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#NEOTERICRACISM: EXPLORING RACE-BASED CONTENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA DURING RACIALLY CHARGED CURRENT EVENTS

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ABSTRACT
Research regarding the expression of race-based content on social media is sparse. To contribute to this understudied area in psychology, a qualitative study was conducted to explore messages used in social media during racially charged events. In the current study, consensual content analysis was used to explore how Twitter users expressed raced-based content following the grand jury decision in the racially-charged case of Michael Brown. A total of N = 101 tweets using the hashtag Ferguson were analyzed and coded. Content related to racial hatred, support of systems enacting racial injustice, racial epithets, opposition to racism, and news coverage emerged from the data and organized into three themes including: a) content related to racism, b) anti-racists content, and c) news coverage. Implications are discussed and the paper culminates with recommendations for mental health providers and scholars considering ways to utilize and integrate social media into their professional roles.

Keywords
Racism, Social Movements, Social Justice, Social Media, Twitter

RESUMEN
La investigación sobre la expresión del contenido basado en la raza en las redes sociales es escasa. Para contribuir a esta área poco estudiada en psicología, se realizó un estudio cualitativo para explorar los mensajes utilizados en las redes sociales durante eventos de carga racial. En el estudio actual, el análisis de contenido consensual se usó para explorar cómo los usuarios de Twitter expresaron contenido racial luego de la decisión del gran jurado en el caso de Michael Brown con cargos raciales. Se analizaron y codificaron un total de N = 101 tweets utilizando el hashtag Ferguson. Contenido relacionado con odio racial, apoyo a sistemas que promulgan injusticia racial, epítetos raciales, oposición al racismo y cobertura de noticias surgieron de los datos los cuales fueron organizados en tres temas: a) contenido relacionado con el racismo, b) contenido antirracista, y c) cobertura de noticias. Las implicaciones se discuten y el documento culmina con recomendaciones para que los proveedores de servicios de salud mental y académicos consideren maneras de utilizar e integrar las redes sociales en sus roles profesionales.

Palabras clave
Racismo, Movimientos Sociales, Justicia Social, Redes Sociales, Twitter

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#RACISMONEOTÉRICO: EXPLORANDO EL CONTENIDO BASADO EN LA CARRERA EN LOS MEDIOS SOCIALES DURANTE LOS ACTOS ACTUALES CARGADOS RACIALMENTE

The topics of race, racism, discrimination, and multiculturalism have received increased attention within the field of psychology in the last few decades. Several foundational publications (e.g., Cokley & Chapman 2009; Helms, 2008; Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001) coupled with the *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists* (APA, 2003) provide a basis for facilitating professional dialogue on race, racism, and social exclusion. Given the focus in psychology on human behavior and cognition, psychologists are in many ways uniquely positioned to work towards ending social diseases (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism) that negatively impact individuals, families, and communities. One of most pervasive social diseases that has existed throughout history is racism (Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2017; Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, & Organista, 2014). Interestingly, the expression of racism has evolved across time and context while its venomous function and damage has remained the same. For instance, prior to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States (U.S.), racism was expressed through overt and blatant acts of hate (e.g., lynchings, use of derogatory terms, exclusion) that were not only perpetuated by individuals but also sanctioned by institutions (e.g., schools, businesses) and reinforced by legislations (e.g., Slavery, Jim Crow Laws). The blatant and open acts of racial hatred that characterized the era before the Civil Rights Movement are often referred as *old-fashioned racism* by scholars (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2013).

