

RELATIONAL AMBIGUITY IN SAME- GENDER VERSUS DIFFERENT-GENDER YOUNG ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

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CONTEMPORARY RELATIONSHIP LANDSCAPE

- The way young adults enter committed relationships has changed since the cultural shift of “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000; Shulman & Conolly, 2013)
- Some commitment markers have lost clear connection to commitment as a result of emerging adulthood (Garcia et. al, 2005; Knobloch & Carter-Theune, 2004)
- Young adults are facing more relational ambiguity (umbrella term for uncertainty in a relationship)
 - Own-Ambivalence
 - Partner Ambiguity
 - Behavioral Uncertainty

CONCERNS ABOUT RELATIONAL AMBIGUITY

- Relational ambiguity has been linked to increase cortisol activity in response to stress, possible negative emotional well-being inducing anxiety and alcohol use (Priem & Solomon, 2011), and depressive symptoms (Knobloch et. al, 2010)

HIGHER RELATIONAL AMBIGUITY IN SEXUAL MINORITIES?

- Scholars theorize: Minority stressors + Everchanging sociopolitical climate = higher relational ambiguity for sexual minorities (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019)
 - Minority Stressors (Meyer, 1995)
 - Internalized homophobia (Rotosky, Riggle, & Hatton, 2007; Mohr & Dahly, 2008), stigma (Lannutti, 2008; Frost, 2011), and experiences of discrimination and violence
 - Everchanging sociopolitical climate
 - Shifting societal acceptance (GLAAD, 2019)
- Sexual minorities also have less commitment markers for stigma related reasons

GENDER MAY INFLUENCE COUPLE TYPE'S EFFECT ON RELATIONAL AMBIGUITY

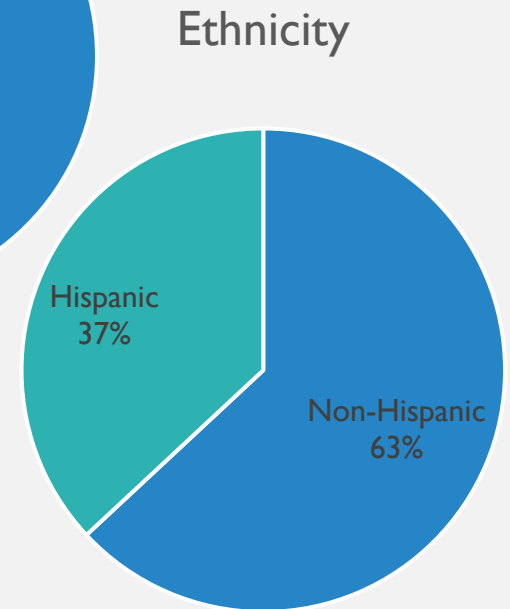
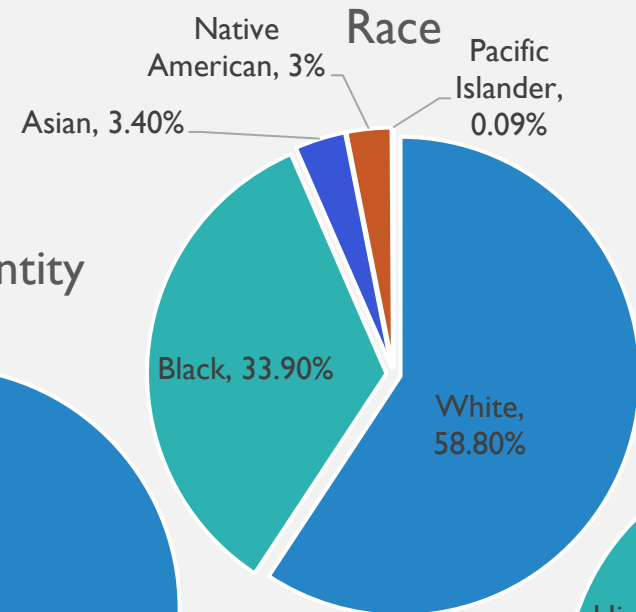
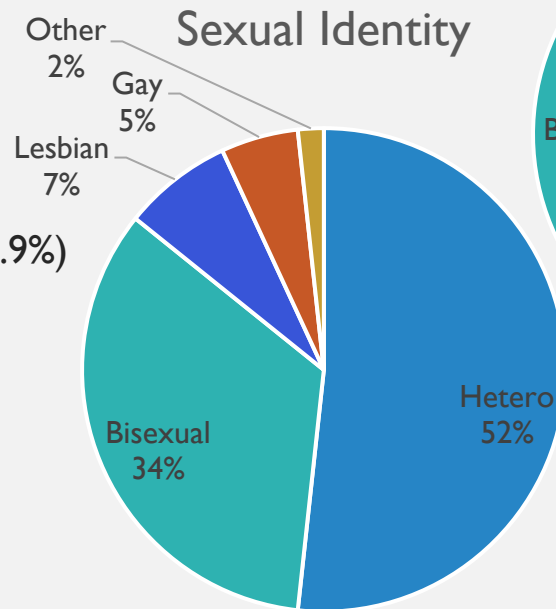
- Effect of gay culture on relational ambiguity may differ between men and women
 - Men report nonconformity to cultural norms and encouraged ambiguous relationships (Tunnell & Greenan, 2004)
 - Women report rapid relationship development and disapproval of casual sex (Rose & Zand, 2008; Gordon, 2006)

