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Technological advancements have provided revolutionary access to information, and communication. In the midst of a pandemic, it has become a reliable source for students, teachers, corporations and influencers. But what are the dangers of exploring the digital space outside of school or work? Can the news and imagery on social media we consume be a hinderance? This paper is an exploration of the realm of digital media and its effects on the mental health of emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29. Using the General Social Survey I will conduct an analysis of respondent's internet use and mental health. Though my findings are mostly insignificant and cannot be generalized to the population it does show that there is a connection with higher internet use and worse mental health. This project ultimately raises questions about the impact of the increased use of internet and possible methods for future research.

TRAVERSING THE SUNKEN PLACE: INVESTIGATING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
INTERNET USE AND MENTAL HEALTH ESPECIALLY AMONG BLACK AMERICANS.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Since COVID-19, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the most recent Presidential election, I grew an even deeper curiosity of how computers could be negatively impacting the Black community. In particular considering how dependent most of us have become on computers to complete daily tasks. The purpose for my research is to understand if and or how computers have created a space for violence, with a specific focus on its Black users. I question if the increase of digital media stimulation is related to poor mental health indicators. I find this topic interesting especially due to posts regarding various protests for the victims of police brutality and injustice and the increase of technology usage caused by the pandemic.

Black people have been plagued with imagery of their ancestors being attacked or killed for years. From public whippings during the 17th and 18th centuries, to the Birmingham Campaign in the spring of 1963 (PBS, 2019), and now videos of Community Based Violence in the past couple of years. Some videos include Trayvon Martin's fatal shooting by a Neighborhood Watchman (February 26, 2012), George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police (May 35, 2020), and the video of Second Lieutenant Caron Nazario being pepper sprayed by police (December 5, 2020). These are just a few of the videos that I can name that have led to many protests and sparked a lot of outrage throughout the country and beyond.

I have also observed television news programs overrepresent African Americans as criminals by twice their overall population. And overrepresent white citizens and police officers as victims, relative to their overall population. (Intravia and Pickett, 2019). On top of the imagery of attacks and killings, there is also an oversaturation of black criminals in the media. These oversaturation's can lead to the depiction of Blacks having higher criminality, which can contribute to further discrimination. Black teens are also more likely to experience racial

discrimination online some examples include users calling black teens racial slurs, or mocking them with racial stereotypes (Tynes, 2015). Some effects of this racial online discrimination are depression, anxiety, low motivation, and an increase in behavioral issues (Tynes, 2015).

There is a lack of online platforms for Black people to tell their stories. It is important for Black people to tell their stories so that they can express themselves, and provide a voice or lesson for others who have gone or are going through similar situations. Most of the stories seen on social media sites are of black immigrants or criminals. Social media platforms do offer pages, groups and threads that can be geared toward sharing these stories; however, there is usually an administrator and they can choose who to let into the group as well as the content posted there. They can also try to submit it on Facebook outside their group but their stories can be flagged by Facebook or other users who find it offensive and deem it to go against community guidelines. With a new platform, far more stories will be able to be told. (see Murphy, 2019 for a similar argument).

The proposed research is extremely important because most people do not understand the Black experience in America, let alone a virtual one. Examples of the black experience include the need to code switch. Code switching is essentially the need for people of color to change the way they talk, mannerisms or even the way they dress to be deemed professional or presentable in White spaces or professional spaces. It is similar to the idea of double consciousness by W.E.B Du Bois in which African Americans struggle to stay true to their Black self while conforming to white society.

There is less imagery of White and Latino people being beaten or killed by cops on the internet or news reports resorting to their past mistakes to justify being mistreated by the police. The lack of violent imagery from other races stems from a long history of racism. This type of

violent imagery has been almost synonymous with the Black American experience for some time now. With modern technology, it is easier for people to record, upload, and share harmful images of Black people. This can be positive as it can deter people from acting in a violent or unsettling manner or create awareness of how people conduct themselves. Some examples include the case of the recording of George Floyd which was meant to spread awareness of how the Minneapolis police were conducting arrests. As well as the recording for Ahmaud Arbery his murders where it shows neighbors in a southern neighborhood chasing them. Though the circulation of this violent imagery helps to provide justice to the victims and their families. Its wide circulation can cause a great deal of sorrow and pain for those who empathize with the victims.

Within my research I have found that there are many platforms and spaces such as Facebook, CNN, and Twitter that make violent imagery available to everyone. Within the past year the world has suffered from a pandemic that has caused many people to resort to mostly electronic interactions. Workplaces, comedy clubs, and even schools have resorted to meeting mostly online where they can be susceptible to many advertisements and different forms of media while using websites or platforms for work or school. In fact, 53% of Americans have said that they relied more on the internet during the COVID outbreak (Pew Research Center, 2021). While they are participating in these electronic interactions there is also an increased risk for Black people to become subject to online discrimination, and harmful imagery.

