

**The Phenomenology of Opinion Expression on Social Media: Culture and Human
Functioning**

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Abstract

Social media provides people with an incredible opportunity to express their opinions on an array of important, meaningful life topics. In turn, they experience a wide variety of opinions from other people to which they react and respond accordingly. However, there is mixed consensus in the literature about the nature of social media in relation to how people psychologically handle the multitude of opinions expressed there about personal and relevant topics. Additionally, most of the literature about social media does not include Canada. Therefore, this study is a phenomenological exploration on the experience of opinion expression on social media for young adults in Canada and how it impacts their human functioning – that is, their cognitions, emotions, and behaviours. With much of the literature concentrating on opinion expression about politics, this study focuses on the topic of culture – one that is inextricably fundamental to human nature and inspires a great deal of contention. Using interviews, I analyzed eight participants' responses for themes and meanings about their experiences with opinion expression about culture through their social media platforms, then extracted and expounded on the essence of their experiences in connection to the overall human experience. I found personality/personal values, positive and negative opinions from other people, agreement and disagreement with such opinions, respect for culture and humanity, fostering interpersonal connections, and gender to all inform participants' experience with opinion expression about culture on social media. I also make recommendations for clinical practice and future research to strengthen the findings of this study.

Keywords: phenomenology, human functioning, social media, opinion expression, culture

The Phenomenology of Opinion Expression on Social Media: Culture and Human Functioning

Social media has become a mainstay of interpersonal communication in our postmodern society. It transformed the means, the frequency, and the intensity with which we express our ideas with one another. It gives us another form of access to other people, whether it be a genuine, intimate, calculated, or limited gateway into their personal lives, with anyone anywhere in the world. It also provides an online platform for different individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions to convey their messages to either the general masses or to specific target audiences in a quick and simple manner.

One of the ways through which people communicate with each other on social media is through *opinion expression* – the sharing of opinions by an individual, group, organization, or institution. Throughout the course of a day, people have countless opportunities to disseminate their values and beliefs to others by expressing their personal and/or professional opinions on a variety of topics, as well as arguing against other people’s differing opinions on those topics.

Considering that value systems and social bonds are seminal aspects of a person’s identity, the exposure to and communication of opinions – along with the consequences that come from expressing and arguing such opinions – can shape people’s sense of selves and their functional capabilities. *Functional*, for the purpose of this paper, refers to *human functioning*: the internal, psychological workings within people to produce cognitions, emotions, and behaviours (Hornby, 1990). Such experiences with opinion expression can, therefore, produce adverse effects on mental health, which eventually feeds back into how people in society function in their personal lives and continue to express themselves on social media.

Therefore, all of these factors are the basis for which I sought to undertake the following study and aimed to address the following two-part research question: (a) How do young adults in Canada experience opinion expression on social media surrounding the topic of *culture* (the shared norms, customs, lifestyles, and experiences of a particular group of people based on age, ethnicity, location, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc.); and (b) how do their experiences functionally (cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally) impact them toward expressing their own opinions? I used these questions to illuminate the psychological processes that take place during these interpersonal interactions on social media over the discussion of pertinent, meaningful topics.

I inquired to see specifically how young adults respond to opinions expressed about culture on social media because (a) young adults account for the largest percentage of social media consumption in Canada (Clement, 2020b); and (b) adolescents are not as well-developed as adults. With respect to the brain physiology and consequent cognitive development in adolescents, the prefrontal cortex – the centre of *executive function* for critical thinking and decision-making – is still in the process of maturation (Santrock et al., 2015). It typically does not reach its prime until early adulthood – around ages 18 to 25 years (Santrock et al., 2015). Therefore, the types of decisions adolescents make regarding their livelihoods – including their interactions on social media – may not be reflective of what is appropriate for their circumstances.

On the other hand, the *amygdala*, which dictates emotional processing, fully develops early in adolescence, leading to a surge and domination of emotion over cognitive processing. In addition, peers tend to have a major influence over adolescent decision-making (Santrock et al., 2015). As a result, some of the potential experiences surrounding opinion expression on social

media with adolescents could be attributed to emotionally-charged and questionable decision-making, social contexts, and their amount of social media use (Banyai et al., 2017; Nesi et al., 2016) rather than: (a) the topic of culture; (b) the expression and argument of opinions; and (c) general human functioning.

Additionally, I chose culture as the focal topic because it inspires a host of aligning and contrasting opinions due to its relevant, sensitive subject matter and applicability to all people. Social justice information also trickles down from discussions of culture as many issues of social injustice are inseparable from cultural belonging, affiliation, marginalization, and discrimination. In contrast, much of the focus in the literature surrounding the concepts of opinion expression – especially on social media – centered around politics.

Furthermore, the locations of most of the research in the literature were in several countries aside from Canada. The lack of Canadian research in these areas of opinion expression and social media is surprising, given the relatively large usage rate of social media (67%) among Internet users in Canada (Clement, 2020a) and their high involvement with it, even with regards to politics (Lizee, 2019). Moreover, although the literature highlighted specific cultural groups in different studies, many of the studies did not have a multicultural group of participants. Using Canada as the base for my current study allows for that diversity consideration, as well as the potential to explore how Canada and the different cultures within Canada deal with opinion expression on social media.

Literature Review

Opinion Expression: Perceptions and Contexts

Spiral of Silence

One of the major concepts surrounding opinion expression and its perception is the *spiral of silence* theory (Abril and Rojas, 2018; Back et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2020; Matthes et al., 2018; Soffer & Gordoni, 2018). The spiral of silence theory states that the greater the discrepancy between one's own opinion and the opinions of others (also known as the *disagreeable context*), the greater the likelihood the person in question will not express that opinion (Abril and Rojas, 2018). Abril and Rojas (2018) brought in a systemic view on the spiral of silence theory, looking at opinion expression and its perception on a political level in a country different from a Westernized context.

Colombia is a country where tolerance for dissent is dramatically low and people traditionally resolved their conflicts through violence. As a result, the social sanctions imposed on its citizens from a national level are harsher than those in Western countries. While some local areas in Colombia shifted to a more diplomatic and democratic approach to conflict resolution, its violent history and nationally-imposed social sanctions are still the overarching forces that influence how its people interact among each other when there is disagreement (Abril & Rojas, 2018)

Given this context, Abril & Rojas (2018) surveyed its citizens post-election and performed multilevel modelling analysis to determine whether the disagreeable context, on both a local and national level, changed the way people expressed their opinions. In addition, they looked to see whether individual characteristics – particularly *self-censorship* – played a part in gauging that level of opinion expression (Abril & Rojas, 2018). They found that both of these contexts for opinion expression – disagreement and self-censorship – were significant on the national level, meaning that opinions expressed on a national level carried more importance and had deeper implications for its citizens than those expressed on a local level. Although this study

mainly focused on opinions expressed around elections and may not be generalizable to the political and societal operation of other countries, this study lends a unique social context by which to understand dissent, disagreement, personal abilities to express opinions, and personal preferences regarding important opinions.

Corrective Action

Duncan et al. (2020) provided another example of how opinion expression and its perception depends on the context of agreement (or disagreement). In this article, they combined the spiral of silence theory with the *corrective action* hypothesis, which states that people will express their opinions in order to correct what they deem as wrong from an opposing opinion source (Duncan et al., 2020). The researchers exposed their university-attending participants in the midwestern United States to a fictitious news story on a topic that would spark a personal opinion. Next, the researchers “randomly assigned [their participants] to one of five opinion climate conditions: supportive, oppositional, mixed moderate, mixed polarized, and uncertain” (Duncan et al., 2020, p. 195) in which the researchers then exposed them to polls and comments regarding the topic at hand. The researchers ascribed the supportive and oppositional conditions as homogenous, the mixed moderate and mixed polarized conditions as heterogenous, and the uncertain condition as ambivalent.

There were five main findings from this study: (a) participants exposed to homogenous conditions changed their opinion more than those in the other conditions; (b) participants exposed to homogenous conditions changed their opinion toward the majority opinion in that respective environment (supportive or oppositional); (c) participants undecided in their opinion about the topic changed their opinion more than those who were strong in their opinion; (d) participants who held moderate opinions did not tend to engage with the topic, whether the

environment was supportive or oppositional; and (e) participants who held strong opinions engaged with the topic when the environment was oppositional (Duncan et al., 2020). Soffer and Gordoni (2018) came across similar results in their research but using real-life topics with their Israeli participants. Given these results, however, it is important to distinguish between how much opinion expression is due to the desire to silence oneself and the desire to correct others in the face of opposing opinions.

Other Relevant Contexts of Opinion Expression

Context shapes the ways in which people express their opinions. A study by Li et al. (2019) found that Chinese citizens modified their opinion expression through changing the type of discourse they had with their government in order to receive attention and responses from it. In China, government control is pervasive; despite this, citizens making demands and complaints to the government is a commonplace practice. They deemed traditional methods of communicating with the government more expensive and less efficient (e.g., some concerns were not able to reach the government); instead, the Internet provided them with a more effective, powerful, and cheaper avenue (e.g., online forums) to voice their concerns.

Over time, the Chinese government – at all levels – became responsive to their citizens and used these discussions on the Internet to learn about public opinion. However, given the overarching authority of the government and the ideologies it wanted to disseminate among its citizens for social and political control, it discriminated among the complaints to which they chose to respond. Therefore, citizens manipulated the government into obtaining responses from it by using discourse that reflected these ideologies, which led to satisfying some of their demands (Li et al., 2019). This study demonstrated the adaptability of people to their given

context in order to express their opinions in a manner appropriate to that context (while still maintaining the essence of their opinions).

Matthes et al. (2018) also discovered that the conditions under which a person expresses an opinion dramatically impacts the opinion expression of others, especially when the topic is highly controversial and the targeted people for the opinion are very important to the person expressing the opinion. In addition, studies by Rios et al. (2018), Steen-Johnsen and Enjolras (2016), and Varela-Rey et al. (2018) have all addressed issues of how people express minority opinions in the context of opposition. Their studies showed that “perceived knowledgeability...[of] controversial issues” (Rios et al., 2018, p. 241), *attitude certainty* toward such issues (Rios et al., 2018), *self-limitation* due to the possibility of offending others (Steen-Johnsen & Enjolras, 2016), “fear of being in a minority position” (Varela-Rey et al., 2018, p. 169), and connection to a *reference group* in that minority position (Varela-Rey et al., 2018) all determine a person’s level of opinion expression in the face of an oppositional majority.

Furthermore, Roberts and Norris (2016) identified a cultural component in which gender sets the expectations for how people should express their opinions. Society typically socializes females to be more agreeable than males. The researchers found that even when behavioural expression is the same between males and females, if females had a temporal delay between hearing someone’s opinion (regardless of the speaker’s gender) and expressing their affirmative opinion, observing participants still deemed them to be less agreeable than males who also had similar lags in their response times (Roberts & Norris, 2016). Although time delay may not be the best measurement of responder agreeableness, this study still provides some insight into the expectations for certain people to express their opinions in an anticipated way and the influence of culture toward that opinion expression.

Social Media: Opportunities and Affordances

Social media provides people with the opportunity to share their experiences and express themselves in a variety of ways and through a number of methods and platforms. During the genesis of some of these platforms, George (2006) documented how social media insulated people from the pressures and stresses of the “real” world. In doing so, it provided them with the assurance that they could share certain aspects of their self-identity that would otherwise be considered socially undesirable during face-to-face contact. In addition, it allowed them to become accepted by a global community of strangers existing online. Ironically, however, the information they shared on social media was not private and it put them at risk (on personal, professional, and psychological levels) if their online identity, which many kept anonymous, was somehow revealed in offline and/or in-person contexts (George, 2006).

Riva et al. (2016) also explored the affordances social media gave for people. They found social media provided people with digital space in which they could express themselves in any way they preferred and to the extent they chose. This included the types of connections they wanted and subsequently formed on social media. Furthermore, social media gave people avenues by which they could fulfill their needs (along the lines of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs – physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization) through the exploration of others, the expression of the self, and providing and receiving support for the self and others (Riva et al., 2016). Finally, the researchers found that social media creates three paradoxes of online identity compared to the “real” self: (a) the (de)personalization of human interaction; (b) the multitude of online identities through different platforms; and (c) the blurring of relationship closeness due to the nature of social media (Riva et al., 2016).

Freedom of Expression on Social Media

Emancipation

Miranda et al. (2016) described social media providing people with a vast opportunity for self-expression as the *emancipatory* effect of social media from the restrictions of traditional media (e.g., television, newspapers). According to their research, social media offered fewer *structural* constraints of *authorship* (those who are able to create content), *citation* (availability of sources of information), and *influence* (those who consume and disseminate content) (Miranda et al., 2016). Similarly, it offered fewer *content* constraints in terms of *signatures* (ways of portraying content) and *emotions* (affective nature of content) (Miranda et al., 2016). However, social media had more constraints on *frames* (ways of organizing content), suggesting that while it provided people with freer and more opportunities for expression, the frameworks by which they can do so were actually more limiting than initially believed (Miranda et al., 2016). In some respects, Zhao (2016) found similar results with regard to the diversity of media content expressed online and its impact on how much people expressed their opinions, although there were differences due to the authoritative political climate of China and the cultural component of ethnicity with Chinese people.

