

**Online Shaming and Life in the Public Eye: Navigating the Grey Zones in the
Politics of Social Disapproval**

Céline Kamar

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By: Céline Kamar

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Examiner

Dr. Greg Nielsen

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)

Dr. Valérie De Courville Nicol

Approved by: _____

Dr. Kregg Hetherington, Graduate Program Director

October 2021 _____

Dr. Pascale Sicotte. Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

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Céline Kamar

Smartphones and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) have become omnipresent in Western societies. A public social media profile can reach a global audience, but the opposite is also true, a public social media profile can receive comments from all over the world. Should a social media user emit a post or statement that goes viral for being controversial, they will be subjected to a wide array of responses ranging from approval to disapproval to denigration (Ronson, 2015). A tension lies in the contemporary and cultural tendency to experience social disapproval as degrading, and this thesis will undertake the exploratory challenge of examining if and how a distinction can be made between expressing a difference of opinion and commenting in a way that puts down others for not meeting one's approval. To do so, the following study conducted an emotional discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kleres, 2010; De Courville Nicol, 2011) of 219 tweets, displaying varying tones and intensities, in response to statements from Quebecoise singer-songwriter Safia Nolin. Combining my analysis with an interdisciplinary emotions-oriented approach (Armon-Jones, 1988; Hochschild, 1983; Thoits; 1989; Freund; 1990; Scheff, 1990; Davis, 2012; Feldman-Barret, 2018), I used the work of De Courville Nicol (2011; 2021; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c) to study the links between social disapproval, contemporary anxiety, feeling rules, and socio-emotional norms. In my analysis, I present the finding that Safia Nolin's statements display signs of social, generalized, and separation anxiety. I then expand on the argument that the tools to counter those anxieties were embedded in audience members' advice, as users systematically oriented the singer towards the feeling rules of positive relationality for social anxiety, positive realism for generalized anxiety, and positive individuality for separation anxiety.

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to those brave enough to be themselves. Safia Nolin, thank you for your art, vulnerability, and resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Cultural Context

The communications and technology sectors have undergone exponential growth over the last three decades. The rapid developments and innovations in these sectors have added a new layer to bullying practices (Pitchin & Hinduja, 2006; Pitchin & Hinduja 2015), as the omnipresence of smartphones and social media in Western societies gradually paved the way for the emergence of cyberbullying. As an umbrella term that encompasses derogatory name-calling, online shaming, cyberstalking, and cyberharassment, cyberbullying can take many forms (Public Safety Canada, 2015). Anyone with Internet access can engage in it, just like anyone can be a victim of it. According to the General Social Survey, in 2014, 17% of Canadians aged 15 to 29 experienced at least one form of cyberbullying (Hango, 2016).

While some use social media to cyberbully, others use it to raise awareness on the psychological impacts of being cyberbullied. In Quebec, some students and celebrities use social media to educate out such harmful practices. For example, Oceane Lavoie, a student from Abitibi, posted a Facebook video in which she discusses her experience as a cyberbullying victim (Parent-Bouchard, 2017). Focusing on a message she received that encouraged her to take her own life, Lavoie walks the viewer through a fictional and emotional scene where she acts on that message and leaves her friends and family to discover her body.

Lavoie's desire to highlight the offline consequences of cyberbullying is shared by many Quebec celebrities who also use their online presence to spread a similar message. Coeur de Pirate, Safia Nolin, Marilou Wolfe, and Catherine Dorion are examples of public figures who use their notoriety and platforms to discuss the real and psychological impacts of cyberbullying (Radio Canada, 2014; Cassivi, 2018; Friend 2018; Allard, 2019). These celebrities share several

characteristics as women who actively go against the status quo. Some choose to opt out of their industry's unofficial dress codes, others openly criticize sexism and heteronormativity, and all have received hateful messages for their actions and opinions. They all experienced cyberbullying. They received messages across different social media platforms that attacked them and their choices.

2. Research Problem

In this thesis, I build on the already established literature on shame, celebrity, and contemporary anxiety, to explore how social disapproval is expressed online and what those expressions reveal about a society's social and emotional norms. Specifically, my primary interest is to study how audiences react to celebrity behaviours that they deem oppositional or resistant to the status quo. The different ways in which audiences react and communicate with a celebrity following a controversial moment in popular culture often sheds light on the boundaries of appropriate versus inappropriate ways of being, thinking, and feeling. That is why I adopt Holmes and Redmond's (2006) view of celebrities as narrative agents that reflect a given society's social norms and views on morality, beauty standards, and gender performance. In what follows, I present an overview of the case study that I put forward and outline the questions that frame my research.

Safia Nolin, a Quebecoise singer-songwriter of Algerian origin, is at the center of my research. The case study I introduce is centered around Nolin's experiences in the Quebec music industry as an artist who has had several controversial moments throughout her career. In this project, I will only be focusing on events between 2016 and 2018, when Nolin made national news and sparked important debates about the expectations and standards to which the general public holds celebrities. Nolin's self-presentation and emotional displays were often at the heart

of these conversations, as they challenged some of the unofficial norms of the music industry. These conversations took place across different communication and media platforms – i.e., newspapers, radio, television, social media, etc. – and ranged in tone from supportive, to critical, to outright rejection. In those two years, Nolin’s choices and self-presentation received significant attention, often including harsh comments, non-constructive criticism, and disrespectful statements in which audience members shamed and denigrated the singer.

My goal is to examine the specificities of how social disapproval is expressed by studying the Twitter threads of audience members reacting to Nolin’s statements and self-presentation. Nolin is a public figure known for regularly expressing her vulnerability, making public statements condemning shaming practices, and advocating for greater inclusion and respect for diversity. The self she chooses to share with the public critiques a celebrity culture focused on body image and hyperfemininity, and encourages body positivity and alternative forms of femininity. Overall, the artist's experiences will shed light on the social norms, feeling rules, and expectations embedded in the comments she receives, and pave the way for the following questions: *(1) How does Safia Nolin embody emotional resistance in her self-presentation? (2) How is social disapproval expressed in the comments Nolin receives? (3) What are the feeling rules embedded in the reactions Nolin receives, and what do they reveal about public displays of vulnerability and sadness?*

3. Thesis Outline

I begin this thesis with a socio-historical contextualization of social media’s emergence and evolution, and a presentation of the purpose, impact, and rise in popularity of the Twitter platform. I then examine the link between social media platforms and interpersonal communication by exploring the boundaries and rules around mediated interpersonal

communication – or, online communication. I conclude my socio-historical chapter with a detailed description and contextualization of the Nolin case study described earlier. From there, I go on to present the theoretical frameworks that guide my thesis. To do so, I combine different bodies of work to offer a multi-disciplinary understanding of social disapproval at the intersection of social media, celebrity, shame, and anxiety. I begin with an overview of how sociologists of emotion view emotions and understand emotional resistance. I then offer an extensive account of the key works of both shame and celebrity theorists. I end my theoretical framework chapter with a consideration for how celebrity theorists assess the celebrity persona, study the dynamics within the online celebrity-audience relationship, and navigate the social, emotional, and gender norms that frame the celebrity experience. This is followed by a detailed description of the methodological framework I put forward. My methodology consists of blending two approaches, narrative emotions analysis (Kleres, 2010) and emotional discourse analysis (De Courville Nicol, 2011), and situating my framework within the broader sphere of thematic analysis that Braun and Clarke (2006) outline. Finally, I present the results of my analysis as well as their implications and contributions to the scholarships on shame and celebrity.

SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Social Media

A. Social Media: Definition, Emergence, and Evolution

The origins of the term ‘social media’ are difficult to trace as literature on this topic yields different results (Bercovici, 2010). While scholars have not identified who coined ‘social media’, they have narrowed down the term’s emergence to the late 1990s. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of internet-based applications that reflect the principles of Web 2.0 and allow for the free-flow of user-generated content (UGC). Web 2.0 emerged in 2004, as users of the world wide web moved from simply consuming internet content – a characteristic of Web 1.0 – to engaging in the creation of that content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Aghei, Nematbakhsh, & Farsani (2012). In other words, the shift to web 2.0 pushed the boundaries of the world wide web in terms of access and publishing. Under web 1.0, information was exchanged in a unilateral way as only businesses and select people could post content, and users were limited to consuming it (Aghei et al., 2012). From Web 2.0 onwards, the scope broadened as content contribution and user interactions became a two-way street. Producing and interacting with content became a collective and collaborative endeavour as web 2.0 allowed anyone to post, create, and edit content. This is where the second term in Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) definition of social media – user-generated content (UGC) – comes in. UGC refers to the publicly available content that end-users create and publish and social media. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2007), for content to be considered ‘UGC’, it should meet the following three conditions: 1) be uploaded onto a publicly

accessible website or social media application, 2) demonstrate a certain level of ‘creative effort’, and 3) be the product of personal work – i.e., not content that individuals are paid to create.

Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) identify six types of social media: collaborative projects such as Wikipedia, blogs and microblogs like Twitter, content communities similar to YouTube or Daily Motion, social networking sites like Facebook or Myspace, virtual game worlds similar to World of Warcraft, and finally, virtual social worlds such as Second Life. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) ground these six categories in two sets of interdependent concepts: self-presentation and self-disclosure, and social presence and media richness. Upon examining various self-presentation and self-disclosure theories, they argue that it is important for social media users to control how they are perceived. In this view, social media are virtual platforms that individuals can use to construct their identity and shape others’ impressions of them. The ‘social presence’ and ‘media richness’ dimensions of Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) understanding of social media focuses on the intimacy and immediacy of a given platform. As the authors highlight, a platform’s social presence level ties directly into how weak or strong the communication is amongst its users. The stronger the communicative bond, the higher the level of social presence, and vice versa. Social presence can either be low, medium, or high, and self-presentation is limited to being either low or high.

It is important to note that as the web continues to develop and evolve, so do the definitions and uses of social media. In 2021, researchers Aichner, Grunfelder, Maurer, and Jegeni published a paper presenting social media’s evolution over the last twenty-five years – from 1994 to 2020. Of the many trends that they highlight, three stand out. The first trend highlights the evolution of the terminology surrounding online platforms. From 1997 to 2002,

online platforms were referred to as ‘virtual communities’ (Aichner et al., 2021). As these platforms evolved and their communicative and networking dimensions grew, the term ‘social networks’ emerged. This term came along in the 2000s and was particularly popular between 2005 and 2009 (Aichner et al., 2021). It was only in 2010 that ‘social media’ became the primary way of referring to social websites and applications. The second trend assesses how researchers refer to those who use social media and presents 2010 as a turning point in that line of terminology as well (Aichner et al., 2021). Researchers went from discussing ‘people’ to studying ‘users’, which shifted the focus from online interactions and connections to online anonymity and the sharing and generating of content (Aichner et al., 2021). This happened alongside another notable shift, as both in academia and the industry, the terms around the dissemination of content moved from ‘exchanging’ and ‘uploading’ to ‘sharing’. Finally, the third trend highlights the versatility of what the web can offer. Research has shown that social media users see online platforms and applications as multifaceted tools that can serve a wide range of purposes (Schau & Gilly, 2003; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Laing & Khattab, 2016; Aichner et al., 2021). Socializing with others is at the heart of modern technology, whether it is connecting with friends and family through social networking sites, meeting like-minded individuals through blogs and microblogs, or forming virtual communities through content creation and virtual social or game worlds. There are different ways to illustrate this social dimension of these platforms. For example, one can use social media for romance and flirting by browsing through dating websites and applications like OK Cupid or Tinder. Alternatively, one could take a more business-oriented approach and use the web to interact with companies and brands or look for jobs and optimize professional networking. Finally, social media platforms

have also played crucial roles in protests and revolutions, as they allowed like-minded individuals to come together regardless of geographic boundaries. In the Arab Spring¹, for example, Facebook and Twitter were at the center of numerous revolutions across the Middle East.

Since its emergence, social media gradually became more accessible to the general public. They began occupying more space in our lives, to the point where it is now said to be an extension of us (McLuhan, 1994; Kuss, 2017). Social networking sites serve many different purposes and play an important role in influencing and impacting social issues. However, social media platforms are not equal in their ways of propagating, intensifying, and distributing messages. The following section will focus on the emergence and specificity of Twitter, the platform I will use to collect data for this thesis.

B. Twitter: a Multifaceted Platform

Twitter emerged as a social media website in 2006 but only gained popularity in 2009, when it became one of the primary sources of information surrounding Michael Jackson's death. On that day, June 25 2009, Google searches for 'Michael Jackson death' were high and led to a system failure (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011). It took the Google search engine 30 minutes to fix the technical error, but the information displayed remained incorrect. While the algorithm confirmed that singer Michael Jackson had died, it represented British author Michael Jackson's

¹ The Arab Spring is the name given to the mass of anti-government protests that swept the Middle East between 2010 and 2012. Social media was central to the organization of these protests and revolutions (Al Jazeera, 2020).

year of death – 2007 instead of 2009. This inaccuracy led to numerous social media users shifting from Google to Twitter for live updates (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) describe Twitter as a micro-blog, the middle ground between traditional blogs and social networking sites. The authors characterize Twitter as a platform with medium to low degrees of social presence and media richness, and high degrees of self-presentation and self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Put differently, Twitter makes it easier for its users to share their thoughts and videos at the click of a button – this is known as the act of ‘Tweeting’ or emitting a Tweet. In tweeting freely, users can shape their image as they see fit, whether they are conscious of this process or not. The public information we provide online allows others to form an idea of our identity and who we are. For example, a Twitter user can be strategic and control how they are perceived by picking and choosing what they tweet about, or they can tweet as they please without much consideration for how the image they give off. Ultimately, Twitter is more than just a social media website or mobile application. It is a communication platform dedicated entirely to interacting with others and sharing one’s thoughts and opinions via tweets of 280 characters maximum (Twitter, n.d.a).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) emphasize that micro-blogs such as Twitter stand out compared to other social media platforms. They first use the concept of ‘ambient awareness’ to frame the Twitter experience. In this context, ‘ambient awareness’ reflects the idea that to understand the Twitter user, we must look at their tweets holistically and not individually, as

there is usually an overarching story or rationale linking those tweets² (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011). Twitter's uniqueness also stems from its 'push-push-pull' form of communication (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011). On Twitter, users may 'follow' one another, meaning that if one person tweets something, the other person will see it on their Twitter '*feed*' – i.e., the user's main page where they can see their activity along with the activity of those they follow (Twitter, n.d.c). Therefore, the first type of 'push' stems from '*following*' others because when we follow a user, their activity is pushed onto our feed (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). The second type of 'push' is linked to Twitter's '*retweet*' option, i.e., the act of retweeting another user's tweet onto your profile or feed (Twitter, n.d.c). In doing so, the retweeted tweet will be 'pushed' onto a broader range of people via a snowball effect. The last leg of this form of communication is the 'pull' factor (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Since Twitter limits statements to only 280 characters³ per Tweet, users may have to do extra research when they come across a Tweet that sparks their interest or requires fact-checking. In Kaplan and Haenlein's (2011) words, tweets or 'micro-blogging messages become similar to traditional banner ads, which equally try to motivate users to click on an embedded link' (p 107). This motivation to read up on a given topic represents the 'pull' factor that the authors discuss. A final way that Twitter or micro-blogs differ from their social media counterparts lies in what Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) call 'virtual exhibitionism

² When Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) wrote their article, Twitter threads had not been created yet. In 2017, Twitter developed the 'thread' feature, which allowed for a user to group a series of tweets together, in the order they desire, making it easier for one to tell a story through several tweets (Twitter, n.d.b).

³ Up until 2017, Tweets were limited to 140 characters. Twitter increased the limit to meet a demand from their non-anglophone users who argued that not all languages could be as concise as the English language (Twitter, n.d.a).

and voyeurism'. As previously mentioned, users often consider how they may be perceived by their followers when engaging in online activity. This is in line with the self-presentation and self-disclosure theories that Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) explore. In doing so, Twitter users craft an online identity that simultaneously consumes and produces content, hence the terms 'virtual exhibitionism' and 'voyeurism'.

Put together, the factors mentioned above illustrate why micro-blogs attract users and are growing in popularity. The Twitter platform is polyvalent and is used in many ways. Twitter's potential in the business world was the first obvious use of the platform. Scholars were quick to notice Twitter's positive impact on marketing and advertising strategies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Edosomwan, Prakasan, Douame, Watson, & Seymour, 2011). Twitter also gained fame in activist circles, as users saw its potential with organizing protests and offering their version of events instead of that of the media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Howard & Parks, 2012). An early example of this is when Iranian authorities shut down mobile communications in the 2009 elections and blocked popular social media platforms to cover up police brutality videos against protesters. Twitter was still in its early days and not as widespread as it now is, so it did not get blocked (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Activists took that opportunity to document the violence they had witnessed and managed to share their stories on a global scale (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). In that sense, Twitter can also be a refuge where one finds a community and support system online (Williams, 2015). Based on algorithms set out to give the user a personalized Twitter feed, the platform becomes home to numerous subcultures. Feeds differ significantly depending on which 'branch' of Twitter one is exploring. Examples of different Twitter 'branches' include LGBTQ+ twitter, academic Twitter, feminist Twitter, right-

wing Twitter, and many more. With time, politicians also saw potential in Twitter and its algorithms and started using it to connect with their citizens and target audiences. This form of mass communication goes beyond geographic boundaries and allows a relatively open line of communication (Howard & Parks, 2012; Williams, 2015). Politicians tweet, and users can reply to and interact with those tweets, which can be both beneficial and detrimental to a public figure. The 2016 American elections testify to the power of Twitter in terms of reaching out to voters and branding one's political values and beliefs (Oates & Moe, 2017).

The former president of the United States, Donald Trump, has shown that catchy hashtags and bold claims from public figures can attract a lot of attention and, at times, lead to dire consequences. The 2021 storming of the United States Capitol illustrates this issue well, as rioters interpreted Trump's tweets against the election outcome as an encouragement and green light to proceed with their violent protest at the Capitol Hill (Tan, Shin, & Rindler, 2021). One could argue that this incident was the peak of Trump's complex and controversial Twitter history – sending out Tweets as official statements, spreading misinformation about Coronavirus pandemic, inciting a riot, etc. (Ratner, 2021). Indeed, his online activity in the days leading to the Capitol Hill protest was the tipping point for many social media founders. It led to numerous platforms banning Trump from online activity for inciting violence (Denham, 2021), with the bans ranging from temporary to permanent. Twitter was among the platforms that imposed a permanent ban on Trump's account, which sparked discussions around the formal and informal regulations that coexist on the platform.

