



COVID-19'S EFFECT ON THE RHYTHMS OF SMILING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

- Smiling is a salient, common, and impactful socio-affective signal
- Photos posted to social media are a rich source of data for studies of smiling (large, frequent, global)
- Social behavior and affect are known to have temporal rhythms (e.g., daily, weekly, and seasonal)
- We planned to analyze temporal rhythms of smiling on Instagram
- *Then something happened in 2020...*



INTRODUCTION

- The COVID-19 pandemic was highly disruptive to many aspects of life
- Fear, uncertainty, loneliness, and loss were widespread negative emotions
- Social distancing and face masks changed social communication
- Lockdowns and work-from-home policies altered temporal rhythms
- We measured smiling on social media to study temporal rhythms before and during the pandemic



HYPOTHESES



HYPOTHESIS 1

At baseline, smiling will be *higher during weekend* days and show a seasonal cycle that *peaks during summer* months



HYPOTHESIS 2

Smiling will *decrease* during COVID's first year and then *partially return to baseline* during COVID's second year



HYPOTHESIS 3

COVID's first year will show a *dampened weekend* effect and *partially return to baseline* during COVID's second year



HYPOTHESIS 4

COVID's first year will show a *dampened seasonal* amplitude and *partially return to baseline* during COVID's second year

DATA AND MEASURES

Where did the data come from? How did we measure smiling?



SOURCE & COUNTS

Partnered with **Whalar** (an international influencer management company)

- 1,905,424 images publicly uploaded
- 5,469 influencers on Instagram
 - 77.3% female, 21.2% male, 1.4% other
 - Age 18-64 ($M=29.34$, $SD = 5.98$)
- 76 countries of origin for influencers
 - 48.5% USA, 26.5% UK, 25% other
- 921 days from May 2019 – Oct 2021
 - All data were missing during Apr 2020



MEASURES

- Smile intensity was estimated using the OpenFace 2.0 toolkit (CV + ML system)



- Validated by 5 crowd-workers and 1 expert (subsample of 300 images)

<i>Correlation</i>	OpenFace	Positive	Smile
CW: Positive	0.79		
CW: Smile	0.78	0.94	
Expert: FACS	0.87	0.97	0.94



MODELING APPROACH

How can we parameterize a model to test our hypotheses?



MODERATED PERIODIC EFFECTS

SEASONAL PERIODIC EFFECTS

$$\text{Amplitude} = \sin\left(t \times \frac{2\pi}{365}\right)$$

How large is the peak of the seasonal cycle?

$$\text{Phase Shift} = \cos\left(t \times \frac{2\pi}{365}\right)$$

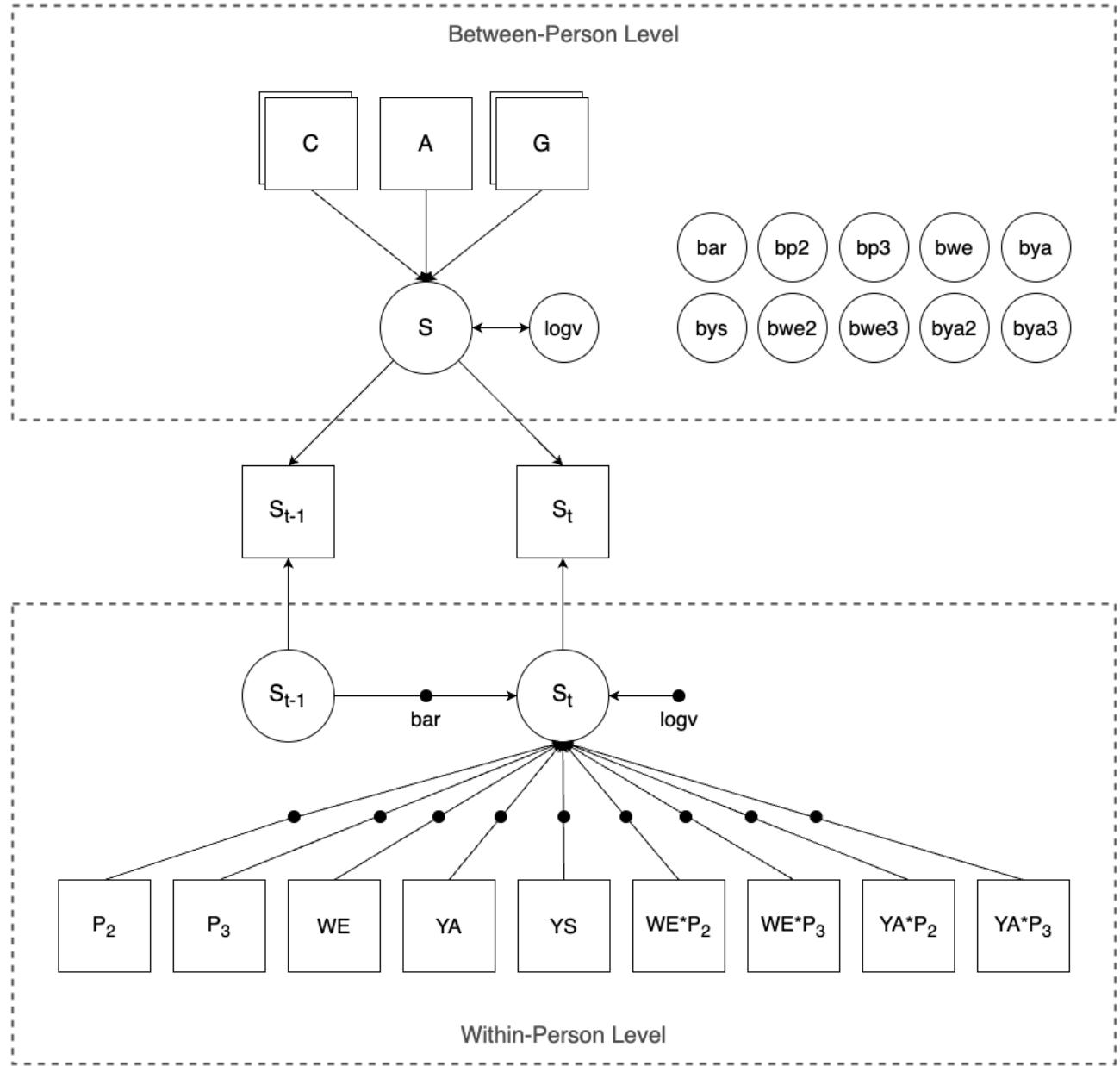
When (in the year) does the cycle start?



