative revealed the way in which some adolescents reject labels altogether and see the need to categorize as psychologically unjust. Maddy and others like her expressed the value of seeing beyond categories, physically manifest in the movement for gender-neutral bathrooms.

While youth like Maddy openly derided labels, some adolescents expressed more ambivalence and the value of labels to make meaning of the experience of gender and sexuality. Gene (she/her/hers), the 16-year-old informant from a high-support community, narrated what she calls the "paradox" of labeling:

> . . . I think especially within the LGBT community, it can get really difficult, because you don't wanna—I don't know. You don't wanna call someone the wrong term, since there are so many different—I think labels in general are a really big thing. Because there's that line between having unnecessary labels, and having labels that fit and help provide a community for people . . . There's millions of labels. They're coming up with tons and tons of new ones, because we're kind of finding out more about spectrums, rather than just two sides. There's a big divide between—we don't need all of these labels, and we don't need to have them. We can kinda just let people exist. At the time we are right now, labels can provide, like I said, a really good sense of community, and so that paradox can become really confusing.

Adolescents like Gene saw both the burdens and benefits of labeling gender and sexual identity. On one hand, there was anxiety about the labeling process, as new labels are constantly emerging, and there is sensitivity about the application of particular labels (e.g., "You don't wanna call someone the wrong term," such as may occur in "misgendering"; see McLemore, 2015, 2018).

Related to concerns about the "policing" of labels within the LGBTQ community, some youth reported challenges in their labeling process related to a concern that they might not be accepted within the community. Lucas (he/him/his), an 18-year-old Latino cisgender bisexual male (AMAB) from a low-support community, expressed concern about openly identifying as bisexual:

> **Lucas:** . . . I'm talking to someone right now in a relationship, and it's a girl, but I know—I only consider myself, or I only identify as a bisexual personally because I know that I've been attracted to men before, but I never felt personally attached to the extent where I would date

someone that's a man. I guess I would only consider myself a bisexual person because I know that I'm attracted to the both sexes, but I haven't necessarily personally and honestly fallen for a man. Does that make sense? . . . That sounds inauthentic to me, but I just know that that's what I feel if I'm being honest.

Interviewer: Why does it feel inauthentic to you? Just curious.

Lucas: Because I feel like if I told another bisexual person that, they'd be like, "Oh, okay. He's just trying to not be cis. He's just trying to identify as something else." I don't think that that's a trend today. When I see a bunch of—not memes, but jokes whenever people say, "Oh, everyone's all of a sudden gay now." That's not the case whatsoever. I think it's just a matter of finding out later in life for everyone. I would hold myself back from telling another bisexual person that I'm bisexual because I would only be afraid that they'd think that I'd be faking it out just to not identify as straight.

Lucas' narrative revealed the way in which challenges in the identity labeling process can occur because of concerns about acceptance within the larger LGBTQ community. Lucas feared that his expression of a bisexual identity would be deemed inauthentic, which speaks to heightened sensitivity to perceived authenticity in the current cohort of adolescents.

Gene expressed similar concerns referring to online spaces for LGBTQ youth:

> . . . Although the internet can provide a lot of information, and it can be very educational and be very helpful, there's also—it can get really intense, and there can be a lot of language policing, which is kind of unnecessary. There's a very fine line between informing, and wanting to make sure that you're not hurting anyone with what you're saying. Also, unnecessarily controlling how you talk about different topics.

The sentiments of youth like Lucas and Gene revealed a heightened anxiety around the use of language and a sense that, although the expansion of vocabulary has been liberating, there are some who want to claim authority over the use of particular labels. The consequence can be an internal questioning, as Lucas has done, of whether one is "queer enough" (see Catalano, 2015).

Pattern 6: Boys of Color May Experience Unique Challenges in Labeling

The sixth pattern of findings emerged in the ethnographic field notes and adult informant interviews and concerned the intersectional experience of

labeling based on race and gender for boys of color (see Figure 6). JB, the Black queer trans adult informant working with youth in a high-support community, reflected on the challenges of using particular labels within the Black community:

> I think there's a thing that comes up that—like gayness. You use a term like gay. It's a term for White people. White people tend to use that term. That's the thinking sometimes. I know that for young men especially are not gonna identify as gay. Even if they sleep with men, they're not gonna identify as gay. I had a colleague who was in the position before, and she had done surveys. On the demographic surveys for the youth, it said, "Straight men who sleeps with other men." I think part of it is a perceived safety issue where "I can't call myself this" because, particularly with men, it's gonna be policed or "I'm gonna get beat up" or whatever, or, like I said, it's seen as a White thing, or people just don't really use that language. I'll say there's just different language and verbiage in Black communities, and there is lots of different terms. [Chuckles] Yeah. I'm still learning and figuring that out, but it's gonna translate the same or I have to be more creative with how I reach kids.