People of Color (POC) earned several civil rights (e.g., voting, integration in schools, businesses, and public settings) following the social unrest, resistance, and activism that exemplified the Civil Rights Movement. The relative success of the Civil Rights Movement purportedly made *old fashioned-racism* less acceptable. As a result of the Civil Rights Movement, the expression of racism changed into two more subtle and covert types known as *modern* and *aversive racism*. (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Neville, Gallardo, Sue, 2016). *Modern racism* is characterized by the belief that racism is no longer a social problem. Thus, racial inequities existing today are blamed on People of Color and their traditional cultural values (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Henry, 2010). Moreover, individuals who engage in *modern racism* reject laws, policies, and programs developed to increase racial representation and ameliorate practices that negatively impact People of Color (e.g., affirmative action, housing discrimination). The second form of subtle racism is known as *aversive racism* and describes the behaviors of individuals who consciously proclaim egalitarian views and endorse fair treatment of all people, but "despite their conscious good intentions, [they] unconsciously harbor feelings of uneasiness…[which are] expressed in subtle, unintentional, and rationalizable ways that disadvantage minorities or unfairly benefit the majority group" (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000, p. 8).

While the expression of racism has evolved over time, examples of all three forms (i.e., old-fashioned, modern, aversive) can be observed in contemporary U.S. society. For instance, modern racism has become more evident since the 2008 election of Barack Hussein Obama, the first African American president. Following President Obama's election, words such as "post-racial" and "colorblind" became popular in the U.S. lexicon (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Helms, 2015; Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013; Schorr, 2008), suggesting that his election had "miraculously" made racism vanish. The suggestion that the historic election of a Black man, made possible by a coalition of majority People of Color (Lopez & Taylor, 2009) eradicated racism, minimizes the role that race continues to play in the lives of racially and ethnically minoritized[2] communities. Despite the popularity of the idea that we are living in a "post-racial" era, where our judgments are race-free, evidence points to the contrary (Helms, 2015). In fact, there is a substantial amount of empirical evidence demonstrating the ways in which racism continues to negatively impact the physical health (Morello-Frosch, Zuk, Jerrett, Shamasunder, & Kyle, 2011; Winston, Barr, Carrasquillo, Bertoni, & Shea, 2009), mental health, (Paradies, 2006; Priest et al., 2013), access to quality education (Orfield & Lee, 2005), and employment opportunities (Royster, 2003) of minoritized communities. Thus, according to scholars, racism in all its forms did not disappear in the Obama era; instead, it increased during that historic time period (Agiesta & Ross, 2012; Neville et al., 2013). Interestingly, the presidency of Obama coincided with the emergence and proliferation of social media, web-based communication tools that allow individuals to interact with others by producing, sharing, and consuming information via text, images, and/or videos (Murthy, 2012; Nations, n.d.). Table 1 provides a description of commonly used terminology in social media. In these digital spaces people share their thoughts and opinions on a wide variety of topics including race and racism. Historically, conversations

[2] Instead of "minority" we use "minoritized" throughout this article to signify the subordination of People of Color in United States (Harper, 2012). "Minority" is identity based where as "minoritized" centers how People of Color are impacted by systems of oppression (Adames et al., 2018).

about racism and its impact on the lives of Communities of Color have taken place at social gatherings, community settings, workplaces, and the like. However, the emergence of social media has opened new spaces for the expression and reaction to racially charged events and content.

The goal of the present qualitative study is to explore how individuals used a specific type of social media (i.e., Twitter) to express their thoughts and opinions related to a racially charged event. Specifically, the study analyzed content generated within 48-hours of the grand jury decision in the shooting of Michael Brown by law enforcement. To help orient readers who are not familiar with social media and the case of Michael Brown, the paper begins with brief introductions to Twitter and the events surrounding the killing of Michael Brown as a prelude to the study. The paper concludes with implications and recommendations for mental health providers and scholars.