As of February 8th 2021, roughly 72% of the adult American population uses some sort of social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), which can lead to this imagery spreading worldwide (Pew Research Center, 2021). 74% of Black people are estimated to use Facebook, 49% are estimated to use Instagram, and about 29% use twitter (Pew Research Center, 2021). Black and Hispanic adults in the US are still less likely to own a traditional computer or have

high speed internet in their homes compared to White adults (Pew Research Center, 2021).

However, there are no differences when it comes to mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones (Pew Research Center, 2021).

There needs to be some study to determine if and how online activity affects a Black person's self-perception, mental health, and perspective about their outlook on their place in America. No one should have to deactivate their accounts or completely alter their news feed because of the constant sharing of harmful images and/or racial-ethnic discrimination committed by others on social media sites. I say this from personal experience. From what I have seen on my timeline, people from all races are tired of seeing such harmful imagery circulating around, and they are tired of the lack of justice the victims get. By being more cognizant of how certain imagery and words affect people's perceptions of black people, more institutions may come up with programs or laws to make the internet use less harmful words and descriptions when it comes to people of color. I also hope this research encourages people to seek help or guidance if they feel traumatized by the constant harmful imagery they are exposed to.

In this paper I will start with a literature review which is comprised of findings based on themes such as community based violence (CBV), stereotypes and discrimination and space and their influence on mental health in regards to digital media. Then in the research methods portion I discuss my desire to learn more of the potential significance between, race, age and experiences with racial violence on the internet and mental health. In doing so I discuss what parameters I should set and what variables I should use to make my research as concise as I would like it to be. After discussing my research methods, I will then go into my conclusion of my findings and what I have accomplished from this study as well as what I hope others can learn from it. Finally, I will have my Appendix and references at the bottom.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental Health and Digital Media

Understanding the mental health effects of indirect exposure to mass trauma through the media, Dr. Yuval Neira and Dr. Gregory Sullivan focus on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by indirect exposure to terrorist attacks. When PTSD is presented, it can express a multitude of distressing and disabling symptoms such as re-experiencing phenomena, hyperarousal, general affective numbing, and avoidance of reminders of the exposure (Neira and Sullivan, 2011). However, there are many community surveys that conclude most adults exhibit resilience following exposure to trauma, even among those who develop symptoms consistent with PTSD in the immediate aftermath, without receiving any clinical intervention. (Neira and Sullivan, 2011)

The neuroscience model of Pavlovian fear conditioning and extinction is used to understand how fear learning may be involved in the emergence of PTSD symptoms and how the persistence of symptoms over time can cause a degradation in learned fear memory or in other words a regression in conditioned fear. Neira and Sullivan (2011) examine the US September 11, 2001 attacks to find out if those who were indirectly exposed to the attacks through media experienced similar post-traumatic stress to those who were directly exposed. They found an acute emergence of PTSD-like symptoms that rapidly declined over several months to a lower, more stable rate with ongoing PTSD. Which means that those who were exposed via media did experience similar PTSD symptoms but as time went by, they experienced less symptoms and ultimately did not have the same post-traumatic stress as those who witnessed the 9/11 attacks. They further discuss the need to increase efforts in understanding how extinction-based psychotherapeutic approaches could help treat PTSD. This study is particularly helpful because it

does show there are some lingering PTSD symptoms after months of indirect exposure to a terrorist attack/disaster. To most people who support the Black Lives Matter Movement police brutality against Black People is seen as a terrorist attack and images of it are constantly circulating on the internet.

Brendesha Tynes (2015) article is instructive here due to her focus on the effect digital media has on mental health after exposure to violence and its measure of seeing if and how a violent incident in a community can cause people to display fear and sadness. Tynes discusses online racial discrimination and how adolescents of color are affected. Her preliminary research found 95 percent of youth have access to the internet and adolescents of color spend 4.5 more hours per day on average than their white peers using digital media. She also found many minority youth find themselves to be victims of online racial ethnic discrimination. A great deal of data suggests the context in which the discriminatory practice occurs, can have differential impacts on child and adolescent adjustment outcomes.

There was a survey conducted by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in which 340 African-American, Latino, Asian and biracial adolescents in the 12th grade participated. The data revealed 42 percent of minority youth indicated they had experienced at least one direct discriminatory incident in the first year, with 55 percent in the second year, and 58 percent in the third year. Participants described their experiences with online racial discrimination. Within this study, the authors monitored the most frequent contexts in which the adolescents experienced discrimination. “58 percent of minority youth indicated that they experienced at least one direct discriminatory event” (Tynes, 2015).

