Potential Changes in Ties With People All Over the World During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses of Polish Adults

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a crisis affecting all humanity. It posed a collective threat, potentially strengthening ties with people all over the world through a feeling of interconnectedness and a common human fate. On the other hand, a sense of physical and psychological threat, competition for scarce resources, and closed national borders may have hindered such ties, worsened the perceptions of people all over the world, and focused individuals on their national and local communities. Thus, the present research aimed to explore the potential changes in ties with people all over the world during the first year of the pandemic in a quantitative (Study 1; Polish national sample, *N* = 762; longitudinal design) and a qualitative way (Study 2; *N* = 33 of Poles, narrative interviews). A mixed-methods approach (explanatory sequential design) was employed to gain deeper insights into the diverse perspectives of individuals regarding ties with people all over the world. Study 1 showed no changes in identification with all humanity between March, May/June, and December 2020. A sense of COVID-19 threat or any demographic factors did not affect this finding. Study 2 revealed a more nuanced picture with a variety of individual perspectives on the world and its inhabitants during the pandemic. Some interviewees perceived the world as small but unifying all humans, with the pandemic increasing their interest and compassion for people from other countries. On the other hand, other participants perceived this "small world" as threatening and preferred their own close-knit communities.

Keywords

ties with people all over the world, identification with all humanity, global social identifications, social identity, COVID-19 threat, COVID-19 pandemic, globalization, mixed-methods

> "Seen from space, the Earth has no borders. The spread of the coronavirus is showing us that what we share is much more powerful than what keeps us apart. All people are inescapably interconnected, and the more we can come together to solve our problems, the better off we will all be. (...) I've seen humans work together to prevail over some of the toughest challenges imaginable, and I know we can prevail over this one if we all do our part and work together as a team."
> – Scott Kelly, a former U.S. astronaut, in an interview for New York Times (Kelly, 2020)

Social sciences research shows increasing interest in the effects of global identifications encompassing all people (e.g., Carmona et al., 2020; Hackett & Hamer, 2023; Leung et al., 2024; McFarland et al., 2019; Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2018; Tunçgenç et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic, which spread all over the world in 2020, can be seen as a collective

crisis affecting all humanity (e.g., Anwar et al., 2020; Sparkman, 2023; Zagefka, 2022). Thus, it could potentially affect people's perceived ties with others all over the world, manifested by global social identifications, such as identification with all humanity (IWAH; see, e.g., Hamer et al., 2021; McFarland et al., 2019; Reese et al., 2020). However, the direction of these changes was hard to predict. Would a situation of a collective threat instigate a feeling of common fate and a sense of connectedness of all humanity, enhancing identification with people all over the world? Or, on the contrary, would such a threat cause not only closing borders between countries (as happened in 2020) but also those existing in people's minds and hearts, prompting them to focus primarily on the survival and well-being of their families, local and national communities, hence hindering global human identification? Or maybe if IWAH has a dispositional character (see, e.g., Hamer et al., 2019, 2021; McFarland et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2023), the pandemic would not affect its level at all.

The aim of our two studies, conducted in 2020 and 2021, was to explore possible changes and diversity in perceptions of ties with people all over the world in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic through mixed methods design. Respondents in Study 1 (quantitative, longitudinal design, nationwide sample, N = 762) were asked to estimate their identification with all humanity three times within the first ten months of the pandemic, whereas participants of Study 2 (qualitative, narrative interviews, N = 30) in April 2021 freely reflected on their personal views about the world and its people. Study 2, as part of the explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), afforded a more in-depth understanding of individuals' views about the world and its inhabitants during the pandemic and captured potential variability in this context, deepening the interpretation of Study 1.

Identification With All Humanity

In the era of globalization, with increasing worldwide interconnectedness, we observe a growing interest in the concept of global social identifications, which express a bond with and concern for people all over the world, no matter their nationality, ethnicity, or religion (see, e.g., McFarland et al., 2019; Melluish, 2014; UNESCO, n.d.). This idea is captured by the construct of identification with all humanity, defined as feeling close to people all over the world, caring about them, and perceiving them as an ingroup (e.g., Hamer et al., 2019; McFarland et al., 2019).

The idea of common humanity, or citizenship of the world, emerged already in ancient times, raised by Socrates, Diogenes of Sinope, and Chrysippus, to name a few thinkers. In psychology, it appeared in the works of Adler (1927/1954), who perceived it as characteristic of the most mature individuals; Maslow (1954, p. 180), whose self-actualized individuals develop "a deep feeling of identification, sympathy, and affection for human beings in general. They feel kinship and connection as if all people were members of a single family"; Allport (1958) who claimed that the end to human conflicts would not be possible without humanity becoming a common ingroup, and Erikson (1968) who considered it as an advanced stage in identity development. Finally, Turner's (1987) self-categorization theory regarded it as the highest level of possible self-categorization.

Research shows that IWAH is related to social and intergroup relations, with more negative attitudes toward issues such as military aggression, including the war in Ukraine, or building walls on countries' borders as well as positive attitudes toward immigrants, intergroup forgiveness, prosocial attitudes and behaviors, concern for global problems, and lower dehumanization of diverse groups (Dunwoody & McFarland, 2018; Gulevich & Osin, 2023; Hamer & Baran, 2022; Hamer et al., 2018; Loy et al., 2022; McFarland et al., 2019; Sparkman & Hamer, 2020).

IWAH may be uniquely suited to offer insights into understanding responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is considered a collective crisis affecting all humanity (Sparkman, 2023). Prior studies showed that IWAH is connected to a greater global concern regarding the spread of dangerous diseases such as AIDS (McFarland et al., 2019), SARS, ZIKA, and the Bird flu (Buchan et al., 2011; Hamer et al., 2018), as well as SARS-CoV-2 (Hamer & Baran, 2022). It also predicted health-related behaviors that could help reduce the spread of COVID-19, such as wearing masks, social distancing (Barragan et al., 2021; Sparkman, 2023; Wang et al., 2023), vaccination (Marchlewska et al., 2022), and helping people in different regions of the world (Chen et al., 2023; Deng, 2021; Zagefka, 2022).

A Potential Decline in Global Social Identifications During the Pandemic

SARS-CoV-2, as a worldwide threat to public health, had an omnipresence in our lives, particularly in 2020. The media were full of reports and footage from all over the world showing overwhelmed hospitals and dead-tired healthcare workers (e.g., Ankel, 2020, March), rising death tolls (e.g., World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.-a), empty streets during lockdowns (e.g., CNN, 2020), and citizens describing their current situation as "the end of the world" (Rubin & Wessely, 2020). Because infectious diseases have caused the greatest human death toll in history (Van Bavel et al., 2020), feelings of being threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic were not surprising. Indeed, fear and anxiety were the dominant emotional responses during this time (see, e.g., Lima et al., 2020; Usher et al., 2020; van Mulukom et al., 2021).