Table 1

Steps to Building a Social Media Presence and Corresponding Terminologies

Steps	Terms	Definitions
Building A Presence	• Profile	- User's homepage where biographical information, location, and posts are shared with the public. Of note, users choose what information they make public about themselves.
	• Handle/Username	- The user's account name which is always preceded by the @ symbol.
	• Avatar	- A visual representation of a user on social media typically of an actual photo of themselves or an image of choice.
	• Follower/Friend	- Used to describe users who have chosen to receive an individual's posts in their timeline.
Creating Content	• Posts	- Information made public by users on social media. Can include text, images, or video (archival or live clips).
	• Timeline	- A real-time stream of posts.
	• Tweets	- Posts of 280 characters or less published on Twitter that can include text, images, or short video (archival or live clips). Tweets are shown on users' timelines and are publicly made available to users and nonusers.
Interacting with Content and Users	• Hashtags	- Represented by the pound sign (#) and to organize and aggregate information by topics.
	• Share	- A common function in social media that allows users to share information with all their friends or followers that was made public by one of their friends/followers.
	• Retweet	- Similar to the Share function in other social medial sites, Retweets allow users to share information made public by their followers.
	• Like	- Represented by different types of symbols or emoticons including thumbs-up and heart. This function allows users to label content they approve.
Impact	• Trending	- A topic determined algorithmically as the most popular at a particular moment in time. Individuals can choose to tailor Trends based on their geographic location.

Twitter in the Age of Social Media

Introduced in 2006, Twitter is a form of real-time microblogging with particular characteristics. First, users have a public profile where they publish short (i.e., 280 characters or less) messages (i.e., Tweets) or re-share other people's content (i.e., re-tweet). Second, messages are organized together across users by topics (i.e., hashtags). Third, public messages posted by users are made readily available to anyone on the social media platform. Thus, unlike other social media spaces where users have some degree of control over who views their posts (e.g., Facebook), content posted on Twitter is typically accessible to the public.

Twitter is often event driven and dynamic allowing people to interact and share their thoughts, reactions, and opinions regarding a host of topics. While traditional media outlets determine the events worthy of being reported and broadcasted, Twitter allows the layperson to become creators and disseminators of content. In recent years, Twitter has gained significant prominence as a virtual form of communication. Just in the U.S., Twitter is projected to reach over 57 million monthly active users by 2018 (Twitter, 2016). Currently there are more than 310 million monthly active Twitter users worldwide, producing approximately 340 million tweets per day (Chiang, 2011; Twitter, 2016). Twitter is particularly popular among young adults (33%) and People of Color (44%, Twitter, 2016).

Twitter use has also become a tool for innovative research across disciplines. To illustrate, Twitter has been used in medical studies to track cholera outbreaks in Haiti (Chunara, Andrews, & Brownstein, 2012), to monitor suicide risk and incidence of depression in mental health (Jashinsky et al., 2013), and to understand patterns of communication during times of natural disasters and social crises (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012). Compared to using traditional forms of data collection (e.g., surveys, interviews), Twitter can help reduce social desirability since individuals are reporting their thoughts, opinions, and beliefs about a wide variety of topics (e.g., health, education, politics, social justice, race) without being prompted by researchers. To this end, Twitter is a viable option for conducting social science research.

Twitter and #Ferguson

On August 9, 2014 Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old Black teenager was fatally shot by Darren Wilson, a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. According to witnesses, Michael Brown's hands were over his head when he was shot. His body was left on the street face down in a pool of blood for approximately four hours (New York Times, 2014). While Michael Brown's body laid on the street uncovered, a crowd gathered around the yellow tape placed by the police, and they began to post tweets about the shooting as well as short videos on what was transpiring in Ferguson. As more and more people began to share and retweet news about the murder of Michael Brown, traditional media took notice and soon this incident made national and international news. During the first week following his murder, over 3.6 million tweets were produced by Twitter users. The tweets were publicly aggregated across people from all over the world using the hashtag Ferguson, which soon became a trending topic across social media sites including Twitter. Details regarding Michael Brown's death began to emerge in the days and months following his murder. For instance, results from the autopsy conducted by Dr. Michael Baden, and requested by Michael Brown's family, revealed that he was shot at least six times (New York Times, 2014). Also, the testimony made by Officer Wilson to the grand jury was made public. In his testimony, Wilson stated that the only way he could describe Michael Brown was as having an "intense aggressive face" that looked like "a demon" (State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson, 2014). Officer Wilson ultimately stated that he feared for his life. Michael Brown's murder took place during a historic time, when several Black People including children and teenagers (e.g., Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice) had been killed in incidents that were highly publicized in both traditional and social media (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). As in other similar cases, Wilson was not indicted and on November of that same year, the grand jury's decision was announced to the public. This decision provoked strong public outrage, leading to massive protests across the country along with unprecedented social media activity using the hashtag Ferguson. Overall, this event propelled people to produce and share over 6 million tweets that included race-based content within a 3-week period (LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2016).

