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“I know we are all going through a similar experience right now. Boredom. Stress. Anxiety. Confusion and fear:” Qualitative Analysis of Adolescent Mental Health Blogging During COVID-19

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Introduction

- Downstream effects of COVID-19 have resulted in a **mental health crisis**¹
- Adolescents and young adults (AYA) are experiencing rises in rates of depression and anxiety, contributed by a **lack of socializing** with peers²
- **Supporting Our Valued Adolescents (SOVA)** is an ongoing social media intervention created in response to the existing need for adolescent **mental health support**, allowing young adults to discuss mental health in a moderated and anonymous space
- SOVA Ambassadors are AYA asked to write monthly blog posts and comment weekly on others’ posts. Participants are allowed to blog about “whatever they want, so long as it pertains to mental health.”
- When **COVID-19** began to affect the United States in March 2020, there was an increase in interested participants and posts about the pandemic, lockdown, and its mental health effects

OBJECTIVE: Analyze online written content in the form of blogposts by AYA engaged as peer bloggers for a social media intervention to understand young people’s experience of coping with mental illness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

- **Participants:** Twenty-three majority White female AYAs ($M_{age}=21$ years, $SD = 3.1$) were primarily recruited through the University of Pittsburgh’s online research registry, Pitt+Me. Participants were encouraged to write monthly blog posts and leave comments on other posts, and were compensated \$15/month for activity.
- **Qualitative method design:** Full blogposts that included words related to COVID (i.e. quarantine, pandemic) were extracted between mid-March and mid-September 2020 from SOVA and imported into NVivo software.
- A preliminary codebook was developed using thematic categories of blog topics, structure, coping strategies and emotions mentioned.
- **Analysis:** Conducted a content analysis and summarized data using a template analysis approach.

