

# Experiences of Online Meditation Offerings: Perspectives from Contemplative Practitioners and Teachers

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## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted dramatic, lasting changes in many people's lives. Not surprisingly, heightened levels of stress<sup>1</sup> and loneliness<sup>2</sup> have been observed during the pandemic. Given the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health, strategies for protecting and improving peoples' well-being are of great value. Previous studies have shown that meditation can help reduce stress and anxiety<sup>3</sup> and increase feelings of social connectedness<sup>4</sup>.

Like most areas of life, contemplative instruction also underwent a massive shift as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Meditation teachings went from being offered mostly in person to being delivered almost exclusively online, with the notable emergence of many live Zoom-based meditation sessions. Here we explore the experiences of meditators and contemplative teachers in navigating online meditation spaces.

AIMS



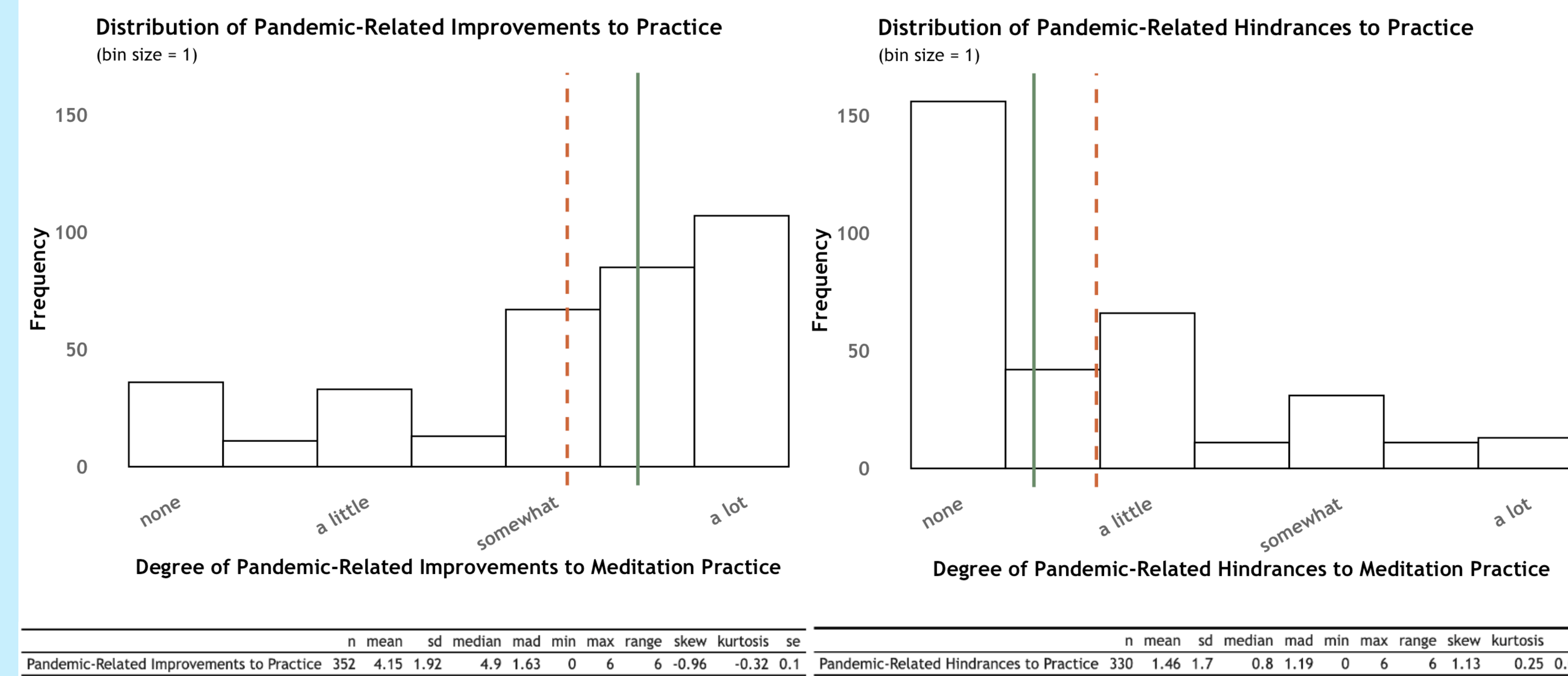
In this study, we examined:

- The degree to which meditation practitioners felt the Covid-19 pandemic strengthened or hindered their meditation practice
- What meditators liked and disliked about online meditation formats
- Perspectives from teachers of standardized mindfulness and compassion-based interventions about the efficacy of online versus in-person training formats

## Study 1: Pandemic-related changes to meditation practice

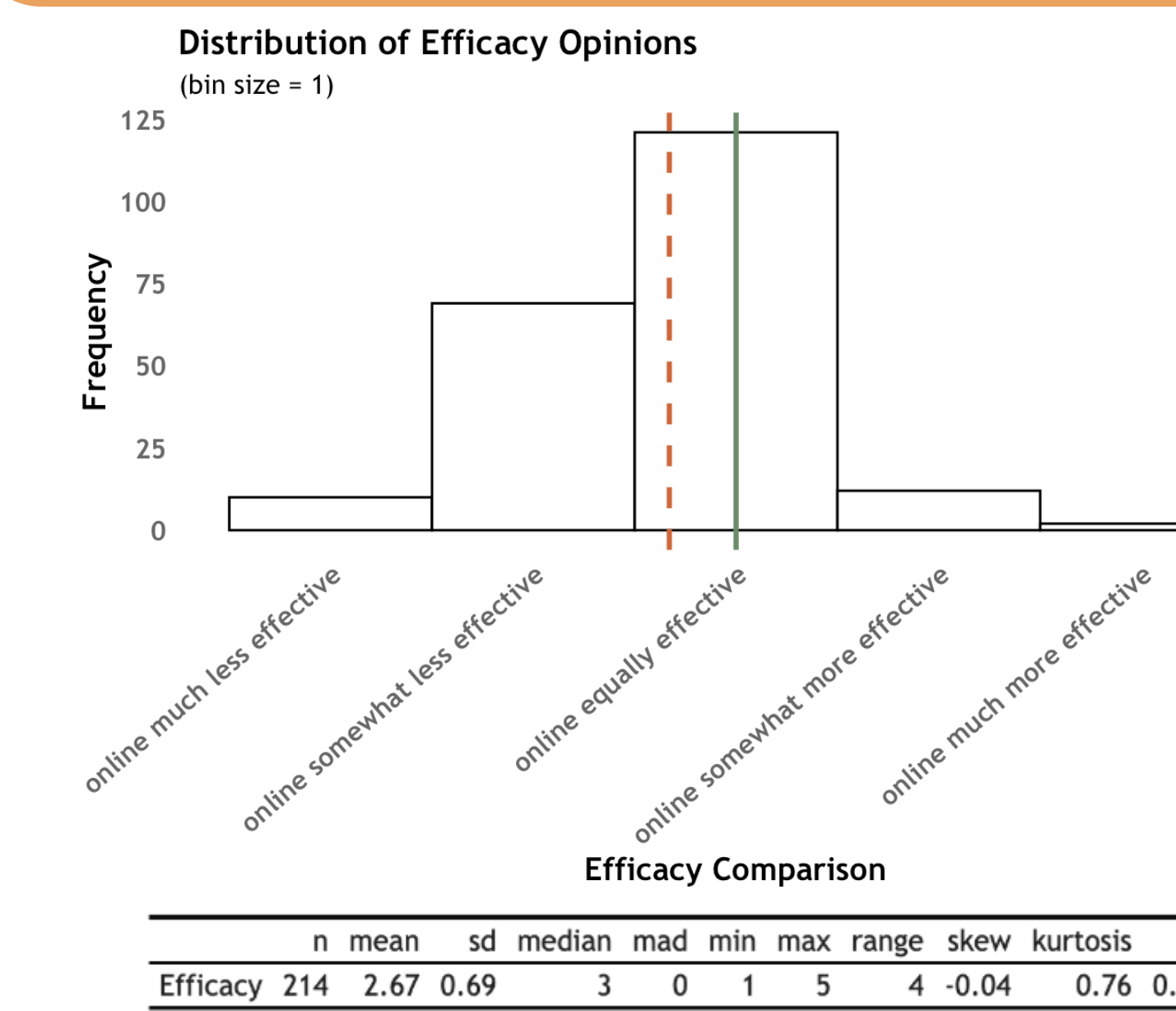
On average, meditators felt that pandemic-related changes somewhat improved their meditation practice (mean = 4.15, standard deviation = 1.92).

