

Shift to gay, lesbian, bisexual identities in early adulthood tied to depressive symptoms

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People whose sexual identities changed toward same-sex attraction in early adulthood reported more symptoms of depression in a nationwide survey than those whose sexual orientations did not change or changed in the opposite direction, according to a new study by a University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) sociologist.

The study, "Sexual Orientation Identity Change and Depressive Symptoms: A Longitudinal Analysis," which appears in the current issue of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people who initially identified as heterosexual or who had not reported same-sex romantic attraction or relationships were more likely to experience [depressive symptoms](#) than others.

This includes heterosexual, bisexual, gay, and lesbian individuals who reported stable sexual identities throughout the survey period, as well as people whose identities changed from gay, lesbian, or bisexual to heterosexual or from gay or lesbian to bisexual.

The findings suggest that a [sexual identity](#) change toward same-sex attraction may continue to be a stressful life event despite American society's increasing acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, said study author Bethany Everett, an assistant professor of sociology at UIC.

"This study highlights the need for social support during periods of sexual identity transition toward same-sex attraction, not just for

adolescents, but also for [young adults](#)," said Everett. "Supporting people during this time-period may be critical for improving their mental health."

Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, also known as Add Health, Everett's study included over 11,200 respondents who were interviewed in both the third (2001-2002) and fourth (2008-2009) waves of the survey about topics including their depressive symptoms. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 26 in wave three and 25 to 33 in wave four.

Everett said future research should continue to investigate the factors that contribute to the link between sexual identity change and [symptoms of depression](#).

"It may be that changes to bisexual, [gay](#), or lesbian identities expose young adults to new sources of LGBT-related discrimination," she said. "Additionally, there is a certain amount of stigma attached to sexual fluidity itself that may impact [mental health](#) during this developmental period."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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