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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Human-Animal Interaction

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Title: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Human-Animal Interaction

Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) is a growing field investigating the complex relationships humans have with animals. Human diversity in HAI, or lack thereof, may have a direct influence on the way HAI data is interpreted and presented. Previous research has studied how apparent disability, racial, sexual or other diversifying identities might affect how humans interact with the world and their pets. However, thus far, there has been little research published on how inequitable barriers towards underrepresented minorities (URM) might play a role in how HAI is studied, interpreted and presented. The present study investigated human diversity among leaders in the HAI field. A survey was sent to HAI research and education center directors to collect their demographics and gauge their perception of diversity, equity and inclusion within their own respective departments. Preliminary data included a 57% response rate (n=15). The majority of directors self-identified as heterosexual (92%), white (100%), able-bodied/neuro-typical (84%), and cis-gender females (69%). When asked about perceived diversity in the field overall, 78% of responding center directors reported HAI professionals as being only "*Slightly Diverse*". From these results, we found a limited range of several areas of diversity within HAI. Having full and direct participation from members of the group(s) affected by the research topics in HAI is beneficial to the way in which the research is designed and data are interpreted. These findings highlight the lack of diverse representation among leadership in HAI, emphasizing the need for continued diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the HAI field.