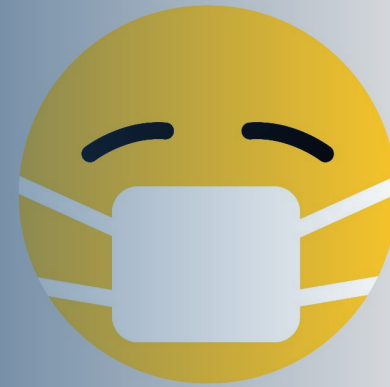


College, Interrupted

Freshmen Narratives of
COVID-19 in Relation to
Identity and Well-Being



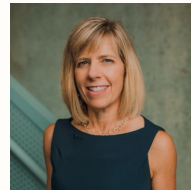
Collaborating Institutions and Investigators

Emory University



Robyn Fivush

University of Kansas



Andrea Follmer Greenhoot

University of Missouri



Jordan Booker

Western Washington



Kate McLean

University of Utah



Monisha Pasupathi



Cecilia Wainryb

Four institutions:
Public/private
East/West
Highly selective/Less
selective

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Research Excellence Initiative

Impact of College Interruptions on AY 2019-2020 First-Year Students

- The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened physical, mental and financial health for people across the globe
- **College students** (especially first-years) are additionally at risk for having their identity work and college careers derailed. Implications for:
 - **Mental health:** Worsening crisis pre-pandemic
 - **Identity development:** Initial forays into autonomy, individuation, future life trajectory
 - **Academic resilience:** Shift in academic work and community
- Students from first-generation, low-income, or historically marginalized groups may be especially vulnerable (Destin, 2020; Syed, 2010; US Dept of Ed, 2014)

The Role of Narratives

Narratives enable us to look at how students are making sense of this experience.

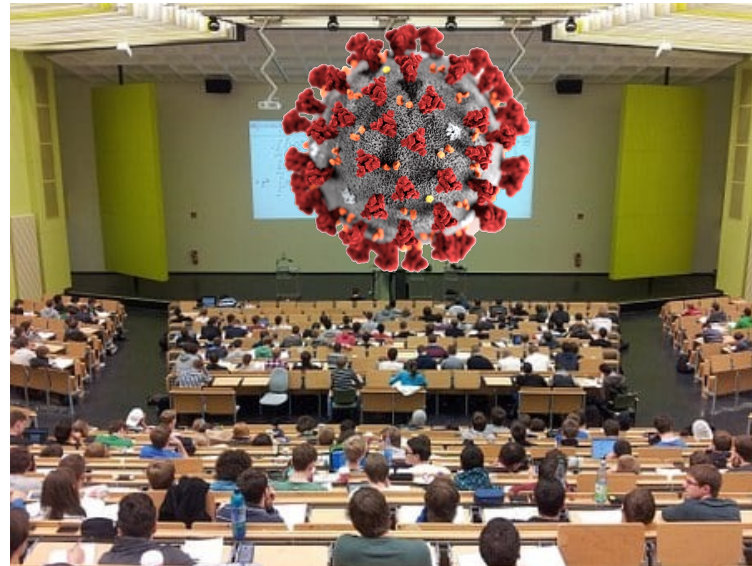
The way students come to narrate this event will inform their coping and resilience

- Coherence, emotional elaboration, closure, positive meaning all predict better mental health and identity development (e.g., Greenhoot et al., 2013; McLean et al., 2019; Pasupathi et al., 2015; Waters & Fivush, 2014; Smyth & Pennebaker, 2008).
- Limited longitudinal work: narrative benefits **may** take time to emerge (e.g., Booker et al., 2020)
- The same narrative qualities may not be adaptive for vulnerable populations (Greenhoot & McLean, 2013; McLean et al., 2013; Sales et al., 2013; Wainryb, 2011)

Aims of this Project

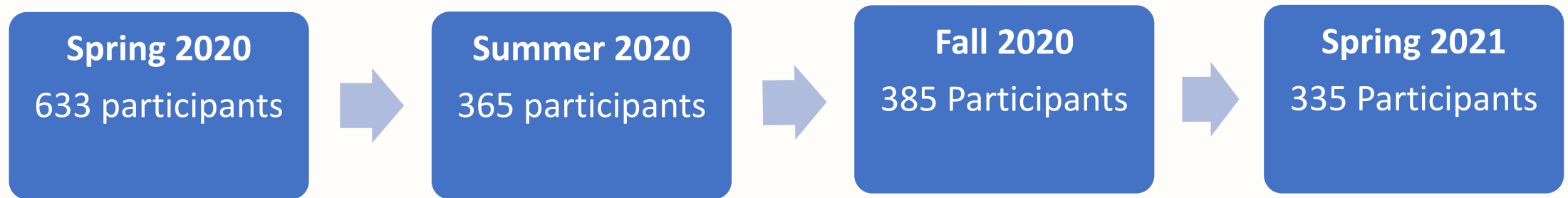
To better understand the challenges faced by AY19-20 first-year students due to the pandemic, and how we can help them flourish, by looking at:

- Their narratives about how their lives have been impacted
- Their reports of psychosocial adjustment, identity and mental health
- How these impacts unfolded over one year



Design

- Repeated online assessments over a period of 1 year



- 243 responded at all four time points
- Oversampled for students who were first generation, Pell-eligible or from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups
- Wave 1 Demographics: Mean age = 19(1.3); 27% male (1.7%non-binary); 33% Pell-eligible in 2020; 21% first-generation; 32% underrepresented minority