In this excerpt, JB revealed the way in which certain labels may be indexed with different racial identities and thus may present particular complications for youth in the identity development process, as they navigate intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The result may be, as JB suggests, a fear of violence that some same-sex attracted boys of color experience if they affiliate with the larger LGBTQ community. This phenomenon was apparent in our ethnographic field notes, which documented the relative absence of cisgender boys of color in LGBTQ spaces, even in high-support communities with large populations of people of color.

For some cisgender boys, especially those who are gender conforming and masculine-presenting, resistance to identify as gay or affiliate with the LGBTQ community may be linked to internalized pressures to conform to compulsive masculinity and a perception of LGBTQ spaces as unwelcoming of cisgender boys and men. JB echoed the sentiments of Thomas, the 52-year-old Chicano gay male informant from a high-support community, attributing part of the challenge in identification and affiliation for younger boys and men with the absence of adult role models in LGBTQ spaces (in the high-support communities):

> [We need] regular coming-out panels where adults will go talk to the kids and be like, "Yeah, I'm gay." Again, a normalizing thing. I think once you are provided with examples of people living happy, normal lives or they're struggling, but they're okay. Kids need to see that.

JB suggested that part of the problem for same-sex attracted youth is the absence of gay adult role models who might "normalize" the experience of sexual and gender diversity.

Pattern 7: Transgender and Nonbinary Adolescents Experience Unique Challenges Related to Stigma, Sexualization, and Violence

The seventh pattern of findings emerged from analysis of all qualitative data sources and revealed the unique challenges of transgender and nonbinary adolescents, particularly with stigma, sexualization, and violence (see Figure 6). Our analysis revealed that these challenges were experienced intersectionally, with transgender women of color especially impacted.

Marina, the youth informant from a low-support community, narrated how a growing acceptance of gay and lesbian identities did not translate to acceptance of transgender identities:

> I feel like things are shifting from sexuality to gender. I know people are being okay with slowly being okay with gay and lesbian and stuff. As soon as you hit transgender it just completely shifts. Sexuality is one thing, but gender is like a completely different story.

Marina was one of many youth and adult informants who suggested that those youth challenging the gender binary experience more discrimination and stigma than their cisgender peers.

The most common challenges described by our informants centered on direct violence toward and sexualization of transgender girls and misgendering related to pronoun use, mainly experienced by transgender boys and nonbinary youth. Reports of direct violence related to bathroom use were also common for all transgender and nonbinary youth. Shosha (she/her/hers), a 16-year-old Black cisgender lesbian (AFAB) from a high-support community, recounted the experience of one of her transgender male friends:

> I'm actually really good friends with a transgender [person]. He is a trans man, and a lot of people don't respect that—they don't respect his gender pronouns. They still call him she and refer to him as her, and it's offensive.

Many youth echoed the experience of Shosha with a disrespect for pronouns for transgender peers.

Accounts of direct violence toward transgender women of color were common and revealed the extent of challenge for transgender youth. JB linked this violence to compulsive masculinity, arguing that violence toward

trans women is ultimately motivated by misogyny and the denigration of femininity:

> . . . Homophobia is connected to hatred of femininity, because it's saying that men can't be feminine, or somebody can't be a trans woman. I mean I think it's all connected, because it's actually a hatred of women—that you're policing, because it's saying so and so can't be feminine, hate women . . . I think it's all piled up in there.

As JB noted based on extensive experience in the community, challenges faced by transgender youth (especially trans girls) are related to compulsive masculinity and the taboo that someone assigned male experiences when they affirm a woman identity and present accordingly.

Informants in high-support communities often discussed experiences of sexualization for transgender girls and women. Rosa (she/her/hers), a 21-year-old Puerto Rican transgender woman (AMAB) from a high-support community discussed the way in which transgender girls are often drawn to sex work, which she links to the need for resources:

> It's just something that I feel comes in hand-in-hand with being transgender, because as a transgender person, you need more things. You need more resources, and resources usually cost money. The only way of actually making money, when you're transgender, is sex work, because nobody takes you serious. When you actually want a job, they just find you as a laughing matter, something to joke around about.

Rosa and other informants highlighted the way in which transgender girls face unique challenges related to sexualization, which may impact their development and well-being.

Dalton, the adult informant from a high-support community, identified gender identity as the most pressing mental health issue in his community work:

> I see a lot of mental health issues . . . Often, gender identity is really big. People who are exploring their gender identity or feel trapped within the confines of their perceived gender and who want to explore other gender expressions or are gender questioning, I see a lot of that . . . I would say that's the biggest issue that we see is [youth] not feeling safe expressing their gender.

