

**Happier from Home: The Predicting Factors of Employee  
Well-Being in In-Person and Virtual Workspaces**

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Word Count = 8423

## ABSTRACT:

The goal of this study is to better understand the predictors of employee well-being in in-person and virtual workspaces by looking at the factors of social connectedness, work-life balance, and work autonomy. This fits into psychological and sociological literature on Industry 4.0, workplace well-being, and the social determinants of mental health. This cross-sectional survey study used convenience sampling methods to gather information from 80 participants, and used Stata to analyze through multiple regression, t-tests, and correlations. It was found that for the sample of mostly white women (87.3% white, 80% women), well-being is higher in those working virtually ( $t = 2.60, p = 0.011$ ), and that this effect is mediated by work-life balance ( $z = 3.89, p = 0.000$ ) and autonomy ( $z = 4.64, p = 0.000$ ). Working mostly virtually improves both work-life balance ( $t = -3.84, p = 0.000$ ) and autonomy ( $t = -4.58, p = 0.000$ ), and those factors in turn increase well-being (work-life balance:  $p = 0.000$ ; autonomy:  $p = 0.007$ ). There is no difference in social connectedness based on work format ( $t = 0.04, p = 0.968$ ); however, higher levels of social connectedness also predicted higher levels of well-being ( $p = 0.004$ ). These findings demonstrate that to increase employees' well-being, especially for their white female employees, workplaces should focus on improving social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy. If they're in-person workplaces, they should especially focus on work-life balance and autonomy, since in-person workplaces tend to fall shorter in those areas than virtual workplaces.

*Keywords:* workplace well-being, autonomy, social connectedness, work-life balance

## **Happier from Home: The Predicting Factors of Employee Well-Being in In-Person and Virtual Workspaces**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, virtual workplaces have become increasingly common, even after the peak of the lockdowns was over. Because the technology for virtual work is now well established, the future of workplace formats appears to be more diverse, including a variety of in-person, hybrid, and virtual workspaces (Kwiotkowska and Gębczyńska 2022). Some refer to this change as part of the fourth industrial revolution, or Industry 4.0 (Lasi 2014). The industrial revolutions to this point have been driven by social, economic, and political factors, resulting in massive mechanical, electrical, and digital shifts in how people work and what products are created (Lasi 2014). Industry 4.0 has been expanding upon the digital shifts of the third industrial revolution to incorporate the internet, “smart” technologies, and most recently, virtual collaboration platforms (Lasi 2014; Kwiotkowska and Gębczyńska 2022). This advancement has come from social pushes for flexibility and efficiency both in getting products to market and in work experiences for employees (Lasi 2014). However, the drivers of these changes are not the only factors of importance; there are multitudes of things that are likely to be affected by Industry 4.0. A major outcome in question is the well-being of professionals in virtual workplaces as compared to in-person workplaces.

This study attempts to answer this question by examining the nature of the relationship between workplace format and employee well-being through factors including social connectedness, work-life balance, and work autonomy, while taking into account the roles of being white and female in the workplace. The goal is to better understand how working professionals are doing and what factors affect them most, so that the future of work may be

designed in a way that fosters well-being and promotes greater gender and racial equity in the experience of working professionally.

The next chapter of this paper walks through the theoretical framework, including conceptual definitions and theories about workplaces, well-being, whiteness, and gender, in which the literature and results of this study will be understood. The following section is the literature review, situating this research among previous psychological and sociological research that has been done on workplace format and workplace relationships, work-life balance, and autonomy, and all of these factors' relationship with well-being. The methods section lays out how this research was conducted and the decision-making processes involved. The findings section describes the results of the study, and the discussion summarizes the results and implications. In the conclusion are suggestions for future research.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study defines well-being through a positive psychology lens. Ryff (1995), a positive psychologist, describes well-being as having six dimensions: self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relations with other people, autonomy, purpose in life, and environmental mastery. Based on Ryff's (1995) theory, changes in any of these dimensions results in a change in overall well-being. Another theory in positive psychology is the top-down and bottom-up models of well-being, which highlight similar aspects of well-being as Ryff (1995). Top-down theories explain the aspects of well-being that come from more internal psychological forces. For example, positive relationships with other people (Boehm, Ruberton, and Lyubomirsky 2018), sense of meaning in life (Steger, Oishi, and Kashdan 2009), and perceived autonomy (Thompson 2018) are highly predictive of subjective well-being, and they tend to be internal cognitive

processes, even if affected by external factors. The bottom-up theories explain well-being as it relates to external factors and circumstances. Factors like income (Biswas-Diener 2008), discrimination (Bucchianeri et al. 2014), and even climate (Wei et al. 2017) fit into bottom-up theorizations of well-being. The psychological concept of bottom-up well-being is similar to the sociological discussion on the social determinants of health. Specifically looking at the social determinants of mental health, income is a factor that frequently contributes to emotional strain and is usually tied to other stressors like material hardship (including housing and food insecurity) (Pevalin et al. 2017). Discrimination has been found to have a cumulative effect on well-being, and it has been argued that discrimination can be a cause of depression and predictor of anxiety (Wallace, Nazroo, and Becares 2016; Khan, Ilcisin, Saxton 2017). Well-being is multidimensional, and is affected by the interactions of many factors, but is important to research as it is a stable way of understanding how people are doing in life (Diener 1984).

This study is concerned with well-being as it relates to the workplace. Warr (1999) described ten elements of work environments that determine well-being, including opportunity for personal control, opportunity for skill use, reasonable externally generated goals, variety, environmental clarity, availability of money, physical security, supportive supervision, opportunity for interpersonal contact, and work being valued by society. It is also supportive of well-being to have work-life balance, as defined by adequate leisure time and time affluence, or the perception that one has enough time for all activities that are meaningful and important to the individual (Kasser and Sheldon 2009). This study is concerned specifically with the factors of well-being in the workplace that may be affected by workplace format. Therefore, workplace relationships (interpersonal contact and supportive supervision in Warr's model), autonomy

(opportunity personal control in Warr's model), and work-life balance (through leisure and time affluence) rise to importance.

One cannot dismiss the roles of gender and race in these topics; in fact, they are just as integral to understanding well-being in the workplace as the aforementioned psychological and sociological factors. Gender has long been a topic of discussion related to professional and familial roles and socialized identities. Miller (1986) theorized about the identity development that is socialized in different genders, explaining that women are socialized to understand themselves in how they relate to others. Based on Ryff's (1995) definition of well-being, which emphasizes autonomy, identity, and relationships, because women's autonomy, authenticity, and identity are all formed within relationships, the importance of social connection is integral to women's well-being (Miller 1986). Meanwhile, men are socialized to identify in terms of how they provide to others and where they succeed (Miller 1986), emphasizing Ryff's (1995) aspects of well-being that call for mastery and personal growth. The field of positive psychology, along with greater gender socialization, places women and their well-being as relational and men and their well-being as professional (Miller 1986). Furthermore, gendered differences in attitudinal commitment to work, which results in gender disparities in leadership roles, have been theorized about through the gender model of work (Cook 1993). This model hypothesizes that women are socialized to value family roles and commitments over professional ones; on the other hand, men are socialized to develop their identity within how they provide and perform, with their professional role as central to who they are (Cook 1993). This socialization, plus the systemic inequities and biases against women in professional spheres, results in less women holding leadership roles at work and less job satisfaction for women (Dodd-McCue and Wright 1996). Finally, even outside of leadership roles, a discussion of workplace violence is potent here.

