Optimistic Anthropology: Identity and Well-Being on Instagram

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Optimistic Anthropology: Identity and Well-Being on Instagram

By

Katherine Picchiotti

Accepted in Partial Completion
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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Katherine Picchiotti

August 2, 2021
Optimistic Anthropology: Identity and Well-Being on Instagram

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Katherine Picchiotti
August 2021
Abstract

This study investigates how students at Western Washington University practice well-being through identity performance on the social media platform, Instagram. Data collection involved multiple qualitative methods, including an initial online survey, 25 semi-structured individual interviews, 5 focus group discussions, and photovoice analysis of participant submitted images. My analysis shows that the participants in this study use Instagram to perform multifaceted identities, and have an acute awareness of the specific affordances the application has to offer, and how that environment impacts overall well-being. Therefore, I argue that these participants have developed methods they perceive as beneficial to their own (definition of) well-being, by using Instagram to form and connect with communities, curate identities, and monitor perceived toxic habits. Through these methods, I conclude along with Boellstorff (2015) that the separation between physical and virtual realities is a dualistic perspective, and add that well-being can be viewed as a practice that is perpetually monitored, navigated, and maintained by the individual.
Acknowledgements

When I finally decided to pursue a Masters degree, I was already armed with the knowledge that anthropology had not always been the open-minded, progressive discipline I had thought it to be. In fact, I was saddened to learn that the origins of racism, sexism, ableism among other isms had deterred many academics whose views would now be welcomed, from even considering anthropology as a career path. I wondered what ideas we were missing out on, and what other issues could be solved if we had a more inclusive rhetoric from the beginning. As anthropology works to rebuild itself through decolonization, an important lesson is brought to the surface: Humanity can learn from the past by admitting to and addressing problems, but also through appreciating multiple perspectives. This work is the accumulation of my attempt to recognize and promote subjective narratives, as they are of use to anthropological inquiry, not only in the context of identity formation and well-being, but in pursuit of understanding humanity as a whole.

The concept for this project was developed with the guidance of my committee, WWU Associate Professors Sean Bruna and Joshua Fisher, as well as my graduate advisor, Professor Judith Pine. I want to acknowledge and thank them for their time, patience, and continuous support as this project developed. I also want to recognize that the recruitment process for this study would have been far more difficult to navigate during the COVID-19 pandemic without the approval of Dr. Maria Paredes Mendez, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr. Kit Spicer, Dean of the College of Fine and Performing Arts, and Dr. Scott Young, Dean of the College of Business and Economics, who allowed mass emails to be sent to students who are enrolled in those schools. I am additionally grateful that through these efforts, and with the help of the WWU Department of Anthropology, specifically Lauren Townsend and Viva Barnes, this study received funding through incentive collections, and significant support through their organization and attention to detail as we navigated ever-changing circumstances through the pandemic.

Finally, I want to express my utmost gratitude to the participants of this study, who persevered through the rigorous phases of this project, and who expressed a keen interest in my work as the process unfolded. Although the participants remain anonymous in this project, I hope each of them know the impact they had sharing their stories, and continue to inspire others with their opinions, passions, art, and individuality.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iv

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... v

List of Tables and Figures .......................................................................................................... vii

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1

  Discussion of Literature ....................................................................................................... 3

    Anthropology and Performative Identity ....................................................................... 3

    Anthropological Conceptions of Well-Being ............................................................... 7

    Digital Anthropology .................................................................................................. 9

Chapter Two: Research Methodology ....................................................................................... 13

  Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 13

  Research Timeline ........................................................................................................... 13

  Research Design ............................................................................................................... 14

  Positionality ...................................................................................................................... 15

  Research Methodology .................................................................................................... 16

    Phase I: Research Approval and Recruitment ......................................................... 17

    Phase II: Data Collection ............................................................................................. 18

    Phase III: Data Storage and Analysis ......................................................................... 23
Limitations ...........................................................................................................................................24

Summary ..............................................................................................................................................25

Chapter Three: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework .................................................................26

Performance Theory ........................................................................................................................26

Performative Theory of Well-Being .................................................................................................27

Affordance Theory ..........................................................................................................................28

Chapter Four: Findings .......................................................................................................................30

Introduction .........................................................................................................................................30

Research Participant Demographics and Survey Statistics ...........................................................31

Instagram Sentiment ......................................................................................................................35

Instagram Versus Facebook .............................................................................................................36

Instagram Best Practices ...............................................................................................................39

Constructing Communities ..........................................................................................................40

Curation and Performance of Multifaceted Identities .....................................................................46

Self-Curation .......................................................................................................................................46

Alternate Accounts ........................................................................................................................50

The Instagram Algorithm ..............................................................................................................53

Monitoring Toxicity and Practicing Well-Being .............................................................................57

Impact of Instagram on Mental Health ..........................................................................................57
Addiction ..............................................................................................................59

Digital Detox ......................................................................................................60

Detox Strategies .................................................................................................61

The Digital Detox Cycle ......................................................................................65

Chapter Five: Conclusion ..................................................................................67

Thesis Summary .................................................................................................67

Major Findings .....................................................................................................69

Directions for Future Research ..........................................................................71

Works Cited .........................................................................................................73

Appendices ..........................................................................................................79

Appendix A: ........................................................................................................79

Appendix B: .........................................................................................................80

Appendix C: ........................................................................................................81

Appendix D: ........................................................................................................84

Appendix E: .........................................................................................................85

Appendix F: .........................................................................................................86

Appendix G: .........................................................................................................87

Appendix H: .........................................................................................................88
List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Percentage of Instagram Enjoyment Levels

Figure 2: Percentages of Instagram Profile Satisfaction

Figure 3: Total Count of Reasons to Like an Instagram Post

Figure 4: List of Instagram Best Practices: Ranked

Figure 5: The Digital Detox Cycle
Chapter One: Introduction

The relative ubiquity of social media use has afforded many people the ability to form communities, express themselves, and perform their identities-- that much is already evident. What is somewhat less obvious is how their well-being ties into those interactions, modes of expression, and performances. Data for this project was collected via an initial online survey, interviews, focus groups, and photovoice analysis, identity and well-being are investigated through participant narratives about Instagram use. The aim of my work is to analyze more optimistic topics of the human experience such as personal identity and subjective well-being using an anthropological perspective. In particular, I chose to inquire about the methods students of Western Washington University (WWU) use with the intention of improving their well-being through identity performance on Instagram. Out of all social media networks, Instagram was selected for this study because of the negative reputation the platform has regarding mental health, and the particular technological, physical, and emotional affordances that allow users to express multifaceted identities.