Current Study

In the current study, we sought to understand the public's response on Twitter to a racially charged event. To capture racially-based content on Twitter, we collected tweets surrounding the grand jury decision in the killing of Michael Brown. Given the nature of tweets, which include posts of 280 characters or less, created in natural settings, and considered a form of archival data, a qualitative content analysis methodology (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008)

informed by grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) was employed. Qualitative content analysis is a method of analyzing written or visual communication messages (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Moreover, content analysis is a systematic and objective method used to understand how words and phrases share meaning (Krippendorff, 2013). Although grounded theory is predominately used to understand focus groups and data collected from interviews, it has also been used in studies that examine text (see Brinkman, Khan, Jedinak, & Vetere, 2015; Hatchett et al., 2009). Using a qualitative consensual content analysis methodology informed by grounded theory, this study sought to answer the following research question: *What type of content was generated on Twitter by the public following the racially charged event surrounding the grand jury decision on the killing of Michael Brown?*

Method

To address our research question, public tweets following the Michael Brown verdict in 2014 were randomly collected as the unit of analysis. The inclusion criteria for this study included Tweets with the hashtag Ferguson. Using the live feed on Twitter's interface, tweets were harvested (i.e., collected) within a 48-hour time period between November 24 to 25, 2014. Public tweets with hashtag Ferguson published on these dates can be accessed by using the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API). To minimize the probability of collecting tweets from the same user, data was harvested every two hours within the sampled time period.

A total of 2,089 tweets were collected. To capture content from regular Twitter users, tweets automatically generated by bots (i.e., automatic computer-generated content), profiles with "the egg avatar" (i.e., the default avatar that Twitter gives to every new account), as well as tweets without a corresponding first and last name in their profile were omitted from the sample. Approximately 20% or 414 tweets did not meet these inclusion criteria, yielding a total of 1,675 tweets from which 101 were randomly picked using the random sorting feature on excel.

Process of Data Analysis

Trustworthiness of data. An inductive approach to qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the sampled tweets. To achieve trustworthiness of the data analysis process, a number of steps were taken (Shenton, 2004) including explicitly discussing the positionality of each research team member (Greene, 2014). For instance, the members of the research team, all active social media users, discussed their expectations (e.g., offensive and racists language is used in social media), assumptions (e.g., most of the content on race is pejorative and negative), and how their experiences could potentially impact data interpretation. The research team was comprised of two trained graduate student coders and a faculty member familiar with qualitative analysis. Throughout the entire process of data analysis, the research team discussed and addressed their assumptions, expectations, and biases (Shenton, 2004). As recommended by Greene (2014), research notes were taken throughout the data analysis process. A critical race theorist, familiar with qualitative methodology and active Twitter user, served as an expert consultant to the team to ensure accuracy, reliability, and confirmability of the study's results (Greene, 2014).