On average, meditators felt that pandemic-related changes hindered their practice only a little (mean = 1.46, standard deviation = 1.70).



The orange dashed line indicates the mean and the solid green line indicates the median.

## Study 2: Teacher perspectives of online training efficacy compared to in-person



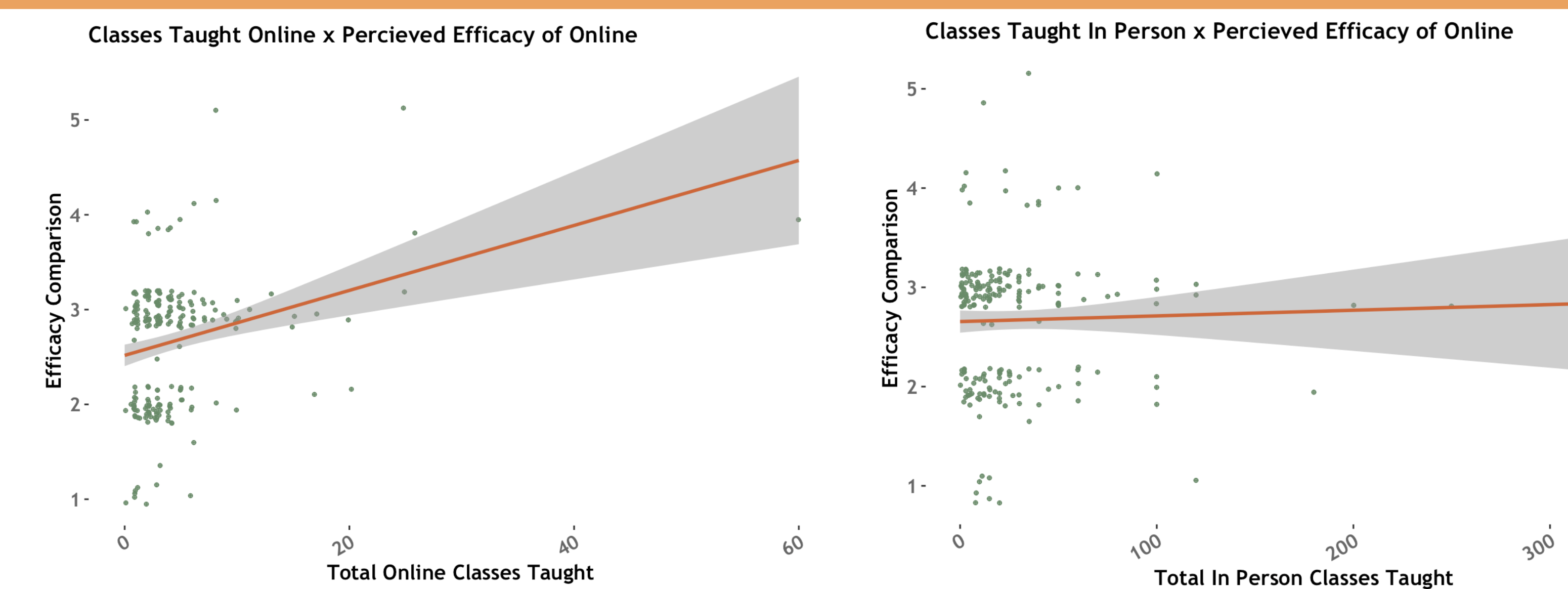
Teachers indicated that online training formats were slightly less effective than their in-person counterparts.