To recap, Twitter is a multifaceted tool whose purpose and functionality are shaped by what a given user wants it to be. For example, one can use Twitter to catch up with celebrity

gossip, keep up with politicians' updates, remain updated on activist narratives, or even engage in academic networking. Since this platform is mainly centered around one's thoughts and opinions, formal and informal regulation of what one says in tweets is frequent. Formal regulation follows Twitter's 'rules and policies' guidelines, whose goal is to ensure safety in their virtual space (Twitter Inc, 2019). In broad terms, their rules aim to protect users against hateful conduct, hate speech, and the spread and organization of illegal or violent acts (Twitter Inc, 2019). Informal regulation relies on a logic of reporting (Twitter Inc, 2019). The more users report a tweet, the more likely it is for Twitter to review its content and sanction it accordingly. These forms of regulation have sparked debates around freedom of speech and the rules that govern online communication, which I will address in the following section.

2. Mediated Interpersonal Communication

A. Masspersonal Communication: Definition and Emerging Practices

Mediated interpersonal communication - i.e., via phone, e-mail, or video call - refers to all verbal and non-verbal exchanges that occur between two or more people, regardless of their relationship (Miller & Steinberg, 1975; Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2014; Wood, 2015; Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor II, 2018; O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018). It is characterized as a form of communication that is central to maintaining relationships and that involves mutual influence, in the sense that one's words or actions could have a significant impact on others (Beebe et. al, 2014). Interpersonal communication implies that the person you communicate with is a "unique human being" and not someone you must talk to for a specific reason, such as a salesclerk or

cashier (Beebe et. al, 2014). There is a general understanding that when engaged in interpersonal communication, whether face to face or online, there is an implicit set of culturally specific rules to abide by (Tolman, 2011; Beebe et. al, 2014). In a Western context, some of the norms governing face-to-face interpersonal communication include respecting others' privacy, not criticizing others publicly, and expressing oneself effectively and appropriately in terms of time and place (Argyle, Hendershon, & Furnham, 1985; Wilson & Sabee, 2003; Beebe et. al, 2014).

The rules of interpersonal communication differ when moved from the physical to the virtual sphere as their focus shifts to being mindful of one's words and how they may impact others in cyberspace (Shea, 1994). The communication that takes place publicly on mass communication channels - e.g., newspapers, social media, radio, etc. - is referred to as masspersonal. Publicly available Tweets and Facebook posts are examples of masspersonal communication, as they bring together elements of mass and interpersonal communication (Adler et. al, 2018). Put differently, masspersonal communication occurs when individuals use mass communication channels to emit a personalized message that others may interact with and use to create further conversations (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018). Electronically mediated communication allows for varying degrees of anonymity and does not provide individuals with the tones of voice and non-verbal cues that we often used to gauge one another's intentions or moods (Amichai-Hamburger, 2005; Beebe et. al, 2014). Over time, the distinctions between face-to-face and electronically mediated communication paved the way for different online practices to emerge and develop. Online shaming is an example of such developments. While the practice of shaming is not novel, online shaming is relatively new and has grown alongside the

developments made in the web and communication industries (Shariff, 2005; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Donegan, 2012).

An accurate understanding of the link between informal communication rules and online shaming first requires background on the socio-historic evolution of shame in Western societies. Stearns (2017) offers a genealogy of shame by tracing its evolution from pre-modern to contemporary times. He does so by focusing on the role of shame in moral correction and outlining the shaming practices maintained and condemned over the years. The literature on shame paints this emotion as contingent on other people's perceptions of one's behavior and one that causes tension in the social bond (Armon-Jones, 1988, Scheff, 1990; Scheff, 2000; Ronson, 2015; Stearns, 2017). With a focus on Western and Eastern societies, Stearns' findings show that in pre-modern and modern times, shaming was a valued practice and tool of social influence and moral correction. When a person's actions seemed threatening to the collective – e.g., adultery, criminal activity, etc. – shaming was done publicly with the goal of returning to what was deemed an appropriate and moral way of being (Stearns, 2017). It was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that western societies began to question shame's efficiency and appropriateness. The long-term effects of shaming on the body and the psyche became a common area of interest, with new narratives arguing that shaming did more harm than good (Kross, Berman, Mischel, Smith & Wager, 2011; Lieberman & Eisenberger, 2009; Stearns, 2017). Legal scholars made similar arguments as they incorporated shame in the category of psychological harassment, arguing that shaming is emotionally harmful to those being shamed (Educaloi, n.d.). Combined, these different perspectives represent a cultural outlook that condemns shaming in Western societies.

While the interest in the negative impacts of shame led to a decline in shaming practices, it still could not curb the intensity with which these practices returned in the twenty-first century (Stearns, 2017). The drastic innovations in technology and communications gave shaming practices a new playing field: cyberspace (Stearns, 2017; Ronson, 2015). Social media – Facebook and Twitter specifically – have become the virtual hunting site for statements deemed harmful, offensive, or politically incorrect (Ronson, 2015). Electronically mediated communication plays an integral part in these practices as anonymity and lack of traceability are central to online shaming. According to Donegan (2012), in hiding behind the screens of electronic devices, the online shamer or cyberbully avoids facing consequences for the negative comments they send out. One might add that this can lead to a vicious cycle: protected by anonymity and sheltered from guilt, those who engage in online shaming can get significantly more intense in their verbal aggressions. Anonymity provides individuals with a sense of security that shields them from the negative impacts of their online activity – no visible harm, no problem (Donegan, 2012; Pitchin and Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2005).

The metaphorical ‘security blanket’ that anonymity and physical distance provide make it more challenging to abide by the basic rules of interpersonal communication – i.e., being mindful of the weight and power of words, avoiding violent language and public confrontation, treating the other with respect, etc. (Beebe et. al, 2014; Park, Na, & Kim, 2014; Adler et. al, 2018). As masspersonal communication becomes increasingly prevalent in daily life, harmful practices such as cyberbullying or online shaming have also become more prevalent. In what follows, I will expand on the masspersonal communication rules that aim to reduce the occurrence of such practices.

B. Informal Communication Rules and the Road to Online Civility as Cyber-Kindness

Studies have shown that developments in communication technologies have challenged interpersonal communication norms (Adler et. al, 2018; O’Sullivan & Carr, 2018) and contributed to the rise of new bullying practices (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Park et. al, 2014; Antoci, Delfino, Paglieri, Panebianco & Sabatini, 2015). Since the 1990s, these practices continue to evolve and vary in form, intensity, and duration. As the Pew Research Center reports, in 2014, 40% of American adults on social networking sites had experienced some form of harassment, 27% say to have been called an offensive name, and 92% of those surveyed found that online environments led people to adopt more aggressive or rude behavior in comparison with offline situations (Duggan, 2014). Opting for a more holistic approach to understanding these practices, scholars use the umbrella term ‘online incivility’ in reference to the different forms of online shaming and cyberbullying that internet users may engage in (Antoci et. al, 2015). While notions of online civility and incivility only began to emerge approximately a decade after the Internet had settled in (Mutz & Reeves, 2005), Virginia Shea (1994) foresaw the challenges that the Internet could and did pose to communication norms and tolerance for others (Adler et. al, 2018; O’Sullivan & Carr, 2018). As one of the first authors to address the nuances and subtleties of online communication, she coined the term ‘netiquette’ to encompass the moral and ethical issues that could arise in electronically mediated communication (Shea 1994; Park et. al, 2014).

In *Netiquette*, Shea (1994) provides the reader with ten principles that explore online manners and orient the internet user on how to act and interact on the web. Of those ten

netiquette rules, the first three are especially relevant to this thesis: (1) remember the person behind the screen, (2) adopt the same behavior online as you would offline, and (3) acknowledge that different sites call for different ways of interacting – for example, networking on LinkedIn differs significantly from sharing with others on Twitter. What ties these three rules together is the link between online behavior and its offline consequences, placing importance on both the power of words and the distinctions within electronically mediated communication. Examples of what one can pay attention to when engaging in online communication are their word choices, use of caps lock, inclusion or exclusion of emojis, and punctuation choices – i.e., overuse of ellipses or exclamation marks. Taken together, a combination of these factors could greatly alter how a given message is read and interpreted in terms of tones and levels of formality.

Shea's (1994) call to place humans at the core of cyberspace is what drives 'cyber-kindness', the movement against cyberbullying that emerged in 2012 (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2011; Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2012) and gained popularity around 2017 (Aubrey, 2017). As experiences and reports of online incivility continue to rise (Antoci et. al, 2016; Rowland & Klisanin, 2018), movements such as #UseTech4Good and #CyberKindness have gained popularity (Aubrey, 2017; Aubrey, 2018). The goal of these catchy hashtags is to raise awareness of the importance of compassion and understanding within masspersonal communication. Through blogs, YouTube videos, and tweets, members of the technology and communications industries seek to educate the general public on what netiquette is and how to use it to practice cyber-kindness. These efforts stem from scholarly findings that confirm the positive correlation between one's knowledge of netiquette and the likelihood of successfully engaging in cyber-kindness (Park et. al, 2014; Rowland & Klisanin, 2018). The cyber-kindness

movement advocates a more mindful form of online communication that would require Internet users to be more reflective and introspective about the messages they send out into cyberspace. It created a set of informal rules and norms of online communication that users are encouraged to follow. For example, it is often beneficial for social media and internet users to consider the different ways in which others may receive or interpret their content. They may also reflect on how their message may impact the recipient, especially when one person disagrees with another. There is an important difference between disagreeing with someone or something by voicing disapproval and degrading or denigrating them by sending out messages focused on shame instead of constructive criticism or difference in outlook and values. The former represents diverse views and opinions in a shared cyberspace, and the latter is a form of online incivility.

In brief terms, the rise of online incivility is now met with online movements that promote kindness on the web and remind users that there is, in fact, a person behind every screen. While it is encouraged to weigh one's words both online and in real life, masspersonal communication lends itself to stricter informal norms when it comes to voicing an opinion. That said, these movements often overlook the experiences of those leading a public life (Adler, et. al, 2018). An increasing number of public figures have started to share their experiences of online incivility and shed light on how these practices affect their mental health and emotional well-being. For this reason, the last section of this chapter is centered around Safia Nolin's rise to fame, moments in her career that were deemed controversial, and the online incivility she experienced during those moments.

3. Safia Nolin: Background and Controversial Moments

A. Artistic Choices and Self-Presentation

Safia Nolin is a Quebecoise-Algerian singer-songwriter who grew up in Limoilou, Quebec City. Known for her pop-folk genre, the sad undertone of her songs is her trademark. In interviews, Nolin often expands on the therapeutic effects of making art and music, and notes that she uses songwriting to cope with her experiences of racism and bullying (Emma, 2016; Boisvert, 219). For that reason, critics often comment on the emotionality portrayed in her songs, deeming them too sad and depressing. Nolin typically responds to by emphasizing the healing and personal dimensions of making music.

Nolin is aware of the power that a celebrity holds in terms of social change and influence (Emma, 2016). So, on her happier days, she works on different projects that allow her to expand on topics that matter to her – i.e., feminism, body positivity, cyberbullying, and systemic racism, to name a few. As an avid social media user with a strong commitment to maintaining an authentic online relationship with her fans, Nolin uses her platform to start and encourage discussions about these social justice issues. She voices her opinions on socio-political, environmental, and feminist challenges in a way that suggests that her plight is not motivated by profit but by a desire for change. However, audience members whose understanding of Nolin stops at her controversial self-presentation often dismiss her statements. These experiences have led Nolin to make public statements about the denigration and degradation she has endured by condemning such shaming practices and advocating greater inclusion and respect for diversity. Her efforts were halted in 2020 when she decided to take periodic breaks from social media for

mental health reasons, as the amount of harmful and hateful comments she received had become overwhelming (Vandeuren, 2020).

In the context of this thesis, I examine Nolin's self-presentation based on four interconnected features of what she makes visible to her public as a politically committed artist: her emotional politics, aesthetic politics, identity politics, and speech politics. Nolin celebrates emotional transparency in her tweets, as she clearly and openly expresses her vulnerability and anger. As an artist, rather than censor her feelings of anger, sadness, and frustration – as is encouraged in both private and public spheres – she displays them towards political ends. This polarizes her audience into those who sympathize with her emotional display and those who disagree with it. In other words, some understand or identify with her struggles, while others feel provoked or undermined by her vulnerability.

Nolin's emotional display ties into her aesthetic choices and speech politics. Her outfits, gait, and hairstyles are physical expressions of her anger towards the rigid gender performance expectations of the music industry (Fortin, 2014). In the same vein, she showcases her vulnerability through speech, either through tweets or lyrics that tend to read as political, given her focus on queer issues and Quebec's #MeToo movement. When combined, the different ways in which her politics intersect create a spectrum of reactions ranging from feeling represented by the statements, to not relating or agreeing with them, to feeling offended and threatened by them. Finally, her emotional, aesthetic, and speech politics meet at the intersection of her identity politics: she is a Quebecoise woman of Algerian origin, a lesbian, writing about queer love in her songs and arguing for women's reproductive rights in her tweets. Nolin's identity is often politicized based on factors that are out of her control, such as her ethnic background and sexual

identity. It is common for online critics to use these factors as tools to comment negatively on her identity as a Quebecoise lesbian. Specifically, they scrutinize and question her activism, mastery of French, bilingualism, and use of ‘franglais’. The linguistic aspects of Nolin’s identity are important to highlight as her audience is mostly francophone, spread between Quebec and France (Cassivi, 2019). In fact, Nolin’s critics often use her linguistic choices as the basis for negative comments about her social class or intelligence.

In what follows, I will expand on selected events from Nolin’s career that have sparked debates on various themes and have been deemed controversial. As will be described shortly, the themes of her controversial moments often intersect with the four dimensions of self-presentation mentioned above - emotional politics, aesthetic politics, identity politics, and speech politics.

B. Timeline of Relevant Events

Nolin began her professional music career in 2015, with the release of her album *Limoilou*. The industry picked up on her talent, and within a year, her music gradually made it into Quebec’s popular music scene (Côté, 2015). Her fame stemmed, in part, from the *Association Québécoise de L’Industrie du Disque, du Spectacle et de la Vidéo* (ADISQ) recognizing her talent and rewarding her for it. In brief terms, the ADISQ is a Quebec association founded in 1978, whose mission statement is twofold (ADISQ, n.d.). On a provincial scale, the ADISQ is committed to hosting an annual awards ceremony – the ADISQ gala – that celebrates and rewards those working in the Quebec music industry. On a global scale, it aims to be the focal point between Quebec musicians and recognized international music associations (ADISQ, n.d.). Nolin won two awards at the 2016 ADISQ Gala, the *Prix Félix-Leclerc de la Chanson*, and the *Révélation de l’Année* award (Bonsound, n.d.a).

The artist has repeatedly expressed having experienced bullying and harassment from a young age, but the 2016 ADISQ gala marked the beginning of her public shaming and bullying experiences, coming from both members of the industry and the general public. Nolin's aesthetic choices for the gala were the first thing that grabbed critics' attention. Her attire, a pair of jeans and a t-shirt with the late rock star Gerry Boulet's face on it, was described as inappropriate and too casual for a formal event such as the ADISQ gala (Gendron-Martin, 2017). Nolin's acceptance speech upon receiving her award also sparked controversy, as her informal tone and use of swear words offended certain members of the industry and the general public. Overall, it is evident Nolin's aesthetic and speech politics were the foundation of these adverse reactions.

The 2017 ADISQ gala demonstrated that the singer had not succumbed to the criticisms she had faced throughout the previous year. Her outfit was, once again, on the casual side: black jeans and a flannel button-up shirt with a feminist patch sewed on (Vincent, 2017). This time, it was Nolin's acceptance speech for the *Interprète Féminine de l'Année* that was scrutinized. For context, she was one of the few artists at the gala to speak in favor of Quebec's #MeToo (#MoiAussi) movement – a movement meant to call out abusers and validate the reality of sexual assault survivors (Viens, 2017). The gala took place in October, when numerous rape allegations about Just for Laughs (JFL) founder Gilbert Rozon began to circulate (CBC, 2017). At the gala, actor Serge Postigo defended the abusers called out in the JFL allegations⁴ (Viens, 2017). Nolin

⁴“Ne laissons pas l'horreur décider de leur avenir à court et moyen terme. Occupons-nous de nos victimes et soyons vigilants, par souci de vengeance, de ne pas en faire des milliers de collatérales. Parce que tous ceux que je vous ai nommés n'ont rien fait... si ce n'est que le spectacle de l'an” (Viens, 2017)

criticized Postigo's message⁵ when accepting her award and later voiced support for those who came forward with stories of sexual abuse. Her emotional politics were under scrutiny following this event, as critics argued that it was ill-timed and inappropriate for the singer to criticize Positgo's speech (Viens, 2017). Considering that Nolin's speech was rooted in a feminist issue, one could argue that the criticism she faced also targeted her identity politics.

As Nolin's fame continued to grow, her online activity continued to be the topic of many conversations (Vandeuren, 2018). On Twitter, the singer did not hold back when voicing her political opinions and calling for social justice. Some of her political comments included criticisms of the Coalition Avenir Quebec party, elected during the 2018 provincial elections, and of the Bloc Québécois, a sovereigntist federal party who acquired a more significant number of votes than usual in the 2019 federal elections. In her commentaries, Nolin criticizes issues of islamophobia and racism in Quebec by stating her position against Quebec's Bill 21, which supports the ban of religious symbols in the public sphere. She also uses Twitter to encourage and engage in discussions about feminism, body positivity, sexuality, and environmental issues. This type of online activity ignites mixed reactions from her audiences, as some relate to her activity while others are offended by them.

The events mentioned above testify to the interconnected dimension of Nolin's self-presentation. While critics may zero-in on a specific aspect of her actions, I argue that an in-depth understanding of these negative commentaries requires a holistic approach. Generally, the

⁵ “Défendre ça devant tout le monde, à la télévision, dans un gala où il y a des femmes qui sont sorties publiquement dire qu'elles avaient été victimes... Pour moi, c'est trop de dire ça, ça n'a pas sa place.” (Viens, 2017)

disapproval and denigration she receives fit with at least one of the four self-presentations features previously discussed – emotional politics, aesthetic politics, identity politics, and speech politics – with significant overlap between the features taking place.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. The Sociology of Emotions

The sociology of emotions emerged around the 1980s, as scholars began to focus on how invisible and culturally specific social factors impact and shape our ways of feeling, being, and acting. Borrowing from feminism and symbolic interactionism, this field finds its roots in the works of those who place emotions at the forefront of their research – such as Goffman, Hochschild, Scheff, Elias, and Mead, to name a few (Thoits, 1989; Greco & Stenner, 2008; Bericat, 2016).

