Article

COVID-19 and Family and Peer Dynamics in Emerging Adults

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Abstract: Although research on the associations between COVID-19 and social relationships has garnered attention, there has been less of a focus on how COVID-19 was discussed within relationships themselves. The present study deepens the understanding of the wide reach of the pandemic by using quantitative surveys and open-ended responses to explore how individuals discussed and reacted to COVID-19 and related health guidelines in the context of their family and peer relationships. Data were collected from 132 young adults in the U.S. (age = 18.9 years, SD = 0.85; 50% female; 14% ethnically racially minoritized students) using standard procedures established by the university's undergraduate research pool. Results suggest that young adults talked about COVID-19 more with their families than with their peers. They also reported sharing similar opinions about the pandemic with both their family and their peers. Young adults described COVID-19, overall, as having positive net effects within their family relationships but straining their peer relationships. Qualitative data provide additional, detailed insight on how the pandemic shifted interpersonal dynamics and family and peer relationships.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has affected virtually all aspects of development. Not only have high infection rates contributed to serious physical health concerns but the pandemic has also had relational implications for people around the world [1]. A growing body of literature shows that COVID-19 has greatly affected individuals' social cohesion, connectedness, and well-being in complex ways. For example, whereas high pre-lockdown levels of social cohesion increased risk for mental health problems during the pandemic, high social cohesion during lockdown appeared to serve as a protective factor [2]. Although such research efforts have begun to uncover the intricate ways in which COVID-19 and relationships are linked, less is known about how COVID-19 was discussed within relationships and how relationships were influenced by reactions to COVID-19 and vice versa [3].

Using both quantitative and open-ended responses, the present study seeks to address several understudied issues around COVID-19 and family and peer dynamics. More specifically, given the megaphone of opinions and debate about COVID-19 trends, vaccines, and health mandates, there has been little attention to how young adults made sense of such guidance within the context of their family and peer relationships. From where did young adults seek their information and with whom did they speak about COVID-19? In addition, how were young adults' relationships with parents and peers disrupted or enhanced by COVID-19, and vice versa, especially with regard to possible differences in perspectives and in understanding and abiding by safety protocols?

Drawing on data from undergraduate students, the present study addresses these questions and aims to provide pertinent insight into how young adults navigated the pandemic within their social relationships. In the following sections of this article, we discuss how young adults might have communicated with their family and peers about critical issues regarding COVID-19, introduce our key research questions, and present

and summarize our results. The investigation of these critical questions is especially salient among individuals who had to manage the pandemic while also undergoing life transitions, such as for students adjusting to college, exploring independence, and changing and maintaining their friend groups [4]. Considering the many practical ways in which young adults regularly interact with both peers and family members, this study has vast implications for better understanding how emerging adults coped, for months, with safety and health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.1. Sources of Information and Concordance of Views on COVID-19

In the midst of a worldwide stressor such as COVID-19, young adults were tasked with processing information from a range of sources as they determined their own strategies for coping with the pandemic. The nature of the pandemic brought a tremendous amount of uncertainty, with constant streams of conflicting information between community members and leaders being communicated to the public. Not only were there global differences in world leaders' responses and safety protocols but the advice and suggestions of individuals and physicians within specific communities also varied [5]. Public figures presented information that was often at odds with guidelines from other experts and many people, not just young adults, were left to question what and whom to trust [6]. For example, within the U.S., there were state-to-state differences in guidelines. California was the first state to issue a stay-at-home order, on 19 March 2020; Alaska very soon followed suit but was the first state to end the order just a short month later [7]. Additionally, more proximal factors like one's political party, one's surrounding community, and personal experiences with COVID-19 largely affected the information to which individuals were exposed as well as their overall perceptions of risk [8,9].

The myriad of diverse opinions contributed to the obscurity, differing views, and misinformation surrounding COVID-19 and its associated protocols and practices [10]. Handling such opaque perspectives presented a notable concern for young adults in college who are engaged in a transitory stage in development. For instance, in some cases, the guidelines set by a university (e.g., vaccine mandates) could have conflicted with a student's personal, family, or home community's norms. With conflicting opinions in the news, among peers, and even within one's own family, young adults were left to make sense of the differences and decipher guidance to best support their lifestyle and needs [9,11]. It is important to understand from where individuals received information so that essential health guidelines and messages, in the future, can be shared in the most effective ways.

