

# Like Molasses in an Hourglass



## A Mixed-Methods Study of Subjective Time and Well-Being over Two Years of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### INTRODUCTION

**"The virus has created its own clock."** (Pardes, 2020)

- The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to leisure, work, and, to some, the sense of time itself
- Subjective time includes the subjective duration of time (how fast/slow is time passing), as well as evaluations of time: having too much (time emptiness) or not enough (time urgency)
- We investigated the relationships among subjective time, therapeutic life choices, and subjective well-being at the first and second anniversaries of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

### How did participants experience time during the pandemic?

### How are experiences of time related to subjective well-being?

### How did lifestyle activities contribute to subjective well-being during the pandemic, and how was this related to the experience of time?

### PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were recruited on Cloud Research ( $N = 905$  in S1 and  $N = 1228$  in S2)
- 53% male in S1; 50% male in S2
- 76% White in S1, 78% White in S2
- Age (years), S1:  $M = 40.68$  ( $SD = 12.24$ ); S2:  $M = 41.70$  ( $SD = 12.19$ )

### MEASURES

- Subjective temporal duration



- Open-ended descriptions of subjective time
- Time urgency and emptiness (Wittman & Lehnoff, 2005)
- PANAS (Watson et al., 1988)
- Life Satisfaction Self-Anchoring Scale (Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1960)
- Subjective Well-Being = Present Life Satisfaction + Positive Affect - Negative Affect
- Therapeutic Life Choices (adapted from Walsh, 2011)

### RESULTS

#### Open-Ended Descriptions of Subjective Time



**Hazy** (15.9% / 10.9%)

"Like a walking coma, almost dreamlike"



**Stuck** (7.2% / 3.7%)

"Like sand being clogged in an hourglass"



**Repetition** (5.9% / 3.2%)

"Same thing over and over, like the movie Groundhog Day"



**Paradox** (3.5% / 4.6%)

"The hours were long, but the months were short"



**Disappearing** (1.8% / 1.9%)

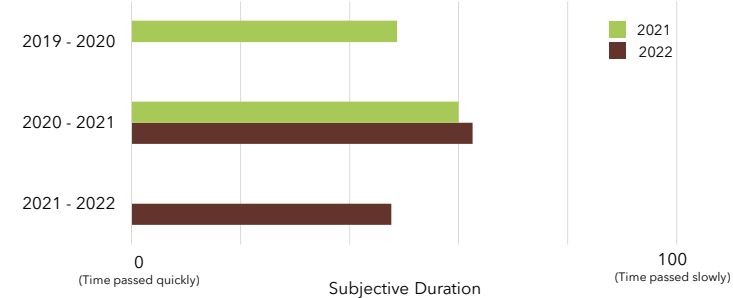
"It's like a year got zapped out of my life."



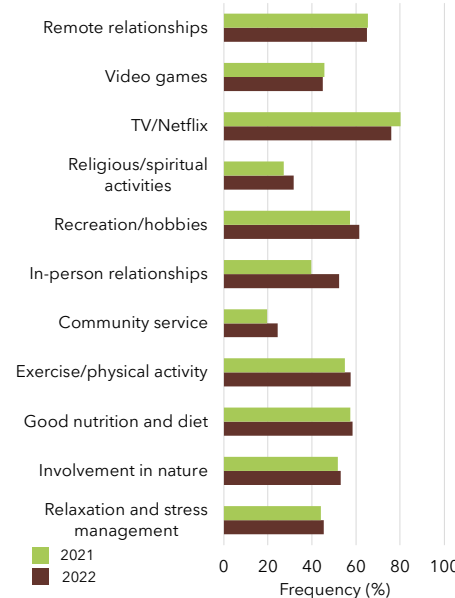
**Rollercoaster** (5.2% / 7.5%)

"Bursts of time passing quickly then dragging on"

#### Subjective Duration of Pre-Pandemic vs. Pandemic Years



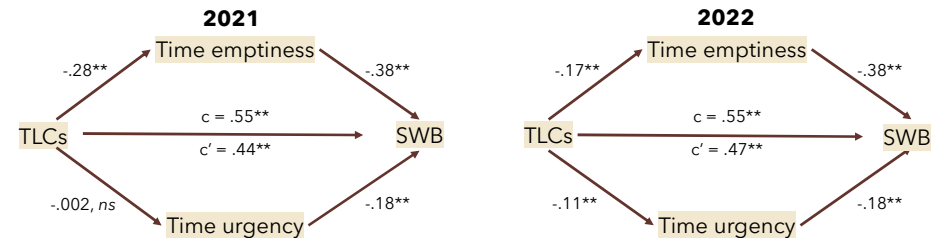
#### Engagement in TLCs



#### Correlations between TLCs, SWB, Time Emptiness & Time Urgency

Variable	Stress management	Nature	Nutrition and diet	Physical activity	Community service	In-person relationships	Recreation and hobbies	Religion/spirituality	TV/Netflix	Video games	Remote relationships
2021 SWB	.29*	.43*	.43*	.37*	.32*	.43**	.40*	.24*	-.02	-.03	.35*
2021 Emptiness	-.13*	-.18*	-.29*	-.24*	-.07*	-.24*	-.22*	-.08	.06	.06	-.19*
2021 Urgency	-.02	-.02	-.09*	-.02	.09*	-.004	-.07*	.05	-.05	-.01	.01
2022 SWB	.30*	.41*	.44*	.39*	.35*	.48*	.45*	.23*	.03	-.09*	.29*
2022 Emptiness	-.06	-.09*	-.21*	-.17*	-.03	-.21*	-.21*	.04	.05	.17*	-.13*
2022 Urgency	-.07*	-.09*	-.14*	-.12*	.04	-.14*	-.16*	.03	.01	.01	-.05

#### Evaluations of Time as Mediators



$p^* < .05$ ;  $p^{**} < .001$

### DISCUSSION

- Participants described a range of distortions to subjective time; however, overall, the first year of the pandemic felt longer than the year prior or the year after.
- The sense of having too much or not enough time was more strongly related to SWB than the subjective duration of time.
- Maintaining social relationships (both in-person and remotely), as well as other TLCs were all associated with greater SWB during the pandemic.
- Time emptiness mediated the relationship between engagement in TLCs and SWB in both S1 and S2; time urgency mediated the relationship in S2 though time emptiness had a stronger indirect effect.