STUDY AIMS

- Study Aim #1
 - Determine if relational ambiguity is higher in same-gender young adult relationships than different-gender young adult relationships
- Study Aim #2
 - Examine interaction effect of gender and couple type on relational ambiguity
 - Does the effect of couple type on relational ambiguity vary by gender?

PARTICIPANTS

- N = 233
- Gender Identity
 - Male, n = 122 (52.4%)
 - Female, n = 111 (47.6%)
- Couple Type
 - Different-Gender, n = 149 (63.9%)
 - Same-Gender, n = 84 (36.1%)
- Mean Age = 24.0 (SD = 1.47)
 - Range = 18 – 25



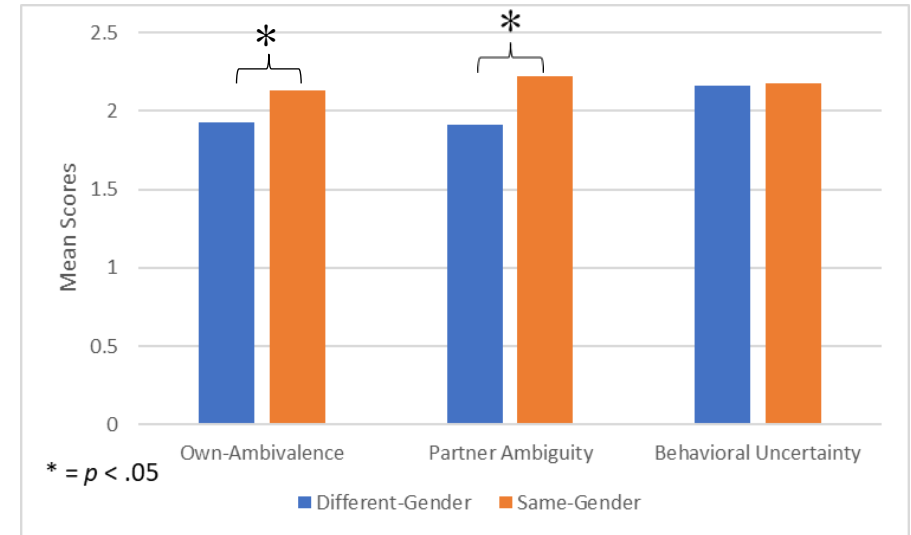
MEASURES

- Independent Variables
 - Gender (Male or Female) & Couple Type (Same-Gender & Different-Gender)
- Dependent Variables
 - Relational Ambiguity Scale (James-Kangal & Whitton, 2020) $\alpha = .94$, 24 item Likert Scale (1 = completely certain, 6 = completely uncertain)
 - Own-Ambivalence $\alpha = .88$, 8 item Likert Scale
 - Partner Ambiguity $\alpha = .89$, 8 item Likert Scale
 - Behavioral Uncertainty $\alpha = .84$, 8 item Likert Scale
- Control Variables
 - Religiosity included as covariate in ANCOVA since it differed by couple type $t(162.33) = -3.02, p = .002$
 - 6-point Likert Scale (1 = not at all religious, 6 = extremely religious)