Measuring Covid-Related Stress

COVID Life Events Checklist (Kelton & Follmer Greenhoot, 2020)

- 33 items related to living arrangements, isolation, academic work, financial stressors, and health/ mental health issues
- Examples
 - I have not been able to see my family
 - School work is taking much longer than it used to
 - Someone in my family lost their job
 - A close friend or family member has died from COVID-19
- Check all that happened (# of stressors)
- Rate How Stressful (0=not stressful to 4=quite stressful, mean stress rating)

Narrative Prompt

*“We are interested in knowing more about the impact of Covid-19 **on you and your life**. To best understand your experience, we would first like to ask you to please think about an **event that best captures the challenges you have faced** as a result of Covid-19.”*

Encouraged participants to write everything they could remember (what, who involved, what you thought and felt), and why they chose that particular event to write about (what does it say about who you are, were or might be?).

Self-Report Measures of Adjustment

Mental Health

(CCAPS, Locke et al., 2011)

- Depression
- Generalized Anxiety
- Social Anxiety
- Academic Distress
- Hostility
- Eating Problems
- Alcohol Problems

Academic Adjustment

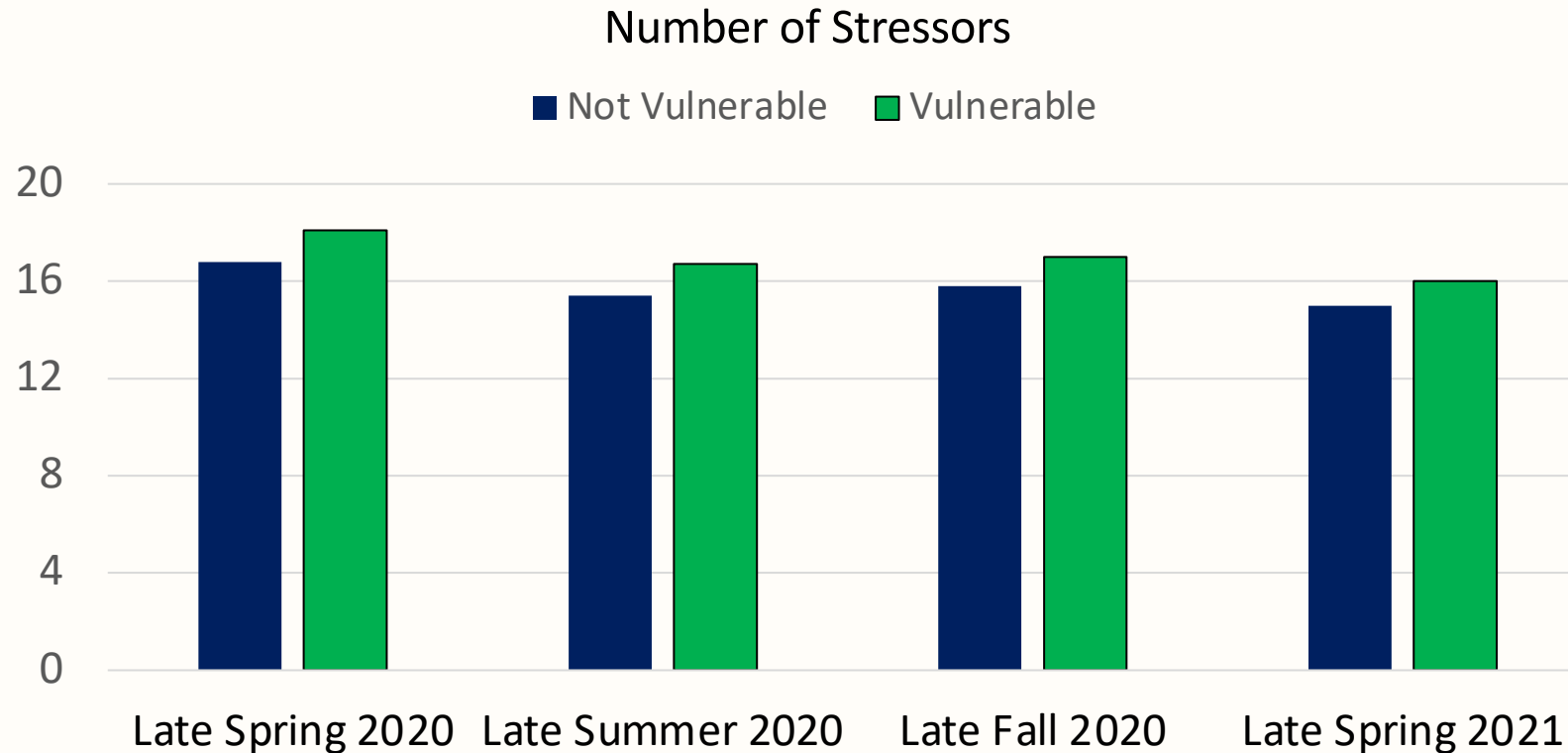
- College Belongingness
- Autonomy Needs Fulfillment
- Competency Needs Fulfillment
- Relatedness Needs Fulfillment
- College Self-Efficacy
- Well-Being

Identity Development

- Commitment making
- Exploration in breadth
- Exploration in depth
- Ruminative exploration
- Identification-Commitment
- Identity achievement