A one-sample t-test showed that the mean of 2.67 (scale of 1-5) was different from the expected mean of 3 ( $t = -7.03$ ,  $df = 213$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

\*We would expect a mean of 3 if teachers thought online and in person trainings were equally effective.

The orange dashed line indicates the mean and the solid green line indicates the median.

## Study 2: Online teaching experience predicts perceived efficacy of online training



We observed a significant positive correlation between the number of classes teachers had taught online and their perception of online training efficacy ( $r_s = 0.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

We found no significant correlation between the number of classes teachers had taught in person and their perception of online training efficacy ( $r_s = -0.004$ ,  $p = .95$ ).

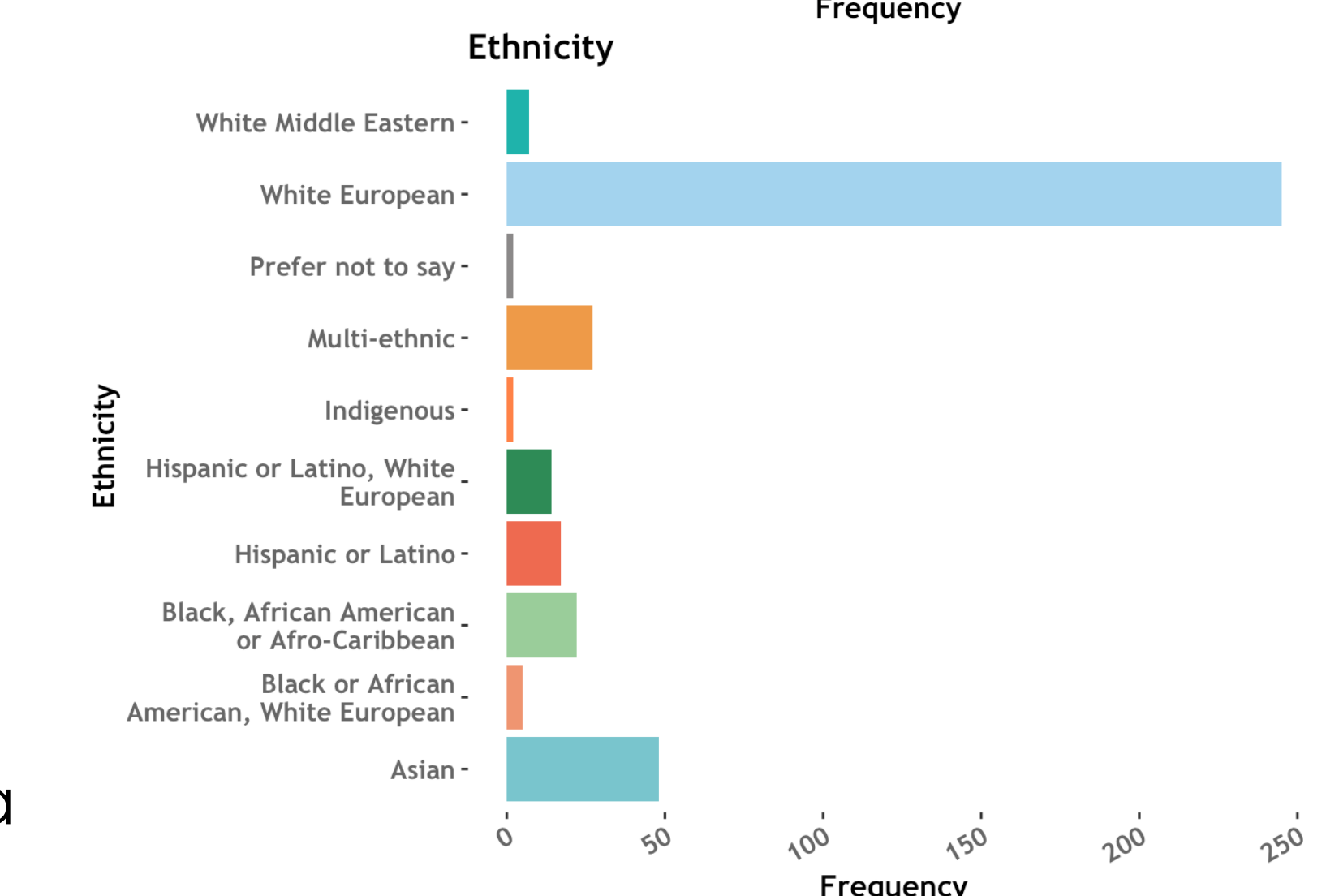
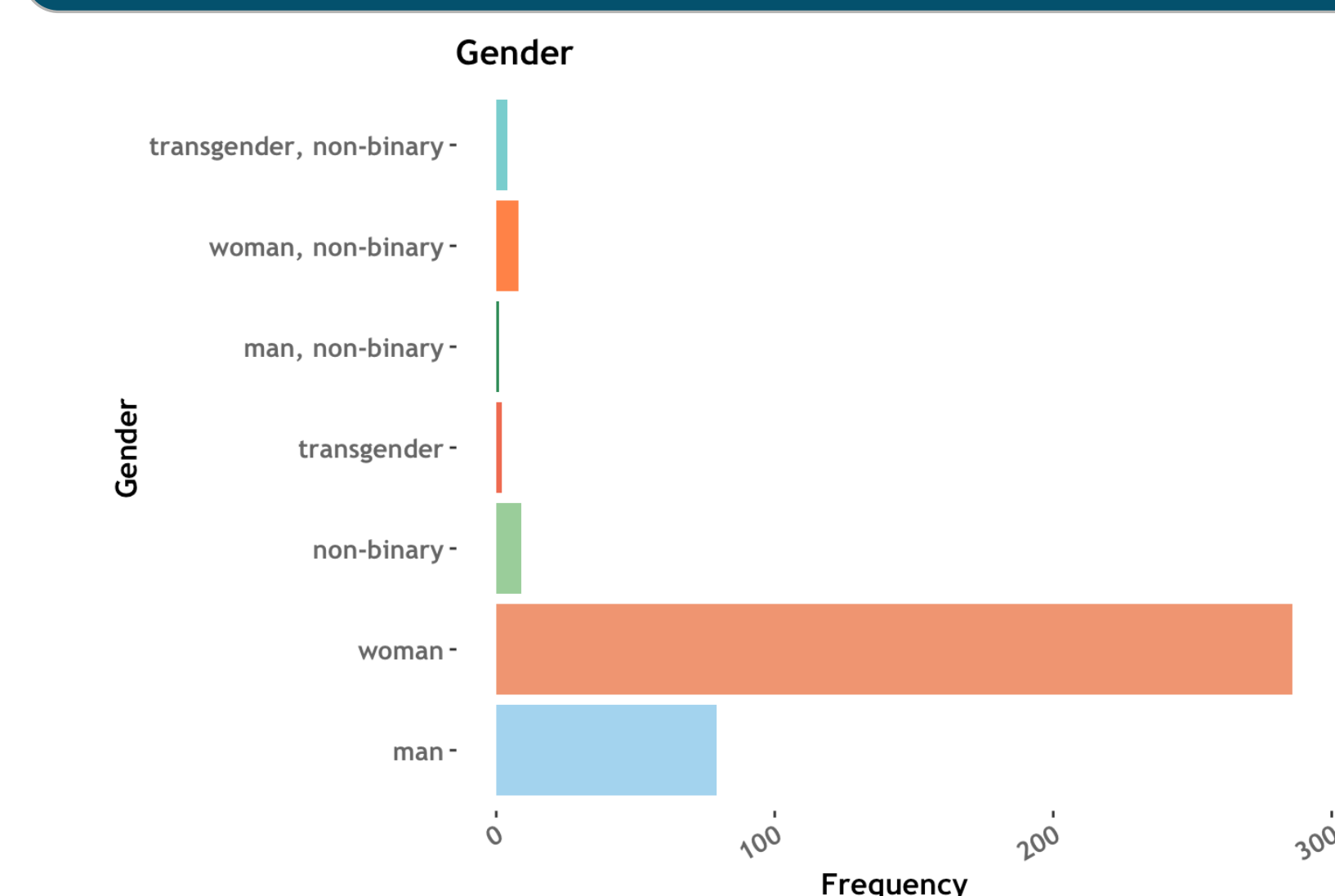
## Methods