They also found most of the time it happened on social networking sites like Facebook and through text messaging. The participants also reported six primary types of experiences: (1)

racial epithets, (2) statements that were untrue, stereotyping and implicitly racist statements, (3) racist jokes, (4) symbols of hate, such as the confederate flag, (5) threats of physical harm or death, (6) graphic representations/actual images of dead black bodies. Tynes (2015) then uses the survey to explain how these experiences cause harm to the black psyche, particularly anxiety and depression caused by being erased and cyberbullied when people disregard their struggle. She hopes her study will help push for cyberbullying prevention, internet safety programs, and interventions to help youth cope with information they are exposed to online. This study is especially helpful to my research because it shows the effects of racial/ethnic cyberbullying on children of color. It also does a very good job at addressing the experiences people of color go through while using the internet.

Observing Stereotypes: The Effects of Subtle Labeling Online

Stereotyping Online? is a study by Jonathan Intravia and Justin T. Pickett (2019) that examines the relationships between online news consumption and crime news engagement. Their study uses cultivation theory, which suggests heavy exposure to the media shapes our view of social reality. Though this seems like a plausible theory for this study, the theory was only intended for television, and the researchers realized it may not be suitable for an online environment. To accommodate this limitation, theories of social identity and categorization and selective exposure theory are also used. Social identity and categorization theories essentially are rooted in the belief that membership of an ingroup will affect stereotyping members of an outgroup. Selective exposure theory claims individuals will choose mass media that align with their beliefs or predispositions. From those 3 theories and prior research, Intravia and Pickett (2019) come up with three hypotheses. The first is internet news consumption will be negatively associated with typifying African Americans as criminals. The second is social media

consumption will be positively related to typifying African Americans as criminals. The last is how race and political ideology moderate the relationship between news consumption and public opinion issues related to crime and justice. Conducting an online survey administered to 7 introductory criminal justice courses in two universities, one being in the Midwest and one being in the northeast, Intravia and Pickett (2019) found internet news consumption is negatively related to racially typifying African Americans as criminals. They also found little evidence that the association between online media consumption and engagement varies by race and American political ideology. Limitations of this study are that they only asked students involved in a criminal justice course and they did not collect data on contextual measures (i.e., neighborhood conditions and crime rate).

Police killings and their spillover effects are arguably significant influences on the mental health of Black Americans. A population-based, quasi-experimental study by Jacob Bor, Atheendar S Venkataramani, David R. Williams, and Alexander C. Tsai (2018) discusses how police killings have an effect on Black Americans. In the beginning of the article, there is a discussion on how the public has become more aware of the killing of unarmed Black people in recent years. Which leads to a discussion on the trauma people of the Black community face by witnessing these killings via social media/news. Some of these traumas include a heightened perception of systemic racism, loss of social status and self-regard, increased fear of victimization, increased vigilance, and diminished trust in social institutions. Bor. et al's purpose in conducting this study was to highlight the structural racism the police are grounded upon and continue to uphold police training and killings, which have not been quantified in nationally representative data. The researchers used data from the US Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and the Mapping Police Violence database. Respondents who took the BRFSS

and reported experiencing poor mental health in the month prior to the interview (which would be conducted 0-3 months after at least one police killing) were analyzed. This study helps us understand the trauma Black people may experience from viewing imagery of people in their community getting killed and how it may or may not escalate certain anxieties.

Community Based Violence on Digital Media

Community based violence can be defined as deliberate acts used to cause harm to a person or persons in a community. Exposure to community-based violence on social media among Black male emerging adults involved with the criminal justice system is the topic of a 2020 journal article by Robert Motley Jr., Yu-Chih Chen, Carnayla Johnson, and Sean Joe. This study essentially examines how seeing videos of community-based violence on social media led to sad, angry, or fearful emotions in 101 Black men detained in a midwestern jail. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics show 2.336 per 100,000 Black men are sentenced to jail, and most of these men are ages 18-29 years old. Between 62% and 98% of Black incarcerated individuals in the 18-29 age range report exposure to at least one community based violent (CBV) event prior to incarceration.

The authors acknowledge social media has created online communities that put black men at a higher risk of CBV exposure. Before conducting their study, they found other studies using community samples of emerging adults (ages 18-29). Eighty one percent of these adults frequented social media websites daily, which they defined as using social media 10.5 hours a day on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They also found those involved in street crime spend an average of 10.5 hours on social media weekly versus their non-crime involved peers that spend an average of 3.8 hours. The data also suggests social media is used by those involved in crime to post threats, videos, and pictures of violent acts perpetrated by either themselves or one

of their peers to gain respect. They also found urban gang-involved youth use social media to express their grief regarding the killing of their peers by police and plans for retaliation.