Women are more likely to encounter sexual and nonsexual harassment (Ilies et al. 2003), verbal and physical abuse (Marsh et al. 2009), and in virtual work platforms, cyber bullying, stalking, and threats (Hess 2014). This is a result of gender stereotyping and workplace design that consistently favors men, and it has a direct result on the well-being of working women (Van De Griend and Hilfinger Messias 2014). Workplace violence results in more anxiety, depression, and burnout, and lower self-esteem and life satisfaction, not just job satisfaction, in women (Bowling and Beehr 2006). Gender is a critical variable to analyze in any research on workplace and well-being, and thus is a factor analyzed in this study.

This study also exists within the context of whiteness. Although I had initially hoped to study differences between racial groups, the sample in this study ended up reflecting the experiences of white people much more than any other group, meaning I shifted to understanding this as a study of whiteness. White people benefit from and reproduce the systemic racial injustice that is ingrained in our country. This concept is known as white complicity, where simply by being white in a society that privileges white people, we perpetuate the systemic inequality (Applebaum 2010). It is also often assumed, especially in research, that the experiences of white people are the norm, and are the neutral comparison point, while the experiences of people of color are abnormal and often lacking (Bohonos 2019). This also reproduces systemic values, because as whiteness is upheld as the standard, the marginalization of the 'other' grows (Cabrera and Corces-Zimmerman 2019). The workplace is a key area for this conversation, as it is one of the many places that deeply rooted discrimination persists, favoring white people in subtle and overt ways (Deitch et al. 2003). Experiencing discrimination and racism is a determinant of well-being (Carter et al. 2013; Brave Heart 1998; Breland-Noble 2013; Khan, Ilcisin, Saxton 2017; Wallace, Nazroo, and Becares 2016) but so is experiencing

white privilege. White privilege provides white people with more accessible and appropriate healthcare resources (Malat et al. 2010). The mental health of white people is what most therapeutic interventions in the United States are catered toward. The so-called scientific, evidence-based foundation of clinical psychology overrepresents white people and is rooted in Western individualistic ideology (Ahsan 2020). Psychology as a discipline centers the white experience in how it conceptualizes of and treats well-being (Wood and Patel 2017). In this study, well-being is also conceptualized in this way, and this conceptualization is applied to a majority white sample. The results cannot necessarily be extended to other racial groups. Instead, the study offers an opening to a conversation about workplace well-being of white people in the context of a culture that favors and upholds whiteness as a standard.

In understanding the changing world that comes with Industry 4.0, the impact of workplace format on well-being must be analyzed. The current field of positive psychology fails to acknowledge that the importance of employee well-being in the United States is because of a capitalist mindset that places one's profession as central to their identity and life (Thier 2020). Capitalism is an economic system where everyone is reliant on the market for their way of living (Chibber 2018). A person's worth is contingent upon their place within the means of production, whether they are selling their labor to others or own the means of production (Shaw and Waterstone 2019). It is no wonder that in a capitalist society, one's work has such an influence on one's well-being. Thus, this facet of work - workplace format - is important to highlight specifically, in order to create more equitable and wellness-fostering workplaces in the future.

This study analyzed this topic by looking at well-being through the mediating factors of workplace relationships, work autonomy, and work-life balance, and their interactions with gender and race in in-person and virtual workspaces.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

This research speaks to psychological and sociological bodies of literature on workplace environments and well-being. In this chapter, existing research on workplace format and social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy and on these factors' impact on employee well-being will be reviewed.

*Social Connectedness*

Most of the research on workplace format has come from studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and on shifts from in-person to virtual work in that time. Unsurprisingly, with the shift to remote work, employees in general spent a lot more time alone. A study by Brown and Leite (2022) found that employees who switched to remote work had higher ill-being as workplace connectedness dropped and more time was spent alone. Organizations where workers felt more interpersonal trust with coworkers and supervisors had less of the negative effect of being isolated, but the isolation persisted nonetheless (Brown and Leite 2022). However, staying connected virtually is possible, and has been important through the pandemic, especially through enhanced communication technologies and social media (Chayko 2014). While loneliness was found to be more associated with virtual connection than face-to-face connection, so was positive coping, suggesting that the virtual relationships might not be all bad as people seek out intentional interaction and other healthy ways to stay occupied (Moore and March 2022). But still, the most commonly reported concern of virtual workers has been perceived isolation from co-workers and workplace social networks (Mann, Varey, and Button 2000), stemming from missing out on “chats around the water cooler” and the informal interactions that come from being in-person (Cooper and Kurland 2002). Work is a place to

socialize, and virtual connections do not predict our well-being as well as face-to-face connections do (Challands, Lacherez, and Obst 2017).

Workplace relationships are an important factor in the question of well-being, as social connectedness is one of the most well-researched areas of positive psychology. Within the workplace specifically, having strong relationships and a sense of belonging makes work more enjoyable for employees (Yager 1997) and increases job satisfaction (Winstead et al. 1995). The emotional and structural support of workplace relationships also helps protect against the effects of negative experiences (Berman et al. 2002). Through the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, this meant that organizational connectedness helped buffer stress and reduce ill-being in workplaces (Brown and Leite 2022). On the other hand, employees who report experiencing workplace isolation note that it is a significant source of stress and hardship (House 1981).

### *Work-Life Balance*

Another well-being factor that is impacted by workplace format is work-life balance. This balance refers to the proportion of time and energy spent on work and non-work activities (Hammig, Gutzwiller, and Bauer 2009), and is an important factor in work attendance, satisfaction, and performance (Voydanoff 2004). Researchers have looked into workplace format as it relates to work-life balance mostly in terms of commute time. Remote working eliminates the time that people spend commuting, which is a defining part of work-life balance. Most people report that commuting to work takes away from time and energy to spend on non-work activities, thus unbalancing the work to non-work proportion (Hobfoll 1989). The relationship between commute time and well-being is mediated by work-life balance, suggesting that reduced commute time does improve work-life balance, and work-life balance in turn affects well-being (Emre and De Spiegeleare 2021). However, other research shows remote work to have two

opposite effects on work-life balance. Some researchers agree with Emre and De Spiegeleare (2021), finding that work-life balance increases when working virtually, especially for women who benefit from work flexibility to fill the roles as mother and housekeeper on top of work (Chung and van der Horst 2018). Other researchers have found, however, that work-life balance suffers during virtual work, as the boundary between work and home life is blurred, removing the perception of a true break from work (Makarius and Larson 2017). Both of these effects may be true, but the current research lacks an understanding on why some people have better work-life balance while working remotely and why some people have worse.

