

Virtual learning is not associated with lower happiness in college students: The role of in-person interactions with close others.

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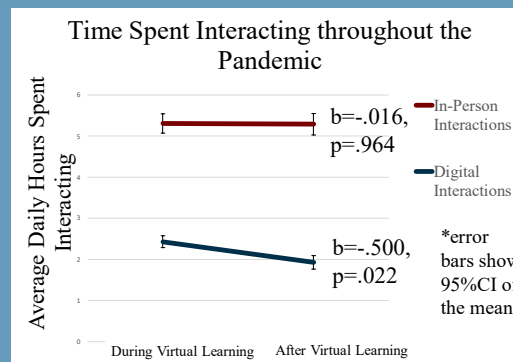
INTRO: It is widely known that social interactions, even with weak ties, are essential for people's mood and well-being (Epley & Schroeder, 2014). During the pandemic, the nature and frequency of social interactions shifted, as people spent more time with family and on their digital devices (Ferreira et al., 2022). Did COVID-19 hurt students' happiness by limiting their in-person social interactions or did technology use help maintain happiness?

METHODS:

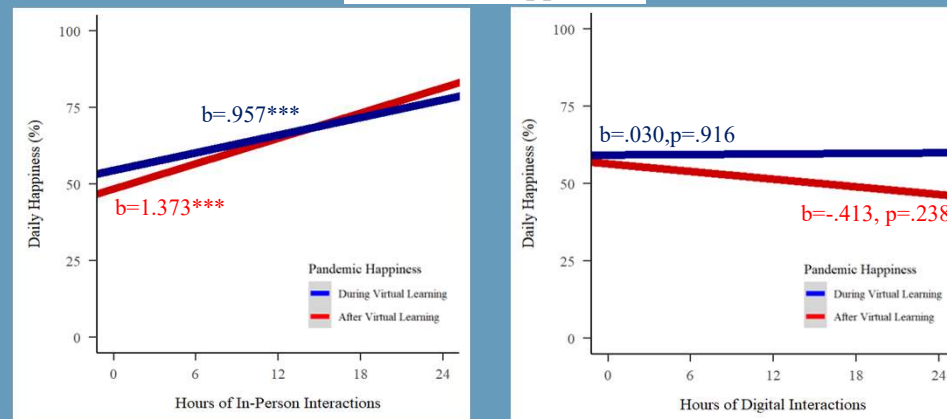
We used a cross-sectional daily diary design to survey undergraduates (N=325) on their daily happiness and social interactions for seven days during the pandemic (N=2,275 surveys). We recruited 188 of these participants when classes were virtual and 137 participants when classes resumed in-person. Participants reported the percentage of the day they felt happy. They also reported the total time spent (in hours) interacting with close others both in-person and digitally over the past 24 hours. Using multi-level models, we examined whether the different stages of the pandemic, including during and after online learning, predicted students' happiness and duration of social interactions. We also looked at the moderating role of digital and in-person social interactions in predicting happiness.

Virtual learning did not result in decreased happiness!

This is not because students socialized more online, but because they socialized with loved ones at home rather than loved ones on campus.



Pandemic Happiness



* p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001



RESULTS:

There was no significant difference in happiness during online learning and upon returning to campus ($b=-3.78, p=.057$). Students who participated during virtual learning did interact more with close ties online ($b=-.500, p=.022$), but this was not linked to happiness ($b=-.151, p=.492$). Students interacted with close others in person just as much during virtual learning as they did on-campus ($b=-.016, p=.964$). Moreover, these in-person interactions predicted greater happiness for students both during and after virtual learning ($b=1.149, p<.001$).

DISCUSSION:

Although the nature of people's interactions changed throughout the pandemic, happiness in college students did not waiver. Importantly, it was in-person interactions that had the greatest impact on happiness. This confirms the need for in-person interactions in satisfying our needs as social beings, even during the times of social distancing.

References:

Epley, N., & Schroeder, J. (2014). Mistakenly seeking solitude. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(5), 1980-1999. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037323>
 Ferreira, J. M., Mergon-Vargas, E. A., & Midgette, A. J. (2022). Sociability, social isolation, and social interaction during the first months of covid-19 pandemic: A qualitative analysis of brazilian, finnish, and american adults. *Trends in Psychology*, 1-33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-022-00172-9>

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