An accurate overview of this field first requires a presentation of how sociologists of emotion make sense of emotion. As this branch of sociology gained popularity, Thoits (1989) offered a synthesis of the definitions and perspectives circulating at the time. With respect to definitions of emotion, Thoits is clear in stating that she does not strive to offer a definition that would fit all approaches, as she highlights that “there are almost as many definitions of emotion as there are authors” (1989, p 318). Instead, she focuses on the commonalities embedded across existing bodies of literature and finds that definitions of emotion typically include at least one of the following components. First, emotions imply making sense of our surrounding environment through positive or negative appraisals. Second, emotions are also visible through our unfiltered expressive gestures, in the sense that we understand these gestures as features of emotions themselves (Thoits, 1989). Finally, emotions are also linked to culture, as emotional displays and experiences are relative to one’s cultural background. The experience or recognition of an emotion does not require the presence of all four components; having at least one of them is enough (Thoits, 1989).

Thoits' (1989) overview of the different emotions approaches points to three main views. Positivist theorists stipulate that emotions are matters of the brain and are universal in that we all experience the same range of emotions. Social constructionists, who center their argument around the cultural transmission of emotions, reflect on the supposed universality of emotions. What Thoits (1989) calls 'weaker' versions of social constructionism find that basic emotions exist only to a certain extent as they are inevitably differentiated or transformed by culture. 'Stronger' versions, she notes, emphasize instead that there is nothing innate about emotions. Rather, it is contingent on one's culture and lived reality as emotions are a product of our social influences (Thoits, 1989). How we interpret the world around us and embody social codes shapes our emotional displays and emotional experiences, implying that emotions are socially and culturally driven (Hochschild, 1983; Armon-Jones, 1988; De Courville Nicol, 2011; Davis, 2012; Wetherell, 2012; Jasper, 2013).

As the field continues to evolve, one could argue that theorists of emotions are moving in an interdisciplinary direction. Peter Freund (1990) and Lisa Feldman Barrett (2018) illustrate this shift well. Focusing on health and illness, Freund (1990) moves across 'mind-body-society' divides and considers the different ways of assessing the expressive body. He calls for a 'bio-psycho-social' understanding of emotions to account for their social, cognitive, and physical dimensions (Freund, 1990). In his account of dramaturgical stress, Freund (1998) describes both the psycho-social and biological dimensions of emotions by focusing on the relationship between one's stress level and one's social position or status and explaining that emotions also manifest themselves in our physical and biological reactions. An example of this would be the visible signs of anger or the rise in blood pressure in employees whose jobs require them to keep a calm and collected front. Feldman Barrett's (2018) aim is similar to Freund's. She rejects the

universality of emotions and presents emotionality as relevant to both the natural and social sciences. She does so by offering a constructionist approach that accounts for the social, psychological, and neurological dimensions of emotional experience. In this view, emotions are similar to personalized scripts that are contingent on what a person has been exposed to and the brain's ability to predict outcomes. The brain's predictions are based on a person's cultural background and past experiences. Thus, our emotions are a product of our brain's subjective and personalized predictions (Feldman Barrett, 2017; Feldman Barrett, 2018).

I will use the understanding of emotions as cultural and personal scripts to inform my thesis. Scholars who view emotions in this way also tend to focus on the links between emotions, social and emotional norms, and conformity (Hochschild, 1983; Thoits, 1989; Scheff, 1990; Davis, 2012; Jasper, 2013). For example, Hochschild (1983) highlights the unconscious process through which we internalize our understanding of emotions in terms of appropriate duration, intensity, timing, and placement. Scheff (2000) complements this work by focusing on emotions as the glue that solidifies social bonds. Should a person display the wrong emotion at the wrong moment, Scheff (2000) would argue that a social bond has been compromised or weakened. The emotional socialization consciously and unconsciously received arms individuals with the necessary tools to secure a feeling of belongingness and remain within the boundaries of appropriate emotional norms and feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983; Thoits, 1989; Wetherell 2012; Loveday, 2016). When one strays too far away from said emotional norms or feeling rules, they risk feeling or being considered emotionally resistant or oppositional.

Many researchers have discussed the concept of emotional resistance that Thoits (1989) describes as 'emotional deviance', but in slightly different ways. Hochschild (1983) and Davis (2012) speak of emotional dissonance and emotional predicaments to describe the instance when

one's emotions do not line up with society's expectations or their own expectations of how they ought to feel. Instances of emotional resistance, dissonance, or predicaments may result in individuals taking corrective measures that would compel them to conform to social life and avoid social and self-imposed sanctions – which can either be empowering or disempowering (Hochschild, 1983; Thoits, 1989; Scheff, 1990; Scheff, 2000; Davis, 2012). Overall, analyzing emotions as cultural and personal scripts sheds light on their role in regulating, upholding, and even changing social values, norms, and expectations (Armon-Jones, 1988; Hochschild, 1983; Thoits, 1989; Scheff, 1990; Scheff, 2000; Davis, 2012).

2. Outlooks on Shame

A. Shame Theories: an Overview

Numerous theorists have written about shame without necessarily treating it as their primary object of study. Scheff (2000), one of the main shame theorists of sociology, highlights the lack of attention paid to shame in academic research. In the history of emotions-oriented research, shame was typically assessed as a secondary, at times unnamed, characteristic of other emotions such as guilt, embarrassment, or humiliation (Scheff, 2000). Researchers wrote about shame with the assumption that readers understood what it was, just as they understood emotions like sadness or anger. However, without a concrete definition of shame, an accurate and systematic study of shame would be challenging to conduct (Scheff, 2000).

Scheff (1990) examines the complexities of shame by assessing both the internal and external factors at play in shame experiences. He assesses the impacts of shame on the self and considers the context surrounding the experience of shame. Scheff (2000) proposes that we conceptualize experiences of social disapproval through the shame construct. He builds on Durkheim's view of emotions as central to social solidarity and morality by treating shame as the

social emotion unnamed by Durkheim. In doing so, Scheff (2000) simultaneously operationalizes the shame construct in sociological thought and underlines its subtle role in social influence. That said, shame remains a culturally and socially bound emotional experience, as the boundaries of social approval and disapproval are not universal. What is appropriate in one social setting may spark controversy in another. In the same vein, different social contexts will yield different shame experiences in terms of quality, intensity, and reaction. Not all shame is experienced in the same way as it depends in part on a collective and individual tolerance for being different or accepting difference. For example, the social discomfort sensed when one does not respect the dress code of a formal event differs from when one violates the dress code at work.

Scheff (1990) identifies two types of shame experiences. First, in undifferentiated shame, the individual is aware of relational discomfort but distorts its source by experiencing it as a personal defect. This serves to undermine their perception and generates negative self-appraisal. Difficulty making eye contact, hunched shoulders, and hushed tone are some of the verbal and non-verbal cues with which such experiences are associated. Second, in bypassed shame, the awareness of relational discomfort is bypassed altogether. This serves to close the self off from painful feelings of social conflict and tends to generate a negative appraisal of others. Bypassed shame can manifest in the dumping of one's feelings of shame onto others. Rapid and repetitive speech, lack of coherence, and agitation are some of the verbal and non-verbal cues with which such experiences are associated (86-87). Valérie de Courville Nicol adds a third type of shame to Scheff's theorization and names it 'processed shame'⁶. In processed shame, the individual is

⁶ Scheff only implies rather than names this type of shame. The named concept of 'processed shame' originates from Valérie de Courville Nicol's interpretation of his work.

aware of and able to tolerate the discomfort produced by a conflict between their perspective and that of the group (V. de Courville Nicol, personal communication, November 12, 2019). This serves to acknowledge the tension at hand and simply move past it without changing oneself. Using undifferentiated and bypassed shame, Scheff develops the shame-rage spiral concept. Taken as a back and forth between shaming and counter shaming practices, it is a violent communication loop that emerges from undifferentiated or bypassed shame. While shaming is characterized by putting oneself or another down, ‘countershaming’ represents the response to such efforts in a similar violent communication style. (Scheff, 1990; V. de Courville Nicol, personal communication, November 12, 2019).

Like Scheff, I argue that when a social bond is compromised, those who feel threatened may take it upon themselves to fix the situation by shaming those that made them feel uncomfortable (Scheff, 2000). I will use the terms ‘social disapproval’ and ‘social degradation’ to navigate the practice of shaming as either respectful or disrespectful – or, as a type of disagreement versus a form of denigration or bullying. The tensions between disapproval and denigration have become especially relevant in online settings, as disapproval tends to be expressed through denigrating or disrespectful comments. Interested in the complexities of online shaming, Adkins (2019) studies the benefits and consequences of marginalized groups calling out their shamers. She uses Nussbaum’s conception of shaming as a stigmatizing process that condemns the breaking of social norms and notes that while shaming practices may be used for change, they tend to be effective only when audiences recognize the shamer as a legitimate authority (Adkins, 2019). She uses that nuance to form her concept of the ‘shame backlash’, defined as an “aggressive redirection of shame [that turns] the power of the shame onto itself” (77). When a marginalized person uses their voice to shame their shamer(s), they often do not

have the right authority to do so mainly because they address their shame to a non-marginalized audience. In her view, that audience will re-direct the shame in question and attack the speaker based on personal features like gender, race, and ethnicity. Adkins uses the story of Connie St. Louis to portray the reality of shame backlashes. In 2015, at a conference for women in science journalism, Connie took offence at a sexist comment made by speaker Tim Hunt (80). She turned to Twitter to voice her disapproval, and while she was successful in acting against him, she was also at the receiving end of criticism. Her legitimacy in the field came to be questioned, which led to financial and emotional repercussions (82). In Scheffian terms, a shame backlash is a modern-day equivalent of a shame-rage spiral.

B. Studying Shame Through Social Positions

This section will cover three social positions used to measure or analyze shame in academic research: gender, class, sexuality. These are three out of many, chosen for their relevance to this thesis' object of study as they are central to Nolin's situation as a queer woman from a working-class background (Kelly, 2018). It is important to note that social positions are not mutually exclusive and should be considered from an intersectional perspective. In broad terms, intersectionality stipulates that a person's identity reflects the intersection of the different social positions they hold (Crenshaw, 1991).

Gender is a common control variable in academic research. With respect to shame, research has revealed a gendered dimension in which women typically display signs of bypassed shame, associated with inferiority complexes, and men display signs of undifferentiated shame, associated with superiority complexes (Scheff, 1990). Gender also manifests itself in shame research when discussing social expectations. Lupton (2000) illustrates this gendered dimension in her analysis of parenting experiences with first-time mothers. She found that the parenting

burden in Australia was still heavily placed on women. First-time mothers typically experience shame in their decisions regarding work, breastfeeding, and co-parenting (Lupton, 2000).

Another variable used to study shame is class, a multilayered concept at the intersection of numerous social positions – gender, race, sexuality, etc. De Botton (2004) uses class and status to understand a type of shame that thrives on the perfectionism and pressure to succeed that characterizes Western countries. Given that individuals are in a constant state of comparison, either to their peers or to their ideal self, a distinct type of anxiety emerges, *status anxiety*. In a setting that rarely allows for an escape from societal pressures and leaves little room for failure and low expectations, individuals' self-esteem is not likely to increase. He uses the United States to illustrate how the constant desire for a better life and status, both of which are always 'to come', constitute the oppressive dimensions of status anxiety. Status anxiety is the name attributed to the reality of a modern-day chronic dissatisfaction that exists within a paradox in which growth is endless, but validation comes from others. The missing element in De Botton's (2004) work is to name the emotion intimately linked with status anxiety, which I argue is shame. In essence, shame for feeling like one does not belong, for comparing oneself unfavorably, for not achieving one's goals, etc.

Loveday (2016) also addresses class by studying the shame felt by working-class women in British higher education. Through a series of interviews, she comes to the same conclusion as Scheff that shame stems from both internal and external judgment. Her findings point to a loop of shame that keeps the negative working-class stereotype alive (Loveday, 2016). Her approach is to assess shame's performative dimension by studying how 'working-class' accents and pregnancies can make one feel ashamed. The takeaway from her work is the notion of 'seeping', which refers to the idea that a body absorbs the shame, making it a part of the individual

(Loveday, 2016). She then notes that her respondents were either empowered or disempowered by the shame they felt – being part of the working class was either embraced and a source of pride or rejected and a source of shame.

A final variable relevant to shame studies is sexuality. There tends to be a burdensome dimension to the LGBTQ+ community that stems from the stereotypes associated with these identities (Freund, 1998; Gould, 2001; Kenney & Craig, 2012). The emotions of pride and shame are at play in this case. Stein’s analysis of a group of Christian activists and their feelings of victimization and fear of difference highlights the complexity of pride, shame, and sexuality (Stein, 2001). She studies a social group that had difficulty accepting choices and lifestyles different from their own, when difference was gradually being accepted and celebrated outside of their community. During the interviews, their verbal and non-verbal cues were clear markers of bypassed shame, suggesting that their feelings stemmed from a perceived threat to their core values and ideals of a ‘proper’ society (Stein, 2001). The Christian activists applied the scapegoat method to shame others and, by the same token, unify their community. Such groups base themselves on caricatures and cultural representations of communities that differ from theirs and are hostile to understanding or embracing diversity. That said, the participants experienced a reversal through which they were being shamed for bigotry and conservatism (Stein, 2001). Stein’s (2001) research offers a detailed illustration of bypassed shame in action, which will serve as a model for the analysis I will conduct.

C. Coping with Shame

The strategies resorted to after sensing a social conflict are not linear and differ depending on the person. In this section, I will focus on two strategies from the scholarship on shame that I argue exist on a spectrum ranging from conformity to resistance.

In Hochschild's study of emotions, the role of shame is secondary but significant. Her concept of 'feeling rules' refers to the implicit actors in social exchanges that are primary influencers on one's emotions, typically enforced through rule reminders and social cues, sanctions and rewards, and introspection and self-reflexivity (Hochschild, 1983). Feeling rules also stem from how emotions are perceived and managed both by the individual and the collective. As a result, feeling rules imply a tension between how one lives and how one ought to live. They do not reflect static scripts but are instead context-bound and assessed in duration, intensity, timing and placement. When one breaks a feeling rule, social pressure orients them towards conforming to the appropriate and expected way of feeling and being (Hochschild, 1983). In this view, one could argue that coping with shame implies changing or correcting how one feels or behaves. This process is in line with Scheff's undifferentiated shame experience and is a characteristic of the 'conformity' end of the spectrum. With respect to the Nolin case study, sanctions, both positive and negative, are rule reminders that highlight inappropriate expressions of one or several feeling rules.

Having presented conformity as a strategy, I will now focus on resistance. Brown developed 'shame resilience theory' to overcome the negative consequences of shame experiences by "speaking shame" (Brown, 2006). The theory stipulates that one must not only acknowledge that they have been shamed but must then proceed to be vocal about their shame experience to avoid the internalization of negative feelings. Without the ability to recognize shame and be vocal about one's experience, healing cannot take place, and shame will consume the affected person (Brown, 2006). Examples of 'speaking shame' include talking about the experience with a family member or sharing it on social media. At this end of the spectrum, resistance cannot take place without the ability to experience processed shame.

Upon examining the different coping strategies associated with social conflict, two broad categories of behaviour emerge. One approach is to conform and adapt how you act, feel, or look, to avoid conflict. Another strategy is to resist conflict and confront its source by speaking out or standing your ground regarding how you act, look, or feel. These strategies exist on a spectrum with a large grey zone as conformity and resistance can take many forms. These forms will differ based on one's social position. For example, those that lead a public life – e.g., a celebrity or a politician – may not always move freely on this spectrum. Therefore, in the next section, I will review the literature on celebrity studies by focusing on social media, gender, and authenticity.

3. Outlooks on Celebrity

A. Celebrity Theories: an Overview

Celebrity studies emerged as a field in the late 1990s as scholars turned their attention to the different dimensions of life in the public eye. For Turner (2010), this is an interdisciplinary field as it brings together cultural studies, communications, and popular culture. As a prominent celebrity studies theorist, Turner identifies the three main research areas that characterize this scholarship: the theory and history of celebrity (Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004), the production of celebrities (Marshall, 1997; Turner, Bonner, & Marshall, 2000) and the celebrity-audience relationship (Gamson, 1994; Hill, 2007). In the same vein, he condenses the different definitions of 'celebrity' into four interconnected themes: representation, discourse, industry, and culture (Turner, 2010). In describing celebrity as a "genre of representation that provides us with a semiotically rich body of text and discourses that fuel a dynamic culture of consumption" (Turner, 2010, p 13), Turner touches on these four themes. He unpacks this sentence by focusing on the 'discursive effect' attached to celebrity, which stipulates that when one enters this

‘representational regime’ and becomes celebritized, it will inevitably change them. This change ranges from empowerment at one end and objectification or exploitation at the other. Marshall (1997) focuses on the exploitation end of the spectrum by studying the link between celebrity, culture, and commodification. He explains how a celebrity can simultaneously be commodified and profit from being commodified (Marshall, 1997). For example, when a singer generates a profit for a record label – i.e., being commodified – they can also benefit from their fame by selling their merchandise to an audience that they represent and resonate with – i.e., benefiting from the promotion of commodities. Celebrities also have a social function unique to those leading a public life as their audiences turn to them as cultural and moral reference points (Turner, 2010). This is especially relevant for younger audiences that use celebrities as cultural scripts that structure their understanding of how to be and what to expect from life (Turner, 2010). Overall, Turner’s (2004) overview is rooted in a contemporary interpretation of celebrity as either a discourse, an industry, a commodity, or a culture.

Typically, the definition of celebrity will vary depending on the school of thought and discipline in question. While Turner’s (2010) classification of celebrity as either based in representation, commodification, or culture covers most understandings of this concept, there are still many angles one can take when studying this topic. For instance, celebrity can also be examined as a semiotic system (Marshall, 1997), analyzed as a historical process (Rojek, 2001), or even taken as a social practice (Rockwell & Giles, 2009; Marwick & boyd, 2011). In this thesis, I will blend elements of Turner (2004) and Boorstin’s (1961) work to put forward a definition that views celebrities in two ways. First, as individuals who lead public lives in the sense that their actions and statements are covered and discussed regularly in the news/media. Second, as people whose statements can strongly influence social and cultural

change – regardless of the nature (i.e., positive or negative) or scale of that change (i.e., local, national, or global).