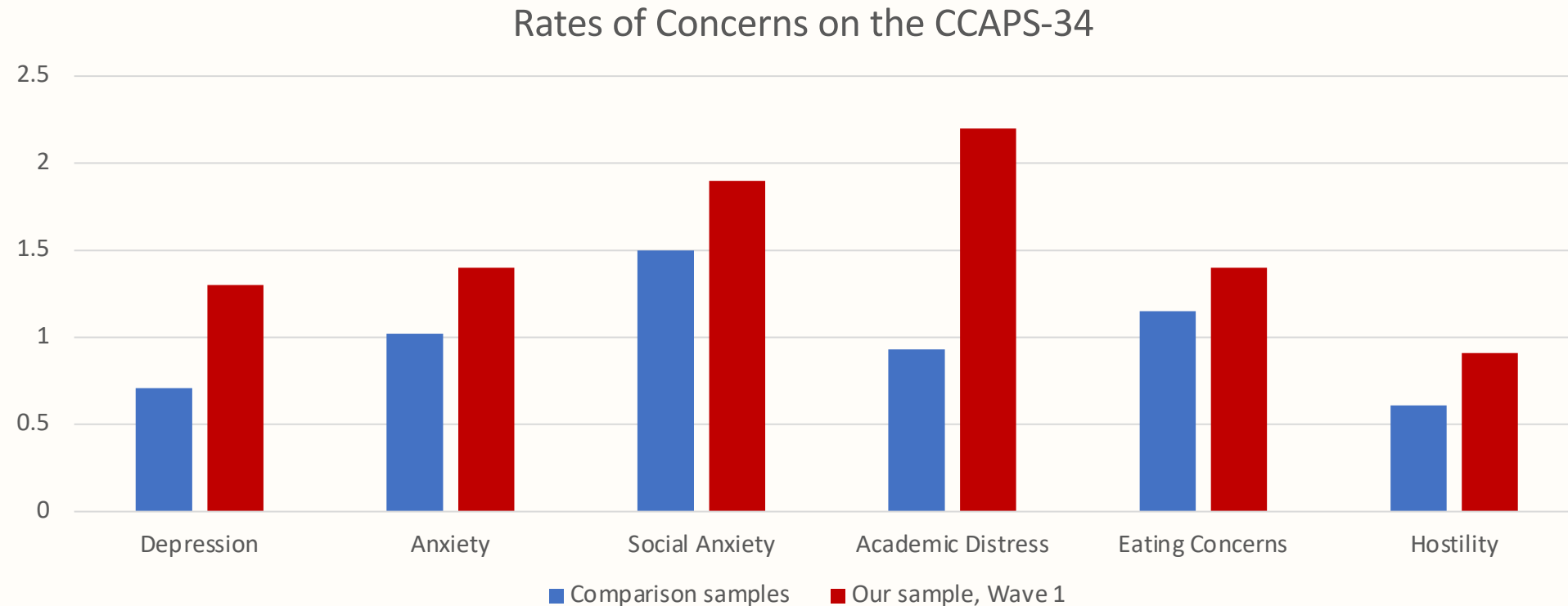
Exposure to Covid Stressors

- Students reported a lot of stress (# and level)
- Vulnerable population reported more stressors and more stress at all time points



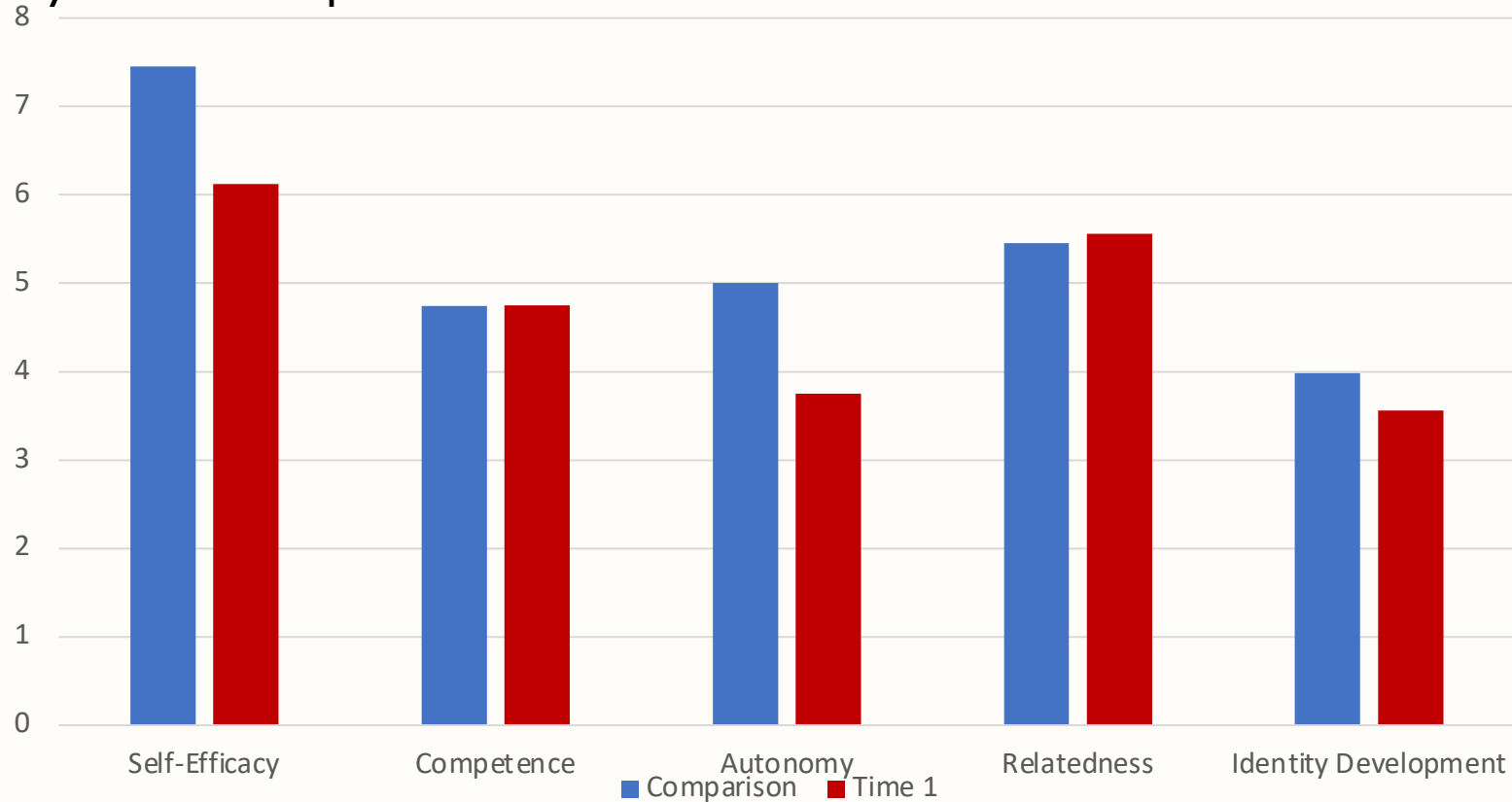
How did the pandemic/shutdowns affect student mental health relative to pre-pandemic?

