

**COPING WITH RACIAL DISCRIMINATION: A NEW WAY FOR
SOCIAL MEDIA TO BE OF INFLUENCE**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Coping with Racial Discrimination: A New Way for Social Media to be of Influence

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Literature Review

This study aims to answer the question, ‘does social media usage influence the impact of racial discrimination on mental health?’ Specifically, this study examines the impact that social media usage has on the relationship between self-reported racial discrimination and psychological distress. If social media usage does in fact influence this relationship, then this study would provide African Americans another way to deal with racial abuse. Experiences of discrimination were assessed using the Williams Everyday Scale (Williams et al. 1997), a 10-question scale of self-reported discrimination encounters. Psychological distress is assessed using the Kessler 6 Scale (Kessler et al. 2002; 2003), a six-question scale of psychological wellbeing. For the purposes of this study, social media usage is defined by those who have a Facebook account, a Twitter account, and their frequency of usage. Data analysis was based on a sample of 220 African American adult respondents residing in Texas (TDS, Keith and Campbell 2015). Results indicate that African Americans reporting higher levels of racial discrimination are more likely to meet the criteria for psychological distress than those who report lower levels

of discrimination. However, social media usage buffers this relationship and results in lower levels of psychological distress among those reporting high levels of racial discrimination. Together, these findings suggest that social media can be a form of coping to mitigate the effects of racial discrimination on mental health.

Thesis Statement

Social media usage will mitigate the negative effects of racial discrimination on mental health.

Theoretical Framework

Three key approaches to coping with racial discrimination include racial and ethnicity identity development, seeking social support, and utilizing confrontation and anger expression (Brondolo 2009). Social media may serve as a site of expression for racial identity, a place where African Americans and other communities come together to air grievances, seek support, and denounce those who oppress them (Miller et al. 2020). Together this suggests that social media can be a positive way to cope with racial discrimination.

Project Description

In this study, I answer the question, does social media usage influence the effects of racial discrimination on mental health? Specifically, this study examines African Americans. The main objective of this study is to identify another way to positively cope with racial discrimination. Based on the criteria of other ways to cope, social media usage can serve as another way to help those who are racially discriminated against. Previous literature proposes

other similar positive coping mechanisms, but there is little about social media usage. This study adds to this field by finding effective coping mechanisms and can help others in the process.

DEDICATION

This undergraduate thesis is dedicated to my mother, Dr. Avril Monique El-Amin. I thank her for all of the love and support she has given me throughout the duration of this thesis. She is the reason that I started this year-long project and she is the reason that I have finished. My mother has helped when I struggled with interpreting data, gave me advice before public presentations, and provided comfort when I needed it. Without her, the probability of completing this thesis would be uncertain. Thank you for everything that you have done for me and will continue to do in the future. I love you.

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KEY WORDS

Racial Discrimination
African Americans
Coping
Social Media
Social Support
Psychological Distress

INTRODUCTION

Racial discrimination has been a part of American society for centuries. Despite present laws and amendments made to ease its effects, racial discrimination still remains. This institution crosses lines of morality, promotes hateful thinking, and further divides the country. Without a full-proof way of dealing with this abuse, racial discrimination will continue to be a prevalent part of American society.

Racial discrimination adversely effects targets in a number of ways. One effect is poorer health. Racial discrimination and overall discrimination, regardless of attribution, are associated with negative health outcomes (Mouzon 2017). This abuse is not limited to physical health. Racial discrimination affects minority groups across the world and has a negative impact on both physical and mental health (Berger 2015). The mental health of those who report racial abuse is diminished and impaired, thus adversely affecting their lives. A number of meta-analyses have identified strong associations between racial discrimination and poor mental health outcomes in adults (Berger 2015). Understanding how stress impacts health, and what factors mitigate these effects, is thus critically important (Toussaint 2016). This shows that there is a definite adverse relationship between racial discrimination and mental health outcomes.

Racial discrimination is too pervasive to be expected to disappear one day, therefore more measures must be taken. Without a clear way to stop this discrimination, coping with the abuse is a way to combat these negative effects on mental health. Learning to cope with the adverse effects of racial discrimination can alleviate some of the inflicted pain. By the time a discriminatory event has run its course, the amount of harm is fixed and one can only attempt to repair the damage (Mallett 2009). Taking on the full force of this abuse will damage a target's

mental health to the point where other medical issues can arise. Carter-Sowell, Chen, & Williams (2008) found that people who were socially excluded during a brief group encounter with strangers were more susceptible to the influence of unknown others shortly afterward. Coping can help lessen the blow of racial discrimination and help save the well-being of those effected.

This study aims to test if social media usage could be an effective form of coping for those who experience racial discrimination. Social media can provide a safe space for these targets to feel connected with others. The ease of access to an online support community can counter the ongoing effects of this abuse. Social support is a critical coping resource (Hudson 2016). Though racial discrimination lies within social media itself, the ability for individuals to personalize their profiles to cater to their needs can counter this abuse.

Coping with racial discrimination in a positive way is essential. Negative coping mechanisms only worsen the health of those who are affected. For example, some studies have linked discrimination with unhealthy behaviors, such as substance use (Gibbons 2014). While negative coping strategies may provide an immediate remedy from psychological distress, they do not help mitigate the underlying problems that racial discrimination causes. This calls for a form of coping that positively impacts the well-being of those who experience racial discrimination. The existing literature suggests that social media could be used as another way to cope with racial discrimination (Miller et al. 2020). This position directly addresses the problem and may add to the already existing forms of positive coping mechanisms that mitigate the relationship between racial discrimination and mental health.

This study aims to take social media, something that a large majority of the population already uses, and see if it can help cope against racial discrimination. Results suggest that social

media usage does lessen the effects of racial discrimination on mental health when the level of self-reported racial discrimination is high.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

Racial Discrimination and its Affects

There are multiple ways which racial discrimination can affect health (Williams 2009). The variety of ways targets of discrimination can be affected makes racial discrimination a complex issue. Racial discrimination is associated with increased risk for heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease, hypertension, liver cirrhosis and homicide, thus providing some explanation for why African Americans have higher death rates compared to Whites (Williams 2009).

Discrimination effects African Americans on a physical and mental level. (Gibbons 2014). Some of these mental consequences include anxiety and depression, which further adds to the load that African Americans must deal with after racial discrimination. Physical consequences are outward behaviors that those who are impacted by the discrimination display. Some of these effects include behavioral issues like anger and hostility, and indulging in harmful practices like substance abuse (Gibbons 2014; Bogart 2013). Substance abuse specifically leads to increased prevalence of internal effects. The motive behind this use is a harmful and ineffective form of coping that comes directly from the racial discrimination.

Another impact racial discrimination has on African Americans is the persistence of its effects. This is especially important when thinking about when discrimination is occurring. Though children and adolescents are not the direct population of focus for this research, their experience with discrimination is still significant. Discrimination experienced at young ages may have implications for mental health disparities across the life course (Bogart 2013). Taking this

into consideration adds to the notion that racial discrimination is pervasive and its impact can stretch over a long period of time. Racial discrimination causes several effects that harm African Americans in ways that offsets their health.