B. Celebrities and Feeling Rules

Hochschild's (1983) concept of feeling rules pairs well with the understanding of celebrities as cultural blueprints. She notes that in times of social and personal change, individuals are more likely to question feeling rules and turn to 'authorities' as references for appropriate and inappropriate behaviours and beliefs (Hochschild, 1983). While she does not set the boundaries of what constitutes an authority, she emphasizes that authorities find themselves both in public and private spheres (Hochschild, 1983)⁷. Building on that, I argue that celebrities with relatable statements and experiences represent a new type of modern authority. The 'Time's Up' and #MeToo movements, which aim to validate the reality of sexual assault survivors, illustrate this argument. Despite its creation more than a decade ago by Tarana Burke, #MeToo was only made famous in October 2017 when celebrities started using their platform to share their stories and call out their abusers (Tambe, 2018). The #MeToo movement's domino effect is still going, as people – mostly women – from different industries continue to share personal stories of sexual assault and harassment. The wave of allegations that Quebec's political and artistic circles saw over the summer of 2020 testify to the power of this movement (Perreux, 2020; Kappler, 2020). Among these allegations was Nolin's sexual harassment experience, which she described on her Instagram profile on July 8, 2020 (Kelly, 2020; Grogue, 2020).

These stories and testimonies paved the way for difficult conversations about sexual assault and harassment, privilege, and misogyny to take place. In this time of social change, I find that celebrities and the media have become authorities or reference points of the

⁷This is not discussed in chapter 4, but in the 19th endnote, at the end of the book.

in/appropriate ways of addressing and dealing with the realities of sexual assault. An important point arises in treating celebrities as authorities because while they have the power to shape feeling rules, they are also subjected to the same set of feeling rules as the general public. Celebrities having to abide by feeling rules but also having the power to change them is a tension that I aim to explore in the data. Specifically, I will assess whether connections exist between the sanctions Nolin experiences and the feeling rules and social norms embedded in those sanctions.

To that effect, two feelings rules will be relevant to this research: that of happiness and that of personal authenticity. To begin, research has shown that happiness and positivity have increasingly become, and continue to be, celebrated in Western culture (Lu & Gilmore, 2004; Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014). As I will discuss in my analysis, Nolin's commitment to being vocal about her depression and anxiety, environmental concerns, and online shaming experiences, often place her in resistance or opposition to the 'happiness' feeling rule. Building on that, studies have also found that in Western cultures, it is encouraged to celebrate oneself by leading an 'authentic' lifestyle – i.e., living in a way that reflects one's values and promotes happiness and positivity, honesty, control over one's life and decisions, etc. (Tolson, 2001; Vannini & Franzese, 2008; Wilt, Thomas, & McAdams, 2019; Sutton, 2020).

These feeling rules pose a significant challenge to those living in the public eye for two reasons. On the one hand, researchers and celebrity audiences often criticize celebrity authenticity, as they view it through a commercial lens of branding, marketing, and publicity (Gamson, 1994; Marshall, 2010; Nunn & Biressi, 2010; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Thomas, 2014; Johnston, 2020). Different publics and audiences often question celebrities' personal authenticity, motives, and rationale. On the other hand, since celebrity lives are highly documented, either by themselves or by the media, their abidance by or transgression of feeling

rules is more visible, increasing the range of people they may offend. As I will expand on in my analysis, these challenges inform my argument that, despite technically abiding by the personal authenticity feeling rule, Nolin's aesthetic and identity politics as a body-positive queer woman of colour ultimately go against this feeling rule.

C. Social Media: Expectations and Celebrity-Audience Relationships

Social media is central to how celebrities portray themselves, their values, and their lifestyles. It typically refers to three online platforms – Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter – and has shaped contemporary expectations within online celebrity-audience relationships. For instance, when audience members engage with celebrities by replying to a Tweet or by commenting on an Instagram or Facebook post, they often expect and hope to get an answer back from the celebrity (Giles, 2017). As for celebrities, their main expectation is that their audience members be respectful when commenting on their work or disagreeing with their choices (Giles, 2013). On the one hand, audience members may feel entitled to get an answer back, regardless of the types of comments they send to celebrities. On the other hand, celebrities may feel pressured to engage with their audience out of a desire to create a more approachable image or forge a stronger rapport with their audience (Giles, 2013). Put differently, the ease and accessibility of social media inform the expectations that govern celebrity-audience relationships and communication norms. Social media gives audience members a direct line of communication to celebrities, but audience members do not always consider the impact or weight of their words on the celebrity behind the screen. They hope for an answer back from the celebrity regardless of the nature of their messages – kind and supportive, neutral and constructive, or harsh and disrespectful (Giles, 2017). On the flip side, celebrities expect audience members and social media users to be respectful in their commentaries, regardless of whether those commentaries are

negative or positive (Giles, 2013; Giles, 2017). Given the fast paced, public, and easily accessible nature of social media, celebrities may feel pressured to engage in active communication with their audience members and avoid ignoring or blocking them when their commentaries are intense or harmful to their mental health. As I will describe shortly, there can be different and numerous motivations for this, which can undermine or delegitimize celebrities' authenticity within the audience-celebrity relationship.

Two issues arise from the expectations mentioned above, one related to the potential online shaming that audience members practice, knowingly or not; the other centered around the issue of celebrities' authenticity in their online interactions and activities. First, it is important to note that the line between respectful and disrespectful, or between disagreement, disapproval, and degradation, is often blurred in online settings. When audience members are disrespectful in their commentaries, they may not fully realize the power of their words and, in turn, may amplify their online aggressions. Donegan (2012) underlines this by explaining that individuals rarely face the consequences of their actions when operating from behind a screen. Safia Nolin touches on this nuance in an interview with Catherine Dorion (Dorion, 2019) and explains that the shaming she experiences has only ever been done in an online setting, never in person. Building on this tension, I point to the emergence of a vicious cycle: protected by the option of anonymity and sheltered from the guilt, those who engage in shaming can get significantly more intense in their verbal aggressions. Combined, anonymity and physical distance equip such audience members with a sense of security that acts as a justification for their actions – no immediate or visible harm, no problem (Donegan, 2012; Pitchin and Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2005). Second, when celebrities engage in online activity, by replying to their audience members, posting tweets, or uploading pictures, their authenticity is not guaranteed. In fact, the consensus within

celebrity studies is that celebrity authenticity is often constructed (Gamson, 1994; Marshall, 2010; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Thomas, 2014). I will base my discussion of authenticity on Tolson's (2001) description of it as a performance that the celebrity should enact discreetly to mimic a state of 'being yourself'. The challenge for celebrities is to 'project an aura of authenticity', as they rarely ever experience an ordinary or anonymous life on account of their notoriety (Tolson, 2001, pp 445-449).

The online self-presentation of those in the public eye is rarely spontaneous, but instead, the fruit of a complex and multilayered process (Marshall, 2010). Marshall (2010) puts forward the concept of 'presentational media' and defines it as a form of self-presentation that brings together "the personal, interpersonal and the mediated" (p 36) to examine this process. In this view, celebrities use online platforms to shed direct light on their private lives and portray a self that is appealing or relatable to their fanbase (Marshall, 2010). It began with celebrities pushing the boundaries of the public self by using online platforms to connect directly with their audience. The examples given in Marshall's (2010) work include Christina Applegate's success in saving her television show, *Samantha Who?*, from being cancelled by reaching out to fans online, and Neil Diamond's commitment Twitter to engaging directly with younger audiences. For Marshall (2010), the public self is a multilayered one, as celebrities continuously work on their image and attempt to stay in line with their audience's expectations. Intercommunication, which he describes as the blending of media and communication, constitutes one of the public self's layers (Marshall, 2010). The intercommunicative self recognizes the importance of media when creating one's image or persona – e.g., tweets, pictures, or videos featured on one's online account. Therefore, as intercommunicative selves, celebrities carefully choose what they upload and share on social media as they curate their public self (Marshall, 2010). The act of uploading

and sharing in a virtual space allows for the examination of another facet of the public self, the parasocial self. The parasocial self reflects the challenges and nuances of online transparency and authenticity. Marshall (2010) notes that while celebrities do hold social media profiles, they are not necessarily the ones engaging with the audience. For instance, employees or managers may be posting on celebrities' behalf, or the content being uploaded may be sponsored. Research shows that subtle tactics are used in the industry to help audiences know if the celebrity is posting or if someone is posting on their behalf (Marshall, 2010). For some, the first vs. third person's use is meant to distinguish the celebrity, first-person, from the manager, third person. For others, there is an explicit mention of sponsorships when applicable, so the audience knows that the celebrity was paid to recommend a service or product. Overall, Marshall's (2010) in-depth exploration of a celebrity's 'public self' demonstrates that celebrities can have several potentially contradictory goals and motivations when generating their online persona. It is often difficult for audience members to know if a celebrity really is the one behind the screen or not (Marshall, 2010). They are also not always aware or conscious of the complex and at times clashing dynamics of creating a public persona or performing one's self-presentation in a very public way. This ambiguity often puts celebrity authenticity into question, which could lead to potentially harmful messages from audience members who openly question celebrities' choices and actions in ways that can be characterized as online shaming or cyberbullying⁸.

Having established that social media has a significant impact on how celebrities interact with their audience and share their life with them, it is also important to note that this form of interaction is not necessarily authentic. As the literature reviewed states, online authenticity is

⁸ One can argue that audience members might not think that their commentaries are not hurting anyone if they develop a fake persona or remain anonymous. This line of research is beyond the scope of this thesis, but worth reflecting on in future pieces.

not guaranteed. There is no way of knowing who the person behind the screen is, except on live videos on Facebook or Instagram, where the person behind the screen is visible and active. That said, there are competing findings that examine how celebrities, specifically female celebrities, use social media to highlight their values and navigate the gendered dynamics of online authenticity.

D. Celebrity and Gender: Femininity, Body Ideals, and Authenticity

Life in the public eye is an experience that is best assessed from an intersectional perspective as it differs greatly depending on one's social positions. In this section, I will first review the literature on celebrity, femininity, and the female body, then navigate how female celebrities use social media to regain control over how they are portrayed.

Numerous researchers have recognized the gendered dimension of celebrity (Negra & Holmes, 2008; Holmes & Negra, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Fairclough, 2012; Kanai, 2015). For instance, Holmes and Negra (2011) argue that female celebrities outline the boundaries of the acceptable forms of femininity in what is now considered a 'postfeminist representational environment' (2011, p 2). Unpacking this statement calls for a look into the term 'postfeminism'. While postfeminism holds different definitions, in this field, it typically refers to the idea that Western feminism has achieved what it initially fought for – the right to vote, to education, and to work – and is now no longer as culturally relevant (Tasker & Negra, 2007; Gill, 2007; Gill & Scharf, 2011). For Holmes and Negra (2011), in a postfeminist climate, a female celebrity is “torn between chaos and (over) control, serenity, and agitation” (p 2). Her success is akin to a game where if she wins – e.g., has a healthy work-life balance – her win is only temporary, and if (when) she loses – e.g., breaks down or struggles – she becomes an example of how women cannot handle the pressure of the industry (Holmes & Negra, 2011). Negra and Holmes (2008)

illustrate this gendered tension by comparing the media reactions to Heath Ledger's overdose and Britney Spears' breakdown. They build on Williams's (2008) work to highlight that when it comes to breakdowns, substance abuse, or mental illness, the media portrays stories differently based on the celebrity's gender. For example, while an accidental overdose caused Heath Ledger's death in 2008, there were numerous videos of him using different drugs circulating on the web. Out of respect to the Ledger family, the media decided against broadcasting those videos (Williams, 2008). When Britney Spears was committed to a psychiatric ward, also in 2008, the media did not grant her the same courtesy. For People's editor Larry Hackett, Spears' status as a mother put her in the spotlight because her ability to handle both fame and family was at stake, and her potential failure was a major topic of interest (Williams, 2008). Overall, the tendency is for the media to sensationalize a female celebrity's distress but discuss the male celebrity's experience with more distance and seriousness. Tying this back to the initial argument, when Negra and Holmes (2008) argue that female celebrities are reference points for acceptable and unacceptable forms of femininity, they also shed light on a gendered double standard upheld, in part, by the media. While male celebrity breakdowns are treated as independent instances, female celebrity breakdowns are taken as proof that women in the industry eventually fail to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Negra & Holmes, 2008; Fairclough, 2012). To extrapolate, it can be argued that when one female celebrity fails, she is a reference for inappropriate femininity. When she succeeds – a success that is only ever temporary – she is a reference for appropriate femininity.

While the focus in the arguments above was on the forms of femininity within the celebrity industry, I will now orient the discussion towards assumptions about the ideal female body and expectations about performing and portraying femininity while living in the public eye.

Hirdman (2017) examines the relationship between celebrity gossip magazines, female body standards, and body-based shame. She highlights how it is difficult to avoid celebrity gossip or celebrity culture as they ‘saturate the “everyday”’ (Holmes as quoted in Hirdman, 2017, p 365) and are quite embedded within our daily lives. That said, while celebrity personas are constrained to rigid ways of acting and behaving, they are also able to offer different perspectives on social issues such as gender performance, morality, or politics (Tyler as cited in Hirdman, 2017, p 365; Holmes & Redmond, 2006). Hirdman (2017) tackles this site of tension by focusing on Swedish gossip magazines and their commentaries on female celebrities’ bodies. She borrows from Berlant’s work on ‘cruel optimism’ to navigate the implicit cultural consensus that frames the public’s view of ideal body types. In Berlant’s (2011) words, “a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (p 1). This concept is centered around one’s relation to an object of desire that can take on any form – e.g., love, personal goals, food, happiness, etc. – and in Hirdman’s research, the object of desire in question is the body. As Hirdman (2017) notes, when discussing or portraying women’s bodies, the media follows an implicit cultural consensus that views the female body as either perfect or imperfect⁹, with both options reinforcing cruel optimism. The ‘perfect’ body represents an everchanging ideal that is rarely or never achievable, and the ‘imperfect’ body serves as a visual illustration that sets and upholds the boundaries of the ‘perfect’ (Hirdman, 2017).

⁹ While Hirdman (2017) does not outline the boundaries of a perfect versus imperfect body, one can assume that the perfect body would be in line with society’s beauty standards, and an imperfect body would go against such standard. This can be thought of through several dichotomies such as fit/fat, tall/short, smooth/hairy, etc (Mckay, Moore, & Kubik, 2018).

There is little room for female celebrities to move across this rigid dichotomy. Pictures of the ‘perfect’ body in the media are often enhanced through digital touch-ups, making it an unrealistic ideal, and pictures of the ‘imperfect’ body are either criticized or ridiculed through a focus or zooming in on the imperfections (Hirdman, 2017). Should a female celebrity choose to go against the beauty norms and body ideals of the industry, I argue that it will either be criticized as inappropriate, unhealthy, or unfeminine, or be seen as a strategic move – i.e., keeping up with the trends of drop the filters and embracing body positivity, etc. This brings us back to the outlooks on celebrity authenticity, which supports the argument that authenticity is typically constructed and part of a ‘brand’ image instead of being an unfiltered version of the self. For Banet-Weiser (as cited in Kanai, 2015, p 328), this turns authenticity into an ideal that needs to be worked on and crafted. Kanai (2015) builds on this by noting that female celebrities can show authenticity – their ‘true self’ – through self-disclosure and transparency. However, the issue is that the media and the general public still assume, to a certain extent, that celebrities’ choices are mostly motivated by their brand image (Marshall, 2010; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Marwick and boyd (2011) tackle this issue by studying how traditional celebrities – i.e., those regularly discussed in the media and news – started using Twitter to take back the control of their image. In doing so, their image no longer depends on their portrayal in gossip magazines and the media. Instead, their Twitter content and social media activity would be a better reflection of their persona. As Marwick and boyd (2011) underline, to ensure more direct and intimate interactions with their audiences, traditional celebrities began adopting a strategy typically used by ‘micro-celebrities’ – i.e., those whose fame started through social, those who went from an ordinary life to a public one. The strategy is multifaceted and ranges from treating one’s followers as fans and ‘virtual friends’, to using

social media to interact with other celebrities and showcase one's personality, to using platforms to offer a counter-story when included in celebrity gossip (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

In brief terms, one cannot deny gender's role in measuring a celebrity's success. The boundaries of success for a female celebrity rest on many factors such as how she looks, interacts with her audience, and navigates her work-life balance. The media often focuses on the female body, and if or when a celebrity chooses to move away from the perfect-imperfect dichotomy, it is up to her to do so in a convincingly authentic way – typically by having a strong and personal online bond with her audience. While her choices may resonate with some, they may also offend others, causing a situation of social conflict and shaming. This grey zone, the one between acceptance and rejection – or between support and shame – is one that I focus on in this research.

METHODOLOGY

1. Twitter as a Research Tool

The body of literature on Twitter analyses in the social sciences is ample (Burns & Stieglitz, 2012; Burns & Stieglitz, 2013) but often overlooks the social dimensions of Twitter. The tendency is to adopt a macro approach by studying hashtags in the context of activism, socio-political issues, and humanitarian crises (Burns & Stieglitz, 2012), with little to no attention paid to how users interact with one another. This represents a gap in the literature because, as stated earlier, Twitter is more than just a social media website or application. Rather, it is a communication platform dedicated entirely to sharing one's thoughts and opinions and interacting with others. It can be a refuge where one finds a virtual community and online support system (Williams, 2015), and it is a space that welcomes a wide array of social groups. Developments in the information and technology sectors have led to the creation of algorithms that now govern the social media experience (Milan, 2015; Cinelli, de Francisci Morales, Galeazzi, Quattrociocchi & Starnini, 2021). These algorithms follow a logic of prediction by scanning through one's online activity and using that data to predict what kind of statements or narratives they are more likely to enjoy (Cinelli et. al, 2021).