Many countries closed their borders and introduced travel bans in an attempt to contain the virus. For the first time, humanity experienced contact restrictions on a global scale and with an unpredictable duration (Landmann & Rohmann, 2022). Moreover, countries were competing for scarce resources: respirators, tools for preventing the spread of viruses (masks, gloves, disinfectants), and COVID-19 vaccines. Lockdowns and calls for social distancing within communities made people feel more lonely, isolated, and detached from others (e.g., Domènech-Abella et al., 2021; Ernst et al., 2022; van Mulukom et al., 2021) and uncertain about social reintegration in the future (see, e.g., Williams et al., 2020).

Previous research showed that ethnocentric orientation, xenophobia, and racism increase with the rise of pathogenic risks and perceived vulnerability (Devakumar et al., 2020; Eder et al., 2021; Faulkner et al., 2004; Navarrete & Fessler, 2006). Such reactions may be considered manifestations of the behavioral immune system's tendency to avoid contact with novel pathogens (Schaller & Park, 2011). Consequently, in many parts of the world, there were xenophobic attacks against people of Asian descent simply because the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak originated in China (Chung & Li, 2020; White, 2020). Referred to as the "Chinese virus," its worldwide advancement represented to many people a realistic threat to their ingroups. According to Integrated Threat Theory, such concerns foster ingroup bias and negative attitudes toward outgroups (Aberson & Gaffney, 2009; Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2000).

Realistic threat, however, may also instigate greater endorsement of attitudes and actions aiming at strengthening one's own community (e.g., Wohl et al., 2010). Hence, by augmenting the importance of one's narrow ingroup, the presence of threat may lead to declines in support for superordinate groups, such as "all humanity." For example, in two studies with American undergraduates, Reysen and colleagues (2014) found a lower global citizenship identification when the U.S. was threatened with "extinction" (operationalized as a possible discontinuation of a group's symbolic or actual existence) compared to the no-threat condition. Would these processes similarly emerge in the context of severe health threats to all humanity? In line with the results of the reviewed research, we speculate that the level of IWAH could have dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Potential Increase of Global Social Identifications During the Pandemic

However, there are reasons to expect potential changes in IWAH in the opposite direction. Research on public responses following disasters and catastrophes supports the notion that perceived common fate when faced with a collective threat may increase "shared social identity with others in the same situation" (Drury, 2018, p. 47). An initial sense of togetherness, increased mutual helping, solidarity, and an emerging sense of post-crisis united community are often observed following collective upheavals (e.g., Drury, 2018; Kaniasty, 2020; Kaniasty & Norris, 2004; Ntontis et al., 2021; Ntontis & Rocha, 2020; Takazawa & Williams, 2011). According to Zagefka (2022), such dynamics could be expected during the COVID-19 pandemic because the entire humanity shared a common fate of threat posed by the virus and adopted similar ways of combating it (see also Sparkman, 2023). Suddenly, the term "global village" (see Poll, 2012) began to have even more palpable meaning, perhaps resulting in growing awareness of the world as a whole.

Importantly, the pandemic has been managed not only on a national but also on a global level. The main agency that disseminated daily reports on the "progress of the pandemic" and methods to diagnose and combat the virus was the World Health Organization (WHO). This development, probably more than anything else, could have made people aware that as humans, "we are all in this together."[1] The pandemic was described as "a global threat, which requires

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1) The words of European Council President Charles Michel (as cited in Dovidio et al., 2020, p. 146).

large-scale cooperation and coordination to be addressed" (Gelfand et al., 2021, p. 136; see also Leung et al., 2024; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2020).

Moreover, global WWW and social media platforms, not constrained by geographic boundaries (González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco, 2020), had a key role in disseminating information about the pandemic, including the newest scientific developments. As time was of the essence, scientists from all over the world worked on ways to combat the pandemic and shared their findings with each other on a scale not seen before. Voices of political and community leaders, scientists, and progressive media continually reminded us that "global solidarity is the only way to win the war against COVID-19" (Forman et al., 2020, p. 578). Media reports and footage showed not only threats but also common pandemic struggles from all over the world. Greater engagement with globalization (e.g., consumption of foreign media) is associated with higher global identity and engagement with diverse others (Reysen et al., 2020); hence, the continuous news accounts potentially had an additional role in strengthening feelings of a common fate, sense of shared threat and similarities in combating the pandemic (Anwar et al., 2020).

All these experiences could have made people realize how "small" the world is, raise their sense of interconnectedness, and augment a feeling of a common human fate. Thus, this line of reasoning would suggest a potential increase in IWAH during the pandemic.

A Potential Stability of Global Social Identifications During the Pandemic

There is also some evidence from earlier studies investigating global identities that an individual sense of identification with all humanity may not be easily malleable. McFarland and colleagues showed stability of IWAH scores across time (McFarland et al., 2012, 2019), suggesting that it may be a disposition (see also Hamer et al., 2019, 2021; Leung et al., 2024). Attempts to situationally increase the level of global identities often resulted in null findings (e.g., Loy & Spence, 2020; Reysen et al., 2021). Eder and colleagues (2021) demonstrated that various constructs connected to pathogenic, psychological, and economic threats associated with COVID-19 did not contribute to predicting IWAH or ethnocentric orientations. Thus, the final possibility concerning the potential changes in global social identifications is that the level of IWAH has not changed during the pandemic.

The Present Research

The main goal of Study 1 was to assess potential changes in IWAH during the first ten months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we examined if the level of threat resulting from the pandemic moderated longitudinal trajectories in IWAH scores. Further, we explored what part of the variance of IWAH during that time was accounted for by situational factors versus individual stability.

These quantitative examinations were followed by Study 2, which qualitatively analyzed participants' own narratives about potential changes in their perception of people all over the world. Semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to understand better how people construct such ties, and what meanings and feelings they attribute to these global connections in the context of the pandemic, with the aim of exploring diverse perspectives that may not have been discernible through quantitative methodologies. Thus, in the current research, we applied a mixed methods approach, specifically explanatory sequential design, where the qualitative data is collected and analyzed after the quantitative phase and is employed to guide the interpretation of the quantitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). We consider triangulation as a methodological approach that expands our research framework, aiming to broaden, deepen, and enrich (Creswell, 2014) our understanding of global social identification processes amidst collective crises such as the pandemic.