The uniqueness of racial discrimination explains why it is pervasive over the life course. Unlike other forms of discrimination, racial discrimination has a unique adverse effect on physical health for African Americans (Mouzon 2017). When compared to other forms of discrimination, racial discrimination hurts specifically African Americans more than non-racial discrimination and overall discrimination (Mouzon 2017). African Americans being more at risk from this prevalent issue stresses the need for some way to counter racial discrimination. This suggests that racial discrimination may be the cause of the disparities in health rather than other factors such as gender discrimination or social economic status.

When discussing self-reported discrimination, it is important to understand how the data itself is collected. Data collected from reports of racial discrimination are self-reported. This system leads to a gap in the field. A limitation of measuring discrimination at the individual level in this way is that such measures capture only incidents that individuals are willing or able to report (Williams 2016). The major takeaway from this limitation is that respondents could be reporting less self-reported discrimination than they are reporting to researchers. This adds to the urgency of finding a way to mitigate the impact that racial discrimination has on African Americans. The listed effects could actually be far worse than the data states, thus increasing the need for solutions.

Racial Discrimination and Mental Health/Well-being

Like the physical effects, racial discrimination affects mental health as well. Undergoing racial discrimination can impair the mental health of African Americans. Stressors can affect the well-being of people in ways that damage their mental health for life. Racial discrimination is one of those stressors. Those who report greater lifetime stress have poorer mental health (Toussaint 2016). This further conveys the stress that racial discrimination causes is a serious one. Racial discrimination, a social stressor, can also cause other individual stressors to arise. Those who experience high levels of discrimination are also increasingly vulnerable to other types of individual-level stressors including social network loss, finances, and adult victimization (Perry 2013).

Social stressors like racial discrimination result in the impairment of neurobiology. Racial discrimination can show signs of activating biological responses. An example can be seen in allostasis. Allostasis describes the adaptation of the body to change demands over time. Typically, our body adequately deals with changes as we grow in age, but stressors inhibit this process. Chronically increased allostasis may lead to "allostatic load" which occurs when our bodies struggle to adapt to change due to stressors. Chronic exposure to stressors such as racial discrimination contributes to this maladaptation (Berger 2015). The stress responses that come from this discrimination weaken mental health and offsets African Americans to more problems like schizophrenia, mood and anxiety disorders, and psychological distress (Berger 2015).

Additionally, stress adversely affects mental health in five key ways. Firstly, when stressors are measured comprehensively, their damaging impacts on mental health are substantial. Secondly, exposure to stress results in racial-ethnic inequalities in mental health. Thirdly, minorities are additionally harmed by discrimination stress. Fourth, stressors worsen

over the life course and across generations. Lastly, the impacts of stressors on health and well-being are reduced when persons have high levels of mastery, self-esteem, and/or social support (Thoits 2010). The first four major findings show the magnitude of just how pervasive racial discrimination is. There are so many ways that the well-being of African Americans can be impaired due to the stress that comes with racial discrimination. The final major finding introduces a change in the policy for African Americans by introducing coping.

Coping with Racial Discrimination

Though it seems that stopping racial discrimination altogether is extremely unlikely, learning to cope with the impact of racial discrimination can preserve mental health. Coping strategies can mitigate the effects of racial discrimination. As stated, stress affects the mental health of African Americans and African Americans report more stress from discrimination than their White counterparts (Ayalon 2011). At older ages, White respondents actually report more distress about discrimination than Blacks, due to the experience being new to them. Black respondents seem to be accustomed to all of the years of abuse and have come up with ways to cope. (Ayalon 2011). Though this information gives more credibility to coping, undergoing a lifetime of discrimination before learning to cope is unhealthy. Finding ways to cope sooner rather than later will help those affected lessen the detrimental effects of racial discrimination.

Three major categories of coping with racial discrimination are racial identity development, social support seeking, and confrontation/anger expression (Brondolo 2009). Racial identity/development allows victims to feel a part of a group in a way that minimizes attacks on their self-esteem (Brondolo 2009). Being able to identify with a group is the source of this form of coping. Seeking social support allows victims a chance to not face racial

discrimination alone. This adds another layer of support to combat the abuse. Using confrontation or anger to deal with discrimination aims to give a voice to those who are constantly put down. In any given interaction, individuals with relatively lower levels of power or status are more likely to suppress anger than high power individuals (Brondolo 2009). Not suppressing this anger may counter the abuse. Different situations call for different forms of coping. Choosing an effective coping mechanism may be ideal from one or multiple of the listed categories.

Those who utilize racial identity coping can find success when trying to buffer racial discrimination's effects on mental health. Heavily identifying with one's race may give a victim a strong sense of self. Those with predominantly high internalization status attitudes and who used primarily empowered resistance racism-related coping strategies had less psychological symptoms (Forsyth 2012). This strategy, also called "self-focused coping," was the most used strategy for overall discrimination (Mallett 2009). This shows that coping strategies of this nature are sufficient. Seeking social support can bring similar results. Allowing others in similar situations that can relate to victims can further ease the effects of racial discrimination. Those who've used this form of coping were found to have lower anxiety and general distress (Smith 2008). Social support seeking is also favored when discrimination occurs on a daily basis (Mallett 2009). Both of these categories of coping bring results of buffering racial discrimination's effects on mental health.

Along with these positive coping strategies, there are also negative ones. These strategies are unhealthy and adversely impact the health of African Americans. Though confrontation and anger strategies do hold results, they are far less than racial identity and seeking social support. In the wrong settings, choosing this route may promote violence, thus causing more stress

(Brondolo 2009). Another ill-advised coping strategy is substance abuse. In some cases, drinking and smoking along with seeking social support from the community were the coping strategies of choice (Hudson 2016). Though social support is definitely a great buffer, drinking and smoking only adds to the impairment of physical and mental health. This stresses the importance of using healthy and appropriate coping strategies when combating racial discrimination.

Social Media as Coping

Social media is defined as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking,” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary 2020). Social media allows users to not only find a sense of self with their own race, but also provides an abundance of social support. People can also use social media to vent about their discrimination, thus showing that social media fulfills the three previous categories of positive coping. The main benefit of social media as a way of coping with racial discrimination is the social support aspect. Peer to peer support on social media is helpful for those with mental illnesses (Naslund 2016). Since the literature supports that racial discrimination damages mental health and causes mental issues, this finding also applies to victims of racial discrimination. The stress caused by this discrimination can be mitigated by a support system that can be found on social media sites. Social media usage can also be defined as leisure coping. Leisure coping strategies are ways to cope passively in one’s leisure time. Leisure coping facilitates positive immediate adaptational outcomes that subsequently have a positive impact on health, irrespective of the level of stress experienced (Iwasaki 2003). Having a coping strategy that works with all levels of severity of stress is invaluable for victims of racial discrimination.