Content analysis of tweets. Coding consisted of three phases. In the first phase, 50 tweets were randomly picked from the sample that met inclusion criteria. All three members of the team independently read the 50 sampled tweets several times before they began to develop their own impressions about the data. The team then used open coding system to independently label tweets into categories in a way that the labels could be identified, understood, and compared with the labels of the other team members. Upon completion of the open coding, the two coders met to discuss their lists with the faculty member. Salient categories in this phase included content related to: racial hatred, support of systems enacting racial injustice, racial epithets, opposition to racism, desire for justice, support of racial equity, and news coverage regarding Ferguson. In the next step categories were merged, eliminated, and themes were developed. Themes were created via a constant comparative analysis, a method used to identify differences and homogeneity in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). With the final coding list, the two coders independently coded each of the 50 tweets. Then, the two coders along with the faculty member met and discussed each tweet, comparing the categories assigned by both coders. There were several tweets that could be read in more than one way. For instance, the tweet "*Decision Reaffirms Right of Police to Use Deadly Force When They Feel Sufficiently Inclined*" could theoretically be interpreted as a) affirming racism or b) critiquing systemic racism. To help understand the intent of the tweets that could be interpreted as having multiple meanings, the research team went to the profile where the tweet originated from to help distinguish the intent of the statement. The categorization of tweets that could be interpreted in various ways was based on content generated by the user. Research team members discussed disagreements until consensus among the three research team members was reached.

The second phase focused on ensuring credibility for the qualitative content analysis. To achieve this goal, we had the expert consultant provide feedback and assess for any possible groupthink that may have emerged in the coding and consensus building process. In this meeting, the consultant provided remarks that some themes appeared redundant and she also helped clarify ways for the research team to code tweets initially labeled as "other." Three themes, consistent with the codes identified in phase-one included: racism, anti-racism, news coverage, and other.

The third and final phase focused on strengthening the methodological rigor of the study and assessing the stability of the coding. To achieve this goal, 51 additional tweets were independently coded for a total of 101 pieces of data analyzed. No new categories emerged from the additional data and the research team in collaboration with the consultant agreed that data saturation was achieved. Lastly, to determine the strength of agreement, the coders independently categorized all 101 tweets into the final categories. Cohen's kappa coefficients were calculated for each category.

Results

Three themes were generated from the qualitative content analysis including I) racism, II) anti-racist, and III) news coverage. Tweets that were either difficult to comprehend (gibberish) or referred to the late-night show Ferguson were categorized as other. Intercoder reliability distinguishing between the categories within each theme was achieved with two coders independently categorizing all tweets. Using Cohen's kappa as the agreement statistic between coders, reliability fell within the substantial agreement range for I) racism (.75, p = <.000), II) anti-racists (.63, p = <.000), and III) news coverage (.72, p = <.000). No kappa was calculated for the category labeled as "other." See Table 2.

Table 2

Intercoder Reliability of Categories

Themes & Categories	Frequencies	Cohen's k For Categories	*p* value
Theme I: Racism	**36/101**	.75	<.000
1. Cultural Racism	25/36		
2. Institutional Racism	11/36		
Theme II: Anti-Racist	**35/101**	.63	<.000
1. Institutional Justice	21/35		
2. Individual Justice	14/35		
Theme III: News Coverage	**25/101**	.72	<.000
1. Neutral	17/25		
2. Condemning	8/25		
IV: Other	**5/101**	n/a	n/a

Theme I: Racism

In the first theme, tweets describing a belief system or ideology used to justify the superiority of one race over another were observed. Two categories were identified within this theme including a) cultural racism and b) institutional racism. Tweets that included language connoting white superiority, as well as those where the law, politics, and events were defined from a dominant white perspective, or where a racial, ethnic group, or culture were objectified, denigrated, or insulted were classified as cultural racism. For instance, "*#Ferguson had nothing to do with Brown. It was for #RaceBaitors to profit and the #CultureOfViolence to loot!*" exemplifies this category. Tweets demonstrating a lack of understanding of systemic inequities was also observed and categorized as institutional racism. The tweet, "*Decision Reaffirms Right of Police to Use Deadly Force When They Feel Sufficiently Inclined #Ferguson*" illustrates this category. In sum, tweets in the institutional racism category included content that justified the unfair treatment of POC by various systems (e.g., educational system, law enforcement, labor force) or demonstrated a lack of understanding regarding systemic and structural barriers.