Dalton's narrative affirms the notion that higher visibility and opportunity for youth to challenge binary thinking about gender does not necessarily translate into positive psychological experience. In fact, there may be

unique mental health challenges associated with the kind of gender exploration youth can now undergo.

Discussion

The 21st century has been a time of significant shift in the meaning and cultural acceptance of gender and sexual diversity, with important implications for adolescent development (Russell & Fish, 2016, 2019). A small but growing line of inquiry has begun to examine the way in which those born around the start of the century may be distinct from prior generations in their gender and sexual identity development and their appropriation of specific labels (e.g., Robertson, 2019; Watson et al., 2019; White et al., 2018). Our study contributes to this literature and adds new insights based on the use of mixed methods and a research design that centered community-level diversity, allowing us to capture the experience of adolescents in communities that vary in their support for gender and sexual diversity.

Our findings revealed the expansive vocabulary contemporary adolescents of this generation cohort use to describe gender and sexual identity. This vocabulary challenges binary conceptions of both gender and sexual attraction, with many youth identifying as nonbinary and with a plurisexual identity label to signify attraction to multiple genders. This vocabulary also challenges normative ideas about sexual and romantic attraction itself, with youth using labels that signify variability in sexual desire, romantic attraction, or the conditions in which desire or attraction occur (e.g., asexual, demisexual).

Early in the 21st century, there was speculation that a "post-gay" generation might emerge that was distinct from prior cohorts in the lessened significance of a sexual minority identity or a preference to not be defined by one's sexual desire (Savin-Williams, 2005). Youth in our study who were critical of labels or who longed for a situation in which labels were not necessary may embody this experience, but they did not represent the experience of most youth, who valued the taxonomies available to make meaning and communicate their gender and sexual desire. Thus, the "emancipation" from labels described earlier in the century (Cohler & Hammack, 2007) may have been more about challenging the *existing* vocabulary of the time rather than the altogether eschewing of sexual identity labels.

The proliferation of more expansive language to describe gender and sexual identity has important implications for social policy and social justice, as a new generation of adolescents challenges binary thinking (Russell, 2016). This fuller lexicon to describe gender and sexuality speaks to the diversity of identities and pushes cultural institutions, social policies, and

educational and health care settings to reconsider fundamental assumptions and practices. Concretely, this fuller lexicon calls us to revisit such practices as binary bathroom configurations (e.g., Porta et al., 2017) and the binary categories on which we base policy and practice in health care settings (e.g., Skaistis et al., 2018).

While the expansion of labels provides youth with greater opportunities for authentic self-expression, the novelty of much of the vocabulary creates unique challenges related to intelligibility (Barsigian et al., 2020). Adolescents in our study narrated multiple challenges with intelligibility, especially related to nonbinary gender identity, plurisexual identity such as pansexual or queer, and asexual spectrum identities. Unintelligibility likely creates challenges related to the disclosure process, with each interaction potentially creating stress about whether one's identity will be understood or possibly denigrated (see Meyer, 2003). Our data suggested that the result is at times a decision to present one's identity *inauthentically*, for ease of interaction—an act that also likely contributes to minority stress through the internalization of stigma.

All sources of data in our study revealed the way in which the current context of gender and sexual identity labeling appears to be benefiting adolescents AFAB more than those AMAB. Our survey findings were consistent with other recent research revealing that youth who identify as nonbinary and with plurisexual labels are more likely to be AFAB (e.g., Bosse & Chiodo, 2016; Clark et al., 2018). Our qualitative data provided evidence that this distinction is linked to the experience of compulsive masculinity and to the continued denigration of femininity among those AMAB (Pascoe, 2007). Informants across diverse settings converged on a consensus that those AMAB often experience fear to express their gender and sexual identities authentically out of a concern for direct violence.

Several patterns of findings revealed the way in which contemporary adolescents navigate normative concepts of both gender and sexuality from within and beyond LGBTQ+ communities. Pressures to conform to masculinity and the denigration of femininity point to the enduring legacy of patriarchy and gender ideologies that privilege particular forms of presentation based on assigned sex (e.g., Diefendorf & Bridges, 2020; Pascoe, 2007). Pressures within LGBTQ+ communities to label in specific ways point to intra-community power dynamics in which monosexual gay and lesbian identities are privileged and bisexual or plurisexual identities viewed as lesser (e.g., Walker & DeVito, 2020). This phenomenon was evident in some of our qualitative data which suggested what Walker and DeVito (2020) call "identity flattening"—"the practice of collapsing down a multifaceted

identity into a less complex presentation of identity that the individual believes will be more acceptable within a space" (p. 7).