Network Heterogeneity

Lee et al. (2014) expands on this concept of freedom found through social media in their study on how people use social media regarding the topic of politics. They conceptualized this freedom as *network heterogeneity* – the diverse wealth of information and connections present on social media regarding a particular topic (Lee et al., 2014). Miranda et al.'s (2016) findings of reduced structural, signature, and emotional constraints on social media can also explain this presence of network heterogeneity. In Lee et al.'s (2014) study, the amount of social media usage

positively predicted network heterogeneity, which also positively mediated how people read, shared, and discussed news on social media.

Opinion Polarization

Conversely, *opinion polarization* – the dichotomization of views on a topic into separate camps on opposite ends of a spectrum – can occur on social media in spite of, or because of, network heterogeneity (Lee et al., 2014). Lee et al. (2014) defined three parameters through which opinions can become polarized on social media (or what they termed as *social networking sites*): (a) partisan differences; (b) ideological differences; and (c) issue differences. They found that network heterogeneity, when mediated by active discussion, was significantly associated with party affiliation and ideological stances, separately. The researchers considered that (de)confirmation bias may be at work to create polarization along partisan and ideological lines. However, differences in issue was not a significant factor, suggesting that the actual topic of discussion may not matter and does not ultimately contribute to or change due to polarization. This means any topic can create polarization on social media, which provides an open window of opportunity for my study using the topic of culture.

Opinion Diversification versus Opinion Polarization

The type of opinion expressed by people can indeed be a result of the type of opinions experienced by those people. Bail et al. (2018) explored how exposure to opinions expressed about a different political party's ideology shaped people's own political opinions. The researchers pitted conservative (Republican) participants in the United States against liberal (Democrat) ideals – and vice versa – that reflected the views of various elected officials and presidential candidates on Twitter. This allowed them to determine whether exposure to opposing opinions will lead to a subsequent diversification or polarization of opinion expression.

They found that exposure to opposing views led to people strengthening themselves within their own personal views, ultimately leading to opinion polarization. This was even more the case for those who aligned with conservative views versus those who aligned with liberal views (Bail et al., 2018). However, there is a huge potential for bias from these results, especially considering the officials and candidates themselves (considering this survey took place between October and December 2017), their personal biases and agendas infused with their political views, and the level of support by the public given to each of them. Nevertheless, there is potential for generalizability of these results to other countries that follow this conservative-liberal continuum such as Canada, although Canada has other parties that fall along such a continuum and Canada's government operates differently from that of the United States.

Communication Quality

According to Han (2018), the way people interact and engage with social media depends on several variables of the author's *communication quality*: "author credibility, interpersonal attraction, communication competence, and intent to interact" (p. 18). He also found that the linguistic elements of social media content also influence their attitudes and responses. Oh (2019) discovered other variables that influence the way people express their opinions online: "race, issue involvement, issue knowledge, fear of isolation, and the revelation of identity" (p. 423).

Social Media versus Face-to-Face Communication

Opinion expression on a topic varies based on which people use social media compared to those who do not use social media and instead use face-to-face communication. Barnidge (2017) examined these differences with regard to how people perceive *political disagreement* – that is, the discrepancy in opinion content among individuals on a politically-charged topic. He

surveyed a number of “social media users and non-users” (Barnidge, 2017, p. 307). He found that those who used social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) perceived more political disagreement than when people interacted on a face-to-face, in person level. Additionally, those who used social media perceived more political disagreement than those who did not. The affordances provided by the social media outlets themselves could explain much of these results due to their heterogenous and emancipatory nature (George, 2006; Lee et al., 2014; Miranda et al., 2016; Riva et al., 2016). This study highlights the importance of perception of disagreement, whether on a social media or face-to-face context. However, Barnidge (2017) also discusses where his study falls short in certain areas, including potential bias through self-report and the level of engagement by the participants with the dissenting opinions.

Social Media and Mental Health

Problematic Social Media Use

Social media, when used inappropriately, can have deleterious psychological effects on its users (van der Velden et al., 2019). Banyai et al. (2017) conducted a study in which they aimed to better capture the idea of *problematic social media use* and understand it psychometrically through an assessment framework. They conceptualized problematic social media use through the lens of addiction as defined by the biopsychosocial model: “salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse” (Banyai et al., 2017, p. 4). They representatively sampled a population of Hungarian adolescents and performed several assessment tools (Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale, and Center of Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale) in order to measure addictive properties, self-esteem, and depression associated with social media use. Next, they compared the results with the frequency of social media use per week by the participants.

Banyai et al. (2017) found that just under five percent of their sample were classified as *at-risk*, meaning that, compared with the rest of the participants, they “showed the lowest self-esteem...the highest level of depressive symptoms and the most time spent on internet and social media” (p. 9). Demographically speaking, most of these at-risk individuals were female, indicating a gender difference. To this point, the researchers cited previous studies demonstrating a difference in the types of addiction to the internet between females (addiction to social media) and males (addiction to pornography) (Banyai et al., 2017). While the researchers were able to account for a large representation of an adolescent population, because they only studied adolescents in Hungary, these results may not be applicable to adolescents in other countries or cultures (Banyai et al., 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to take caution in generalizing such findings to other representative populations.

Traditional Communication

Nesi et al. (2016) also implemented a study on adolescents in the United States to determine other ways social media impacts mental health. The researchers found that adolescents who used more technological (texting and social media) than traditional methods (phone and face-to-face) of communication to interact with their romantic partners had lower levels of *negative assertion* (ability to stand up for oneself during periods of disagreement) and *conflict management* (ability to deal with and resolve conflict) (Nesi et al., 2016). They also noted a gender difference in that the lowered conflict management was only significant for boys. This suggests that social media use may compromise people’s abilities to express themselves over time and handle conflict constructively. Yau and Reich (2018) also discussed how social media usage occupies a great deal of effort from adolescents; however, these past three studies only focused on adolescents. Young adults may approach social media somewhat differently – as the

following studies will show – with respect to their development compared to adolescents (Santrock et al., 2015); therefore, the type of statistics reported may not be generalizable to other age groups.

Emotional Connections

Speaking to this difference between adolescents and adults, Bekalu et al. (2019) revealed that it is not necessarily the amount of social media use that is psychologically destructive as it is the emotional connection a person has to social media. Using adults in the United States as the participants, the researchers measured their health along three axes of outcomes – “social well-being, positive mental health, and self-rated health” (Bekalu et al., 2019, p. 60S) – with the Social Media Use Integration Scale (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013). They found that *routine use* (e.g., “Using social media is part of my everyday routine”) (Bekalu et al., 2019, p. 71S) by the participants was positively correlated with all three health outcomes, while emotional connection (e.g., “I feel disconnected from friends when I have not logged into social media”) (Bekalu et al., 2019, p. 71S) was negatively correlated with the outcomes. One of the benefits of this study is the attention to differences in cultural groups – specifically, “socioeconomic and racial/ethnic population subgroups” (Bekalu et al., 2019, p. 60S). However, this experience of *emotional connection* is somewhat vague – it would be crucial to define and expand upon it in terms of specific emotions and specific emotional experiences.

Exposure to Negative Content

Overall, whether adolescents or adults, the frequency of use, or the type of connection established, people who use social media need to be careful in how they consume it and engage with it. Brown (2018), for example, addressed the need for rising young doctors in the medical field to monitor their social media use. They tended to use social media for both personal and

professional reasons, whether they were absorbing the experiences of fellow professionals or contributing their own experiences through their posts. Experienced medical professionals debated and expressed concern over what would be an appropriate level of social media use with these aspiring doctors, noting that constant exposure to negative (even traumatic) content or expressing high levels of vitriol and negativity over social media can lead to negative drawbacks on the mental health of its users. This article is a brief synopsis of professional advice from experienced clinicians; it does not actually divulge much detail into the functioning of these young doctors or the applicability of such advice to other groups of young adults. However, it does provide some context as to the potential effects of consuming negative content on social media.

Personality

Kim (2018) exemplified how different personality types approached and interacted with social media. Using assessments of identity and the Big Five personalities as put forth by John and Srivastava (1999), he identified four types of people who use social media: (a) those who manage how they are received by others (Impression Management, Type I); (b) those who mostly watch what others do (Lurker, Type II); (c) those who enjoy social media and emphasize building relationships (Enjoyer and Relationship Focus, Type III); and (d) those who focus on social and political issues on a community and global scale (Social Value Orientation, Type IV). He found that the Type IV personality significantly differs from Type I and II personalities separately in the *relational identity* category – that is, how people perceive their connections with others (Kim, 2018). Therefore, people with different personalities will absorb and engage with social media content and interactions differently.

In another study, Lee et al. (2019) demonstrated that individuals who were in romantic relationships approached Instagram posts about potential and current romantic partners differently depending on their dominant personality trait. Whereas individuals with narcissism had positive attitudes toward potential (extraneous) romantic partners with respect to their current romantic partners, individuals with high self-esteem had negative attitudes toward such potential romantic partnerships. In other words, personality traits play a large part in how people view and engage with content and interpersonal interactions on social media.

Back et al. (2019) also offered a personality characteristic that impacts the way people express themselves on social media in a political context. *Rejection sensitivity* (RS) describes how a person absorbs and responds to real or perceived rejection (Back et al., 2019). It operates as a defense mechanism against potential defamation in order to protect their reputation in the eyes of other people. Individuals would, therefore, monitor and restrict their responses based on how sensitive they are to rejection. Back et al. (2019) used “the short version of the RS Scale” (p. 305) by Downey and Feldman (1996) to examine Swedish young people’s opinion expression about politics on social media. They found that scores on the scale’s corresponding rejection sensitivity index were negatively associated with opinion expression, indicating that those who did not fear rejection or adapted strong coping mechanisms along with resiliency to withstand it were the ones more apt to express their opinions (Back et al., 2019). It would be interesting to examine the specific coping mechanisms of these individuals and their states of resiliency, which the researchers did not explore.

Human Functioning

Hornby (1990) proposed an integrative model for effective therapy that combines humanistic elements of person-centered therapy and psychoeducational elements of cognitive

behavioural therapy. In his model, he outlined the *ABC model of human functioning* as the triangulating psychological process among affect, behaviour, and cognition within individuals (Hornby, 1990). He stated that all three components are equally essential to the psychological functioning of the individual and that all of the components are susceptible to external influence. He described the available techniques that could tackle and change any of one of these components in order to impact the other components and, as a result, change a person's psychological functioning as a whole. There are also individual differences with respect to which component most impacts certain people (Hornby, 1990).

Jain (2014) also adopted this conceptualization of human functioning, using the terminology of *attitude* to describe the affective, behavioural, and cognitive components working together to produce people's psychological approach to their world. He presented a three-dimensional model in which each component (ABC) conjunctively operates on either a positive or negative polarity (P or N) to create a specific attitude. He determined there are eight combinations of attitudes, which he termed as *triodes*. For example, if the affective component was negative, the behaviour component was positive, and the cognitive component was negative, this attitude would be ascribed as NPN (Jain, 2014).

In addition, Wilt and Revelle (2015) framed the ABC model in the context of personality trait theory with each of the Big Five personality traits, adding a fourth functional component – Desire (D) – to the model. Taken together with some of the previously examined literature in this paper regarding opinion expression and its perception, this study adds depth to understanding how people absorb and engage with content on social media (Abril & Rojas, 2018; Duncan et al., 2019; Han, 2018). Furthermore, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed., American Psychiatric Association, 2013) offers a psychiatric framework for the ABC model

of human functioning. For example, in the case of depression, there may be problems with concentration (cognition), lowered affect, and decreased psychomotor activity (behaviour), which all severely alter a person's attitude toward life and that person's consequent functioning.

Interpersonal Connections

Quality of Connections: Facebook

Hammond and Chou (2016) examined the impact of Facebook on romantic relationships, finding that intimacy and connection were negatively correlated with Facebook use. This is mainly due to the setup of Facebook: its users are able to publicly share and engage with a multitude of posts, including making observations and critiques of the posts of other people through several ways (e.g., likes, comments, mentions). By frequently engaging with other people (friends, family, and partners) on Facebook, the researchers saw that the connections between partners in their respective romantic relationships deteriorated. Conversely, they found that couples who engaged in more face-to-face interactions with the same people had closer connections (Hammond & Chou, 2016). While this study provides good insight into the quality and proximity of connections among people on social media versus face-to-face interactions, the generalizability of this study to non-intimate relationships and non-Facebook social media platforms is questionable.