To highlight anthropological interest in both individual identity and well-being, this study poses questions related to well-being, and how that ties into community, identity, and self-awareness. By reflecting on my own experiences on Instagram, and listening to participant narratives about Instagram use, I explored the ways in which the social media platform works as a space in which individual identity and well-being are both informed. My analysis of these narratives, which draw on performance and affordance theories, suggest that participants do not consider the performance of identity or the performance of affect/emotion in a digital space and those performances in the “real” physical world, mutually exclusive.
My analytical approach deploys an optimistic lens, taking inspiration from Edward Fischer’s positive anthropology, in that both concepts contribute to the documentation of social norms and institutions that work to enhance well-being, in specific contexts. To avoid assigning “positive” or “negative” values to anthropology, however, I am using what I have termed “Optimistic Anthropology” to encompass additional topics beyond well-being, and encourage anthropological investigation in more enjoyable and even mundane aspects of the human experience. By explicitly inquiring about the notion of well-being as a practice on Instagram and unpacking the everyday ways in which college students at Western Washington University perceive the relationship between Instagram use and individual identity, optimism is at the core of this analysis. **While some frequent users of Instagram assert that the platform is costly to well-being, my participants indicate that a successful Instagram experience is dependent upon the development of communities tied to self-expression, the performance of multifaceted identities, and the navigation of perceived toxic environments within the application. A successful Instagram experience, therefore, relates to well-being through various technological, emotional and physical affordances that permit participants (and other Instagram users) to perform multifaceted identities. In this thesis I argue that these users, my participants, have demonstrated methods to practice well-being through Instagram use by finding and connecting with communities, curating their identities, and monitoring what they perceive as toxic habits.**

This thesis joins a growing body of work focusing on the anthropology of well-being, where the findings of this study suggest that well-being may be productively theorized as a practice, rather than a feeling or state of being. Understanding the nature of well-being through this view not only connects to the broader anthropological conceptualization of the term, but it
also speaks to the importance and usefulness of qualitative research. While broad claims or generalizations cannot be made with the information discovered from this thesis, my research does provide ethnographic data that may inform future ethnological studies.

**Discussion of Literature**

My work on well-being as a practice among Instagram users is situated among three larger conversational areas: (1) anthropology and performative identity (2) anthropological conceptions of well-being, and (3) how I draw on these two categories through digital anthropology. With these three subjects, I expand on topics connected to my work including the analysis and construction of identity and well-being, how well-being has been approached by anthropology, and why social media matters for current anthropological methodologies.

**Anthropology and Performative Identity**

There has been much scholarship within anthropology on how identity is conceptualized and how well-being is constructed. Identity is a topic that has several interdisciplinary interpretations, and remains a useful subject for anthropological analysis and empirical inquiry (Finke and Sökefeld 2018). My work subscribes to the view laid out by Finke and Sökefeld (2018), that identity is a question of various classifications, socially constructed categories, and social interactions. My work also agrees that the phenomenon of understanding oneself is guided by interactions and relations to others, and is processed through outside aspects such as power asymmetries and affordances, among other topics crucial to understanding culture. The affordances considered in this study, stem from Gibson’s (1979) definition, that affordances are what the environment provides an individual, and therefore determine what that individual can achieve within specific contexts, such as identity performance on Instagram.
Identity performance, also referenced as performative identity, is discussed by Goffman (1956) as a form of self-presentation where individuals project a certain image (or multiple images) of themselves depending on a social situation. Through these performances, the impressions an individual makes are managed to depict an ideal version that is most likely to be accepted within a given environment. Although most performances lie between being sincere and contrived, the range individuals have depends on an agreed interpretation of the social situation, and affordances offered to the individual. Goffman asserts that in order to study human interaction, research must consider the dramaturgical complexities involved in individual behavior.

Underpinning all approaches to studying identity however, as Linger (2007) asserts, requires models of the person, meaning anthropology must examine identity by mediating between public representations and personal subjectivities, and make those models explicit for further studies. A number of scholars in favor of an experience-oriented approach, including Linger, have asserted that linking different assumptions about subjectivity and meaning is necessary to explore identity from an anthropological perspective, and can be oriented through a model of individuality or consciousness (Cohen 1994; Strauss 1997; Sökefeld 1999; Chodorow 1999; Rapport and Overing 2000). These works represent a portion of the various analyses and interests in studying identity, and suggest that a model of the self is important for understanding how people define themselves. For my participants, multifaceted identities are not split into multiple selves, nor are they anchored to either the virtual space or physical space. Instead, my participants consider themselves (and their identities) to be a unified whole, performing inside different settings. With these ideas in mind, and the understanding that the importance of individuality and identity has seemingly increased overtime, my study injects well-being into the
investigation, and aims to understand how these concepts are tied to individual self-expression, community formation, agency, awareness, and operate within (but are not determined by) the affordances of specific environments.

Anthropologists such as Neil Thin, Edward Fischer, and Webb Keane have also argued for an explicit engagement with well-being as it relates to other social concepts of happiness, ethics, and morality. Thin 2020 notes that well-being “refers to the desired processes and outcomes of living well, including mental, bodily (somatic), sociocultural, and physical environmental dimensions” (pg. 22). Similarly, Fischer (2014) introduces “the good life” which develops through aspiration, opportunity, dignity and purpose, and examines well-being based on the way cultural values impact choices, or stated and revealed preferences. Keane (2017) frames well-being using ethical affordances, or what experiences might offer people as they navigate relationships with themselves and others (pg. 31). The significance of identity in relation to well-being is emphasized in ethnographic works by Whyte (2009) or Barratt and Green (2017), for example, while recent scholarship has explored why well-being has been previously ignored by anthropology, and how that has impacted the field (Thin 2008; Fischer 2014; Ferraro and Barletti 2016). Taking inspiration from these works, my study recognizes the contested definitions of well-being and seeks to explore additional conceptualizations for the term, including my own definition based on my collected data.

To broaden the notion of well-being and the larger frameworks in which anthropology conceptualizes the term, consider potential engagements between anthropology and well-being, as well as how well-being has been previously defined. For example, Thin (2008) outlines both essential and desirable areas of study between anthropology and well-being, such as mental health, progress, politics, and consumption. Thin’s definition of well-being also recognizes that
anthropological engagement offers interpersonal and intercultural comparisons for how well-being is viewed worldwide, where well-being, although vague, “is an optimal state for an individual, community, society, and world as a whole.” (Thin 2008 pg. 5).

Specifically, Thin mentions that anthropologists engaging with the economic sector of well-being require refined distinctions about different types of pleasure and motives, which relates quite interestingly to Edward Fischer’s (2014) view of well-being, or what he calls “the good life.” Fischer suggests anthropology observe stated and revealed preferences (generated by people) in specific contexts to gauge overall life satisfaction. For anthropological analysis, these coexisting modalities provide insight into economic behavior, and the construction of moral subjectivity (Fischer 2014). Taking note of both Thin and Fischer’s perspectives, well-being is reconsidered based on the data analysis of my own work, discussing how students at WWU monitor their well-being through identity performance. For the purposes of this study, my own definition of well-being is based on the ethnographic data I have collected, where well-being is considered a practice, during which feelings, beliefs, behaviors, ideologies, and actions are established, monitored, and adjusted to affirm personal sense of self and acceptance.

