

# PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND POSITIVE COVID-19 EXPERIENCES: A CASE FOR EXAMINING THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

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## Introduction

- Before and during the pandemic, research has shown that higher perceived social support from family and friends is related to better well-being and less negative experiences (Kalaitzaki et al., 2020).
- During the pandemic, many emerging adults who identify as LGBTQ+ were cut off from critical sources of social support at university and many have been forced to live within unsupportive family environments because of campus closures (Fish et al., 2020; Salerno et al., 2020).
- Extant research shows that indices of psychosocial adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic differed across emerging adults from different sexuality groups (Moore et al., 2021).
- Results examining gender differences in adjustment to COVID have been mixed, but there is some evidence that women had worse experiences and reported more negative adjustment than men (Williams et al., 2021).
- Past studies have overlooked the relationship between social support and positive experiences during the pandemic, and often do not use an intersectional approach to examine the roles of gender and sexuality.
- The present study addressed this gap in the literature and examined the following research question: Does the association between social support (from family and friends) and positive COVID-19 experiences differ across gender-sexuality groups?

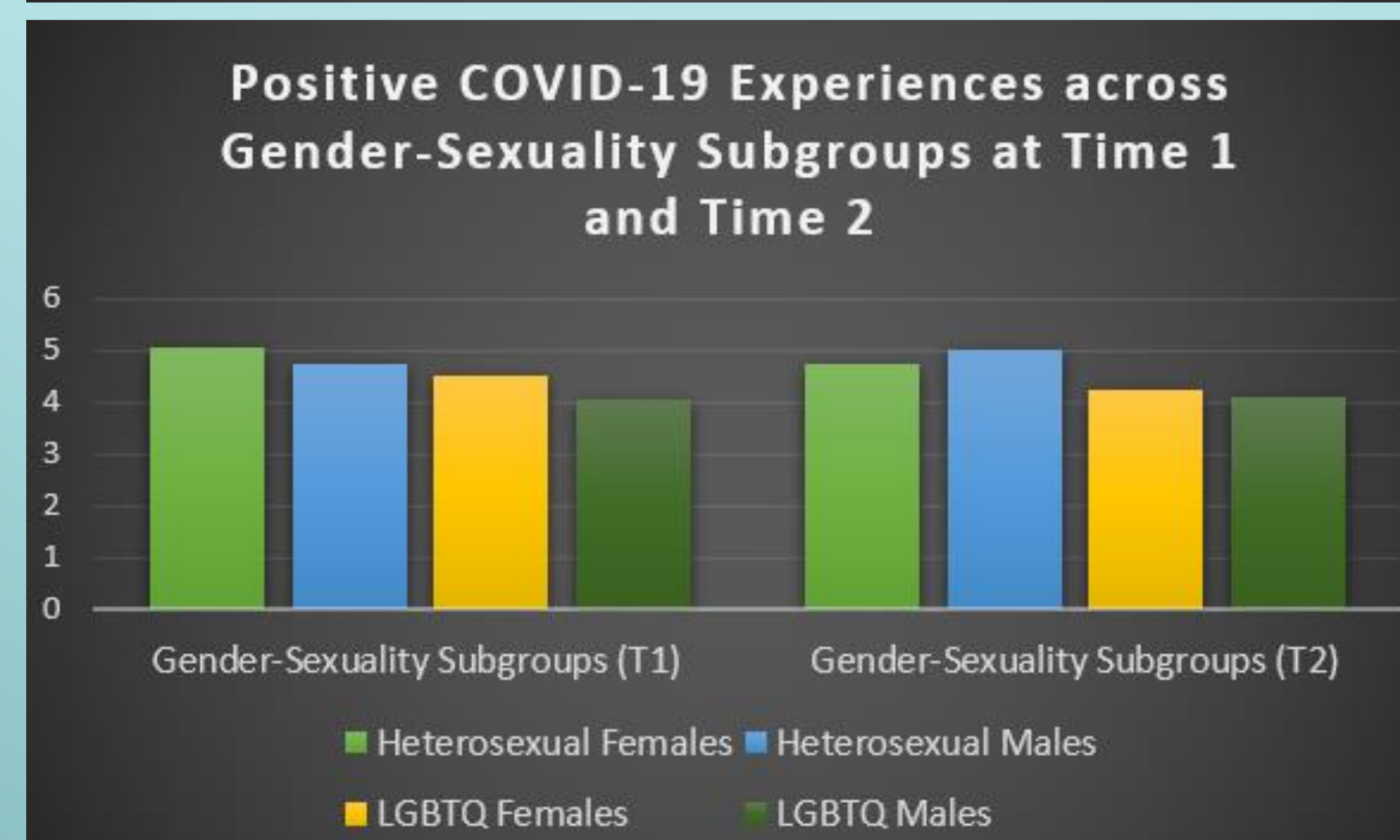
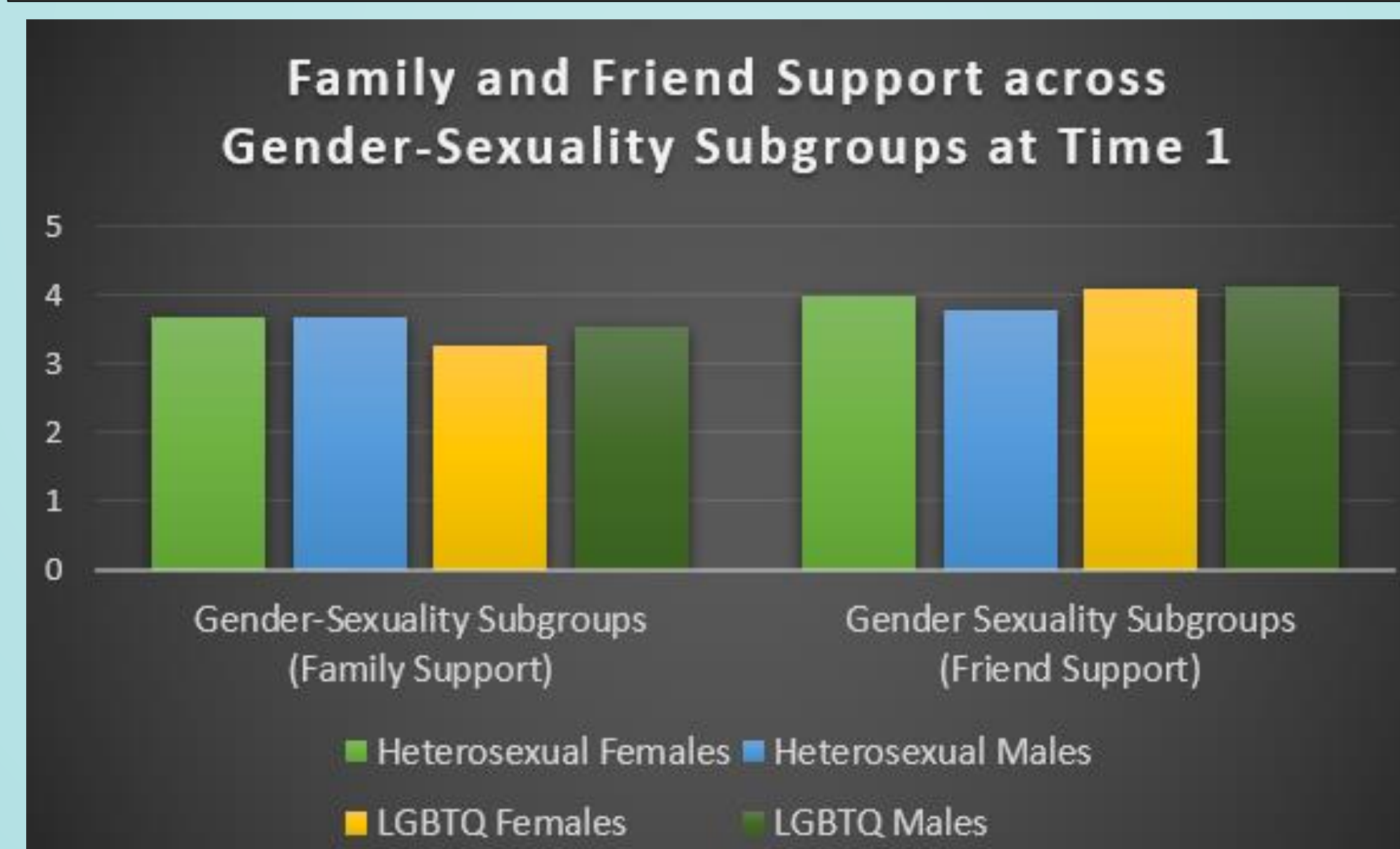
## Participants

