Definition of Sexual Minority Raises Concerns for Reader

While I did enjoy the article by White and Boehmer (2012) in the March issue, I did have a hard time accepting the author’s definition of sexual minority women. When I first saw the title, I immediately thought of minority women, thinking race or ethnicity. I just don’t think that this title is appropriate. I have discussed this with some of my colleagues and I guess we are having a problem with the term (I don’t want to use the word label).

The use of this term was not discussed in the article. Can you tell me how the authors came about using that particular term? I did enjoy the article and feel that it is a much needed topic; I am just not sure about the use of the term minority.

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The Author Responds

We use the term sexual minority women after defining that it encompasses lesbian and bisexual women, and women who partner with women. We use the term sexual minority as an umbrella term because we are combining sexual identities with women who report partnering with women, but do not identify as lesbian or bisexual. If this study had only focused on sexual identity, we could have easily guessed we are having a problem with the term. Sexual and gender choices are not of the norm (whatever that is!), they are a minority because of their sexual and gender choices. In fact, it was brought to my attention that the author of this article was slightly incorrect when she said only “lesbians, bisexual women, and women who partner with women” (White & Boehmer, 2012, p. 210); she should also have listed transgender women, as they have breasts and may be just as likely to get breast cancer as any man or woman. As researchers, we need to be more conscious about including all types of sexual/gender variants in studies.

I have a better understanding of the term SMW and it is an appropriate term. Again, I thank the authors for the article; it opens the doors to a better understanding, increasing knowledge and, in the end, the most important factor is increased understanding to who we are and not what we represent.

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References


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