Sexual orientation and Substance use trajectories in emerging adulthood

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Sexual Orientation and Substance Use Trajectories in Emerging Adulthood: Amelia E. Talley & Kenneth J. Sher
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BACKGROUND

Sexual minority individuals are at elevated risk for engagement in substance use behaviors (SUs; e.g., Marshall et al., 2008; Marshal et al., 2009; Meyer, 2003; Talley et al., in press), compared to their sexual majority counterparts. Recent findings have revealed differences in sexual-minority substance use patterns based on gender (Corliss et al., 2008; Ziyadeh et al., 2007) and sexual orientation subgroup (Corliss et al., 2008; Marshall et al., 2009; Talley et al., in press). Past research has been limited to cross-sectional data (e.g., Stall et al., 2001) and only eight studies (e.g, Corliss et al., 2008; Marshall et al., 2009) have examined patterns of substance use among non-clinical samples of sexual minority individuals over time and compared those to the patterns of use among samples of sexual majority individuals.

METHOD

Primary Outcomes:

Substance Use Behaviors (SUs):
- Usual quantity of alcohol consumed: “In the past 3 months, when you were drinking alcohol, how many drinks did you usually consume?” (0 = No drinking in past 3 mos.; 1 = 1-2 drinks; 2 = 3-4 drinks; 3 = More than 4 drinks).
- Frequency of alcohol use in previous 3 months: (0 = Never/Not in the past 3 months; 1 = Less than once a month; 2 = 1-2 times a month; 3 = 3-4 times a month; 4 = 5-6 times a month; 5 = 7-8 times a month; 6 = 9-10 times a month; 7 = 12 or more times a month).
- Frequency of binge drinking: “Over the past 30 days, on how many days did you drink five or more drinks in a row?” (0 = Not at all in the past 30 days; 1 = Once or twice in the past 30 days; 2 = 3-4 times; 3 = 5-6 times; 4 = 7-8 times; 5 = 9-10 times; 6 = 11-12 times; 7 = More than 12 times). (c) Frequency of alcohol use in previous 3 months: (0 = Never/Not in the past 3 months; 1 = Less than once a month; 2 = 1-2 times a month; 3 = 3-4 times a month; 4 = 5-6 times a month; 5 = 7-8 times a month; 6 = 9-10 times a month; 7 = 12 or more times a month).
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RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

• LLCA identified three latent classes based on facets of sexual orientation over the four-year period for both male (Entropy = .95) and female (Entropy = .91) sexual minority participants. As shown in Figure 1, one class was composed of bisexual as well as primarily or exclusively homosexual individuals (BG), a second class was composed of primarily heterosexual individuals (PS), and a third class was composed of those individuals having only a slight tendency toward non-heterosexuality (i.e., “virtually straight”, VS). As shown in Figure 2, PS men (n = 203) endorsed the lowest levels of alcohol involvement, especially compared to levels endorsed by ES men (n = 758) and BG men (n = 31). Depicted in Figure 3, PS women (n = 186) reported the highest levels of alcohol involvement at the onset of emerging adulthood, especially compared to levels reported by ES women (n = 886) and VS women (n = 505). These findings provide evidence that alcohol use is relative normative among most college-aged men, with the exception of VS men. Finally, there is initial evidence that PS women may display the most problematic alcohol use patterns, compared to their other female counterparts, during the onset of emerging adulthood.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS:

- Subsample of the IMPACTS (Sher & Rutledge, 2007) dataset: n = 2643
- Women (n = 1610); Men (n = 1033)
- Baseline Age: 18.72 (SD = .47)
- 90% Caucasian/European-American

PROCEDURE:

Eighty-eight percent of 4,226 incoming first-time college students at the University of Missouri—Columbia completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire in the summer orientation preceding college matriculation. This precollege sample was followed up and administered a Web-based survey every fall (October/November) and spring (March/April) of the subsequent 4 years.

• Sexual Orientation assessed in the Spring of each year:
- Self-identification = self-labeling of sexual identity
  - “How would you describe your sexual orientation?” (1 = Exclusively homosexual; 5 = Exclusively heterosexual).
- Sexual attraction = degree of opposite- vs. same-sex sexual attractions
  - “To which group are you sexually attracted?” (1 = Opposite-sex only; 7 = Same-sex only).
- Sexual behavior = degree of opposite- vs. same-sex sexual activity
  - “With which group do you engage in sexual behavior?” (1 = Opposite-sex only; 7 = Same-sex only).

Figure 1 Longitudinal Latent Classes

Figure 2 Estimated (from repeated-measures analysis) mean-level changes in alcohol involvement for male participants over time, as moderated by sexual orientation classification group

Figure 3 Estimated (from repeated-measures analysis) mean-level changes in alcohol involvement for female participants over time, as moderated by sexual orientation classification group

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