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

Questionnaires were administered as a part of a larger study[2] to a nationwide sample of 1098 adult Polish citizens from all regions of the country, selected with quota random sampling from the research panel Ariadna[3]. The sample size was determined as the most common for nationally representative samples in Poland, and it provides the best reflection of age, gender, and place of residence in the general Polish population (see, e.g., Sparkman & Hamer, 2020).

This three-wave longitudinal CAWI (computer-assisted web interview) study was conducted in March (T1), May/June (T2), and December (T3) 2020. Only participants who took part in all three waves were included in the analyses. The final sample consisted of 762 participants whose ages ranged from 18 to 85 years (M_{age} = 45.74, SD = 15.62), 49.7% were women, with different levels of education and residing in varying sizes of municipalities. The ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of IP PAS.

Measures

Identification with all humanity was measured with nine items from the IWAH scale (McFarland et al., 2012) in the Polish adaptation by Hamer and colleagues (2021; e.g., "How close do you feel to each of the following groups…: people all over the world"; "How much would you say you care (feel upset, want to help) when bad things happen to…: all humans everywhere"). All items used a 5-point response scale, but the anchors differed on the basis of question-wording (i.e., 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very close*; 1 = *almost never* to 5 = *very often*; Cronbach's α > .94 in all three waves). We additionally analyzed IWAH's two subscales: "bond with" (Items 1-4; T1 α = .89) and "concern for" (Items 6-9, T1 α = .90) all humanity (see Hamer et al., 2021).

COVID-19 threat was assessed with nine items (e.g., *I am afraid: I am going to be infected/ someone close to me will be infected/ hospitals will be overcrowded/ of panic and irrational behaviors/ financial crisis/ changes in lifestyle*, etc.). All items used a 5-point response scale (from 1 – *definitely not agree* to 5 – *definitely agree*; Cronbach's α > .84 in all three waves).

Sociodemographic variables. Age, gender, level of education, and municipality size were all measured by one item each.

Results

General IWAH, as well as IWAH bond and concern scores, correlated positively with COVID-19 threat in all three time points (see Table 1). Comparison of the correlations between general IWAH and COVID-19 threat showed that this relationship grew stronger with time: in T1 (r = .17) correlation was lower than in T2 (r = .28; Z = -2.64, p = .0004) and in T3 (r = .28; Z = -2.66, p = .0004), with no differences between T2 and T3 (Z = -0.023, p = .49)[4].

Analysis of Variance

To answer our main research question and check if the level of identification with all humanity changed during the first ten months of the pandemic, we conducted repeated measures analysis of variance (with the Greenhouse-Geisser correction) for IWAH at three time points. There was no main effect of time F(1.99, 1515.96) = 0.08, p = .92. Similarly, the analysis for IWAH subscales (bond with and concern for all humanity) showed no main effect of time (see Hamer et al., 2024S).

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2) A part of this sample has been used in previous studies (i.e., Marchlewska et al., 2022, Study 2).

3) Ariadna is a Polish online research panel with over 150,000 registered and verified Polish users that offers points for participation that can be exchanged for rewards.

4) For the results for IWAH subscales (bond with and concern for all humanity) see Hamer et al. (2024S).

Repeated measures analysis of variance (with the Greenhouse-Geisser correction) for COVID-19 threat at three time points showed the main effect of time $F(1.98, 1506.75) = 118.89$, $p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons showed a significant decrease in COVID-19 threat level between March 2020 (T1), when it was the highest, and May 2020 (T2; $M_{dif} = 0.37$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.50$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.43]) and December 2020 (T3; $M_{dif} = 0.33$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.45$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.40]). There were no differences in perceptions of threat between T2 and T3 ($M_{dif} = -0.04$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .52$, 95% CI [-0.1, 0.03]).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations (Study 1)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. IWAH general T1	2.91	0.80	–										
2. IWAH Bond T1	2.74	0.86	.93*	–									
3. IWAH Concern T1	3.11	0.86	.92*	.73*	–								
4. COVID-19 threat T1	3.76	0.72	.17*	.13*	.19*	–							
5. IWAH general T2	2.91	0.79	.70*	.66*	.65*	.22*	–						
6. IWAH Bond T2	2.78	0.86	.66*	.67*	.54*	.18*	.94*	–					
7. IWAH Concern T2	3.06	0.83	.66*	.55*	.67*	.24*	.92*	.74*	–				
8. COVID-19 threat T2	3.39	0.76	.18*	.19*	.15*	.56*	.28*	.25*	.27*	–			
9. IWAH general T3	2.91	0.80	.71*	.63*	.68*	.15*	.73*	.67*	.70*	.19*	–		
10. IWAH Bond T3	2.78	0.84	.66*	.64*	.59*	.13*	.70*	.69*	.62*	.19*	.94*	–	
11. IWAH Concern T3	3.08	0.86	.66*	.53*	.70*	.17*	.65*	.55*	.68*	.17*	.93*	.75*	–
12. COVID-19 threat T3	3.43	0.76	.23*	.20*	.23*	.48*	.28*	.24*	.27*	.55*	.28*	.27*	.25*

Note. N = 762. IWAH = Identification with all humanity; IWAH Bond = Bond with all humanity subscale; IWAH Concern = Concern for all humanity subscale.

*$p < .05$.

Multilevel Modelling

Since the analysis of variance indicated the stability of IWAH over time, we opted to delve deeper into this matter to ascertain the primary source of IWAH variance: situational versus individual factors. With Multilevel Modelling, we tested what part of the variance in IWAH was accounted for by situational factors versus individual stability. We estimated a range of two-level models in which measurement time points (Level 1) were nested in individuals (Level 2), and IWAH served as a DV. Multilevel Modelling was performed in Mplus Version 8.1 using an ML estimator (see Table 2). First, we estimated an intercept-only model (Model 1), which permitted IWAH scores to vary between individuals. This solution allowed us to determine what part of the variance in IWAH was located at different levels of analysis. Next (Model 2), a fixed slope for time (0 = March, 2 = May/June, 9 = December) was added at the within-person level of analysis. As the effect of time reflected the temporal changes in IWAH, this step was reexamining the main research question. In Model 3, the effect of time was allowed to differ between participants (a random-slope model). Model 4 tested a cross-level interaction between time and COVID-19 threat (a Level-2 predictor). In the final step (Model 5), gender, age, education, and place of residence were added as Level-2 level predictors of the DV.

The results showed that 71.3% of the variation in IWAH occurred at the individual level of analysis (Model 1, Level 2, see Table 2)[5]. Neither Model 2 nor Model 3 revealed a significant effect of time. These results again indicated that the levels of IWAH remained stable over time. Moreover, the effect of time did not depend on one's average level of COVID-19 threat or any of sociodemographic covariates. Further cluster analyses did not find any groups of participants where the results would show any significant changes.