Work-life balance is a crucial determinant of employee well-being for all workers, no matter if they work virtually, in-person, or a mix of both. A study by Jung et al. (2022) found that work-life balance impacted physician burnout and job satisfaction, specifically in terms of number of overtime hours worked. Furthermore, those who reported having time for family and private life also had higher levels of well-being and job satisfaction than those who reported feeling overworked (Jung et al. 2022). Having adequate leisure time and recovery time between work shifts is also tied to mental and physical health, due to physiological needs for rest and the body's circadian rhythm (Moreno et al. 2019).

### *Autonomy*

However, work-life balance isn't the only time-related factor of work that impacts well-being. An employee's autonomy over their schedule, their routine, and their decisions in the workplace is related to well-being, and also potentially workplace format. While there is a lack of research into how workplace format impacts work autonomy, similar to work-life balance, autonomy does mediate the relationship between commuting time and well-being (Emre and De

Spiegeleare 2021). Because commuting time is directly related to workplace format, it can be hypothesized that workplace format may also impact autonomy.

It is more established, however, that workplace autonomy impacts well-being. Specifically in the adjustment to remote work, employees who felt that they had more independence and control surrounding their work adjusted better than those who did not feel as autonomous (van Zoonen et al. 2021). Similarly, workers with higher levels of autonomy tend to report greater job satisfaction and less burnout (Jung et al. 2022). Autonomy actually moderates the relationship between the number of hours one works and their satisfaction with their job, suggesting that those who have greater perceived control over when and how they work may be somewhat protected from the harmful effects of being overworked on well-being (Dong et al. 2021). Similarly, those with higher levels of autonomy were at a lower risk of burnout, even when the emotional demands of their job were high, compared to those with low autonomy (Tahar et al. 2022). Autonomy, in the literature, impacts well-being greatly on its own, and also buffers against the negative effects of adverse working conditions, making it an important variable in the question of how workplace format impacts well-being.

### *This Study*

It is established in the literature that workplace format impacts workplace social connectedness and work-life balance in some ways, though the direction of impact on work-life balance seems to still be a question. It is also easy to hypothesize, based on the research on commuting, that workplace format also impacts work autonomy. Furthermore, the effects that social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy have on well-being are very clear and well-researched. What is missing, however, is an understanding of how these factors work together, and what factors matter most when working in-person or remotely. The present research

attempts to address this research gap by analyzing the impact of working in-person or remotely on well-being through the potential mediators of social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy. It also hopes to address which factors matter more for which populations, specifically related to whiteness and gender, which are under-researched topics at the moment.

Based on the literature, I hypothesize that workplace format does impact well-being, and that the relationship is mediated by all three factors of social connectedness, work-life balance, and work autonomy. I hypothesize that working in-person may contribute higher social connectedness, and thus greater well-being. The direction of the impact of workplace format on work-life balance and autonomy is up for question, but I hypothesize that higher work-life balance and autonomy will lead to higher well-being. The strength and importance of each factor's effect is also up for question. I also will include whiteness and gender as potential moderators in these relationships to analyze if any of the effects differ based on gender or whiteness. I hypothesize that gender will moderate specifically the effect of working virtually on work-life balance, as white women may find higher levels of work-life balance from working virtually, and it may have a more positive impact on their well-being.

## METHODS

### *Methodology*

This study chose to use survey research because of its efficiency in gathering responses from a great number of people, increasing the generalizability of the results (Ruel, Wagner, and Gillespie 2015). Survey research is also inexpensive and accessible, making it useful for this undergraduate thesis research. While positive psychology and sociology often call for multiple methodologies of research to gain a well-rounded perspective on the human experience, survey

research provides an initial point to jump off from in the future (Compton and Hoffman 2020). This cross-sectional survey will give a point-in-time understanding of the variables across a population of in-person and virtual professionals.

Convenience sampling is a method where a researcher uses their own connections to gather a sample of participants that is accessible and convenient to them (Ruel, Wagner, and Gillespie 2015). This study chose to sample this way because it was the most inexpensive way to gain responses. In this study, convenience sampling was done by posting the survey link to LinkedIn, Facebook, and by sending the link to individual participants asking them to participate.

The survey gathered 90 responses. After cleaning the data, 80 usable responses were included in the study. Participants worked in 18 different industries, including business and financial operations occupations, education occupations, legal occupations, armed forces, management occupations, and more. The participants were 80% female-identifying and 87.3% white-identifying. Half of them work mostly virtually, and half work mostly in person. The participants varied across age, income levels, relationship status, whether they had children, and in how many hours they work per week. Exact counts for these variables can be found in the findings section.

#### *Positionality Statement*

Before presenting my findings, I wanted to acknowledge my positionality as it relates to this research. While I do my best to produce empirical research, I know that no research is absent of contexts, biases, and influence, and who I am and how I chose to conduct this research will impact the results. This research is being conducted as a requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at Colorado College. I am also pursuing the psychology major, alongside sociology, making this interdisciplinary research of interest to me. I use a multidisciplinary

approach that builds on sociological and psychological research and lenses while looking at the world, which will impact how I conduct this research and how results are interpreted. I, as the researcher, am an undergraduate student, holding only part time professional positions, making the topic of this research not directly applicable to me.

I chose to do this work in conversation with Innovative Connections, as my interest in workplace well-being lined up with their conversations about the changing nature of work. I have a family connection to the company Innovative Connections, and decided to team up in recruiting participants because they had access to working professionals that I did not. Innovative Connections is a business consulting company that works with clients across the United States, providing leadership training, relationship-based coaching, and organizational development support. The survey was distributed using their LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as personal sharing of the link. We are defining and measuring well-being through a limited lens, positioned within western values like capitalism and productivity that may not generalize to all ways of thinking about and feeling well-being.

Finally, I am a white cisgender female, and I recognize that convenience sampling with this identity has led me to have a sample that largely does reflect my own identities, and not necessarily the entire population.

### *The Survey Instrument*

This study utilized Qualtrics to create and distribute a survey. The participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Participants were contacted through email, Facebook, and LinkedIn, utilizing personal connections and business connections to the leadership consulting company, Innovative Connections. Participants were provided with a link in their

email, or they came across the link posted to their LinkedIn or Facebook feed, and from there they could choose whether to participate in the study or not.