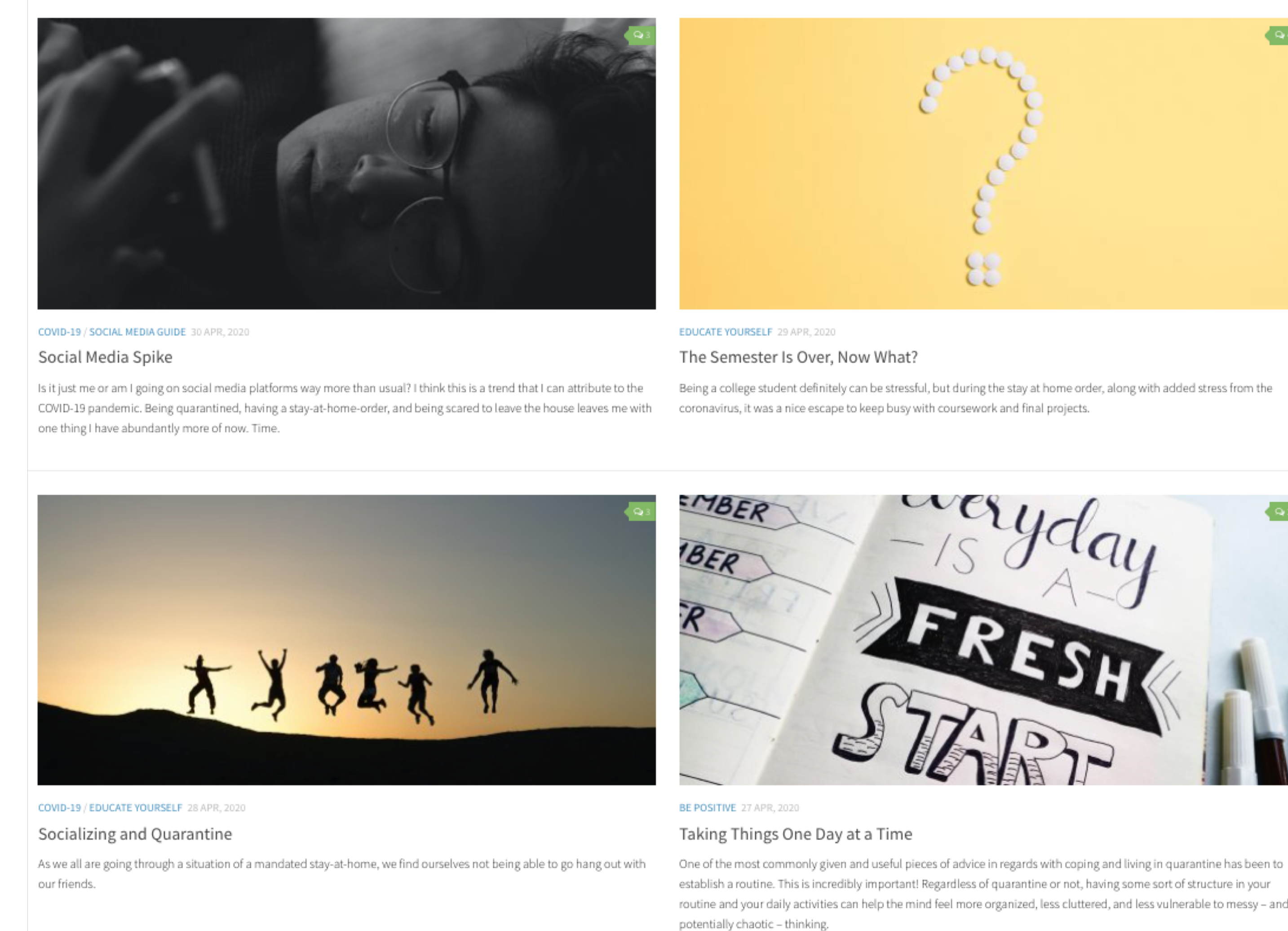
Results in Progress

- Of the 69 blog posts written by blogging ambassadors between March and September, 29 (42%) discussed the pandemic and/or its effects.
- Five blogposts and 12 comments written throughout the first five weeks (**March 16th-April 21st**) have been analyzed thus far. Coding has been done by the first two authors to further develop the codebook and to build rater reliability.

Table 1: Codebook in Progress

Code Sections	Sample Codes	Examples From Blogs
Blog Topic	Adjusting during COVID; loneliness and socializing	“A Quiet Quarantine” (ID 82)
Blog Structure	Present problem – share solution	“wanted to share some tips and tricks that have helped me in the last couple days” (ID 70)
Concern for Others	All in this together; reassurance	“It will all be okay” (ID 82)
Coping Mechanisms	Emotion focused; problem focused; social coping	“ I have done a lot of baking haha. I’ve also used this time to catch up on Netflix shows which is something I never was able to do.” (ID 86)
COVID Effects	Habit changes; mental illness; takeaways	“I think that’s an important lesson we can take away from this whole experience.” (ID 63)
Problems Expressed in Relation to COVID	Socializing; everything being online; educational concern	“being stuck in a house with your family can be stressful” (ID 88)
Time Period Discussed	Transitions, life pre-COVID, life after COVID	“It has been really challenging for me to adjust to living back home in my small town again.” (ID 82)
SOVA Platform	Blog helping user, enjoying a post	“This was a good blog for me to read” (ID 96)

“I find it hard to focus on my online school, keep up with my studies and even write this blog post. My mind is just in other places and its hard not to think about and worry about the things going on in the world around us.” (ID 70)



Preliminary Conclusions

- Adolescents and young adults participating in this online mental health intervention showed evidence of experiencing worsened mental health; however, they also demonstrated resilience and positive coping.
- Bloggers appear to be concerned for others and want to give support throughout this shared experience.

¹Pfefferbaum, B., & North, C. S. (2020). Mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic. *New England Journal of Medicine*.
²Loades, M. E., Chatburn, E., Higson-Sweeney, N., Reynolds, S., Shafran, R., Brigden, A., ... & Crawley, E. (2020). Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*.

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