Elevated mental health concerns



How did the pandemic affect academic & identity development relative to pre-pandemic?

Dampened self-efficacy and autonomy and curtailed identity development

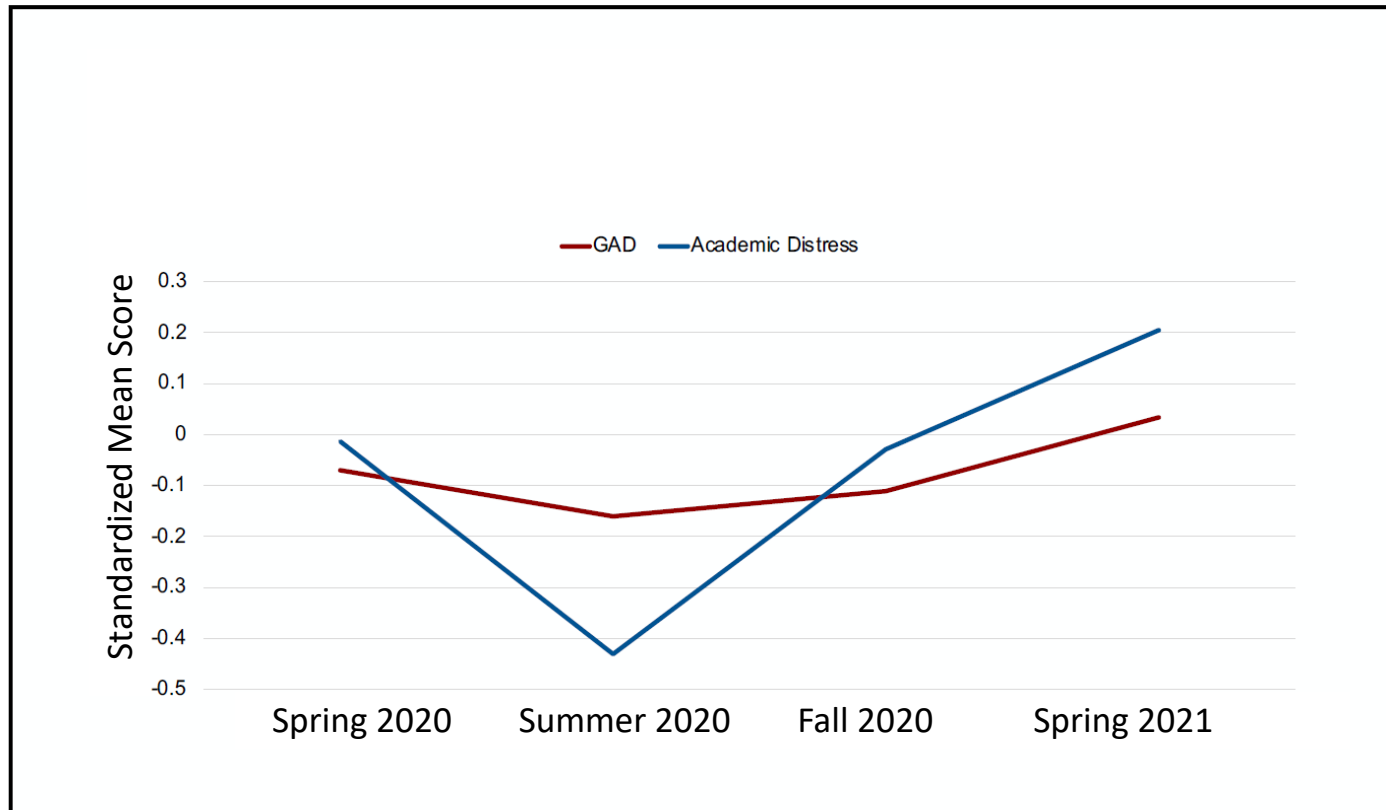


Trajectories Over Time

- No improvements in any area over 1 year period
- Some elevated mental health concerns were maintained:
 - Depression
 - Social Anxiety
 - Eating Concerns
 - Hostility