Engagement and Perception of Content: Twitter

Toubia and Stephen (2013) discussed how the nature of Twitter influences people to express themselves. Through its character limit and straightforward elements of reading and reacting (likes, retweets, comments, quotes, and (un)follows), Twitter allows its users to be very directive with one another. Two types of utility also arose from Twitter use in their study: *intrinsic utility* and *image-related utility* (Toubia & Stephen, 2013). Intrinsic utility deals with

the immediate satisfaction that people receive based on the direct interactions they have with one another and with the content they post (Toubia & Stephen, 2013). “Image-related utility, on the other hand, assumes that users are motivated by the perceptions of others” (Toubia & Stephen, p. 369). In this study, the researchers determined that while both types of utility are at work when people gain followers, image-related utility is the major reason behind people’s engagement with the content on Twitter based on the number of followers (interactions). In other words, subjective reality is more influential for people than objective reality, which fits well with the philosophies of phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Culture: Antecedents and Influences

Culture and Engagement with Social Media Content

Culture is a key component to the operation and underpinnings of social media use (Rautela & Singhal, 2020; Yates & Lockley, 2018). It determines how an individual perceives the importance of certain content on social media. For instance, Khan and Dongping (2017), in addition to seeking further understanding to how social networking services operate, discovered that people from different countries (United States, United Kingdom, and Australia) engaged more with certain elements of brand content – post volume, day of a post, and time of a post – than others. Rampersad and Althiyabi (2020) also noted that the demographic component of *age* has the most impact on the acceptance of fake news (misleading information).

Culture and Responsiveness to Social Media Content

Han (2018) demonstrated that young and female users, independently, tended to respond more positively to social media content compared to old and male users. This was due to their positive perception of how the author of the content communicated online with them. However, he noted that other research contradicts these findings so as not to generalize them to other

relevant contexts. Reuter et al. (2019) and Zhou et al. (2019) showed that people's perception and use of social media during emergencies varied depending on their country of residence. Ott (2018) emphasized the need to exercise caution surrounding issues of culture and intersectionality on social media. On the other hand, Park et al. (2017) exhibited that cultures can come together over certain social media content such as popular YouTube videos enjoyed by people of differing "cultural values, language, gross domestic product (GDP), and Internet penetration rate" (p. 2).

Culture and Use of Social Media

The nature of social media can determine how people from different cultural backgrounds use and present themselves on it. Dhoest and Szulc (2016) studied how gay men in Belgium, who themselves or their parents were immigrants from other countries, expressed their sexuality on social media (particularly Facebook and dating apps geared toward gay men). This was based on their multilayered, intersectional social and cultural contexts (being geographically distanced from their country of origin and living in another country with different norms and customs). The researchers played on the fact that different social media platforms provide varying degrees of anonymity (with respect to face-to-face interaction) and open-endedness for freedom of self-expression of one's culture.

The researchers found through their interviews that gay men who directly migrated to Belgium (described as *sexual refugees*) were more expressive about their sexuality than those who were born in Belgium and their parents were the immigrants (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016). This was mainly due to the distance between themselves and their families and ethnicities of origin (which tended to hold homophobic views), which, therefore, determined the level of influence their families and ethnicities of origin had over their sexual expressiveness as evidenced by their

social media use (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016). This research provides some insight into how individuals of certain cultures (given the intersectionality of ethnicity, geographic location, and sexual orientation) express themselves on social media.

Methods

Research Design Overview

The research methodology I implemented for this study followed Moustakas' (1994) *transcendental phenomenological approach* to qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There are eight steps in this process of determining, focusing, examining, and understanding a phenomenon as proposed by the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994):

1. Determine the fit of the phenomenological approach to the study.
2. Identify and describe the phenomenon of study.
3. Specify the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology.
4. Collect data from the participants.
5. Analyze and generate themes from the data.
6. Develop textural and structural descriptions from the themes.
7. Report the essence of the phenomenon.
8. Present the essence of the phenomenon.

Throughout this Methods section, I will specify and expound upon which steps of this approach apply to each part of the research process.

Step One: Determine Fit of Phenomenological Approach to Study

A *phenomenon* is an experience shared by a certain group of people; it is something considered worthwhile exploring to gather and appreciate a deeper sense of what happens to people who go through that experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I considered

the research topic of opinion expression on social media surrounding the topic of culture and its functional (cognitive, emotional, and behavioural) impact on young adults in Canada toward their own opinion expression as such an experience. Therefore, this study fit the phenomenological approach.

Step Two: Identify and Describe Phenomenon of Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of young adults in Canada with opinion expression on social media about culture and its functional impact on them toward expressing their own opinions about culture. I focused on young adults because they may respond differently than adolescents; this may be due to their more-advanced development and their possible emotional connection to social media as opposed to their amount of social media use (Banyai et al., 2017; Bekalu et al., 2019; Nesi et al., 2016; Santrock et al., 2015; Yau & Reich, 2018). I used Canada as the place of recruitment due to the lack of Canadian representation about social media in the literature.

I set forth the following operational definitions to conceptualize the phenomenon:

- An *opinion* is a statement that reflects a person's values and beliefs about the topic at hand.
- *Expression* of opinions is an affirmative stance on that person's values and beliefs.
- *Argument* of opinions is an oppositional stance against other people's values and beliefs.

For the purpose of brevity, unless there was an indication that a person was taking an oppositional stance to an issue on the topic of culture, I used expression as the default term to describe that person's stance on the issue. Additionally, following the essence of qualitative research, as I proceeded with this study, these definitions were open to change. The subtopics

open for consideration surrounding culture ranged from any personal, professional, or social subject, with the exception of politics because of its widespread coverage in the literature.

Step Three: Specifying the Philosophical Assumptions of Phenomenology

The main assumptions of phenomenology are that: (a) a group of people share a common experience; (b) they experience the phenomenon consciously; (c) these experiences define the nature of reality for this phenomenon and its true meaning rather than any preconceived notions from outsider perspectives about it; and (d) there is a philosophical rather than empirical analysis of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Part of performing phenomenological research involves *bracketing* – the compartmentalizing of the researcher's own personal experiences and biases away from the study in order to focus clearly on the participants' experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Once I laid the groundwork for my study, I deemphasized those experiences and focused squarely on the participants and their experiences with the phenomenon.

Participants

There were nine participants recruited for the study, with eight remaining participants going forward with the research process and one participant not being able to proceed with the interviews. This falls within the range of the typical number of participants necessary to perform phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used pseudonyms to preserve anonymity (ethical consideration of privacy) (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2017). The following is a detailed demographic description of each participant as they reported to me (age, gender, sexual orientation, location, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status):

- “Emily” – age 26; female; straight; living in Calgary, Alberta; Indian (Southeast Asian); Seventh-day Adventist/Christian; and middle class.
- “Farrah” – age 29; female; straight; has residence in Alberta and currently living in Quebec; Black/Caribbean-Canadian; “Jesus follower who believes in the accuracy of the Seventh-day Adventist church in relating to God”; and low class.
- “Jane” – age 35; female; straight; living in Calgary, Alberta; Black/Afro-Caribbean; Seventh-day Adventist; and low class.
- “Kelly” – age 20; female; straight; living in Chestermere, Alberta; Asian/Cambodian-Canadian; Seventh-day Adventist/Christian; and middle class.
- “Lucy” – age 20; female; straight; living in Calgary, Alberta; Black/Caribbean; Christian; and middle class.
- “Mary” – age 28; female; straight; living in Crossfield, Alberta; White/Canadian; spiritual/non-religious; and middle class.
- “Nancy” – age 28; female; straight; living in Calgary, Alberta; East Asian/Chinese; atheist; and middle class.
- “Vicky” – age 25; female; straight; living in Edmonton, Alberta; Black/Caribbean-Canadian; Christian; and middle class.

In sum, the participants ranged in age from 20 to 35 years old with an average age of 26.5 years. All of them were either from, located, or once lived in Alberta. They were all female and all of them identified as straight. Racially and ethnically speaking, four participants identified as Black and having Caribbean descent, of which two specifically identified themselves as Caribbean-Canadian. One participant identified herself as White/Canadian and one participant identified as herself as Indian. Additionally, two participants identified as Asian, with one specifically

identifying as Asian/Cambodian-Canadian and another specifically identifying as East Asian/Chinese. In terms of socioeconomic status, which I based on a self-reported description rather than a standardized measurement, six participants identified as middle class while two participants identified as low class.

Regarding religious affiliation, three participants identified as Christian, of which two specifically identified as Seventh-day Adventist. Four participants, in general, identified as Seventh-day Adventist or aligned with the Seventh-day Adventist church. On the other hand, one participant identified as atheist while another participant identified as spiritual/non-religious.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

I had prior relationships independently with all of the participants. My personal demographic background – growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist (Christian) church, living in Calgary, and being of Black/Caribbean descent – would primarily explain why most of the participants identify as Seventh-day Adventist and/or Christian and as Black/Caribbean, as well as live in Alberta (mostly Calgary and area). Before engaging in the research process, I advised each of them regarding the voluntary nature of their participation and reminded them not to feel obligated to participate in the study because of our current relationship.

Given my history with these participants, there were many moments where I personally related and connected to their responses on a cognitive and emotional level. In the same token, there were a few moments I disagreed with the stances they took in reference to their experiences. In order to overcome these biases, I bracketed them out as electronic journal entries. I also took time to openly acknowledge to my participants during the interviews when any of the responses resonated (positively or negatively) with me in order to bring illumination and

awareness to such biases. This allowed for some dialogue about the biases and a refocus of the research back on the participants' experiences.

Recruitment Process

My study received International Review Board (IRB) approval on February 23, 2020 prior to commencement of the recruitment process. I recruited young adults ages 18-35 years old living in Canada of any cultural demographic who are active on social media in the past three to six months. I recruited participants through poster advertisement (see Appendix A) on my personal social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).

Demographic Information

Prior to collecting data specific to the phenomenon from the participants, I collected demographic information during the interview, particularly to ensure that the participants are Canada-based and to observe (and honor) aspects of diversity and culture (ethical consideration of justice) (CPA, 2017). I did this through direct questioning reflective of different cultural components (age, location, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status).

Gaining Rapport with Participants

The recruitment poster identified me as a Master of Counselling Psychology student at City University of Seattle, containing a description about my research study (e.g., the effects of opinion expression on social media on young adults) and using non-coercive language (e.g., use of the terms *voluntary* and *consent*) to recruit participants (CPA, 2017). I described the requirements for participation (description of participants), the length of the interviews, the incentive for participation (\$20 Amazon or Walmart gift card), the voluntary nature of participation and participants' ability to revoke consent at any time, and my contact information (using my City University email and personal cellphone number). I also allowed people on my

social media to share the poster with their friends and followers on their social media platforms (e.g., snowball effect). Ethically speaking, social media profiles – especially those that are set to “public” – are already available for public consumption and, therefore, is in line with ethical codes with regard to reaching out to potential participants (CPA, 2017).

Making Contact with Participants

I made contact with the participants through phone and email. I continued to use non-coercive language in our conversations and explicitly outlined the purpose and procedures of my study, particularly through the informed consent form (see Appendix B) that I emailed to them (ethical considerations of informed consent and confidentiality) (CPA, 2017).

Risk-Benefit Analysis

Because I was inquiring about past social media experiences, this study did not put any undue pressure on the participants to monitor or change the content of their present or future interactions on social media. I believe that, taken together with the security measures for storing the data, the benefits outweigh the risks, allowing my research to be ethically sound.

Participant Selection

I looked for young adults ages 18-35 years old living across all of Canada. I aimed to get a broad representation of Canada as much as possible in my sample. These potential participants needed to have been active on social media in the past three to six months and observing expressed opinions on a number of different topics on culture. I selected participants based on responses to the poster advertisement, receiving their informed consent, and scheduling of the interviews – selection was on a first-come, first-serve basis (convenience sampling). Interviews took place between May and August 2020.

Data Collection

Step Four: Collecting Data from Participants

The primary source of data in phenomenological research is the *interview* (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Using interviews provided me with the information I needed concerning the participants' experiences with opinion expression on social media about culture and how it functionally impacted them toward their own opinion expression. Overall, I looked to ask the participants the two general, primary questions that reflect the core of phenomenological inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) and set the tone for understanding the overall experience. I adapted these questions as interview questions for the first interview:

- *What is your experience with seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media?*
- *What affects your experience with seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media?*

Next, I drafted the following research sub-questions that acted as specifiers for the primary questions, delving into the multiple layers that may inform participants' experience with opinion expression on social media about culture. I also adapted as these questions as interview questions for the first interview. In the spirit of qualitative research, these sub-questions were subject and open to change during the research procedure:

1. How do you express your opinions about culture on social media?
2. How does the topic of culture invite you to express (or not express) your opinions?
3. What is happening for/to you cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally when you express your opinions about culture on social media?
4. What about social media that emboldens or discourages you from expressing your opinions about culture?

5. What about the topical content of culture and its affect that emboldens or discourages you from expressing your opinions?
6. What are the fundamental differences for you between expressing opinions about culture on social media and through face-to-face communication?
7. What is the state and proximity of the relationships/connections you have with people with aligning or contrasting opinions about culture on social media?
8. What is your perspective of social justice information on social media?
9. How do you functionally (cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally) respond to social justice information on social media?
10. What is your opinion about a given topic (of choice) of culture?