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5) This % of variance is the result of dividing the Level 2 variance by the sum of the level variances on the Levels 1 and 2: 0.45 / (0.45 + 0.18).

Table 2

Potential Changes in IWAH Over Time – Multilevel Modelling (Study 1)

Effect	Model 1 B	Model 1 SE	Model 2 B	Model 2 SE	Model 3 B	Model 3 SE	Model 4 B	Model 4 SE	Model 5 B	Model 5 SE
Intercept	2.91***	0.03	2.91***	0.03	2.91***	0.03	2.91***	0.03	2.91***	0.04
Level-1 effects										
Time			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Level-2 effects										
Threat (mean)							0.34***	0.05	0.34***	0.05
Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)									-0.02	0.05
Age									0.00	0.00
Education									-0.04*	0.02
Place of residence									0.02	0.02
Cross-level interactions										
Time × Threat (mean)							0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time × Gender									0.00	0.01
Time × Age									0.00	0.00
Time × Education									0.00	0.00
Time × Place of residence									0.00	0.00
Variance										
Level-1 variance in the DV	0.18***	0.01	0.18***	0.01	0.18***	0.01	0.18***	0.01	0.18***	0.01
Level-2 variance of the DV	0.45***	0.03	0.45***	0.03	0.45***	0.03	0.41***	0.03	0.40***	0.03
Level-2 variance in the Level-1 effect of time					0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
-2 LL	4229.636		4229.482		4229.974		4160.894		4150.230	
AIC	4235.635		4237.482		4241.975		4176.894		4182.231	
BIC	4252.839		4260.420		4229.974		4222.770		4273.984	

Note. Continuous Level-2 predictors were centered to the grand mean prior to the analyses.

*p < .05. ***p < .001.

Summary

Study 1 demonstrated that during the first ten months of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no changes in the level of identification with all humanity (IWAH total score as well as scores on the bond and concern subscales). The results indicated that most of the variance in IWAH was at the individual level, suggesting its high individual stability. Further, the effect of time did not depend on one's average level of perceived COVID-19 threat or sociodemographic factors. Nevertheless, levels of IWAH and COVID-19 threat were positively associated, and this relationship became stronger with time.

Study 2

Different statistical analyses employed in Study 1 consistently demonstrated the stability of IWAH over time, and further multilevel modeling indicated that individual stability was the primary source of IWAH variance. Thus, Study 2 engaged a qualitative approach to investigate potential changes in individuals' perceptions of the world and its inhabitants due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to explore the potential diversity in these perspectives. This approach was employed to inform the interpretation of the findings from Study 1 (explanatory sequential design, mixed methods). We wanted to give voice to different individuals and examine how they reflected on any potential changes in their own words as an extension, enrichment, and a follow-up of the quantitative phase of this research.

Method

Participants

Thirty-three people (55% of women, aged 19 to 74 years), recruited from the pool of respondents associated with research panel Ariadna, participated in this study (for details on the demographics, see Table S1 in Hamer et al., 2024S). Persons participating in Study 1 or in other similar studies administered by Ariadna were excluded from the recruitment process. The ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of IP PAS.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted online via a video conferencing platform (but only using audio, without video transmission) or by phone in April 2021. The semi-structured in-depth narrative interviews, lasting 30-45 minutes, explored key moments and aspects of participants' lives within the last 12-13 months, that is, since March 2020, when the COVID-19 monitoring began in Poland. The goal was to instigate narratives about the main life stressors experienced during that time, social support exchanges, potential interpersonal conflicts, possible perceived benefits of the pandemic, and reflections about people around the world and the world itself. In this article, we focused on analyzing answers to the last question of the interview: *"The pandemic is a global event and has caused a crisis all over the world. Has it influenced the way you view the world and people from other countries or your feelings toward them? If so, how?"*

Analysis and Interpretation of the Interviews

The narratives were transcribed and then analyzed by two independent judges (the first and second authors) who were competent in identifying themes, subthemes, and meanings. The analysis was performed using MAXQDA. The themes and categories were coded according to the method of thematic analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). Thematic analysis (TA), like most qualitative methodologies, rejects hypothesis formulation prior to data analysis. The purpose of this approach is to extract key paradigms/themes from the data. In line with the six-step TA procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2022), the first step was to familiarize with the data by actively reading and rereading the content – looking for meanings and patterns and recording initial ideas. Then, we took notes and coded the data, i.e., we created concise label codes. Next, based on the list of codes, we generated initial themes. Metaphorically speaking, if we compare the motifs to "a wall," then the codes could be likened to "the bricks" that construct it. Subsequently, we checked and thoroughly reviewed the initial themes, some of which were changed or discarded. Finally, after repeated careful analysis, we gave the topics final names so that they best reflect the sense and meaning of the data.

Results

The thematic analysis of participants' narratives about the potential influence of the pandemic on the way they viewed the world and people in other countries allowed us to identify four main themes and 14 subthemes, demonstrating a rich array of perspectives among the participants (see Figure 1). Below, we present the key themes, with examples of the narratives they represented.

Theme 1: The World Is Small

The first of the four main themes reflected the view that the pandemic made people realize that "the world is small," just like a proverbial global village. Interestingly, this theme revolved around two opposing perspectives in the participants' narratives. For some of our interviewees, the world was small and threatening, whereas, for others, the world was small but unifying all humanity.

Figure 1

Four Themes and 14 Subthemes
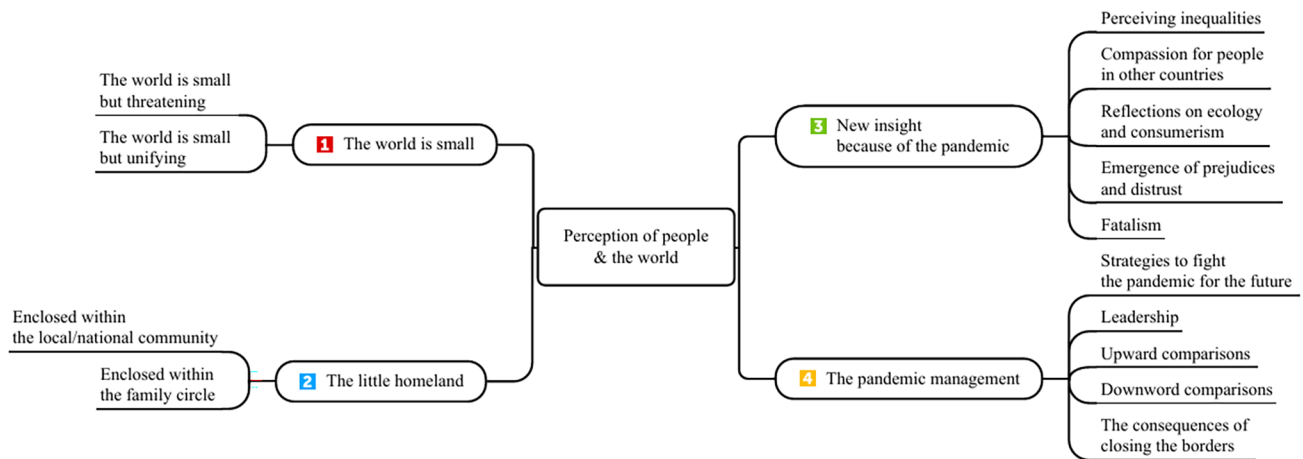
1.1. The World Is Small but Threatening — Some respondents said that because of the global spread of COVID-19, they noticed that the world is small and, therefore, the threat of the virus was ominous. The central point of these narratives was the repeated observation that the SARS-CoV-2 virus expanded very quickly through the world, and no geographical borders could stop it. For some people, this observation triggered a generalization of worries to other threats, such as wars:

> It turns out that the word is a global village, yes. Someone would imagine that, since the pandemic is in China, so how is this related to Europe and then it turned out that it was a matter of two or three months and the pandemic was knocking on your door and later knocking everyone off their feet (…) now you can see that even if there is a conflict if someone drops a bomb on North Korea (…). So we're all gone. It turned out that the world is small. (P27_57_2_3_6)[6]

Some people focused on fear of the virus and a general sense of danger experienced by themselves and people around the world:

> However, this pandemic has caused this general sense of panic all over the globe (…) general fear, threat, and fear (…). As they say, you don't know from what place this virus will come, right? (P15_51_2_1_2)

1.2. The World Is Small but Unifying — Other participants also spoke of the pandemic as a global experience for all humanity and mentioned that it gave them the feeling that the "world is small." However, they concentrated on an observation that all people are similar to one another and face similar problems. The issue of threat may have been mentioned, but the sense of global unity during the pandemic, the common fate, and the overarching necessity to face the same difficulties were more salient in these reflections:

> Well, it seems to me that all over the world, except probably Antarctica, all humanity is similar. There is no nook anywhere where there is no pandemic (…) simply saying we are equal, regardless of religious beliefs, gender, ethnicity, and skin color. In this respect, we are equal, and it seems to me that this fight against this virus should happen simultaneously all over the world, not only in some selected regions because it will spread anyway, and after some time, it all will amount to the same. (P21_69_1_1_5)

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6) The coding: participant's number, age, gender (1-female, 2-male), city (1-village, 2-small, 3-medium, 4-big, 5-metropolis), education (from 1-primary school to 6 - master degree and above; see Hamer et al., 2024S for details).

Well, when it comes to people as people, as citizens, I noticed that everyone has the same problems; they struggle... for some, it was easier; for others, it was worse, but everyone experienced it somehow. (P31_70_1_1_5)

Theme 2: The Little Homeland

The second key theme emerging from the narratives was the sense of "the little homeland." The comments identified in this thread reflected respondents' beliefs that the pandemic made them feel confined to their close attachments, specified as their country, local community, or simply their closest family.

2.1. Enclosed Within the Local/National Community — Some participants said that the pandemic did not change their perceptions of people from different parts of the world and the world itself. Rather, they stressed that their already close interpersonal ties and interest in their local/national community provided them with a safe enclave, "a little homeland," during the pandemic.

I am just here, rather in my own neighborhood and my own town, because one never had any aspirations to travel a lot, around the world and abroad, mostly limited oneself to this immediate area. This own homeland. (P29_74_2_1_3)

Another participant reflected that this interview made him realize that being restricted to the local (national) community for safety reasons created a sense of psychological "lockdown" so much that now he would want to reinstate his prior relations with family and friends.

This pandemic and this closure of borders caused a psychological closing of borders in my head. This is an extremely interesting thing that happened... Even more, I want to thank you for this interview (...) because what I want to do right away (...) is simply call my family, my close friends and rebuild relationships with them a bit because I think this nationalistic approach to protecting against pandemic really influenced my behavior. (P4_42_2_5_6)

2.2. Enclosed Within the Family Circle — The change due to the pandemic noticed by other participants was not a decline of interest in the world but rather a stronger attention to kin relations and reliance on the family circle for comfort and safety.

I don't look at it globally, but here I am, more interested in the closest family, in my life here as it is. (P9_33_1_5_6)

So a person felt more confident, as we were within our own circle, among the whole family. (P18_61_2_1_2)

Theme 3: New Insights Because of the Pandemic

Changes in the perception of the world and people around it were another frequent topic in our interviews.

3.1. Perceiving Inequalities — For many participants, the pandemic was a lens that showed more clearly what inequalities exist in the world. Some noticed that there was no egalitarianism during the pandemic, and the poor countries seemed to have no chance of winning with the virus, whereas more privileged nations could cope much better. Sometimes, these comments brought about stereotypes as well (see also 3.4 and 4.4):

The only thing that has become apparent right now is that poor countries are really poor, and there is a problem with that. The pandemic showed that the rich can do more. (...) we have Israel, we have Great Britain, where the societies were vaccinated so quickly, but in India, we have a problem because there are no hospitals, there is practically nothing... or the whole of Africa. Generally, there is a great disparity. Well, the next gap that is showing is that something like "the middle" is disappearing. Either one is rich or one is poor. (P8_51_2_4_5)

Another person went even further by saying that people in impoverished countries were inherently disadvantaged and had very few resources for survival:

> *There is simply poverty, injustice; some people have absolutely no chance. Literally, they are only born to die (…) They realize that they have far fewer chances than we have here (…) they already had far fewer chances, and in the case of a virus that spreads so quickly, they have even less. (P10_59_1_5 _4)*

3.2. Compassion for People in Other Countries — Apart from recognizing the fact that there were vast differences between rich and poor in their capabilities of dealing with the pandemic, many participants reflected on the suffering of people in other countries and expressed compassion and empathy toward them:

> *Of course, I feel sorry for those people who lost their loved ones somewhere there (…) not only in the world but also in Poland, there are also such cases. (P16_38_1_5_6)*

Another person talked directly about compassion and the bond with people in different countries:

> *One felt some kind of stronger bond, maybe… well, I feel sorry for these people in other countries. (P11_50_2_1_5)*

It is worth noting that the subtheme of compassion has often been linked to the theme of being connected with all of humanity (see Theme 1). It was also sometimes associated with downward social comparisons when participants reported that they felt sorry for those whose situation during the pandemic, and in life in general, was worse than theirs (see Subtheme 4.4).

