

Minority Stress, Pain catastrophizing, and Dyspareunia in Sexual Minorities

Camila F. Fontes¹, John Matkovic¹, and Kelly Clemens¹



HP² Lab
Health Psychology &
Health Promotion Lab

Illinois State University | cfontes@ilstu.edu

1 = Illinois State University

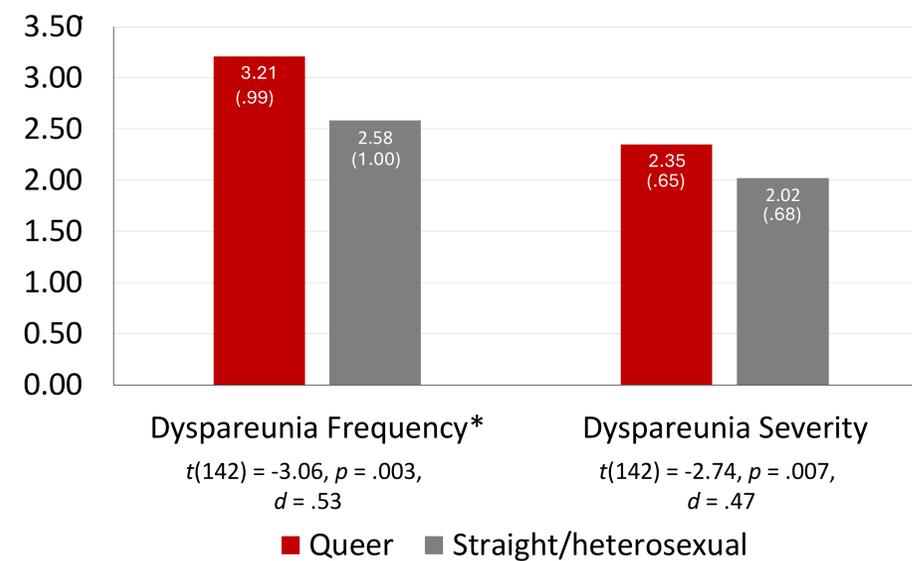
BACKGROUND

- Dyspareunia (pain during sex) is common, but there is a lack of research about gynecological pain during sex from a medical, psychological, and social perspective.
- Some sources indicate a disparity in dyspareunia in queer individuals.
- While physiological factors may explain some differences, many of these differences are likely due to psychosocial influences.
- This aligns with minority stress theory, a model that suggests that because of prejudice and discrimination, social minorities experience more stress, can have downstream health outcomes.
- The present study aimed to understand if stress and pain catastrophizing were related to the differential pain experiences of queer and straight AFAB individuals.

METHOD

- Data on expectancies for dyspareunia, pain frequency and intensity, psychological distress, pain catastrophizing, and demographic information were collected via a survey package distributed on Prolific.
- Participants (N = 150, M_{age} = 32.4, SD = 10.4) who were assigned female at birth were recruited from Prolific.
- Dyspareunia frequency was assessed with the item, "How often do you experience pain during vaginal, penetrative sex?" on a scale ranging from 1, never to 5, every time
- Dyspareunia severity was assessed with the item, "How severe would you rate the pain you experience during vaginal, penetrative sex?" on a 4-point scale (not at all painful, mildly, moderately, severely painful).

RESULTS

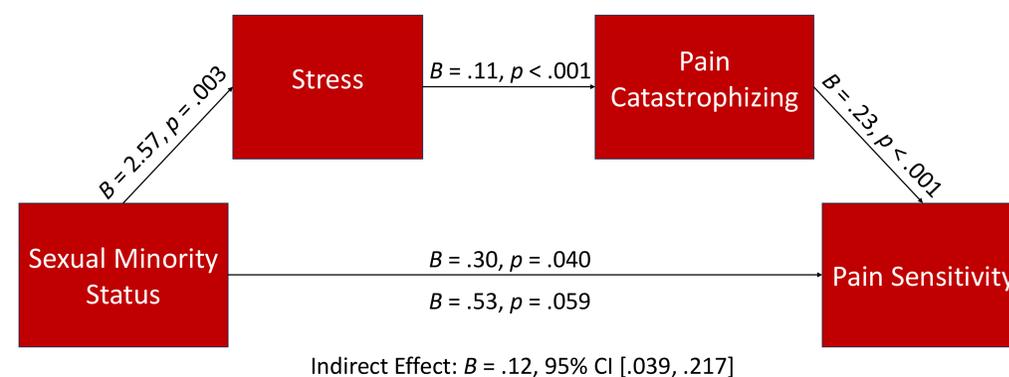
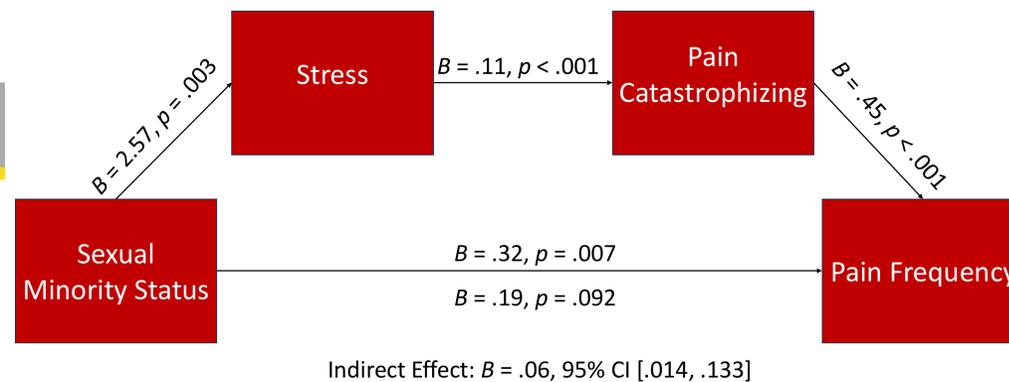


RESULTS

- Two t-tests indicate that sexual minority participants experienced dyspareunia more frequently and more severely.
- Mechanisms for this disparity were assessed using serial mediation (PROCESS model 4 for SPSS; Hayes, 2022).
- Stress and pain catastrophizing fully mediated the relationship between sexual minority status and pain frequency and sensitivity.

DISCUSSION

- Like previous studies, sexual minority participants experienced more dyspareunia than straight participants
- In line with minority stress theory, sexual minorities experienced increased stress, which in turn predicted increases in pain catastrophizing.
- This pain catastrophizing predicted increased pain frequency and sensitivity.
- Queer people's identity should be taken into consideration by their medical providers, particularly in relation to how identity-related experiences may affect their affective and cognitive states.
- These findings suggest that interventions related to stress reduction and pain reframing may be particularly effective at reducing dyspareunia.
- Limitations of this study include its correlational and cross-sectional nature. Additionally, participants reported on past sexual experiences when reporting variables related to pain, which may present issues with recall bias.
- Future studies should attempt to follow participants longitudinally to determine the influence of cognitive and affective factors on pain over time.



Find my contact information,
poster, and other work here!
<https://hp2lab.org/camila-fontes>

