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Does Sexual Orientation Moderate the Association Between Partner Substance Use and One’s Own Substance Use?

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INTRODUCTION
- Partner substance use is related to one’s own substance use (Fleming, White, & Catalano 2010).
- Much of the research in this area has been done in heterosexual samples. Little is known about the association between partner substance use and alcohol consumption as a function of sexual orientation.
- Sexual minorities (lesbian, gay, or bisexual) report higher levels of substance use than those who are not sexual minorities (McCabe, Bostwick, Hughes, West, & Boyd 2010).
- We examined whether the association between partner substance use and alcohol use differs as a function of sexual orientation. We expected that this association would be stronger among sexual minorities compared to heterosexuals.

METHODS
Sample
- Participants came from “Spit for Science,” a university research opportunity for any freshman that would like to participate. Participants were invited to participate in surveys during their freshman year and every spring semester after (N=12,364; Dick et al., 2014).
- We used a subset based on participants who reported to be in a relationship during the spring semester of their freshman year (N=1,633). Approximately, 61.5% are female and 38.5% are male while 86.1% are heterosexual and 13.9% are not heterosexual.
- The study took place at a diverse, urban campus.

Method and Measures
- Alcohol Consumption- how many grams of ethanol did one consume per month. Participants reported on their frequency and quantity of alcohol which was converted to grams of ethanol consumed.
- Sexual Orientation- whether participants self identify themselves as heterosexual or non-heterosexual (participants who identified as homosexual and bisexual were collapsed into one category).
- Partner Substance Use- whether one believed their partner smokes cigarettes, consumes alcohol, and whether they believed their partner has a problem with alcohol. Participants answered on a 1-5 scale, (1 being never and 5 being every day). A sum score was created with higher scores indicating higher partner substance use.

RESULTS
- Results of the Pearson correlation shows that there was a significant, positive association between partner substance use and alcohol consumption for individuals who identify as heterosexual (r = .303, p = .000) and individuals who identify as not heterosexuals (r = .325, p = .000).
- An r-to-z transformation was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between heterosexual and not heterosexual correlation coefficients. There was not a significant difference between these associations of participants who identified as heterosexual and of participants who identified as not heterosexual (r = -.36, p = .7188).

DISCUSSION
- Consistent with prior research and our hypothesis, having a partner with higher substance use is associated with one’s own.
- Inconsistent with our hypothesis, sexual orientation does not moderate the association between partner substance use and alcohol consumption.

LIMITATIONS
- The data is self-reported, therefore, it is unknown whether the results could be different.
- We do not understand the mechanisms of our findings.

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