Diversity in levels of community support shaped the labeling process, with nonbinary gender and queer sexual identity labels more frequent in high-support communities. However, our findings revealed the way in which adolescents had access to contexts to safely explore gender and sexual identity online (e.g., Belous & Bauman, 2017; Craig & McInroy, 2014; Singh, 2013). Social media challenges the notion of community as geographically bounded in the 21st century, and youth have unprecedented open access to information about diversity through new media and online communities (Hur & Gupta, 2013; Manago et al., 2015). Our ethnographic methods revealed that these communities were distinct, especially in terms of visibility of sexual and gender diversity, but that access to online communities "equalized" the experience of labeling in many ways by providing all youth with information and new relationships and connections (see Wang & Edwards, 2016).

Our findings suggested ways in which the experience of gender and sexual identity labeling occurs uniquely depending on the intersections of identities (Bowleg, 2013; Fine et al., 2018). For example, some youth of color may not identify with language such as "gay" or "queer" and thus may be less likely to associate in spaces discursively marked as such. For those AMAB, the rejection of a gay or queer identity may be related to pressures related to masculinity that are unique for men of color (e.g., Gonzalez, 2007). Yet, both our survey and qualitative data revealed that this experience may be influenced as well by community context, as youth of color in low-support communities appreciated "queer" as an umbrella term.

Echoing many of our adult informants, we suggest that increased attention to language and the use of inclusive and broad language will better speak to a new generation of youth whose language transcends "LGBTQ." In fact, it may be more effective to speak about the *phenomenon* of gender and sexual diversity rather than the specific *identities* that make up a larger community because an identity-based approach is likely to exclude those with newer or emergent labels. This distinction was manifest in our fieldwork, with more school-based organizations shifting the meaning of "GSA" from an identity-based framework ("gay-straight alliance") to what we call a phenomenon-based framework ("gender-sexuality alliance").

Finally, it is important to note that visibility did not equate with affirmation for the nonbinary and transgender youth in our study. In fact, consistent with existing literature, our qualitative data revealed the way in which these youth encounter potential violence and microaggressions associated with misgendering and the constant navigation of binary spaces such as bathrooms

(e.g., Nadal et al., 2014; Wernick et al., 2017; Wirtz et al., 2020). The affirmation process will require that nonbinary thinking and its material manifestation (e.g., in all-gender bathrooms) become increasingly recognized in the community settings youth experience.

The main strength of this study lies in its mixed-methods design which allowed us to not only describe broad patterns across the communities (through survey methods) but also interrogate the meaning and experience of labeling (through ethnographic and interview methods). The community diversity design also allowed us to address an important question about the patterning of experience across settings at a time of social change in the meaning and cultural acceptance of gender and sexual diversity in the United States. Limitations included our reliance on a nonprobability survey sample, which prevents us from drawing any conclusions about the broader population of adolescents in these or other communities. Our criterion that adult and youth informants be identified community leaders limits our ability to generalize our qualitative findings beyond this sample. Patterns of findings which emerged primarily from the qualitative data may speak to the experience of community leaders rather than represent the common or modal experience for adolescents. Narrative accounts of the labeling experience and the community climate represented the perspectives of a select group of community members who served as informants and may not represent the full range of experiences among adolescents in the communities. While factors associated with intra-community dynamics around labeling emerged in our qualitative data, the study's focus on community climate toward gender and sexual diversity from beyond the LGBTQ+ community might have limited our ability to fully capture these dynamics. Future research should foreground the study of intra-community climate within the broader sexual and gender minority community. As we realized at the end of our fieldwork, our decision to avoid sites focused on sexual health or HIV prevention may have limited the access we had to boys of color, which may have resulted in an underrepresentation of those voices across our sets of data.

The 21st century has been a time of change in our understanding of sexuality and gender. As language has expanded to recognize a broader spectrum of experience in gender and sexual identity development, contemporary adolescents navigate the legacy of normative, binary conceptions inherited from the past. Research that foregrounds the experience of contemporary youth as they develop their identities will reveal the challenges and opportunities of this historical moment and contribute to a more contextualized and evolving scientific understanding of sexuality, gender, and adolescent development.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge Stephen T. Russell and Ilan H. Meyer as scientific advisors; David Pletta and Zeneva Schindler as project coordinators; Doug Bonett as statistical consultant; Jeremy Goldbach and Sheree Schrager as survey administration consultants; and Mikaela Marcos and Austin Bailey for assistance with survey data validation.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by a William T. Grant Scholar Award and a fellowship from the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, both awarded to the first author.