Each group has unofficial expectations and boundaries of appropriate or inappropriate statements that differ depending on the values and worldviews of that group. When a user's Twitter profile is open, their tweets are public and accessible to everyone, meaning that those who are not part of the original poster's (OP) social group are free to respond to the user's statements as they please. My interest lies in the virtual interactions that occur following a celebrity moment when different groups intersect and blur the boundaries between appropriate

and inappropriate. Given the controversial undertone of Nolin's tweets, her Twitter page often brings together members of different social groups that tend to criticize and disagree with one another. I aim to examine the tension that emerges in these crossovers and how it manifests in the users' communication styles – e.g., aggressive vs sympathetic, respectful vs disrespectful, disagreeing vs denigrating. I will conduct a micro-level analysis by studying the interactions between Nolin and the portion of her audience that express negative appraisals towards her self-presentation. The tweets chosen reflect Nolin's narrative as a social justice advocate tackling political and feminist issues. Specifically, the two most discussed topics in her tweets revolve around her self-presentation and her views on socio-political issues such as the #MeToo movement and Quebec's ban against religious symbols (Bill 21). Before presenting the details of my data collection process, I will expand on the methodologies I chose to frame my analysis.

2. Blending Narrative Emotions Analysis and Emotional Discourse Analysis

While the sociology of emotions has been gaining popularity in the social sciences, it has not yet made its way into the realm of methodology (Kleres, 2010). In qualitative analysis, emotions are typically studied by either focusing on anger or shame or analyzing the emotions that emerge during research interviews (Kleres, 2010). The role of emotions and how they manifest through words has yet to be discussed. That is why Kleres (2010) builds on narrative analysis – the study of interview transcripts' narrative structure – by adding the layer of emotions to it. His methodology is interdisciplinary as he highlights the primordial role of emotions in storytelling by focusing on sentence structure, emotion words, and tone of voice (Kleres, 2010). In a similar vein, De Courville Nicol's (2011) approach assesses how discourse and emotional socialization relate to one another. I combine 'narrative emotions analysis' (Kleres, 2010) and 'emotional discourse analysis' (De Courville Nicol, 2011) to better understand the emotional

tones embedded in the tweets collected. This combination considers the stories carried within emotion words (Kleres, 2010) and the cultural and emotional themes (De Courville Nicol, 2011) identifiable within online social relations.

The blended methodology that I propose fits within the broader methodological framework of thematic analyses. The main goal of thematic analysis is to identify the patterns embedded in one's data set by organizing them into themes and sub-themes. While there are different approaches to conducting a thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) identify and outline six steps that are common across the different takes on this methodology. For the first step, they recommend familiarizing oneself with the data. The researcher will benefit from developing a system to store the data, as this will allow them to take notes efficiently and read through the data as many times as necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Building on this, the second step is centered around a deeper reading of the data to help the researcher generate the initial analysis codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once this is done, the next three steps focus on assessing, reviewing, and defining the themes in the codes previously generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This pattern identification process is a lengthy one that implies several back and forths between the steps (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). After defining and refining the themes of the data set, the researcher can move on to the last step of analysis: reporting the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Applying these steps to my research, I begin by inputting the tweets I collected from Nolin's Twitter page in an Excel document. I opted for open coding in the sense that I did not read through the data with pre-set codes. Instead, I developed and refined the codes as I went through the various steps of analysis. In what follows, I present the details of my data collection and selection process and outline the codes and themes I identified.

3. Data Collection Process

A. Data Collection

I did not require a Twitter account to collect the data for this research. The Twitter profiles I came across were all open profiles, from Nolin's Twitter page to the profiles of her respondents. Therefore, the information and statements they shared are considered public, and users have no significant expectation of privacy. As per article 2.2 of the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement: "research that relies exclusively on publicly available information does not require REB [research ethics board] review when (a) the information is legally accessible to the public and appropriately located by law; or (b) the information is publicly accessible and there is no reasonable expectation of privacy" (TCPS, 2018). Since my research met these two criteria, I was not required to submit an ethics proposal.

My data collection consists of two tweets from the original poster (OP) Safia Nolin and a combined total of 219 responses to those tweets. To avoid getting stuck in the limitations of analyzing hashtags (Burns and Steigitz, 2012), I focused on Nolin's statements and the Twitter reactions to her statements for a more accurate collection of tweets. I focused exclusively on Nolin's activity from 2018 to 2020, as that represents the period in which she was most vocal about her thoughts on various social issues and experiences with the music industry. Nolin's Twitter activity is somewhat sporadic, making it possible to extract the data manually. To do so, I scrolled through the singer's Twitter page to identify specific tweets in which she voiced her opinions on different socio-political issues and expanded on the online shaming she experienced. Below are the two tweets I chose for analysis that reflect Nolin's emotional space at different points in time and speak to the social issues she actively challenges. With two tweets from the OP, the data collected is sufficient to conduct an analysis as each tweet generated 88 and 131 responses, respectively. All tweets were de-identified and entered in an Excel document, and full

tweets will not be included in this thesis to maintain a level of privacy for the Twitter users but will be made available to the supervising committee.

- “Les gens qui m'écrivent de la merde PEU IMPORTE c'que j'écris, les hommes ET femmes qui me parlent de mon odeur, de mon poids, de mon hygiène, qui me traitent de truie, de dyke quand je parle de l'environnement: j'arrêterai pas de m'exprimer, je m'abaisserai pas à votre niveau.” August 19, 2018

“People who give me shit REGARDLESS of what I write, men AND women who bring up my smell, my weight, my hygiene, who call me a pig, a dyke when I talk about the environment: I won't stop expressing myself, I won't stoop to your level.” [translation is my own]

- “Encore une fois, l'expérience de vouloir être moi-même dans cette société vient avec un lot de merde. C'est fucking désespérant pour la femme de 27 ans que je suis de constater ça.” September 6, 2019

“Once again, the experience of being of myself in this society is a shitty one. It's exasperating for the 27-year-old woman that I am to come to this realization.”
[translation is my own]

B. Criteria of Exclusion and Limitations

For a clear rationale of how I collected the replies to Nolin's statements, I adopted the 'criteria of exclusion' practice typically used in clinical psychology (Velasco, 2012). The goal is to list the criteria that would make a tweet inadmissible in the scope of this research and avoid issues of redundancy or invalid data. Thus, I have chosen to exclude the following: tweets composed solely of a picture (e.g., memes, pictures with no text); tweets containing spam messages (e.g., selling a service/product); tweets composed solely of GIFs, emojis or emoticons;

tweets that include a link to other sites or articles; and tweets in languages other than English or French.

I have dealt with some limitations when collecting the data due, in part, to my lack of computer coding knowledge. Initially, I had intended to extract the data through the Twitter application programming interface (API), but it required an understanding of Python or R that I do not possess. I have attempted to find different APIs to extract tweets, but they all require some level of code writing. That is why I opted for a manual approach and a more focused data set instead of a larger and more general one. Another limitation I faced was centered around the characteristics of the Twitter users replying to Nolin's statements. In an online setting, anonymity is easy to maintain. One can fake an identity by using a different name and profile picture and taking on a new persona. This poses a challenge when studying markers of identity – e.g., gender, age, class, ethnicity. For that reason, I made no assumptions on the markers of identity of the Twitter users in question. Future research on this topic could include a second level of analysis in which the researcher interviews relevant Twitter users for further information and perspective on their markers of identity.

4. Guiding Concepts and Main Themes

A. Concept Operationalization

The statements that Nolin generates are the objects of disapproval of her critics. The criticisms she receives can take on many forms, all varying in intensity and aggression. Examples of such expressions include denigration, criticism, disappointment, angry commentaries, shaming, and bullying. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between two broad expressions of disapproval with respect to someone's actions, thoughts, or behaviours. In the context of this research, I use the concept of cyber-kindness and the rules of masspersonal

communication to identify the: 1) voicing of disagreement with someone or something without resorting to insults or verbal aggressions; 2) expression of an alternative point of view without bringing the other down, and; 3) criticism of someone's opinion(s) without criticizing their personhood. In a similar vein, I use the rules of netiquette to expand on how denigration takes place in online settings. Denigrating comments are typically characterized by: 1) attacks on a person's integrity, values, or intelligence, and; 2) negative comments on a person's physical attributes.

To assess the feeling rules around expressing disapproval, I observe two levels of analysis at play in the data. To begin, there is the general critique of Nolin as an artist and person. The responses from Nolin's critics reveal which social norms and feeling rules they consider her to be challenging. Building on that, how critics express their disapproval – e.g., overall tone, word choices, levels of incivility or aggression – reveals the complexities and nuances of disagreeing with others in a digital age. Upon a preliminary readthrough of the data, I noted that responses to Nolin's tweets were not extremely violent (e.g., death threats or mentions of suicide) and typically focused on the four elements of Nolin's self-presentation – i.e., her emotional politics, aesthetic politics, identity politics, and speech politics. I use this observation as a guide for the pattern identification I will expand on shortly.

B. Description of the Sample

In the responses to Nolin's tweets, audience members systematically brought up two of Nolin's controversial moments¹⁰: the 2016 *Voir* magazine photoshoot, when the singer posed giving the middle finger to the camera to show her anger against the patriarchal and misogynistic

¹⁰ I collected the data prior to Safia Nolin accusing Marie Pier Morin (Vandeuren, 2020) of sexual assault in 2020. That accusation was controversial and brought a lot of attention to Nolin's Twitter feed.

standards of the music industry (Genest, 2016); and the 2018 video clip for *Lesbian Break-Up Song*, in which Nolin made the artistic choice to showcase and celebrate female nudity and body positivity (Bonsound, n.d.b). The replies I collected mainly displayed disapproval of Nolin's self-presentation and of how she handled pushback. The disapproval expressed ranged from supportive to unsupportive, respectful to disrespectful, and nurturing to denigrating. Users read Nolin's tweets as a call for feedback and gave her their unsolicited advice on how to be, how to feel, how to handle adverse criticism, etc. I view this type of advice-giving as a form of rule reminder rooted in overt and covert online shaming practices – i.e., practices centered around online public commentaries about a person's choices and actions that are executed in different tones and intensities . When audience members offer advice and explain why they disapprove of Nolin's personal ethics, they implicitly affirm the ethics and principles that they live by and shed light on dominant and acceptable ways of being and feeling. For this reason, I argue that there are clear emotional and cultural themes embedded in this data. To make sense of these themes and patterns, I organize them by feeling rules and evaluate how they tie into De Courville Nicol's (2021) multi-levelled exploration of contemporary anxiety.

C. Feeling Rules and Contemporary Forms of Anxiety

Upon analyzing the data, I observed six recurrent and interconnected themes in the advice that Nolin was receiving. Specifically, I treated the advice in the replies as rule reminders to the overarching feeling rules embedded in the data. The most recurrent theme was that of positivity, as audience members systematically comment on the sad undertones in Nolin's statements. They recommended that she look towards a brighter and more optimistic future but also invited her to reflect on the consequences of her controversial choices. I linked the advice surrounding controversy and resistance of the status quo to themes of respect and discretion. Users explained

that western societies promoted values of respect and discretion, and it was up to public figures like Nolin to uphold those values. Should she choose to resist or challenge these ideals, she should also expect a certain degree of backlash and criticism. The recommendation that Nolin learn to anticipate backlash after a non-traditional choice ties into a theme realism, which encourages individuals to develop a realistic outlook on life and the consequences of one's actions. The last two themes I noted in the data focused on Nolin's ability to process denigrating or degrading comments by not letting such replies change her character or impact her emotional wellbeing. Specifically, these types of rule reminders oriented Nolin towards assertiveness and mental health literacy. Audience members urged her to keep being herself but also emphasized the importance of developing practical ways of processing harsh criticism and knowing when to ask for help when the pushback becomes overwhelming.

With positivity as the overarching theme of my analysis, I narrowed down my classification of the data further and suggested three broad feeling rules: positive relationality, positive realism, and positive individuality. Positive relationality involves the importance of one learning how to foster supportive, compassionate, and non-judgmental relationships with others. Positive realism encompasses the need to work with existing social in getting by, whether one chooses to resist them or not. Finally, positive individuality implies developing a strong sense of self-definition that would help one be assertive and resilient in one's choices in ways that do not compromise one's mental health and emotional wellbeing.

As I will discuss in the following chapter, I drew parallels between the feeling rules and rule reminders mentioned above and De Courville's Nicol (2021) sociological account of self-help literature and contemporary forms of anxiety. De Courville Nicol (2021) analyzes a sample of self-help books published between the 1970s and 2010s as well as the broader literature on

anxiety. She places problem-solving at the center of anxiety in an outline of six contemporary anxiety types: separation anxiety, social anxiety, generalized anxiety, existential anxiety, health anxiety, and performance anxiety. De Courville Nicol (2021) produces a socio-cultural contextualization for each type of anxiety, as well as a three-part categorization of experts' advice on how to counter a given form of anxiety. In the data I collected, I noted a clear connection between the advice Nolin received and the following categories: social anxiety, generalized anxiety, and separation anxiety.

ANALYSIS

1. Curbing Social Anxiety by Reinforcing Self-Love and Positivity

As described by De Courville Nicol (2021a), social anxiety is rooted in an internal emotional conflict centered around the challenge of accepting one's imperfections and vulnerability in the social context of intense status competition. Today, in neoliberal western societies, individuals are encouraged to meet unrealistic image ideals of health, appearance, success, and so on. Pressures around status and self-presentation arise (De Botton, 2017; De Courville Nicol, 2021a). The perceived failure to meet social expectations of success and happiness and that one's feelings do not align with what society expects generates what De Courville Nicol (2021a) terms 'social pain'. Feelings of worthlessness and shame intensify social anxiety. They are also connected to what De Courville Nicol (2021b) conceptualizes as 'validation stress'. Validation stress refers to the tensions in one's self-esteem or sense of value when one senses negative social appraisal (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). Generally, self-help authors present the multilayered experience of social anxiety in a dialectical manner, with painful unworthiness at one end and pleasurable belonging at the other end (De Courville Nicol, 2021a).

De Courville Nicol (2021a) analyzed the advice of self-help experts and categorized them into three means, or techniques, that help one move towards the experience of belonging through a broad feeling rule of positive relationality: social interdependence, compassion, and inclusion. Social interdependence is the ability to uphold mutually beneficial ties with others in a positive and nurturing way, such as being there for others, knowing how to ask for support, and being mindful of how one's negativity may impact others (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). Compassion, building on the previous technique, consists of learning how and when to successfully give and

receive emotional support. The overarching goal is to learn how to foster a more caring attitude towards oneself and others. Finally, inclusion, which can be taken as the product of social interdependence and compassion, represents one's capacity to embrace differences in oneself and others in a non-judgmental and open-minded way (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). Self-love is the foundation of these three techniques. When individuals successfully adopt one or all these techniques, they also succeed in adopting a self-love strategy to counter their feelings of validation stress and social anxiety (De Courville Nicol, 2021a).

The tweets chosen for analysis in this thesis illustrate the concept of social pain. They represent Nolin's thoughts on the challenges of contemporary authenticity and the difficulties of resisting certain social and emotional norms. Her statements reflect the concept of social anxiety discussed above. In the first tweet, from August 2018, Nolin voices frustration with how her self-presentation and actions tend to generate harsh and often hurtful criticism while making it clear that the negative comments will not stop her from being herself: "j'arrêterai pas de m'exprimer, je m'abaisserai pas à votre niveau". In the second tweet, from September 2019, Nolin once again expresses difficulty managing the negative comments and pushback from those who disapprove of her authentic self-presentation: "l'expérience de vouloir être moi-même dans cette société vient avec un lot de merde". Her 2019 statement was not hopeful and empowering like her 2018 statement. Rather, it hinted at feelings of hopelessness and defeat.

Nolin's tweets appear to resist the contemporary feeling rule of positive relationality that her Twitter respondents uphold. This feeling rule builds on cultural messages that encourage individuals to positively portray themselves and prioritize optimism and happiness (Lu & Gilmore, 2004; Stearns, 2012; Joshanloo, 2013) to achieve the pleasurable feeling of belonging (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). In both sets of data, 2018 and 2019, audience members interpreted

Nolin's tweets as a call for feedback and proceeded to give her advice on how to cope with her social pain and social anxiety. The advice from audience members aims to orient Nolin towards the feeling rule of positive relationality. These rule reminders range from supportive with explicit or implicit disapproval, to unsupportive with explicit disapproval, to outright and disrespectful rejection. Interestingly, comments that are unsupportive and disrespectful break the rule of positive relationality preached in their commentaries. In what follows, I will draw parallels between the rule reminders embedded in the data and De Courville Nicol's (2021a) categorization of self-help techniques for social anxiety.

A. Social Interdependence

To cope with the emotional pain of status anxiety and validation stress, the contemporary self-help authors urge readers to recognize that life is inevitably a collective experience. Humans need each other to get by, so they would significantly benefit from adopting strategies that would help them ask for support and offer support in a way that maximizes and nurtures their overall well-being (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). This is at the core of the social interdependence strategy, which encompasses the different ways in which one can develop and maintain mutually supportive relationships with others. Nolin's audience members provide her with such ways via the unsolicited advice they offer when replying to her statements. As I will explain shortly, the data sets differed in volume and intensity depending on the overall tone of Nolin's statement. Still, both sets of data (2018 vs 2019) generated interesting patterns and results.

In 2018, Nolin tweeted about the online shaming she had been receiving and stated that she would not silence her emotional expression or stop being herself. In my analysis of the responses to the 2018 tweet, I observed two patterns in the rule reminders that oriented Nolin towards the positive relationality feeling rule. In the first pattern, audience members tended to

remind Nolin to be more mindful of how her negativity could impact others and recommended that she monitor her emotional expression accordingly. In this case, users did not express any support in their replies. Instead, they focused on the sadness in Nolin's music by calling it flat and depressing or criticizing the singer for trying to gain sympathy by playing the victim after engaging in provocative behavior – i.e., resisting the positive relationality feeling rule. Examples of such responses are: *“on dirait que jouer la victime, ça t'arrange”* and *“ca pourrait être pire. Imagine si les 287 autres gens commençaient à écrire de la merde aussi”*. In the second pattern, users were more supportive in their comments. They urged the singer to prioritize the positive connections she already had with her supportive fans by ignoring the harmful and disrespectful replies.