The importance of identity curation in pursuit of well-being is exemplified in social media use, where both concepts are connected through embracing subjectivity, affordances, agency, and narrative processes. The subjects of identity and well-being are found in anthropological studies investigating technology use on multiple platforms, through various scales, and across many cultures (Miller et. al 2017; Vedwan 2013; Peake 2017; Bareither 2019). In this work, I define identity through a subjective and (presumed objective lens of digital) perspectives, the combination of affordances and individual agency helps to understand how Instagram can be used to perform identities and practice well-being.
Anthropological Conceptions of Well-Being

Well-being has been subjected to a host of definitions predominantly within psychology, as well as philosophy, ethics, sociology, and economics. Words such as positivity, flourishing, thriving, and mindfulness, have all enjoyed a renewed interest in these fields, with a review of the existing literature revealing a few biases among scholars and theories surrounding ideas about life satisfaction (Ferraro and Barletti 2016). Namely, well-being has inter/multidisciplinary relevance, yet psychology appears to have staked its claim for how it is defined and what methods are used to study it. Happiness is considered a component of well-being, generally discussed as a state-of-mind or feeling, where well-being encompasses value beyond the scope of happiness, investigating the quality of life (Haybron 2018). Although psychology tackles several models of well-being, the evolving debate differentiating hedonic and eudaimonic approaches looks at broader categories related to well-being, including pursuits to experience pleasure, and enabling self-fulfillment (Ferraro and Barletti 2016). Contextualized within these large areas of study—philosophy, ethics, sociology, and economics—, anthropology has the capability to not only conceptualize, but assess and promote well-being through comparative study.

The psychological and ethical perspectives on well-being have not only shaped how well-being has been discussed, but these views generate areas for anthropology to engage in the conversation. Thin (2008) for instance takes into account ways psychology distinguishes between several terms related to subjective well-being that on the surface overlap (such as flourishing, thriving) but when broken down, provide specific meaning to how well-being is examined. According to Thin, these meanings have caused anthropology to be wary of exploring well-being, since as an analytic (rather than ethnographic) term, well-being tends to not be used by people as they describe their lives. A central concern of ethnography, the way people describe
themselves and their lives also requires anthropology to involve ethics, especially in regard to well-being.

For example, Keane (2017) theorizes about ethical life by drawing from psychology and ethics, comparing and reviewing the natures, interactions, and history of everyday social convergences, and synthesizing what makes an ethical life through ethnography. By rethinking the relationship between natural and social realities, Keane proposes that an ethical life is signaled by people’s actions, their sense of self, and sense of other interlocutors. The performance of identities factors in such ethical decisions in terms of vulnerability and authenticity, and impacts well-being based on how the performance is received by the individual and perceived audience. This is particularly critical when distinguishing between performative activism, a colloquial, pejorative term for feigning interest in social causes to achieve higher social standing, versus performative identity, a scholarly term in reference to the multifacetedness of individuals. Addressing intersectional views on ethical life, and how those views tie into people’s descriptions of well-being, allows anthropology to embark on comparative, analytical studies without the pressure of emphasizing pathologies.

The qualitative ethnographic methods of anthropology allow for extensive detail to be provided about a particular study and for data to be examined through the discourse generated by interlocutors. If we elaborate on Thin’s discussion (but not definition) of well-being as a cultural process that is an elusive, fluid set of feelings and evaluations, an optimistic anthropology maximizes important features of qualitative research such as opinions, identities, and expression, to grasp how well-being is composed in relation to identity performance on Instagram. Furthermore, Keane’s combining of natural and social realities connects to ‘subjective’ well-being, on Instagram in that intersubjectivity between people depends on their constructions of
reality. Examining these realities by listening to participant experiences on Instagram, contributes to the complex behaviors surrounding everyday interactions, and classifies well-being as a practice.

**Digital Anthropology**

Digital anthropology works to understand the relationship between humans and technology, in part by investigating the online communities present on social media (Boellstorff 2015; Miller 2021). Social media by nature is entangled with anthropological interests—primarily human performance, emotion and cognition. Ideas, aesthetics, trends, and norms are all tied into the online network of sharing, posting, and participating in social media. As digital anthropology develops (and continues to develop) alongside new technologies and updated forms of sociality, the discipline has generated crucial research on virtual realities. The descriptive techniques of anthropology, rather than prescriptive, generate needed discourse about the social implications of technology use and virtual spaces (Boellstorff 2015). Related technological topics such as telehealth, virtual worlds, and gaming communities have propelled anthropology into new areas of digital culture, and into investigating social dynamics considered “virtually human” (Boellstorff 2015; Geismar and Knox, 2021).

According to Boellstorff (2015), the concept that online experiences are virtually human can be translated into two meanings: First, that acknowledging the virtual space as an extension of self is markedly human, as opposed to posthuman, because of the social design, integrated structures from the physical world, and the very development of virtual reality itself, by humans, for humans. Second, that the virtual space can be interpreted as nearly human, in that the cultural construction has foundations in the “real world” but is transformed through creative mechanisms,
such as avatar customization in Boellstorff’s work. Digital ethnography, Boellstorff asserts, acknowledges that virtual and physical worlds are not mutually exclusive, but are in fact interconnected with one another. His research, which takes place on Second Life, an online gaming community, is one of several ethnographies that prioritize how individual experiences are displayed and practiced on various online forums, and gives insight into transcending social dynamics that expand understandings of identity and personhood (Boellstorff 2015; Miller 2021; Geismar and Knox, 2021).

Conducting research on human relationships to technology also confronts how social media impacts well-being, and requires an understanding that individuals, with their embodied, physical, and cognitive resources, interpret meaning in several different fashions. Miller et al. (2016) for example discusses happiness on social media- separate to well-being- defining happiness as “feelings, expressions and reports of emotions, as well as the important stories that people tell, the relationships that they build and their aesthetic preferences” (pg. 194). This definition, in fact, takes inspiration from Thin’s (2008) explanation of happiness that involves motive, evaluation, and emotion: “In [Thin’s] formulation, motive is related to ambition and perceived purpose of life. Evaluation is related to individuals’ perceptions of their own quality of life as related to cultural values and morality. Emotion is associated with temporary pleasures and more enduring emotional states of well-being.” Miller et. al (2016) then adds that happiness, when conceptualized in this way, makes room for both cultural and individual variations of the term. Well-being however, as a practice, and as Miller and Thin note, is not so fleeting as the emotion happiness, and while there are certainly aspects of their definitions that can contribute to well-being, the long-term goal of self-approval and acceptance requires monitoring, maintenance, and on social media, technological, emotional, and physical affordances.
The various types of affordances digital media provide are particularly critical for ethnographic research, as social media continues to transform individual pathways and thus shape future notions of well-being. Examining niche, individual perspectives about Instagram use, and capitalizing on the technological and emotional affordances offered by the application, has allowed me to better understand the experiences of my participants, and to contribute to the anthropological analysis of personal and collective ideas of well-being within our growing digital world.

Technological affordances are the various mechanical infrastructures that shape the possibilities of identity performance, including behavioral practices involving media and enacted experiences. Emotional affordances can make connections between materials, spaces, media practices and are permitted in the digital space due to the broad variety of technological affordances on a given platform (Bareither 2019; Madianou 2014; Madianou and Miller 2012). The combination of these affordances contributes to the non-dualistic nature of performance and reality, due to their capacity to bring agency to the user by creating identities and demonstrating well-being. Bareither (2019) exemplifies this well by investigating technological and emotional affordances through digital media, and determines that emotional experiences are done or made rather than had.

