

**Field Research**

Achanty Mora

English Department, The City College of New York.

ENGL 21002: Writing for the Social Sciences.

Professor Ervin.

Fall Semester 2025

What once looked like oversharing online has become a form of healing. Scrolling through social media can sometimes feel like therapy for Gen Z. While older generations might see TikTok and Twitter as distractions, young people today use them as emotional outlets and support systems. During my digital ethnography, I spent time on TikTok hashtags like #TherapyTok and #TraumaTok, and on Twitter/X threads under #MentalHealthMatters and #MentalHealthAwareness. I wanted to understand how Gen Z copes with mental health online—on how we turn public spaces into private-feeling communities of care. Illustrating that Gen Z uses TikTok and Twitter as informal coping tools by sharing humor, vulnerability and validation, creating digital spaces that make mental health conversations feel collectively safe.

While scrolling through TikTok, I noticed how humor makes mental health conversations more approachable for my generation. Creators like @nurse.john joke about anxiety and burnout in ways that feel deeply relatable. In one clip, he says “if your coping skill is dissociating,, congrats— you’re basically meditating with extra steps.” The comments section instantly fills with “so true bestie” and laughing emojis, showing how laughter becomes a shared relief. On Twitter, the same coping pattern appears but in shorter, sharper posts. @islandtherapyyy tweeted, “explaining depression to Caribbean parents is like speaking Wi-Fi to dial-up.” That simple line captures a complex generational clash while also inviting others to join in with memes work because members empower one another through shared language and humor. In both apps, jokes are not just jokes— they are pressure valves.

Beyond the humor, I saw how self-disclosure and empathy build micro-communities of healing. TikTok creator @asenaspov posts posts where he acts out an inner dialogue between her anxious and calm selves, with the caption “me vs. me when overthinking again.” Commenters respond with “so real it hurts” or share their own experiences. Another creator, @JazzThornton\_,

directly addresses viewers with, “To anyone struggling tonight, you are not a burden.” The tone feels intimate, as if she’s talking to a friend rather than to the millions of people in her fyp (for you page). We have accounts on Twitter like @drmarie\_mindcare or @slowhealingclub post gentle affirmations: “Normalize emotional check-ins like weather checks.” Note that these posts circulate like daily mantras, that is, the more people consume this type of content the more likely they’ll see this content in their algorithm across social media platforms. According to Samuel et al. (2024), first person storytelling in mental health videos generate higher engagement than clinical information, explaining why creators who share lived traumatic experiences attract such interactive followers.

### Behavioral Analysis

Now let's get into how identity plays a role in how Gen Z performs coping online: @goodlocdcharly made a TikTok about being the oldest daughter in a family, describing how she’s always the emotional caretaker. Viewers flooded the comment with agreement: “Oldest daughters don’t get to rest”. @Boundariesbaddie on Twitter writes, “I need 48 business hours of silence and snacks.” Both posts reframe emotional exhaustion through humor but also through shared identity— turning exhaustion into solidarity across different digital platforms. These exchanges reflect what AbouWarda et. al. (2024) was referring to by describing peer-to-peer empowerment, where users normalize boundaries and affirm each other’s worth.

Spirituality and culture also shape Gen Z coping. @chatwithzaina often reminds followers that “Rest is worship too.” Another family account, @ustheremingtons, models apology and forgiveness after arguments, showing repair instead of perfection. Across these platforms we can infer that for many young people, coping isn’t just about health labels but about breaking generational cycles, finding internal peace, peace within families and community as

well as, having unconditional love and faith. These small messages of rest and softness, contrast the fast motion in which both platforms operate but thrive precisely because they offer emotional pause.

Each platform has its own way of performing emotion: TikTok enables users to stage through filters, audio and acting somehow transforming vulnerability into a visual and immersive form of expression. Twitter on the other hand, squeezes emotion into punchlines and concise statements that activates the brain's reward system, and that causes repetition. Considering daily engagement on both platforms: if the right content isn't dismissed, this might help someone struggling with mental health. Both environments serve similar coping purposes because while TikTok encourages a slower, more reflective emotional performance, while Twitter facilitates rapid validation through brief textual exchanges. This dynamic between self-disclosure and even if is not structured as formal therapy, instant peer response molds digital expression into being therapeutic.