I interviewed each participant twice, with each interview ranging for 45 minutes to two hours. In the first interview, I asked the two primary questions with the accompanying secondary sub-questions – this gave me the first insights into their experiences with opinion expression on social media about culture. After the first interviews, I analyzed my notes from these interviews, looking for information pointing to the phenomenon and clustering the information into themes (more on this later).

The second interviews were a follow-up, clarification process to the responses during the first interview. I asked them about the fit of the themes I discovered in the first interview to their own experiences to see how well each participant's response encapsulated the holistic phenomenological experience. Additionally, in keeping with the nature of qualitative research, I modified a few of my original sub-questions and drafted some additional sub-questions to ask the participants in those second interviews based on the interesting information and themes I gathered from their responses in the first interview:

1. What are some of the positive experiences you had with opinions expressed about culture on social media?
2. What is happening for/to you cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally when you see opinions expressed about culture on social media? How is it different for posts/opinions you like/agree with as opposed to posts/opinions you don't like/disagree with?
3. What are the fundamental differences for you between expressing your opinions about culture on social media and through face-to-face communication? Does your answer about social media change depending whether communication takes place over direct messaging? Does your answer about face-to-face communication change depending on whether it takes place as one-to-ones or in larger groups?
4. How do you think being female shapes your experience with seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media?
5. How do you think identifying as straight shapes your experience with seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media?
6. How do you think being from/in Alberta shapes your experience with seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media?

Social Media Posts

My other potential source of data was the content of the participants' social media posts from the past three to six months. In order to access this data, I asked my participants for screenshots of their profiles, stories, and feeds from any of their social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to further examine and elucidate the experiences they had with opinions expressed on those platforms through their various interpersonal interactions with other

people. However, this was not a requirement for participation in the study – they were free to decline this part of the study. Consequently, as the study progressed, I decided to forego this aspect and focused squarely on the responses from the interview questions. I did this for the sake of brevity and time constraints; additionally, I deemed their answers from the interviews sufficient enough to address the research question.

Recording and Data Transformation

The interviews took place over the secure e-conferencing platform of Zoom or over the phone. I recorded data through note taking of the responses of the participants during the interviews, taking time to reflect their answers back to them to ensure I best captured the wording and essence of their responses. I recorded one first interview (with Kelly) and manually transcribed her responses from the recording. Participant quotes in the Findings section are a combination of paraphrased and verbatim responses from the participants. I stored the notes on an encrypted file on a USB drive exclusive for use in this study (ethical consideration of confidentiality) (CPA, 2017).

Data-Analytic Strategies

Step Five: Analyzing Data and Generating Themes

Once I collected the data, I proceeded with the process of *horizontalization*: narrowing down the answers to the interview questions to those that refer to the phenomenon and then extracting the meaningful parts that speak to my participants' experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Afterward, I created *clusters of meaning* from this extracted data by grouping the data into specific units and organizing the units into meaningful themes that arose from the participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). This step was reflected in the Findings section of this paper.

Step Six: Developing Textural and Structural Descriptions

The two main components of a phenomenon are the *what* (*textural* description) and the *context* (*structural* description) of an experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Based on my in-depth analysis of the data and the themes that emerged, I wrote both of these descriptions to capture both aspects of the phenomenon. Although I already bracketed out my own views of the phenomenon earlier in this methodological process, I ensured at this point to again reflect on my own personal experiences and make a clear distinction between my experiences and those of my participants. This is particularly due to the personal meaning this phenomenon holds for me – I wanted to prevent as many of my personal biases as possible from informing my analysis of the data. This step was reflected in the Discussion section of this paper.

Step Seven: Reporting the Essence of the Phenomenon

Once I made my textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon, I holistically molded them together to report the essence of the phenomenon – also known as the *invariant structure* (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). In other words, I sought to make as complete sense of the phenomenon as possible and structured the description of it in such a way that it captures an in-depth, comprehensive experience of the participants. This step was also reflected in the Discussion section of this paper.

Step Eight: Presenting the Essence of the Phenomenon

After I reported the invariant structure of the phenomenon, I proceeded to expand upon it even further to fully elucidate the experiences of my participants, suggested implications for human psychology, and connected their experiences to the general experience of being human (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This step was reflected in the Conclusion section of this paper.

Findings

Additional Demographic/Cultural Considerations

Upon analysis of the data, I recognized two other demographic aspects that were crucial to understanding the background and cultural diversity of the participants: religion and race.

Religion came up as an additional consideration due to the religious background and nature of nearly half of the participants. It explicitly informed a couple of the participants' responses. For example, Farrah said:

I post a few things about my faith but not as much. Part of my own fear and bias but I don't believe I am strong in my faith as yet, although some may think otherwise. I let it be known that I am a Christian but it comes with questions that tend to marginalize who I am. I'm more in a transition – I would like to say I am a Jesus follower.

Kelly also added:

If my life was just to live to protect myself...[or] just my family, then what? I live for more than just what is expected of me. I feel like everyone is expected to live for themselves or expected to look out for the people closest to them...[but] I just couldn't stand by and watch someone get hurt. I would rather it be me. This is the thing: because of my religious background, I'm also the type to figure out how can you be most effective with love. Because honestly, people are confused by that concept because they're so used to hate. So how can I also attack this with a way that is standing up for what I know to be true...in a way that lets people know what's up but I also want them to know that your wrong actions don't make you unlovable...People lack love – “real” love: I love you; I want to understand you; I want to stick by you. I'm talking love...even where it's so easy to hate...to figure out what put them in the position to do this in the

first place...I want my angle to be different – like you need to know what’s going on....But like anything, shoving things down people’s throat, they don’t take it well. Same thing with religion...people don’t want to hear it and they’re more prone to it because...they’re just being. That’s just who they are. In the same way, me being who I am, I hope is enough to demonstrate love and kinda get them at the angle where I wanna hear you out.

Therefore, I wanted to see if religion also informed the responses of my other participants. For the most part, however, the content of most of the responses from my religious participants aligned with the responses from my non-religious participants. For example, with reference to their behavioural responses to social justice information, Farrah (a Christian) and Mary (a non-religious person) responded similarly. Farrah said, “I will start having conversations with friends and family members,” while Mary said, “I might message a friend and screenshot the info to talk about it and reflect on it, and see if the friend knows about it.”

Furthermore, during the proposal stage of this study, I initially aimed to hone in on the ethnic component that specifically describes the cultural background behind one’s skin color. However, the issue of race became increasingly apparent, especially for the Black participants, as it specifically elucidated a primary concern with regard to their (and others’) systemic treatment as individuals. Vicky was the first participant to mention such a concern about her experiences with opinions expressed on social media about culture:

It is disappointing because of race wars. I don’t see it in terms of Black and White...I see things in terms of Black and other cultures... [What affects my experience is] disappointment [that] comes from [feeling] “this will never end.”

Consequently, I inquired about this demographic aspect of race in the second interviews.

Experience with Opinion Expression about Culture on Social Media

In response to the first primary question (What is your experience with seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media?), participants' overall experiences varied from polite to hateful. These experiences depended on the specific social media platform (Riva et al., 2016). Their interactions with these opinions largely varied as well, which depended on the passion of the people with such opinions, the content of the topic discussed by those people, and the importance of the topics to the participants.

Emily's response summarized the polite-hateful variation:

Most of my interactions have been good. Most people are polite with how they express themselves on social media. There are obviously people who feel extremely passionate and if I do happen to come across them, then it's not great. I personally choose to not interact with them.

Jane, on the other hand, talked more explicitly to the other side of the polite-hateful spectrum: "I see a lot of hateful comments, to be honest, especially racial." Mary and Vicky both made direct references to the factor of social media platform. "It varies with what platform I am on...With the different platforms I'm on, you get different audiences, different styles of expression, different demographics...It triggers different reactions," Mary recounted. Vicky added:

[My experience is] 70% disappointing, 30% "I agree with this," if I was to round a figure.

It depends on which social media platform. On Twitter, it is spot on with that estimate.

With Instagram, I have more control over what I see, based on who I follow and block.

Participants experienced a presence of negative content about culture on social media (e.g., ignorance of some people, pigeonholing of cultural experiences by some people,

selectiveness of information conveyed by other people, hesitation by some people to express certain information). Nancy encapsulated this experience by saying,

It is hit or miss....I really want to factcheck people. There is not a lot of evidence with people expressing their opinions. I wonder where people are deriving their opinion from. It makes me uncomfortable to try to educate people.

In contrast, participants had a desire to be positive, to promote positivity (especially about culture), and to have positive interactions with others on social media. There was a desire to not engage with negativity, hostility, and extremely passionate individuals on social media. Nancy also spoke to this experience: “Why am I arguing with people? People are telling me that I am right or wrong. I am frustrated. My vibe is that people are being ignorant.”

Participants were very selective and particular with who they interacted and followed. They tended to follow likeminded people and those who promoted positive content (e.g., Black participants following content created by Black people). Farrah said, “I have changed my social circle and social media. I focus on specific podcasts/YouTubers that promote positive Black families.” Lucy also added, “I follow pages ran by Black people.”

Lastly, there was a desire among my participants to educate others and to allow others to educate them – in other words, to inform and be informative about the various topics of culture. In addition to Nancy’s desire to factcheck others, Kelly captured this desire to educate and to learn in her response:

I don’t like social media like that. But knowing that I’m not Black, knowing that there is privilege to who I am as a person...people are almost prone to listening to me so I have to use that and use my platforms in whatever fashion to make sure things are projected out there. That’s almost why I do it even though I just don’t like to post. A lot of people are

uneducated so educate them! Not to say that I know everything either because I don't but I'm in this whole process because we're all kinda learning and that's okay.

Effects on Experience with Opinion Expression about Culture on Social Media

In response to the second primary question (What affects your experience with seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media?), my participants' personality and temperament, (e.g., empathic, sensitive, critical), their own cultural background (e.g., ethnicity, religion) in relation to others (whether similar or different), their own personal experiences (e.g., travelling, work), their personal preferences (e.g., having a desire to learn, their subjectivity or objectivity toward a topic or opinion), their past and present state of mind and environment (e.g., being at home alone, current events), the content and nature of the opinions expressed on social media by other people, and worldly (external to their own personal) experiences (e.g., Black Lives Matter movement, credibility of information on social media) all affected their experience with seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media. Appendix C provides participant quotes that point to each of these themes.

General Opinion Expression on Social Media

Participants expressed their opinions on social media cautiously, carefully, intentionally, artistically, and with a desire to be certain and factual prior to expressing their opinions (Rios et al., 2018). Some participants rarely expressed opinions on social media, preferring to express them face-to-face. Other participants posted on social media more frequently. Participants also expressed their opinions with the intent to bring awareness to cultural and social justice information. Furthermore, their expression was based on their own educational and cultural background.

As examples of these themes, when asked about how she expressed her opinions on social media, Emily responded:

I pretty much spend a while thinking about what I'm going to say or post or, before I actually post it, I make certain that's what I want to do. Otherwise, I prefer to express my opinions with individuals in-person. I very rarely express online/social media.

Jane talked about how she takes caution in her opinion expression:

I have to be very, very careful. I don't want to come across as someone hateful, angry, or bitter. I definitely filter my mind. I respond to posts, comments, [and] repost things that are relevant to me. I only post something that I know I am right. I am expressing facts.

Farrah brought up the artistic angle to the expression: "Definitely through my art...[I] draw."

Finally, Mary discussed how her education encouraged her to express herself on social media, especially to people in her hometown:

How I shared last year or even two years ago would be quite different than how I share now. That is because of education and experiences in my life, opening that education to the world [and] sharing what I know to the world on that platform. There are so many people that I know that have never left my town...I can share something to help those people understand and share that same perspective of things happening in the world. I grew up in the smallest, Whitest town...I really make a point to share stuff about social justice, advocacy, and cultural injustice in both our own communities and globally.

Opinion Expression on Social Media due to Culture

The topic of culture invited participants to express their opinions when there were like-minded people or people who shared their specific culture(s) present – a sense of culturally-

based support was important to them (Varela-Rey et al., 2018). Emily spoke to this theme, stating:

Mostly, it's easier to express your opinions if you know there are people out there that share that similarity with you. That would be the major factor for me – I know that they are going to understand what I'm going say because we have that shared cultural background. For example, if I was making a post about women, if the majority of my social media followers were female, it would be easier to express what I have to say. If they were 75% male, it would be harder for me to express it – I would have to change what I have to say to cater to them so they understand as opposed to saying what I really want to say.

In addition, their desire/need to learn, understand, or express something about culture, whether for positive reasons (e.g., to enjoy, uplift, and empower a cultural group) or negative reasons (e.g., to shine light on injustice and discrimination against a cultural group), also invited them to express their opinions. Mary said:

I think because culture is just so amazing and incredible and different for everybody, it is such an important thing to express culture. Believing in the good of the people, doing good for people, expressing who they are, stop worrying about what everybody thinks, and getting to true authenticity. Culture plays such an important part in the world. To respect and encourage that is so important for people to reach their potential and capacity for self-actualization and being comfortable with who they are. Racism and prejudice get in the way of that because we're so focused on 'our way is the right way.' There is so much beauty under culture and it...[is] so important to express it but it can be scary to express it.

