



2021

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Relations Between Sexual and Gender Minority Stress, Personal Hardiness, and Psychological Stress in Emerging Adulthood: Examining Indirect Effects via Human-Animal Interaction

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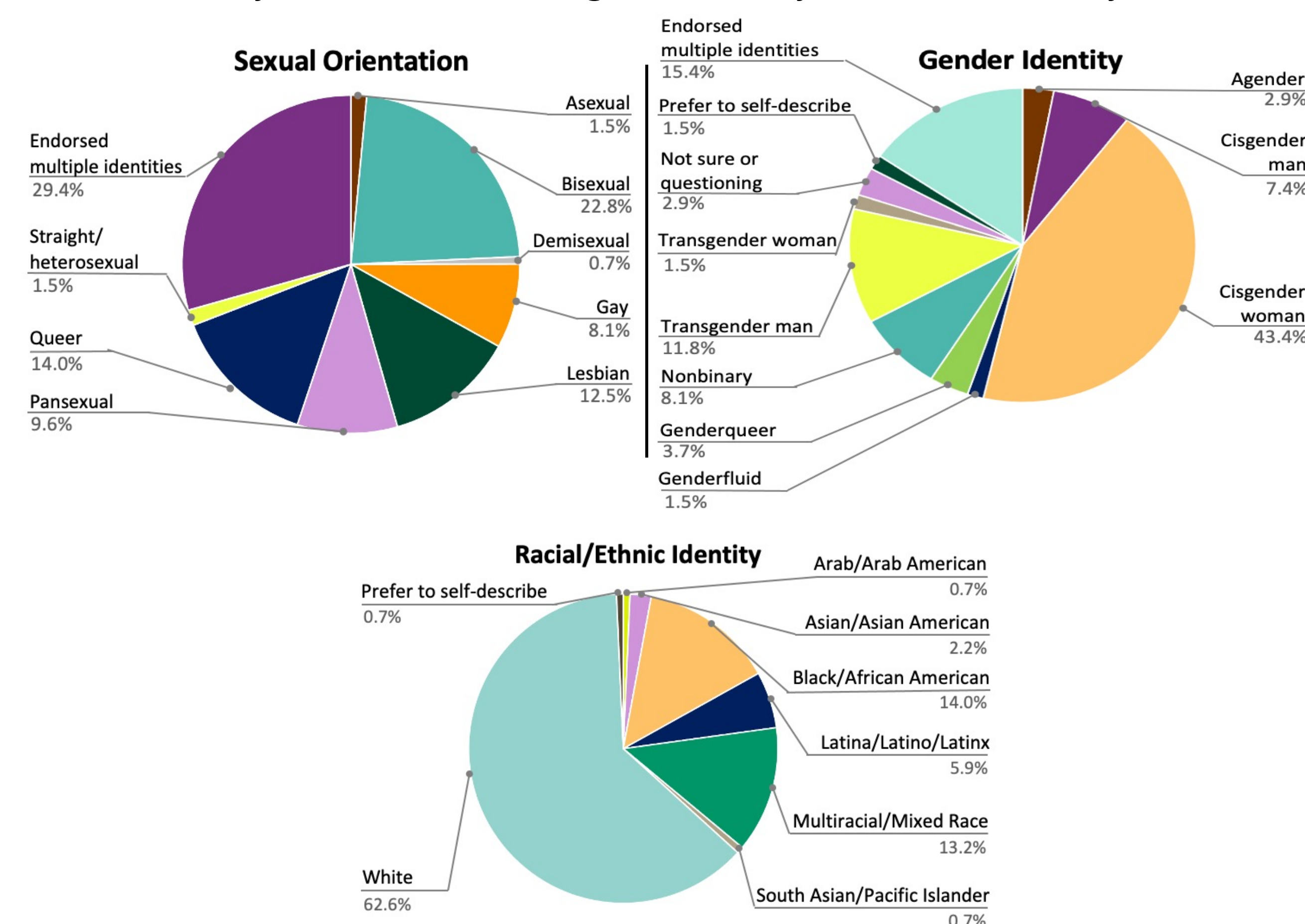
@DrShelbyMcD