The trends mentioned above applied to Nolin's 2019 tweet too, as her tone shifted from resilient and proud to defeated and hurt. As the tone in her statement shifted, the reactions to that statement also shifted. I noted the adoption of a more neutral tone from audience members as their comments went from 'supportive, with advice giving' to 'disapproving, with advice giving'. In this case, there is a disapproval of Nolin's emotional expression in the replies, and there is no supportive undertone in the advice offered in the replies. The following quotes illustrate the more critical approach adopted by some when voicing frustration with Nolin's negativity: *“pas encore un tweet dépressif. Y en a qui essaie de trouver la vie belle par ici.”*, *“moi j'aime bien les gens marginaux mais ton chialage est un ti peu fatigant.”*, and *“mais fait juste arrêter d'écoeurer le peuple avec ça”*. This critical tone was also apparent as fans reminded Nolin to appreciate the love and support she received instead of choosing to focus on the bad comments.

In addition to the patterns common to the two sets of data, I also observed two trends that were specific to the 2019 data. These patterns are rooted in both commentators' speculations about why Nolin received negative comments, and their considerations for what she could do to feel less defeated about the hurtful pushback. To begin, audience members noted that when one is negative, the energy they attract will also be negative. This was said both explicitly "*une personne attire ce qu'elle dégage*", and implicitly "*on a tous quelque chose à donner à la société, le lot de merde vient de ce qu'on exige d'elle*". The relationship between being negative and attracting negativity ties into the final trend, which emphasizes that one can choose to prioritize the good parts of their life and accept that how others react is, to a certain extent, out of one's control. According to the commentators, acknowledging that one cannot always control how others react is central to being happy and more at peace with oneself. Some users were harsh in their rule reminders, with statements such as "*être désespéré est ta nature profonde [...] change simplement ce que tu contrôles*" and "*des chansons toujours dans un espace désespérant ne rejoignent pas bien des gens [...] il n'y a rien de plaisant dans ta vie que tu pourrais partager?*". However, most users simply offered their advice in a neutral way like "*prend tout ce qui passe sois heureuse*" or "*Y a du beau tsé, faut juste regarder aux bons endroits*".

While assessing this data, I drew a parallel between the different facets of social interdependence and the four trends embedded in these replies. Nolin's statements are oppositional and resistant to the positive relationality feeling rule since she uses her platform as an outlet for emotional expression and a tool to call out online shaming practices publicly. Audience members react to this in different ways but ultimately engage in orienting Nolin towards limiting the negativity she emits online because it is neither something that they enjoy reading nor is it a productive way of connecting with others in their view. Their advice aligns

with the finding that the more negativity one emits, the harder it is for one to connect with others (De Courville Nicol, 2021a), ultimately decreasing instances of social interdependence.

Commentators also call on Nolin to understand that her happiness and well-being are intimately connected to her acknowledgement that certain things, such as reactions from the public and others' opinions, are simply out of her control. As her fans underline, what she can control is to ignore triggering and negative comments, and instead focus on upholding existing positive connections with supportive audience members. These pieces of advice fall under the scope of social interdependence as their main goal is to help Nolin navigate her emotional expression in a way that allows her to solidify existing supportive relationships and learn how to develop similar relationships in the future. That said, I also observe a secondary goal or argument implied in these pieces, which is that being more positive will ultimately help Nolin increase and nurture her self-love.

B. Compassion

Elements from the social interdependence strategy are also present in the compassion strategy. Having mutually supportive relationships with others requires empathetic understanding and sympathetic caring towards oneself and others (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). Empathetic understanding and sympathetic caring take many forms, like openness and authenticity in one's emotional expression, kindness and patience towards oneself and others, or acknowledging and celebrating one's strengths and accomplishments (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). The advice Nolin received reflects these forms, so I grouped the advice based on which form of compassion they illustrated. This led to the identification of three interconnected patterns across the 2018 and 2019 data. The replies were all supportive but expressed varying degrees of disagreement with Nolin's statements.

The first type of rule reminder I identified focused on the advice from audience members that Nolin ought to be kinder to herself when dealing with online shaming. Fans encouraged the singer to do so by recommending that she ignore negative messages and focus instead on her future via comments such as “*garde ta ligne, ça va bien aller*” or “*laisse la merde couler dans les égouts*”. I picked up on this narrative again in the second trend, which I argue reflects commentators’ justifications of why Nolin ought to be kinder to herself. This pattern, or the takeaway of this piece of advice, can be summarized as follows: when Nolin shows pride and authenticity in who she is, she is also helping others be themselves. As a person leading a public life, Nolin represents different communities such as advocates for body diversity and body positivity, feminists engaged in different types of activism, and those who resist patriarchal social and emotional norms. The following reply from one of Nolin’s audience members captures the essence of this second trend: “*Tu es une inspiration pour plusieurs [...] C’est ça le plus important*”. Put differently, both Nolin and her followers would ultimately benefit from her authenticity and happiness. The third pattern also fits within the overarching theme of self-love. Indeed, audience members often reminded Nolin that her talent was bigger and greater than the negative comments she regularly receives, and she should be proud of her achievements and strength. One commentator, for example, writes: “*vous êtes excellente dans vos choix, votre créativité etc. Regardez devant la vie est merveilleuse*”.

In reviewing these trends, I saw a clear connection between the rule reminders that commentators offered Nolin and the different ways in which the compassion technique can be exercised. There was an evident theme of self-love embedded in the advice reviewed, as users focused on the powerful impact that being kind and patient with oneself can have. Their messages can be summarized as follows: when Nolin develops a caring and kind attitude towards

herself, she paves the way for herself to receive and provide emotional support. Adopting a compassionate and self-loving attitude towards herself would also help Nolin authentically express herself and thrive artistically. In turn, this would also inspire others to live a life they are content and satisfied with. Overall, these observations are consistent with the findings that emphasize the positive relationship between one's capacity to be compassionate towards oneself and one's overall well-being. Building on that, one could argue that the better Nolin is doing – happiness and mental health-wise – the better she can represent the communities that matter to her. Moreover, as per the feeling rules of positive relationality and self-love, these four trends imply that for Nolin to exercise compassion successfully, she must prioritize self-love and adapt her emotional expression to lean more towards the positive and less towards the negative.

C. Inclusion

Inclusion is the final means that contemporary self-help experts offer to counter one's social anxiety. Like interdependence and compassion, inclusion is a means of moving through social anxiety that has become part of the contemporary cultural fabric and therefore informs the positivity-promoting advice of those who responded to Nolin's tweets. Adopting an inclusive mind-frame requires one to first be comfortable with the techniques of social interdependence and compassion on which it builds. The goal of adopting an inclusive attitude is for one to acknowledge and accept that not everyone will share the same values or agree on what constitutes appropriate versus inappropriate beliefs and self-presentation styles (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). This will help individuals develop ways to move away from feeling like they don't belong and get closer to loving themselves and accepting who they are even when they resist dominant social or emotional norms. In doing so, not only do they increase their overall

well-being, but they also unconsciously create non-judgmental spaces for others to follow in their footsteps.

In the data reviewed, Nolin received two types of advice that I argue fit within an inclusive framework. First, audience members acknowledged and validated the singer's feelings of suffering, but still reminded her that they celebrate and appreciate what makes her different. What I assess from statements such as "*mais malheureusement les réseaux sociaux sont gangrénés et les gens sensés et posés seront à jamais en minorité*" and "*Safia, vous savez dire/chanter la complexité de la vie et on a tous besoin de l'entendre*", is that Nolin's supportive followers were subtly or unconsciously expressing that they were willing to be a safe and non-judgmental space for her, regardless of the pushback. The second type of advice also revolved around the theme of safe spaces, but from a different angle. Audience members let Nolin know that her open-mindedness was helping others, as she was creating a safe and non-judgmental space for her fans simply by unapologetically being herself. The following reply best portrays this message: "*Il y a TOUS les autres à qui vous avez fait du bien en étant vous même*", where a commentator offered emotional support by emphasizing the good that came out of Nolin's authenticity. This sentiment reflects the cooperative nature of the inclusion technique and highlights how the path to belonging, self-love, and self-acceptance is a collaborative one (De Courville Nicol, 2021a). Put simply, when Nolin lives her life in a way that is oppositional to dominant social norms and emotional norms, she creates a safe space for those who share her interests and values. The nuance at play is that, since Nolin's authenticity and choices are often harshly challenged and criticized, her fanbase sometimes turns into a support system and safe space for her when the pushback becomes too intense. They provide love and kindness when she

cannot give herself that. This usually happens when the singer openly discusses her anger or sadness on Twitter, and commentators reply with supportive and uplifting messages.

A takeaway from the inclusion coded tweets is that in being authentic and accepting themselves and others for who they are, individuals will gradually gain the ability to foster and maintain mutually beneficial, cooperative, supportive, and uplifting relationships.

Generally, Nolin's audience members expressed rule reminders in their comments that hinted at the means of compassion and inclusion. By expressing their support, they expressed compassion and inclusion. Some of the replies also hinted at elements of social interdependence, as audience members reminded Nolin of the benefits and role of positivity in upholding mutually supportive relationships. The feeling rule of positive relationality emerges from the emotional space embedded in the social anxiety techniques, so from the desire to connect with others in a space of diversity, inclusion, and compassion. Commentators systematically reminded Nolin to consider how the negativity she circulated on her platform could affect others and limit it accordingly, take pride in her uniqueness by celebrating her difference and talent, and continue being herself because she was both providing and receiving a safe space from her fanbase. Together, these rule reminders aimed to orient Nolin, in both supportive and unsupportive ways, towards the feeling rules of positive relationality and self-love.

2. Working Through Generalized Anxiety by Practicing Self-Reflexivity

According to De Courville Nicol (2021b), contemporary generalized anxiety emerges from the emotional tensions that one experiences when attempting to be self-reflexive in a social setting where reality is considered constructed. This description of generalized anxiety borrows from the constructionist argument that knowledge is not directly derived from observation, nor is it objective or absolute. Rather, individuals derive their perception of the world from the tools

through which they observe the world, like the literature they consume, their socio-economic status, or even themselves. Put differently, this perspective views reality as constructed, subjective, and contingent upon time, space, and culture (De Courville Nicol, 2021b).

In the early 20th century, Weber (Runciman, 1978) put forward the concept of rationalization to make sense of his modern, western, reality. Rationalization is an early example of constructionist thought and refers to the process that groups and societies engage in to classify and organize their reality (Runciman, 1978). While the process of rationalization can never fully capture the complexities of reality, it ultimately makes reality more predictable for individuals because it helps them produce different ways of interacting and coping with their surroundings. Throughout the 20th century, social theories and intricate concepts aligning with constructionist views continued to emerge. Theorists placed reflexivity and relativity at the center of the literature (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). The heavy focus on reflexivity and self-reflexivity in contemporary societies is at the core of generalized anxiety. To make sense of this, De Courville Nicol (2021b) describes contemporary generalized anxiety as instances of suffering and emotional pain that some associate with managing their cognitive scripts and adapting their outlook according to what they feel is expected of them. This potentially overwhelming experience is intimately connected to De Courville Nicol's (2021b) concept of 'unwarranted stress'. Unwarranted stress refers to the painful perception that one's cognitive scripting is unhelpful in the contemporary social setting.

When attempting to overcome generalized anxiety and unwarranted stress, individuals are encouraged to move away from unhelpful mental constructs and prioritize self-reflexive mental control (De Courville Nicol 2021b). This is consistent with self-help authors' view of generalized anxiety as existing on a spectrum ranging from mental disorder and incapacitating

experiences of cognitive dysfunction to mental control and capacitating experiences of cognitive function (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). De Courville Nicol (2021b) identified three strategies in the self-help literature she reviewed that help one move towards feelings of mental control and cognitive function: self-observation, cognitive reframing, and problem-solving. Self-observation is rooted in self-knowledge. The advice is designed to help individuals recognize, reflect on, and separate themselves from the maladaptive patterns in their perceptions and behavior (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). Building on self-observation, cognitive reframing consists of learning how to stop engaging in impractical and unhelpful cognitions and move towards fostering a realistic and positive outlook regarding oneself and one's circumstances (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). Finally, problem-solving builds on self-observation and cognitive reframing. It is the capacity to work through emotional pain by developing practical coping mechanisms rooted in self-knowledge and pragmatism (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). Self-reflexivity is the foundation and guiding principle of these three strategies. When individuals successfully adopt these approaches, they counter their feelings of unwarranted stress and generalized anxiety (De Courville Nicol, 2021b).

Nolin's emotional pain is interpreted by her fans as a result of her inability to recognize, reflect on, and separate herself from the unhelpful perceptions through which she deals with online shaming and cyberbullying. Her statements reflect the concept of generalized anxiety discussed above. In the tweet dated August 2018, Nolin lists the themes and topics that usually generate adverse reactions from her critics. She expresses hurt, anger, and resistance towards some of the comments she receives, as she writes: *"j'arrêterai pas de m'exprimer, je m'abaisserai pas à votre niveau"*. In their responses, audience members offered Nolin advice that aligned with the three self-reflexive strategies. In the tweet dated September 2019, Nolin

similarly voices feelings of suffering and frustration towards negative responses to her authentic self-expression: “*l’expérience de vouloir être moi-même dans cette société vient avec un lot de merde. C’est fucking désespérant [...] de constater ça*”.

Nolin’s statements appear to diverge from the normative advice of self-help experts who encourage those experiencing generalized anxiety to engage in techniques of self-observation, cognitive reframing, and reality-based problem-solving. Their overarching goal is to help individuals understand themselves better and get closer to practical and pleasurable feelings of mental control and cognitive function (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). In the two sets of data collected, Nolin’s audience members demonstrated a commitment to offering the singer advice on how to work through her painful feelings of generalized anxiety. Their tone ranged from supportive with explicit or implicit disapproval, to unsupportive with explicit disapproval, to outright and disrespectful rejection. Once again, I interpret this data as sets of rule reminders whose goal is to guide Nolin towards implementing the strategies mentioned above. Upon classifying and engaging with the data, I identified three main rule reminders centered around the themes of respect, realism, and discretion. For a more holistic approach, I place these themes within the feeling rule of positive realism, which encompasses the need to work with existing social norms in getting by, whether one chooses to resist them or not. In her first response, Nolin is more positively realistic in acknowledging the norm and choosing to resist it. In what follows, I will draw parallels between the three types of rule reminders embedded in the data and De Courville Nicol’s (2021b) categorization of self-help strategies for managing contemporary generalized anxiety.

A. Self-Observation

To cope with the emotional pain of generalized anxiety and unwarranted stress, contemporary self-help experts urge readers to reflect on what they can do to navigate their emotions in a way that brings them closer to the pleasurable experience of cognitive control. To work through generalized anxiety, one must first acquire self-knowledge (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). This is at the core of the self-reflexivity in the path to mental control. Examples of acquiring self-knowledge include learning about one's triggers, familiarizing oneself with the intensity and extent of one's emotional pain and suffering, and assessing how one copes with emotional distress (De Courville Nicol, 2021b).

I observed three patterns in the feedback that Nolin received from her audience. The underlying theme across these patterns was centered around respect and shed light on how and why the audience members view the singer's self-presentation as disrespectful. In offering their opinions and feedback, audience members provided the singer with the seeds of self-knowledge. Generally, the responses differed in tone and intensity, with most commentators across the two sets of data voicing disapproval of Nolin's self-presentation and only a few users showing support and nurture in the advice they offered. I saw these responses as an invitation for Nolin to reflect on her aesthetic, emotional, speech, and identity politics and understand the consequences of resisting or straying too far away from Quebecois values and norms as a person leading a public life. Consistent with neoliberal expectation, the onus is placed on the singer to navigate these replies and turn them into tools of self-knowledge.

The first pattern I identified in the replies to Nolin's tweets was centered around the physical dimension of Nolin's self-presentation, her aesthetic politics. Audience members repeatedly reminded the singer that her self-presentation did not reflect the western femininity

standards of the industry – i.e., hyper-feminine, fit, elegant, well-spoken, etc. (Mckay et. al, 2018). Their main issue with Nolin’s physical appearance was that she gave the impression of being unhygienic due to her gait, body size, and choice of clothing. Harsher commentators offered unsupportive and often disrespectful replies such as *“si le monde disent que tu pue, c’est une constatation/un fait. Spa un problème de liberté d’expression mais d’hygiène”* or *“si tu te lavais de temps en temps on ne parlerait pas de ton hygiène”*. Following the commentators’ logic, since Nolin’s self-presentation did not align with certain expectations of beauty and femininity, she was more likely to appear disrespectful, offensive, or even resistant to the status quo. This was evident in more critical statements such as *“j’ai l’impression que tu fais exprès de provoquer.. Ex l’habillement [...] admet que tu veux provoquer”* or *“y’a que [...] de la provocation dans cette personne ! Merci d’arrêter de polluer l’espace public Québécois Mlle”*. As implied in these replies, resistance often reads as provocation, which may lead to harsher criticism and pushback from the public: *“vous vouliez faire réagir en même temps? L’un va avec l’autre malheureusement”*. That said, some fans also reminded Nolin that while negative comments were inevitable, they did not reflect her self-worth. They did so by condemning the attacks on the singer’s personhood in supportive statements like: *“c’est pas parce que tu est connue que tu m’erite ça ! de dire que t’aime pas sa musique ok ta le droit mais de juger la personne personnellement...”*.

A second pattern I observed explored commentators’ thoughts on how Nolin’s emotional politics challenges some of the norms and standards of the music industry. To prove their point, commentators often referred to two controversial moments in Nolin’s artistic evolution. The singer’s 2016 *Voir* magazine cover shoot and 2018 music video for *Lesbian Break-Up Song*. Many of Nolin’s audience members appeared to be offended by her art, as they took her

vulnerability and anger as signs of disrespect towards Quebec society and values. While in the first pattern, the focus was on Nolin's aesthetic politics, in this pattern, the focus is on her emotional politics. Commentators encouraged Nolin to reflect on the content and political undertones of her art, as her artistic choices tended to attract negative attention. Those who voiced disapproval without expressing support offered Nolin advice in a way that would invite her to consider how and why her art could come across as provoking. This ranged from straightforward replies such as "*quiconque s'afficherait nu(e) en public au Québec recevrait son lot de marde*" and "*le fuck you que tu nous montre sur la photo, était-il vraiment nécessaire ? C'était provocateur et moins sympathique à mon avis*", to more sarcastic statements like "*faire un doigt d'honneur coucher nu, tu t'attendais à recevoir des fleurs?*". Audience members who expressed offense were much harsher in their commentary by either shaming Nolin for her physical appearance "*tu n'es pas obligée de monter ton corps affreux, ce n'est pas ça la liberté...penses avant de poster*" or sending her denigrating comments: "*Fuck t'as juste 27! Pourquoi t'as la shape d'une bonne femme de 64?*". The core message in this pattern is that audience members view Nolin's art as raw and vulnerable enough to challenge the beauty standards of the music industry. However, they call on the singer to first accept that not all reactions will be pleasant, then to anticipate or even expect potentially harmful comments when she showcases 'risqué' art.

