

Do you think you're exclusively straight? How people's perceptions of their sexual orientation may be influenced

August 20 2021



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Scientific research has shown that sexuality exists on a spectrum. But

how certain are people about where they fit on it? A new University of Sydney study suggests that people's reported sexual orientation can change after reading about the nature of sexual orientation.

Published in peer-reviewed journal, Nature's *Scientific Reports*, the study found that a significant number of heterosexual people report being less exclusive in their [sexual orientation](#) as well as more willing to have same-sex experiences after reading one of two 1-page informational articles.

Lead author, Dr. James Morandini, said: "Did we change people's sexual orientation via our interventions? Surely not. I think our study may have changed how people interpreted their underlying sexual feelings. This means two people with identical sexual orientations could describe their sexual orientation quite differently, depending on whether they have been exposed to fluid or continuous ways of understanding sexuality."

[One informational article](#) read by participants suggested that scientific research has found that there are many gradations of sexual [attraction](#) towards men and [women](#), and people can fall anywhere along the continuum, from exclusive attraction to men to exclusive attraction to women. Another informational [article](#) showed that sexual orientation can change overtime, thus can be fluid.

All participants self-identified as "straight" before the study began. Compared to a [control group](#), after reading the first article, participants were 28 percent more likely to identify as non-exclusively heterosexual, and 19 percent indicated they would be more likely to be willing to engage in same-sex sexual activities. Overall, the rate of "non-exclusive heterosexuality" more than quadrupled after this activity. Similar, albeit weaker, effects were found when people read that sexual orientation is better characterized as fluid rather than stable throughout life.

The study's senior author, Associate Professor Ilan Dar-Nimrod from the

School of Psychology, said: "This is not that surprising given that 'non-exclusive heterosexuals' (as opposed to bisexual, gay or lesbian individuals), although being the biggest same-sex attracted group, are not well captured in our society's representations and even vernacular."

He added: "Given the social value that our society attach to these labels, however, such a shift may have far-reaching implications. It also suggests that certain level of same-sex sexual attraction may be much more common than previously estimated."

Methodology

A national Australian sample of 460 individuals (232 women, 228 men) who identified as "straight" prior the study took part in an online panel study.

They were instructed to read an article that suggested that [scientific research](#) found one of the following:

- There are many gradations of sexual attraction towards men and women and people can fall anywhere along the continuum from exclusive attraction to men to exclusive attraction to women.
- Sexual orientation exists in three discrete, non-overlapping categories: gay, bisexual, and straight.
- Sexual orientation can change throughout one's lifetime.
- Sexual orientation is stable once a person identifies which gender they are attracted to.
- Control (no discussion of sexual orientation but instead discussing global warming).

They were then asked to rate their sexual orientation on a 9-point scale from exclusively heterosexual (1) to exclusively homosexual (9) and provide information on how certain they are about their sexual

orientation and how willing they are to engage in same-sex sexual encounters.

More information: James S. Morandini et al, Exposure to continuous or fluid theories of sexual orientation leads some heterosexuals to embrace less-exclusive heterosexual orientations, *Scientific Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-94479-9](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-94479-9)

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: Do you think you're exclusively straight? How people's perceptions of their sexual orientation may be influenced (2021, August 20) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-08-youre-exclusively-straight-people-perceptions.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.