### STUDY DESIGN

### PARTICIPANTS

#### Study 1 | CCC Study

Meditation Practitioner Demographics (mean | range)  
Age = 50.79 | 19-88  
Years practicing = 9.44 | 0-44.25



#### Study 2 | Teacher Study

Teacher Demographics (mean | range)  
Age = 55.81 | 32-78  
Years teaching = 7.26 | 1-36  
Number of classes taught in-person = 27.41 | 0-350  
Number of classes taught online = 4.38 | 0-60  
Total number of classes taught = 31.80 | 1-356

**Study 1** ( $N = 389$ ) was the Contemplative Coping During Covid-19 (CCC) study comprised of a national cohort of meditation practitioners. In this study, meditators were asked to describe what they liked and disliked about the online meditation classes and retreats they had engaged in. Meditators also rated the degree to which pandemic-related changes 1) improved or strengthened and 2) hindered or disrupted their meditation practice on a scale of 0 (none) to 6 (a lot). Data were collected between June of 2020 and January 2021.

**Study 2** ( $N = 275$ ) was an international, anonymous sample of teachers of mindfulness and compassion-based interventions. Teachers indicated their perceptions of the efficacy of online versus in person training programs on a 5-point scale: (1) online much less effective, (2) online somewhat less effective, (3) online equally effective, (4) online somewhat more effective, and (5) online much more effective. Data were collected in 2021.