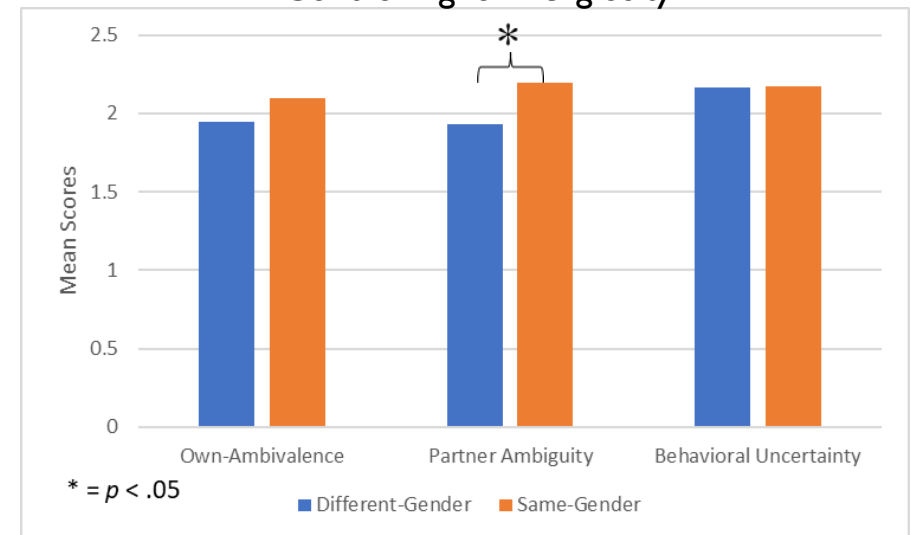
STUDY AIM #1 RESULTS

- Study Aim #1
 - Determine if relational ambiguity is higher in same-gender young adult relationships than different-gender young adult relationships
- This study hypothesis was partially supported
 - Participants in same-gender relationships reported higher own-ambivalence $F(1, 229) = 5.276, p = .023$ and partner ambiguity $F(1, 229) = 10.341, p = .001$ without controlling for religiosity
 - When controlling for religiosity, only partner ambiguity ($F(1, 228) = 7.732, p = .006$) differed by couple type

Means of Relational Ambiguity by Couple Type



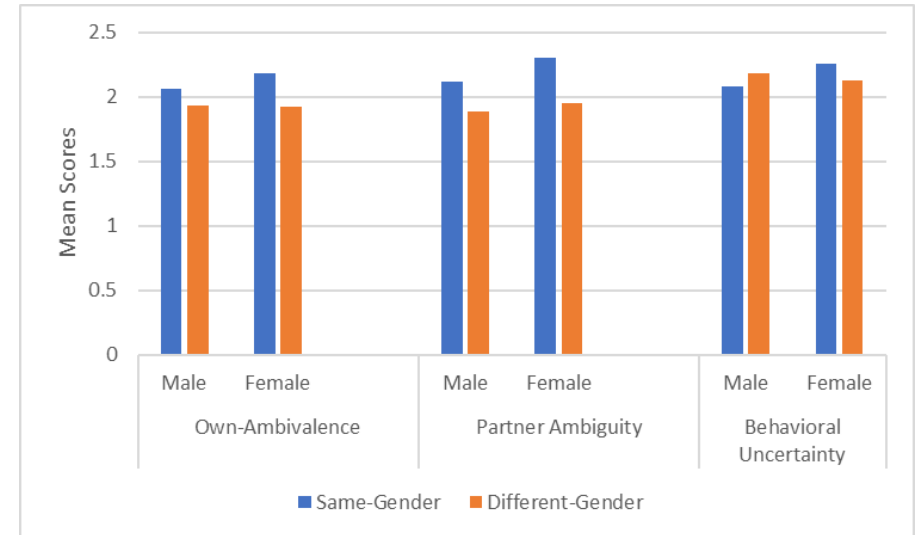
Means of Relational Ambiguity by Couple Type
Controlling for Religiosity