3.3. Reflections on the Need to Protect the World — The pandemic prompted some participants to reflect on the functioning of the contemporary world. Due to the pandemic, they began to consider the need to reduce consumerism and endorse ecological attitudes.

> *I think that during the pandemic, people started to, at least I have this impression, be more concerned about climate change, about ecology. That human causes a lot of damage to the earth. Now pays attention more to it because before it was, how to say, consumerism, the pursuit of money, to buy as much as possible, go on vacation twice a year, but now one also has other problems… (P3_26_1_4_6)*

Another person pointed out the problem of overpopulation and moral dilemmas associated with it:

> *On top of that, there is the awareness that there are seven and a half billion of us… we do terrible things as a species; we do terrible things to other animals. (…) For me, the solution is to ultimately reduce the number of people in the world. And uh, it doesn't mean that I wish these people to die, but I know, intellectually I know, that fewer of us should be born. And honestly, I wouldn't mind if I hadn't been born at all. And this is such an emotional justification for me, why I can look at this tragedy with such an emotional distance… (P10_59_1_5 _4)*

3.4. Stereotypes and Emergence of Distrust — Sometimes, the changes caused by the pandemic appeared to instill a very different emotion from compassion: distrust. It was related to prejudice and stereotypes toward people in other countries (also appeared in 3.1 and 4.4):

> *Well, I have this distrust (…) particularly toward China, yes (…). Before that, no, I didn't feel anything like that, but when it comes to this pandemic… It all started there. (P28_40_1_5_6)*

3.5 Fatalism — A sense of fatalism was another motive that appeared in the context of the pandemic. These narratives were formulated in a negative affective tone, devoid of hope.

> *It seems to me that the pandemic caused everyone to think about themselves. There is no solidarity but rather (…) like during a war or a difficult situation, people rather think only about themselves in order to survive. (P19_59_2_5_6)*

Probably, this is how this world is created that from time to time, such a blow must happen. (P30_72_2_1_4)

Theme 4: The Pandemic Management

When reflecting on changes in their perceptions of the world and people around it due to COVID-19, some participants offered comments on how they appraised solutions and strategies for managing the pandemic.

4.1. Strategies to Fight the Pandemic — The topic of pandemic management raised strong feelings, and several of our interviewees put forward their own ideas for strategies to fight such crises in the future. They talked about the need for solidarity between the countries, helping each other, and sharing vaccines in a fair way:

> *So I think that (…) countries should help each other, ok, not that we will buy so many vaccines, and you have nothing, because you have no money, no, there should be some globalization. Everyone, we all try at the same time, the rich, the poor, equally should have access to at least (…) these vaccines.* (P21_69_1_1_5)

Another person talked about their moral dilemmas when considering strategies to manage the pandemic:

> *There was this Polish consul who was transported from India. On the one hand, we should help, but on the other hand, it is also exposure. (…) I mean, there is a serious dilemma here because, at this point, the person who comes to Poland can infect other people. (…) Lots of dilemmas, very serious dilemmas, even moral ones. Can we, shouldn't we? I mean, I was wondering (…) you could have fenced off, let's say, a certain village, and everyone could have died, then the pandemic would have died. Well, these people die then too… So, to help them or not?* (P19_59_2_5_6)

4.2. Leadership — Another common thread in the narratives was reflecting on leadership during the pandemic:

> *When it comes to the leaders, I think that they did too little to prevent the spread of the pandemic. More could have been done; the borders could have been closed faster. Definitely, quarantine all visitors. Prevent this pandemic from spreading.* (P31_70_1_1_5)

> *I admire the nations that have dealt with it on a rational and emotional level. With great respect, I observed the work of… the prime minister of New Zealand, the work of the prime minister of Singapore, the prime minister of Canada (…) Angela Merkel's work in Germany, and I have to say that these nations showed how to cope well in these situations. There are several nations that have clearly shown that in such a stressful situation, they are able to combine rational and emotional actions, unite; I admit that I envy them a little.* (P4_42_2_5_6)

4.3. Upwards Comparisons — The above-quoted narrative concerning leadership was full of admiration and even envy, which suggested the next sub-topic in the area of pandemic management: upwards comparisons (i.e., others had better situation/management than us). Several countries were mentioned, but it is worth noting that the "lower restriction" solutions used to manage the pandemic enjoyed some popularity:

> *We admired a little, I guess… probably Sweden; they didn't close it at all. That if someone was afraid to just leave the house, they would not leave the house, but the rest of things were available to people anyway. (…) Why here* [in Poland] *we don't have freedom like that… if someone is afraid, then just let him stay at home, but if I am not afraid and I would like to live normally, why make it difficult for me? Not being allowed to go out for coffee or dinner, travel.* (P7_31_1_3_5)

Another person called for experts managing the pandemic instead of celebrities sharing their views:

> *I was jealous that, for example, in the Czech Republic, there was a state of emergency, that the Czech Republic coped better with this pandemic, more efficiently, that they have better scientists, not that*

some celebrities are talking about a pandemic as here (...) I think our country is going in the wrong direction and I just had the feeling that I would rather be in another country, live elsewhere (...) I think if I was, say, in England or the Czech Republic or anywhere else well, I wouldn't have had such a negative experience as here. (P12_24_1_5_5)

4.4. Downward Comparisons — Other participants used downward comparisons to express their feelings about the pandemic. In this case, Poland, or Europe in general, were seen as being in a more advantageous position than other countries:

Maybe in Poland, it did not have such a tragic character as somewhere in other countries, at the very beginning, in China or Italy... many deaths, and it was a bit scary for me (...), and luckily, here it's not as bad as somewhere else. (P16_38_1_5_6)

The quote below is interesting and stands out from others in this subtheme because the participant used downward comparisons from a European, not national (i.e., Polish), perspective (potentially showing a broader social identification):

I did not change my view; I knew perfectly well that in South America it would be messy, it was obvious. I did not expect anything else from Trump and the Americans... in India, it was known that it would explode with a huge force due to the population density, in China, it was clear that they would impose restrictions on civil rights to deal with it (...) Europe dealt with it... well, it's overcoming it. (P4_42_2_5_6)

Additionally, these threads deserve attention as they may suggest that both upward and downward comparisons were utilized as coping strategies with the pandemic hardships. They also appear to be connected with prejudice and stereotypes as they rely on biased generalizations (see also 3.4).