Existing research has long demonstrated that both parents and peers hold integral roles in individuals' development [12]. However, it is unknown whether young adults turned more to their parents or to their peers as key sources of information about the pandemic. Similarly, was there concordance in the way in which young adults and their parents and peers perceived the pandemic and related protocols? Consistent with the broader parenting literature suggesting that parents are often seen as resources to gain wisdom and shape overall values [13] and with the logistical constraints of the pandemic (e.g., stay-at-home orders, spending more time with the family during lockdown), perhaps young adults relied more on their parents than on their peers for information regarding COVID-19.

In addition, drawing on the more general parenting literature, given that youth are often financially dependent on their parents, they often turn to parental feedback for decision making around critical issues [14]. Job loss was a common concern amidst the pandemic, and thus, financial dependence and reliance on parents' perspectives may have increased even further [15]. With all of the uncertainty around the pandemic, many emerging adults could have also viewed their parents as "competent guides", viewing them as having more experience navigating serious situations and having to make future-oriented decisions in the past [16]. As such, considering the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic,

and risk of COVID-19 infection, with life-altering and long-term health implications, the role of parents in decision making and information seeking was likely essential.

Alternatively, young adults were still able to connect with their peers during the pandemic, whether virtually or in limited in-person situations (e.g., masked). Hence, it is possible that peers were also seen as reliable sources of information, maybe even more so than were parents, especially if young adults found that their perceptions happened to coincide more strongly with their peers' views than with their parents'. The present study addressed these questions by asking young adults about their preferred sources of information about the pandemic and also whether their views about COVID-19 were concordant with those of their family members and peers.

1.2. Perceptions of COVID-19 in the Context of Parent and Peer Relationships

Above and beyond information-seeking, young adults' social relationships have been directly affected by the pandemic in multiple ways. Lockdowns and other logistical consequences of the pandemic generated increased degrees of interpersonal stress and conflict, especially among families that were already at risk due to low socioeconomic status or other limited resources [17,18]. COVID-19 also has been connected to mental health concerns for many children and adolescents, especially within vulnerable populations, such as those with pre-existing mental disorders and those with special needs; specifically, anxiety, depression, irritability, and reports of rage spiked during the pandemic [19]. Among emerging adults, many of those who were living on college campuses were forced to move back home with their parents. As such, this presented a unique environment for some young adults in which mental health issues were negatively affected; however, for others, family provided an important support system, despite pandemic challenges [20]. Further, issues of mental health might be dependent on prior issues with mental health, leaving young adults more vulnerable [21]. It is important to note that, although many families experienced high degrees of stress, a slower pace of life and more family time contributed to positive effects, and some families coped well [22]. Further, adolescents were noted to actively use positive coping strategies to moderate COVID-19 stress even when their parents did not [23]. More deeply examining the specific ways that family relationships were affected by the pandemic could provide an important glimpse into broader relationship changes (both positive and negative) between those who live together, or share familial bonds, and intimate home-life dynamics during a time when many were forced to stay indoors, social distance, and quarantine.

Peer relationships among young adults have also been affected [24,25]. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, many young adults were encouraged to physically isolate or remove themselves from the risk of infection, thereby limiting social contact and challenging peer relationships. Declines in friend support at the beginning of the pandemic have been documented, and these declines have implications for adolescents' well-being [26]. Considering that peer relationships play a primary role in development, with downstream implications for well-being and mental health [27,28], it is essential to further understand the perceived peer and relational implications of the pandemic, especially given the strain of lower social support and physical companionship. It is notable that some research has found positive implications for youth's peer relationships. For example, among both younger and older adolescents, significant decreases in negative interactions with friends were reported during the pandemic, suggesting that there could have been some benefits to having fewer in-person interactions with peers [29]. Further, some have found that stronger social connections were forged with novel social identities, due to the pandemic [30]. However, other studies note that the pandemic's effect on social situations generated increased feelings of loneliness and discomfort [31,32]. Many also felt that virtual spaces did not satisfy their need for social interactions [33].

Our research aims to supplement existing and emerging findings regarding family and peer dynamics amidst COVID-19. Although there is no question that the pandemic contributed to family and interpersonal stress and affected the well-being and relationships

of many individuals [34,35], the diverse array of individuals' experiences indicates that a unique and tailored approach should be used when considering the overall impact of COVID-19 [36,37]. With this in mind, we directly asked participants how their family and peer relationships were affected by the pandemic. We also solicited open-ended reflections regarding their perceived associations between COVID-19 and relationships with the hopes of improving understanding of how they coped with the stress of a pandemic within their interpersonal contexts.