ORCID iD

Phillip L. Hammack https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2203-858X

Notes

1. All interviewee names are pseudonyms.
2. By "historically high" or "historically low," we mean that these regions have been characterized in cultural artifacts such as news accounts and literature as being either very supportive or unsupportive for gender and sexual diversity. For example, the San Francisco Bay Area has long been framed as a safe gathering place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ)+ people (e.g., Nicoletta, 2017), while the rural, politically conservative Central Valley has been reported as a place in which discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is common (e.g., Nagourney, 2013).
3. To randomly select the 10 counties, we wrote the name of every county in the two larger regions on pieces of paper. We then placed all pieces in a hat and conducted two drawings from the hat (one drawing per region), drawing five pieces for each.

References

Abreu, R. L., & Kenny, M. C. (2018). Cyberbullying and LGBTQ youth: A systematic literature review and recommendations for prevention and intervention. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, *11*(1), 81–97.

Barker, M., & Iantaffi, A. (2019). *Life isn't binary: On being both, beyond, and in-between*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Barker, M., & Scheele, J. (2016). *Queer: A graphic history*. Icon.

Barsigian, L. L., Hammack, P. L., Morrow, Q. J., Wilson, B. D. M., & Russell, S. T. (2020). Narratives of gender, sexuality, and community in three generations of genderqueer sexual minorities. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *7*(3), 276–292.

Belous, C. K., & Bauman, M. L. (2017). What's in a name? Exploring pansexuality online. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*, 58–72.

Bornstein, K. (1995). *Gender outlaw: On men, women, and the rest of us*. Vintage.

Bosse, J. D., & Chiodo, L. (2016). It is complicated: Gender and sexual orientation identity in LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, *25*, 3665–3675.

Bowleg, L. (2013). "Once you've blended the cake, you can't take the parts back to the main ingredients": Black gay men's descriptions and experiences of intersectionality. *Sex Roles*, *68*, 754–767.

Callis, A. S. (2014). Bisexual, pansexual, queer: Non-binary identities and the sexual borderlands. *Sexualities*, *17*, 63–80.

Catalano, D. C. J. (2015). "Trans enough?" The pressures trans men negotiate in higher education. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *2*(3), 411–430.

Clark, B. A., Veale, J. F., Townsend, M., Frohard-Dourlent, H., & Saewyc, E. (2018). Non-binary youth: Access to gender-affirming primary health care. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, *19*(2), 158–169.

Cohler, B. J., & Hammack, P. L. (2007). The psychological world of the gay teenager: Social change, narrative, and "normality." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *36*, 47–59.

Cole, E. R. (2009). Intersectionality and research in psychology. *American Psychologist*, *64*(3), 170–180.

Coleman-Fountain, E. (2014). Lesbian and gay youth and the question of labels. *Sexualities*, *17*(7), 802–817.

Corvino, J., & Gallagher, M. (2012). *Debating same-sex marriage*. Oxford University Press.

Coston, B. M., & Kimmel, M. (2012). Seeing privilege where it isn't: Marginalized masculinities and the intersectionality of privilege. *Journal of Social Issues*, *68*(1), 97–111.

Craig, S. L., & McInroy, L. (2014). You can form a part of yourself online: The influence of new media on identity development and coming out for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, *18*(1), 95–109.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE.

DeVito, M. A., Walker, A. M., & Birnholtz, J. (2018). "Too gay for Facebook": Presenting LGBTQ+ identity throughout the personal social media ecosystem. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *2*, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1145/3274313

Diamond, L. M. (2003). What does sexual orientation orient? A biobehavioral model distinguishing romantic love and sexual desire. *Psychological Review*, *110*(1), 173–192.

Diamond, L. M. (2004). Emerging perspectives on distinctions between romantic love and sexual desire. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *13*(3), 116–119.

Diefendorf, S., & Bridges, T. (2020). On the enduring relationship between masculinity and homophobia. *Sexualities*, *23*(7), 1264–1284. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460719876843

Duguay, S. (2016). "He has a way gayer Facebook than I do": Investigating sexual identity disclosure and context collapse on a social networking site. *New Media & Society*, *18*(6), 891–907.

Eisenberg, M., Gower, A., Brown, C., Wood, B., & Porta, C. (2017). "They want to put a label on it": Patterns and interpretations of sexual orientation and gender identity labels among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *60*, S27–S28.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Fine, M., Torre, M. E., Frost, D. M., & Cabana, A. (2018). Queer solidarities: New activisms erupting at the intersection of structural precarity and radical misrecognition. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *6*, 608–630.

Fine, M., Torre, M. E., Frost, D. M., Cabana, A., & Avory, S. (2018). Refusing to check the box: Participatory inqueery at the radical rim. In K. Gallagher (Ed.), *The methodological dilemma revisited: Creative, critical, and collaborative approaches to qualitative research for a new era* (pp. 11–31). Routledge.