Theme II: Anti-Racist

In this study, content expressing opposition to the unfair treatment of individuals based on race, as well as those promoting racial equity in society, were coded as antiracist. Two categories emerged from this theme, a) institutional and b) individual justice. Tweets in the institutional justice category contained language describing the need for institutions and structures within society to afford POC equal access to fundamental human rights such as education, justice, employment, and the like. For instance, the "*Join Us #LittleRock stand with #Ferguson End #Racism #PoliceBrutality*" calling for people across the country to mobilize, address, and create change within structural systems was assigned to the category of institutional justice. Other tweets pointing to the importance of individual responsibility and those calling out individuals to understand racism such as, "*If you truly cannot understand the injustice of the decision, I recommend you take a moment to examine your own privilege. #Ferguson*" were coded as individual justice.

Theme III: News Coverage

The third theme that emerged from the sample of tweets collected from this study centered on content related to news coverage reporting on the events taking place in Ferguson. News coverage consisted of information being posted by traditional media outlets (e.g., newspapers, television, radio stations), as well as people re-tweeting or sharing such news stories. The tweets which formed the news coverage theme, included two categories a) neutral and b) condemning content. Tweets in the neutral category contained stories and information about what was happening in Ferguson without demonstrating an explicit judgment on the events taking place. For instance, "*Brian Williams To Anchor From Ferguson: NBC News said Brian Williams would anchor the unit's signature evening news…*". Tweets in the condemning category included news stories and information demonstrating an explicit negative judgment of the events taking place in Ferguson. For instance, "*Obama Begs for Calm as Rioters set Fires...Iconic Split Screen Image Will Endure after O Leaves…#Ferguson*." Interestingly, we observed more comments that fell in the neutral or noncondemning categories than the condemning categories in our sample.

IV: Other

The last group included tweets that lacked sufficient content to be categorized in any of the consensually built themes. For example, "*I know we're all pretty upset about this #Ferguson thing. But the sad truth is he couldn't host the Late Show forever*." Given the small number of tweets (i.e., 5), no categories were identified.

Discussion

Twitter, a form of social media, has become an important tool of engagement where people document and express their reactions to a plethora of current events, from pop culture to politics. In addition, people use Twitter to disseminate information on topics in real time, reaching a broad and potentially limitless audience. For the present qualitative study, we were interested in specifically exploring how individuals used Twitter to express their thoughts, reactions, and opinions related to an event surrounding the grand jury decision in a case that elicited race-based content. Valuable findings emerged from the tweets harvested for this study. For instance, from the sampled tweets, three themes emerged: a) racism, b) antiracism, c) news coverage. Our results demonstrate how individuals used Twitter to express racist ideologies, speak against racism, or share information (i.e., from traditional media sources) about the events that took place in Ferguson following the verdict in the shooting of Michael Brown.

While different forms of racism (e.g., cultural, institutional) have existed throughout history, results from this content analysis support that with the emergence and proliferation of social media, racism is also being expressed in digital spaces. Historically, cultural and institutional racism were expressed through blatant and out in the open acts of racial hatred, classified in the literature as *old-fashioned racism*. Blatant expressions of cultural and institutional racism have arguably declined in recent decades and are likely to be expressed under some conditions including: 1) when some degree of anonymity can be ensured, 2) while in the presence of others who share similar beliefs, and 3) when individuals have lost control over their feelings and behaviors due to cognitive impairment (Sue & Sue, 2013). However, in the sample of tweets analyzed in this study, individuals posted blatantly racist messages without the assurance of anonymity. For example, all the tweets included in the analyses had profiles with corresponding first and last names. While it is possible that some users created fake names to maintain their anonymity, the expression of racism in digital spaces can be readily observed in the tweets of well-known individuals (e.g., politicians, artists, journalists) in today's society. Similarly, traces of *new racism* were also abundant in our sample. Specifically, some individuals expressed covert and subtle forms of racism, such as the belief that oppression no longer exists and that all people are currently being treated with equity.