The third trend in the data also revolved around respect but focused exclusively on Nolin's speech politics. The main message from her audience members was that Nolin's way of expressing herself in French was offensive and disrespectful to the Francophone pride that resonates with a portion of her Quebecois audience. They did not see themselves in Nolin's "Franglais" style. They also did not feel represented by what they considered a vulgar self-

expression style – i.e., using a colloquial or informal tone during a formal and televised event, incorporating swear words and slang in her award acceptance speeches, making spelling mistakes in her Twitter statements, etc. Therefore, users did not express any support when voicing their disapproval of the singer’s speech politics. Some expressed their disapproval clearly with statements like “*parler d’abord un français correct*” or “*comme moi de constater ton probleme avec la grammaire*”. In contrast, others used sarcasm to get their point across. Such audience members expressed their disapproval by mockingly mimicking Nolin’s linguistic choices to remind her that her word choice was offensive and disrespectful. These users sent sarcastic and mocking replies such as: “*tsé genre fuck!*” and “*tsé genre j’veux dire! Fuck!*”.

Overall, the three trends in the data made it clear that Nolin had broken several rules or codes of civility, which made her appear disrespectful to certain members of her audience who interpreted this supposed lack of respect as provocation. Such audience members typically adopted a critical tone when telling Nolin to simply anticipate and expect these adverse reactions. While it can be taxing and painful for a celebrity to read through replies from the public, I argue that the content in the potentially harmful commentaries can help the singer learn about the triggers, extent, and intensity of her emotional pain. Put differently, to heal from an issue and learn to cope with it, one must first be aware of its existence.

This idea is underlying in the advice and reactions Nolin received from users emphasizing that she ought to learn how to navigate harsh criticism without it impacting her emotional wellbeing. These are all rule reminders, primarily delivered in critical and disrespectful ways, that encourage Nolin to separate herself from feelings of sadness and defeat and instead develop a non-judgmental and reflexive attitude towards herself.

B. Cognitive Reframing

The cognitive reframing technique builds on the self-observation technique as developing practical ways of navigating one's generalized anxiety first requires a strong level of self-knowledge. As previously discussed, to exercise mental control and prioritize cognitive function, individuals must first recognize the sources, scale, and intensity of their triggers and emotional pain (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). With this knowledge, they will have the right tools to move from a negative and impractical mindset to a realistic and positive one. In her tweets, Nolin displays signs of self-knowledge by voicing her sadness and hurt with respect to the pushback and online shaming she receives. As Nolin mentioned in interviews (Genest, 2016; Dorion, 2019), songwriting is her way of processing and moving past denigrating and disrespectful statements directed at her. This is consistent with certain strategies that self-help experts recommend to actively engage in cognitive reframing. Their advice is for individuals to practice writing and journaling to navigate their generalized anxiety and gradually change their outlook to a more realistic and positive one (De Courville Nicol, 2021b). Nolin does this through her art, in the lyrics she writes.

When Nolin's audience members come across her tweets about her emotional politics – i.e., the sadness, anger, and frustration she grapples with – they often offer advice of their own on how she could achieve a more positive and realistic way of dealing with the pushback. In other words, they orient her towards cognitive reframing strategies that go beyond simply tweeting about her emotional politics or discussing the unwarranted stress and emotional pain she experiences. The replies I reviewed across the two sets of data all expressed disapproval with Nolin's statement, with most users expressing support. While very few audience members expressed disrespect or outright rejection of the singer's statements, others were clear in offering

advice without any form of support in their replies. Overall, I identified three types of advice in the data, all centered around the theme of realism with respect to how Nolin ought to approach the pushback she often has to deal with. The three trends I observed reflect three main ways that fans recommended Nolin adopt a more realistic and positive way of navigating the harsh criticism and online shaming that she openly describes as a root of her anxiety (Dorion, 2019).

The first type of advice I observed centered around Nolin's ability to keep being herself regardless of the pushback and acknowledge that self-worth and self-love come from within and are not tied to what others think of her. Supportive users who indirectly disagreed with Nolin's expressions of sadness and frustration offered statements such as "*ne t abaisse pas à ç est frustré de sous sol cacher derrière leurs écrans et qui vomissent sur tout*", "*ne vous laissez pas atteindre pas les propos dégelasses de ces petites personnes*", and "*continue d'être toi même visiblement ça fatigue beaucoup de gens d'être authentique*". Additionally, embedded in the data was the suggestion for Nolin to take control of her happiness and develop a more positive way of processing disrespectful comments. This was evident in supportive or nurturing replies that explored themes of authenticity and happiness, such as "*être soit même en 2019 n'était pas plus facile dans les années 20 [...] fais ta vie prend tout ce qui passe sois heureuse*", "*quand tu t'acceptes et que tu aimes qui tu es tu n'as pas besoin de l'approbation de personnes*", and "*commence par te calicer du monde et ce qu'il peuvent penser la seule personne responsable de ton bonheur c'est toi*". That said, not all commentators expressed kindness regarding the singer's statements. Some users expressed frustration with what they interpreted as Nolin playing the victim again. Examples of replies that were critical in tone included comments like "*le monde commence à se tanner de toi et tes conneries d'ado mal dans sa peau*" and "*quoi? T'es encore une victime de la société ?*". In contrast, others opted for outright disrespect in their statements

by writing things like “*continue te crisser à poil pis à jouer a victimes criss de conne*”. Finally, some audience members were critical of Nolin’s victimhood but reminded her to prioritize her happiness and authenticity. To that effect, one user wrote: “*mais un moment donné arrêtez de vouloir prouver et montrer qui vous êtes et soyez juste vous sans plus*”.

A second pattern I noted in the advice offered to Nolin emphasized that the pushback and disrespectful comments she received do not reflect her self-worth, and she should not take them at face value. Fans strongly suggested that she dismiss such statements by ignoring them and focusing instead on the positive impact she had on her supportive following. Such replies were mainly supportive and emphasized that disrespectful responses say more about the people sending them than about Nolin. As one user writes “*j’imagine que les trolls sont des maladaptés à neurone solitaire mal dans leur peau [...] ils veulent que tu te sentes aussi mal qu’eux. En espérant que ça ne fonctionne pas sur toi*”. Building on this, comments such as “*Souvent des gens cachés derrière le clavier. C’est facile pour eux d’insulter dans le confort et l’anonymat des réseaux sociaux. FB et Twitter le font pas sortir le meilleur de l’humain*” and “*y a pleins de jaloux marches la tete haute tu le mérites et fou s-toi d eux[...] Ils n ont pas de vie et derriere un écran c est facile de ne pas se regarder le nombril*” emphasize that while Nolin leads a public and authentic life, her shamers tend to hide behind the anonymity that social media often provides. Other users were more critical in the advice they offered by inviting Nolin to look inwards when reflecting on her happiness instead of letting others’ opinions control it for her. Examples of such replies include “*il faut arrêter de se faire définir par le regard des Autres. Notre valeur intrinsèque est ce qui importe*” and “*commence par te calicer du monde et ce qu’il peuvent penser la seule personne responsable de ton bonheur c’est toi*”.

When reviewing the patterns in the advice Nolin received, it was evident that her following – both supportive and unsupportive – tended to send a similar message. Indeed, regardless of tone, they systematically urged Nolin to reflect on her identity as a celebrity who is actively challenging social and emotional norms. Given the public dimension of her life, users argue that Nolin ought to develop a more realistic and practical way of handling pushback – i.e., accepting that pushback will happen but knowing that it is not a reflection of her worth as a person. They also recommended that Nolin move away from victimhood and feelings of defeat and prioritize the positive outcomes of her choices on her fans and the communities she represents. Overall, these types of advice promote the feeling rules of positive realism and advocate practices of self-reflexivity and self-love.


C. Problem-Solving

Problem-solving is the final means that contemporary self-help experts offer to counter one's generalized anxiety. Like self-observation and cognitive reframing, problem-solving is a means of moving through generalized anxiety that has become central to the contemporary cultural fabric of western societies and therefore informs the reality-based advice of those who responded to Nolin's tweets. Adopting a self-reflexive, realistic, and neutral attitude towards oneself requires one first to be comfortable with the self-observation and cognitive reframing techniques on which it builds. The goal of adopting such an attitude is for readers to regain control of their emotional wellbeing, get closer to achieving cognitive flexibility, and reinforce reality and solution-based strategies in the way they navigate their generalized anxiety (De Courville Nicol 2021b). While self-help experts offer different ways of developing such a mind-frame, I focus exclusively on a specific strategy put forward by Ewin Lang Phillips (1977) that De Courville Nicol (2021b) reviews in her work. The strategy incorporates the problem-solving

technique by inviting readers to identify and reflect on the elements and details of a perceived conflict. This can be done by first identifying the boundaries of the conflict, considering the different ways it can be handled and processed, and finally, reflecting on how the issue unfolded versus how it could have unfolded. Since Nolin does not explicitly display signs of this strategy, her audience members take it upon themselves to offer answers and insight regarding the boundaries, sources, and mistakes related to the conflict she perceives and the emotional pain she feels.

Upon assessing the data, I observed two trends in how users reacted to the singer's statements and noted that very few commentators offered support in their replies. They typically disapproved of how Nolin expressed herself and either gave her advice in a critical tone or sent her outright disrespectful comments. In the first trend I identified, critics called on Nolin to be less vocal about the online shaming she experiences, as that could potentially attract more pushback. Instead, they recommended she remain indifferent when handling harsh comments to show that she is strong and has faith in her artistic vision. This came through in comments such as *“l'indifférence est la pire des sentences. Soyez indifférente”* and *“justement. Si t'étais au-dessus de tout ça t'en parlerais pas”*. Other reminded that singer that everyone must face their demons and deal with harsh criticism at some point, but their strength lies in their ability to move past it and know which traits to keep public and which to keep private. To that effect, one user writes: *“tout le monde a un côté qu'on préfère ne pas montrer. Sinon ça devient « fucking désespérant »”*.

Consistent with the underlying theme of discretion embedded in the users' advice, the second trend I noted was centered around critics' recommendation that Nolin adapts her public self-presentation in a way that is more mindful of certain informal codes of civility. Once again,

the topic of her music video and *Voir* cover picture were reference points for audience members. Harsher critics emphasized that a naked body was not appropriate for the public sphere and that a bit of discretion would not compromise her authenticity but could ultimately decrease experiences of backlash and disrespectful criticism. Examples of unsupportive statements portraying that sentiment include “*on s'en fout que tu veuilles être toi-même, tu n'es pas obligée de monter ton corps affreux, ce n'est pas ça la liberté*” and “*arrête de vouloir te mettre à nu constamment. Avoir des réserves ça des avantages aussi*”. Fans who offered the same advice in a more nurturing tone wrote replies like “*pas trouble que tu veuilles être toi-même mais justement garde donc ça pour toi*” and “*on peut être soi de multiples façons, qui attire +ou- d'  [heart emoji]*”. In these messages, users provide Nolin with feedback about why she is receiving pushback, what she could have done differently to avoid it, and what she can do in the future to move away from triggering comments and online shaming. In other words, they engage in the problem-solving strategy outline by Phillips (1977) and provide the singer with the boundaries, details, and nuances of the controversies and conflict related to her art.

3. Navigating Separation Anxiety by Prioritizing Self-Definition

De Courville Nicol (2021c) describes separation anxiety as rooted in an internal emotional conflict centered around the challenge of abiding by a society's social and emotional norms while simultaneously upholding one's authenticity and personal boundaries. Today, individual rights and liberties, freedom of expression, and freedom of choice have become key characteristics of neoliberal western societies. In parallel, it has also become common for one to feel torn between wanting to comply and prioritize feelings of belonging, and exercising one's free choice but risking straying too far away from acceptable ways of being and feeling. The struggle to balance the two reflects the anxious tension at the core of separation anxiety (De

Courville Nicol, 2021c). Those who experience separation anxiety are typically culturally aware of the social constraints attached to resisting accepted ways of being and feeling. Should they choose to continue in their path – i.e., going against the social constraints that they are aware of – they may experience a type of suffering rooted in the tensions mentioned above (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). This is intimately connected to what De Courville Nicol (2021c) terms 'dependence stress'. Dependence stress refers to the painful realization or perception that one is engaging in social overreliance at the expense of their individual and unique independence.

Self-help authors view these multilayered experiences as existing on a spectrum ranging from incapacitating feelings of oppression to capacitating feelings of emancipation (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). To alleviate separation anxiety and dependence stress, they underline the importance of promoting individual responsibility for freedom and separating from what De Courville Nicol (2021c) calls a 'suffocating other'. To that effect, individuals are encouraged to move away from engaging in overcompliance and prioritizing their free choice. To do so, experts recommend self-definition. De Courville Nicol (2021c) categorized their advice into three interconnected strategies: moral individuation, assertiveness, and mental health literacy. Moral individuation is the first step in self-definition. It refers to one's ability to distance oneself from the group and reflect on which social rules they desire to abide by and which they choose to move away from. This implies looking inwards, becoming familiar with one's limits and boundaries, and eventually learning to develop and nurture one's unique features (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). Assertiveness, building on the previous technique, consists of honoring the features, desires, wants and needs identified through moral individuation and knowing how and when to express them effectively (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). Finally, mental health literacy, which can be taken as the product of moral individuation and assertiveness, represents one's

capacity to work on one's mental health by making informed choices with respect to knowing how and when to seek professional help, or how to engage in self-care (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). Self-definition is the foundation and guiding principle of these three strategies. When individuals successfully adopt and engage in either or all these strategies, they also engage in self-definition to alleviate their feelings of dependence stress and separation anxiety and orient them towards social emancipation in a society that promotes freedom of choice (De Courville Nicol, 2021c).

Internal emotional conflicts and anxious tensions regarding belonging, freedom, and authenticity are evident in Nolin's overall rhetoric (Bonsound, n.d.b; Emma, 2016; Dorion, 2019), which sheds light on the nuances and challenges of navigating self-definition. Separation anxiety and dependence stress are especially relevant to Nolin's emotional field, as they come through in the statements she emits and the art she makes. In 2018, the singer Tweeted about how every aspect of her self-presentation was constantly scrutinized by what she saw as a harsh public: *“les gens qui m'écrivent de la merde PEU IMPORTE c'que j'écris, les hommes ET femmes qui me parlent de mon odeur, de mon poids, de mon hygiène, qui me traitent de truie, de dyke quand je parle de l'environnement”*. Her efforts to separate from the 'suffocating other' are evident as she lets her audience know that the pushback she constantly receives will not stop her from being authentic and assert herself: *“j'arrêterai pas de m'exprimer, je m'abaisserai pas à votre niveau”*. However, a year later in her 2019 tweet, Nolin offers a look into a different part of separation anxiety. Her statement *“encore une fois, l'expérience de vouloir être moi-même dans cette société vient avec un lot de merde. C'est fucking désespérant pour la femme de 27 ans que je suis de constater ça”* sheds light on the challenges and reality of individuating oneself. The path to becoming a distinct individual is not straightforward, especially for someone like Nolin,

who leads a public life and whose decisions and behaviors are scrutinized by an often unforgiving public.

Nolin's tweets offer a concrete example of what adopting a self-definition strategy can look like in practice. In the 2018 tweet, she displays signs of actively engaging in moral individuation and assertiveness techniques as she navigates and openly discusses her personal boundaries and assertiveness. Her audience's replies were primarily supportive with varying degrees of disapproval and offered advice on how to reinforce these techniques. In the 2019 tweet, as Nolin's tone shifted to a more explicitly frustrated and discouraged one, the replies to her statements were still supportive when they addressed her assertiveness but more critical when they focused on her mental health literacy. Users feel interpellated by the singer's difficulties and challenges and often advice to orient her within an ethic of pleasurable social emancipation in a free society. I read those replies as rule reminders of how to individually navigate the challenges of self-definition. In what follows, I draw parallels between the rule reminders embedded in the data and De Courville Nicol's (2021c) categorization of self-help strategies for contemporary separation anxiety.

A. Moral Individuation

To cope with the anxious tensions of separation anxiety and dependence stress, contemporary self-help authors urge readers to familiarize themselves with their wants, needs, and identity. The overarching goal is for readers to become distinct individuals and work towards a successful and rewarding experience of social emancipation (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). To work through separation anxiety, one must first reflect on the tensions between their identity and the social expectations that surround them, with the goal of separating from social norms and being a distinct individual (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). This is at the core of the moral

individuation strategy, which De Courville Nicol (2021c) describes as a dual capacity. The first goal of moral individuation is to develop the ability to separate one's identity and emotional state from the social expectations embedded in one's society or social context. The second goal is to acknowledge and accept that one's identity is not tied to others' identities. Put differently, moral individuation helps individuals understand that they cannot let social ideals control how they view and feel about themselves, nor can they control how others interpret their identity. Therefore, they should not let others' opinions or beliefs affect who they are or how they feel about themselves. I noted this dual capacity in the data I analyzed. The two goals of moral individuation also reflected the two trends I observed in the replies.

In the first trend I identified, audience members mostly commented on the frequency and likelihood of a celebrity receiving adverse reactions and harsh or disrespectful criticism. They explained that these types of responses were inevitable, and it was up to Nolin to separate herself from them and not let them negatively affect her identity and emotional wellbeing. Some users' advice was more implicit, as they offered support by focusing on those sending disrespectful messages. Supportive users spoke against degrading and denigrating comments and underlined that those offended were under no obligation to follow Nolin on Twitter. They also encouraged the singer not to let pushback dictate her self-presentation or self-expression. Fans expressed this in statements such as *“ta liberté d'expression est aussi importante que n'importe qui. Les gens ont le choix de te suivre ou non”* and *“y en a toujours qui chialeront, au lieu de se dire, ça ne m'intéresse pas et je fais autre chose”*. Other fans focused on how Nolin processed pushback and reminded her that it was simply part of social media, and her mental health would be better off if she stopped paying attention to the pushback. This came through in replies like *“le lot de marde viens avec les réseaux sociaux et comme toute toilette a ça clenche, faut juste s'en servir plus*

souvent”, “*des crétins y’en aura toujours*” and “*perd pas ton temps avec ces gens la, ca vaut pas la peine*”.