One could argue that social media sites can also open victims up to more abuse. Though African Americans can be exposed to discrimination online, their mental health does not suffer. Results indicated that social media use was not predictive of impaired mental health functioning (Berryman 2017). By meeting the multiple levels of the criteria, social media can be a positive and effective way of coping with racial discrimination in order to preserve mental health.

CHAPTER II

DATA AND METHODS

Data

I used the 2015 Texas Diversity Survey, a representative telephone survey designed to measure racial attitudes and experiences of Black, Latinx, and White Texans aged 18 and older (TDS, Keith and Campbell 2015). Texas is an ideal context to conduct research on racial attitudes and experiences with discrimination because of the racial diversity of the state. The Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University administered the survey, with an oversampling of Black and Latinx respondents in order to allow for in-depth examination of how the race/ethnicity of the individual is related to various beliefs and experiences. Of the 1,323 completed surveys¹, this analysis is based on 279 self-reported African American respondents. Data was weighted to address oversampling with weights constructed from the 2014 American Community Survey population estimates by age, race, and sex. I only include respondents who had valid data on all variables included in each model, using listwise deletion for respondents with missing data.

¹ Of 9,405 numbers contacted, the completion rate of the survey was 14%. An additional 33% requested follow-up calls but did not complete the survey by the end date, 2% terminated the call early, and 51% refused participation. The survey lab made five attempts at contact, at various times throughout the day, unless a respondent completed the survey or provided a firm refusal. Surveys conducted in this nature are dominated by cell phone responses that have low response rates; however, they include parts of the population that are typically hard to reach with landline phone surveys including those employed, people of color, and younger respondents (Link et al. 2007).

Key Variables

My outcome variable is *Psychological Distress*, a measure constructed based on a series of six variables known as the Kessler 6 (K6), developed by Kessler and colleagues (Kessler et al. 2002; 2003). These six variables ask individuals how often they have felt that everything is an effort, felt hopeless, nervous, restless, sad and/or worthless, during the past 30 days. The attributes for these six variables are none of the time (0), a little of the time (1), some of the time (2), most of the time (3) and all the time (4). These responses can be added as a scale to measure nonspecific psychological distress with scores ranging from 0 to 24. Individuals scoring 13 or greater are likely to be experiencing severe psychological distress (Kessler et al. 2003) while individuals scoring between 5 and 12 meet the criteria for moderate psychological distress (Prochaska et al. 2012). Thus, I measure distress in three ways, 1) *Moderate Distress*, a dichotomous measure that identifies respondents whose summed score is between 5 and 12; 2) *Severe Distress*, also a dichotomous measure identifying respondents with a score of 13 or over and, 3) *Psychological Distress* as a count variable, the original Kessler 6 scale (K6) with scores ranging from 0-24.

Average Self-Reported Racial Discrimination measures the self-reported frequency of racial discrimination ranging from never experiencing racial discrimination to experiencing racial discrimination almost every day. The scaling was developed from The Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams et al. 1997) and includes ten questions gauging everyday experiences of discrimination. The scaling asks, “In your day-to-day life have any of the following things happened to you because of your race or ethnicity? Would you say almost every day, at least once a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, or less than a year? 1) You are treated with less courtesy than other people; 2) You are treated with less respect than other

people; 3) You received poorer service than other people at restaurants and stores; 4) People act as if they think you are not smart; 5) People act as if they are afraid of you; 6) People act as if they think you are dishonest; 7) People act as if they're better than you are; 8) You are called names and insulted; 9) You are threatened or harassed; 10) You are followed around in stores". We average the responses of these 10 questions to have a single self-reported discrimination value.

Social Media Frequency measures the self-reported frequency of use, consumption, or viewing of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Respondents self-reported their usage ranging from never to very often on a five-point scale. We also identify the most used social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter to include in our analysis. *Facebook Account* is a dichotomous variable that identifies respondents who report having a Facebook account. Similarly, *Twitter Account* identifies respondents who report having a Twitter account.

In each model, I control for gender, coded as *Female* (0/1), *Age* coded categorically in 18-29; 30-49; 50-64 with 65+ as a reference category, and *Education* coded as High School or GED; Post-High School, no 4-Year Degree; 4-Year Degree; Post 4-Year Degree with Less than High School as a reference category.

Analytical Techniques

Moderate and severe psychological distress were analyzed using binary logistic regression. I used negative binomial regression to analyze psychological distress as a count variable. I conducted the analysis using Stata 15 (StataCorp 2015) accounting for the complex sample design of the Texas Diversity Survey by applying *svy* commands to all models in Stata.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the weighted and unweighted distributions of key variables. Of the 1322 respondents, my sample is only Black respondents that represent 279 or 21.1% of the TDS. On average, 39% of African Americans meet the criteria for moderate distress, and 6% meet the criteria for severe distress. The total distress score on average was 4.43. When asked how often they use social media usage, 21% said “never”, 14% said “not very often”, 9% said “not often”, 31% said “often”, and 25% said “very often”. The average reported racial discrimination on average was 1.76 on scale of 0 to 5. 57% of the sample were women. 18% of the sample were from the ages 18-29, 39% were 30-49, 28% were 50-64, and 15% were 65 years old or older. 3% of the sample had less than high school education, 14% had high school education, 37% had post high school but no four-year degree education, 27% had a four-year degree, and 19% had post a four-year degree education.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Black Americans in the Texas Diversity Survey (n=279).

Variable	Mean/%	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Distress				
Moderate	0.39			
Severe	0.06			
Total Distress	4.43	4.02	0	20
Frequency of Social Media Usage				
Never	0.21			
Not Very Often	0.14			
Not Often	0.09			
Often	0.31			
Very Often	0.25			
Has a Facebook Account	0.80			
Has a Twitter Account	0.45			
Average Self-Reported Discrimination ^a	1.76	0.98	0	5
Controls				
Female	0.57			
Age Category				
18-29	0.18			
30-49	0.39			
50-64	0.28			
65+	0.15			
Education Category				
Less than High School	0.03			
High School Diploma or GED	0.14			
Post-High School, no 4-Year	0.37			
4-Year Degree	0.27			
Post 4-Year Degree	0.19			

Note:

^aAverage Self-Reported Discrimination: 1 = Never; 2 = Less than Once a Year; 3 = A Few Times a Month; 4 = At Least Once a Week; 5 = Almost Everyday

Psychological Distress

The relationship between average self-reported racial discrimination and psychological distress is as expected.

Moderate Distress

Table 2. Logistic Model of Likelihood of Moderate Distress expressed in Odds Ratios.				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Moderate Distress	1.78*** (0.299)	1.79*** (0.300)	1.57** (0.274)	1.57** (0.275)
Female		1.19 (0.388)	1.12 (0.375)	1.17 (0.404)
Age				
18-29			6.39** (4.644)	8.43 (6.873)
30-49			3.51 (2.453)	4.84 (3.886)
50-64			2.28 (1.622)	3.28 (2.655)
Education				
High School				0.39 (0.345)
Post High School				0.51 (0.406)
4-year Degree				0.16** (0.135)
Post 4-year Degree				0.29 (0.256)
Constant	0.19 (0.063)	0.17 (0.066)	0.07 (0.044)	0.15 (0.117)

Model 1 in Table 2 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and moderate psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=1.78$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for moderate distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-4, although the relationship is less robust ($b=1.57$, $p<0.05$).