1.3. The Current Study

Although research on the implications of COVID-19 on various relationships has grown [3], less is known about how COVID-19 was discussed in different relationships or how relationships and COVID-19 related attitudes and behaviors might be interrelated. For example, with whom did young adults' conversations about COVID-19 transpire (i.e., parents, peers) and what were the contents of these discussions? The current investigation relied on young adults' quantitative and open-ended responses to explore these questions. With regard to information seeking, we generally expected that youths would report that both their parents and friends served as sources of information during the pandemic, with perhaps a greater emphasis on family influences due to greater proximity to and familiarity with parents. We also examined whether young adults' views about the pandemic would correspond with the views of their parents and peers but did not have any a priori hypotheses regarding possible differences. Similarly, without imposing pre-determined hypotheses, we directly asked individuals to report whether their relationships were affected positively or negatively by the pandemic and allowed individuals' own voices to capture insight on how COVID-19 and social relationships might be intricately linked. In response to open-ended prompts, we expected that young adults would report multifaceted ways in which they discussed COVID-19 within the context of their parent and peer relationships. Considering the global and wide-reaching scale of COVID-19, the current study's results can provide meaningful information into the views of young adults in crises, so that support can be most effective and best cater to their needs if future issues arise.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were 132 undergraduate students enrolled at a small, private university in the Southeastern U.S. The mean age was 18.9 years ($SD = 0.85$). There was an even split (50%) across self-reported male and female gender. Based on self-report, the majority of the sample identified as monoracially White, with 14% of participants indicating ethnically racially minoritized backgrounds (e.g., Asian, Latinx, Black, Multiracial).

2.2. Procedures

Using convenience sampling and standard procedures for the university's undergraduate psychology research pool, students signed up to participate through an online system. Students enrolled in an Introductory Psychology class read a brief description of the study and interested students were given a Qualtrics link where they provided online consent and completed questionnaires on their own personal computer in their own time. The surveys took approximately 10–15 min to complete. All procedures were approved by the university's IRB.

Notably, at the onset of the pandemic, classes at this particular university shifted from in-person to entirely online during mid-semester in the spring of 2020 and students were required to leave campus. As the height of the pandemic continued, classes were offered only remotely during the following Fall Semester (August to December 2020), though students could remain physically on campus, if they chose. Guidelines were revised for the Spring Term (January to May 2021), as classes were offered using in-person, hybrid, and virtual modalities. At first, on-campus buildings and in-person resources were closed, and social programming events were canceled. Then, buildings slowly began to

reopen and event attendance was limited. In addition to encouraging masking indoors and handwashing, the COVID-19 vaccine was mandated for all students, unless a religious or health exemption was approved. The present study was conducted during the spring of 2022, a period in which many college campuses and much of the U.S., including this university, were still cautious about COVID-19 but were also beginning to revert to pre-pandemic ways of life (e.g., optional masking, in-person classes).

2.3. Measures

Quantitative surveys and open-ended responses were collected. Due to the novelty of the empirical questions and lack of existing measures, all of the items in the current study were developed by the researchers and designed to be high in face validity.

2.3.1. Perspectives on and Implications of COVID-19

On a 6-point scale (1 = *very infrequently*, 6 = *multiple times a day*), participants were asked, "How often do you talk about COVID-19-related health protocols (e.g., social distancing guidelines, vaccination requirements, mask mandates) with your parents/family?" This item was repeated with respect to their "friends". Participants were also asked, "Do you and your parents/family (alternatively, "peers") have the same opinions on the COVID-19 pandemic?" and asked to respond on a Yes/No basis. Two separate questions also assessed participants' perceptions of how the pandemic affected their relationships ("How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your relationships with parents/family (alternatively, "peers")?" Responses were on a 1–5 scale (1 = *very negative effect*, 2 = *little negative effect*, 3 = *no effect*, 4 = *little positive effect*, 5 = *very positive effect*).

2.3.2. Open-Ended Responses and Coding

Qualitative data provided additional insight as young adults were asked, "What fears or concerns do you have about the health crisis caused by COVID-19?" and "How are they affected by your parents, family, or friends?" They were also asked, "Please describe the specific ways in which your parents, family, friends, or social media have affected your response to COVID-19". Responses to these two open-ended questions were coded through an interactive, consensus process.