In a second trend, I noted that commentators offered Nolin three practical ways of navigating disrespectful pushback and learning to detach herself from it. First, users encouraged Nolin to simply accept that she cannot please everyone. As one person writes: “*Il y des gens qui veulent s’en servir de nous pour nous détester où pour qu’on confirme leur vision plate du monde. Pour faire court: ils ont tort*”. This suggests that the singer's emotional politics could offend certain audience members because it differs from theirs and thus challenges their worldview. However, as the second dimension of moral individuation states, Nolin is not responsible for her critics’ wellbeing. As audience members emphasized, one cannot control how another will react or feel, so Nolin should not let critics’ disrespectful commentaries change the unique features that make up her self-presentation. In a similar vein, commentators also emphasized that not everyone shared the same values, and Nolin should take pride in her art because it represents a core part of her. Examples of such replies include “*suis mon exemple car on ne peut pas être aimer de tout le monde*” and “*si vous avez fait le clip pour vous ,c’est se qui compte.On doit faire se qui nous plait à nous ,pas pour les autres*”. Once again, users reminded Nolin of the second goal of moral individuation and push her towards nurturing her self-definition. A third strategy embedded in the replies was for Nolin to expect pushback on account of the nature of her notoriety, authenticity, and art – i.e., oppositional, authentic, non-traditional, thought-provoking. Some fans offered advice without any support in statements such as “*n’en faites pas une affaire personnelle. Assumez sereinement votre décision, sachant très bien ce qu’elle allait provoquer*” and “*vous n’avez pas choisit une voie sans risques de dérapages[...]* *Mais s’attendre au départ aux conséquences probables aide p-ê à assumer et "encaisser*”. Others

adopted a more nurturing tone when reminding the singer to protect her emotional wellbeing by taking a non-judgmental attitude towards herself and taking pride in her authenticity: “*changer le monde: vraiment pas facile. Te changer: pas facile. Changer ton attitude: faisable avec de la patience et de la tendresse envers toi*” and “*etre soi-même est difficile dans une société qui exige la perfection et performance en toute chose*”.

In analyzing this data, I saw a clear connection between the replies reviewed and the goals of moral individuation. By recommending that Nolin prioritize herself and take pride in her identity, I argue that supportive audience members also push her to break the tie between her identity and emotional wellbeing, and the social ideals and expectations that critics constantly bring up. It is up to Nolin to reflect on the social rules and norms embedded in these replies and identify which to comply with and which to challenge or ignore. However, users also underlined that challenging social norms inevitably implies a certain degree of pushback, especially for celebrities on social media. Nolin must accept that she cannot impose her view on others, just like others cannot impose their view on her. The recurring message across the patterns at hand is for Nolin to separate herself from suffocating others in her journey of self-definition.

B. Assertiveness

The assertiveness strategy builds on moral individuation, as identifying, expressing, and honoring one's needs and desires first requires one to separate one's identity from that of the group and from the group norms (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). Through moral individuation, individuals develop their unique features and reflect on which social rules they choose to comply with and which they choose to overlook. Assertiveness takes this process one step further and drives individuals to, when possible, stand firm in identifying and expressing their needs, desires, and choices. The advice Nolin received can be taken as rule reminders of how to be assertive and

why the singer's assertiveness also benefits her audience. Despite the change in Nolin's tone from assertive to frustrated between 2018 and 2019, I observed five interconnected patterns in the replies that were common to both sets of data. Overall, users were mostly supportive with only implicit expressions of disapproval in the 2018 tweet and more critical with explicit expressions of disapproval in the 2019 tweet.

The first two trends I observed were common to the two sets of data and revolved around the theme of pride and resonance with respect to Nolin's authenticity. To begin, fans first expressed support regarding Nolin's decision to stand by her choices and assert herself despite the pushback. In some replies, like *"bien content que tu ne te laisses pas abattre par ça"*, *"continuez et restez ce que vous êtes. Bravo."*, and *"être toi-même. On adore ça."*, fans simply stated that they were proud of Nolin and happy that she did not let the harsh criticism get to her. Their pride doubled as words of encouragement for the singer to keep up the positive and assertive attitude. Other users, who stated that they either did not care for Nolin's art or were unfamiliar with her struggles, pointed out that regardless of who she is or what she experiences, her dedication to assertiveness and freedom of expression must prevail. Examples of such replies included: *"je ne suis pas un de vos fans mme @safiannolin mais fan de vous quand vous tenez debout"* and *"je ne connais pas tes combats, mais la liberté d'expression doit prévaloir"*. The second trend builds on this commitment to resilience that commentators discussed. Moving beyond words of encouragement, fans also explained to Nolin that her assertiveness not only resonated with them but also inspired them to take pride in who they are and challenge certain social norms. Some users focused on representation and the importance of someone in the public eye actively showcasing and advocating for diversity. This was evident in responses such as: *"tu es grosse (moi aussi!) mais comme tu es belle et que tu as du talent!!! je t'aime, tu es un exemple"*

"d'assumance" and *"en étant toi, tu rends ce monde tellement plus beau pour tout ceux qui avaient besoin de voir TOI être et exister dans toute ta beauté. #RepresentationMatters"*. Other fans reminded Nolin of the impact she had on them and referred to her art as comforting and inspirational: *"tu es une source d'inspiration pour nous tous!"*, *"for what it's worth, your video makes me feel a little better about myself every time I watch it"*.

In the third and fourth patterns, users focused on the link between Nolin's assertiveness and the art she shares with her audience. On the one hand, fans highlighted that in being assertive and standing by her artistic choice, Nolin showcased a level of talent and creativity that they deeply enjoyed. This was evident in replies like *"continue avec ta belle créativité, j'adore"*, *"tu es une artiste exceptionnelle avec une grande sensibilité. [...] tu vauX tellement plus que tout ça"*, and *"votre indéniable talent de chanteuse devrait primer, selon moi."* On the other hand, fans encouraged Nolin to take the emotional pain and anxious tensions she is often grappling with and use it as material for her art. They offered replies such as: *"tu devrait écrire une tounesur ce sujet"*, and *"vous devriez ignorer et en faire une chanson: quand on est con, on est con (Brassens)"*¹¹.

The fifth and final pattern was only present in the 2019 data set, when Nolin's assertive tone shifted to a more defeated and frustrated one. In this pattern, replies were still somewhat supportive but portrayed in a critical tone that explicitly expressed disagreement with Nolin's tweet. Commentators picked up on the shift in tone between 2018 and 2019 and proceeded to implicitly outline the boundaries of acceptable versus unacceptable assertiveness in their statements. Specifically, critics emphasized that being assertive means accepting one's choices

¹¹ This user is referencing lyrics from *Le Temps Ne Fait Rien a l'Affaire* by Georges Brassens: *"quand on est con, on est con"*.

without falling into victimhood. Harsher users offered comments like *“c’est pas vraiment mieux de choisir d’accepter le rôle d’un victime non plus”* and *“sois toi-même et vie ta vie ! mais fait juste arrêter d’écoeurer le peuple avec ça”*. They are not telling Nolin to stop being herself.

Rather, they are telling her to accept the consequences of her choices. Others offered concrete advice and recommended that Nolin take control of her happiness and try to ignore or look past what people think of her. This came through in replies such as *“commence par te calicer du monde et ce qu’il peuvent penser la seule personne responsable de ton bonheur c’est toi”*, *“faut s’en crisser, on est qui on est”*, and *“un moment donné arrêtez de vouloir prouver et montrer qui vous êtes et soyez juste vous sans plus”*.

Explored collectively, these patterns revolved around the overarching feeling rule of positive individuality. In different ways, audience members systematically encouraged Nolin to be more assertive and resilient when dealing with pushback or resistance from a disapproving public. Many of them explicitly urged the singer to move away from victimhood, as that would go against the resiliency and assertiveness that they have come to expect from someone who actively challenges the norms of the music industry. Consistent with the assertiveness technique, the message embedded in this data is for Nolin to continue expressing her views, objections, and needs. In doing so, she would be actively working through her separation anxiety and showing her supportive members what assertiveness and resiliency can look like in practice.

C. Mental Health Literacy

Mental health literacy is the final means that contemporary self-help experts offer to counter one's separation anxiety. Like moral individuation and assertiveness, mental health literacy is a means of moving through separation anxiety that has become central to the contemporary cultural fabric that informs the advice Nolin receives. Adopting an attitude that is

mindful of one's boundaries and internal conflict first requires one to be comfortable with the strategies of moral individuation and assertiveness on which this attitude builds. The goal is to effectively navigate and manage one's mental health in an informed and educated way, which implies reading up on the choices and diversity available when seeking help, engaging in different types of treatment, or incorporating self-care (De Courville Nicol, 2021c). In doing so, individuals will have the tools to move away from overcompliance and social oppression and get closer to free choice and social emancipation. Overall, Nolin received two types of advice that I argue promote the overarching goal of the mental-health literacy technique. Across the two data sets, users expressed clear disagreement with Nolin's statements. Their tone varied between supportive and unsupportive, but the disapproval of Nolin's defeat and low self-esteem was evident across the board.

In the first pattern, commentators focused on the challenging dimension of receiving harsh criticism and dealing with negative reactions. They urged the singer to take care of herself by seeking help and learning how to cope with such statements. In expressing this type of advice, commentators were supportive and portrayed a nurturing tone in their tweets. Examples of these responses include: *“je vous suggère d'en parler à votre médecin de famille ou toutes autres ressources qui pourraient vous aider. Sincèrement bonne chance pour la suite.”*, *“prends soin de toi aussi C'est destabilisant recevoir ce truck d'ignorance”*, and *“prends soin de toi contre ces horreurs”*. One user referenced the ‘27 Club’¹² to stress the importance of seeking professional help and remind Nolin of the urgency and reality of untreated mental health. They wrote *“T'sais, à 27 ans, Janis, Jimi, Brian Jones et Jim Morrison n'étaient plus de ce monde. C'est pas pq le*

¹² The ‘27 Club’ refers to a series of coincides in celebrity culture, where artists die by suicide, homicide, addiction, or other accidents when they are 27 years old (Rolling Stone, 2019).

monde les aimait pas”. The majority of responses in this pattern were supportive, with varying degrees of disapproval of how Nolin handled her mental health. That said, even unsupportive replies offered some form of advice, despite accusing the singer of wanting to be in the spotlight – implying that her issues were exaggerated or not real. As one user wrote: “*Déjà en manque d'un peu d'attention? Une bonne thérapie discrètement te ferait le plus grand bien. Une bonne thérapie discrètement te ferait le plus grand bien*”. I use this reply to segue into the second trend, which sees audience members criticize Nolin's reactions to the pushback and disrespectful comments. In this case, replies were solely unsupportive and at times disrespectful, as users repeatedly told Nolin to look inwards and start the process of getting professional help. Users offered their own psychological diagnosis as to what Nolin may be going through by stating that she either loved herself too much – i.e., narcissistic – or not enough. The following two responses capture that sentiment: “*qu'est ce que tu veux que le monde entier te disent que tu es belle?? Va voir cette définition [user included a URL to a psychology webpage about narcissism]*”, “*un jour, on réalise que c'est de soi que l'on désespère. Un classique psychologique que tout le monde devrait connaître.*”

A takeaway from the mental health literacy tweets is that Nolin's following was just as vocal about her emotional wellbeing as she was. When the singer expressed sadness and defeat, audience members were quick to comment on her mental health with reactions ranging from compassion and concern to rejection and mockery. Regardless of tone, what tied these replies together was the focus on the singer's mental health. Supportive and unsupportive users alike urged Nolin to familiarize herself with the reality of untreated mental health, then use that knowledge to make informed choices on seeking professional help and dealing with her social and emotional pain. The feeling rule of positive individuality came through in the emotional

space that characterizes the separation anxiety strategies. The rule reminders embedded in the data aimed to help Nolin practice self-definition by recommending that she learn how to engage in the free choice ideal that characterizes neoliberal western societies, and developing productive and practical ways of moving away from overcompliance.

4. Summary of Findings

Nolin's tweets from 2018 and 2019 displayed clear signs of the social, generalized, and separation anxiety constructs developed by De Courville Nicol (2021) in her work on the contemporary forms of middle-class anxiety in late modernity. Her social anxiety came through when she expressed feelings of unworthiness, resentment, and low self-esteem. Most audience members responded to the singer's narrative in supportive and respectful ways and encouraged her to engage in self-love when reading through shaming comments. Specifically, they suggested she prioritize the positive and supportive relationships she already had instead of focusing on the negativity and scorn emerging in her Twitter feed. Their advice also aligned with experts' recommendation of limiting the negativity one shares with the world (De Courville Nicol, 2021a).

Nolin's generalized anxiety came through in her difficulty to ground her actions and expectations in positive reality. Users displayed critical and supportive tones when they recommended that the singer develop a more practical, positive, and realistic way of navigating pushback and disapproval. This kind of rewiring requires a strong sense of self-reflexivity and is rooted in a type of positivity that differs from the one mentioned earlier. The advice in the data aligned with the authors' recommendation of developing a positive outlook on life by taking a step back and assessing the limits of what one can or cannot do, and focusing positively on the people or things that are helpful in one's daily life (De Courville Nicol, 2021b).

Finally, Nolin's separation anxiety came through when her statements focused on those sending her denigrating or degrading messages instead of those sending her love and support. The singer's narrative indicated that she was struggling with her mental health and had difficulty detaching from 'suffocating others'. Through a mix of nurturing and critical replies, audience members urged Nolin to be assertive and resilient in her choices, despite harsh criticism and pushback. However, they also cautioned her to focus on her mental health and seek help when assertiveness and resiliency became too challenging. Reaching this level of individuality requires a strong sense of self-definition. Overall, audience members gave Nolin a wide array of advice to help her navigate controversy and pushback and develop a more non-judgmental, practical, realistic, and positive outlook on life. Their advice reinforced self-help practices of self-love, self-reflexivity, and self-definition, and emphasized feeling rules of positive relationality, realism, and individuality.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary of Thesis

This thesis aimed to contribute to the existing sociological literature on shame, the growing scholarship on social media and online communication, and the emerging research on celebrity studies. Upon comprehensively reviewing these bodies of work, I decided to focus my research on the intersection of social disapproval, emotion management, online communication, and the celebrity self. To do so, I put forward a case study centered around Quebec singer Safia Nolin's experiences with online shaming following a series of controversial events. I based my sample on two statements from Nolin's Twitter feed in which she openly discussed the challenges of constantly receiving unsolicited feedback. I collected the responses to Nolin's statements and had a sample of n=219 tweets to analyze. Using a sociology of emotions perspective and a blend of narrative emotions analysis (Kleres, 2010) and emotional discourse analysis (De Courville Nicol, 2011), I aimed to answer three interconnected research questions. First, I wanted to understand how Safia Nolin embodied emotional resistance in her self-presentation. Building on that, my goal was also to explore how her audience expressed social disapproval of Nolin's actions and statements. Finally, the aim of my analysis was to examine the social norms and feeling rules embedded in audience members' commentaries.

Before presenting a summary of my results, I will expand on an unexpected finding I came across in my research. In the section of my thesis on celebrities and feeling rules, I suggested that celebrities have come to represent a new form of authority that we turn to in times of intense personal or societal change for cues on how to act, think, and feel. Upon analyzing my data, I noted that it is in fact the fans that act as authorities in the advice-giving that occurs both online and offline. Put differently, celebrities receive constant feedback and advice in the

commentaries they receive from audience members, fellow artists, members of the arts and music industries, the general public, and many more. Below are the broad lines of my result and the main findings of my research.

My first finding is that four dimensions of Nolin's self-presentation are at the core of the criticisms she received. Audience members repeatedly voiced disapproval of Nolin's emotional, aesthetic, identity, and speech politics by claiming that they were either inappropriate for the public sphere or did not resonate with their ethics, identity, or life principles. My second finding focuses on how audience members expressed their disapproval. Generally, responses ranged in tone from supportive to unsupportive. How users framed their advice – i.e., their communication style – also fits within a spectrum, with cyber-kindness and nurture at one end and cyberbullying and denigration at the other. The former implies offering advice in a compassionate and mindful way, while the latter implies imposing advice in a more sarcastic or disrespectful way. I read the wide array of advice in the data as rule reminders meant to orient Nolin on appropriate ways of being, feeling, and acting. Building on this, my third finding considers both Nolin and users' statements and considers what they represent in terms of social norms, feeling rules, and contemporary anxieties. I made three observations in Nolin's statements that fits within De Courville Nicol's (2021) typology of contemporary anxiety. Specifically, I noted that Nolin displayed signs of social, generalized, and separation anxiety, and that the tools to counter those anxieties were embedded in audience members' advice. Users systematically oriented the singer towards the feeling rules of positive relationality for social anxiety, of positive realism for generalized anxiety, and of positive individuality for separation anxiety.

2. Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research

In contemporary culture, social disapproval and social degradation tend to be used interchangeably. My research will make an original contribution to the scholarship on shame as it goes beyond discussions of shame and morality and focuses instead on how disagreement can be respectfully practiced today. This will highlight the increasing anxieties concerning social media use and the rights to freedom of expression and address the increasing resonance of online shaming with contemporary values of diversity and inclusion. My thesis project will also offer a unique contribution to the literature on celebrity studies as it features the novel perspective of understanding the challenges and complexities of challenging feeling rules while leading a public life.

It is important to note that my research is not generalizable or representative of the population, and the trends I identified in my findings are specific to this sample and case study. Still, my findings contribute to the growing bodies of literature on shame, anxiety, and celebrity, and shed light on substantial connections between online communication and anxiety – a topic that can be studied numerous perspectives. That said, a significant limitation of analyzing online content lies in accurately assessing users' markers of identity. Authenticity is not guaranteed in cyberspace as anonymity is easy to maintain. Users may present themselves however they please online by constructing a persona and faking their identity – i.e., using a fake name or uploading a non-identifiable profile picture, etc. Future researchers who study masspersonal communication could opt for a mixed-methods approach and include a qualitative layer of analysis to their primary methodology – thematic, content, discourse, etc. Researchers can interview relevant social media users for further information and perspective on their markers of identity to give their study greater depth. Another avenue of research is to conduct this kind of study across

different platforms – i.e., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc. – and examine how the forms, tones, and intensity of advice-giving vary depending on the platform.

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