Emotional affordances can both be inscribed into materialities (of spaces, bodies, etc.) and technologies. In the ethnographic study of digital media, emotional affordances are media technologies’ capacities to enable, prompt and restrict the enactment of particular emotional experiences unfolding in between the media technology and an actor’s practical sense for its use (pg. 15).
With the capabilities of social media, arguably Instagram in particular, there is a clear link between identity performance and well-being. The combined technologies, such as smartphone cameras or photo-sharing applications create boundaries (or affordances) around how individuals create communities, express themselves, and perceive or interpret experiences. The affordances Instagram offers for participants to be able to perform their identities, and practice well-being are rooted in two prominent theories with relevance in psychological anthropology, sociology, and philosophy: performance theory and affordance theory, to acknowledge how the performance of identity impacts the way individuals work to achieve or maintain well-being, both online and offline.
Chapter Two: Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the structure and process of my research including an explanation of participant demographics, research design, positionality, methodology, data analysis, and limitations. To investigate the juxtaposition between collective and personal realities on Instagram, I employed a triangulation of qualitative ethnographic methods and empirical tools. After reviewing a preliminary demographic survey, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews, followed by focus groups and photovoice analysis. The use of these techniques helped shape my inquiry question and define research objectives. I sought to understand not only how identity is created and performed on Instagram, but how that process impacts individual perceptions of well-being. However, the information exchanged between myself, participants, and through media on Instagram, brought out unique perspectives that shifted the focus of some of my questions to more conceptual topics. By combining results from survey analysis, interviews, focus groups, and photovoice procedures, I was able to discover a link between individual feelings of well-being and experiences on Instagram, as well as provide findings for future studies to draw upon.

Research Timeline

The research for this project was conducted between June 10th, 2020, and August 14th, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the coronavirus lockdowns forced all data collection to be completed entirely online, a timeline of the research features Washington state regulations in Appendix D, starting with significant dates between June 1st and the last week of August 2020. Appendix E shows the rules for each phase of lockdown.
Data collection began with opening a Qualtrics survey to potential participants. Though forty-five responses were collected by the following month, only twenty-five agreed to participate in the interviews. On June 19th, 2020, the first semi-structured individual interview was scheduled via zoom. Most of the interviews were conducted within the first week, and completed by June 30th. Some time was taken between the interview and focus groups to refine research questions. Focus groups were held again over zoom during the second and third weeks of July, and finished on July 24th, 2020. This process was made more difficult since participants had to individually share when they were available to zoom, and groups were then set based on availability. On July 31st, photovoice instructions were detailed in an email to participants, including a deadline of August 10th, 2020, to submit their pictures, and ensure that third parties featured in the photos were asked to provide consent for the study. After sending pictures securely through email, the photovoice interviews were then conducted sequentially during the first three weeks of August. During the data collection period, a total of nine participants dropped the study, or could not be reached through email. With the remaining participants (n=16), each conversation lasted approximately thirty to sixty minutes, allowing ample time to discuss with participants their opinions on Instagram, and how their use of the application impacts well-being and helps shape identity.

**Research Design**

The research for this Masters thesis serves as a case study demonstrating my optimistic approach to anthropology, and analyzes how students at WWU perform multifaceted identities on Instagram, allowing for well-being to be monitored and practiced. My work was carried out sequentially, in three phases: Participant Recruitment, Data Collection, and Data Analysis, to not
only reveal the specific steps in my methodology, but to also show how involved my participants were in devising research themes.

**Positionality**

My interest in social media and well-being developed when I actively reflected on my relationship with technology, mental health, and anthropology as a discipline. With so many platforms now available to consumers, I faced a lot of difficulty in selecting an application that would capture the complexity of identity formation and performance. However, when I noticed distinct communication patterns and behaviors within myself and others, I chose to narrow down my research to Instagram specifically. My decision to pursue Instagram out of all other social media platforms was also informed by my knowledge of and interest in some users owning multiple alternate accounts.

For this project, I was able to investigate a few types of Instagram accounts that represented areas of identity based on my own experiences on the application and participant narratives. I initially selected main accounts and fake accounts - also known as “Finstagram” at the start of my research, because I wanted to compare the two and understand how that supposed dichotomy was interpreted by Instagram users, and how or if their well-being was impacted depending on what account they used. Through the data collection process however, participants brought my attention to alternate accounts that deviated from either the main or finsta categories. These alternate accounts correlate to my investigation, but branch off from my initial inquiry, so they were added to the study and expanded upon within Appendix F. The integration of my participants’ suggestions enriched the methodology and justified my reasoning as to why I collected data from Instagram, the way I collected it, and how that data was stored and
interpreted. Hearing from my participants also allowed me to prioritize their input and make connections within my research on user experience and the influence of Instagram.

Since the introduction of Instagram in October of 2010, the platform has grown in popularity and has developed a peculiar reputation in the world of social media. Not only is Instagram ranked the least beneficial social network for overall well-being (Cramer and Inkster 2017), but it is also one of the most popular and fastest-growing among young people, next to Facebook and YouTube (Ortiz-Ospina 2019). The conflict between the staggering volume of Instagram users and the proposed negative impacts on user well-being, creates a fascinating paradox. To examine the paradoxical framework of user experiences on Instagram, I constructed my inquiries around how individual’s use the application, how Instagram is employed to perform identity, and what that means for the monitoring, maintenance, and improvement of participant well-being.

The connection well-being has with social media is a fairly new topic to anthropology, despite playing an extensive role in constructing culture and individual identity. The avoidance of these subjects detracts from anthropology as a relevant discipline to modern societal analysis, since researchers are primarily interested in pathologies and oddities rather than normalcy (Thin 2018). By implementing a blend of research methods to focus on the optimistic perspectives of individuals, anthropology can gain insight into the everyday meaning making across Instagram.

**Research Methodology**

The research techniques employed for this thesis deal with intimate accounts of personal experiences on Instagram, and reflect the subjective narratives of both the researcher and participants involved. To best explore the various ways identity is presented and interpreted
through Instagram accounts, I elected to use a triangulation of data collected from interviews, focus groups, and photovoice, because each method allowed me to form connections to three distinct relationships: (1) The relationship between myself as the researcher and my participants during individual interviews, (2) the relationship participants had with each other during focus group discussion, and (3) the relationship participants had with the application, Instagram photography, during photovoice analysis. I utilized each procedure to explore three main objectives that were intended to orient the study. The first objective was to understand how users improve, or at the very least, monitor and maintain general well-being by using available technology. Second, to show what sort of interactions on Instagram generate happiness or positively affect well-being. Third, to offer methods of further study based on findings. The structure for this thesis research will be addressed in the order in which data collection was completed.