Trajectories Over Time

Other measures showed initial improvements followed by worsening outcomes (academic and competence)



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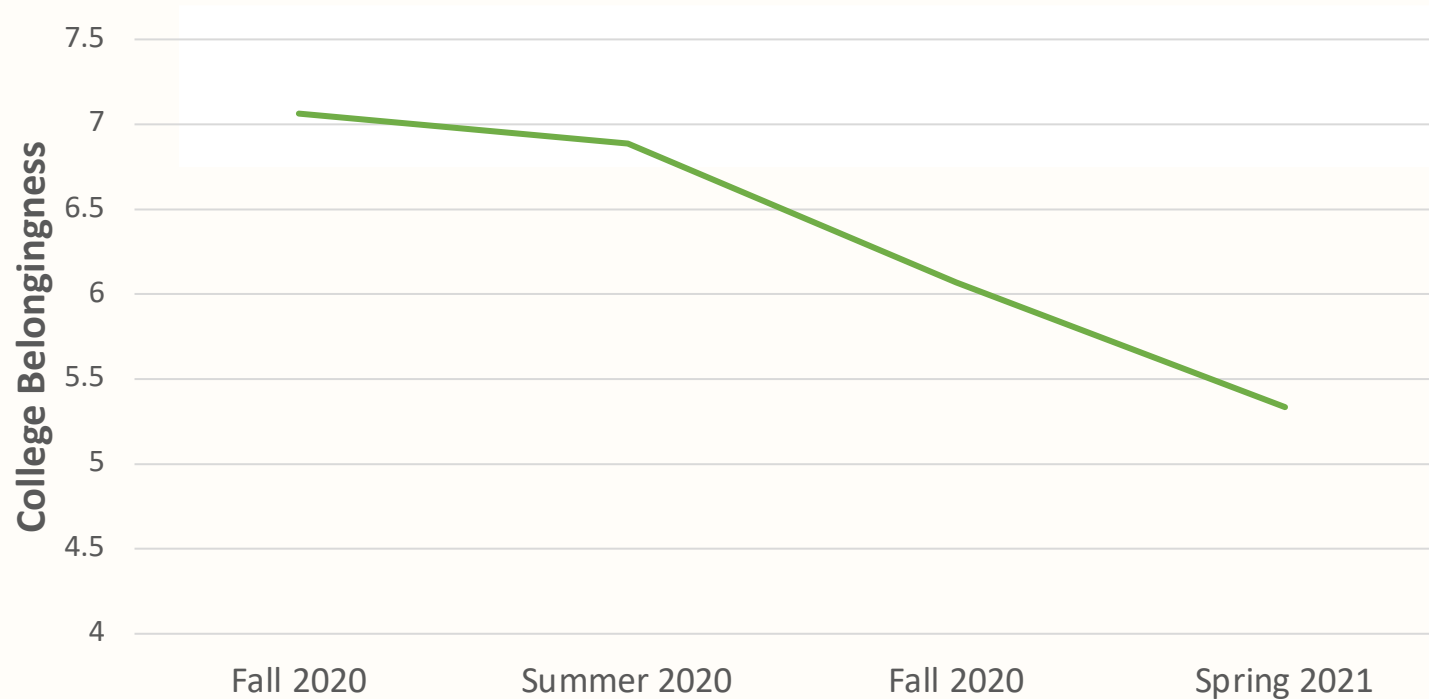
- Academic distress (blue)
- Generalized anxiety (red)

Also

- College Self-Efficacy
- Need Fulfillment-Competence
- Identity achievement

Trajectories Over Time

Still others showed linear declines over time (community and identity exploration)