Figure 1

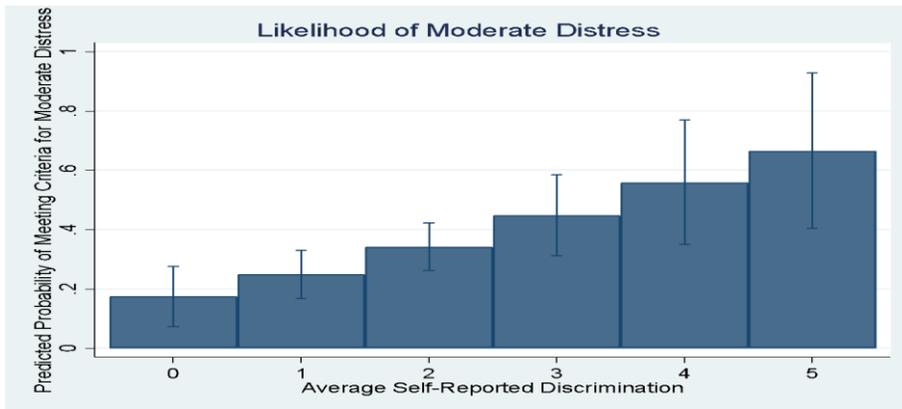


Figure 1 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for moderate distress by average self-reported racial discrimination. For every unit increase in self-reported discrimination, the odds of meeting the criteria for moderate distress increase by 10.43%. This translates to a 58.51% increase in the odds of meeting the criteria for moderate distress between those who report on average no racial discrimination and those who report discrimination occurring almost every day (scoring 76.29 instead of 17.78), net of the effects of all the control variables.

Severe Distress

Table 3. Logistic Model of Likelihood of Severe Distress expressed in Odds Ratios.				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Severe Distress	2.05*** (0.484)	2.37 (0.661)	2.71*** (0.876)	2.38*** (0.762)
Female		5.65 (4.895)	6.01 (5.524)	5.87** (4.940)
Age				
18-29			0.31 (0.278)	0.43 (0.476)
30-49			0.24 (0.221)	0.63 (0.708)
50-64			0.25 (0.257)	0.38 (0.418)
Education				
High School				0.21 (0.228)
Post High School				0.15 (0.159)
4-year Degree				0.04** (0.049)
Post 4-year Degree				0.03** (0.047)
Constant	0.01 (0.008)	0.00 (0.003)	0.01 (0.008)	0.04 (0.053)

Model 1 in Table 3 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and severe psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=2.05$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for severe distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 3-4, although Model 2 does not show significance. The gender category also shows significance here, but is less robust ($b=5.87$, $p<0.05$).

Figure 2

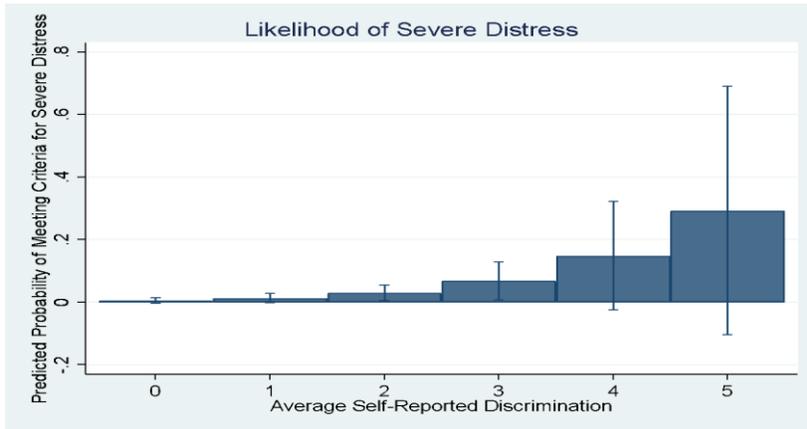


Figure 2 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for severe distress by average self-reported racial discrimination. For every unit increase in self-reported discrimination, the odds of meeting the criteria for severe distress increase by 4.04%. This translates to a 28.79% increase in the odds of meeting the criteria for severe distress between those who report on average no racial discrimination and those who report discrimination occurring almost every day (scoring 29.33 instead of 0.54), net of the effects of all the control variables.

K6 Sum of Distress

Table 4. Negative Binomial Model of K6 Sum of Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
K6 Sum Distress	0.30*** (0.062)	0.30*** (0.060)	0.27*** (0.064)	0.24*** (0.060)
Female		0.22 (0.116)	0.19 (0.119)	0.18 (0.118)
Age				
18-29			0.34 (0.207)	0.45** (0.212)
30-49			0.10 (0.203)	0.30 (0.206)
50-64			0.00 (0.217)	0.15 (0.208)
Education				
High School				-0.66** (0.267)
Post High School				-0.62** (0.237)
4-year Degree				-1.03*** (0.248)
Post 4-year Degree				-0.10*** (0.252)
Constant	0.91 (0.127)	0.77 (0.139)	0.72 (0.194)	1.40 (0.257)

Model 1 in Table 4 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and the K6 sum of psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=0.30$, $p<0.01$) with a greater K6 score. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-4. Though it is less robust, there is also significance for age in the category 18-29 ($b=0.45$, $p<0.05$) and for every level of education, though the level of robustness varies ($p<0.01$ and $p<0.05$).

Figure 3

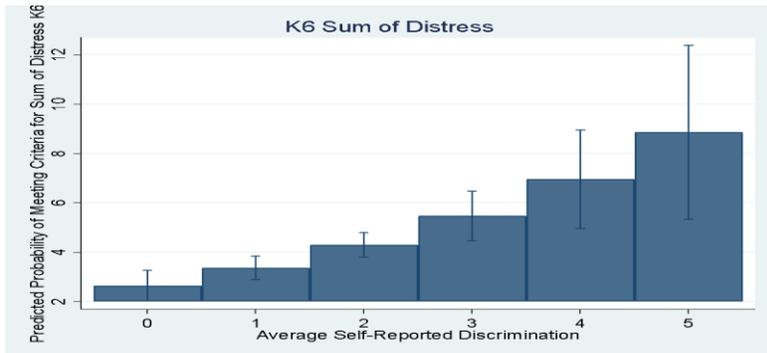


Figure 3 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for K6 sum of distress by average self-reported racial discrimination. For every unit increase in self-reported discrimination, the predicted number of meeting the criteria for K6 sum of distress increase by 1.07. This translates to a 6.22-point increase in the odds of meeting the criteria for K6 sum of distress between those who report on average no racial discrimination and those who report discrimination occurring almost every day (scoring 8.86 instead of 2.64), net of the effects of all the control variables.