The survey took an average of six minutes to complete. It collected information on participants' gender, racial, and ethnic identities, and asked in what format (in-person, hybrid, or virtual) individuals worked. Other factors were also collected for control purposes, including marital status, income, age, if they had children, working hours per week, and occupation industry. The survey included several pre-established and validated scales from past research to measure the dependent variable, well-being, and the mediating variables, autonomy, social support, and work-life balance. All of the scales were rearranged into a group of 50 Likert-scale questions to keep participants from knowing which questions were measuring each concept. To account for the rearrangement, the scales were re-validated using a pilot study of 10 participants. This process had the survey sent out to 10 working adults before general distribution, and Cronbach's alpha tests were run on the scale items to make sure the composite measures were still valid. This process verified that the scales were usable in the new survey order.

The scales to measure autonomy and social support both came from the Work Design Questionnaire (Moregson and Humphery 2006). Autonomy was measured using nine 5-point Likert scale items. Social support was measured using six 5-point Likert scale items, but with the addition of one item asking participants' satisfaction in the amount of social connectedness they have at work. These scales were created and validated through several phases of research and trial, and were found to be reliable and valid in terms of both convergent and divergent validity (Moregson and Humphery 2006). The Work Design Questionnaire was created for scholars and researchers to use in any research related to work, work design, and organization. These scales were re-validated in a pilot study of 10 participants to account for changing the order of the



questions in the survey and for the addition of one question in the social support scale. (Cronbach's alpha for social support = 0.87, and for autonomy = 0.85).

Work-life balance was measured using the Work-Life Balance Scale (Fisher, Bulger, and Smith 2009). This measure uses 16 5-point Likert Scale items to create a composite measure of work-life balance, looking at how personal life interferes with or enhances work and how work interferes with or enhances personal life. This measure was developed and validated through a series of adaptations to other related scales and trial studies. This measure has been seen to have good convergent, discriminant, and criterion validity across workers with various jobs and work designs (Fisher, Bulger, and Smith 2009). The scale was re-validated in a pilot study of 10 participants to account for changing the order of the questions in the survey (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85).

Well-being was measured using the Employee Well-Being Scale (Zheng, Zhu, Zhao, and Zhang 2015). A series of 18 5-point Likert Scale items were used to measure well-being on three subscales: life well-being, work well-being, and psychological well-being. Reliability and validity was established through a series of quantitative studies and cross-cultural analyses, demonstrating that the Employee Well-Being Scale is reliable, valid, and has measurement invariance across the Chinese and American contexts (Zheng, Zhu, Zhao, and Zhang 2015). The scale was re-validated in a pilot study of 10 participants to account for changing the order of the questions in the survey and slight wording changes to aid the translation from the original Chinese scale (Cronbach's alpha for full scale = 0.81, for life well-being = 0.71, for workplace well-being = 0.74, and for psychological well-being = 0.84).

*Statistical Methods*

Quantitative analyses of the survey results were conducted using Stata. Some of the tests run included t-tests, Pearson's  $r$  correlations, ANOVAs, and OLS multiple regression models for mediation and moderation. To allow for greater comparison groups, workplace format was condensed into two categories: working mostly virtually and mostly in-person. Race was also condensed into two categories: white and non-white participants. Finally, respondents only selected the male and female options for gender, reducing the gender variable into only two categories as well.

*Limitations*

There are numerous limitations to survey research. For example, survey research reduces participants' experiences to numbers and lacks the ability to gain depth and perspective on their answers. Furthermore, every participant may interpret the same questions and scales differently. Survey research is also vulnerable to respondents tailoring their answers based on what they believe the researcher is looking for, fatigue and boredom as questions go on, and accessibility issues through technology use.

This sample was taken through convenience sampling, meaning that it may not be representative of and generalizable to all working professionals in the United States. The sample was also small, reducing the statistical ability to confidently predict societal patterns. This cross-sectional study is also just a snapshot of one point in time, and this point in time happens to be a unique one as the world is beginning to normalize after the lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic. The nature of work has changed drastically over the past few years, and it is possible that this affected results.

The instruments used to measure these concepts of social connectedness, work-life balance, autonomy, and well-being were valid and reliable, but were created under western values and conceptualizations. Reducing these concepts, which can be defined and understood in many ways across the world, to a handful of scale questions removes much of the depth, nuance, and real-world experience of these concepts, and reinforces the western conceptualization of well-being. The western conceptualization of well-being is limited and comes with its own flaws, and that must be kept in mind when thinking about these results.

Finally, although this study provides interesting insight into the well-being of white women at work, this study did not provide a sufficient understanding of how gender and race impact this issue for all working professionals. Given these limitations, the findings of this study can only really be generalizable to a population which the sample represents, which turned out to be mostly working white women in the context of coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## FINDINGS

The independent variable in this study was work format. The control variables were income, if the participant has children, relationship status, gender, race/ethnicity, weekly hours worked, age, and industry. The total counts for each independent and control variable, except industry, are in the following tables, Table 1a and 1b. Industry was not included in the table due to the large number of different industries represented. However, it was still controlled for in the following statistics.

Table 1a. Categorical Control Variables and Independent Variable

Variable		Number	%
Work Format (n=80)	Mostly virtual	40	50.0
	Mostly in-person	40	50.0
Income (n=79)	\$0 - 29,999	4	5.0
	\$30,000 - 59,999	18	22.8
	\$60,000 - 89,999	18	22.8
	\$90,000 - 119,999	12	15.2
	\$120,000+	27	34.2
Children (n=80)	No children	33	41.2
	Yes, adult children not living at home	11	13.8
	Yes, adult children living at home	6	7.5
	Yes, school-aged children living at home	30	37.5
Relationship Status (n=80)	Single (never married)	19	23.7
	Married or in a domestic partnership	48	60.0
	Divorced/Separated	13	16.3
Gender (n=80)	Female	64	80.0
	Male	16	20.0
Race/Ethnicity (n=79)	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0.0
	Asian	4	5.1
	Black or African American	3	3.8
	Hispanic or Latino	2	2.5
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	1.3
	White	69	87.3

Table 1b. Continuous Control Variables

Variable	Mean[SD]	Range
Weekly Hours Worked (n=80)	40.8[10.7]	10 - 65
Age (n=77)	42.9[12.9]	21 - 73

Tables 1a and 1b display the descriptive statistics for the independent variable and the control variables. The independent variable, work format, was condensed from five categories, with different levels of hybrid working, down into two categories: working mostly virtually and

mostly in-person. This allowed for larger comparison groups in running statistical tests so we could have clearer and more valid results. The variable ‘children’ was coded based on the most impactful children status. For example, if a participant selected that they had both adult children living not at home and school-aged children living at home, then they were coded for school-aged children living at home. In analyzing race as a moderator, the categories were collapsed into white and non-white groups, to allow for larger comparison groups and to give insight into the variable of whiteness. Furthermore, this study did not have any respondents who selected a non-binary gender in the survey, so this study is limited in only examining the effects in male and female-identifying participants.