Standard approaches to the content analysis of qualitative data were followed [38]. A coding team consisted of a coding leader to guide discussion and organize the execution of coding and two independent coders. The coding process began by the coding leader developing an initial coding scheme with primary categories and associated descriptions. Once the scheme was identified, the proposed scheme was sent to the two independent coders for assessment. The independent coders reviewed the proposed coding scheme and met with the coding leader to come to consensus on the themes. Coders were individually encouraged, outside of group discussion, to make any changes to the codebook and codes as needed. After the final codebook was generated, each member of the team was assigned a subset of responses to code independently. In group meetings, these independently coded responses were presented, and any disagreements were discussed until 100% consensus was reached for all responses and codes.

The derived themes encompassed five categories: family/positive, family/negative, peer/positive, peer/negative, and nothing/no response (i.e., uncodable). Subthemes within both family and peer responses that were coded as positive included participants who indicated concordance in ideas and beliefs, especially regarding COVID-19 protocols and its handling, and circumstances whereby one felt supported and encouraged during the pandemic. Positive themes also included situations in which any fears were assuaged by one's family or friends. Negative subthemes indicated disagreement or instances where fears were intensified within one's relationships. For example, a response which noted, "My parents lessened my fears" was coded under the family/positive response category because the respondent's fears were mitigated by the familial interaction. However, "My family made me paranoid about it happening again" was categorized as a family/negative

response, as the familial interaction generated a heightened fear about the pandemic. As another example, "My friends have similar thoughts" would be a peer/positive response as there is concordance in the views within the relationship. "We were all afraid, so I was in a constant state of fear and isolation" was coded as a peer/negative response, and a "None" response was coded under the nothing/no concern category. Notably, the coding was not mutually exclusive, and some responses were categorized by multiple themes.

3. Results

3.1. Sources of COVID-19 Information, Concordance of Attitudes, and Relationship Implications

Paired samples *t*-tests revealed that young adults reported talking about COVID-19 significantly more with their parents (M = 4.29, *SD* = 1.54) than with their friends (M = 4.02, *SD* = 1.52), (t(131) = 4.41, $p < 0.001$). Young adults tended to share similar opinions about the pandemic with both their parents (80% agreement) and their friends (72%). In terms of perceived impact of COVID-19 on relationships, young adults reported a net positive effect within their family relationships (M = 3.11, *SD* = 0.96), but a net negative effect within their peer relationships (M = 2.77, *SD* = 0.91) (t(130) = 3.43, $p < 0.001$).

3.2. Qualitative Insight

Coded themes pooled across responses revealed that COVID-19-related fears and concerns were both assuaged and intensified by relationships. Through the coding process, four primary categories emerged: family-positive, family-negative, peers/friends-positive, and peers/friends-negative. Table 1 lists descriptions of these themes, including the fifth *uncodable* category, as well as excerpts to illustrate each theme.

Table 1. Adolescents' open-ended responses on COVID-19 perceptions and relationships links.

Theme Title	Description	Examples	Frequency
Family-Positive	Adolescents indicate concordance with family/parents and talked in positive ways (e.g., parents provided information and resources, encouraged compliance with health mandates, lessened or assuaged fears).	"My parents lessened these fears". "My family and friends were all very understanding about the pandemic. We followed protocol…" "I think most of my family and friends feel similarly as I do, but I was definitely influenced by what my parents told me to do" "I learned a lot of my information from the news, but also my parents. We would discuss it every day during the peak of quarantine". "… Like people saying the government puts chips in the vaccine, things like that were just everywhere and it's a joke but there was a lot of other misinformation my parents helped me see". "My dad is a doctor and told me about it…"	54.2%
Family-Negative	Parents and family heightened fears, and some adolescents were fearful for family and older adults.	"My family made me paranoid about it happening again" "My mother was immune compromised at the time, so I was mainly concerned about her". "My mom often worries about new variants".	31.06%
Peers/Friends-Positive	Friends served as a source of social support and encouragement to follow guidelines.	"My family and friends helped me get through my concerns" "My friends have similar thoughts" "My friends and I all came to an agreement that we would be in each other's inner circles so we could see each other". "I think my…friends led me in a positive direction. They motivated me to follow protocols and helped me spend my time during the pandemic".	8.47%