Fish, J. N., & Pasley, K. (2015). Sexual (minority) trajectories, mental health, and alcohol use: A longitudinal study of youth as they transition to adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *44*(8), 1508–1527.

Flanders, C. E., Lebreton, M. E., Robinson, M., Bian, J., & Caravaca-Morera, J. A. (2017). Defining bisexuality: Young bisexual and pansexual people's voices. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*, 39–57.

Galupo, M. P., Pulice-Farrow, L., Clements, Z. A., & Morris, E. R. (2019). "I love you as both and I love you as neither": Romantic partners' affirmations of nonbinary transgender individuals. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, *20*, 315–327.

Galupo, M. P., Ramirez, J. L., & Pulice-Farrow, L. (2017). "Regardless of their gender": Descriptions of sexual identity among bisexual, pansexual, and queer identified individuals. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(1), 108–124.

Gender Identity in U.S. Surveillance Group. (2014). *Best practices for asking questions to identify transgender and other gender minority respondents on population-based surveys*. Williams Institute, University of California, Los Angeles. http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/geniuss-report-sep-2014.pdf

Gold, R. L. (1997). The ethnographic method in sociology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *3*(4), 388–402.

Goldberg, S. K., Rothblum, E. D., Russell, S. T., & Meyer, I. H. (2020). Exploring the Q in LGBTQ: Demographic characteristics and sexuality of queer people in a U.S. representative sample of sexual minorities. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *7*(1), 101–112.

Gonzalez, M. A. (2007). Latinos on DA down low: The limitations of sexual identity in public health. *Latino Studies*, *5*(1), 25–52.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation variability. *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59–82.

Haimson, O. L., Brubaker, J. R., Dombrowski, L., & Hayes, G. R. (2015). Disclosure, stress, and support during gender transition on Facebook. In *Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing* (pp. 1176–1190). https://doi.org/10.1145/2675133.2675152

Hammack, P. L., & Cohler, B. J. (2009). Narrative engagement and sexual identity: An interdisciplinary approach to the study of sexual lives. In P. L. Hammack & B. J. Cohler (Eds.), *The story of sexual identity: Narrative perspectives on the gay and lesbian life course* (pp. 3–22). Oxford University Press.

Hammack, P. L., Frost, D. M., & Hughes, S. D. (2019). Queer intimacies: A new paradigm for the study of relationship diversity. *Journal of Sex Research*, *56*, 556–592.

Hammack, P. L., Frost, D. M., Meyer, I. H., & Pletta, D. R. (2018). Gay men's health and identity: Social change and the life course. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *47*, 59–74.

Hammack, P. L., Thompson, E. M., & Pilecki, A. (2009). Configurations of identity among sexual minority youth: Context, desire, and narrative. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *38*, 867–883.

Hammack, P. L., & Toolis, E. (2015). Identity, politics, and the cultural psychology of adolescence. In L. Jensen (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of human development and culture: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 396–409). Oxford University Press.

Hammack, P. L., & Windell, E. P. (2011). Psychology and the politics of same-sex desire in the United States: An analysis of three cases. *History of Psychology*, *14*(3), 220–248.

Hatzenbuehler, M. L. (2011). The social environment and suicide attempts in lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Pediatrics*, *127*(5), 896–903.

Hegarty, P., Ansara, Y. G., & Barker, M. (2018). Nonbinary gender identities. In N. K. Dess, J. Marecek, & L. C. Bell (Eds.), *Gender, sex, and sexualities: Psychological perspectives* (pp. 53–76). Oxford University Press.

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *15*(9), 1277–1288.

Hughto, J. M. W., Reisner, S. L., & Pachankis, J. E. (2015). Transgender stigma and health: A critical review of stigma determinants, mechanisms, and interventions. *Social Science & Medicine*, *147*, 222–231.

Hulko, W., & Hovanes, J. (2018). Intersectionality in the lives of LGBTQ youth: Identifying as LGBTQ and finding community in small cities and rural towns. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *65*(4), 427–455.

Hur, J. L., & Gupta, M. (2013). Growing up in the web of social networking: Adolescent development and social media. *Adolescent Psychiatry*, *3*(3), 233–244.

Hyde, J. S., Bigler, R. S., Joel, D., Tate, C. C., & van Anders, S. M. (2019). The future of sex and gender in psychology: Five challenges to the gender binary. *American Psychologist*, *74*(2), 171–193.

Johnson, J. C. (1990). *Selecting ethnographic informants*. SAGE.

Krueger, E. A., Fish, J. N., Hammack, P. L., Lightfoot, M., Bishop, M. D., & Russell, S. T. (2020). Comparing national probability and community-based samples of

sexual minority adults: Implications and recommendations for sampling and measurement. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *49*, 1463–1475.

