

**Resolving a Shaken World:  
A Mixed-Methods Investigation of  
College Students' Social Media Use during COVID**



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# Literature Review

## Media and Well Being

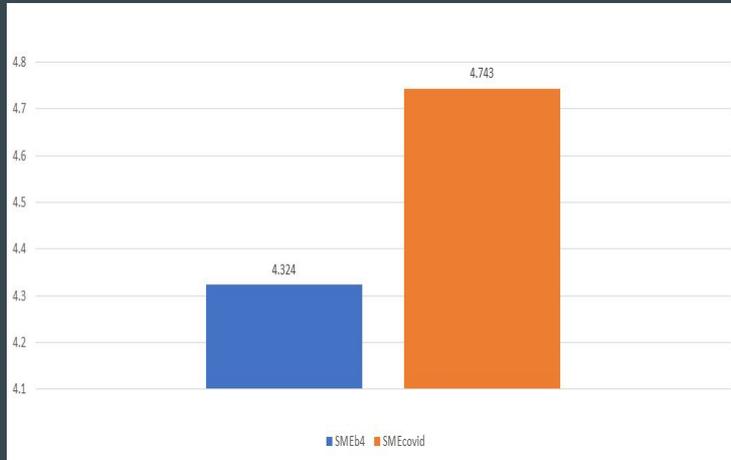
- media exposure is related to negative stress, anxiety, and depression.
- these relationships may possibly extend to electronic, and especially social media.
- raises the question of whether adolescents' mental health may be particularly vulnerable, especially in regard to attempts to maintain connection to their broader social networks in the midst of the Covid - 19 pandemic.

# Quantitative Study

- convenience sample of students ( $N = 74$ )
- 74.3% self identified as female, 2 participants did not report a gender
- $M = 20.357$ ,  $SD = 3.875$
- **H1:** Social Media Exposure (SME) during COVID will be greater than before;
- **H2:** SME during COVID and Covid stress will be positively related;
- **H3:** SME during COVID and anxiety symptomatology will be positively related.
- **SME** (adapted from Roche et al., 2016)
  - regarding self-reported hours spent per day using social media platforms - one before and one during COVID.
- **Covid stress** (adapted from COVID-19 stress scale Ellis et al., 2020).
  - 8 items, 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much)
  - Example: “To what extent are you worried about how COVID 19 will impact your school year?”
- **Anxiety** (adapted from General Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7, Spitzer et al., 2006).
  - 7 items, 1 (not at all) to 4 (nearly everyday)
  - Example: “Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems? Trouble relaxing.”

# T-test and Correlations

$t(73) = -2.566, p = .012, d = -.298$



		Correlations				
		SMEb4	SMEcovid	covidstress	depression	anxiety
SMEb4	Pearson Correlation	--				
	N	74				
SMEcovid	Pearson Correlation	.758**	--			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	74	74			
covidstress	Pearson Correlation	.167	.247*	--		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.155	.034			
	N	74	74	74		
depression	Pearson Correlation	.200	.213	.404**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.088	.068	.000		
	N	74	74	74	74	
anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.090	.053	.446**	.799**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.446	.651	.000	.000	
	N	74	74	74	74	74

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
 \* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

# Qualitative Study

Shifting from magnitude to meaning

- What does it mean to be anxious in the age of COVID?
- How does social media use contribute to this anxiety?
- What are they anxious about?

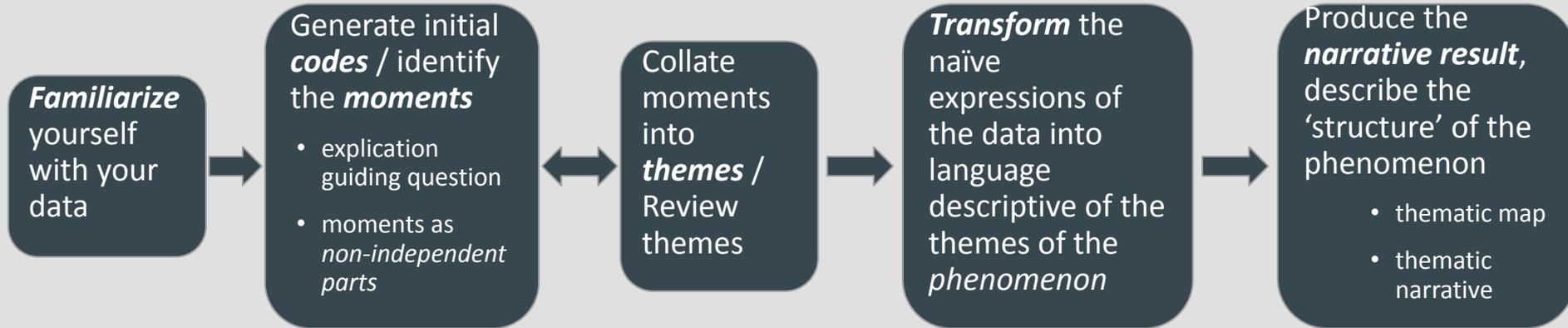
Data Collection:

Describe a specific situation in which you were engaging with social media about the COVID pandemic and felt upset, rattled, shaken, or unsettled. Describe the situation as completely as possible. Describe this situation like a story with a beginning, middle and end, how you came to be on social media, how this experience affected your understanding of yourself, others and the world as well as your future and possibilities. How did this situation conclude or resolve for you?