- Add amplitude and phase shift parameters
- Add a dummy code for weekend day
- Add dummy codes for study period (1 = Baseline, 2 = First Year, 3 = Second Year)
- Add interactions with period dummy codes
- *Does the weekend effect differ by period?*
- *Does seasonal amplitude differ by period?*
- *Does seasonal phase shift differ by period?*



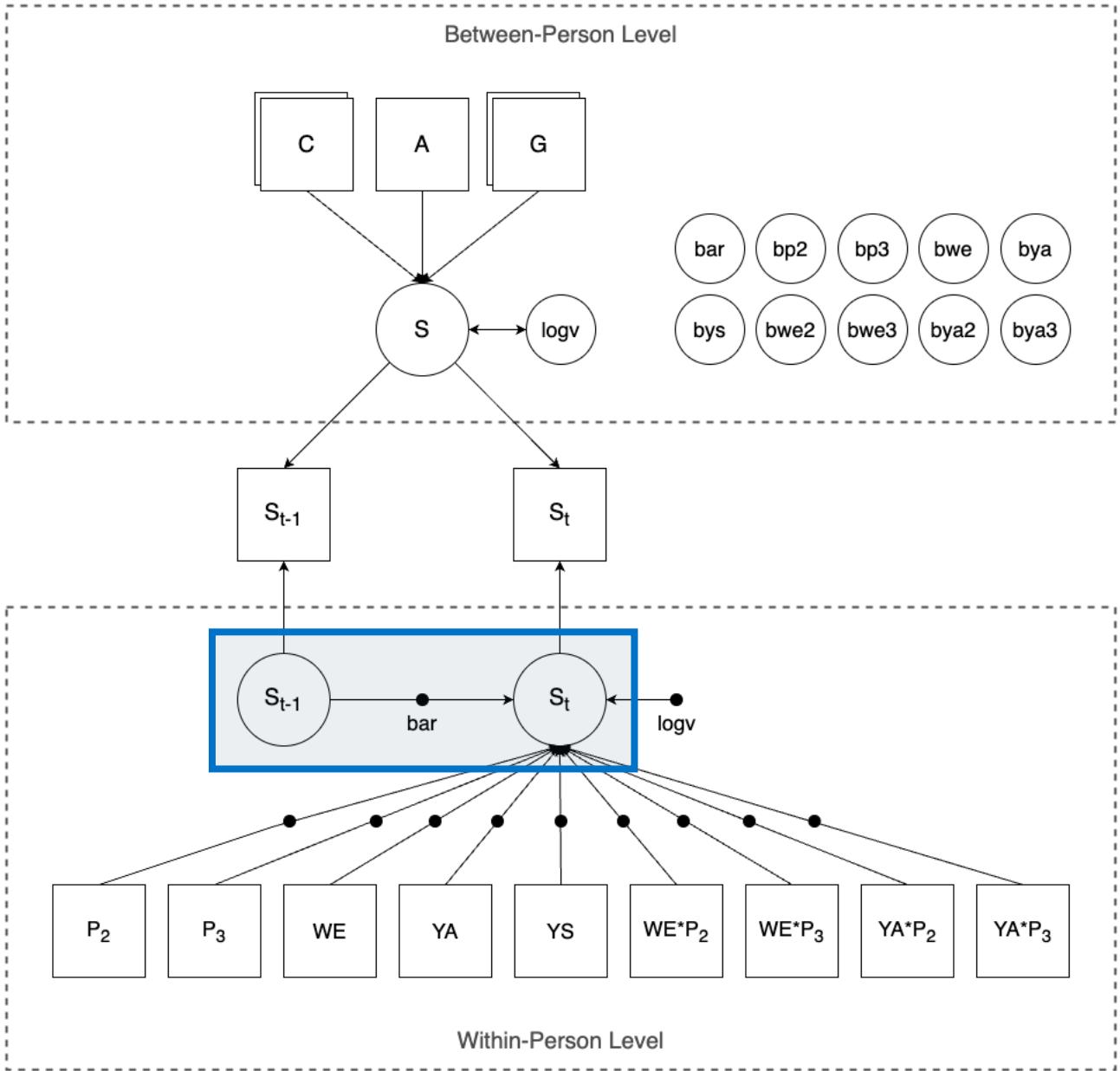
MODERATION



DSEM PATH DIAGRAM

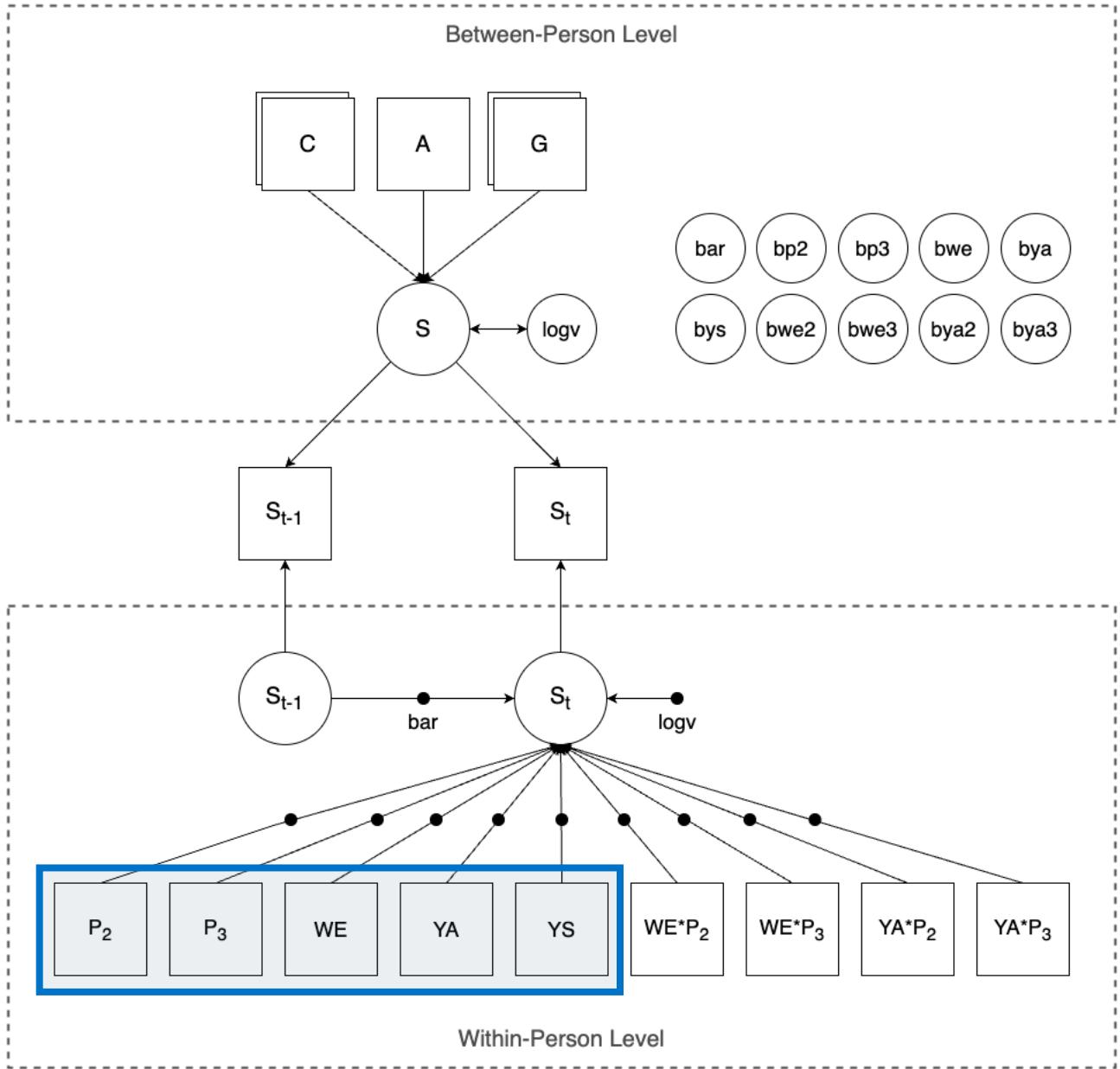
Dynamic Structural Equation Modeling

- Built for intensive longitudinal data
- Combines MLM, SEM, TSA, TVEM
- Jointly models participants' time series
- Decomposes time-varying relationships