**Phase I: Research Approval and Recruitment**

Prior to initiating any form of recruitment or human subjects research, my study under application #3733EX20 was determined Exempt Category Two and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following the protocol laid out in my application, the data collected during this study including identifying information such as audio, video, and photograph files are not present in this work, nor will they be placed in any potential outside publications. To ensure the privacy of participants, these identifiers were deleted upon completion of the study in Spring 2021, while contact information including Western emails of the participants, will be kept for two years after publication, so that consent can be obtained for potential article publications.
The recruitment process for this study took place at Western Washington University (WWU) in Bellingham, Washington. Due to the unforeseen circumstances of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (Inslee 2020), participant selection was conducted using convenience sampling, online via email. The email template contained a brief overview of the study and explained that in order to partake in the study, participants must be at least 18 years old, a current WWU student, and have an active Instagram account.

Potential participants were recruited using a QR code present on the virtual flyer within the email (see Appendix A), or through an anonymous link to fill out a Qualtrics survey that explained the study, allowed for informed consent, and asked demographic information. Once finished, participants were redirected to a website that again detailed the study, consent form, and gave a location to put each participant’s email address and availability for the first interview. Having a second website available to participants beyond Qualtrics was useful because it allowed participants to go back and review the consent form if desired, and had direct contact with me about their availability, which Qualtrics did not provide. Of the forty-five interested participants, twenty-five were able to continue on to the individual interview process.

Phase II: Data Collection

Following a qualitative approach, data collection involved four methods: survey review, semi-structured individual interviews, focus groups discussion, and photovoice analysis. Data was collected between June 10th, 2020, and August 17th, 2020, using Qualtrics survey software and Zoom Video Communications to protect the physical safety of participants during the pandemic.
Online Survey

The circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that crucial aspects of traditional ethnographic work, such as participant recruitment, informed consent, and in-person survey dissemination, would be best delivered online via Qualtrics to protect the health and safety of the participants and myself. While 45 WWU students filled out the 24-question survey, only 25 responded with interest after I followed up with their survey submission, and ultimately 16 out of the initial 45 were able to see the study through to the end. Therefore, the percentages given here reflect only those who remained in the study, since informed consent permitted participants electing to drop the study, to not have their data collected.

Interviews

Twenty-five individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to determine general uses for Instagram and to elicit how participants feel when they are using the app by expressing their unique perspective. To prepare for the interviews, a zoom link was emailed to the participant a few hours in advance with a meeting ID and password so that the discussion was more private. Video imaging and audio were recorded through the zoom software, and saved within a private, password protected file\(^1\).

During each interview, I discussed what was expected of the participant through the course of the research project. Following their consent to record, thirteen open-ended questions were asked to participants, with sub-questions prepared depending on the response of the individual (See Appendix B). For example, if the participant stated that they operated a

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\(^1\) Zoom video imaging and audio, recorded through the downloaded software, not the online web-browser, is automatically stored locally onto the computer in use, which in this case was my personal laptop.
Finstagram (or “Fake Instagram”) account or alternate account, a follow-up question was designed to extract more information about that experience. On occasion, questions were modified to fit the language of a participant, or to better define the intended meaning behind the question. The length of each interview ranged from thirty minutes to one hour, and covered a variety of themes related to personal observations about Instagram as well as commentary on social media as a whole.

Upon the conclusion of each interview, participants were prompted to ask their own questions, and supply any other information they felt relevant to the research. Several participants brought up topics I had not yet thought of or inquired about, and therefore guided part of the interview process. Reflexivity on the part of the researcher allowed for recommended subjects to be added later, either into the remaining phases of data collection, or reserved for data analysis.

**Focus Groups**

The implementation of focus groups (n=5) gave participants the opportunity to create a dialogue amongst themselves about Instagram. The twenty-five participants that interviewed were split into five groups of five but unfortunately, by the time the zoom calls were initiated, only eighteen participants remained. Those that left the study explained they were no longer available, did not wish to continue participating in the study, or simply ghosted the project.

Questions were asked to determine some unspoken rules of Instagram, evaluate how participants perceived the impact on mental health, define Instagram as a platform- including the use of Finsta accounts, and gauge the importance of Instagram (See Appendix C). The responses from participants aligned with the expectations I had for the focus groups and were relevant to the study. Participants communicating with each other brought out excellent examples of
individual versus collective interpretations of Instagram, which can be found along with the complete analysis of the focus group data in the Findings chapter. After listening to their responses, participants then went through a photo-analysis exercise to see what makes a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ post on Instagram, where good and bad are measured through various interpretations of what makes a “successful” or “likeable” photo on Instagram including: image content, quality, coloring, aesthetic, perspective, subject, and relatability. This exercise consisted of ten photos (see Appendix C) in which these measured areas of success were discussed, and acted as a simulation for the next phase of the research.

The photos selected for the exercise were based on my subjective experiences as an account holder on Instagram. While I tried to incorporate a few niche pictorial groups that I understood to be present on the app, it would have been impossible to cover all categories given the hour time frame I allotted for this portion of the project. Though the pictures can be categorized in several fashions depending on the user (Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati 2014), the photos in the analysis were only labeled based on whether or not participants thought the photo would (or should) exist on Instagram, and if not, what adjustments make that photo better. All pictures were classified to exist on Instagram, hypothetically originating from either a Finstagram or Main Account as a post or advertisement.

The photo-exercise proved to be both a bonding mechanism and a window into how meaning is created on a collaborative level. The actual data collection developed through participant commentary on my selected photos, and revealed an interesting critique on photo subjects, quality, and helped regulate what material is considered relatable to college students. In addition, the fact that the selected photos were subjective yet understandable and engaging says
something about the manufacturing of Instagram-worthy posts as perceived by a collective of users.

**Photovoice**

For this project, photovoice aided in understanding online communication, initiating discussion, and reflecting reality (Volpe 2019). While photovoice is often used to raise awareness for social issues and jumpstart communal change, the method can also help to develop participant narratives and highlight research themes (Wang and Burris 1997). This study called for the remaining participants to capture two to five photos that made them feel happy using their smartphone camera or other device. While the 18 participants responded with interest, two additional members dropped the study, leaving the final number at 16. If pictures included a friend or person outside of the study, verbal consent was given stating the third-party was willing to be discussed during review and analysis of the participants' photos. Photos could be taken directly from a participant’s Instagram account as the original post, as a screenshot, or selected from their camera roll if the photo had content the participant would consider posting, or planned to post on Instagram.

Altogether, I collected and analyzed 61 photo submissions with each participant individually during a follow-up zoom interview, where photovoice methods were explored. Each participant submitted approximately 3-4 photos, and answered questions probing details of the pictures including why the photo was taken, what about the photo makes the participant feel happy, if the photo invoked any other emotions, and what the photo says about the participants life (See Appendix D). Participants were also given a chance to reflect on their photos, solidify
their thoughts on identity formation through capturing memories, and develop their concluding thoughts on the study.

Overall, the data collected through the survey, individual interviews, focus groups, and photovoice culminates into a triangulation of information about Instagram, identity, and well-being. The individual interviews lay out an opportunity for interactions between myself and the participant, focus groups analyze the interactions between participants, and photovoice shows the interactions between participants and the medium: Instagram.

