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Sexual fluidity and the diversity of sexual orientation

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Who are you today? Who were you a decade ago? For many of us, shifts in our lives — relationships, jobs, friendships, where we live, what we believe — are the only constant. Yet it's a common misconception that sexual orientation develops at an early age and then remains stable throughout one's life.

Rather, changes in sexual orientation are a common thread in many people's lives. People may experience changes in who they are attracted to, who they have sex with, and which labels they use to describe their sexual orientation. Such changes in sexual orientation are called sexual fluidity.

Attraction, identity, and behavior

While anyone can experience changes in their sexual orientation, sexually fluidity is [more common in younger people](#) and among people who are LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and additional identities).

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Sexual fluidity might include

changes in attractions: Someone may be attracted to one gender at one time point and attracted to a different gender or more than one gender at another time point.

changes in identity labels: Someone may identify as lesbian at one time point and as bisexual at another time point.

changes in sexual behavior: Someone may have a sexual partner at one time point who is a cisgender woman and then have another sexual partner at a different time point who is nonbinary. (A cisgender woman is a person assigned as a female at birth and who identifies as a woman. Someone who is nonbinary was assigned either female or male at birth and identifies as neither a woman nor a man.)

Sexual fluidity happens for many [different reasons](#). For some people, sexual fluidity occurs when they meet people and discover new attractions. For other people, sexual fluidity may occur when they learn a new identity label that better fits their experience.

Misconceptions and stigma about sexual fluidity

Many people may have questions and biases about sexual fluidity. Let's explore a few.

Are people who identify as bisexual sexually fluid? Some are and others are not. Sexual fluidity is distinct from bisexuality. Sexual fluidity may be experienced by people with any sexual orientation identity, including people who identify as bisexual, lesbian, gay, or heterosexual.

Stigma directed at sexual fluidity (and similar stigma surrounding [bisexuality](#)) may stem from misconceptions about changes in sexual orientation. Consciously or unconsciously, some people may believe that anyone who experiences changes in their sexual orientation is promiscuous or incapable of being monogamous. However, such beliefs are untrue.

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Misconceptions and stigma can hurt. [Growing evidence](#) links different forms of stigma experienced by people who are sexually fluid with more depression and poor mental health. Yet it's not the change in sexual orientation that raises this risk, nor is it automatic, genetic, or otherwise predestined. The higher risk of mental health concerns among people who experience sexual fluidity is more likely to be related to [minority stress](#) – that is, because sexual fluidity is stigmatized, people who experience that stigma may also experience stress that negatively affects their mental health.

Changing misconceptions and stigma about sexual fluidity

We can help normalize sexual fluidity in several ways. First, we can introduce the possibility of changes in sexual orientation as part of sex education in schools and in the doctor's office. Second, we can work toward responding to sexual fluidity with openness and curiosity rather than making assumptions and viewing these changes as negative. Third, we can move beyond preconceived notions of sexual orientation as stable to expecting change in sexual orientation for some people.

As people experience the world and learn more about themselves, their views, beliefs, and feelings may change. Sexual fluidity reflects one possible change over time, a change that fits into the greater diversity of sexuality. We can all hold space for this diversity by letting go of misconceptions about the stability of sexual orientation over a lifespan and staying open instead to the possibility of change.

About the Author



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