4.5. The Consequences of Closing the Borders — When people talked about pandemic management, they often raised the issue of closed borders. They sometimes regretted it, or mentioned it as a noticeable change in the world that was once more accessible and open:

Well, before you took a bike or a scooter and rode to the Czech Republic and socialized. I have friends on the Czech side (...), and now you cannot visit, not even go there for a Czech beer, everything is closed, border guards are patrolling the border. (P15_51_2_1_2)

Another person showed their frustration connected to travel restrictions and claimed that the risks of the pandemic were exaggerated:

I am kind of annoyed by this crossing out other countries (...) such as what we say about Poland that there is a red zone and we can't go somewhere or do something. (...) In my opinion, the pandemic is blown out of proportion, too much of it in the media (...) one would like to go somewhere... Portugal (...) countries have locked themselves into closed zones and there are hardly any possibilities to move around. (P33_19_1_2_1)

It is worth noting here that the next person said that the world in her perception has become larger but with more challenges for travelers:

The world was so open, in the sense you could go anywhere, and it was not a problem. Let's say we sometimes had an idea to take a night train to Vienna for the weekend or Berlin or get on a plane and fly somewhere. Now a trip by plane is a bit like an expedition to Mount Everest as if the world had become much, much larger for me because such trips are a much greater logistic challenge (...) for which you have to prepare compared to what it used to be, when it was as simple as to walk to the airport, you could fly somewhere and back. (P17_34_1_5_6)

Finally, three participants said that the pandemic did not affect their perceptions of the world and its people, that their opinions have not changed or they did not have any reflections on the subject.

Summary and General Discussion

The goal of this mixed methods research was to explore both 1) the potential longitudinally observed changes in identification with people all over the world in the context of the COVID-19 threat and 2) a more comprehensive understanding of how people construct such ties in the context of the ongoing pandemic along with potential variability in these perspectives. There were theoretical and empirical grounds to expect a potential increase, decrease, or no changes in the strength of such ties. We also explored if the COVID-19 threat could be a moderator of such changes if they existed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a global crisis affecting all humanity. As Dovidio et al. (2020) claimed (p. 142), "Whoever we are and wherever we are, COVID-19 represents an existential threat to us all." Managed on a global level by WHO, the virus was spreading fast all over the globe, no matter the national borders. People were urged to "embrace our shared identity as humans in the face of this common threat" (Osisanwo, 2022, p. 195), and a growing sense of common human fate was projected.

Although some people blamed the Chinese for the pandemic outbreak, the moment COVID-19 spread all over the world, it was not clear who was the actual outgroup. Dovidio et al. (2020, p. 114) suggested:

> "If, however, the threat is defined as the virus itself, and as pitting a non-human source against all of humanity, then there is the possibility of developing (…) 'superordinate level of categorisation.' That is, instead of dividing people into different social categories, humanity as a whole can be constituted as a single category. If that happens, then anyone's suffering becomes my own."

The results of Study 1 did not document any changes in the level of identification with humanity (IWAH total score, bond, or concern factors) in the Polish nationwide sample during the first 10 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, even if the virus was defined as a threat to the human race, it did not prompt more people to embrace all humanity as members of the same group during this time. Because most of the variance in IWAH was found at an individual level, it should be recognized that this identification may have largely a dispositional character (see also McFarland et al., 2019), not affected by environmental circumstances, even by such a serious threat and worldwide crisis as the pandemic. Neither the sense of COVID-19 threat or demographic factors modified these results. Recent studies have reported slight changes in IWAH (see, Landmann & Rohmann, 2022, for Germany; Wlodarczyk et al., 2022, for Spain and Chile), but these were observed only during strict lockdowns and over brief periods of a few weeks. In contrast, our study demonstrated that IWAH remained unchanged over an extended period of 10 first months of the pandemic.

The analysis of qualitative interviews from Study 2 deepened this picture and revealed a variety of individual perspectives on the world and its inhabitants during the pandemic. Some participants perceived the world as small but unifying all humans. They talked about compassion, empathy, and calls for solidarity while overcoming the threats and losses associated with the virus. Other participants, exposed to media accounts from all over the world, commented on the ways the pandemic was managed in different countries and were interested in the fate of diverse populations, both close and distant geographically. A few interviewees referred to ecology, and overpopulation, and expressed hope that the pandemic may inspire people to focus more on the need to protect the planet. On the other hand, for other participants, the world was small and threatening. The individuals who espoused this perspective were also more focused on their "small homelands". In these cases a sense of health and life threat, closed national borders, and competition for scarce resources may have hindered potential ties with people all over the world, making them focused on their small communities. Some participants expressed biased and stereotypical views of people from other nations and a sense of distrust toward them.

The outcomes of the qualitative study illustrated the intricacies of individual perspectives regarding the potential pandemic-induced changes in perceptions of the world and its inhabitants, a dimension not fully captured in the initial quantitative investigation. Considering Study 1's conclusion that the predominant source of IWAH variance

resides in individual stability, alongside extant literature proposing IWAH as a stable characteristic (Hamer et al., 2018, 2019; Leung et al., 2024; McFarland et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2023), the integration of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies enabled nuanced and more comprehensive insights into the pandemic's influence on Poles' understanding of the world and all humanity at that time.

While qualitative studies may not enable the generalization of results or the estimation of variable intensity, they do provide significant opportunities to broaden perspectives and allow for a more nuanced understanding of the diverse meanings individuals assign to psychological constructs such as social ties. In this context, our Study 2 represents a significant step toward formulating additional questions for future quantitative and mixed-methods investigations.

Interestingly, as Study 1 showed, people who felt more threatened by COVID-19 also felt more identified with all humanity, and this connection became stronger with time. Also Leung et al. (2024) showed that participants with a higher cosmopolitan orientation (which includes identification with citizens of the world) were more likely to perceive a greater threat posed by COVID-19 over time. The fact that the relationship between IWAH and perceived COVID threat was positive was not unexpected as McFarland and colleagues (2019) showed before the pandemic that people with higher IWAH scores reported greater concerns about different global issues, including the spread of dangerous diseases. However, the answer to why this relationship became stronger with time can only be speculative at this point. It could have been connected to the overall trajectory of the pandemic in its first year – a catastrophic wave of COVID-19 infections in many countries of the world, including Poland, starting with the late Summer of 2020. This caused serious problems for overloaded healthcare services in the country and the highest fatality rate in Poland during the pandemic. Analyses from 79 countries showed low levels of sense of control and elevated levels of anxiety and depression worldwide associated with perceived COVID-19 threats (van Mulukom et al., 2021). When faced with existential threats, to regain a sense of control, people have a greater tendency to deny or avoid death anxiety (Scrima et al., 2022), for instance, by believing in conspiracy theories (Douglas et al., 2019). Indeed, denialism and the rise of conspiracy theories were observed during the pandemic as well (Jaspal & Nerlich, 2023; Sternisko et al., 2023). In a study in Slovakia, higher perceptions of the risk of COVID-19 related to feelings of anxiety and lack of control, and the latter predicted endorsements of COVID-19 conspiracy theories (Šrol et al., 2021). Our Study 1 revealed that the level of COVID-19 threat was the highest at the pandemic outbreak in Poland (March 2020), then dropped by May/June 2020 and stayed at a moderate level till December 2020, even with the pandemic being on the rise. Still, it did not affect the level of IWAH. Interestingly, individuals with higher IWAH were found to be less prone to believe in conspiracy theories related to the pandemic (Marchlewska et al., 2022). Hence, it could be that people highly identified with all humanity were less likely to be swayed by these superficial ways of buffering the COVID-19 fears, so less prone to suppress their sense of the COVID-19 threat in that way. All these factors may have served as parts in explaining why the awareness and feelings of the COVID-19 threats were stronger among individuals with higher IWAH scores.