The researchers believe viewing CBV in real life may have a more direct negative influence on a Black male because he is somewhat connected to the people or places in the environments where the CBV event took place. And witnessing a CBV event between people that you know or are like people you know in places that you are familiar with can leave one feeling frightened or emotional. They also believe exposure to digital CBV causes the Black male to personalize the event, and in turn, that causes him to see himself as being similar to the victim. Their study surveyed 101 emerging adults detained in a medium-size midwestern city jail using elements of Richters and Martinez *Things I Have Seen and Heard Before* instruments as well as socio-demographic questions. They found the majority of the men in the study were low-income and had moderately high rates of seeing CBV videos. They also found when police violence was involved in the video, it increased the odds of the men feeling sad, angry, or fearful.

Individuals perpetrating the CBV in videos on social media were more impactful for the men with a history of involvement with the criminal justice system. Finally, they found the men in the study perceived the police violence in the video as being excessive or unfair outside of their control and absent of any dire consequences. This study is similar to the Neira and Sullivan (2011) study, which indirectly shows a trauma response among individuals that are exposed to CBV. Like the Intravia and Pickett (2019) article findings reviewed above, these authors argue that the oversaturation of criminality in the media exposes more individuals to videos which might include CBV.

Rogers, Smoak, and Liu (2006) have a study examining the differences between individuals self-reporting computer deviant behaviors (i.e., virus writing, hacking and file changing) and those reporting no computer-related deviant behaviors. The researchers hypothesized that computer deviants would be more introverted, exploitive, manipulative, neurotic, less open to experience, and rank lower on a moral decision making scale than individuals not reporting deviant computer-related behavior. The authors surveyed 381 undergraduate students related to their computer-related deviant activities, personality characteristics, and general behaviors. The researchers found, “Many virus writers use defense mechanisms as a way to rationalize that what they did in creating and releasing a virus was really not all that harmful. Envy motives can also come to the surface if the virus writer attempts to sabotage others who have better ideas, do superior work, or possess faster, more advanced computer equipment.” The findings conclude that virus writers use deviant cyber activity in an attempt to cope with the lack of success at maintaining close relationships or the desire to control others. It seems clear that cyber deviance can affect both people and society. Mainly by depleting financial resources, invalidating someone’s identity, corrupting personal data, and sharing harmful imagery and information. These situations may increase anxiety, stress, depression, and even compromise national security. This information is useful because it goes to show that some people participate in cyber deviance out of anger and can become destructive to not only themselves but to others as well. One of the downfalls of this study is the participants did not necessarily talk about who they hurt or what type of people they would hurt. Some participants would mention revenge, but they would not go further into detail about it. I mention this article here because it discusses how people utilize technology to commit CBV on a virtual scale.

Aggressive Confrontation Shapes Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Racist Content

Online is a study based on confrontation to discrimination in the form of comments on social media (Meyers et. al). The author particularly focuses on how aggressive comments can shape perceptions of racism or racist content online. The goal is to report how aggressive and passive confrontation types and ingroup and outgroup membership influence Asian Americans perceptions of online prejudice and their attitudes towards the confronters (Meyers et. al). The researchers chose 60 participants from the University of Hawai'i. Using Asian and White faces from a Chicago database and making sure they matched in attractiveness and prototypicality, the faces were then used for 16 mock Facebook posts, which included a racist statement. Research participants rated how offensive the posts were. They also had to evaluate how strongly they identified with their ethnic group and how frequently they experienced discrimination (both using a likert scale). The authors found Asian American participants were taking their fellow ingroup members as reference to decide what was deemed offensive versus what was not. When the researchers added the ability for participants to report and respond to the post, in addition to rating its perceived offensiveness, they found Asian American participants viewed posts confronted by outgroup members as more offensive, compared to posts confronted by ingroup members. Finally, the researchers measured the potential social cost of confronting by measuring participants' attitudes toward the confronter with an attitude scale and a warmth thermometer. They found participants who identified strongly with their ethnic group viewed posts as more offensive regardless of input related to confrontation. Participants favored ingroup confronters more than outgroup confronters. Participants also demonstrated backlash to the passive outgroup responder but did not respond negatively to the passive ingroup responder.

Space and Place: Within Digital Media

Murphy (2019) uses predominantly secondary research to discuss how social media is an opportunity for people to come together and discuss similar issues. Murphy (2019) argues that social media is divided by the “working class,” which are often portrayed as white, patriarchal males, “Blacks,” which only appear in relation to oppression, and “Immigrants,” which are portrayed as asylum seekers or criminals. She talks about how she rarely sees stories by, about, or for people like her, Black, immigrant and woman, the real working class. Murphy (2019) wants a media outlet for the actual working-class in America to incorporate more stories from people who often don’t have their stories told. For this new working-class media, she discusses two components: anger (she wants the working class to be angry when the media does not uplift the working class narrative), and a view of society and ourselves from the underside of power. Murphy (2019) used a number of textual and visual resources for her analysis. The works vary tremendously as she uses data from books, articles, social media posts, and comedy sketches.