This opinion expression also depended on the receptiveness of the person or audience receiving the opinions. There was a sense to proceed with caution with their expression and sometimes they felt uncomfortable expressing their opinions. Nancy referred to this theme in her response:

When I'm reading posts on Asian culture, I feel conflicted. I can relate to the social media posts but I cannot comment on the posts where they are serious – I feel uneducated to form an opinion because I was raised in a diverse climate. I was not raised in the culture enough. I have a conflicted identity. I feel disrespectful to not comment with an informed, educational stance.

Overall, it was less about the topic of culture itself for participants and more about who was culturally around them and supporting them that led to their opinion expression.

Cognitive Response to Opinion Expression about Culture on Social Media

When participants saw opinions expressed about culture on social media, the content of their thoughts varied based on agreement and disagreement (aligning and contrasting) with the opinions. Cognitively speaking, when these were opinions the participants aligned/agreed with, they sensed support from and connection/similarity to the people expressing those opinions. In turn, they also wanted to be supportive of those people and their opinions. This was especially the case regarding marginalized cultural groups (e.g., Black people in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement) where they recognized their suffering through discrimination and wanted to do something about it.

There was a desire to repost/share the information in order to bring support and attention to that information. The Asian participants specifically had a willingness to learn and do something supportive/helpful with the information being posted on social media. Kelly summed up these themes in her response:

Okay, cool, this is something I can share. This is another point that I can add because I don't know everything. One extra thing I can look into. One extra thing that I can build into discussion. Something I can use to be a better person. It is important to check yourself before you check other people. I guess introspection – it helps me with my introspection. And you can better help those around you once you figure yourself out.

On the other hand, when participants experienced opinions they contrasted/disagreed with, there was a negative reaction that came with various negative thoughts typically in the direction of the people expressing those opinions. To this point, Mary said:

I want to angry-type something and express my opinion. I sometimes get stuck on it. I can't believe someone would say that! Idiot! I find on Facebook that people get into power battles and people just end up getting mad at each other.

Overall, however, there was a desire to be understanding and critically analytical. For some participants, there was some questioning of the self. Emily described this theme in her response:

Because I am aware that being an empath is how I emotionally respond to things I have to question myself. Are these actual facts? Is this true? ...I have to fact check. If I know the person posting it and...how they tend to respond based on their personality, I will factor that into how I see their posts. Because I know that emotionally I can connect with them, I want to make sure that I'm not agreeing or disagreeing based on how they feel.

Emotional Response to Opinion Expression about Culture on Social Media

Emotionally speaking, when participants encountered opinions about culture they liked or agreed with, there was a common positive emotional reaction – mainly happiness, excitement, pride, and hopefulness. Overall, there was a wealth and experience of positive emotions. Lucy specifically cited feeling “happy” and “excited” and, generally speaking, having “positive

feelings.” Vicky noted that this experience mitigated some of her negative feelings, stating that she felt “less anxious and hopeful.”

On the other hand, when they encountered opinions about culture they disliked or disagreed with, there was a common, strong negative emotional reaction across all participants. These emotions were specific and straightforward – mainly sad, angry, hurt, frustrated, irritated, annoyed, and exhausted. Farrah went into detail with her emotions when seeing information about unarmed African-Americans who are murdered by the police. Although this response would fit more with social justice information, she responded to this question with that type of information as her basis for her feelings already at this part of the interview. She described herself as feeling “hurt, angry, anxious, unsafe, sad, depressed, lots of bitterness, tired, exhausted, and overwhelmed.” Nancy also added: “It makes me so mad to see a person comment on a culture that [he/she/they] doesn’t understand and doesn’t agree with.”

Behavioural Response to Opinion Expression about Culture on Social Media

Some participants liked, shared, or posted content about the topic of culture at hand, especially if it was meaningful and important to them. Most of my participants used some form of social media interaction with the aligning opinions (e.g., like, repost, share). Their behaviour showed support for the information and brought awareness/attention to it. On the other hand, two participants did not always use social media interaction – there was a sense of disconnection from social media with them. Emily and Nancy discussed the latter experience in their responses:

If I felt that whatever the post tried to achieve accomplished its point, I like it or don’t like it...I don’t leave comments unless it’s a very light post... But if it is like a serious opinion piece, I keep my thoughts to myself and keep scrolling. (Emily)

If it is for a really strong stance based on values, I will comment on the post and form a protective stance to defend your culture or opinion. If it gets to the point that people comment and comment, it gets exhausting and I just stop...I've been trying to disconnect from social media. (Nancy)

Overall, however, participants found a way to express their thoughts and emotions about the topic, whether it was to express it to others on social media, express it to themselves, or express it through a creative outlet. Lucy described it accordingly: "I don't always repost or share; most times I'll like the post or talk about it with someone." Participants either engaged or did not engage in arguments – it depended on direction of the conversations and the purpose they were going to accomplish. Some participants acted out of impulse (e.g., without further thought) to the opinions; other participants acted out of instinct (e.g., protectiveness of others – especially marginalized people). Mary illuminated some of these behavioural themes in her response:

I'm not one to get into comment wars because they don't really go anywhere. But I have typed out an angry comment and deleted it before posting. I put my phone away for a bit. I don't really do anything. Maybe I should more? Maybe there is a time for it? But I feel it does more harm than good.

Influence of Social Media on Opinion Expression

Social media emboldened participants to express their opinions about culture mainly through internal motivation – whatever content they deemed as valuable (especially culturally speaking), inspiring, important, and comfortable to express. For example, Jane said, "It's what I'm thinking or feeling at that certain moment that I want to express." Conversely, it discouraged participants mainly through external factors: current events; negative or potentially negative reactions from other people (e.g., internet trolls); the possibilities of being attacked (e.g.,

cancelled), dragged, blocked, misunderstood, being wrong, or having potential arguments; and loss of work, indicating potential impacts of such expression outside of social media. Jane also encapsulated this experience in her response: “Sometimes I worry that people get their accounts deleted or blocked. I want to make sure that I am cautious [and] that I’m not coming across as hateful. Sometimes in speaking the truth, people still think you’re being hateful.”

Influence of Culture on Opinion Expression on Social Media

The topical content of culture and its affect emboldened participants to express their opinions through being able to relate to others culturally, having the desire to talk about culture, or having the topic of culture resonate with their values or preferences. Emily responded in regards to this theme: “Just the fact that someone can relate to my culture, even if it isn’t 100%, because we’re human beings and we like to connect to each other.” On the other hand, it discouraged them when other people tried to put one cultural experience over another or tried to pigeonhole a cultural experience. In addition, expression was discouraging due to the controversial nature of some topics surrounding culture, the potential for some conversations around culture to be offensive (Steen-Johnsen & Enjolras, 2016), and participants not knowing enough about a particular culture and, therefore, not wanting to be disrespectful or ignorant (Rios et al., 2018). Mary’s response epitomized this discouraging experience:

You don’t want to be disrespectful to a group or culture. Don’t want to spread something that is untrue. I would never want to be disrespectful to a person of color, coming across as rude or inaccurate. You try to do good but can end up doing bad if you’re not informed or [it’s] based on your delivery of the information. You want to do the good and not the unintentionally bad. Scared to hurt everyone. Such a fine line and can be difficult to manage trying to spread awareness while not hurting people.

Social Media versus Face-to-Face Communication

Social Media: Overall Experience

Regarding the fundamental differences between expressing opinions about culture on social media and expressing them through face-to-face communication, social media allowed for a broader audience reach for expression – a presence of multiple people available to them at once (Miranda et al., 2016). It was less personal and there was a lack of personal connection (Riva et al., 2016). Participants were unable to read the non-verbal elements of communication (e.g., facial expressions, tone of voice). There was a tendency to focus on the posts themselves and not on the people behind the posts. Participants also had to be more careful with what they said (e.g., holding back parts of their true selves/opinions, an understanding that past posts could come back to haunt them) (Steen-Johnsen & Enjolras, 2016). Additionally, there was also a period of waiting (sometimes with nervous anticipation) for people to respond to their posts/comments.

To these themes of experience, Emily said:

It's easy for people to miss all of the in-person elements. But also, when people are expressing themselves on social media, they are usually putting their best foot forward. If I'm trying to express my opinion, it's like I'm censoring myself. It's very easy for people to miss the intention behind your opinion. You're just seeing the post and not the person.

Mary added:

You can get a lot of trolls and a lot of people that hide behind their account and write really hurtful things behind fake accounts...You never know how people are going to react. And it makes it difficult...You can't express tone or body language. Sometimes there are hours between comments and direct messages. Doesn't always provide a genuine connection. It sucks because social media is such a great platform for sharing

issues but when it comes to actually understanding people and the topic, social media creates a block because there is no connection that really happens online.

Social Media: Public Forums versus Direct Messaging

For some participants, using direct messaging changed their answers regarding the fundamental differences between expressing their opinions on social media and expressing them through face-to-face communication. They would rather communicate with people privately than publicly. The one-to-one element of direct messaging made the communication as if it were face-to-face. They could also go into more depth with their conversations and direct messaging allowed for more direct back-and-forth communication (as opposed to a multitude of interfering comments and posts from other people). Emily spoke to these themes: “Because it’s direct, it’s me and the person, so it would be along the lines as if I was interacting with them face-to-face.” Additionally, Kelly said, “On a one-to-one direct messaging, I’d go into more depth.”

For other participants, however, using direct messaging did not change their answer regarding their opinion expression between social media and face-to-face communication. The nature of social media itself (e.g., the absence of real-time face-to-face interaction, an ability to easily change stances on a topic) and the personality/temperament of the participants with respect to social media were the primary determining factors in influencing their expression. Lucy discussed this point: “Online you can just say whatever and be rude or insulting versus face-to-face when [they] have to look into your face and say those things.” Additionally, Mary said: “I don’t think I would change that much whether it’s private or public messaging. No matter what, my intention and my vision remain constant.”

Face-to-Face Communication: Overall Experience

On the other hand, it was much more preferable for participants to express their opinions face-to-face than on social media. It was more personal and more comfortable to them, as well as more natural to them as human beings. They were able to establish more of a genuine connection and have more understanding with the people with whom they were engaging in conversations. They could gauge for any [mis]understanding and [mis]interpretation between themselves and other people. Participants could also have more control over the interaction between themselves and other people. They could watch and pay attention to the non-verbal elements of the conversation. Lastly, there were more opportunities to understand and inform/educate one another within the conversation. Kelly summarized this experience quite thoroughly:

Talking in person is the best! I'm more vocal. You can ask me anything in person. I love to talk in person. ...Like when I'm talking to someone face-to-face, I can read body language really well and I can read people so well that I know where their head is at, for the most part. It does depend on the person though – if they come...with this kind of energy like where they're defensive and very attack-like, I'm not about to talk to you. I want to know that when I'm talking to you, you want to hear what I'm saying [and] you don't just want to hear what I'm saying so that you can fight me (*laughs*).

Face-to-Face Communication: One-to-Ones versus Larger Groups

A couple of participants specifically mentioned their opinions did not change between one-to-ones and groups, although their means of expression/presentation did change in group settings. Kelly said:

Face-to-face, I'm more of a one-on-one person. Groups...[are] more intimidating for me because I don't know what everyone is thinking...My opinion doesn't change but the way I present myself changes. I'm quieter and more of a listener when I'm in a group.

Mary added:

If I had two people at my house or 20, it wouldn't really change what I would talk about or what I would engage in. I think it would really be close to the same conversation. It would be dynamically different because more people would be asking questions, but like I said before, my intention would stay constant in terms of what I was trying to get across. The group dynamic wouldn't change it.

However, for most participants, there were differences in face-to-face communication between sharing their opinions in a group as opposed to sharing them one-to-one. In this case, it was easier to share their opinions in one-to-one settings and they could go deeper in their conversations. Farrah said, "With someone I know, [things] may get deeper. In public, in a large group, [it] depends on who is in that group and it doesn't get as deep in comparison to one-on-ones."

Participants' opinion expression also depended on the group dynamics (e.g., number of people, personalities/temperaments/attitudes of the people, cultural affiliation of those people, opinions expressed by those people). In a group setting, there were more people to account for, navigate through, and understand – opinion expression became more of a layered process than it would be in a one-to-one setting. In such cases, a couple of participants tended to take more of a listener role rather than focusing on expressing their own opinions. Lucy spoke to the cultural affiliation aspect: "If you have people who relate to you culturally in that group, it's easier. And vice versa." And Vicky added:

With a larger group, there's more people I have to navigate and understand. I'm thinking more steps before I'm saying my opinion. I might say a couple things that are your

opinion. But I'm trying to listen to everybody. With one-to-ones, I can do the navigation process quicker.

Social Media and Quality of Relationships

For the most part, agreement or disagreement with opinions did not impact the closeness and proximity of the relationships between participants and the people they interacted with on social media. In the case of any disagreement, there was a mutual understanding or a previously-held connection that existed between the participants and those people. Emily discussed this experience in her response:

Honestly, the majority of people that are on my social media are on there because I met them at some point. The people who I'm actually close with are the people I see in-person....The people who are there – it's not like I don't get along with or haven't met them. I'm just not very close with the people I have on social media. My closeness with individuals depends on whether I see them in person or not. There are certain people that you just are close with mostly because of the quality time you spend with these people – these are the people that you connect with and it has nothing to do with whether I agree or disagree with their opinions.