### *Predicting Well-Being*

When running a t-test for difference in mean well-being scores between those working mostly virtually and those working mostly in-person, there was a significant difference. Those working mostly virtually have, on average, a 0.36 point higher well-being score than those working mostly in-person ( $t = 2.60, p = 0.011$ ).

However, the results of that t-test do not take into account any other factors. Table 2 presents the results from an OLS regression including models regressing composite well-being scores on workplace format, social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy scores. The control variables for these models were weekly hours worked, income, industry, relationship status, children, race, and gender. The controls are not presented in the table, but any significant effects of the controls on well-being are noted in the description below the table. Figure 1 presents Model 5 in a visual format as well. For interpretation, note that well-being composite scores range from -2.267 to 0.916, with a higher score indicating a higher level of well-being.

Table 2. OLS Regression Results - Well-Being

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Virtual Work ref. In-person	0.05 [-0.27,0.37]	0.04 [-0.23,0.31]	-0.09 [-0.37,0.19]	-0.10 [-0.35,0.14]	-0.13 [-0.34,0.08]
Social Connectedness		0.46*** [0.27,0.65]			0.24** [0.08,0.39]
Autonomy			0.42*** [0.24,0.60]		0.21** [0.06,0.36]
Work-Life Balance				0.74*** [0.51,0.96]	0.49*** [0.28,0.71]
Constant	1.03 [-0.08,2.16]	0.52 [-0.42,1.47]	0.87 [-0.07,1.80]	0.28 [-0.57,1.14]	0.03 [-0.08,0.15]
Observations	78	78	78	78	78
$R^2$	0.595	0.730	0.724	0.786	0.857

95% confidence intervals in brackets

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

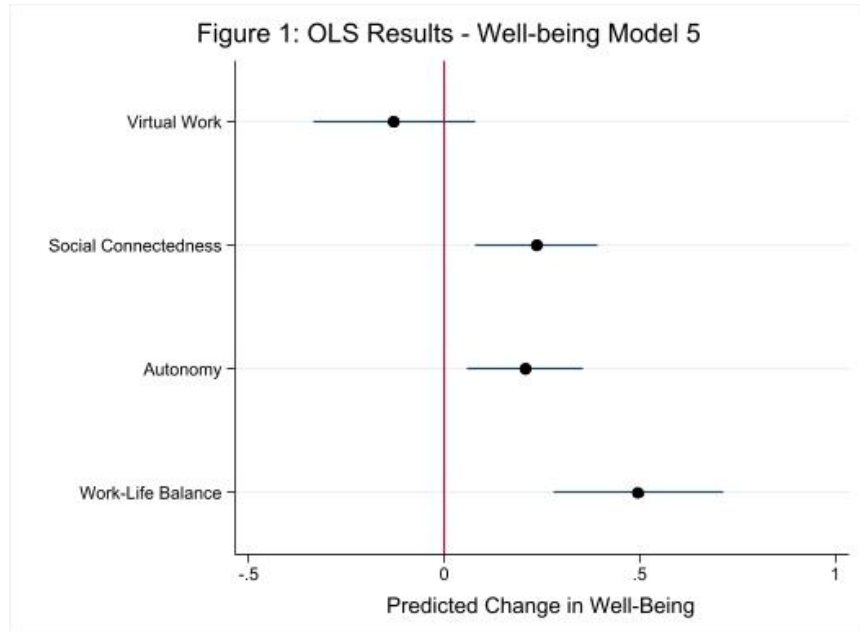
In Model 1, well-being scores were regressed on work format, controlling for weekly hours worked, income, industry, relationship status, children, race, and gender. While controlling for other factors, working virtually did not have a significant impact on well-being ( $t = 0.30$ ,  $p = 0.389$ ). Rather, hours worked weekly had the only significant impact. For every additional hour worked per week, we can expect well-being to decrease by 0.03 points ( $t = -3.53$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

In Model 2, well-being scores were regressed on work format and social connectedness scores. When controlling for social connectedness, alongside the control variables, working virtually still did not have a significant impact on well-being ( $t = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.775$ ). Social connectedness, when controlling for work format and the control variables, did have a significant impact. Social connectedness composite scores ranged from -2.324 to 0.800, with a higher score indicating more social connectedness. For every 1 point increase in social connectedness, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.46 points ( $t = 4.85$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The only control variable with

a significant impact was again weekly hours worked, with every additional hour predicting a 0.03 point decrease in well-being ( $t = -3.39, p = 0.001$ ).

In Model 3, well-being scores were regressed on work format and autonomy scores. When controlling for autonomy, alongside the control variables, working virtually still did not have a significant impact on well-being ( $t = -0.64, p = 0.523$ ). Autonomy, when controlling for work format and the control variables, did have a significant impact. Autonomy composite scores range from -3.021 to 0.836, with a higher score indicating more autonomy. For every 1 point increase in autonomy, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.42 points ( $t = 4.68, p = 0.000$ ). The only control variable with a significant impact was again weekly hours worked, with every additional hour predicting a 0.02 point decrease in well-being ( $t = -2.54, p = 0.015$ ).

In Model 4, well-being scores were regressed on work format and work-life balance scores. When controlling for work-life balance, alongside the control variables, working virtually did not have a significant impact on well-being ( $t = -0.86, p = 0.393$ ). Work-life balance, when controlling for work format and the control variables, did have a significant impact. Work-life balance composite scores range from -2.105 to 1.063, with a higher score indicating better work-life balance. For every 1 point increase in work-life balance, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.74 points ( $t = 6.47, p = 0.000$ ). None of the control variables had a significant impact in this model.



In Model 5, as visualized in Figure 1, well-being scores were regressed on work format, social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy. When controlling for social connectedness, work-life balance, autonomy, and the control variables, working virtually did not have a significant impact on well-being ( $t = -1.35, p = 0.219$ ). Social connectedness, when controlling for the other factors, did have a significant impact on well-being. For every 1 point increase in social connectedness, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.24 points ( $t = 3.02, p = 0.004$ ). Autonomy also had a significant impact while controlling for the other factors. For every 1 point increase in autonomy, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.21 points ( $t = 2.83, p = 0.007$ ). Finally, work-life balance did have a significant impact while controlling for other factors as well. For every 1 point increase in work-life balance, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.49 points ( $t = 4.60, p = 0.000$ ). None of the control variables had impacts in this model.