Social Media, Discrimination, and Psychological Distress

Overall, the relationship between average self-reported racial discrimination and psychological distress when social media was added yielded mixed results.

Social Media Frequency

The relationship between average self-reported racial discrimination and psychological distress when social media frequency is included yielded mixed results.

Moderate Distress

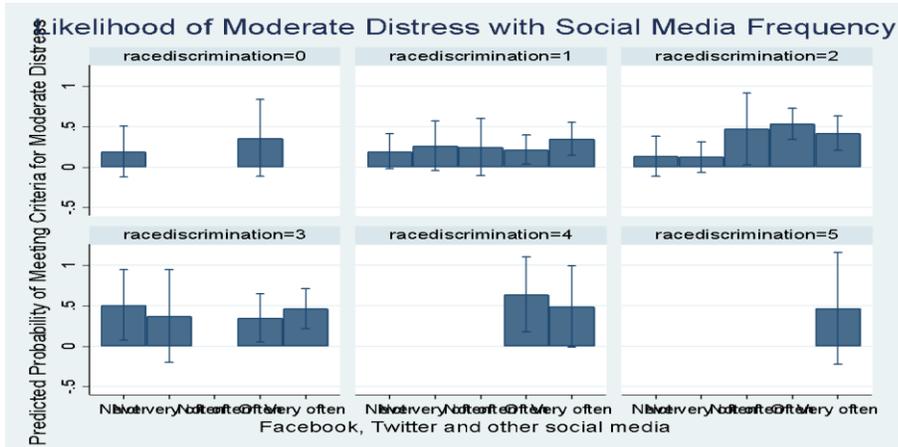
Table 5. Logistic Model of Social Media Frequency and Likelihood of Moderate Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Social Media. Moderate Distress	1.58*** (0.254)	1.43** (0.244)	1.43* (0.244)	1.35* (0.232)	1.37* (0.231)
Social Media Frequency		1.42*** (0.167)	1.42*** (0.167)	1.29** (0.159)	1.26* (0.152)
Female			1.06 (0.350)	1.04 (0.345)	1.12 (0.383)
Age					
18-29				4.86** (3.606)	6.37** (5.181)
30-49				2.61 (1.859)	3.66 (2.907)
50-64				2.01 (1.470)	2.84 (2.288)
Education					
High School					0.41 (0.349)
Post High School					0.46 (0.359)
4-year Degree					0.15** (0.125)
Post 4-year Degree					0.27 (0.227)
Constant	0.23 (0.075)	0.08 (0.040)	0.08 (0.042)	0.05 (0.035)	0.11 (0.089)

Model 1 in Table 5 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and moderate psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=1.58$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for moderate distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-5, although the relationship is less robust ($b=1.43$, $p<0.05$) ($b=1.43$, $p<0.10$). Social media frequency on Model 2 ($b=1.42$, $p<0.01$) is significant, but becomes less robust ($b=1.26$, $p<0.10$). Though they are less robust, there is significance for age in the category 18-29 on Model 5 ($b=6.37$, $p<0.05$) and on the 4-year

degree level of education ($b=0.15$, $p<0.05$). Figure 4 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for moderate distress by average self-reported racial discrimination.

Figure 4



Severe Distress

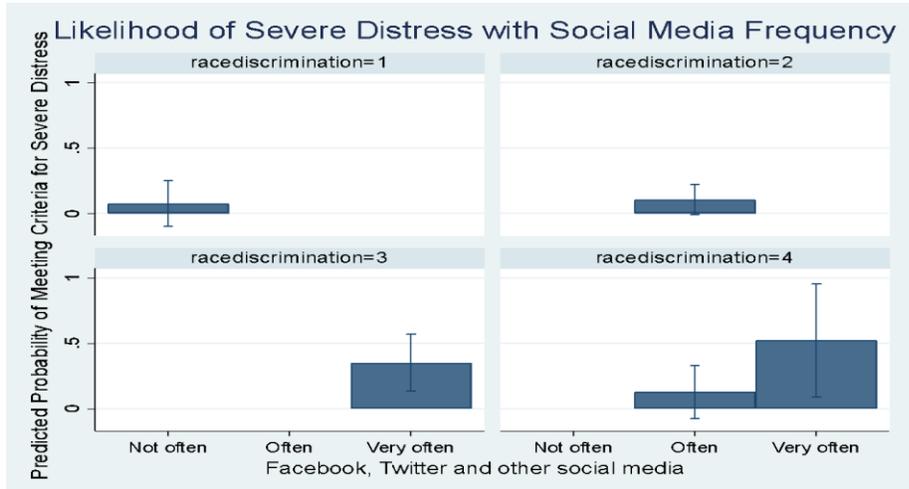
Table 6. Logistic Model of Social Media Frequency and Likelihood of Severe Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Social Media. Severe Distress	2.14*** (0.500)	2.22*** (0.558)	2.58*** (0.764)	2.79*** (0.887)	2.58*** (0.809)
Social Media Frequency		0.89 (0.194)	0.88 (0.190)	0.95 (0.258)	1.11 (0.369)
Female			5.99 (5.571)	6.11 (5.924)	6.38** (5.618)
Age					
18-29				0.36 (0.385)	0.41 (0.558)
30-49				0.28 (0.294)	0.52 (0.712)
50-64				0.25 (0.262)	0.36 (0.418)
Education					
High School					0.15* (0.167)
Post High School					0.13* (0.139)
4-year Degree					0.03** (0.039)
Post 4-year Degree					0.03*** (0.038)
Constant	0.01 (0.007)	0.02 (0.013)	0.00 (0.004)	0.05 (0.008)	0.03 (0.037)

Model 1 in Table 6 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and severe psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=2.14$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for severe distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-5. There is significance for gender Model 5 ($b=6.38$, $p<0.05$) and for every level of education ($b=0.15$, $p<0.10$) ($b=0.03$, $p<0.05$), though they are less robust. The post 4-year degree category has the same level of robustness as

Model 1. Figure 5 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for moderate distress by average self-reported racial discrimination.

Figure 5



Sum of K6 Score

Table 7. Negative Binomial Model of Social Media Frequency and K6 Sum of Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
K6/Sum Distress	0.28*** (0.060)	0.26*** (0.065)	2.60*** (0.062)	0.24*** (0.064)	0.22*** (0.057)	0.22*** (0.057)
Social Media Frequency		0.08* (0.045)	0.75* (0.044)	0.06 (0.050)	0.10 (0.048)	0.07 (0.048)
Female			0.20* (0.117)	0.18 (0.118)	0.16 (0.117)	0.16 (0.117)
Age						
18-29				0.27 (0.234)	0.37 (0.233)	0.37 (0.233)
30-49				0.01 (0.224)	0.21 (0.221)	0.21 (0.221)
50-64				-0.03 (0.224)	0.12 (0.210)	0.12 (0.210)
Education						
High School					-0.71*** (0.270)	-0.71*** (0.267)
Post High School					-0.68*** (0.250)	-0.68*** (0.250)
4-year Degree					-1.09*** (0.255)	-1.09*** (0.255)
Post 4-year Degree					-1.07*** (0.265)	-1.07*** (0.265)
Constant	0.93 (0.129)	0.07 (0.174)	0.59 (0.172)	0.62 (0.208)	1.32 (0.269)	1.31 (0.269)

Model 1 in Table 7 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and K6 sum of psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=0.28$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for K6 sum of distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-6. Though they are less robust, there is significance for every level of education ($b=-0.71$, $p.0.05$). Figure 6 presents the predicted value of the K6 sum of distress by average self-reported racial discrimination.

