

Study finds slight shift in attitudes toward bisexuals, from negative to neutral

October 31 2016

While positive attitudes toward gay men and lesbians have increased over recent decades, a new study led by researchers at IU's Center for Sexual Health Promotion shows attitudes toward bisexual men and women are relatively neutral, if not ambivalent.

The study, led by Brian Dodge, associate professor in the Department of Applied Health Science and associate director of the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University's School of Public Health-Bloomington, was recently published in *PLOS ONE*, an open-access, peer-reviewed online journal. Dodge and his colleagues are presenting the data today at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association in Denver, Colorado.

The study is only the second to explore attitudes toward [bisexual men](#) and [women](#)—those with the capacity for physical, romantic and/or sexual attraction to more than one sex or gender—in a nationally representative sample. It is also the first to do so with a sample of gay, lesbian and other-identified individuals (pansexual, queer and other identity labels), in addition to those who identify as heterosexuals. The nationally representative sample was taken from the Center for Sexual Health Promotion's 2015 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, one wave of data from an ongoing population-based survey of adults and adolescents in the U.S.

"While recent data demonstrates dramatic shifts in attitude (from negative to positive) toward homosexuality, gay/lesbian individuals and

same-sex marriage in the U.S., most of these surveys do not ask about attitudes toward bisexuality or [bisexual individuals](#)," Dodge said. "And many rely on convenience sampling strategies that are not representative of the general population of the U.S."

The study looked at five negative connotations, found in previous studies, associated with bisexual men and women, including the idea that they are confused or in transition regarding their sexual orientation, that they are hypersexual and that they are vectors of sexually transmitted diseases.

The research showed that a majority of male and female respondents, more than one-third, were most likely to "neither agree nor disagree" with the attitudinal statements. In regard to bisexual men and women having the capability to be faithful in a relationship, nearly 40 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Those who identified as "other" had the most positive attitudes toward bisexuality, followed by gay/lesbian respondents and then heterosexuals.

Age played a factor in the results, with participants under the age of 25 indicating more positive attitudes toward bisexual men and women. Income and education also played a role: Higher-income participants were more likely to report more positive attitudes toward bisexual men and women, in addition to participants with higher levels of education.

Overall, attitudes toward [bisexual women](#) were more positive than attitudes toward bisexual men.

"While our society has seen marked shifts in more positive attitudes toward homosexuality in recent decades, our data suggest that attitudes toward bisexual men and women have shifted only slightly from very negative to neutral," Dodge said. "That nearly one-third of participants

reported moderately to extremely negative attitudes toward bisexual individuals is of great concern given the dramatic [health disparities](#) faced by bisexual men and women in our country, even relative to gay and lesbian individuals."

Bisexual men and women face a disproportionate rate of physical, mental and other health disparities in comparison to monosexuals—those who identify as exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual, Dodge said. Although research has not determined the cause, Dodge said that negative attitudes and stigma associated with bisexuality could play a role.

Data from the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior shows that approximately 2.6 percent of adult men and 3.6 percent of adult women in the U.S. identify as bisexual. For females, that number is more than double the number of women who identify as lesbian, 0.9 percent. When it comes to adolescents, 1.5 percent of male adolescents (age 14 to 17) and 8.4 percent of female adolescents identify as bisexual.

Dodge said he hopes the results emphasize the need for efforts to decrease negative stereotypes and increase acceptance of bisexual individuals as a component of broader initiatives aimed at tolerance of sexual and gender minority individuals.

"After documenting the absence of [positive attitudes](#) toward bisexual men and women in the general U.S. population, we encourage future research, intervention and practice opportunities focused on assessing, understanding and eliminating biphobia—for example, among clinicians and other service providers—and determining how health disparities among bisexual men and women can be alleviated," he said.

More information: Brian Dodge et al, Attitudes toward Bisexual Men and Women among a Nationally Representative Probability Sample of

Adults in the United States, *PLOS ONE* (2016). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0164430](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0164430)

Provided by Indiana University

Citation: Study finds slight shift in attitudes toward bisexuals, from negative to neutral (2016, October 31) retrieved 25 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-10-slight-shift-attitudes-bisexuals-negative.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.