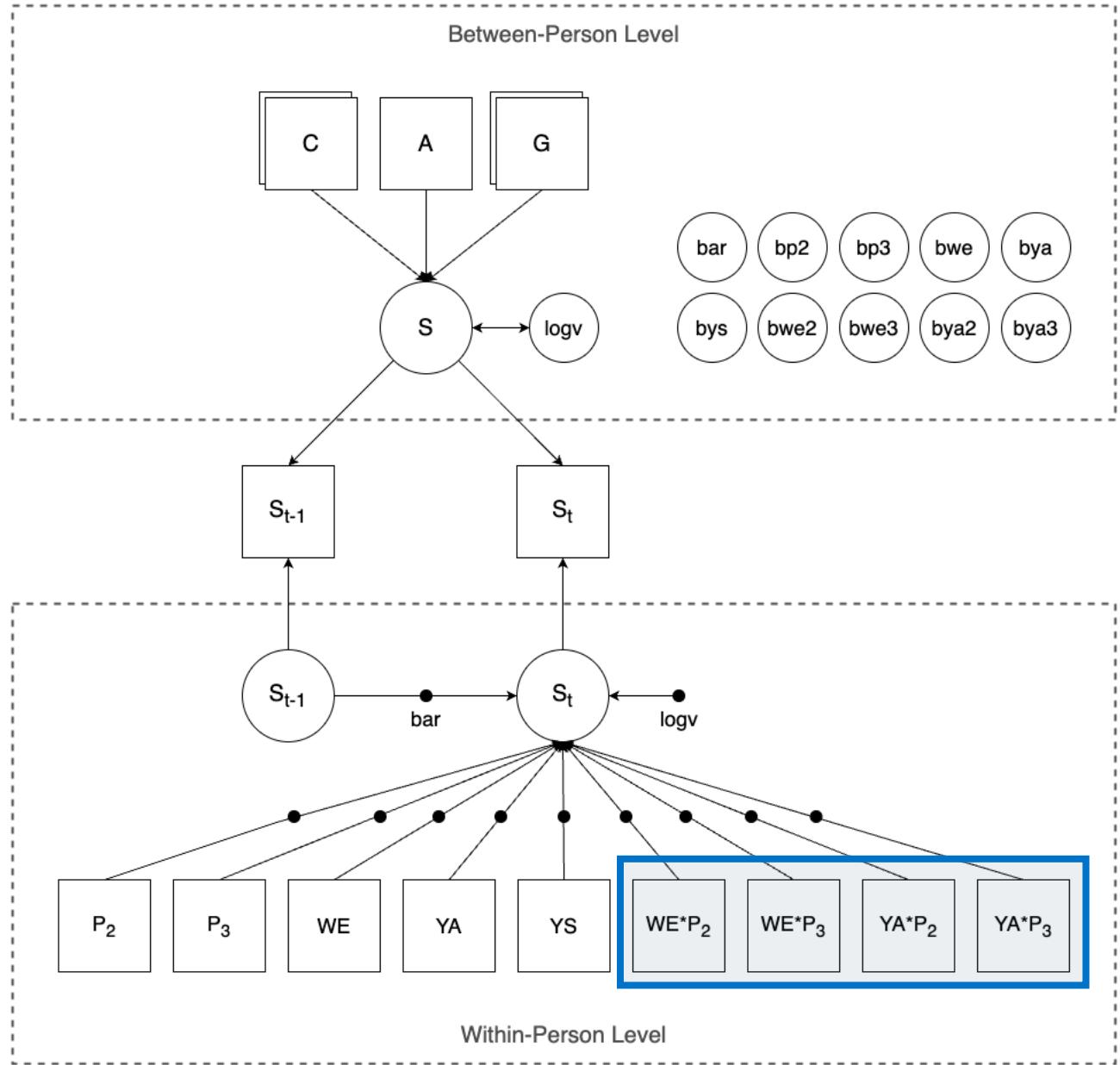
DSEM PATH DIAGRAM

Latent within-person autoregression
Is smiling today related to smiling yesterday?