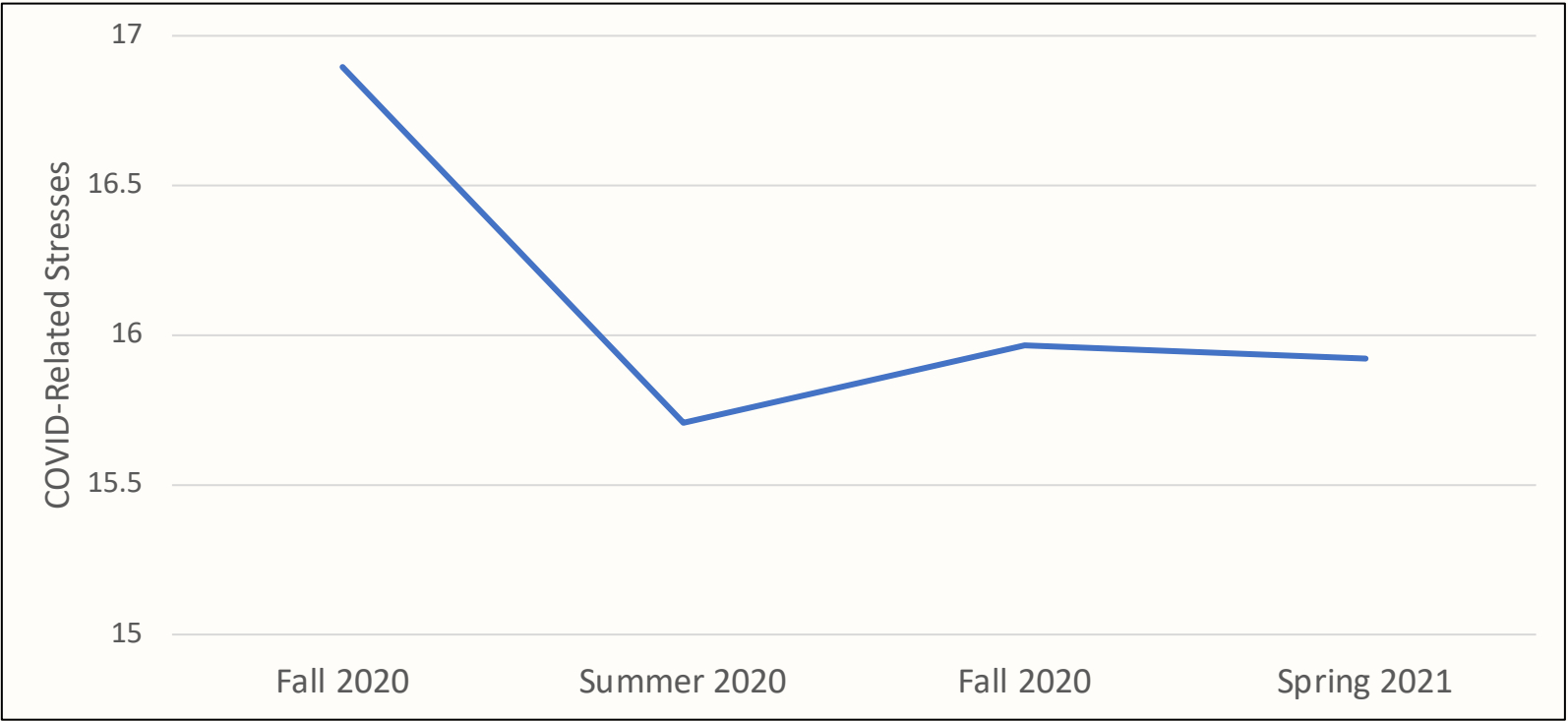
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- College Belongingness

Also:

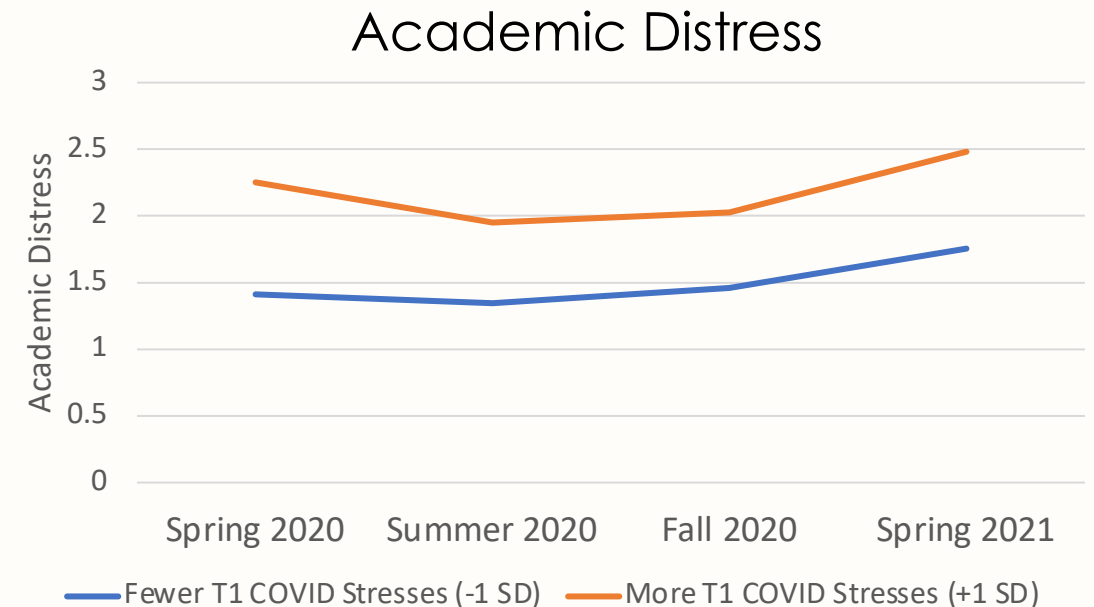
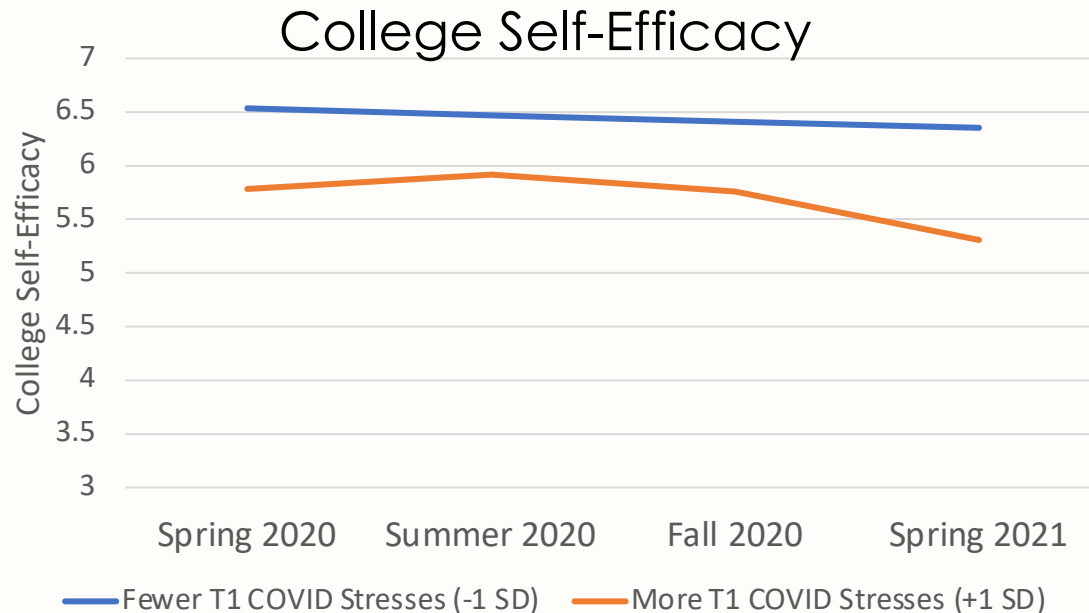
- Need Fulfillment-Relatedness
- Identity commitment
- Identity exploration in depth
- Identity exploration in breadth