The results of the current study also suggest that the expression of racism in social media is not fully captured by the nomenclature of "*old, new, and aversive racism*." For instance, the expression of racist content on Twitter, whether blatant or subtle, are newly produced and disseminated in real time, reaching broad audiences in a matter of seconds. Thus, the speed of dissemination, broad reach, and digital space in which racist content is produced, makes the expression of racism in social media platforms qualitatively unique. We refer to the constant production, expression, and promulgation of racism (i.e., old, new, aversive) in social media platforms as *Neoteric Racism,* a term we are coining to help capture the uniqueness of racist content in social media spaces.

The findings of this study also suggest that some individuals use social media platforms as a vehicle to express ideas and thoughts that promote social equity and oppose the unfair treatment of individuals based on race. Several tweets in this study centered on ways that communities come together and engage to address racism. For example, tweets in our sample suggested that some users understood the role that institutional racism played in the murder of Michael Brown. These tweets contained content advocating for institutional accountability and structural change. These findings support how in recent years, individuals have used Twitter as a tool of social and racial justice activism. For instance, people have used this platform to create movement against violence, racial profiling, and systemic racism (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, #HereToStay).

In many ways, social media has come to revolutionize how information is disseminated, how fast it travels, and how far it reaches the masses. For instance, in the age of social media, anyone with access to the internet can create and share news. While people continue to consume information from professional journalists, they are also being exposed to content produced by common individuals or "citizen journalists" who share stories, describe events they witness, or capture important moments in real time through images and videos. The power of citizen journalism became poignantly evident following the shooting of Michael Brown and the protests that ensued in Ferguson. During these events, everyday people recorded the aftermath of his murder, the response from the police as his body laid on the street, and the violent response to the protests that followed the grand jury's decision not to indict the officer who was accused of his murder. In this case, social media allowed citizen journalists to serve as public pundits who expressed the voices of communities historically missing from the national discourse on traditional media outlets.

The proliferation of social media has led to a change in how individuals communicate and express their ideologies about race. Thus, in contemporary times individuals receive as much information from each other as they do from social media. We believe this rapid exchange of information has implications in all spheres of society ranging from healthcare, education, and social justice, to multiculturalism and psychology. We posit that understanding these new spaces of engagement, community building, and participation is a vital step toward racial and social justice in the new millennium.

Limitations

The present study provides rich information on race-based content in social media; however, caution must be exercised in generalizing our findings given that sample to population generalizability are not the goals of qualitative research. Instead, we sought to use this methodology to help us describe how race-based content is expressed in social media spaces, an under-researched area. A limitation of conducting research on areas that have not been examined before is the lack of established best practices and procedures for collecting and analyzing data. As a result, this study demonstrates only one of many possible ways to analyze race-based content in a particular form of social media (i.e., Twitter). Thus, scholars interested in conducting similar studies on different types of

social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) will need to make adaptations specific to those platforms and the type of content produced (e.g., text, images, videos). Despite these limitations, our study highlights how insidious racism is and its ability to manifest across a wide variety of forums including social media. We offer the following recommendations to help mental health professionals and scholars consider some ways in which they can utilize social media in their professional roles.