Table 1. *Cont.*

Theme Title	Description	Examples	Frequency
Peers/Friends-Negative	Peer and social dynamics were changed due to physical isolation and respondents indicated a desire for elements of a pre-COVID-19 world/normal social environment.	"I was more concerned than the people around me at times and sometimes strained my relationships". "I was fearful for my family and friends and my family and friends share my concerns which amplify these feelings". "We were all afraid, so I was in a constant state of fear and isolation". "The fear does not affect my parents or family as much as my friends. Coming from a pandemic senior year, we all wanted a more normal freshman year of college".	9.03%
Nothing/No response	The respondent indicates that they are indifferent or there is no concern.	"They are not affected by any of the above". "None"	22.53

Note: The coding was not mutually exclusive; hence, percentages add up to over 100.

3.2.1. Just over the majority (52.4%) of coded responses indicated that young adults had positive conversations with their parents about COVID-19. These *family-positive* responses tended to reflect positive views about the pandemic in terms of the concordance of family views, positive conversations and information seeking within the relationship, and general support or resilience that stemmed from the relationship. Family-positive was also used when emerging adults demonstrated agreement with family members and reflected on their interactions in a positive way. Parents and families were particularly common sources of support and encouragement and tended to generate positive environments. For example, some young adults noted that family members were "understanding" and attuned to their needs. They felt supported and talked about discussing information that they collected "from the news" and other sources with their parents. Some dialogue surrounding COVID-19 was more casual. For example, one young adult noted that family members discussed various forms of misinformation such as "chips in the vaccine" in a joking manner.

3.2.2. *Family-negative* (slightly less than a third of the responses, 31.1%) themes were found when family relationships generated an increase in fear. For example, some young adults noted that their parents were concerned "about new variants" or made them "para-noid" which heightened their own concerns. Additionally, some negative relationship-specific themes emerged as young adults expressed concern for "immunocompromised" as well as older family members and their health.

3.2.3. *Peer/friends-positive* themes were reported by slightly less than 10% of respondents and represented those that felt that friends were sources of social support and encouragement to abide by guidelines. For example, some noted that friends "led them in a positive direction". Participants also noted that friends expressed "similar thoughts" and there was a great degree of "agreement" to guide their actions and follow protocols.

3.2.4. The *peers/friends-negative* category was also reported by slightly less than 10% of respondents. These themes reflected social and peer dynamics that were negatively affected and/or expressed the strains of isolation. For example, some friends did not carry the same degree of concern as the participants and, thus, "strained [their] relationships".

3.2.5. Finally, about a quarter of the responses were categorized by *nothing/no concern*, such as when participants felt indifferent or that they had no significant concerns regarding COVID-19 and associated protocols.

4. Discussion

Amid a worldwide stressor such as the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals were tasked with putting together information from a wide range of sources. The diverse array of

COVID-19 guidelines and precautions further complicated individuals' responses and related emotions. For young adults, the novelty of adjusting to college during a pandemic provided students with many outlets and voices to form their own views. Diverse opinions abounded, making it important to identify from where young adults were sourcing their information [5]. The relationships that young adults hold with those around them are especially important to consider when there are so many novel and unprecedented decisions to make, as well as perspectives to consider. The present study provides knowledge on the formation of young adults' attitudes and opinions by examining how they discussed and responded to COVID-19 and related health guidelines in the contexts of their family and peer relationships.

4.1. Sources of Information

One primary aim was to directly ask young adults about their sources of information. In doing so, we found that young adults reported talking more with their families, on average, compared to friends with whom they spoke less about COVID-19. Notably, young adults indicated preferences in speaking with their family, adding to our finding that there were overall positive effects of the pandemic on family relationships. In part, these results could be explained by the fact that physical and social distancing were prevalent. Consistent with some research showing that the majority of young adults talk to their parents about COVID-19 and vaccination intentions more specifically [39], parents could have been the sole source of communication or primary mechanisms for youth to speak with. However, cell phones and technology (e.g., Zoom) could still allow youth to communicate virtually with those outside of the family.

Practically, these patterns are in keeping with the literature showing that parents remain vital influences on adolescents and emerging adults, and contrary to stereotypes, are perhaps even more important than are peers when it comes to important issues [12]. Consistent with some studies suggesting that young adults make key decisions that tend to favor parents' needs rather than peers', our findings similarly suggest that parents appear to hold a greater impact on adolescents' decision making than do friends or peers [40]. In general, young adults could also feel more loyal to their parents than to their peers, especially in terms of reactions to such serious stressors as a pandemic. Other studies indicate that the opinions of parents are more valued in young adults' future-oriented decisions while peer opinions are more valued for current decisions [41]. As such, when young adults in the current study were making decisions about COVID-19 (e.g., whether to get vaccinated, social distance), this might have been because they were thinking of long-term health care and the future consequences of their decisions.