On the other hand, for some participants, they were closer to people with whom they agreed and more distant from those with whom they disagreed. Overall, however, for the most part, this agreement/disagreement dichotomy did not matter. Farrah summarized the complexity of these relational and (dis)agreement dynamics in her response:

There are people that I follow and agree with in many things. Some of the people I follow are not of the same faith as me...I have a lot of friends that I agree with and they are really close. Most of them have the same faith as me. Some of them that I disagree with

claim to have the same faith as me but I don't really align with them. 20% of the people that I follow I agree with – these are close friends and family. These are people I can count on. With the other 80%, it's all over the place – I agree with them sometimes but we're not close.

Social Justice and Social Media

There was a general sense from participants that the social justice information present on social media may be biased, incomplete, or shared without fact-checking (both on the part of the source and the persons who shared the information). They found such information to be easy to find and widespread. They questioned the motives and agendas behind the presentation and sharing of this information – there was a desire to critically analyze the information and the motives of those who posted/shared it. Emily encapsulated this experience in her response:

It's very easy to find of kind that information on social media. But it can also be very easily geared to present one perspective because social media connects people and there are certain aspects of things that you simplify so you can connect with people. The presentation of social justice information is easier to access on social media but it's simplified so that you can make it easily accessible. I'm referring to statistics or events that happen. In terms of bringing awareness to social injustices, it's very easy to present it but people are going to miss a part of it because they weren't there in the places of those injustices. When you take a picture or record something to post on social media, you're showing it from that lens but you're not showing everything else behind it. With that person who saw it, you're not understanding what that person is feeling or what they experienced when they were there. You're only seeing that side of the picture or

recording. And people can connect to whatever is being seen but they're not actually connecting to the thing that happened.

Cognitive Response to Social Justice Information on Social Media

Participants cognitively responded to social justice information on social media by having interest and paying attention to the information. There was a desire and an awareness among them to respond to the information thoughtfully and mindfully and a desire and request for objectivity with that information. Emily spoke to these desires in her response: "I understand that an opinion is that person's thought about it. The actual information that you're seeing should be objective. People need to be able to process information in a way that works for them."

There was also a desire to want awareness and action brought toward the situations requiring social justice. Mary discussed this desire in her response:

How many times do we have to go through this again? But we have to keep working and keep spreading this and keep advocating. It is always going to be an issue – fighting inequality. But seeing people share such information, we're slowly getting somewhere. How many things have happened that we weren't aware of? The more people share, the more people are aware and the more people can do work about it.

Participants looked to focus the attention of the social justice information outside of social media – for it to not just be a social media discussion.

Emotional Response to Social Justice Information on Social Media

Participants had many negative emotional responses to social justice information on social media. It mainly centered around the social injustices being done and continuing to be done to the different affected groups in society. Some of these emotional responses included sadness, anger, annoyance, exhaustion, and fear. They also expressed intrigue with the social

justice information describing these injustices. On the other hand, there were some positive emotional responses when awareness was brought to the social injustices and actions were occurring to deal with them. Mary expressed this parallelism and dualism of feelings in her response:

If it is something I haven't been made aware of yet, it brings some sadness in reading about it for the first time or seeing it for the first time. It is disheartening. But it does get exhausting and tiring to fight against these people. [However] it is exciting seeing people sharing it – seeing multiple people sharing it.

Behavioural Response to Social Justice Information on Social Media

Participants behaviourally responded to social justice information on social media with some form of expression – for some, it was through posting and sharing the information on social media; for others, it was through talking with friends, creative expression, and actions outside of social media (e.g., community work). For example, Emily said, “I prefer to interact with people on a personal level...If I see something that happens that shouldn't be happening, I won't post it on social media. I prefer to physically, in person, do something about it.” Vicky said. “I [would] cry, write a poem, [and] talk to my friends.” Jane would “post a lot of stuff on the issues.”

In addition, participants usually engaged in research, especially prior to posting about the issue on social media; however, this was not always the case – sometimes they posted impulsively. For example, Lucy responded:

Usually, I'll read about it (open up the post); I probably won't do a lot of research. If I do, only then I would repost; I won't repost over just seeing a small portion – I want to read

for context. I will repost if I gather enough information and think more people should know about this post.

Nancy mentioned, “if they link a reference in the article, I will look it up. I take a neutral stance.”

Farrah was candid about her varied expression:

If I’m angry or sad, I’ll share without thinking. [Other times] I’ll do research. I go out and protest. I will start having conversations with friends and family members but that sometimes doesn’t go down well. I’m trying to check myself.

Participants’ Own Opinion about Culture

When participants gave their opinion about a given topic of their choice about culture, they all stressed the importance of acknowledging and promoting diversity and culture in the world. In the same vein, they were tired of the hatred, exclusionary tactics, and discrimination toward certain targeted, marginalized cultural groups. Appendix D contains a list of their opinions on several different aspects of culture but all aligned under this theme of emphasizing diversity and shunning marginalization.

Positive Experiences with Opinion Expression about Culture on Social Media

Some of the positive experiences my participants had with regard to opinion expression about culture on social media included affirmation and appreciation from people toward them for sharing certain information about important topics (e.g., race), positive reactions/responses (e.g., increased awareness and education, admission of bias, apologies for racism, curiosity, desire to learn) to the information shared by participants, and a sense of community and support from like-minded people and people who share in the participants’ own culture.

For example, Lucy said: “I reposted something on my story about passive racist remarks and one of my white friends apologized because he didn’t realize he was being racist toward me.

That was the one thing I really noticed.” Jane also said: “[I’m] happy to find like-minded people and requests for people to follow me [on my private account]. These people don’t know me but support what I do.” Emily mentioned: “I think people affirming you, leaving comments that are appreciative of you for sharing. Most of that is because I don’t share much so when they see something they’re like, ‘Thank you for that.’” And Kelly added: “It’s nice to know that I’m not the only Cambodian in the world...it’s nice to know like, wow, they have a whole community. It’s...[great] to see something I can relate to and...see Cambodian beauty portrayed out there.”

Influence of Shared Demographics on Opinion Expression on Social Media

Being Female

Some of my participants brought up the biological nature and gendered role of being female – having a sensitive and nurturing temperament, which leads to an openness of mind and willingness to research/be knowledgeable about important and relevant issues. Both Emily and Mary summed up this experience in their responses:

Obviously, we’re a little more sensitive to the whole appearance-wise stuff. Which is why it’s important to make sure we’re being thorough with the research and being factual about stuff. You always want to identify areas that could potentially be weaknesses and countering it with facts. (Emily)

I think women in general are softer in general in their approach and I think because women naturally fall into that caring/nurturing role that they can understand [and] be more open to different viewpoints. (Mary)

In contrast, Nancy was the only participant to explicitly describe her experience as empowering while also attesting to the negativity that arises with that experience:

It's really interesting that more women are rising up to speak on their perceptions and the issues that have transcended the past few months/years. More of that movement [due to] strength and confidence. You see more positive women empowerment than before because, back then, there were not women empowering each other. In our community, we're transitioning from suppressing each other (not for me, but friends of mine have encountered these types of incidents). Now, we see on social media, there is that trend of women empowerment. More feministic approach. Obviously, we women have to be supportive of our peers. Unfortunately, we have a lot of suppression still going on. I empower my peers – social media has displayed that trend. But in the comments, you see women bashing each other anyway. You still see that negativity.

There was also a tendency for people to undermine and overlook the participants, both as people and their opinions. Two of my Black participants and one of my Asian participants brought up an intersectionality component (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016; Ott, 2018) with regard to the dynamics and negative experiences of being a Black woman. For example, Vicky, a Black woman, discussed being unable to separate “Blackness” from “womanhood” – that they must be taken together in order to fully understand her experiences as a woman:

If these females are Black, as a Black woman, you are taught to analyze everything from a young age. Some of those steps are unhealthy (judging yourself before giving yourself a chance to see things for what they are), but others are healthy (helps with understanding and empathy). You're trained to see things from every angle. I can't separate being Black from being a woman and this is apparent when I talk to White women. When White women are being addressed, they are being addressed as a woman. When Black women are being addressed, they are addressed as Black – as their skin color.

Kelly, an Asian woman, also emphasized this experience in her response:

I think being female and being someone who's not Black is also my privilege because females who are Black get it worse than me. Even though I get it bad, I don't get it as bad as them. Yeah, there are disadvantages but Black females are being treated the worst – least respected, least valued, and just horrible. And if anything, they're seen as reward for something. It's sad and it's sick, to be honest.

Taken together, there was an emphasis surrounding Black women receiving some of the worst treatment from in society – being heavily discriminated, mischaracterized, and misunderstood by society.

Identifying as Straight

There was an acknowledgement of privilege from my participants for identifying as straight and a recognition that it made expression of their opinions easier for them. Sexual orientation was not a major – or, at least, a conscious – factor in shaping their experiences of seeing opinions expressed about culture on social media. They did not feel the effects of marginalization, consistently see the information about, or have constant conscious awareness of problems as members of the LGBTQ2AI+ community deal with in such experiences. However, they placed a major emphasis on humanity and everyone deserving equal, fair treatment, regardless of sexual orientation. Mary summarized these themes in her response:

I think that being straight comes with a lot of privilege and a lack of experiences in ways of being viewed differently and being marginalized. Being straight, being White – there's a lot of things that I've never experienced...[or] felt. That privilege piece comes into play because I don't even know what those experiences are. It is genuinely harder to resonate with different cultural experiences because a) you haven't experienced them and b) you

can't even identify the things you haven't experienced – you wouldn't even think [of it] because it's not on your radar. It's hard for straight people to have empathy. Really not knowing. It takes effort to really understand such cultural experiences. Never had to even think about it. Don't even know how to remotely consider something different.

Nancy also added:

Obviously, there is privilege being heterosexual. I haven't experienced the threats that others have experienced. Being trans, being homosexual, being part of the LGBTQ community – they are perceiving threats from others. There is a shift for more inclusion but [it's] still so hard for them to face the pressure to make that change off acceptance. Especially in the Asian community, we frown upon it... We need to learn and accept. There are still other cultures that don't approve of it. Lot of threats – really unfortunate. We want to be an ally but it's hard to practice. I'm trying to help my friends who are LGBTQ – trying to stir up the allyship. But it's hard to have the community accept them. It's a constant battle – I can't even help them because I feel useless in a way.

Being from/in Alberta

Some participants acknowledged the cultural milieu of Alberta (e.g., small-town, farming/agricultural, White, conservative, money-focused, biased against Indigenous people) and recognized its influence on some people (e.g., narrow-minded views of White Albertans, racist remarks directed toward one of the Black participants). Mary, being born and raised in this traditional Albertan culture, spoke to this experience in great detail:

I think in general that Albertans are very conservative and very narrow-minded and have a very strong White viewpoint. And also, the culture of Alberta – outside of Calgary and Edmonton, we have small towns, farming communities, agricultural, prairie White folk. I

think that people in Alberta don't really venture out, generally speaking, and leave the farm and leave the area they grew up in and are raised in one way – working hard and making money...it influences them in a bad way and they only see it that one way. It's really hard for those people unless they intentionally venture out and explore. It's really hard when you've only seen one way. Living in this little bubble of conservatism.

However, being from/in Alberta was not necessarily impactful to most participants' own experiences. Other national or global influences, both culturally similar and different to Alberta, informed their own experiences. For example, Jane said, "What I see on social media really doesn't have anything to do with Alberta. It's about what is happening all over the world." Moreover, they were able to maintain and forge their own identity (e.g., holding on to their own culture, cultural diversity in Alberta, "traditional" Albertan culture not conscious in their minds).

Lucy described it this way:

I think because I've held onto my culture and background, it hasn't changed anything. But I think being friends with the majority [White people], I've seen more things directed toward my race and seeing how their opinions have been shaped toward me. It hasn't changed anything for me but those around me because the racism has been directed toward me.

Discussion

Textural Description of the Phenomenon

Participants experienced the presence of network heterogeneity (Lee et al., 2014) due to the variety of opinions expressed about culture by other people on social media. Conversely, the experience of this opinion expression (along with the content of the opinions themselves) occurred along a dichotomy of positivity and negativity based on the content of those opinions

and the participants' own values and philosophies on life (including those specifically about culture and social media). This is all reflective of both opinion polarization through this dichotomization of the opinion content into positivity and negativity (Bail et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2014), as well image-related utility through such perspective-informed experience (Toubia & Stephen, 2013), respectively.

Participants' experience also occurred on a functional – cognitive, emotional, and behavioural – level. On one hand, when they encountered positive content/content they agreed with or negative content/content they disagreed with, generally speaking, they cognitively and emotionally responded accordingly with positive or negative responses, respectively. This discovery bolsters and broadens the findings in Brown's (2018) study about the impact of exposure to negative content on social media and generalizes her findings to the experiences of young adults outside of the medical profession.