DSEM PATH DIAGRAM

Within-person smiling rhythms
Differences between periods
Weekend and seasonal effects

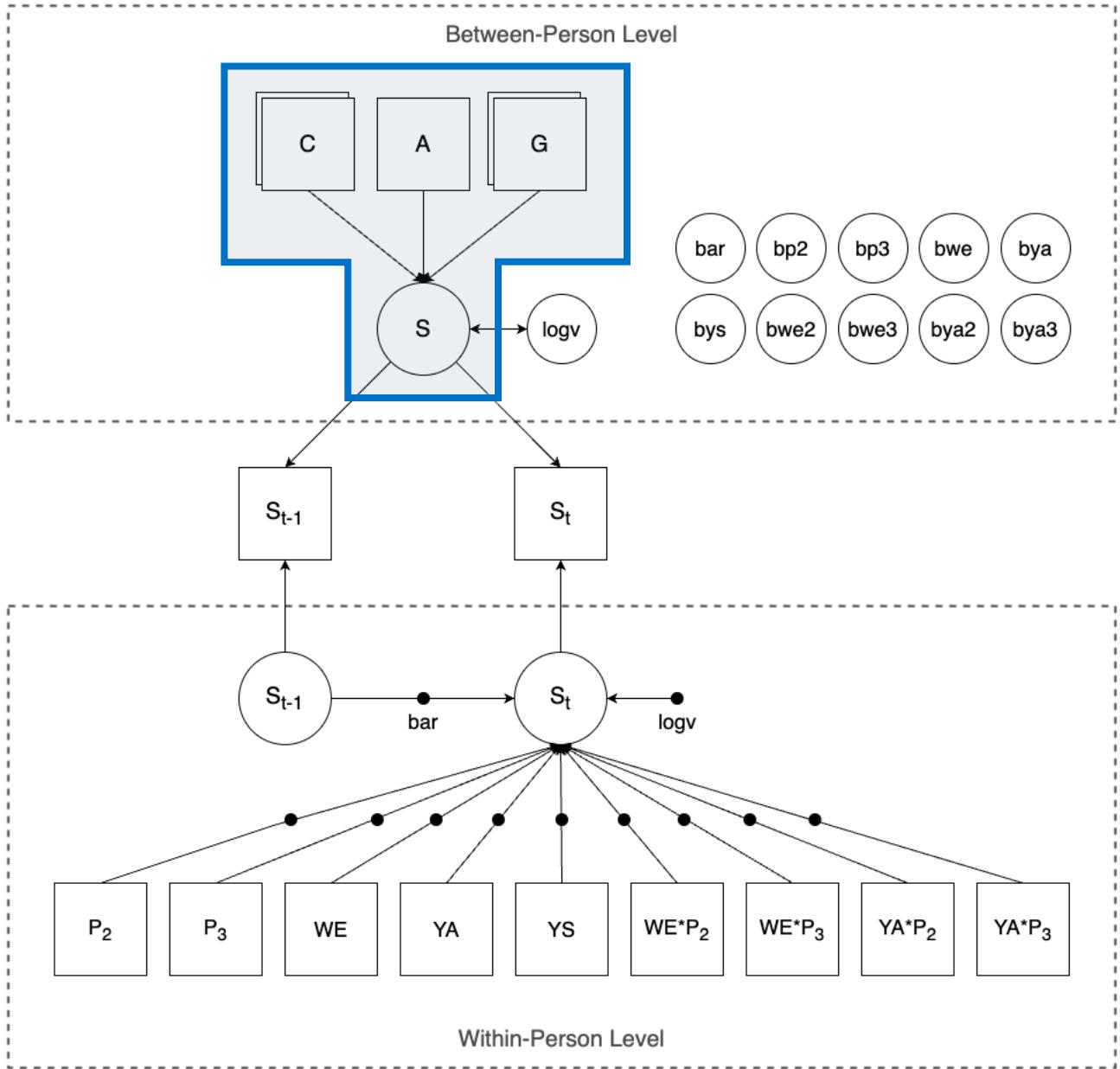


DSEM PATH DIAGRAM

Moderation by period

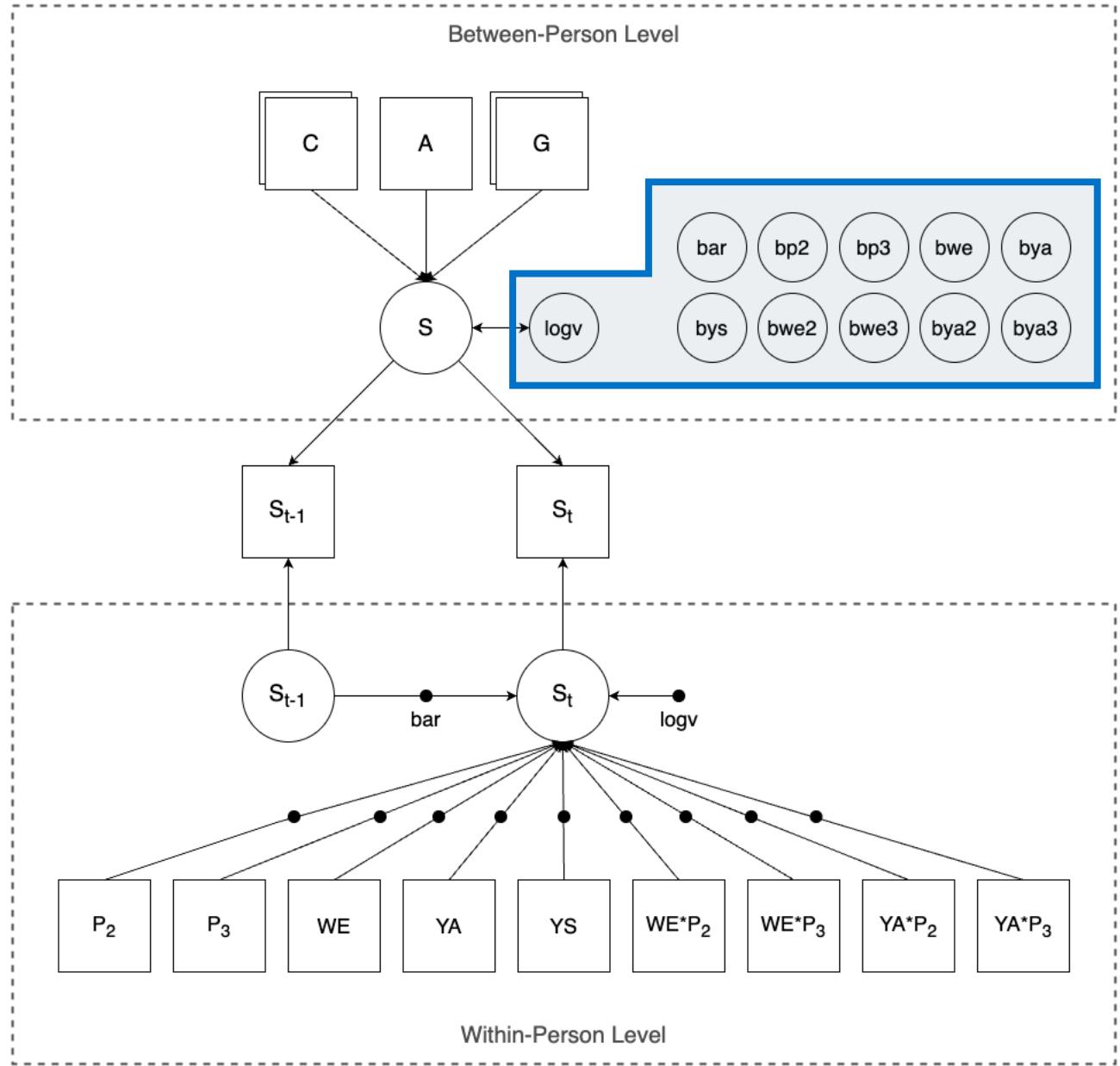
Does the weekend effect vary by period?

Do the seasonal effects vary by period?



DSEM PATH DIAGRAM

Latent between-person regression
Does average smiling differ by country?
Does average smiling differ by age?
Does average smiling differ by gender?



DSEM PATH DIAGRAM

Random effects per participant
How much do the strengths of these relationships vary across people?

RESULTS

What did our model find?



FIXED EFFECTS

Parameter	Est.	p	Sig.
Intercept	20.65	<.001	***
Age	0.73	<.001	***
Sex: Male	-4.03	<.001	***
Sex: Other	-2.11	<.001	***
Autoregression	0.03	<.001	***
Period 2	-0.11	.038	*
Period 3	0.32	<.001	***
Weekend	0.75	<.001	***
Yearly Amplitude	0.33	<.001	***
Yearly Phase Shift	0.00	.456	

H1

	Est	p	Sig.
Weekend × Period 2	-0.14	.027	*
Weekend × Period 3	0.25	<.001	***
Amplitude × Period 2	-0.02	.400	
Amplitude × Period 3	0.52	<.001	***

FIXED EFFECTS

Parameter	Est.	p	Sig.
Intercept	20.65	<.001	***
Age	0.73	<.001	***
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Yearly Phase Shift	0.00	.456	

H2

	Est	p	Sig.
Weekend × Period 2	-0.14	.027	*
Weekend × Period 3	0.25	<.001	***
Amplitude × Period 2	-0.02	.400	
Amplitude × Period 3	0.52	<.001	***

FIXED EFFECTS

Parameter	Est.	p	Sig.
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Moderation Effects

	Est	p	Sig.
Weekend × Period 2	-0.14	.027	*
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Amplitude × Period 2	-0.02	.400	
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H3