Phase III: Data Storage and Analysis

The collected data was stored and analyzed in accordance with Human Subjects approval entirely online using a private, password protected computer backed up by a hard drive. Materials submitted by participants such as email addresses, photographs and screenshots were exchanged through either a private, password protected email created solely for this Masters thesis, or through Western Washington University email depending on which address the participant felt more comfortable exchanging information with. To protect the identity of participants, files were saved as a coded number, and all email exchanges have been deleted from both email locations².

After the research data was gathered and safely stored, data analysis took place in Bellingham, Washington. In total, the data accumulated to twenty-five semi-structured interviews (n=25), five focus groups (n=5) with eighteen participants (3/5 present in group one, 4/5 present in group two, 2/5 present in group three, 5/5 present in group four, and 4/5 present in

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² All exchanges between myself and my participants have been erased on my end, but traces of conversations could be present within their inbox.
group five), and sixteen participant submissions for photovoice analysis. Each method of data collection had a specific goal in mind. The individual interviews were intended to gauge how participants felt about Instagram as a whole. Then, focus groups developed accepted social rules of Instagram and analyzed the impact Instagram has on mental health, and photovoice targeted how Instagram may influence photography and identity presentation.

With these goals in mind, the transcribed interviews were coded for themes using narrative analysis (Hennick, Hutter and Bailey 2011; Creswell and Creswell 2018). Themes that emerged from the data were identified without the use of analytic software, so that key elements could be extracted based on patterns and concepts relevant to the qualitative research, and that I as the researcher could fully parse through the data within the transcribed interviews. The resulting codes were determined based on themes, with my pre-established interests exploring the behavior of users on Instagram, and participant interests revealing codes related to environmental factors and comparisons.

Limitations

During the course of this research there were a few unexpected and challenging limitations. The most glaring of these is certainly the COVID-19 pandemic, which in many ways affected the research on an institutional and personal level. Since the data was collected online, meetings with participants were not always captured in a traditional manner. For example, on occasion technical difficulties would occur including breaks in video and audio transfers. While Zoom Video Communications had several other helpful features such as recording software and screen-sharing, the ability to have the same interactions as a face-to-face interview was irreplicable. Additionally, staying indoors was often mandatory during the months data was
collected, and because outside social interaction was restricted, people turned to devices and social media applications for entertainment and connection. While this is interesting for the research topic as a whole, it is limiting in the sense that the coronavirus has changed how people view social networking sites, compared to usage pre-pandemic.

**Summary**

The research and data collection methods used in this project were empirical tools to ask how college students at Western Washington University felt about their identity on Instagram, and how that relationship impacted well-being. According to participants, well-being is viewed as an intrinsic practice that is closely monitored based on mental and physical interactions. Through interviews, focus groups, and photovoic[e, participants were able to contribute personal narratives that were relevant to the research, and engage in a triangulating process that highlights important subjects not always addressed in anthropology such as individuality and happiness. The completion of each phase of data collection was difficult due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the information gathered was crucial to the understanding of how identity can be expressed online as well as how anthropology can conduct qualitative analysis through individual perspectives.
Chapter Three: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This chapter details (1) how performance theory applies to identity and well-being, (2) a performative theory of happiness, in which the dualistic distinction between physical or “real” and virtual worlds is reconsidered as a practice, and (3) affordance theory, and why the affordances of digital spaces are in fact a part of “real-life.”

Performance Theory

Performance theory brings attention to and assesses the performative dynamics of human interaction (Goffman 1956; Turner 1988). My work draws on performance theory to analyze how social interactions are perceived and how identity can be presented on Instagram. Erving Goffman (1956) discusses performance theory via microsociology for example, where social identity is described using dramaturgical analysis, or a theatrical metaphor that refers to people as actors on a stage, to discuss self-presentation. Goffman argues that to analyze (face-to-face) human interaction, the social world people navigate is understood through various performances, or in Goffman’s terms “self-presentations” in an attempt to manage the impressions people make on one another (Goffman 1956; Thompson 2016). Impression management also coincides with a concept Goffman outlines as an “agreed upon definition of the situation” between interacting parties, which is crucial for maintaining positive social relationships and impressions.

Although Goffman’s contributions to performance theory, more specifically, his self-presentation theory, has been referenced in qualitative studies involving social media, digital anthropologists such as Boellstorff (2015) have demonstrated that online social spaces can still mirror face-to-face human interaction. This allows ethnographers such as myself to treat social media spaces as stages on which individuals engage in self-presentation. In particular, I use
Boellstorff’s assertion that the digital space does not need to be distinguished from “real” physical space, as this separation is dualistic and discounts the ethnographic possibilities available (and yet to be conducted) on social media. With performance theory as a foundation to my work, my data analysis shows that identity performance on the digital space Instagram is a part of real-life social interaction, and contributes to maintenance of individual well-being. The assertion that identity is performed has also been thoroughly researched in social contexts including race, class and linguistic ideologies (Rosa 2019). The work of Rosa serves as an excellent example that unpacks more specific aspects of performance theory, and informs my study by exploring core conditions within which identities are performed (often influenced by cultural norms, values, constructions) and expanded on specific social interactions. Although not online, other scholars well versed in cultural studies and anthropology such as Belk 2013 and Haynes 2016, demonstrate digital qualitative research on communication styles and identifiers such as race and gender.

**Performative Theory of Well-Being**

Applying performance theory to my analysis of Instagram has not only helped me interpret my data discussing identity, but it has also allowed me to consider a performative theory of well-being. I use Sedgwick’s (2006) discussion of affect and performance to analyze the underlying practices that emotionally connect my participants to Instagram, and drive a continuous detox cycle as well-being is being monitored. According to Sedgwick, “affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of things, including other affects.” (2006, pg. 19). The idea that affects, including happiness, is intertwined with social experiences and is performed on a social
stage, presents a strong case for well-being to be redefined as a practice on Instagram, since not only identity is performed, but happiness too. Therefore, a performative theory of well-being based on my data analysis can be thought of as: Any act that contributes to the happiness of an individual or group, in an attempt to navigate, validate, and stabilize external and/or internal social acceptance.

Affordance Theory

Affordances are the perceived possibilities that an environment offers to the individual in specific contexts (Gibson 1979). Developed within the field of psychology, affordance theory initially focused on physical human relationships. More recent anthropological work notes that affordances, as a concept, are also excellent analytical tools with which to think about and use in context with human-computer interaction (HCI). HCI affordances can then refer to the readily available actions of technology provided to an individual (Norman 1988). Performing identity and practicing well-being on Instagram connects to and expands on affordance theory since the performances are enacted on digital space, yet are still not a separate realm from the physical world, but an integrated part of reality. Therefore, I use affordance theory to permeate my data analysis by considering performances that occur in the digital environment Instagram, as acts permitted through three types of affordances: technological media affordances, physical affordances, and emotional affordances.