Matsick et al. (2020) found approximately half of the adults in the U.S. engage in political behavior on social media, and there is an established positive relationship between social media use and political participation. People engage in profile filter use on the premise it brings increased attention to an issue. Profile filters can be described as the use of captions or artistic edits that can be applied to profile images. In the researchers' initial investigation, they find social media websites such as Facebook may be responsible for shaping attitudes about the LGBTQ community by facilitating allyship across communities with filters. They also found women are more likely to be involved in filter campaigns (especially same-sex marriage) than men, and women are more likely to raise awareness for social and political causes on social media than men. Their study investigates the effects of Pro-LGBTQ pictivism (specifically in

regards to the rainbow filter) on the dominant group (heterosexual people) and the marginalized group (LGBTQ people). They examined whether filter use and the profile user's visible sexual orientation influenced: (1) perceptions of the target's activism, (2) attitudes toward LGBTQ people and feelings of belonging among LGBTQ people, (3) donation behavior among heterosexual people. They excluded participants who did not correctly identify the target's sexual orientation, failed attention or manipulation checks, or did not identify as heterosexual. The sample was predominately white (75+%). Nearly 200 undergraduate students who ranged between 17-29 years old and employees at Amazon's Mechanical Turk were given an incentive of \$1.80 for their 12 minutes of participation. The researchers created 6 profiles, 2 were what they called filler stimuli and the other 4 were different versions of the experimental profile. This profile displayed a picture of either a white different-gender or same gender couple with or without a rainbow filter. The participants completed an online survey advertised as investigating short-term memory of online information. They were shown both the filler profiles and 1 of the 4 experimental profiles. Participants then evaluated the profile by responding to measures of reactance, willingness to interact with the target, and perceived activism. They found participants exposed to the filter perceived the users as being greater activists. However, their attitudes toward the LGBTQ community did not change. Queer women, regardless of filters, were seen as greater activists; however, they caused the participants to have fewer positive thoughts in regards to the LGBTQ community. In addition, the filter contributed to greater feelings of freedom threat and higher prejudicial outcomes, and exposure to a queer target contributed to greater internalized affirmativeness and closeness to LGBTQ people than the heterosexual target. Finally, the filter created a greater perceived activism, especially when it was used by a queer woman, which lead the participants to have greater feelings of online and societal belonging.

This article somewhat reminds me of the O'Neil and Ackland (2020) article, which I discuss below, because they both measure participation in a social movement. This article measures people's feelings or reactions towards pictivism participation in a social movement, and the O'Neil and Ackland article measures how quick social movement organizations are to endorse a problem.

O'Neil and Ackland (2020) focus on understanding the competition that Social Movement Organizations (SMO) have for members' resources and attention over an environmental risk issue. The authors analyze how actors in the online environmental movement responded to the emergence of nanoscience and technology (NST) as a risk issue from 2002 to 2012. They note SMO's have three courses of action when dealing with an issue. The first is called the innovative course of action, which means when the risk is first introduced the SMO's find a way to combat the new risk and create a social movement. The second is called co-opt, this course is the one more conservative SMOs use as they do not necessarily want to take on a new movement concerning the problem but will use old methods to combat it. The last course of action is simply doing nothing. The authors used hyperlink network data and an online activist field to show what type of action course SMOs used the majority of the time. This article is relevant to my research because SMOs have played a part in the Summer 2020 protests and riots. Indeed, SMOs help to spread awareness of issues (i.e., Black Lives Matter spreading awareness to end police brutality). Though SMOs are applauded for taking up such noble causes, they also need to take into account the harm or damage they can do when they use harmful imagery.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

Data Collection and Methods

To learn more about potential links between race, age, experiences with racial violence on the internet, and mental health, I studied the online presence and activities of emerging Black adults ages 18-29 using secondary data analysis. Data from the 2010-2018 General Social Survey, which is a national survey that has sampled adults in the United States since 1972, was used. Psychological well-being, stress and traumatic events, and intergroup tolerance are just some of the topics covered by the GSS. The variables I focused on from the GSS were whether respondents use the internet or not, how many minutes and hours per week respondents spend on the internet (including time spent visiting regular web sites and services like chat rooms), how many days (in the last 30 days) the respondents' mental health not good, how many days within the last 30 days the respondents missed work, respondents' happiness, how the respondents rate their mental health, and the respondent's race, residential region and political party. See Appendix A for a fuller description of the questions and their (re)coding.

Given my interests, I select respondents based on age. Specifically, I included persons who are 18-29 years of age. This age is consistent with emerging adulthood in prior research.