Recommendations for Mental Health Providers and Scholars

1. Given the proliferation of social media, it has become increasingly important for mental health providers and scholars to become familiar with these platforms of communication. As evidenced by the results of the present study, individuals utilize social media to connect, build community, create dialogue, advocate for social justice, and share information. Mental health professionals can utilize social media in similar ways while putting their areas of expertise to work in these new digital spaces. The following recommendations are offered for mental health professionals interested in incorporating social media into their professional repertoire:

    a. Mental health professionals can utilize social media as a tool for social justice advocacy. For instance, they can create content that raises awareness regarding the challenges faced by of People of Color and their impact on mental health.
    b. Social media can also be an effective way for mental health professionals to stay informed, mobilize, and/or support national and local campaigns designed to oppose legislation and policies disproportionately impacting marginalized communities.
    c. Mental health professionals can utilize social media as a networking tool to connect with other professionals with similar interests, disseminate up-to-date research, and learn about opportunities for collaboration and employment.

2. Given the prevalence of race-based content expressed on Twitter, as evidenced by this study, it is important for mental health professionals to understand the impact that constant exposure to racist messages may have on the mental health of racial and ethnic minoritized clients. Nonstop exposure to denigrating or dehumanizing messages about a person's racial-ethnic group may exacerbate existing mental health conditions as well as trigger the development of new symptoms. In an effort to help mental health providers address the impact of exposure to racist content on social media, the following recommendations are provided:

    a. Mental health providers can provide clients with psychoeducation regarding the use of social media. For instance, clients can be encouraged to become aware of how negative racialized messages may impact their sense of wellbeing and functioning. This information can help them to determine when they may need to take breaks from social media.
    b. Providers and clients together can identify organizations and groups dedicated to social justice on digital spaces. These organizations often post information People of Color can use to counter the negative stereotypes and messages portrayed about minoritized groups.
    c. Providers can also assist clients in learning ways to use social media as a tool for social justice advocacy. For instance, clients may learn about ongoing social media campaigns as well as upcoming events, meetings, and rallies. This endeavor can also help clients connect with other people facing similar struggles, which may decrease feelings of isolation. In addition, clients may feel a sense of empowerment and agency by using their voices to advocate for social and political change.
    d. Clients can also benefit from learning when it may not be an ideal time (i.e., when experiencing intense emotional reactions) to respond to racist messages as well as being explicitly reminded that social media posts are permanent and can be used against them. Hence, clients need to consider any possible ramifications of the content they create or share.

3. This study was a step towards examining how individuals produced content on a particular topic (i.e., race-based content) in a specific type of social media (i.e., Twitter). Despite the popularity of these platforms, research on social media in the behavioral sciences is currently in its infancy stage. Nonetheless, social media can be a goldmine for researchers interested in human behavior as it holds a wealth of information that is publicly available and easily accessible. The possibilities for mental health scholars to utilize social media as a

tool for data collection are endless. We offer the following recommendations for scholars interested in conducting research utilizing content produced on social media platforms:

a. Information from some social media platforms (i.e., Twitter, Instagram) is publicly available to individuals and can be harvested directly from the application's (apps) interface. Additionally, Twitter has apps available that facilitate access to historical data in an organized format (e.g., chronologically, grouped by topics).
b. Data produced in social media comes in many forms. For instance, posts on Instagram and Pinterest consist primarily of images (e.g., photos, art clips). Other platforms include images and text with a character limit (e.g., Twitter) or no limit (e.g., Facebook). Social media platforms also exist where the content produced is made up of short videos that can also include text (e.g., Snapchat, Vines). Finally, some social media spaces produce live streaming of content (e.g., Facebook live, Periscope). Thus, scholars need to consider the type of data that best helps to answer the research question(s) they are interested in investigating.
c. Social media can be a useful way for researchers to recruit participants from populations that are 1) particularly difficult to reach and engage in research studies as well as 2) individuals who may be hesitant to answer questions about themselves in a face-to-face format. Scholars can post information on social media regarding their studies, and how participating in these efforts can contribute to the betterment of their communities. To facilitate recruitment, researchers can tag (i.e., alert users) organizations and individuals that are well known and trusted by the community of interest.
d. Given the dearth of research on social media in psychology, it would be fruitful for scholars to collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines to develop best practices for conducting social media research.

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