These three types influence how identity is performed and how well-being is socially achieved on Instagram. Technological media affordances range from smartphone features, camera and photograph capabilities, and in-app filter or emoji selections, to Wi-Fi and cell service (Bareither 2019 pg. 8-12). Physical affordances refer to the fact that interpersonal
communication involves physical and social interactions, which further encompass economic, medical and political inequalities (Biehl and Moran-Thomas 2009). Physical affordances play an especially significant role in the development of additional technological affordances, since, in an effort to continually gain user interest (and attention), Instagram and other social media platforms have started to accommodate disabled users, for instance, implementing the option to display closed captions on video posts with audio. Emotional affordances, covered at length by Scheer (2012) as an internal and external system of practices, are conditioned by cultural and historical specificity.

While affordances vary between individuals, particularly in terms of social communication and physical interpretations of self, Instagram offers the same communication tools to each user across devices and across platforms. For example, an Instagram post can be easily linked to Facebook, and posted on that platform simultaneously (Instagram Help Center 2021). As a mechanism for identity performance, the technological and emotional affordances Instagram offers, plays a role in how well-being is discussed and practiced. As discussed earlier, emotional affordances are understood to be media technologies’ capacity to govern how particular emotional experiences unfolding between the media technology and an individual’s practical sense for its use. Additionally, a definition of well-being based on performance and affordance theories challenges the notion that it is an achievable state or feeling, rather, it is a practice that can be maintained, manipulated, and shaped through endlessly changing cultures and embodied experiences.

Chapter Four: Findings
There are only two industries that refer to their customers as ‘users’: illegal drugs and software.  
— Edward Tufte

Introduction

In this chapter, I present my research findings on the ways in which users have demonstrated methods to practice well-being in the context of Instagram use by finding and connecting with communities, curating their identities, and monitoring what they perceive as toxic habits. I posit that identity formation on Instagram is divided into multiple categories (using alternate accounts or in linguistic practice), structured by algorithm software, and marked by (often cyclical) patterns of internal conflict about personal social media use. It is important to note that my participants’ understanding of the Instagram algorithm is only front-end facing, meaning that the algorithm is viewed as a bodiless entity created by developers that in part dictates what is presented on Instagram, and is catered to individual users. My reasoning for investigating identity performance and the conception of well-being as a practice is supported and outlined by the ethnographic data within this present study, which begins with an overview of participant demographics and survey statistics. Then, based on participant narratives, I review the affordances Instagram offers, and detail the way those affordances are entangled with the complexities of social justice. Next, I discuss the construction of communities, particularly the recurring mention of Black Lives Matter (BLM) as participants touched on the significance of the movement in relation to identity performance, including performative activism. After that, I analyze identity performance on Instagram, describing how multifaceted identities are created using self-curation, Finstagram or alternate accounts, and the Instagram algorithm. Then, I summarize how participants monitor toxicity on Instagram and dissect the impact Instagram has on mental health, addiction, and well-being practices. Lastly, I provide a synopsis of how
Instagram is used to achieve, promote, or maintain well-being through digital detoxing, and outline major findings as well as directions for future research.

**Research Participant Demographics and Survey Statistics**

The 16 participants that took part in this study represent several pockets of student life within Western Washington University and illustrate the varying individual, subjective opinions of Instagram use. Though participants consented to disclose names and other information by signing informed consent, I as the researcher chose to protect the privacy of participants by only forfeiting descriptive data that will not reveal identifying facts or links to a specific individual.

The demographic data shows that of the 16 participants, 63% (n=10) identify as a woman, 25% (n=4) identify as a man, 6% (n=1) identify as non-binary, and 6% (n=1) identify as genderfluid. Half of the participants were in a committed relationship, while half were single or did not provide a response. Half of participants classified themselves as bisexual at 50% (n=8), with 31% (n=5) being heterosexual, and 6% (n=1) homosexual, (n=1) pansexual, or (n=1) asexual respectively. The age range of participants was approximately between 18 and 42, with 57% (n=9) being 22 years old and under, and 43% (n=7) over 22 years old. Participants revealed their race as 75% (n=12) identifying as White, 13% (n=2) Hispanic/Spanish/Latinx, 6% (n=1) Black or African American, 3% (n=0.5) Asian, and 3% (n=0.5) Other. Lastly, 81% (n=13) of participants did not identify as having a disability, and of the 19% (n=3) that did, all were comfortable discussing their experience. This question was posed explicitly in the survey, in case an individual did not wish to discuss how that portion of their identity impacts the way they use Instagram, and to avoid any unnecessary emotional discomfort.
Participants also answered 24 multiple-choice, closed-ended questions on the initial online survey related to Instagram use, where options were also provided to write in answers. Questions went over topics including hours per day spent on Instagram, Instagram enjoyment, profile satisfaction, what is considered a ‘good’ number of likes on a post, reasons participants liked a post, how receiving no likes on a post would make participants feel, and how they would feel if someone offered to redesign their profile. Before gauging how many hours per day participants spend scrolling through Instagram, it is important to also know how many hours they spend per week on social media overall. The results show that 6% (n=1) of participants spend 1-2 hours per week on social media, 19% (n=3) spending 3-4 hours, 13% (n=2) 5-6 hours, 13% (n=2) 7-8 hours, and 50% (n=8) spending 10 or more hours on social media. This finding is interesting in contrast to daily Instagram use, which reports 88% (n=14) of participants spending 1-3 hours on Instagram per day, and 12% (n=2) spending 4-6 hours per day. Due to this project centering around Instagram, reporting zero hours of activity per week was not provided as an option. Therefore, given the minimum response of one hour per day, participants should most commonly spend about 7 hours per week on Instagram alone.

Participants overwhelmingly report that they enjoy Instagram (see Figure 1). Ranked between a definite yes and no, 18% (n=3) of participants answered definitely yes, they enjoy Instagram, 59% (n=11) probably yes, 12% (n=2) each for might or might not and probably not, and 0% for definitely not. The survey also asked about their perception of their own Instagram account, to see if they are satisfied with their profile. Interestingly, 25% (n=4) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 19% (n=3) were slightly satisfied, 50% (n=8) were moderately satisfied, and 6% (n=1) were extremely satisfied (see Figure 2). Profile satisfaction stems from a myriad of factors. One way a photo can be considered ‘successful’ on Instagram is based on
various analytics including how many people have liked the post. The participants in this study rated what number of likes on a post qualify as good – or in other words, how many likes on a post would be satisfactory: 13% (n=2) cited 0-50 as a good number of likes, 50% (n=8) said 50-100 likes, 31% (n=5) said 100-500, and 6% (n=1) said 500-1,000. Conversely, if participants did not receive any likes on a post, 81% (n=13) would be either slightly, moderately, or extremely displeased, while 19% (n=3) would be neither pleased nor displeased. Part of the appeal with likes is associated with what a like represents. To better understand why a post receives likes, participants could select up to seven provided reasons why they like a post. The options to choose from included: I thought the photograph was nice, the post was made by a friend, the post was made by a family member, I thought the photo was funny/a meme, I disagreed with the post/posters message, I related or connected to the post, the post detailed something I was interested in or planned on doing, and other. Figure 2 shows that the most common reason for participants to like a photo on Instagram is because the post was made by a friend, with 100% (n=16) of participants selecting that option, and 0% (n=0) opting for other.
Figure 1: Percentages of Instagram Enjoyment Levels