4.2. Concordance of Views

Another essential aim was to examine how and if the opinions of young adults corresponded with parents as well as with peers. Although many COVID-19-related opinions were shared by both friends and families of young adults, there was a slightly greater tendency to share similar opinions with parents than with peers. Young adults have lived with parents and have obviously known them for longer periods of time compared to peers. Perhaps young adults have a greater understanding of their parents' perspectives and, as such, are more likely to be transparent and discuss sensitive and controversial topics, like COVID-19, with them. With stay-at-home orders, it is also possible that young adults and parents were exposed to similar news and media resources which then resulted in shared perspectives. Future work should examine further implications for having similar or different beliefs around critical issues among young adults in college with respect to well-being and other outcomes.

4.3. Additional Associations between COVID-19 and Relationships

Consistent with prior work [1,3], family and peer relationships experienced both positive and negative impacts of the pandemic. Based on quantitative self-report items, familial

relationships seemed to have experienced a positive effect, versus friend relationships, which were reported to be strained by the pandemic. This also corroborates previous work suggesting that increased time spent together due to stay-at-home orders strengthened family bonds [14]. Additionally, other research [42] indicates that familial relationships can serve as a protective factor if friend relationships are strained. With decreased physical contact with friends (due to social distancing guidelines), perhaps young adults experienced a fracturing of friends while also leaning into familial support. Another factor to consider is whether related health care challenges and the prevalence of misinformation further taxed a society already strained by COVID-19 and contributed to negative effects in friendships.

The qualitative responses provide some unique insights that extend these quantitative trends. Specifically, open-ended responses indicated that young adults navigated a wide array of dynamic relationship changes throughout the course of COVID-19. In terms of the frequencies of coded responses, most students discussed positive themes when linking COVID-19 and family relationship experiences. Indeed, some of the participants in the current study found their parents to be strong sources of information as well as contacts to ease the stress of the pandemic. A notable portion of students also mentioned negative impacts, though to a lesser extent. For those who experienced negative relationship effects, it appears that they sensed increased stress and worry due to the concerns of their family and older adults in their lives.

Although fewer youth noted changes or differences in relational effects with friends, some participants did experience social change due to COVID-19. For example, some discussed the negative effects of social isolation as well as the decreased social connectedness with their peers. Yet, there were also peer-positive views with friends serving as a stream of support and encouragement, especially in the context of abiding by governmental regulations. Some participants found that the deep bonds of friendships motivated or affirmed their desires to follow guidelines or feel more at ease about health concerns. Greater cognizance of the relational implications of global health events like COVID-19 could better inform efforts to support young adults in stressful situations.

4.4. Limitations and Future Directions

Although our findings contribute to a more robust understanding of how COVID-19 and parent and peer relationships are linked, some limitations should be noted. Specifically, the sample was relatively small and confined to college students. Perhaps young adults in the work force or those not in college had different experiences compared to the young adults in our sample who had to isolate in the inherently social setting of undergraduate life. Additionally, the demographics of the sample were limited, with most identifying as White. Thus, the results might not be fully reflective of broader populations and limited to the sample addressed. Given that the effects of COVID-19 have been found to be disproportionately negative for people of color, it would be important for future work with a more racially diverse sample to systematically investigate any differential effects [43,44]. Responses were also limited by their self-reported and retrospective nature, which may conflate certain responses to those most inclined to complete the survey, versus a more general audience.

Despite limitations, the present study provides essential information about how young adults navigate distressing situations, including the primary sources and outlets that they seek for streams of information and how they respond to relationships during such circumstances. Further research should be conducted to assess the ongoing health and relationship implications for young adults to understand the possible lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, it would be important to consider prior relationship dynamics before the pandemic to determine whether significant changes have occurred and how the nature of such changes might relate to other important factors in individuals' lives. Such knowledge would be valuable in discerning ideal practices that can support young adults in times of unprecedented stress, speaking to feasible and effective means to

disseminate information and garnering an overall more solid understanding of the wide impacts of a global pandemic.

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