Participants:

Convenience sample of students

# Phenomenological Thematic Analysis



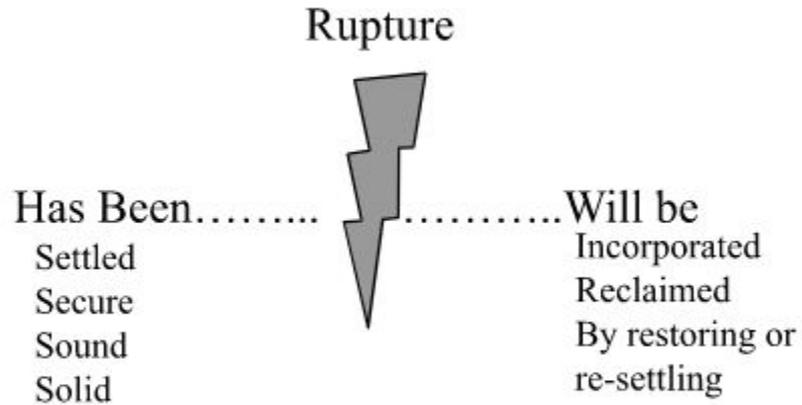
Landrum & Garza, 2022

# Participants

- **Lauren** (Latina female) feels ostracized and diminished in view of her skepticism regarding COVID precautions. When she comes across social media content that is at odds with her views, she feels silenced, bullied, and rejected. She longs for the possibility of open discussion and reciprocal understanding.
- **Samantha** (Latina female) describes feeling betrayed by her friends who she had previously thought were on the same page regarding COVID precautions in preparation for Samantha's birthday party. When she discovers through social media that these friends had been lax with precautions, Samantha begins to question who shares her understanding of the situation.
- **Mirabel** (Latina female) discovers that her cousin has posted outlandish and conspiratorial views about COVID which threatens her and her grandmother's sense of safety. Mirabel finds that what she considers to be dangerous attitudes towards COVID are closer to home than she imagined.
- **Dana** (white female) is surprised at the degree of hostility expressed in response to her pro mask social media post. Particularly unsettling was the response from a woman she knew from her church community. She was bewildered at how the woman lashed out at her post and begins to question her church community and its values.
- Watching a video on Youtube, **Willow** (Black female) is at first amused by a catchy up-tempo song which quickly turns to being horrified by the graphics which depict the number of COVID deaths by country. She comes to consider the possibility that she is more affected by the pandemic than she realized.

# Thematic Structure

Figure 1: The Experience of Being Unsettled



In being unsettled, participants experience a rupture in their worlds that brings to light what has been and what would have been as they contemplate what this rupture portends for what will be.

# Rupture, Recollection, Resolution

## Rupture

Being unsettled during COVID entails a rupture which occurs across dimensions of self, relationships with others, one's place and standing in the world, and temporality. In experiencing this rupture, participants attuned to different possibilities for themselves and were pulled between an acceptable and desirable path and a disconcerting and uncertain place.

Lauren says, "I was frustrated that I felt that I couldn't say what I wanted to even when (seemingly) everyone else could, simply because I hold unpopular opinions."

Dana writes, "I was very hesitant to post anything about COVID-19 because it had become so politicized by then."

Samantha says, "I was already annoyed that I couldn't do what I originally had wanted to do for my birthday because of covid, so I was even more irritated that my friends didn't care and would put me and the 6 other people I had invited in danger."

# Rupture, Recollection, Resolution

## Recollection

The rupture lays bare the past and its anticipated future from the occluded vantage point of the uncertain now. In being unsettled, one orients to what has been and what might be as witness not agent, as passive not active. Being unsettled is to find oneself experientially detached from one's agency in an attempt to recapture the past and carry it forward to the future.

Samantha writes, “You only turn 21 once, I was finally/officially allowed to go out to clubs and bars and I wanted to go with my squad and experience a normal 21st birthday night out on the town...but it just sucks when you picture doing something for so long and then something out of your control ruins it.”

Willow ponders, “I stopped smiling in amusement at the stupidity of the video, and nostalgia at the music, and thought, ‘What the [heck] [sic] is going on with this country?’

# Rupture, Recollection, Resolution

## Resolution

In resolving the feeling of being unsettled, the fractured aspects of self and world and disconnected timeline begin to be woven together through one's understanding of how one's world has changed.

Resolution means to give the rupture a place with respect to what has been and what will be. By resolving the rupture, one's world is not necessarily the same as before nor harmoniously reconciled.

When one re-settles and resituates oneself, the rupture moves from an on going now to what has been and one's future is now no longer engulfed and clouded by the rupture.

Japanese art form *kintsugi*

Mirabel says, “Nonetheless I know I do not have to let myself become upset, I am responsible for my emotions and I can disagree without becoming angry.”

Dana writes, “Nevertheless, the damage had been done. I did my best to patch up the comment section and smooth things over, since I do respect this lady and, until the pandemic, she had always been such a kind human being.”



# Discussion

- Quantitative findings: stress about COVID increases, albeit weakly, with increased social media usage
- Qualitative findings: participants are particularly concerned with the question of where and how they fit alongside their peers and how their relationships with others will unfold.
- In being unsettled, one adopts an evaluative rubric to know where and with whom one stands
- Together, quantitative and qualitative research provide a more complete understanding of what it means to be anxious in the time of COVID

Questions?

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