

Out of health psychology and back again

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2020: the Covid-19 pandemic strikes mankind. A German PhD student is stranded in his kitchen in Helsinki, Finland, where he finds himself with one mission – finish his PhD thesis. With the support of his supervisors who bring him office equipment and good advice, he struggles through. A thesis is born. All it awaits is being defended and – perhaps more importantly – its final study to be presented to an international audience. But lo!, the time for the EHPS conference comes close and the pandemic still holds its grip on the world.

2021: the PhD student has evolved into a Postdoc. Changed fields. Works in a project on intergroup relations now. The 2021 EHPS conference approaches. Does he still have enough health psychology in him to attend? Thanks to a slow and effortful publication process the final study of his PhD is still unpublished and therefore eligible to be presented at EHPS. He applies, he applies for a grant. He gets it! He attends and, yet again, marvels at the world of European health psychology.

After this somewhat dramatized prelude, I can honestly say that the EHPS conference grant was my only way to attend the 2021 EHPS annual meeting. In the beginning of 2021, I had taken up a postdoctoral position in a project on intergroup relations which would not pay for a health psychology conference, no matter how great and prestigious it may be.

So there I was with the final study of my PhD, in which I had examined usage patterns for a mobile app. In the app, participants learned to

withhold their impulses to react to unhealthy food images in an attempt to decrease their unhealthy snack consumption. Following Jun.-Prof. Laura König's invitation to join the symposium "The potential of digital technologies for understanding and changing eating behavior" she had organized, I had the great pleasure to present my work alongside Stuart Ferguson (University of Tasmania), Michael Kilb (University of Mannheim), and Laura herself (University of Bayreuth). Daniel Powell (University of Aberdeen) gave us the honor to discuss our work. The audience got to hear and discuss about fascinating research from comfort eating to healthy colorful meals, from improving communication in online support groups to food impulse training. It became clear yet again to everyone that digital technologies have great potential to further our understanding of and to intervene on eating behavior but that user engagement is key to both observational and intervention studies.

I also had plenty of opportunity to attend other sessions. This way I learned more about TV viewing and dietary intake, using nudges in all kinds of different settings and for all kinds of different behaviors, about habits for hygiene behavior, physical behavior, and sleep routines, and how health psychology and environmental psychology can go hand in hand and learn from each other. All of these talks and ideas presented great work and really stimulated my thinking, exactly what I hoped for when signing up for the conference.

Hearing talks was not just possible live, but, since most presentations were pre-recorded, they could also be watched afterwards on the easyconferences platform. This was a great

advantage of the online conference format compared to a face-to-face one (in addition to environmental aspects and being more inclusive for parents or people with disabilities). Of course, there are also downsides that made painfully clear what we're missing out on in these times of no face-to-face contact: not only are networking opportunities much rarer and interactions happen less spontaneously. I personally found rather striking how important the change of scenery is that comes with a "normal" conference visit. I never made it to any of the social events that took place in the evening on specialized platforms. Not because I did not care or was not interested (and I heard people had good fun on those occasions). It was just that my regular day-to-day life kept happening around me and kept me busy. So despite the overall very positive experience of this online conference I have to say: I'm looking forward to the next EHPS meeting to hopefully be face-to-face again.

For my final words about something close to my heart I need to go back to the beginning of the conference. While the opening ceremony is usually not my favorite part of the conference (sorry!) it was special to me this year. Ari Haukkala, who supervised my PhD and was a great mentor and guide in my academic life, passed away in February 2021. In this year's opening ceremony, the EHPS announced the introduction of a new mentoring scheme that will be named after him. From all my personal experience with Ari I can definitely say that I cannot imagine any better way to honor his memory as a great mentor and teacher – these were the things he was most passionate about and he was always vocal about the pride he felt for his students' success. Without the EHPS's conference grant I would not have been able to attend the opening ceremony to hear this announcement first hand. For this I am very grateful.

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