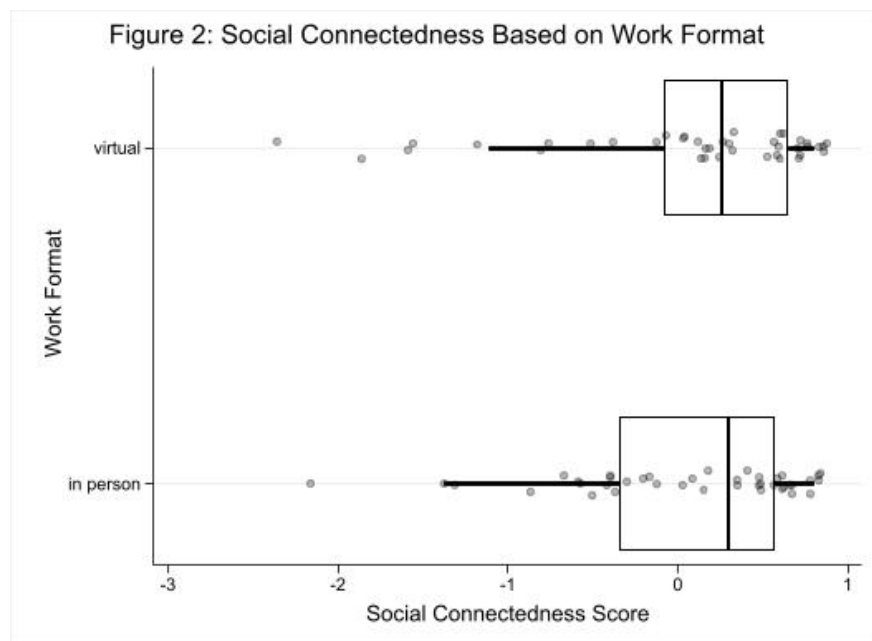
### *Mediation*



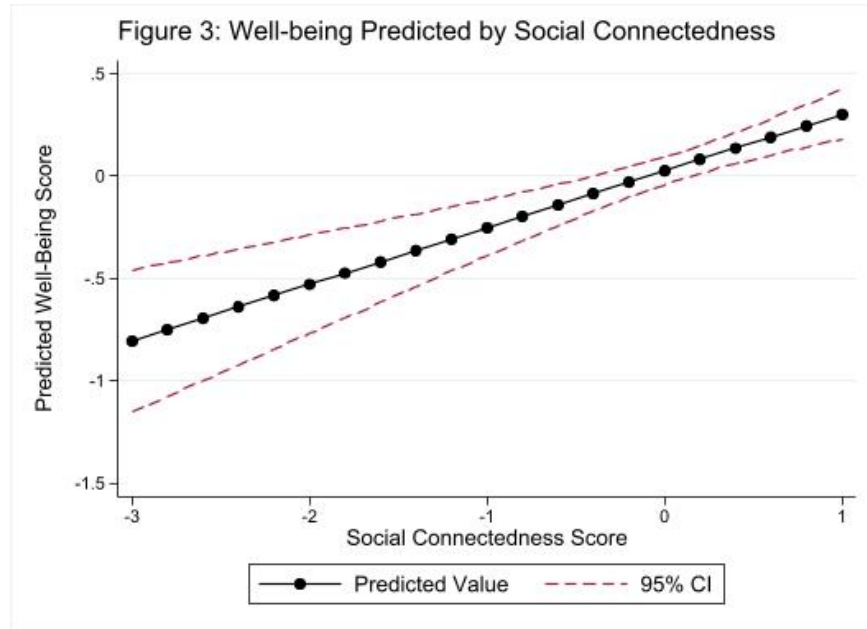
It was hypothesized that if there was a difference in well-being scores based on work format, which the regression model demonstrates to be true, that social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy are possible mediators of this relationship. To assess this, the Stata sem command was used to run a test for mediation with these three possible mediators.

### *Social Connectedness*

As displayed in Figure 2, there was not actually any significant difference in social connectedness scores between those who worked mostly virtually and those who worked mostly in-person ( $t = 0.04, p = 0.968$ ). The sem test confirmed that social connectedness did not act as a mediator between work format and well-being ( $z = 0.04, p = 0.967$ ).



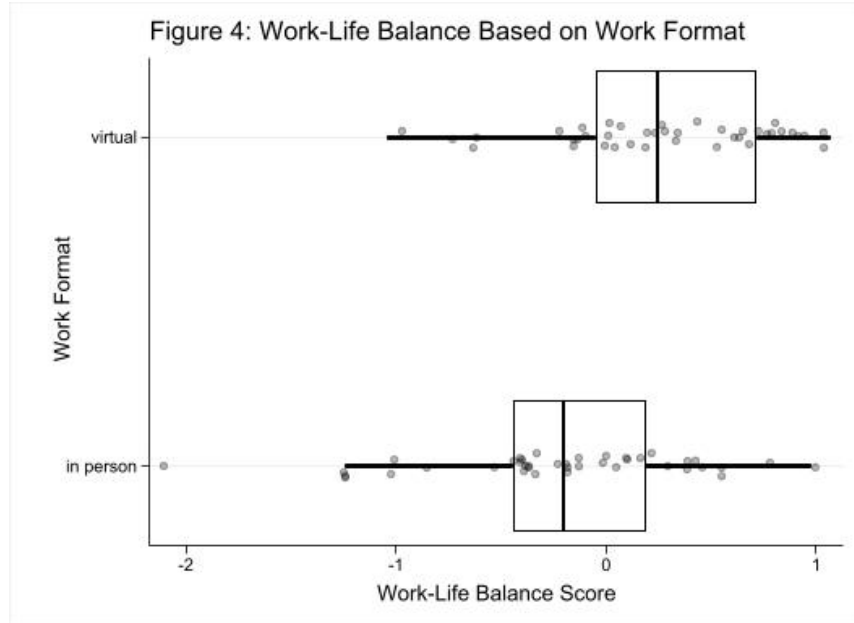
However, social connectedness did have an impact of its own on well-being, as demonstrated in the regression model. As shown in Figure 3, while controlling for the other possible factors, for every 1 point increase in social connectedness, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.24 points ( $t = 3.02, p = 0.004$ ).