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- LGBTQ+ emerging adults** are at increased risk for experiencing adversity (e.g., bullying, harassment, rejection) due to oppressive, cis-heteronormative societal structures and attitudes.¹⁻²
- Minority stress** increased risk for psychological stress and mental health disorders.³⁻⁵
- Social support** and **affirming social relationships** mediate relations between sexual and gender minority stress and resilience (self-efficacy, self-esteem) and mental health.⁶⁻²⁰
- Companion animals** (e.g., dogs, cats) may provide a unique form of social support.^{21, 22}
- Current Study:** tested whether there is an indirect effect of LGBTQ+ minority stress on personal hardiness and psychological stress via HAI, adjusting for human social support and other covariates.

METHODS

- Sample:** 136 emerging adults
 - 18-21 year olds; Mean age = 19.34 years, *SD* = 1.12 years



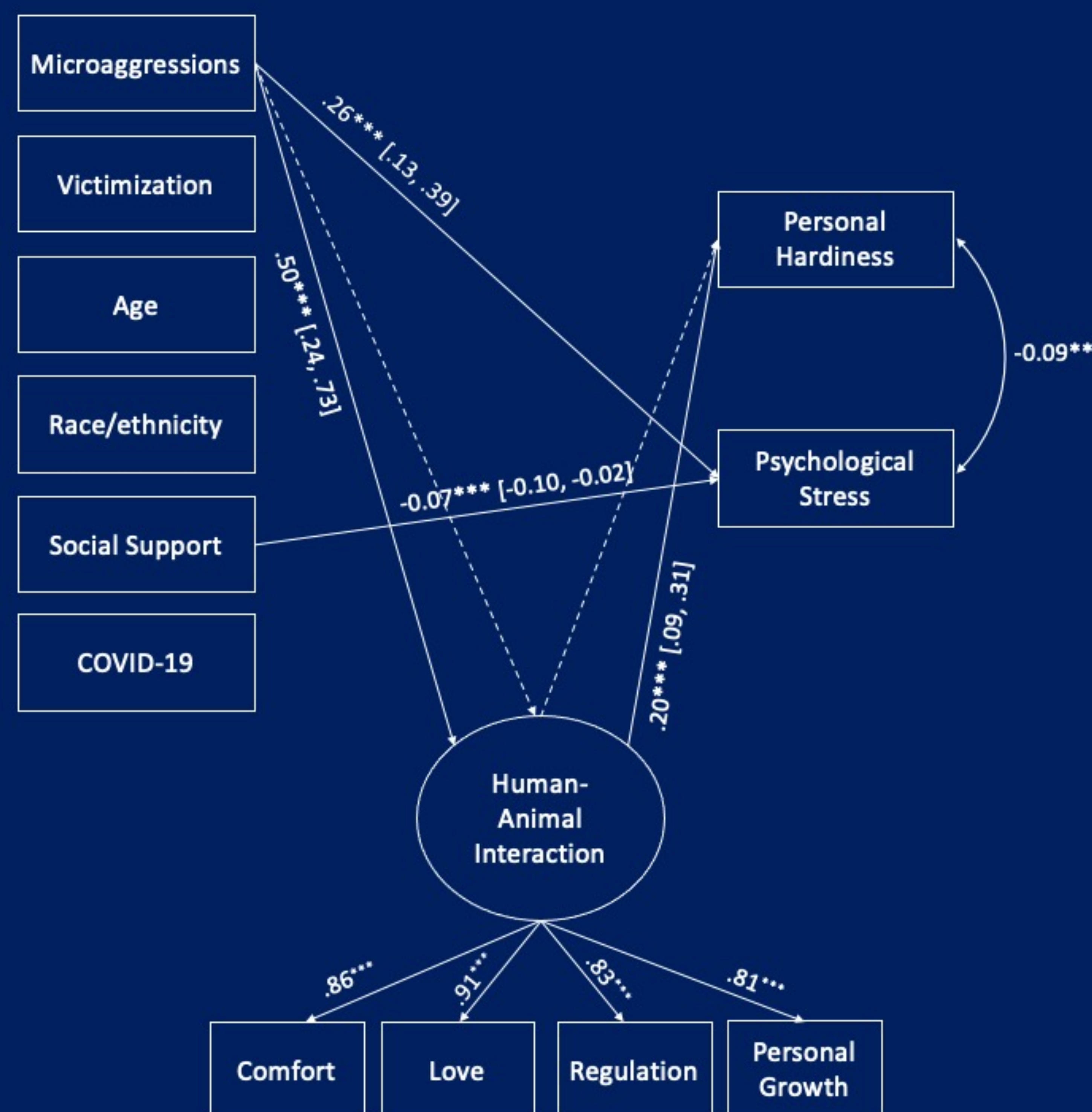
Measures:

- LGBQ Microaggressions on Campus Scale**²³ – includes interpersonal and environmental microaggressions ($\alpha = .90$)
- Gender Minority Stress and Resilience Scale**²⁴ – victimization subscale ($\alpha = .86$)
- Courage to Challenge Scale**²⁵ – measure of personal hardiness, a component of resilience ($\alpha = .84$)
- Brief Symptom Inventory**²⁶ – measure of overall psychological stress ($\alpha = .96$)
- HAI (latent) – **Comfort from Companion Animals Scale**²⁷ + 3 subscales (love, regulation, personal growth) from the **Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale**²⁸

Analyses:

- CFA** to confirm appropriateness of latent HAI construct
- Path analysis** with latent mediator/SEM & bootstrapping technique²⁹⁻³²
- Examination of model with **non-contributory paths removed**

Exposure to microaggressions may lead LGBTQ+ young adults to seek out relationships with pets, which in turn, may promote personal hardiness, a factor associated with resilience.



Note. The figure shows the significant **direct** (solid lines) associations between microaggressions, victimization, personal hardiness, and psychological stress and significant **indirect** (dashed lines) associations via human-animal interaction, adjusting for covariates. The coefficients and confidence interval estimates presented for the main effects are unstandardized; however, the factor loadings are standardized. All exogenous variables were allowed to correlate. For clarity, covariances, residuals, and residual covariances estimates and non-significant paths are not reported in the figure.

RESULTS

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Microaggressions	2.53	1.02	-					
2. Interpersonal victimization	3.85	3.76	.27**	-				
3. Personal hardiness	5.47	.70	.01	-.011	-			
4. Psychological stress	1.25	.72	.48***	.18*	-.020**	-		
5. Social support	15.88	2.92	-.027**	-.011	.16	-.037***	-	
6. Human-animal interaction			.38***	.01	.29***	.21**	.05	-

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

HAI Measurement Model: CFA = excellent fit ✓

Mediation Model: demonstrated adequate fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.71$, CFI = .96, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .04).

- Model explained:
 - 20% of the variance in HAI ($p = .007$)
 - 30% of the variance in psychological stress ($p < .001$)
 - 12% of the variance in personal hardiness ($p = .015$)

DISCUSSION

- Significant **direct effects** were found:
 - As microaggressions ↑, psychological stress ↑. This is consistent with research with LGBTQ+ populations.³³
 - As microaggressions ↑, HAI ↑.
 - As HAI ↑, personal hardiness also ↑.
- The significant **indirect effect** ($\beta = .14^{***} [.07, .24]$) of microaggressions on hardiness via HAI is consistent with prior HAI studies. There is evidence that pet ownership and HAI are associated with ↑ self-efficacy, which is related to hardiness.^{34,35}
- The **non-significant effects are surprising** in the context of our study but match with some of the broader HAI literature.
 - Prior studies examining relations between HAI and mental health have been mixed: HAI may provide protective benefits, may exacerbate psychological stress, and/or may not be significantly associated with mental health.^{36,37}

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Convenience methods, sample size/power
 - Collapsed variables (e.g., race/ethnicity; sexual orientation, gender identity)

Future Directions:

- Longitudinal designs
- Qualitative methods
- Incorporate additional measures of stress, adjustment, HAI

IMPLICATIONS

- Community supports can promote individual-level resilience and the ability to cope with stress.³⁸ Our results suggest integrating community-level human and animal resources may support resilience in LGBTQ+ communities who benefit from relationships with companion animals.

REFERENCES

To see the full reference list and acknowledgements, click the link below or scan the QR code.

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