Lapointe, A. A. (2017). "It's not pans, it's people": Student and teacher perspectives on bisexuality and pansexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *17*(1), 88–107.

Levitt, H. M., Bamberg, M., Creswell, J. W., Frost, D., Josselson, R., & Suárez-Orozco, C. (2018). Journal article reporting standards for qualitative primary, qualitative meta-analytic, and mixed methods research in psychology: The APA Publications and Communications Board Task Force Report. *American Psychologist*, *73*(1), 26–46.

Levitt, H. M., & Ippolito, M. R. (2014a). Being transgender: Navigating minority stressors and developing authentic self-presentation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *38*(1), 46–64.

Levitt, H. M., & Ippolito, M. R. (2014b). Being transgender: The experience of transgender identity development. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *61*(12), 1727–1758.

Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative Psychology*, *4*(1), 2–22.

Madill, A., Jordan, A., & Shirley, C. (2000). Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: Realist, contextualist, and radical constructionist epistemologies. *British Journal of Psychology*, *91*, 1–20.

Manago, A., Guan, S. A., & Greenfield, P. (2015). New media, social change, and human development from adolescence through the transition to adulthood. In L. A. Jensen (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of human development and culture: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 519–534). Oxford University Press.

Mardell, A. (2016). *The ABC's of LGBT+*. Mango Media.

McLemore, K. A. (2015). Experiences with misgendering: Identity misclassification of transgender spectrum individuals. *Self and Identity*, *14*(1), 51–74.

McLemore, K. A. (2018). A minority stress perspective on transgender individuals' experiences with misgendering. *Stigma and Health*, *3*(1), 53–64.

Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*(5), 674–697.

Meyer, I. H., & Wilson, P. A. (2009). Sampling lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *56*(1), 23–31.

Michikyan, M., & Suárez-Orozco, C. (2016). Adolescent media and social media use: Implications for development. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *31*(4), 411–414.

Middaugh, E., Clark, L. S., & Ballard, P. J. (2017). Digital media, participatory politics, and positive youth development. *Pediatrics*, *140*(Suppl. 2), S127–S131.

Miller, S. D., Taylor, V., & Rupp, L. J. (2016). Social movements and the construction of queer identity. In J. E. Stets & R. T. Serpe (Eds.), *New directions in identity theory and research* (pp. 443–470). Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, R. C., Davis, K. S., & Galupo, M. P. (2015). Comparing perceived experiences of prejudice among self-identified plurisexual individuals. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *6*(3), 245–257.

Morandini, J. S., Blaszcynski, A., & Dar-Nimrod, I. (2017). Who adopts queer and pansexual sexual identities? *Journal of Sex Research*, *54*, 911–922.

Mustanski, B. (2011). Ethical and regulatory issues with conducting sexuality research with LGBT adolescents: A call to action for a scientifically informed approach. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *40*(4), 673–686.

Nadal, K. L., Davidoff, K. C., Davis, L. S., & Wong, Y. (2014). Emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions to microaggressions: Transgender perspectives. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *1*(1), 72–81.

Nagourney, A. (2013, September 27). Unlikely debate on gay rights in California town. *The New York Times*. https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:59FJ-YRH1-DXY4-X1GM-00000-00&context=1516831

Nestle, J., Howell, C., & Wilchins, R. (Eds.). (2002). *GenderQueer: Voices from beyond the sexual binary*. Alyson Books.

Nicoletta, D. (2017). *LGBT San Francisco: The Daniel Nicoletta photographs*. Reel Art Press.

Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 U.S. (2015). https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf

Oswald, R. F., Cuthbertson, C., Lazarevic, V., & Goldberg, A. E. (2010). New developments in the field: Measuring community climate. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, *6*(2), 214–228.

Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude, you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school*. University of California Press.

Porta, C. M., Gower, A. L., Mehus, C. J., Yu, X., Saewyc, E. M., & Eisenberg, M. (2017). "Kicked out": LGBTQ youths' bathroom experiences and preferences. *Journal of Adolescence*, *56*, 107–112.

Reisner, S. L., Greytak, E. A., Parsons, J. T., & Ybarra, M. L. (2015). Gender minority social stress in adolescence: Disparities in adolescent bullying and substance use by gender identity. *Journal of Sex Research*, *52*(3), 243–256.

Richards, C., Bouman, W. P., Seal, L., Barker, M. J., Nieder, T. O., & T'Sjoen, G. (2016). Non-binary or genderqueer genders. *International Review of Psychiatry*, *28*(1), 95–102.

Risman, B. J. (2018). *Where the millennials will take us: A new generation wrestles with the gender structure*. Oxford University Press.

Robertson, M. (2019). *Growing up queer: Kids and the remaking of LGBTQ identity*. New York University Press.