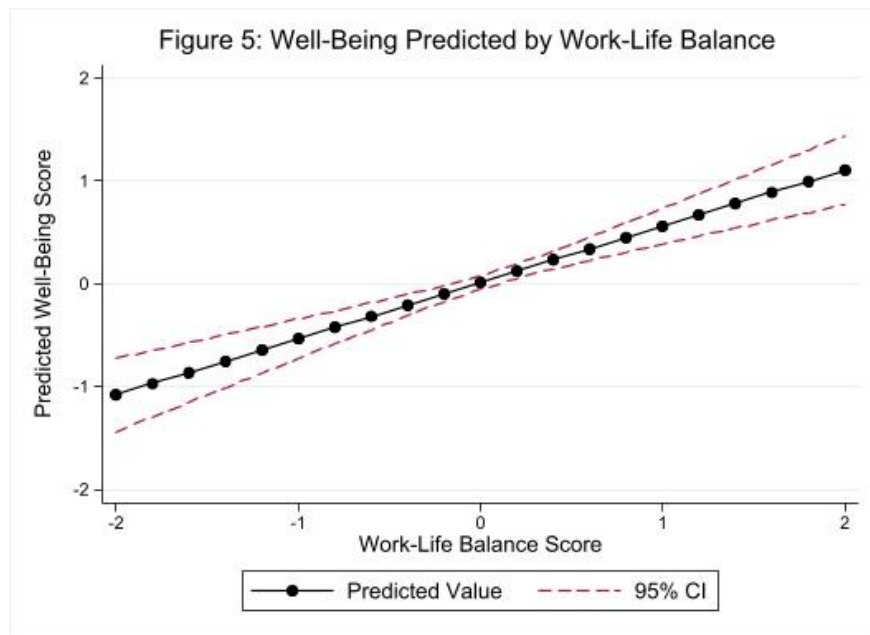
All of this demonstrates that the effect of social connectedness on well-being was present, but separate from work format. Social connectedness was not a mediating factor in the relationship between work format and well-being.

#### *Work-Life Balance*

As displayed in Figure 4, there was a significant difference in work-life balance scores between those who worked mostly virtually and those who worked mostly in-person. On average, those who work mostly virtually have 0.48 points higher work-life balance scores than those who work in-person ( $t = -3.84, p = 0.000$ ). The sem test confirmed that work-life balance did indeed act as a mediator between work format and well-being ( $z = 3.89, p = 0.000$ ).



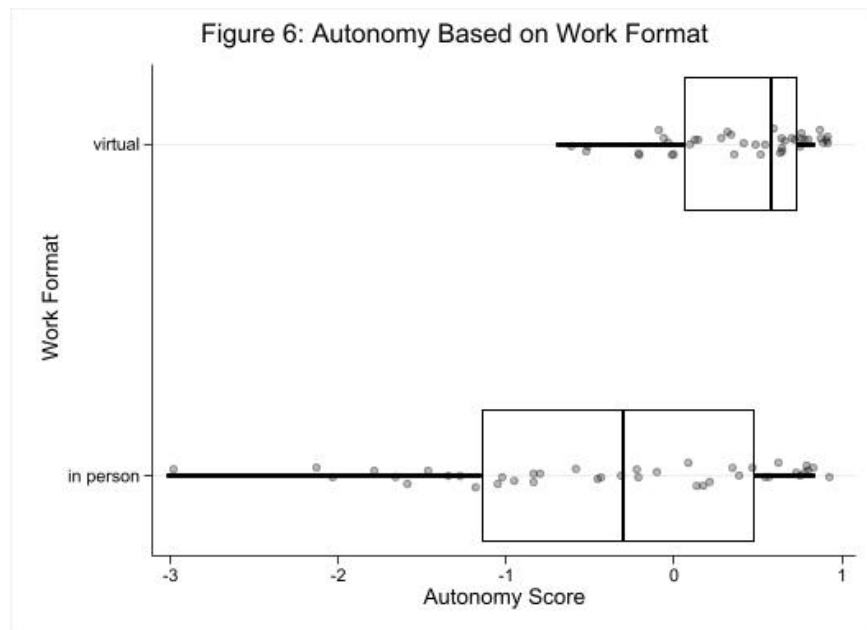
Work-life balance accounted for at least some of the impact that work format had on well-being with its impact demonstrated in the regression model. As shown in Figure 5, while controlling for the other possible factors, for every 1 point increase in work-life balance, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.49 points ( $t = 4.60, p = 0.000$ ).



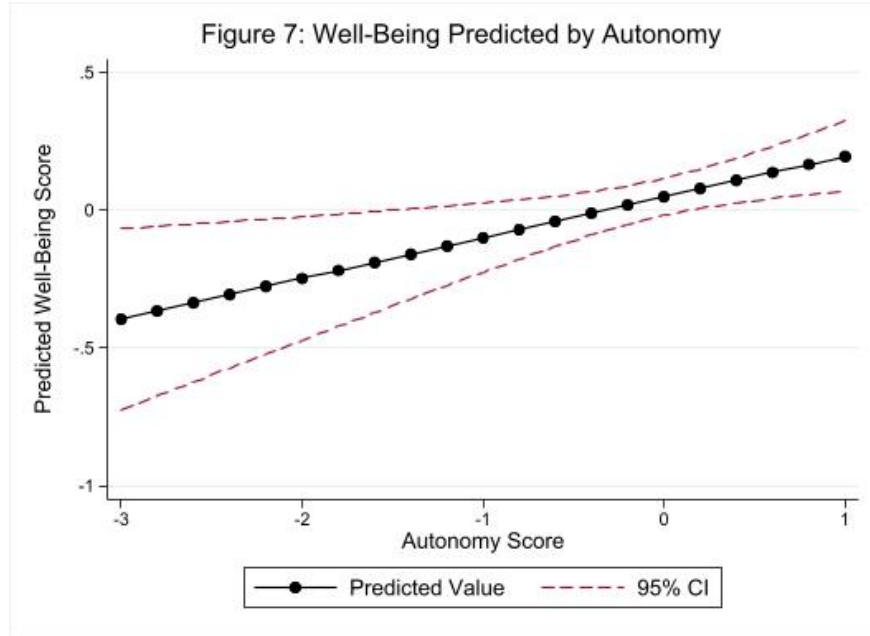
The percentage of the total effect of work format on well-being that is mediated by work-life balance is 81.45%.

### *Autonomy*

As displayed in Figure 6, there was a significant difference in autonomy scores between those who worked mostly virtually and those who worked mostly in-person. On average, those who work mostly virtually have 0.78 points higher autonomy scores than those who work in-person ( $t = -4.58, p = 0.000$ ). The sem test confirmed that autonomy did indeed act as a mediator between work format and well-being ( $z = 4.64, p = 0.000$ ).



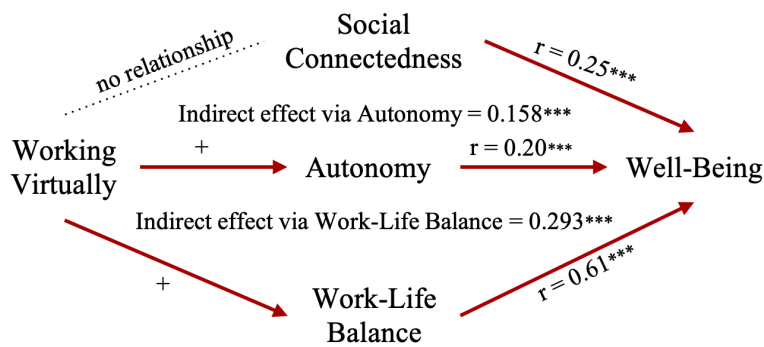
Autonomy accounted for at least some of the impact that work format had on well-being with its impact demonstrated in the regression model. As shown in Figure 7, while controlling for the other possible factors, for every 1 point increase in autonomy, we can expect well-being to increase by 0.21 points ( $t = 2.83, p = 0.007$ ).