Participants' cognitive and emotional responses then informed their behavioural responses based on how they aligned with the opinions expressed by other people. In other words, the affective (A) and cognitive (C) components of their human functioning were the gateways through which they experienced opinion expression. This, in turn, influenced their behaviour (B) (Hornby, 1990). In terms of their actual responses, however, when participants encountered and experienced negativity in both their emotions and cognitions, they aimed to respond positively in their behaviours, reflecting an NPN attitude as outlined by Jain (2014) and the additional functional component of desire (D) as outlined by Wilt & Revelle (2015).

Opinion expression about culture on social media tended to be more discouraging than encouraging to participants with regard their own opinion expression. This was especially because the nature of social media allows for the expression of a multitude of different opinions

(Miranda et al., 2016; Riva et al., 2016), the perception of disagreement (Barnidge, 2017), and some sensitivity to rejection (Back et al., 2019). However, there were several encouraging components that arose out of personal values and having a community type of support, likely alluding to their focus on relationships and orientation toward social value (Kim, 2018).

Participants also appeared to approach their experience with social justice information on social media more powerfully compared to their experience with opinions expressed about culture in general. Their responses – both ideologically and functionally – were stronger and more focused, which appears to operate along with the corrective action hypothesis in concert with the spiral of silence theory (Abril and Rojas, 2018; Back et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2020; Matthes et al., 2018; Soffer & Gordoni, 2018). More specifically, it aligns with the fifth finding of Duncan et al.'s (2020) research where those who held strong opinions engaged more with a topic when the environment surrounding that topic was oppositional. Although there were elements and contexts that were discouraging to expression (Matthes et al., 2018), it did not necessarily stop them from expressing their opinions. And especially in the contexts of social justice, they sought to bring correction to the possible wrongs in either the portrayal of social justice information or the actual injustices themselves (Duncan et al., 2020).

All participants preferred face-to-face communication to voice opinions about culture over using social media. The numerous interpersonal dynamics of conversations and interactions mattered to them such that they preferred one-to-one, face-to-face connections over any of the other styles of communication, particularly due to the depersonalizing factor of social media (Riva et al., 2016) and the increased quality of relationships attained through face-to-face communication (Hammond and Chou, 2016). The differences in perception of disagreement

between social media and face-to-face may also play a role in swaying this preference (Barnidge, 2017).

These interpersonal dynamics, on top of the participants' abilities to assert themselves and manage conflict better over face-to-face communication, confirms and adds layers (an adult perspective) to the findings of the Nesi et al. (2016) study. Interestingly, social media did not appear to stop the participants from managing any conflict that arose, even though this conflict management was better for them over face-to-face communication. This also speaks to the non-significant differences in conflict management for females between technological and traditional methods of communication (Nesi et al., 2016).

Structural Description of the Phenomenon

A combination of internal and external factors created the context by which participants experienced opinion expression about culture on social media. Internally speaking, this included their cognitive and emotional states (Hornby, 1990; Jain, 2014; Wilt & Revelle, 2015) along with their personalities (Back et al., 2019; Kim, 2018; Lee et al., 2019). Regarding the external influences, their cultural background (specifically gender, race, and ethnicity), personal circumstances, events in the world, opinions expressed on social media, social media itself, and the people with whom they interact affected how they absorbed other people's opinions and expressed their own opinions (Khan and Dongping, 2017; Rampersad and Althiyabi, 2020); Reuter et al., 2019; Riva et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2019)

Many of the cultural issues brought up by the participants centered around race and ethnicity. They reflected recent events related to culture and social justice in their answers (e.g., murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police and the ensuing Black Lives Matter movement, displacement of Africans in China during the COVID-19 pandemic) (Burke et al.,

2020; Hill et al., 2020). There was a heightened sensitivity among participants toward cultural and social justice issues since the murder of George Floyd. They also told me how important it was for me to be doing such a study during such times.

Invariant Structure of the Phenomenon

Participants' experiences with opinions expressed about culture on social media and its functional impact on them ultimately appeared to depend upon six factors: (a) their personality/personal values; (b) the positive-negative dichotomy through which they experienced other people's opinions; (c) their agreement or disagreement with those opinions; (d) respect for culture and humanity; (e) fostering interpersonal connections; and (f) gender. The personalities and values of the participants seemed to determine their perception of positivity or negativity of the opinions expressed by other people about culture on social media. In turn, these opinions impacted the thoughts and emotions of the participants, which subsequently reflected in their behaviours, including their own opinion expression. This experience reflects some of the findings in the literature with regard to how personality influences perception of the content and the opinions expressed on social media (Back et al., 2019; Kim, 2018; Lee et al., 2019).

Participants desired to be well-informed over matters of culture and social justice, especially before posting on social media. Knowledge and education seemed to be pivotal to how they approached these matters, which reflected in their personal values. This finding is reflective of Rios et al.'s (2018) study where participants wanted to be perceived as knowledgeable before expressing their opinions on controversial matters. Yamamoto et al. (2016) identified *skepticism* as a personality characteristic that influences opinion expression, which also appeared to fit in with the themes of how my participants interacted and engaged with information on social media.

Agreement and disagreement with opinions expressed about culture on social media by other people were key factors in how participants functionally responded to opinions but not necessarily how they connected with or related to others. Interpersonal connection mattered greatly to the participants, whether on a microscale of their own interpersonal relationships with other people or on a macroscale of global, intercultural understanding and appreciation across groups of people. For some participants, the divergence between alignment to opinions and connection to people reflected in their perceptions toward people who did not share in their cultural identities (based on demographics). However, participants supported those different others as human beings, asserting that others should not experience discrimination because of their distinctive cultural identifications.

Overall, there was a deep appreciation in my participants for other cultures and a focus on emphasizing humanity. Their functional responses both to culturally-related opinions (in general) and social justice information (more specifically) greatly reflected this appreciation with their desires to learn and support people of other cultures, especially marginalized cultures. This aspect of the participants' experience adds a more general and serious element to the findings in Park et al.'s (2017) study where participants of different cultures and demographics came together and showed commonality/unity over a particular topic of interest (in this case, culture).

Finally, the demographic/cultural factor of gender (being female) most influenced how participants experienced and interacted with opinions expressed about culture on social media. This partially supports Banyai et al.'s (2017) study in terms of female inclination toward social media, although I would not classify my participants' use of social media as problematic, at-risk, or addictive. These findings also add another contradiction to Han's (2018) study – indeed, young and female individuals do not always respond positively to information (e.g., opinion

expression) on social media. On the other hand, the participants recognized how their traditionally marginalized position created a disadvantage for them in terms of how others perceive and treat them (Roberts & Norris, 2016). However, they noted that their gender's characteristics provide them with a foundation to be impactful through educating themselves and having empathetic understanding.

Conclusion

Strengths of this Study

This study provided an illumination of what seemed to be unconscious, rarely mentioned psychological processes behind a person experiencing opinions expressed on social media. Implementing the ABC model of human functioning presented the opportunity to discover and make direct connections between external, interpersonal, and systemic experiences on social media and internal, intrapersonal, and psychological processes of cognition, emotion, and behaviour. Additionally, the use of culture as the topic allowed for the exploration of diversity and another controversy-creating topic aside from politics, as well as shed light on some of the types of content that may affect people in a meaningful way (positively or negatively). Furthermore, I was able to have a fairly diverse racially/ethnically group of participants, which captures some of the essence of the Canadian cultural landscape.

Limitations of this Study

While having all of the participants share some of the same demographics (female, straight, Alberta-based) was advantageous in capturing a phenomenological experience, I was not able to account for the multitude of other demographics and diversity of cultures (e.g., other genders, sexual orientations, religious affiliation, socioeconomic status) in my research. This unfortunately takes some of the depth away from the results and the conclusions drawn from it.

Of course, as this study focused on young adults in Canada and the topical content of culture, it is important to use caution in applying these findings to people of other demographics and nationalities, as well as to other relevant topics in which people express their opinions. I also did not use a standardized measure for socioeconomic status, which potentially decreases the validity of the use of that demographic in this study.

Additionally, since philosophical values inform phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994), there may be some bias present (e.g., my own demographical/cultural background and consequent experiences in relation to my participants, my personal experiences with opinion expression on social media, my personal views on issues of culture and social justice and how to go about addressing them) in my analysis of the data, in spite of controlling it through bracketing. There was also fatigue and burnout on my part as the researcher, which may have led to a few missing elements during the gathering and analysis of the data. However, readers and potential researchers may be able to pick up on some of these details from the findings and use them for future research.

Although I did my best to capture the participants' responses through notetaking, I did not record all of my interviews. Admittedly, this was a lapse of judgment on my part as I did not remember to do so after going through more than half of my first interviews. After this realization, while I did record one interview to retain as an example of my interview process, I decided to not record the rest of the interviews for the sake of procedural fidelity across all participants. As a result, I may have missed some important details from the participants (both verbal and non-verbal) and the participant quotes I reported may not be as accurate.

Alternative Explanations

Referring again to the philosophical basis of phenomenological research, it is possible to interpret the data I collected in other ways that deviate from my own analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). For example, there was the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic in the beginning of 2020 (Government of Alberta, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020) and the Black Lives Matter protests that spread globally in May-June 2020 after the murder of George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Hill et al., 2020). As stated in the Findings and Discussion sections, the participants reflected these events in their responses to the interview questions. However, it is possible that some of their experiences specifically arose from and pointed to these events rather than a more general experience of opinion expression on social media about culture. As a result, the phenomenon in question may be more about their experience with opinion expression on social media about culture in the wake of life-changing, potentially traumatizing events, the experience of which may have been different if I collected most of the data prior to the occurrence of such events.

Implications for Clinical Practice

Since opinion expression on social media specifically around culture showed to be impactful on human functioning in this study, it behooves clinicians to give more credence to this experience as a part of the overall assessment and exploration of an individual's mental health. It is possible for clinicians, when examining a person's presenting concerns, to overlook the influence of social media with regard to how individuals perceive and functionally respond to other people and their opinions.

It is also important to promote and exercise cultural competency and humility, watching for the contexts in which culturally-diverse individuals have interactions with people on social media – especially when those contexts are intercultural (Oh, 2019). They may feel marginalized

or discriminated due to their experiences on social media, which could explain some of their problems and mental health challenges that present themselves functionally. In particular, it is vital to attend to the cognitive and emotional aspects, which may not exhibit on a conscious, mindful, or outward level and, as a result, go undetected. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the findings, their behaviours may not always reflect their cognitive or emotional states (Jain, 2014).

When dealing with culturally diverse individuals, it is important to comprehensively understand and engage with their perspective within their personal, cultural, and intersectional contexts. Broom et al. (2019) discussed this issue in their study of health care workers and professionals providing care to cancer patients from different cultural backgrounds.

Unfortunately, the patients experienced more of the differences between their cultures and the overarching Westernized culture of the health care system rather than a focus on the aspects of diversity that make their cultures unique compared to Western culture (Broom et al., 2019).

Therefore, cultural competence and humility is key to understanding the mental health challenges that people experience, especially with respect to social media.

van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2013) also discussed the role human functioning plays in conjunction with culture, adapting the ABC model to the concept of culture shock with respect to individuals' culturally-based responses to intercultural experiences. Srivastava (2008) adds two cultural components to the ABC framework, using a different type of "D" (*dynamics of difference*) and including an "E" (*equity and environment*) as a means of encompassing the needs and issues for multicultural individuals. Taken together, it is necessary to explore the phenomenological perspectives of culturally-diverse individuals regarding their culturally-influenced experiences to elucidate and remediate their mental health concerns.

Possible Future Methodological Considerations

Future research could implement other methods to analyze the content of expressed opinions in order to obtain a more detailed understanding of how opinion expression impacts human functioning and mental health, on whole.

Quantitative Research Consideration

Chatzakou and Vakali (2015) detailed a method using Web 2.0 platforms to comb through the texts of sentences and paragraphs of social media posts, break them down into sets and orders of words (*n*-grams), and zero in on specific parts of speech (e.g., adjectives, adverbs, intensifiers, negators) that elucidate sentiment. The platform then analyzes this sentiment using either:

- An *opinion-mining approach* that assigns scores to the source text based on a set of lexicons.
- An *affective analysis* that predefines a set of primary emotional words, assigns secondary emotional words to those primary emotional words, and scores certain emotions based on the frequency of the primary and secondary emotional words that appear in a text.

Either approach may be done through an unsupervised lexicon analysis on a computer program, a supervised lexicon analysis in which the machine assigns new information (testing data) based on past information (training data), or a hybrid approach that combines both unsupervised and supervised techniques by reducing the amount of input training data and decreasing strict reliance on lexicons (Chatzakou and Vakali, 2015). Although this consideration could allow my study to have a mixed method through adding a quantitative analysis, such a type of analysis somewhat strays away from the essence of phenomenological research. Therefore, I could consider this method as a future, follow-up study with a more quantitative emphasis on

understanding the content of expressed opinions of the participants. In this case, I could use their own social media posts, which was the part of the data collection process I abandoned in favor in the interviews.