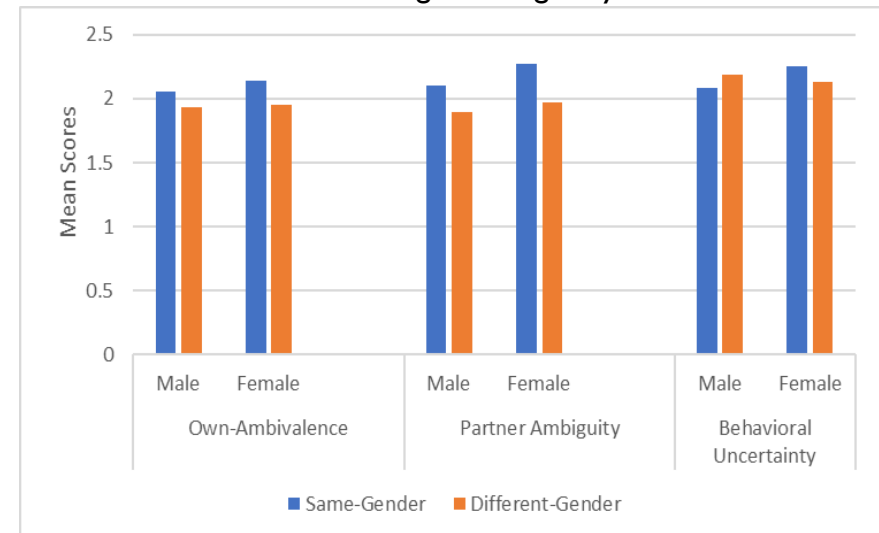
STUDY AIM #2 RESULTS

- Study Aim #2
 - Does the effect of couple type on relational ambiguity vary by gender?
- This study hypothesis was not supported across any relational ambiguity subscales

Means of Relational Ambiguity by Couplettype*Gender



Means of Relational Ambiguity by Couplettype*Gender
Controlling for Religiosity



DISCUSSION: WHAT WE FOUND

- Sexual minorities face higher own-ambivalence and partner ambiguity than their heterosexual counterparts
 - Higher own-ambivalence for sexual minorities was accounted for by their lower religiosity
- Findings may reflect the lack of socially prescribed relationship norms (Greene et. al, 2014) and education on how a “define-the-relationship” talk may differ for same-gender couples
- LGBTQ+ school-based sexual education programs and other relationship materials should be created to provide healthy relationship scripts or communication skills to sexual minority youth

DISCUSSION: WHAT WE DID NOT FIND

- No support for sexual minorities facing higher behavioral uncertainty
 - This could be truly the case, or it could reflect a limitation in our study
- No support for interaction effect of gender and couple type across any relational ambiguity subscales
 - This goes against previous research which suggests same-gender female relationships are prone to establish committed relationships (Rose & Zand, 2008; Gordon, 2006) while same-gender male relationships are impartial to lowering relational ambiguity (Tunnell & Greenan, 2004)

LIMITATIONS

- Sexual minority participants could refrain from engaging in commitment markers altogether
- Participants had higher than anticipated relationship lengths
- Our sample is WEIRD: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (Henrich et. al, 2010)
- Limited scope for undergraduate thesis

CONCLUSION

- Strengthen LGBTQ+ content in sex-education programs and relationship materials
- Encourage clinical psychologists to consider added stress of partner ambiguity and own-ambivalence when treating LGBTQ+ clients
- Look closer at stigma's effects on commitment markers

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