- Data were collected from a sample of university students as a part of the larger "Sleep and Psychosocial Adjustment during COVID-19" study (Time 1: May-June 2020 and Time 2: October-November 2020).
- N = 608 university students who reported their gender and sexuality (65.4% female, 76.6% heterosexual)
  - Heterosexual females:  $n = 287$
  - Heterosexual males:  $n = 179$
  - LGBTQ+ females:  $n = 111$
  - LGBTQ+ males:  $n = 31$

## Measures

- Questions assessing demographic information were used to generate the four gender-sexuality groups.
- Family and Friend support: The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) (e.g., "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family").
- Positive COVID-19 experiences (measured at T1 and T2): The Epidemic-Pandemic Impacts Inventory (EPII; Grasso et al., 2020) (e.g., "More appreciative of things usually taken for granted").

## Results (ANOVAs)



Note.  $N = 334$  for Time 2 ( $n = 155$  heterosexual females,  $n = 94$  heterosexual males,  $n = 67$  LGBTQ females, and  $n = 18$  LGBTQ males)

## Results (Multigroup Path Analysis)

- Greater family support was associated with more positive COVID-19 experiences at Time 1 for both heterosexual ( $\beta = .213$ ,  $SE = .122$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and LGBTQ+ women ( $\beta = .179$ ,  $SE = .178$ ,  $p = .034$ ).
- Greater friend support was associated with more positive COVID-19 experiences at Time 1 for both heterosexual women ( $\beta = .111$ ,  $SE = .125$ ,  $p = .027$ ) and men ( $\beta = .229$ ,  $SE = .177$ ,  $p = .002$ ).
- Greater friend support at Time 1 was associated with more positive COVID-19 experiences at Time 2 for heterosexual men ( $\beta = .256$ ,  $SE = .230$ ,  $p = .014$ ).
- There were no significant relationships between family or friend support and positive COVID-19 experiences at Time 1 or 2 for LGBTQ+ men.

## Discussion

- Heterosexual participants had more positive COVID-19 experiences and family support, and LGBTQ+ participants had more friend support. These mean differences are consistent with previous literature.
- At Time 1, greater family support was associated with more positive experiences for both female groups, and greater friend support was associated with more positive experiences for both heterosexual groups.
- At Time 2 greater friend support was associated with more positive experiences for heterosexual men only.
- Previous research shows that heterosexuals and men had fewer negative experiences during the pandemic than LGBTQ+ individuals and women (Moore et al., 2021, Williams et al., 2021). It is possible that support maintained its association with positive experiences because heterosexual males had the least amount of negative experiences to contend with.
- A limitation of this study was the small size of the LGBTQ+ male group. Strengths, however, include the longitudinal nature of positive experiences data and the intersectional nature of the analysis by including groups based on gender and sexuality.
- Future research should utilize larger samples and explore the role of additional socio-demographic factors, including race-ethnicity.