These Changes in Adjustment are despite Small Declines in COVID Stresses



Did Adjustment Trajectories Depend on Baseline Covid Stress or Structural Vulnerability?

- 1st generation, low-income and URM status did not affect adjustment or trajectories over time
- T1 COVID stress related to:
 - Worse adjustment on just about every measure
 - In two cases, different change patterns:



Summary of Adjustment Findings

- Concerning, lasting, increasing impact of COVID on students, often escalating by Wave 4
- Baseline COVID stress is a vulnerability factor, particularly for academic outcomes
- **NEXT:** The role of narrating the challenges of Covid
 - Does the way students make sense of what is happening matter?

The Narratives

- ~3500 narratives
- Recurrent themes in content revolve around loss and loss of control:
 - Academic stressors: Increased workload, lack of Instructor sensitivity and flexibility, poor quality learning experience, lack of motivation
 - Mental health concerns
 - Loneliness and isolation
 - Institutional response: semester schedule, lack of input from student perspective, disorganization
 - Health concerns: being ill, Covid exposure and quarantine
 - Goal disruption
 - Financial stressors

Example Narrative

My parents are at risk, more so my mom than my dad and since I am living at home due to online school I am very worried about giving covid to them. I am always worried about it and the only person from outside my household I have been seeing in person is my boyfriend. He works and since he was not worried about his workplace situation I did not worry about it as much as I should have. I had voiced my concerns on how his boss has no precautions in place and how nobody has to wear masks even though they are all within 6 feet of each other all day. I voiced that multiple times and the response was "it is what it is". If I were smarter I would have dumped him but I am not that smart. Around 2 weeks ago, his coworker found out that someone in their household tested positive. He called me while I had a class so i did not pick up and I thought to myself, that is strange... why would he call me? So i texted him and he told me that his coworker may have been exposed to covid and so he has to go get tested, his whole workplace was exposed. I really thought it was a joke, I was in shock, denial, disbelief. And I was in a Zoom class while trying not to cry for an hour. So, my boyfriend isolated at his house after getting tested and I isolated at my house until he got his result. It was my worst fear coming true. We isolated for 2 days and his test came back negative but I have worried for months about his workplace and how I could kill my parents. I am privileged so I have not had to worry about money, but in turn I am worrying about killing my parents and it scares me everyday.

After my boyfriends covid test came back negative the next step was that his workplace needed to change, and it did but only after his covid denying boss did a 3 hour presentation on why covid is not serious. I hate his boss with all my heart and he makes my blood boil beyond belief. This event says that I care about people but I need to be more careful and make sure people I come in contact with are also being careful.

How We are Analyzing the Narratives

Factual Information	Interpretive Information	Growth	Coherence-Context	Coherence-Chronology	Coherence - Theme
Global Ratings on 0 to 3 scale	Global ratings on 0 to 3 scale	Global ratings conducted on a 0 to 6 scale	Global Ratings on 0 to 3 scale	Global Ratings on 0 to 3 scale	Global Ratings on 0 to 3 scale
Narrator provides verifiable information about actors, settings, and the event that helps the coder easily envision the situation.	Narrator includes sufficient motivations, intentions, and internal states that coder can easily grasp what was going on in the narrator's mind	The narrator addresses new knowledge, reasoning, attitudes, behaviors, or personal strengths/resources as a result of the lived event	Specificity of information about time and place	Degree of temporal ordering	Degree of development and links to autobiographical knowledge

Examples

My campus shut down the week after spring break. I had to pack up my dorm room alone and drive home. I couldn't believe this was how my freshman year was going to end. I was robbed of the chance to have a normal college experience.

- **Factual** information

- Provides content that can be objectively verified; statements of action, use of one of the five senses, casual information, quotes

- **Interpretive** information

- Includes subjective thoughts, mental processes, emotions, motivations, judgments; essentially anything that cannot be objectively verified.