Mental Health Assessment Consideration

While this study discussed the impacts of opinion expression on social media on young adults' mental health from the standpoint of general human functioning (cognition, emotion, and behaviour), it would be worthwhile to explore in more detail the specific mental health concerns that may arise as a result of this phenomenological experience. For example, Escobar-Viera et al. (2018) discussed how passive and active social media use predicted depressive symptoms in Reddit users. Future research using psychological assessment tests and instruments for mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, dissociation, trauma, psychosis, compulsion, and somatization (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) could provide an additional boost to the findings of this study, especially for clinicians looking to trace connections between experiences on social media and specific mental health concerns for their clients.

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Appendix A

Poster Advertisement

I am a Master of Counselling Psychology student completing his degree at City University of Seattle.

You are invited to participate in the following research study:

ARE YOU CURIOUS ABOUT HOW OPINIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?



This is a research study on how opinion expression about topics of culture on social media affects the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours of young adults (ages 18-35) in Canada.

Interviews will last 1-2 hours.

Your participation and information will be held confidential.

Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to revoke your consent at any time without penalty or consequences.

You will be given a \$20 gift card for Amazon or Walmart as an incentive for participating.

If you are interested in participating in this study, contact Thompson Robin @ 403-919-4521 or tfrobin@cityuniversity.edu

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form



School/Division of Arts and Sciences

CITYU RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study:

The Phenomenology of Opinion Expression about Culture on Social Media

Name and Title of Researcher(s):

Thompson Robin

For Student Researcher(s):

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert Roughley

Department: Division of Arts and Sciences

Telephone: 403-919-4521

City U E-mail: tfrobin@cityuniversity.edu

Program Coordinator (or Program Director):

Dr. Robert Roughley

Key Information about this Research Study

You are being invited to participate in a research study.

The researcher will explain this research study to you before you will be asked to participate in the study and before you sign this consent form.

- You do not have to participate in this research.
- It is your choice whether or not you want to participate in this research.
- Your participation is voluntary and you can decide not to participate or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or negative consequences.
- You should talk to the researcher(s) about the study and ask them as many questions you need to help you make your decision.

What should I know about being a participant in this research study?

This form contains important information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Take the time to carefully review this information.

You are eligible to participate in this study because you are between 18 and 35 years of age; live in Canada and are active on social media within the past three to six months.

You will be in this research study for approximately 6 months, which will terminate on September 1, 2020.

About 10-15 individuals will participate in this study.

To make your decision, you must consider all the information below:

- The purpose of the research
- The procedures of the research. That is, what you will be asked to do and how much of your time will be required.
- The risks of participating in the research.
- The benefits of participating in the research and whether participation is worth the risk.

If you decide to join the study, you will be asked to sign this form before you can start study-related activities.

Why is this research being done?

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to research how social media psychologically affects the abilities of young adults in Canada to express their opinions on topics surrounding culture due to its relevant, sensitive subject matter.

Research Participation.

You will be asked to participate in the following procedures:

- Two 1-2-hour interviews over a secure video platform (e.g., GoToMeeting, Zoom) and/or over the phone. The first interview is to gather an initial sense of how you are affected by opinion expression about culture on social media. The second interview will be a clarification process after analyzing your initial interview.
- **Voluntary** access to your social media profiles and feeds via your own personal screenshots that you would send to me to examine posts surrounding the effects of opinion expression about culture on social media.

I understand I am being asked to participate in this study in one or more of the following ways (initial options below that apply):

- Respond to interview questions over video conferencing and/or phone; Approximate time 1-2 hours.
- Voluntary access to social media profiles and feeds via your own personal screenshots.

You may refuse to answer any question or any item in verbal/messaging interviews, written questionnaires or surveys, and, you can stop or withdraw from any audio or visual recording at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.

Are there any risks, stress or discomforts that I will experience as a result of being a participant in this study?

I/We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. However, there may be strong emotional feelings (e.g., sadness, anxiety, anger) that may arise from strong opinions and discussions surrounding elements of culture. In the event that you need support, you will be provided with a list of distress and counselling services that you can access in your local area.

Will being a participant in this study benefit me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your participation in this research. However, possible indirect benefits may include a better understanding of yourself through

reflection on your opinions on culture. Information from this study may benefit other people in the future regarding how they psychologically process information on social media.

You will receive a \$20 Amazon or Walmart gift card (your choice) for your participation in this research.

Confidentiality

I understand that participation is confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the faculty researcher or student researcher, his/her supervisor and Program Coordinator (or Program Director) will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means.

Steps will be taken to protect your identity, however, information collected about you can never be 100% secure. Your name and any other identifying information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from data collected as part of the research study. The results of this study will be published as a thesis and potentially published in an academic book or journal, or presented at an academic conference. To protect your privacy no information that could directly identify you will be included.

All data (the questionnaires, audio/video tapes, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer discs, any backup of computer discs and any other storage devices) are kept locked and computer files will be encrypted and password protected by the researcher. The research data will be stored for five years (5 years). At the end of that time all data of whatever nature will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Signatures

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject.

My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research study at any time. I further

understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

I have been advised that I may request a copy of the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand that I will be asked to pay the costs of photocopy and mailing.

Participant's Name: _____

Please Print

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Thompson Robin

Please Print

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

If I have any questions about this research, I have been advised to contact the researcher and/or his/her supervisor, as listed on page one of this consent form.

Should I have any concerns about the way I have been treated or think that I have been harmed as a research participant, I may contact the following individual(s):

Dr. Robert Roughley, Program Coordinator (and/or Program Director), City University of Seattle, at Suite 120, 1040 7 Ave SW, Calgary, AB T2P 3G9, 587-880-4143, robbier1@cityu.edu.

This study has been reviewed and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of City University of Seattle. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the IRB at:

City University of Seattle

521 Wall Street, Suite 100.

Seattle, WA, 98121

IRB@Cityu.edu

Appendix C

Participant Quotes on Effects on Experience with Opinion Expression on Social Media

Theme	Example Quote
Personality and temperament	<p>“I am a very emotional person. I would consider myself an empath. It is very easy to connect with someone on an emotional level. If someone is feeling something, I can feel that, even if I haven’t experienced that. When people express certain opinions, and they are very strong ones, I tend to almost internalize what they’re feeling. If they are angry, upset, or sad, I’m going to feel that. That’s why I don’t engage as much with those situations. I am aware that it does impact me.” (Emily)</p>
Cultural background	<p>“Majority of my friends and family are Black. Whenever I see stuff like that, I think of them...I try not to turn away from it anymore. But it’s like hard to watch and see. But it’s like I have to because I need it to empower me. You know some people are desensitized to it but I’m the type to like not to look at it but know that it’s happening because I can’t because my body physically hates seeing people in pain.” (Kelly)</p>
Personal experiences	<p>“I worked with a lot of South Korean teachers as staff, as well as White teachers in Alberta. When I’ve worked with people who are like me [Caribbean-Canadian], we were either musicians or custodians. Is that the only job available for them? I don’t think so. But that’s my own experience. Who I’ve worked with affects my experiences on social media.” (Farrah)</p>
Personal preferences	<p>“I have to take everything with a grain of salt. Is it a reputable news account or is it a very famous person? I have to look it up.” (Nancy)</p>
State of mind and environment	<p>“Two years ago, I would have a different feeling or expression than I would now. That varies with my own life experiences with the world and culture and how that has changed for me in how I viewed different social justice issues in the world. The smallest thing like looking at social media can affect me like being at home by myself and reading the</p>

	intensity versus being out doing something and just scrolling through. Different stages in my life, awareness, experiences in my life affect me on a deeper level rather than who is sharing the post.” (Mary)
Content and nature of opinions expressed	“You can’t underestimate the damage that those expressed opinions have on a person’s psyche – both myself and others. It can affect anyone. With this whole Black Lives Matter thing going on, it causes a lot of feelings – everyone’s gone crazy over this movement. As a Black person, it does affect me. You don’t want to see your own people getting killed. It makes me feel like Black people need their own social media platforms – our own Facebooks, Instagrams, YouTubes – for positive upliftment. We’re always bombarded with negative images.” (Jane)
Worldly experiences	“As much as I want to be knowledgeable and educated, a lot of mainstream media is essentially catered to having people approve of it or that it sounds so misleading; therefore, people don’t question the media outlet. I am so tired of the blatant news media, in general, such as the amount of the news relayed onto social media.” (Nancy)

Appendix D

Participant Quotes on their Own Opinions about Their Chosen Topic of Culture

Quote
<p>“I feel like each element of culture (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age) is important. One is not more important than the other. That’s why I can’t just pick one topic of culture. It’s like asking me my favorite color – I like all of them. I may like one thing one day and another thing a next day. Same with culture. For instance, someone may do something sexist and, as a result, gender is important for that day. If someone discriminates you because of how you look like [referring to ethnicity], that’s what I focus on. If someone puts you down for being a young person, I have to let them know. All aspects of culture are important – I’m not just one thing and not the others. They all make up who I am.” (Emily)</p>
<p>“I believe there is not enough multicultural stories in the children’s books that our kids read – specifically Black characters as main characters. That also ties into that there is not enough people of color being educators – not in universities, but in elementary, junior high. ... Children need to see people of color teachers – and specifically Black male teachers – to feel safe and see themselves in such positions. When I saw my first Black teacher in grade 5-6, I wanted to do better and be seen by her. I never thought that I could be a teacher – that I wasn’t smart enough to be one. Children need to see themselves in the people that teach them.” (Farrah)</p>
<p>“My opinion on Black Lives Matter: it’s good that people are aware but at the same time, people need to know it’s not just a trend. “Black lives” isn’t just a trend. When this movement dies down, are people going carry forward the same thing? All of this marching and protesting is in vain if people are going to return to their same lives.” (Jane)</p>
<p>“I believe in pushing people to embrace their own cultures because I know it changed me and made me appreciate my culture more when I back in high school. There’s a sense of pride where it’s not like, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m so different from you, etc.’ It’s like, ‘Wow, I’m really proud to be who I am. There is some uniqueness in that. And it’s not something I’m shunned for but something that I am praised for.’ Like to be praised for my culture? Never have I ever. By my peers? That was huge. I loved it. I love being able to share my language and being able to demonstrate the uniqueness of that. And also, not feeling like it’s something superior but it’s something we all do and we all like to share with each other. Because I wanted to learn about each other’s cultures too. So, I encourage that - it creates a really different environment where you gain a certain sense of self-confidence. I feel like it can really build a person up. I wish we created an environment where people felt safe to embrace that. I think that’s why HBCUs are so significant.” (Kelly)</p>
<p>“What was going on with Black people in China due to COVID-19. I don’t have a strong opinion other than how does that make sense and why do they need to be a scapegoat? I don’t think it was right for that to happen and that they have to sleep on the street. There are other ways to go about it instead of putting up signs to not serve Black people and kicking them out of their apartments. This situation could be handled much better.” (Lucy)</p>
<p>“My deepest opinion is that culture is so amazing and incredible and worth celebrating all of the time. Culture is what makes people amazing and authentic and genuine and beautiful. Nothing more that I love than being in their home and sharing a meal and having them share their interests. I feel culture deserves to be spread everywhere. What culture can do is</p>

incredible: it can change lives and perspectives. People can ground (knowing who you are and being comfortable who you are), re-find (someone was adopted away from their culture and reconnecting with the roots), and enhance (learning more about culture and become a more well-rounded person) themselves in culture. It can bring out so much. I hate that culture is silenced and discouraged.” (Mary)

“Sometimes I don’t feel that cultural! I want to talk about the Asian culture but I don’t know if I can talk about it. In the US, there is a huge rise of this Asian cultural representation because of this rise of having the perspective of not wanting to be in the shadows anymore. After COVID-19, I feel a lot of influx of hate-related crimes. When I see it on social media, it’s really sad to see this hatred being stemmed and broadcast. When you see that type of hatred, I feel like I can’t voice an opinion because you’re so far away from there in Canada. I can’t form an opinion because I don’t have that stance or knowledge. For example, there are hate crimes in Vancouver because this virus has caused an influx of racism against the Chinese community – [like] they all eat bats – and because of mainstream media’s disproportionate coverage. People don’t have all of the facts about where the virus comes from. There is shaming. Negative videos being circulated. No factual basis to defend the culture because I am far away and don’t have the information. I’m nervous of the backlash. It’s great that social media is providing a light to these situations but most of these posts clearly have a certain type of tone being broadcast and no neutral tone. Obviously, there is a negative stance/tone that they want to showcase. I am selective on what I digest of Asian culture. People need to provide a more neutral stance of what they want to emulate. I can understand the anger but it is unfortunate to have that negative tone in which we have to ‘hunt them down.’ [There is an] element of trickiness.” (Nancy)

“I’m mostly disappointed in other people of color and how they treat Black people. But Black people also mistreat other people of color and I am also disappointed in that. My disappointment is the bottom emotion because I am too tired to feel anything else [e.g., anger, frustration, sadness]. I am tired.” (Vicky)