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Predicting adolescent sexual behavior by sexual identity and sexual attraction

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Disclosure

The authors have no conflicts to declare.

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Study motivation

The term “men who have sex with men” was brought into the research vernacular to acknowledge that sexual behavior does not necessarily align with one’s sexual orientation identity. Over time however, behavior (MSM) and sexual orientation identity (gay) have become conflated.

Little is known about the extent to which this applies to adolescents.

Understanding how sexual attraction, behavior, and sexual orientation relate to each other in adolescence is critical to ensure that appropriate tailoring and targeting of healthy sexuality programs is being done.

Teen Health and Technology survey methodology

- ▶ Analytical sample was restricted to 5,100 cisgender youth

Analytical sample characteristics (n=5,100 cisgender youth)

	Male non-LGB (n=1497)	Female non-LGB (n=1861)	Male GB (n=763)	Female LG (n=979)
Age (M:SE)	15.4 (0.05)	15.7 (0.05)	16.2 (0.1)	15.8 (0.1)
White race	73%	66%	60%	65%
Hispanic ethnicity	17%	19%	30%	17%
Lower than average household income	27%	27%	31%	32%
Rural / small town	40%	44%	29%	37%

Measures: Sexual activity

- ▶ “Have you ever had oral sex (we mean stimulating the vagina or penis with the mouth or tongue) when you wanted to?”
- ▶ “Have you ever had sex with another person that involved a finger or sex toy going into the vagina or anus when you wanted to?”
- ▶ “Have you ever, when you wanted to, had sex where a penis went into a vagina?”
- ▶ “Have you ever, when you wanted to had sex where someone’s penis went into your anus?” and “Have you ever, when you wanted to had sex where your penis went into someone’s anus?”

Measures: Sexual orientation identity

- ▶ “Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. How would you describe your sexuality or sexual orientation? Please select all that apply.”
- ▶ Response options included:
 - ▶ Gay,
 - ▶ Lesbian,
 - ▶ Bisexual,
 - ▶ Straight/heterosexual,
 - ▶ Questioning,
 - ▶ Queer,
 - ▶ Other, or
 - ▶ Not Sure

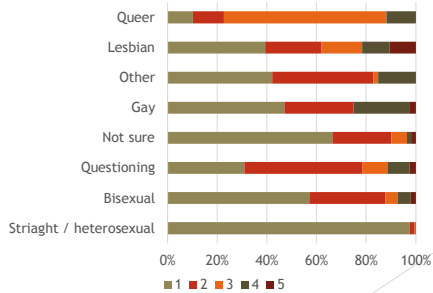
Measures: Same sex attraction

- ▶ Have you ever had a romantic attraction to a female?
- ▶ Have you ever had a romantic attraction to a male?

Population-level statistics

Sexual orientation identity	
Straight / heterosexual:	93.8%
Bisexual:	3.2%
Questioning:	2.6%
Not sure:	1.6%
Gay:	1.3%
Other:	1.1%
Lesbian:	0.6%
Queer:	0.3%
Same sex attraction	
Male - female attraction:	86.1%
Female - female attraction:	5.2%
Male - male attraction:	2.3%
No attraction:	12.7%
Same sex behavior (among those who have had oral, penetrative, anal, vaginal sex)	
Male - female sexual behavior	94.0%
Male - male sexual behavior	4.05%
Female - female sexual behavior	4.2%

Overlap in sexual orientation identity



Overlap in sexual orientation identity and sexual attraction

	Females			Males		
	Same sex attracted	Opposite sex attracted	Neither attraction	Same sex attracted	Opposite sex attracted	Neither attraction
Straight / heterosexual	5%	86%	13%	2%	87%	13%
Gay	85%	81%	1%	99%	34%	0%
Lesbian	98%	61%	0%	-	-	-
Bisexual	92%	96%	3%	91%	92%	0%
Queer	100%	83%	0%	97%	40%	3%
Questioning	96%	94%	3%	97%	74%	0%
Not sure	97%	93%	3%	94%	91%	0%
Other	91%	96%	0%	98%	91%	0%

Overlap in sexual orientation identity and sexual behavior among sexually active youth

	Females		Males	
	Same sex partner	Opposite sex partner	Same sex partner	Opposite sex partner
Straight / heterosexual	2%	98%	4%	97%
Gay	65%	36%	99%	3%
Lesbian	86%	30%	-	-
Bisexual	34%	85%	78%	32%
Queer	54%	51%	99%	6%
Questioning	52%	63%	93%	18%
Not sure	43%	59%	100%	0%
Other	68%	70%	99%	4%

Summary

- ▶ 90.6% of youth self-identify as heterosexual exclusively; 9.4% identify with other sexual orientation identities
- ▶ For the majority of youth, sexual identity is consistent with attraction. However, 5% of heterosexual females and 2% of heterosexual males report some attraction to the same gender.
- ▶ Similar findings were noted for sexual activity: 2% of heterosexual females and 4% of heterosexual males reported having vaginal or anal sex with someone of the same gender.
- ▶ Among gay and lesbian adolescents, lesbian youth were more likely than gay youth (30-36% vs 3%) to reporting having recent sexual experience with a partner of the opposite gender.
- ▶ Similar gender differences are noted for bisexual youth: more females (85%) reported having sex with a partner of the opposite gender compared to males (32%)

Limitations

- ▶ As with all self-report measures, some youth respondents may not have accurately disclosed sensitive topics.
- ▶ The representativeness of the sample is based upon the weighting. Findings should be replicated.
- ▶ Sexual identity is fluid in adolescence. It is possible that sexual behavior, which reflected the two most recent partners, may reflect some youth who went through an identity transition (e.g., first identified as bisexual and subsequently as lesbian).

Conclusions

- ▶ Same sex attraction is common among all youth, and should not be used as a proxy for either sexual orientation identity nor sexual behavior
- ▶ Conflation of sexual orientation identity (e.g., gay) and sexual behavior (e.g., having sex with same sex exclusively) is not supported by the data. This appears to be particularly true for non-heterosexual females, who are reporting sexual encounters with males at high rates.