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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

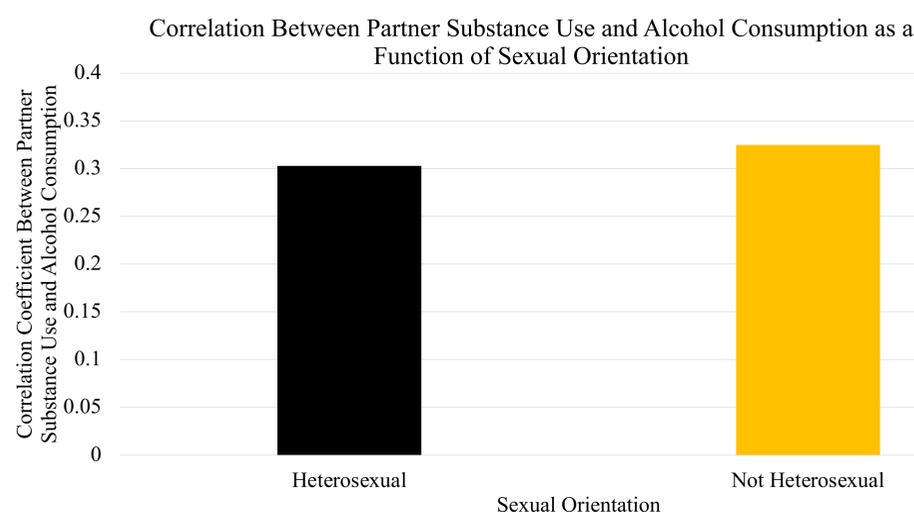
- **Alcohol Consumption**- how many grams of ethanol did one consume per month. Participants reported on their frequency and quantity of alcohol which was converted to grams of ethanol consumed.
- **Sexual Orientation**- whether participants self identify them self as heterosexual or non-heterosexual (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

Measure	Min	Max	M	SD
Alcohol Consumption	.00	5108.18	218.81	487.60
Partner Substance Use	3.00	15.00	5.39	2.21

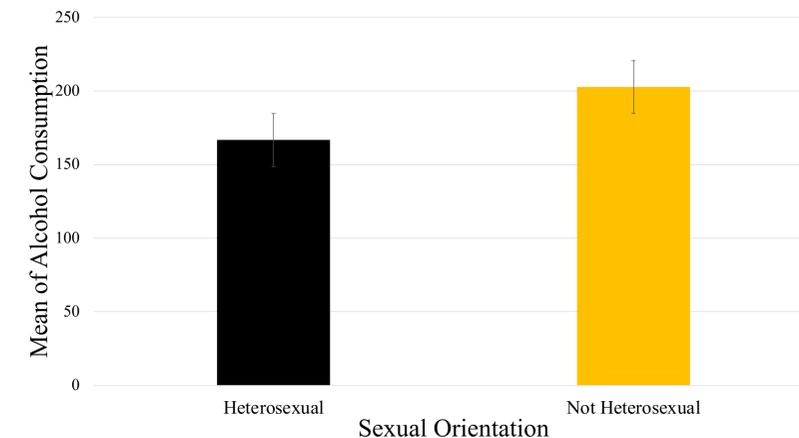
Notes. Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum; M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation.

Individuals who are involved with someone who consumes alcohol will consume more alcohol, however, this does not differ as a function of sexual orientation.



- 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 ($r = -.36, p = .7188$).

Mean Alcohol Consumption by Sexual Orientation



- An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare alcohol consumption between partners who identified as heterosexual and partners who identified as not heterosexual. There was not a significant difference in mean alcohol use between participants who identified as heterosexual ($M = 166.73, SD = 401.54$) and participants who identified as not heterosexual ($M = 202.78, SD = 379.09$), $t(1631) = -1.35, p = .18$.

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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