

Improving Engagement in a Brief Digital Loneliness Intervention: An Examination of User Experience

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INTRODUCTION

- Loneliness is the subjective discrepancy between desired and actual relationships and is linked to pervasive deleterious outcomes.¹
- Brief digital mental health interventions (DMHIs) have shown efficacy in several domains² but have had challenges with engagement.³
- College students are particularly vulnerable to loneliness.⁴
- Potential end-user input early in development could inform efficacious resource allocation.

METHODS

- $N = 6$ undergraduate students (3 White, 2 Hispanic/Latino/a/x, 1 Black/African American; 3 female, 3 male) reporting recent loneliness completed a brief ACT and self-compassion informed DMHI and provided feedback in a think-aloud interview.
- Transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis,⁵ including two rounds of coding, resulting in identification of 5 comprehensive themes.
- Researchers discussed and acknowledged individual perspectives throughout analysis.

RESULTS

Users valued:

- Ability to customize the intervention to personal preferences
- Interactive components of intervention content
- Intervention appeal in visual and other presentation of material
- Communication that integrates research and emotional appeal
- Reflecting on content and relating as it applies to one's life
- Planning, motivation, and appeal in engagement of behavior change.

DISCUSSION

- Customization, visual appeal, and interactive content were appealing to users, suggesting integration of these components is important for engagement.
- Messaging that relates to user experience, blends emotional appeal with data, and promotes actionable behavior change was also desirable.
- While participants had recently experienced loneliness and represent a population that may benefit from the intervention, the sample size was small, and recruitment conducted through an undergraduate subject pool.

Engagement improves when digital interventions are customizable, visually appealing, and interactive, with content that is emotionally meaningful, evidence-based, and personally relevant.