Limitations

The first potential limitation may be connected to the fact that the explanatory sequential design we applied caused our research to be spread in time. Study 1 started in March 2020 and concluded in December 2020, whereas Study 2 was conducted in April 2021. At that time, the COVID-19 situation was somewhat different. COVID-19 vaccinations commenced in January of 2021, which gave hope for beating the virus. In the Spring of 2021, there was another wave of the pandemic, causing a substantial increase in cases, but the death rate in April 2021, was lower (below 3%) in Poland than in the Fall of 2020 (over 5%, with a catastrophic wave of infections, i.e., high effective reproduction rate of 1.72[7]; Our World in Data, n.d.). On the other hand, the time separation between both phases of our research may have provided our respondents with psychological distance and time needed to process potential changes in their perspectives and attitudes toward the world and its inhabitants caused by the pandemic crisis.

The second possible limitation is the potential of our results to be generalized. Our studies were conducted in the Polish national context. Undoubtedly, there were a lot of similarities in challenges people all over the world faced during

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7) "If the rate is greater than 1, the infection is able to spread in the population. If it is below 1, the number of cases occurring in the population will gradually decrease to zero".

the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., infections, the possibility of dying, lockdowns, social distancing, wearing masks, working at home, health care hardships, shortage of safety and medical equipment, etc.). On the other hand, there have been differences based on cultural, political, and economic contexts, such as infection cases growth over time, specificity of governments health policies, or cultural dimensions related to ways of coping with the virus (see, e.g., Dheer et al., 2021; Gelfand et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2024). Regarding the austerity of governmental responses to the pandemic, considering thirteen public health measures (i.e., bans on mass gatherings, bans on sporting and recreational events, restaurant and bar closures, domestic lockdowns, international travel restrictions, domestic travel restrictions, curfew, declarations of states of emergency, public testing, enhanced surveillance, obligations to wear masks in the public space, school closures, and the postponement of elections), data gathered from 228 countries placed Poland somewhere in the middle at the onset of the pandemic, and as having lower levels of restrictions later in September 2020 (Porcher, 2020). Similarly to other countries, at the beginning of October 2020, Poland experienced a catastrophic wave of infections, but it noted one of the highest excess death rates in the years 2020-2022 (OECD, n.d.). The results of Gelfand et al.'s (2021) global analysis showed that it might have been connected to the cultural dimension of tightness-looseness, which describes the degree to which cultures have strict norms and punish deviance (in this case, how well people followed health recommendations). On the other hand, Poland was very similar to other countries regarding COVID-19 vaccinations: they started at the beginning of 2021, as in other countries, and over 50% of the country's population was inoculated (compared to 56% of the total population according to WHO, n.d.-b).

Taking all these facts into account, it seems that the overall trajectory of the pandemic in Poland in this time was generally similar to other (especially Western) countries, apart from a higher death rate. We believe that it is not unreasonable to attempt to generalize our results to other nationalities and cultural contexts, but a routine caution should be exercised. Given that the most severe phase of the COVID-19 pandemic is behind us, conducting similar studies in other countries may no longer be feasible at this time. Nevertheless, future international studies are recommended to explore potential changes in the level of global social identifications during the inevitable global crises that lie ahead.

Conclusions

In today's world, interconnected on a scope never seen before, potential existential threats and dangers spread around the globe rapidly. Thus, the question of whether these collectively experienced events affect people's identifications with others around the world is most warranted. Our study revealed that during the first year of the pandemic of COVID-19, a crisis affecting all humanity, the IWAH scores quantitatively assessed with a psychometrically sound instrument did not significantly fluctuate in a sample of Polish adults, suggesting its internal stability. Nevertheless, COVID-19 experiences as concomitants of appraisals of people's connections with the greater world, and of ties with its inhabitants, emerged in qualitative analyses of respondents' personal narratives showing a variety of people's perspectives.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contributions: (i) Conception and design: Study 1 – KH &MBa; Study 2 – KH, MBo, KK, MBa & BU; (ii) data collection: Study 1 – KH & MBa; Study 2 – MBo, KK, KH, MBa & BU; (iii) data analysis and interpretation: Study 1 – KH, PG & KK; Study 2 – MBo, & KH; (iv) manuscript drafting: KH, MBo, KK & PG; (v) manuscript revising: all authors; (vi) approval of final version for submission: all authors.

Positionality Statements: The interviews were conducted by a second author, whereas Thematic Analysis was performed by both the first and second author. The second author is a qualitative analysis researcher, a practicing clinical psychologist and a researcher with 15 years of empirical experience. She has 12 years of practice in qualitative data analysis. The first author is a researcher and a teacher in social and political psychology with 25 years of empirical experience, particularly in the area of global social identifications. She has 2 years of practice in qualitative data analysis. To avoid over-interpretation and speaking on behalf of the data, the authors, both Caucasian Polish women, tried to take into account existing biases or assumptions about the study respondents. There were no prior hypotheses about where the data would lead. All authors of this manuscript made every effort to identify and discuss key fundamental and mediating expectations and beliefs to avoid bias or overgeneralization of the data analyzed.

Data Availability: The data from Study 1 is publicly available (Hamer et al., 2024S). Materials related to Study 2 can be requested from the second author.

Supplementary Materials

The online supplement (Hamer et al., 2024S) contains results for IWAH Subscales (Bond With and Concern for All Humanity) from Study 1, and participants' demographic information from Study 2.

Index of Supplementary Materials

Hamer, K., Kaniasty, K., Baran, M., Boczkowska, M., Urbańska, B., & Górska, P. (2024S). *Potential changes in ties with people all over the world during the COVID-19 pandemic* [Research data for Study 1 and Supplementary Materials]. OSF. https://osf.io/p7c8n/

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