The percentage of the total effect of work format on well-being that is mediated by autonomy is 43.84%.

*Mediation Model*

Below is a path model to represent all relationships discussed so far.



The direct effect of working virtually on well-being is actually found to be negative, suggesting that the impact of working virtually, regardless of autonomy and work-life balance, leads to on average a 0.09 point lower well-being score than working in-person. However this finding is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.280$ ), and based on the regression model, there may not be a direct effect at all.

*Gender, Race, and Income as Moderators*

It was hypothesized that gender and race may play a role in the model of how work format impacts well-being. This ended up being an overwhelmingly white sample, with 69 white respondents and 11 people of color, making this a study of mostly white people. The sample was majority female, as well, with 64 female respondents and 16 male respondents, making this a study of mostly white women. The effects of gender and whiteness were examined in how they potentially moderate the relationships between work format and social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy, as well as the relationship between those three variables and well-being. However, neither gender nor race moderated any relationships in the model, perhaps limited by the small sample size and small comparison groups. The composition of this sample means that the preceding results of this study give insight into workplace well-being for white women.

Because there was greater variability in income in this sample, income was also examined as a possible moderator. However, there was no significant interaction effect at any income level between any of the variables.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of this study confirm that, for white women, there is a difference in employee well-being based on whether someone works mostly in-person or mostly virtually. In general, white women who work virtually tend to have higher levels of well-being. This difference is due to how workplace format impacts other factors, though, such as autonomy and work-life balance. Working virtually increases these employee's autonomy and work-life balance, and these factors in turn increase well-being. However, working virtually does not impact these employee's social connection. How socially connected white women feel is separate from their work format, but it

does impact their well-being as well. The more socially connected someone feels in their workplace, the higher their well-being tends to be.

The finding that social connectedness is not related to workplace format is contrary to the initial hypothesis that working virtually would lower social connectedness. Previous literature overwhelmingly suggested that working virtually meant people felt more isolated (Brown and Leite, 2022; Mann et al., 2000; Cooper and Kurland 2002). However, some literature pointed out that staying connected virtually is more possible now than ever before as technologies improve (Chayko 2014). The fact that Chayko's 2014 study found virtual connectedness to be possible with the rise of the digital world suggests that now, nine years later, virtual connectedness may be even stronger. The results of this study do support this idea, as we found no difference in employee social connectedness based on if people worked mostly virtually or mostly in-person. The results of this study suggest that white women can find social connection at work regardless of how they are interacting, whether it is online or in-person. This study supports previous literature in emphasizing that social connectedness is crucial for well-being, regardless of workplace format (Yager 1997; Winstead et al. 1995; Berman et al. 2022; Brown and Leite 2022).

The finding that well-being is improved by working virtually through an increased work-life balance is in part supported by previous research and supports the hypothesis of work-life balance being a mediator in the relationship between work format and well-being. Existing literature both suggested that working remotely could hurt work-life balance because of a lack of separation between home life and work life (Makarius and Larson 2017) and suggested that working remotely would improve work-life balance because of lessened commute time (Emre and De Spiegeleare 2021). The results of this study primarily support the latter idea, that

there is a benefit to working virtually, and that it does help white women find a sense of balance. This also was in line with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of work-life balance in increasing well-being (Jung et al. 2022; Moreno et al. 2019).

The finding that well-being is improved by working virtually through an increased sense of autonomy fits with and adds to previous literature and supports the hypothesis of autonomy being a mediator in the relationship between work format and well-being. There was a lack of literature discussing how workplace format impacts employee's autonomy; however, this study gave new insight, finding that working virtually increases employee autonomy for white women. This autonomy, in turn, improves well-being, and that is in line with past research that has emphasized the importance of autonomy (van Zoonen et al. 2021; Jung et al. 2022; Dong et al. 2021, Tahar et al., 2022).

The factor that had the largest effect on the well-being of white female employees was work-life balance. In many models, the number of hours worked per week also impacted well-being, as those who work more reported less well-being. This may be tied to work-life balance as well. These findings about the importance of work-life balance fall in line with literature that theorized about the woman's role at home and in the workplace and where they find meaning in life (Miller 1986; Cook 1993), and this gave some new insight into the experience of whiteness in the workplace.

### *Implications*

Virtual workplaces tend to foster well-being better than in-person workplaces, but this study contributes important and applicable takeaways for all workplaces. Employers that want to increase well-being, whether working in-person or virtual, can improve their employee's well-being, especially for their white female employees, by fostering a sense of social



connectedness. And for especially in-person workplaces, it is important to help employees find a sense of work-life balance and autonomy to improve employee well-being. Working virtually tends to provide higher work-life balance and autonomy, but in-person workplaces may be able to foster this as well. By improving work-life balance and autonomy, in-person workplaces could eliminate the well-being difference between in-person and virtual work, because according to this study, the well-being difference was entirely due to differences in work-life balance and autonomy. However, it should be a priority especially for employers to focus on increasing their employee's work-life balance, because work-life balance had the largest effect on well-being for white women in this study.

## CONCLUSION

Through a cross-sectional survey of white, female, working professionals across a multitude of different industries, in this study I have gained insight into some factors that influence workplace well-being for this group of people, and how well-being is impacted by workplace format. This research is timely, as Industry 4.0 pushes us toward a new level of digital workplace that our world has never seen before. In what is referred to by some as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Lasi 2014), questions arise about what the impacts will be of our changing professional world. The well-being of employees is of great importance, so research about well-being in the context of Industry 4.0 is called for. This study opened a conversation about how workplace format, be it in-person or virtual, impacts well-being through its impact on factors such as work-life balance and autonomy. It also highlighted the importance of social connectedness in fostering well-being, regardless of workplace format. This information can

inform workplaces as they transform and adapt to Industry 4.0 and may help in designing the future of work in a way that fosters well-being in the experience of working professionally.

### *Future Directions*

This study also opens the conversation for future research to continue. It will be important for future research to look at gendered and racial differences in this discussion, rather than just focusing on one group, white females, like in this study. Furthermore, this study only looked at those working mostly virtually and mostly in-person. Future studies should look with more nuance, including fully virtual, fully in-person, and hybrid work. Finally, in future research, social connectedness, work-life balance, and autonomy can be further broken down in future exploration. For instance, one could look at specific layers of social connectedness, like connectedness to a supervisor, trust in coworkers, friendship, and communication. Or for work-life balance, one could examine hours worked per week, commute time, home responsibilities, and mental separation between home and work. This may give a more detailed insight into how workplaces can specifically try to improve these factors to improve their employee's well-being.

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