INTRODUCTION

• As technology continues to develop, adolescents are spending less in-person time with their peers and more time online.¹
• With adolescents using digital technology, specifically social media, at increasing rates, it is important to assess its impact on their well-being. Previous research has found links between loneliness and social media use.

METHOD

Participants: Participants were part of a larger longitudinal study administered in five waves across four school years (N = 1,385). During the fourth year of this longitudinal study, a subset of participants (N = 103) in 10th and 11th grade with low SES participated in the current virtual study.

• Relationship Quality: Relationship quality between the participant and their best friend was assessed using the NRI-SPV, specifically the support subscale measure.²
• Social Media Use: Daily social media use over a 14-day period was collected through screen usage screenshots.
• Loneliness: Participants rated their perceived level of loneliness every day over a 14-day period.

RESULTS

• Mixed-effects models were conducted to see the association between social media usage and loneliness.
• Higher average social media usage was associated with increased loneliness across the 14 days of participation (b = 16.17, SE = 7.37, p = 0.04).
• When adding peer support as a moderator to the model, the model was not significant (see Table 2).

AIM: This study aims to examine how social media use amongst teens impacts their perceived loneliness while also examining how their peer relationships can moderate this impact in order to harness the positive effects that social media has on peer relationships while informing prevention efforts to limit social media’s potentially negative effects.

DISCUSSION

• Our results highlight the ambiguity around teens’ motivations for using social media and due to our inability to determine causality this needs to be further explored.
• The racial differences found in the amount of social media that was used suggests the ways in which social media was used differ, which could be explained by the increased awareness of social justice movements, such as BLM, when the data was collected in the summer of 2020.
• Future research may be needed to determine how teens are using social media, individual differences in usage, what function it serves teens, and how this function can potentially impact their mental health.