Facebook

The relationship between average self-reported racial discrimination and psychological distress when having a Facebook account yielded mixed results.

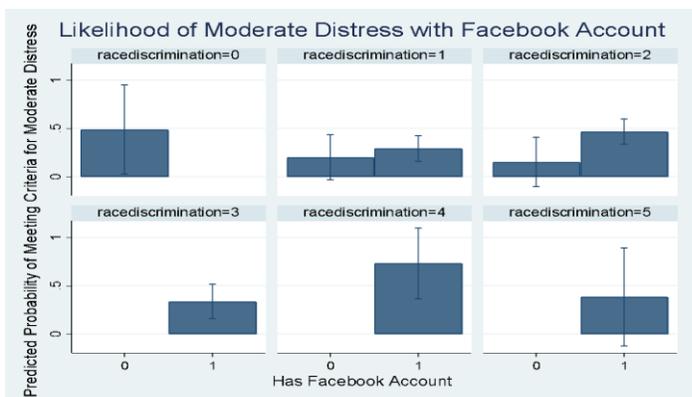
Moderate Distress

Table 8. Logistic Model of Likelihood of having a Facebook Account and Likelihood of Moderate Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Facebook SMF Moderate Distress	1.58*** (0.254)	1.55** (0.276)	1.57** (0.277)	1.44** (0.260)	1.48** (0.262)
Has a Facebook Account		1.34 (0.551)	1.32 (0.542)	1.31 (0.601)	0.92 (0.440)
Gender					
Female			1.20 (0.411)	1.16 (0.406)	1.24 (0.451)
Age					
18-29				4.02* (2.955)	4.94* (4.148)
30-49				2.31 (1.668)	3.20 (2.617)
50-64				1.18 (0.886)	1.61 (1.372)
Education					
High School					0.43 (0.437)
Post High School					0.51 (0.450)
4-year Degree					0.15** (0.138)
Post 4-year Degree					0.29 (0.269)
Constant	0.23 (0.075)	0.21 (0.968)	0.18 (0.095)	0.10 (0.077)	0.29 (0.289)

Model 1 in Table 8 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and moderate psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=1.58, p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for moderate distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-5, although the relationship is less robust ($b=1.48, p<0.05$). Model 5 for the age category for 18-29 ($b=4.94, p<0.10$) and the 4-year degree education level ($b=0.15, p<0.05$) are significant, but the relationships are less robust. Figure 7 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for moderate distress by average self-reported racial discrimination.

Figure 6



Severe Distress

Table 9. Logistic Model of Likelihood of having a Facebook Account and Likelihood of Severe Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Facebook SMF Severe Distress	2.14*** (0.500)	2.10*** (0.563)	2.42*** (0.772)	2.74*** (0.996)	2.62** (0.994)
Has a Facebook Account		1.70 (1.855)	1.62 (1.735)	1.99 (2.170)	2.13 (3.279)
Gender					
Female			4.47 (4.392)	4.72 (5.173)	4.73 (4.970)
Age					
18-29				0.24 (0.221)	0.26 (0.278)
30-49				0.13** (0.123)	0.22 (0.263)
50-64				0.12 (0.159)	0.16 (0.288)
Education					
High School					0.36 (0.502)
Post High School					0.25 (0.367)
4-year Degree					1 (empty)
Post 4-year Degree					0.06* (0.103)
Constant	0.01 (0.007)	0.01 (0.008)	0.00 (0.003)	0.01 (0.009)	0.29 (0.289)

Model 1 in Table 9 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and moderate psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are

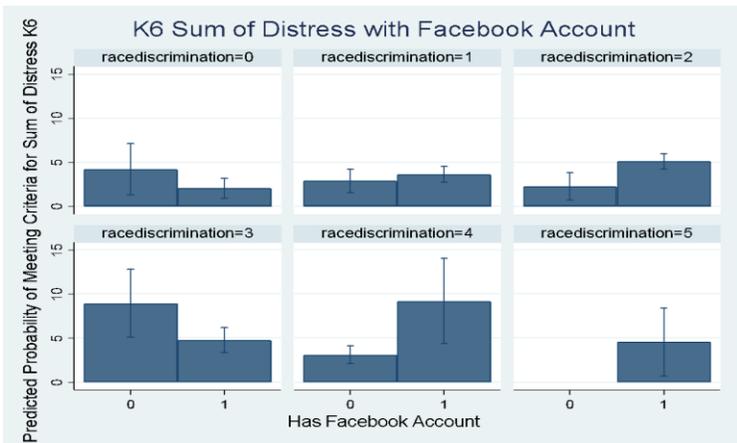
significantly associated ($b=2.14$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for moderate distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-5, although the relationship is less robust ($b=2.62$, $p<0.05$). The post 4-year degree education level also shows significance ($b=0.06$, $p<0.10$), though the relationship is less robust.

Sum of K6 Score

Table 10. Negative Binomial Model of Likelihood of having a Facebook Account and K6 Sum of Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Facebook SMF K6 Sum Distress	0.28*** (0.060)	0.25*** (0.066)	0.26*** (0.063)	0.22*** (0.065)	0.22*** (0.060)
Has a Facebook Account		0.20 (0.167)	0.19 (0.164)	0.21 (0.167)	0.04 (0.168)
Gender					
Female			0.16 (0.123)	0.13 (0.124)	0.12 (0.123)
Age					
18-29				0.17 (0.214)	0.23 (0.216)
30-49				-0.10 (0.214)	0.08 (0.213)
50-64				-0.32 (0.245)	-0.15 (0.240)
Education					
High School					-0.51 (0.324)
Post High School					-0.46 (0.284)
4-year Degree					-0.10*** (0.299)
Post 4-year Degree					-0.83*** (0.302)
Constant	0.93 (0.129)	0.84 (0.179)	0.73 (0.190)	0.85 (0.248)	1.52 (0.340)

Model 1 in Table 10 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and K6 sum of psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=0.28$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for K6 sum distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-5. The 4-year degree ($b=-0.10$, $p<0.01$) and post 4-year degree education ($b=-0.83$, $p<0.01$) levels also maintain this same level of significance. Figure 9 presents the predicted values of the sum of K6 of distress by average self-reported racial discrimination.