FIXED EFFECTS

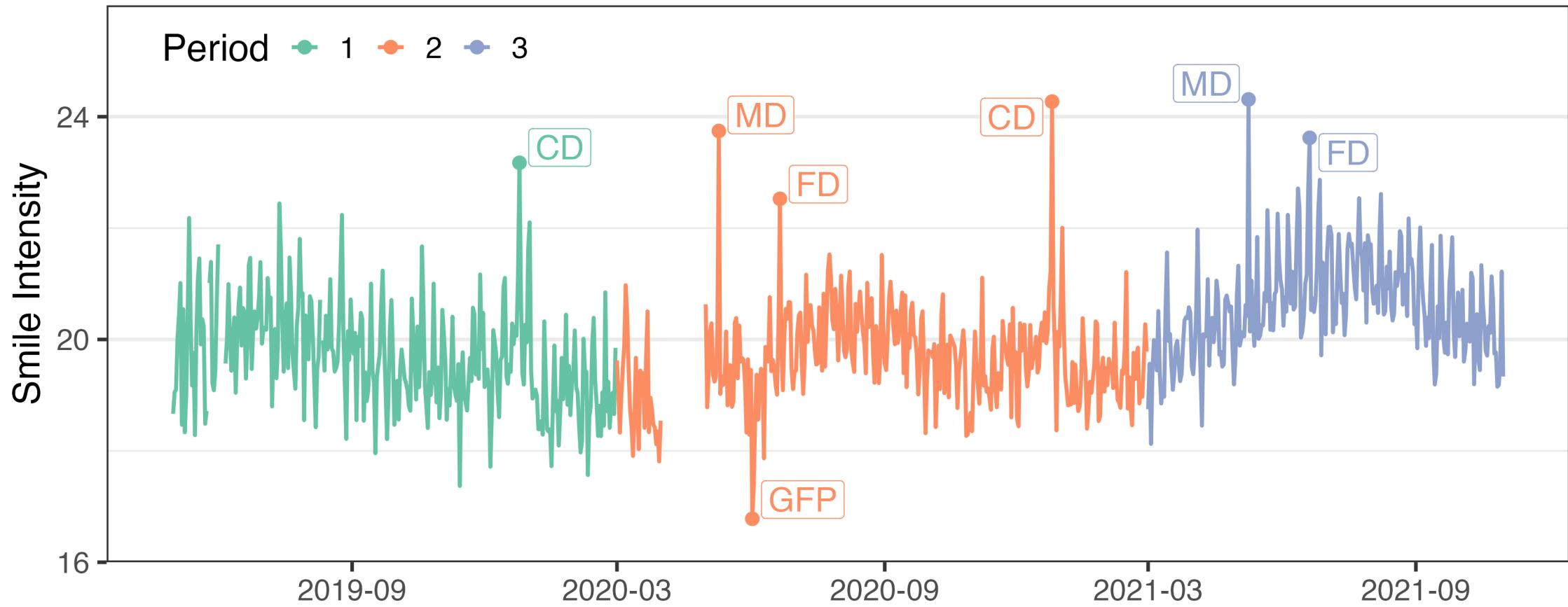
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Moderation Effects

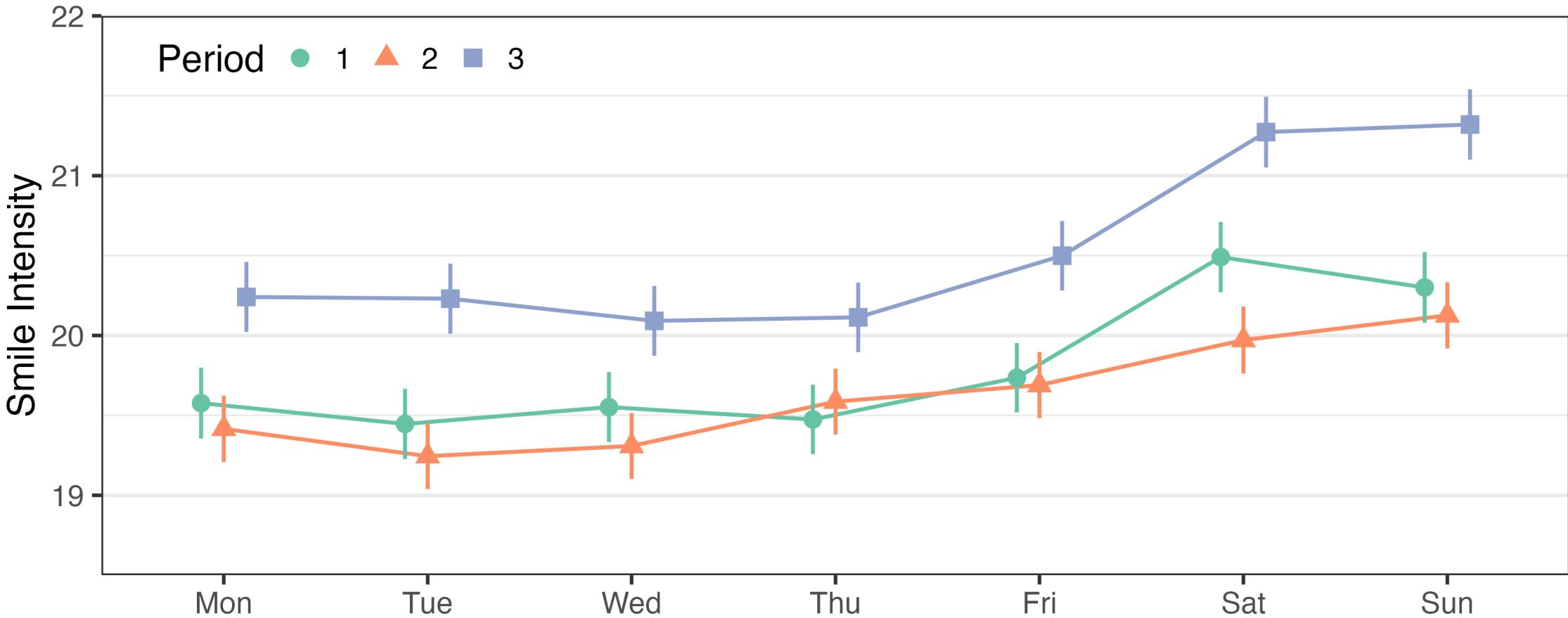
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H4