The questions about if the respondents use the internet and how much time they frequent the internet are important to this study because they tell you how often they use the internet, how interactive they are with certain websites and possibly other users, which provides information about their digital footprint. I conducted cross-item reliability measures (i.e., Cronbach alpha score) to see if I could combine these variables into a single composite variable.

The respondents' mental health, which I examine on a health scale using multiple mental health questions, will be used as a dependent variable. Age and race are used as selection criteria,

political party, sex, and region will be used as control variables and various variables incorporated in an internet scale will make up the independent variable. I chose the controls based on prior research showing that sex, region, and political affiliation are related to both digital media consumption and mental health. I hope this will provide evidence of similarities or differences between males and females, democrats and republicans, and south or non-south areas when it comes to the association between mental health and internet use time. Region in particular is interesting to examine because Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Caron Nazario, Sandra Bland and many more people were in the Southern part of the US when they suffered their fates by either the police or someone with a police-esque role.

The goal for this project was to find out whether or not there is a relationship between internet usage and poor mental health among the emerging adult GSS respondents. With a focus on black respondent's mental health and internet usage. I would like to mention that prior evidence, in both the Chen et. al (2020) and Tynes (2015) articles, provides evidence that young black people are seeing instances of violence on the internet. However, the GSS does not ask whether respondents have seen violence on the internet or have experienced any form of violence (i.e., cyberbullying, racial-ethnic discrimination or violent imagery) while on the internet, so I am using GSS data to see the results of relationships between mental health and general use of the internet or digital apps among of emerging adults across races.

CHAPTER IV:RESULTS

Several re-codes were needed in order to appropriately assess and examine the data (see Appendix A for a list of re-codes). After reviewing the cross-item reliability scores using a Cronbach alpha score, I created a Mental Health Index and an Internet Use Index by combining relevant variables together into respective scales (i.e., MNTLHLTH, MISSWORK, HLTHMNTL, and HAPPY were combined into one dependent variable [HealthScale] and INTUSE, POLINTER, INTRECNT, INTWKDYH, INTWKENH, INTCNTCT, NEWSFROM were combined to create one independent variable [InternetAll]). With these re-codes completed, I conducted a correlation analysis of all variables (see Appendix B). No problematic correlations were noted, but I discovered that the data from two of the internet variables were not producing any results when applied to the correlation matrix. These variables were POLHITOK and SCINEWS2, so they were removed from the internet use scale.

With those variables removed, I conducted a multivariate OLS regression analysis with the remaining variables, including variables capturing the respondent's internet use, mental health, race, sex, region, and political affiliation. The Regression equation is $\hat{y} = \alpha + \beta_{x1} + \beta_{x2...} + \epsilon$. In this equation, \hat{y} is the expected value for the dependent variable (HealthScale), α is the constant and tells you the value of \hat{y} (Health Scale) when all independent variables (Internet Use, race, sex, region, political affiliation) are at a value of zero, $\beta_{x1} + \beta_{x2...}$ represents all of the actual scores of each independent variable (i.e., internet value race, sex, region, political affiliation) so it gives information about the increase or decrease of \hat{y} (HealthScale) when the actual variables' scores are included in the regression, and ϵ is the error term.

The regression analysis shows that the full model is statistically significant on the whole (F=3.137, p=.05) and the adjusted R square for the full model is .007 meaning that about .7

percent of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by knowing the independent variables. I organized HealthScale so that lower numbers represented better mental health and higher numbers represented poor mental health. I also recoded the sex variable (Male) so that 0=female and 1= male. The parameter estimates indicate the following information: Every unit decrease in the health (HealthScale), I expect a -1.032 unit decrease in the sex variable (Male). In other words, all else being equal men are less likely to report good mental health than women. This relationship is statistically significant at a 0.05 level controlling for other variables in the model.

The race variable was re-coded so that Black=1 and non-Black= 0. The regression results show that for every unit increase in health (HealthScale), I can expect a -0.159 unit decrease in race (Black). However, the results are not statistically significant at a 0.05 level, controlling for other variables in the model. Even though it isn't statistically significant, in this sample, the data shows that all else being equal, those who identify as Black are less likely to report good mental health than those who do not identify as Black.

Internet use (InternetAll) was coded so that higher numbers represent greater amounts of internet use, whereas lower numbers indicate less internet use. The results are that for every unit increase in the respondent's health score (HealthScale), I expect a 0.14 unit increase in the respondent's internet use (InternetAll). Again, however, the relationship is not statistically significant at a 0.05 level, controlling for other variables in the model. In this sample, the positive relationship between internet use and health, however, shows that all else being equal, people who use the internet less are more likely to report good mental health than those who do not.