Figure 7



Twitter

The relationship between average self-reported racial discrimination and psychological distress with having a Twitter account added yielded mixed results.

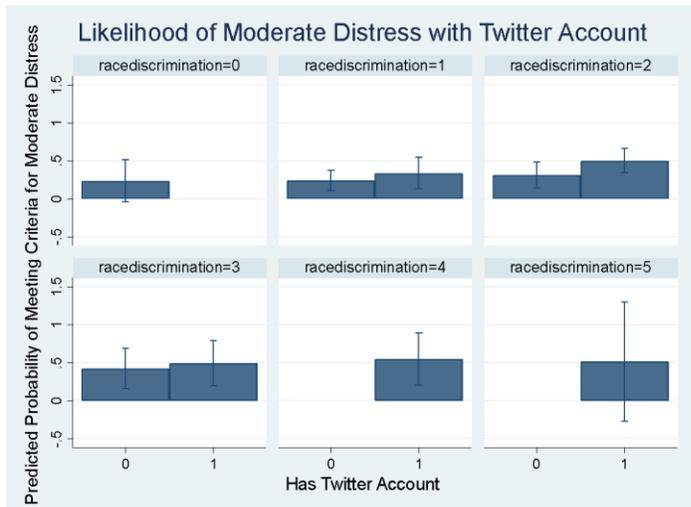
Moderate Distress

Table 11. Logistic Model of Likelihood of having a Twitter Account and Likelihood of Moderate Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Twitter SMF Moderate Distress	1.58*** (0.254)	1.46** (0.268)	1.47** (0.269)	1.38* (0.255)	1.39* (0.255)
Has a Twitter Account		2.01** (0.684)	2.00** (0.682)	1.76 (0.622)	1.85 (0.705)
Gender					
Female			1.20 (0.414)	1.17 (0.414)	1.25 (0.468)
Age					
18-29				3.54* (2.652)	3.97 (3.372)
30-49				2.04 (1.487)	2.51 (0.021)
50-64				1.15 (0.869)	1.45 (1.215)
Education					
High School					0.61 (0.655)
Post High School					0.68 (0.631)
4-year Degree					0.19* (0.187)
Post 4-year Degree					0.36 (0.349)
Constant	0.23 (0.075)	0.21 (0.081)	0.18 (0.083)	0.11 (0.085)	0.21 (0.214)

Model 1 in Table 11 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and moderate psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=1.58$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for moderate distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-5, although the relationship is less robust ($b=1.39$, $p<0.05$). The 4-year degree education level also shows

significance ($b=0.19$, $p<0.10$), but the relationship is less robust. Figure 10 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for moderate distress by average self-reported racial discrimination.

Figure 8



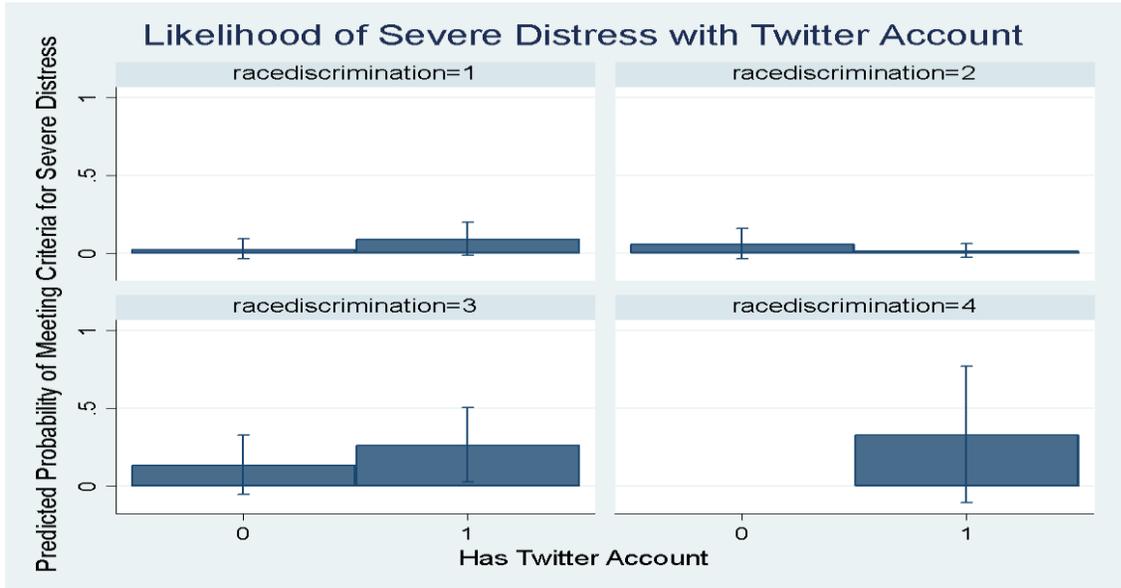
Severe Distress

Table 12. Logistic Model of Likelihood of having a Twitter Account and Likelihood of Moderate Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Twitter SMF Severe Distress	2.14*** (0.500)	2.06*** (0.539)	2.38*** (0.747)	2.65*** (0.942)	2.50** (0.960)
Has a Twitter Account		1.41 (0.951)	1.27 (0.859)	1.60 (1.195)	1.77 (1.393)
Gender					
Female			4.40 (4.257)	4.51 (4.977)	4.30 (4.266)
Age					
18-29				0.22 (0.213)	0.22 (0.246)
30-49				0.12** (0.123)	0.19 (0.242)
50-64				0.12 (0.157)	0.17 (0.299)
Education					
High School					0.44 (0.621)
Post High School					0.36 (0.485)
4-year Degree					1 (empty)
Post 4-year Degree					0.09 (0.129)
Constant	0.01 (0.007)	0.01 (0.008)	0.00 (0.004)	0.01 (0.015)	0.03 (0.062)

Model 1 in Table 12 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and severe psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=2.14$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting

the criteria for severe distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-5, although the relationship is less robust ($b=2.50$, $p<0.05$). Figure 11 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for severe distress by average self-reported racial discrimination.