Russell, S. T. (2016). Social justice, research, and adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *26*(1), 4–15.

Russell, S. T., Clarke, T. J., & Clary, J. (2009). Are teens "post-gay"? Contemporary adolescents' sexual identity labels. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *38*(7), 884–890.

Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, *12*, 465–487.

Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2019). Sexual minority youth, social change, and health: A developmental collision. *Research in Human Development*, *16*(1), 5–20.

Santos, C. E., & Toomey, R. B. (2018). Integrating an intersectionality lens in theory and research in developmental science. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, *161*, 7–15.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (2005). *The new gay teenager*. Harvard University Press.

Sexual Minority Assessment Research Team. (2009). *Best practices for asking questions about sexual orientation on surveys*. Williams Institute, University of California, Los Angeles. http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/SMART-FINAL-Nov-2009.pdf

Singh, A. A. (2013). Transgender youth of color and resilience: Negotiating oppression and finding support. *Sex Roles*, *68*, 690–702.

Skaistis, S. M., Cook, J. M., Nair, D., & Borden, S. (2018). A content analysis of intake paperwork: An exploration of how clinicians ask about gender, sex, and sexual/affectual orientation. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *12*(2), 87–100.

Toft, A., Franklin, A., & Langley, E. (2020). "You're not sure that you are gay yet": The perpetuation of the "phase" in the lives of young disabled LGBT+ people. *Sexualities*, *23*(4), 516–529.

van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford University Press.

Van Houdenhove, E., Gijs, L., T'Sjoen, G., & Enzlin, P. (2015). Asexuality: A multidimensional approach. *Journal of Sex Research*, *52*(6), 669–678.

Vincent, B., & Manzano, A. (2017). History and cultural diversity. In C. Richards, W. P. Bouman, & M. Barker (Eds.), *Genderqueer and non-binary genders* (pp. 11–30). Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, A. M., & DeVito, M. A. (2020, April). "'More gay' fits in better": Intracommunity power dynamics and harms in online LGBTQ+ spaces. In *Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376497

Walton, M. T., Lykins, A. D., & Bhullar, N. (2016). Beyond heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexuality: A diversity in sexual identity expression. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *45*(7), 1591–1597.

Wang, V., & Edwards, S. (2016). Strangers are friends I haven't met yet: A positive approach to young people's use of social media. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *19*(9), 1204–1219.

Watson, R. J., Wheldon, C. W., & Puhl, R. M. (2019). Evidence of diverse identities in a large national sample of sexual and gender minority adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *30*(Suppl. 2), 431–442.

Wernick, L. J., Kulick, A., & Chin, M. (2017). Gender identity disparities in bathroom safety and wellbeing among high school students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *46*(5), 917–930.

White, A. E., Moeller, J., Ivcevic, Z., & Brackett, M. A. (2018). Gender identity and sexual identity labels used by U.S. high school students: A co-occurrence network analysis. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *5*(2), 243–252.

Wirtz, A. L., Poteat, T. C., Malik, M., & Glass, N. (2020). Gender-based violence against transgender people in the United States: A call for research and programming. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *21*(2), 227–241. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018757749

Woolley, S. W. (2017). Contesting silence, claiming space: Gender and sexuality in the neo-liberal public high school. *Gender and Education*, *29*(1), 84–99.

Yon-Leau, C., & Muñoz-Laboy, M. (2010). "I don't like to say that I'm anything": Sexuality politics and cultural critique among sexual-minority Latino youth. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, *7*(2), 105–117.

Yost, M. R., & Thomas, G. D. (2012). Gender and binegativity: Men's and women's attitudes toward male and female bisexuals. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *41*(3), 691–702.

Author Biographies

Phillip L. Hammack is professor of psychology and director of the Sexual and Gender Diversity Laboratory at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His research interests include the study of social change and the experience of sexual and gender diversity across the life course.

Sam D. Hughes is a graduate student in social psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He researches the psychology of sexual minority people, including kinky and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) people. His work focuses on the relationship among sexual identity, stigma, institutions, and intersectionality.

Julianne M. Atwood is a field researcher at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is interested in systemic oppression, minority stress, the intersection of race and class, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) identities. Her work aims to increase resources and community support for queer youth, especially for those experiencing houselessness or food insecurity.

Elliot M. Cohen is a field researcher at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He is interested in the connection between social structures and intrapsychic conflict. His work focuses on the relationship between community organization and mental health, political message framing, and the autonomic nervous system's connection to stress and resilience.

Richard C. Clark is a doctoral student in the Critical Social Personality Psychology Program at the Graduate Center, The City University of New York. Richard is a researcher in social psychology that specializes in critical discourse analysis. Currently, they are working on a project looking at how LGBTQ youth are engaging with Whiteness and White privilege.