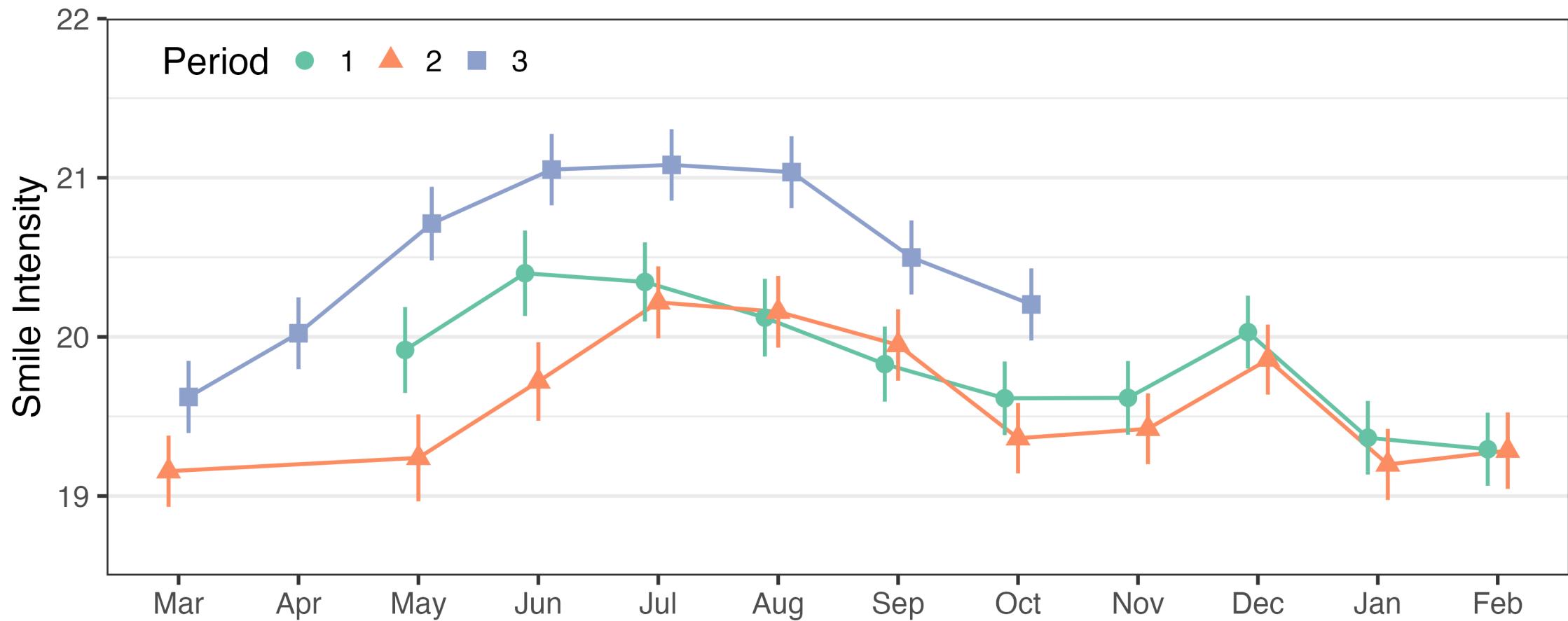
DAILY AVERAGES ACROSS PERIODS



WEEKDAY AVERAGES BY PERIOD



MONTH AVERAGE BY PERIOD



DISCUSSION

What does it all mean?



CONCLUSIONS

- The baseline (pre-COVID) year showed *weekend* and *seasonal* effects on social media smiling
- COVID year 1 showed *lower smiling* and a *dampened weekend* effect
- COVID year 2 showed *higher smiling* and an *amplified weekend* and an *amplified seasonal* effect
- These results are consistent with a “rebound” effect as lockdowns ended
- Socio-affective rhythms are sensitive to shifts in environmental context



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Who else was important to making this work possible?



RESEARCH TEAM



DASHA YERMOL

PhD Student in Psychology
at University of Kansas



DANIEL MCDUFF

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Helped in conceptualizing the project, conducting literature reviews, and writing the paper.



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Helped access and collect the data, provided expertise on Instagram and influencers.



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THANK YOU



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Affective Communication and Computing Lab