Figure 9



Sum of K6 Score

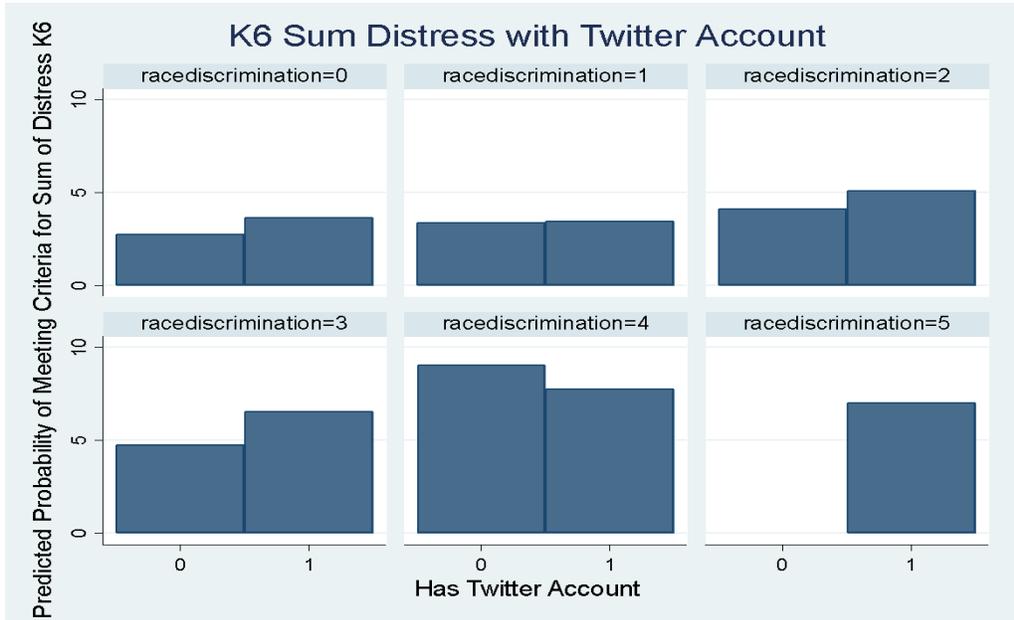
Table 13. Negative Binomial Model of Likelihood of having a Twitter Account and K6 Sum of Distress expressed as Odds Ratios.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Twitter SMF K6 Sum Distress	0.28*** (0.060)	0.23*** (0.068)	0.23*** (0.066)	0.20*** (0.067)	0.20*** (0.063)
Has a Twitter Account		0.22 (0.133)	0.22 (0.132)	0.21 (0.136)	0.98 (0.126)
Gender					
Female			0.16 (0.124)	0.13 (0.125)	0.12 (0.124)
Age					
18-29				0.11 (0.232)	0.17 (0.255)
30-49				-0.15 (0.228)	0.01 (0.218)
50-64				-0.36 (0.251)	-0.18 (0.238)
Education					
High School					-0.45 (0.310)
Post High School					-0.38 (0.277)
4-year Degree					-0.93*** (0.287)
Post 4-year Degree					-0.79*** (0.290)
Constant	0.93 (0.129)	0.94 (0.145)	0.83 (0.159)	1.00 (0.237)	1.50 (0.308)

Model 1 in Table 13 tests the zero-order relationship between self-reported discrimination and K6 sum of psychological distress. Increasing levels of self-reported discrimination are significantly associated ($b=0.28$, $p<0.01$) with a greater likelihood of meeting the criteria for K6 distress. This association holds in subsequent Models 2-5. The 4-year education level ($b=-0.93$, $p<0.01$) and the post 4-year degree education level ($b=-0.79$, $p<0.01$)

both are subsequent with the previous association. Figure 12 presents the predicted probability of meeting the criteria for K6 sum of distress by average self-reported racial discrimination.

Figure 10



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Racial discrimination is a persistent obstacle for African Americans to deal with (Mouzon 2017). It not only results in poorer physical health outcomes, but also works as a stressor, damaging mental health as well. These outcomes negatively affect the African Americans who report being discriminated against across their entire lifetime. Racial discrimination is such a pervasive threat to Africans Americans that getting rid of the abuse is not possible. Learning to cope is a strong and effective way for dealing with this discrimination. Racism acts as a stressor and requires the mobilization of coping resources (Brondolo 2009). Choosing a positive coping mechanism that does not worsen the outcomes of racial discrimination is key. Social media fulfills the criteria of a positive coping mechanism and therefore can be considered as a way to mitigate the effects of racial discrimination on mental health.

Social media usage can be a way for those who feel discriminated against to become connected with a community, build self-identity, and to get away from their discrimination altogether (Brondolo 2009; Iwasaki 2003). The results show that there was an inverse relationship between social media usage and mental health from those with social media accounts who experience higher levels of racial discrimination. As social media usage increased, worse mental distress decreased. This information supports the hypothesis and gives us ground to believe that social media usage can be used as a positive way to cope with racial discrimination. By analyzing overall usage, lower mental distress can be attributed to higher social media frequency when there's higher self-reported racial discrimination.

Another important finding of the data is that significance was found across different tables specifically in the age group of 18-29. This could speak to the fact that this is the youngest

age group in the TDS Survey which represents the population that are more likely to be using social media. This finding tells us that social media may help those who are more likely to be using social media more than older people, to cope with racial discrimination. What's interesting about this topic of age is that those who were 18-29 were not the only group that showed significance. This would imply that social media can help people cope across multiple age groups which makes it a more diverse coping mechanism.

This is also true about those who received a 4-year degree. This specific category of education seemed to yield significance multiple times throughout the testing. Those who are reaching higher levels of education may be giving us these results due to them being more educated than those who have not obtained a 4-year degree. There seems to be something about this education level that is buffering racial discrimination's effects on mental distress. Whatever the cause, this finding also supports social media being a positive coping mechanism.

However, social media usage also had the exact opposite effect. Social media seemed to actually worsen the mental health of those who reported having lower levels of racial discrimination. With each type of social media, this relationship between mental distress and social media usage of unfortunately positive. With these results, social media does not appear to be a universal coping mechanism for racial discrimination, but a situational one. This shows that social media does in fact have the ability to help those who feel discriminated against, but can also hurt them depending on how much discrimination they face. Opposite to the first finding, by analyzing overall usage, higher mental distress can be attributed to higher social media usage when there's lower self-reported discrimination. Understanding this finding will help others move forward with this research.

The next step with this study would be updating the sample technique and looking for social media usage itself. As stated, self-reported studies are only successful based on how truthful respondents are willing to be (Williams 2016). Learning ways to improve the accuracy of self-reported studies like this one can change the results of this study to help further support the hypothesis. This implementation would be a way to enhance the positive results of this study and further this research.

Another future step would be to analyze social media usage itself. Yes, higher frequency of usage leads to implications about the relationship between racial discrimination and mental health, but this does not answer how these sites are being used. A future study should research how respondents are using their social media in order to make even more assumptions. In doing this, we may find that those who were found to have worse distress with high social media usage may be using social media in a negative way or are being exposed to harmful content/users. This extension to my study would bolster the findings and reveal more about social media as a positive coping mechanism.

This study is significant because it suggests a new way for African Americans to cope with racial discrimination (El-Amin, Miller, & Carter-Sowell 2020, February). Finding ways to deal with this pervasive issue helps preserve the physical and mental health of those who perceive that they are being discriminated against. What separates social media from other positive coping mechanisms is its common use in today's society. Social media functioning in this way makes it a relevant and applicable tool which is exciting. This research gives African Americans a way to combat discrimination with an alternative that they likely already use. Finding more ways to combat racial discrimination can bring hope to those who unfortunately deal with this issue. With this finding, the distress of African Americans, in terms of racial

discrimination, can be lessened which helps promote their overall well-being. This study and ones that may follow it should serve as a reminder that we are moving forward.

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