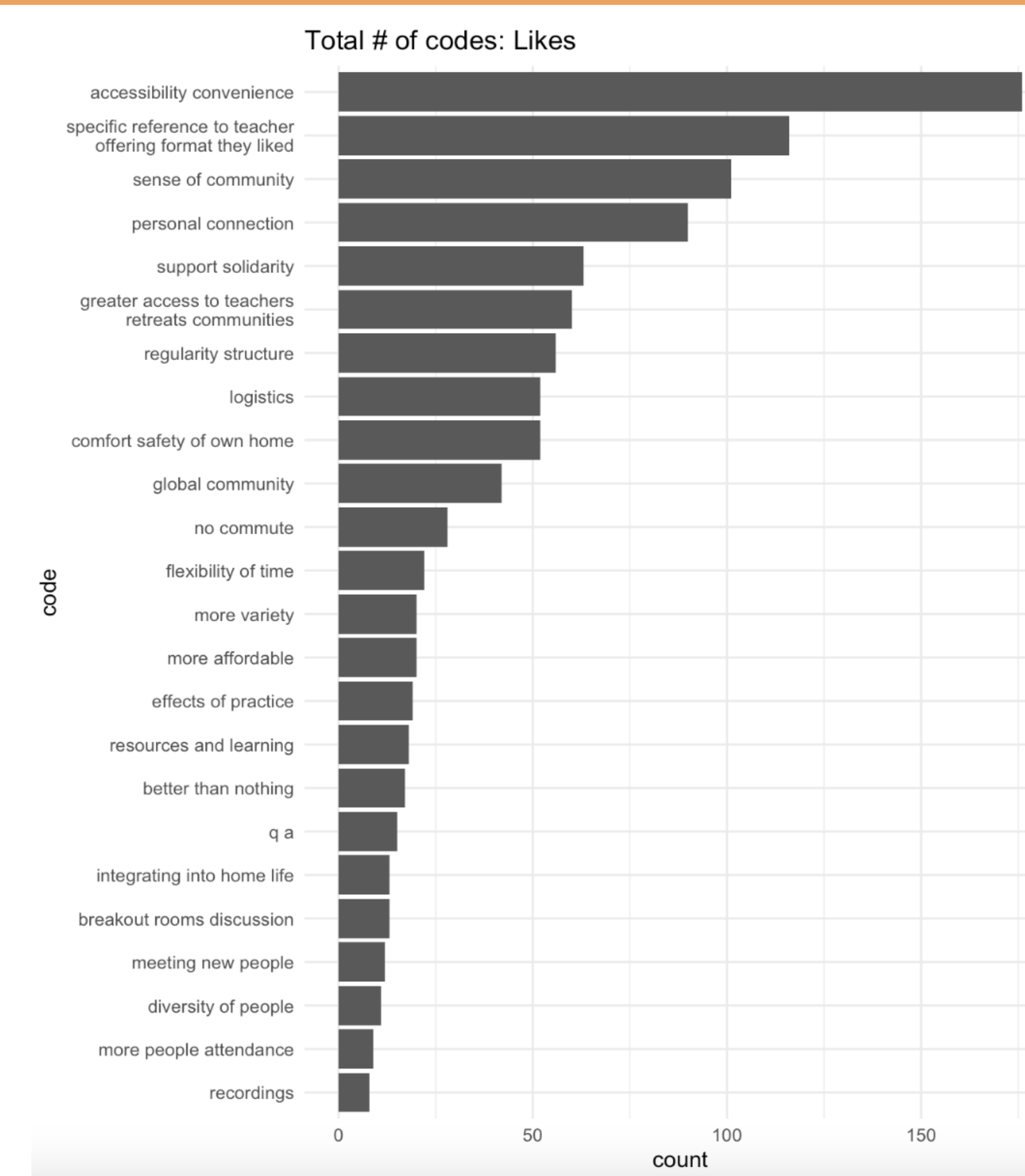
## Study 1: Practitioners likes and dislikes about online meditation formats

318 participants reported engaging in online meditation activities. Written responses were coded in Dedoose by 2 independent coders who came to agreement on all codes.

For more information about the qualitative codes, [view our codebook here](#).

When asked what they liked or found helpful about online meditation classes and retreats, meditators shared they liked the:

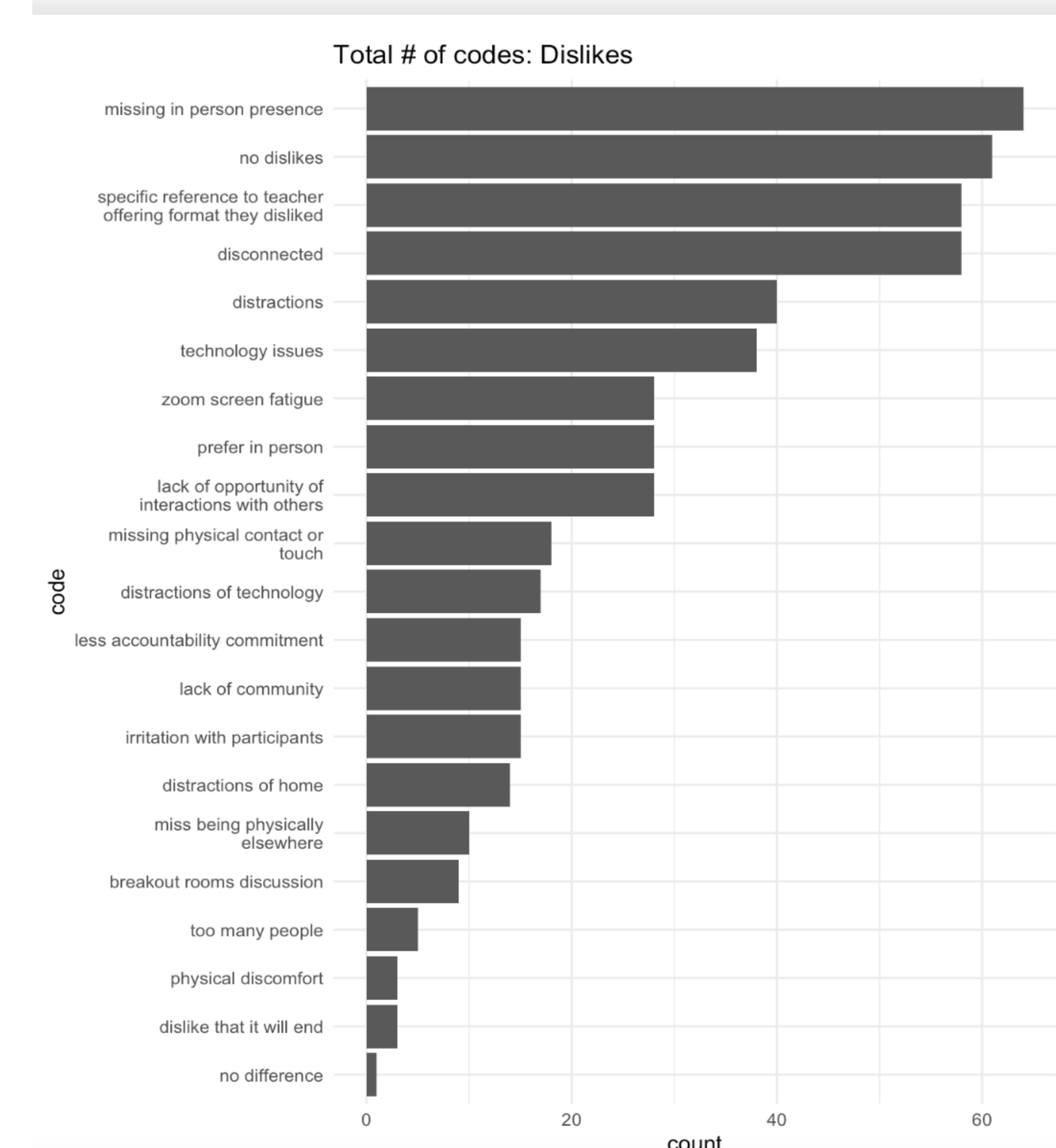
- **accessibility & convenience**
- **sense of community**
- **sense of personal connection**



When asked what they disliked or found unhelpful about online meditation classes and retreats, meditators shared they disliked the:

- **missing in-person presence**
- **disconnectedness**
- **distractions**

Also notable was that many meditators (19%) shared that there was nothing they disliked about the online offerings they engaged with.



## Summary & Conclusions

- Meditators generally felt their practice somewhat improved and was minimally hindered as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Meditators noted many pros and cons to online meditation formats, largely centered around concerns of accessibility and social connection.
- Teachers of mindfulness and contemplative-based trainings felt that online programs were slightly less effective than in-person programs.
- Amount of online teaching experience, but not in-person teaching experience, was positively related to teacher's perceptions of online training efficacy.
- These data suggest that teachers and practitioners find online meditation formats valuable, despite their limitations.

## References

1. Robillard et al. (2020). *BMJ Open*, 10(12), 1-12.
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3. Goyal et al. (2014). *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 174(3):357-368.
4. Hutcherson et al. (2008). *Emotion*, 8(5), 720-724.

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