Political affiliation (DEMOCRAT) is re-coded so that higher numbers represent those who identify or closely identify as Democrat and lower numbers represent those who identify or closely identify as those who are not a Democrat. The regression shows that for every unit decrease in the health scale (HealthScale), I expect a -0.29 unit decrease in political affiliation (Democrat). The results in these variables are not statistically significant at a 0.05 level, controlling for other variables in the model. In the sample, it still shows that all else being equal, democrats are less likely to report good mental health than republicans, but again, the relationship isn't statistically significant.

Region has been re-coded to associate southerners with the number 1 (South=1) and other regions with 0 (non south =0). The results show that for every unit decrease in health, I expect a -.564 unit decrease in region. Again, the two are not statistically significant at a 0.05 level, controlling for other variables in the model. In this sample, however, all else being equal, southerners are less likely to report good mental health than non-southerners.

In sum, with these re-codes I was able to identify more precisely how internet use was associated with reported mental health. Among this sample, I was able to find that those who identify as Black, male, southern, democrat and use the internet more are more likely to report better mental health than those who identify as non-Black, female, non-southern, republican and use the internet less. However, none of the relationships, except sex, was statistically significant, so these results of any other variables should not be generalized to the population.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Digital media is a relatively new phenomenon in the realm of technology. It is seen as a gateway for instant news, socializing via chat or “groups” with people you have not interacted with for a while or people that share similar ideas or thoughts, and a great resource for information. It is important to understand how this impacts people of color because they are the ones that are most susceptible to internalizing the negative imagery shown on digital media. By using GSS data to measure mental health and internet time, I have created an analysis to examine how mental health and internet use are related, net of race, gender, political identification, region, and sex among persons ages of 18-29.

Though my research was originally interested in focusing predominantly on Black people of color, I was unable to focus only on Black respondents because of GSS data limitations, so I included all races and compared Black respondents with those of other races. The regression results revealed that internet usage and health did not have a statistically significant relationship. I believe some drawbacks to this research include limited data due to only utilizing the GSS data from 2010 to 2018 and the lack of variables that cater to my unique questions. None of the variables in the GSS asked about perceptions of people of color, especially black people of color within the years of 2010-2018 and did not ask about violence on the internet. In fact, many of the questions in regards to the internet revolved around basic use (how long do you use the internet, do you use it for communication, and do you use it to express your political views). Although these are important questions, more questions about cyberbullying, hate speech, violent videos and use of the internet with coworkers or classmates could possibly help refine the research a bit more and possibly implore more people to answer questions about how these interactions on the internet impacts their mental health.

Another drawback in the study would be the lack of subtle questions about mental health as well as the stigma society has put on mental health. Most recent research shows that those in the Black community conceal their mental health and take refuge in religion and other practices to help alleviate stress or signs of declining mental health (John, 2018). This needs to conceal could very well have influenced the respondents' responses. More subtle questions hinting at poor mental health (i.e., How many days have you felt stress? How often do you worry?) could be better indicators of poor mental health and help gauge more responses within the GSS respondents. It is with great hope that within these next few years the GSS or any other social survey program asks more questions about violence on digital media since internet use continues to grow each year. I also hope that more questions about respondents' mental health are asked since it declines each year.

Within the past few years, the world has suffered from a pandemic that has caused many people to resort to mostly electronic interactions. There were also multiple peaceful protests being conducted around the country in the summer of 2020, some organized by the Black Lives Matter Movement, to raise awareness of the deaths and injustices of African Americans by the hands of police officers. Because of the reliance of technology to interact with others, there is an increased risk for Black people to become subject to cyberbullying, racial-ethnic discrimination, and other harmful imagery. Some of this imagery and discrimination could be people disparaging victims of violence to shed light on their past mistakes (i.e., news of George Floyd being an addict), victim blaming, labeling Blacks as criminal and aggressive or cyber bullying.

All of these scenarios and many more can occur due to the increase of these social interactions, advertisements and overall convenience of the internet. I hope in completing this research I can shed light on topics people may not be as familiar with such as cyber bullying or

virtual community-based violence. I also hope my research creates a dialogue about digital media's effect on mental health. bell hooks' notion of oppositional gaze could also be an excellent coping strategy for those who engage in too much digital media consumption. The premise of oppositional gaze is essentially taking a break from digital media and spare one's gaze from imagery that might be deemed harmful or derogatory. Though this is a great concept and should be discussed more I also do believe that it is short term as trending video's and suggested video's may still make its way into someone's news feed. The oppositional gaze only reduces views for certain images. In order to stop the circulation of certain videos, there needs to be action and policy accompanied with the oppositional gaze in order to make real change in the digital realm.

