Author's response to reviews

Title: Substance Use and Related Problems Among U.S. Women Who Identify as Mostly Heterosexual

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Ms. Zapanta,

We are pleased to have the opportunity to revise and resubmit our paper “Substance use and related problems among U.S. women who identify as mostly heterosexual.” We very much appreciate the reviewers’ helpful comments and suggestions for minor revisions. As described below, we have addressed each of the reviewers’ comments in the revised manuscript.

**Reviewer #1**

The manuscript describes analyses of alcohol and drug use indicators by levels of a sexual identity measures that is not widely used. The authors make a convincing case that the "mostly heterosexual" category is more precise in regard to associations with alcohol and drug use for women. They appropriately point out limitations based on the relatively small samples of some categories, and interpret the results in the context of potential stigma, and in relation to other potential social determinants of alcohol and drug use.

Minor essential revisions:

1. The authors should discuss how likely underreporting of lesbian and bisexual categories may have affected the results. Why did so few women report being lesbian? Perhaps some lesbian women reported as mostly heterosexual due to response bias. A more detailed description of the interview methods would provide more context to evaluate potential interview bias.

We have included additional information about the interview methods (Methods section) and new information in the narrative (Discussion section) that addresses the possibility of underreporting of lesbian and bisexual identity.

2. Confidence intervals would be more informative than the df and p-values given in the results text along with the odds ratios.

We have removed the degrees of freedom and p values and now present the odds ratios and confidence intervals in the narrative.

3. Line 212 states that "findings highlight the omission of a large population...” However, these populations have not been omitted from previous work, rather, they have been misclassified as being in one of the 3 more common identity categories.

We have revised this statement to be clearer that mostly heterosexual women have likely been misclassified in previous studies that have not allowed for this sexual identity response option.

4. The implications section refers to "health risk behaviors," but this study presents data only on alcohol and other drug use. The authors should specify which implications should be drawn from this study, and which other specific findings are relevant to draw other conclusions.

We appreciate this comment and have revised the subtitle of this section to read “Why are mostly heterosexual women at higher risk for substance use/misuse?”
Discretionary Revisions

Sentences declaring the novelty of the findings are rarely more than superficially informative. The Discussion could be improved if this was omitted or deemphasized, and the Discussion began instead with the interpretation of the findings.

This statement has been deleted.

Reviewer #2

Minor essential revisions:

1. I think this paper straddles the line between being an empirical presentation of findings, while then trying to offer a theoretical explanation for who the population of interest really "is". I find this somewhat confusing, especially given the title of the paper, and how the work is described in the abstract. Table 3 confuses things, and should likely be dropped.

We have substantially revised the discussion to focus more on why women who identify as mostly heterosexual may be at greater risk for substance use/abuse than women who identify as only heterosexual (also see response to comment #2 below). We believe that these revisions simplify the discussion and address the concern about “straddling the line between being an empirical presentation of findings, while then trying to offer a theoretical explanation...” After much consideration we decided to retain Table 3 as we believe it is important in understanding mostly heterosexual women’s elevated risk for substance use/abuse.

2. The section on why mostly hetero women are most at risk should precede the section on "who" these women are. To this end, though, I don’t think the discussion of "who" adds to the paper. I find it highly speculative within the context of what is presented as an empirical paper. Perhaps condense and put toward the end. If you plan to keep the section, please discuss the issues of outness, and internalized biphobia and/or homophobia, and how these may also play into "mostly heterosexual" as an identity label.

We have removed the section of the paper “Who are Mostly Heterosexual Women?”. We have also added brief discussions of internalized biphobia/homophobia and sexual orientation disclosure as potential reasons for choosing the ‘mostly heterosexual’ identity label (and the potential for underreporting of lesbian or bisexual identities).

3. Something the authors have not addressed is the validity of the main question here. That is, is a question that allows for the qualifications of “mostly”, truly assessing sexual identity? Identity labels have inherent meaning, of course, but they are not ordinal, they are nominal. What would it mean to ask a racial identity question that allows participants to self-label as “mostly white” or a religious identity question that allowed “mostly Jewish”? Sexual orientation, sexual attraction and sexual behavior all allow for such a qualification. A true identity question cannot logically be measured in this way.

We respectfully disagree that ‘mostly heterosexual’ is not a valid identity category—an opinion shared by a growing number of researchers (see especially qualitative work by Austin and colleagues, 2007). Although most surveys do not offer intermediate categories for race/ethnicity, they do (as we do in our current study) allow study participants to choose more than one racial/ethnic identity and then indicate which race/ethnicity they most strongly identify with.

Reference:

Sincerely,

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