#### Deduction

The research relied solely on publicly accessible posts under mental-health hashtags and excluded private messages or closed communities. Each creator's tag preserves authorship and transparency. Because algorithms influence visibility, the data analyzed represent a specific cultural snapshot rather than a comprehensive depiction of Gen Z's coping strategies. The focus remained on observable interaction patterns— language, humor and engagement rather than private experiences of individual users.

Overall, the findings suggest that generation Z has transformed the discourse around mental health by using digital platforms as collective environments. Through humor— that sometimes can be dark or metaphorical, repetition and shared vulnerability, these users normalize

emotional struggles and challenge stigma. TikTok functions as a stage for emotional storytelling, while X operates as textual exchange that converts feelings into concise, relatable insights. Together, these platforms demonstrate how networked participation can transform personal distress into communal understanding. Such interactions do not replace professional psychological care, they highlight the potential of social media to foster belonging, empathy, and everyday healing practices among young people.

## Reflection

Conducting this digital ethnography changed the way I see social media. At first, I thought of TikTok and Twitter as simple entertainment or distractions, but after spending time observing how people hold space for real emotions. Watching strangers turn anxiety, burnout and generational trauma into jokes or affirmations made me understand how humor becomes survival language for Gen Z. It's a coping method that feels familiar because it's fast, accessible and communal. While collecting posts, also I noticed how easily I related to them: As a Gen Z observer, I recognize that my feed's algorithm shapes my daily mood.

My timeline reflects the content I already interact with, which influences my interpretations. That made me reflect on my own position— not as an ethnographer, but as part of the same generation I was analyzing. It reminded me that research doesn't always have to be distant; it can also be empathetic. I became more aware of how algorithms shape what we see and how they amplify certain moods. The digital loop makes digital expression feel therapeutic, even when it is not therapy in a traditional setting disposed by experts. Largely, without romanticizing the idea of seeking emotional support from strangers rather than professional guidance, this project helped me see how Gen Z reshapes traditional ideas of emotional coping for healing purposes and personal growth.

## References

AbouWarda, H., González-Barrientos, J. A., & Jaidka, K. (2024).

How does an online mental health community on Twitter empower its members?

Journal of Medical Internet Research, 26, e55965. <https://doi.org/10.2196/55965>

Samuel, L., Abdulkareem, M., Habib, A. O., Tafida, M. B., & Ibrahim, M. A. (2024).

TherapyTok for depression and anxiety: A quantitative content analysis of high-engagement TikTok videos. Journal of Affective Disorders Reports, 17, 100621.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38493396/>

@asenaspov. (n.d.). Me vs. me when overthinking again. [TikTok video]. TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@asenaspov/>

@Carlys\_couch. (n.d.). If you grew up in survival mode, peace might feel boring. [TikTok video].

TikTok. [https://www.tiktok.com/@carlys\\_couch/](https://www.tiktok.com/@carlys_couch/)

@chatswithzaina. (n.d.). Sometimes rest is worship too. [TikTok video]. TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@chatswithzaina/>

@goodlocdcharly. (2024, May 12). Being the oldest daughter POV. [TikTok video]. TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@goodlocdcharly/>

@JazzThornton\_. (2024, Apr 8). To anyone struggling tonight, you are not a burden. [TikTok video]. TikTok. [https://www.tiktok.com/@jazzthornton\\_/](https://www.tiktok.com/@jazzthornton_/)

@nurse.john. (2024, Mar 3). If your coping skill is dissociating, congrats—you're basically meditating with extra steps. [TikTok video]. TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@nurse.johnn/>

@ustheremingtons. (n.d.). Apologizing after a heated moment. [TikTok video]. TikTok.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@ustheremingtons/>

@boundariesbaddie. (2024, June 5). I need 48 business hours of silence and snacks. [X post].

<https://twitter.com/boundariesbaddie/>

@drmarie\_mindcare. (2024, Feb 27). Normalize emotional check-ins like weather checks. [X

post]. [https://twitter.com/drmarie\\_mindcare/](https://twitter.com/drmarie_mindcare/)

@grindcultureburnout. (n.d.). Reminder: Rest is productive. [X post].

<https://twitter.com/grindcultureburnout/>

@islandtherapyyy. (2024, Jan 10). Explaining depression to Caribbean parents is like speaking

Wi-Fi to dial-up. [X post]. <https://twitter.com/islandtherapyyy/>

@slowhealingclub. (2024, Apr 2). Healing isn't linear but you're still doing amazing. [X post].

<https://twitter.com/slowhealingclub/>