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APPENDIX A: VARIABLE INFORMATION

Variables	Re-coded Variables when applicable	Question	Possible Answers, Recoded	Frequency/Percent	Mean	Median	Mode	STD. DEV.
AGE		RESPONDENT'S AGE	18-29 years old	1916	24.55	25	25	3.065
Race	Black	. What race do you consider yourself?	Black (1), White (0), Other (0)	1916 (391 Black)	2014.18	2014	2016	2.795
Internet Time and Content Variables								
USEWW	USEWWW	Other than for e-mail, do you use the Internet or World Wide Web?	Yes (0), No (1)	187	.85	1.00	1	.358
WWHR		Not counting e-mail, how many minutes or hours per week Do you use the Web? (Including time spent visiting websites and interactive Internet services (chat rooms, Usenet groups,	1-140 Hours	1203/62.8	16.35	10	10	19.25

		discussion forums, bulletin boards, and the like.)						
INTRECN T	INTRECN T2	Used internet/apps yesterday	Yes, used internet yesterday (0), No, did not use internet yesterday (1)	302/15.8	.96	1.00	1	.196
INTUSE	INTUSE2	Use internet/apps more than occasionally	Yes, used internet/apps more than occasionally (0), No did not use internet/apps more than occasionally (1)	343/17.9	.88	1.00	1	.325
POLINTE R	POLINTE R2	Expressed political views on internet past year	Have not done it and would never do it (1), Have done it and would never do it (2), Have done it in the more distant past (3), Have done it in the past year (4).	183/9.6	2.16	2.00	1	1.151

INTWKD YH		Hours of internet use on weekdays	Hours of internet use on weekdays (0-16)	290/15.1	4.13	3.00	2	4.331
INTWKE NH		Hours of internet use on the weekends	Hours of internet use on the weekends (0-24)	186/15.0	5.50	5.00	5	3.908
INTCNT CT	INTCNTC T2	How much of R's communication is via text, mobile phone, or internet	None or almost none of it (0), Some of it (1), About half of it (2), Most of it (3) and All or almost all of it (4),	193/10.1	3.92	4.00	5	1.048
NEWSFR OM	NEWSFR OM2	Main source of information about events in the news	Other (0), Internet (1)	767/40.0	.66	1.00	1	.472
Mental Health Variables	Re-coded Variables when applicable	Question	Possible Answers	Frequency/Perce nt	Mean	Media n	Mode	Std. Dev.
MNTLHL TH		Now thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your	0-30 Days	1088/56.8	4.45	1.00	0	7.523

		mental health not good?						
MISSWORK		During the past 30 days, how many days did you miss work due to your mental or physical health?	0-30 Days	468/24.4	0.43	.00	0	1.316
HLTHMNTL		In general, how would you rate your mental health, mood and ability to think?	Excellent (1), Very Good (2), Good (3), Fair (4), Poor (5)	375/19.6	2.40	2	3	1.037
HAPPY		Taken all together, how would you say things are these days--would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?	Very Happy (1), Pretty Happy (2), Not Too Happy (3)	1913/99.8	1.87	2	2	0.625
Control Variables	Re-coded Variables when applicable	Question	Possible Answers	Frequency/Percent	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.
SEX		Respondent's Sex	Female (0), Male (1),	1916	1.54	2	2	0.499
REGION	Region2	A. REGION OF INTERVIEW	New England, Middle Atlantic, E. Nor. Central, W.	1916	.36	0	0	.481

			Nor. Central, Mountain, Pacific (0), South Atlantic, E. Sou. Central, W. Sou. Central,(1)					
PARTYI D	Democrat Democrat Higher Numbers	Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?	Strong republican (1), Not Str Republican (2), IND Near Republican (3), Independent (4), IND Near Democrat (5), Not Str Democrat (6),	1637/85.4	4.07	4	4	1.472

APPENDIX B: CORRELATION MATRIX

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
1) InternetAll	1	.051*	-.007	.038	-.019	.048
2) HealthScale	.051*	1	-.022	-.068**	-.041	-.001
3) Age of respondent	-.007	.022	1	-.032	-.019	.017
4) Recode of Sex (1=Male)	.038	-.068**	-.032	1	-.057	-.027
5) Recode of REGION	-.019	-.041	-.019	-.057*	1	-.075**
6) DEMOCRAT higher numbers	0.48	-.001	.017	-.027	.075**	1

*=p<.05, **=p<.01

APPENDIX C: REGRESSION MODEL

	Unstandardized Coefficients (Standard Error)
Y (constant)	5.566(.547)
X1 InternetAll	.014(.009)
X2 Black re-code of Race (1=Black)	-.519(.438)
X3 Male re-code of Sex (1=Male)	-1.032(.331)*
X4 DEMOCRAT Democrat Higher Numbers	-.029(.114)
X5 Region2 re-code of REGION	-.564(.352)
R ²	.007

*==p<.0