Examples

- *Staying home most of the day, makes me feel unmotivated and feel like I am not moving forward with my life. I like being around my family but not all the time. I chose to write about this because I feel like because of this, I became more lazy and unhealthy.*

Growth = 1

Examples

- *This event has made me stronger and showed me to control what I can control.*



Growth = 4

- *The dedication I bring to online classes: Starting off a new school year in a Covid spiraled world and to experience college differently online was sup how a weird but exciting Change. A lot of things you hear from students of all ages doing online/remote learning are usually negative but in my personal opinion and experiences, I have leaned more and have accomplished more on my daily schedules then when doing In-person classes. As a highly productive person, it was a shift but something I think helped me mentally. This explains both my dedication to school but my embrace of understanding sometimes you need to step back and get lost of work done. This has not only shaped the way I learn and think but me as a person*

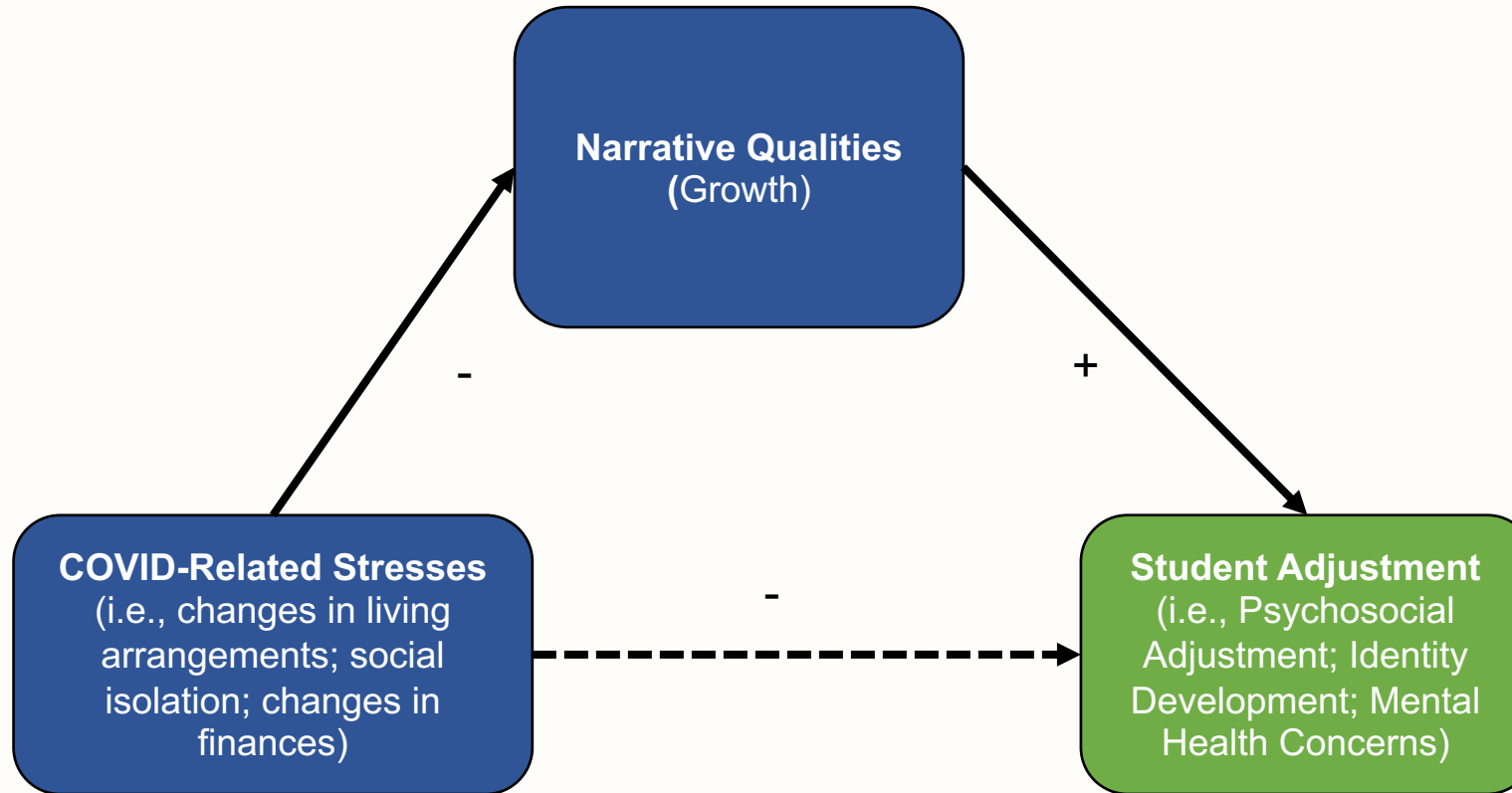
Growth = 5

Do Narrative Qualities Predict Mental Health, Well-Being and other measures?

Hierarchical Linear Models:

- Coherence generally unrelated to adjustment
- Factual and Interpretive Elaboration  Poorer adjustment at all time points:
 - More depression
 - More academic distress
 - Poorer well-being
- Growth at Time 1  Better adjustment at Time 1 and one year later (almost all measures)
 - Fewer mental health concerns
 - Better psychological/academic adjustment
 - Identity development

Growth explained the relation between baseline covid stressors and adjustment



Summary of Narrative Findings so far

- Richer elaboration about COVID-related events is associated with poorer well-being, more challenges with depression, and increased academic distress across timepoints
- Possible we are seeing these results because of:
 - Enduring impacts of COVID-19 compared to acute experiences
 - Challenges via *persistent* cognitive engagement due to continuation of the pandemic
 - There has not been a chance for psychologically distancing from the pandemic
- In contrast, growth appears to be a protective factor, even helping to explain the impact of COVID stress on adjustment

Some Take-Aways

- Our students have been significantly adversely affected by the pandemic
- Despite decreases in Covid-related stressors, students' functioning has further declined over the year since the pandemic began
- Yet students' life stories about COVID are helping us better explain how it is impacting individual students' lives, both concurrently and longitudinally
- These findings reinforce the importance of constructive autobiographical reasoning for promoting resilience against a background of chronic and collective trauma
- We need to explore the developmental factors that set the stage for effective autobiographical reasoning