Figure 2: Percentages of Instagram Profile Satisfaction
Figure 3: Total Count of Reasons to Like an Instagram Post

Instagram Sentiment

The participants of this study discussed how self-expression is navigated on Instagram based on their personal narratives from individual interviews, focus group discussions, and photovoice content. The themes that emerged from data collection that relate to self-expression unpack the reasoning behind Instagram use as opposed to Facebook, Instagram best practices, confidence, the influence of censorship on expression, and why memory formation is critical to individual meaning making. Performance theory suggests that these self-expressions are performances, where participants would be signaling to themselves and to each other, the social role they play within their lives, on Instagram. The notion of well-being as a practice also connects to identity performance, since the interactions that result from Instagram use contribute to behavior modifications - such as conforming to best practices - (see Figure 5) and extend to
monitoring well-being. Affordance theory then, as it has been developed in digital anthropology, indicates participants are capable of these self-expressions, these performances, using the particular affordances Instagram offers, which is as integrated into “real life” as environmental affordances, emotional affordances or even user affordances. By merging the data collected from various narratives and interactions between participants, the following topics encapsulate the most noticeable identity performances and uses for Instagram among WWU students.

**Instagram Versus Facebook**

In 2012, Facebook acquired Instagram for $1 billion (Lee et. al 2015). As a parent company, Facebook seized ownership of Instagram and catalyzed several social changes on both platforms, which became a motif throughout the study. A majority of participants (68% n=11) mentioned Facebook unprompted, and spoke as though the social networking sites were still completely separate. When comparing Facebook to Instagram, three main attributes that impact self-expression were frequently mentioned: the perceived demographic majority or potential audience, the amount of information presented, and the level of choice.

The sentiment toward Facebook, in particular, contrasted feelings about Instagram, especially when reminiscing about the changing dynamics of Facebook. Participants maintained that Facebook was once held together by the promise of exclusivity and privacy but is no longer. As “older generations” started creating Facebook profiles, differing views were brought to the public forum, and to the attention of close family and friends. Many participants agonized over the topics brought to and shared throughout the platform, labeling Facebook as a space now dominated by personal drama, political debate, and controversy.
As the once highly respected image of Facebook becomes marred by such divisive content, participants emphasized that Instagram is becoming a generational haven, away from close family and newsfeed discourse. Newsfeed discourse can be considered any social image or commentary made by users that strikes debate, where information is shared and perspectives are publicly available to users, who are mindful of their content. One participant recalls their desire to express support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, but remained cognizant of their audience on Facebook versus Instagram:

“Yeah, I mean even with Black Lives Matter, I almost feel uncomfortable posting things like that on my Facebook versus - I’m like hell yeah everything on Instagram I see so much and I think it’s a great platform to use [for self-expression] but I’m almost scared to on Facebook, because my family is like, I don’t know not as understanding.”

Three more participants also noted that Facebook is getting overrun by “older generations,” and while the site is still useful for connecting to other platforms and webpages, participants enjoyed the simpler layout of Instagram. As a participant mentioned: “I’m comparing [Instagram] with Facebook - I don’t like Facebook ‘cause it’s just like - I feel like there’s a billion posts everywhere and it’s really difficult to follow anything but Instagram I feel like it’s more- I can catch up with things better if that makes sense” The perspective of this participant was shared by others, with another stating “It’s just nice to have people, like, my age particularly, to have people that I knew that I could talk to that weren’t on Facebook and wasn’t so like, spastic.”

3 While this participant is likely referring to Facebook as a clustered or chaotic space, the term “spastic” can, in some communities, be regarded as ableist language. I want to provide that acknowledgement and clarify the use here, that this statement is not a reflection on Facebook, nor is it a comment on whether or not Facebook is an ableist platform.
These two comments, while sharing the same sentiment that Facebook can be overwhelming in comparison to Instagram, point to distinct types of affordances. The first relates to technological affordances, where the participants agree that Instagram provides this illusion of comfort that feels more private or exclusive. The second quote touches on emotional affordances, voicing concerns over audiences, and how that generates conflict between virtual and physical reality.

Another strong comparison between Facebook and Instagram that impacts how self-expression is conducted is the level of choice offered by each platform. Both Facebook and Instagram provide a myriad of ways to express oneself, however some participants feel the display of information on Facebook is overwhelming, or even required:

“I feel like with Facebook there is definitely this um...*necessity* for having words to your pictures and like a description of what you’re posting and that kind of extra little bit is really stressful for me”

Taking all this data together, there is a clear reasoning behind why a majority of participants in this study feel conflicted about the affordances of Facebook and Instagram. Both platforms strategically give users various options for self-expression, such as photographs, text, video, commentary, and reactions. Instagram, however, is selected by participants to pursue well-being based on its minimalist design, which narrows down participant choices through technological affordances, and allows for emotional affordances to be easily navigated in comparison to Facebook. Self-expression however is dependent upon both the user and the social networking site, ultimately resulting in a plethora of choices when it comes to who information is
shared with, how much information is shared, and whether or not the information remains available online.

**Instagram Best Practices**

The way a user presents and interacts on social media is frequently guided by self-monitoring practices, as well as observing, understanding, and replicating other user behaviors (Yau and Reich 2019; Boellstorff 2015). The rules of social media sites are ever changing as applications update and topics that were previously taboo on Instagram, such as mental health, have become more normalized. Participants generally described expected behavior on Instagram as “best practices” which constitute the accepted ways multifaceted identities are performed. Best practices impact self-expression on Instagram because deviating from such practices may affect the user’s social status. Therefore, participant responses demonstrate the informal social rules on Instagram, or best practices, during the time of this study as well as how the practices are ranked, by order of importance. A list was created first by acknowledging repeating patterns between groups, followed by the frequency in which those common practices were ranked by participants as more or less important. The list of Instagram Best Practices according to participants can be found in Figure 5, sorted from most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned.
### Instagram Best Practices

1. There are time limits for when it is appropriate or inappropriate to “like” another user’s post. (n=16)

2. Avoid partaking in “toxic” behavior. (See list of terms) (n=14)

3. Pay attention to the online behavior of friends, especially close friends. (n=11)

4. Post at certain times to receive more engagement - do not have a long caption. (n=10)

5. Have a theme, aesthetic, or pattern to photos/posts. (n=5)

**Figure 5. List of Instagram Best Practices: Ranked.**

Instagram best practices are determined by how quickly or easily the results of personal behavior impacts the user’s social status, and how long the effects of that impact lasts. Rather than best practices being imposed upon other users, as the study questions predicted, the findings show that best practices are monitored and tended to by the individual, and happen as a result of combined choices by each user. By acknowledging and presenting this list of best practices, a dynamic is uncovered between individual and collective ideas of social acceptance, which in part determines how participants may express themselves.

**Constructing Communities**

When asked whether Instagram is important, participants elaborated on the construction of communities. Boellstorff (2015) notes that the term “community” and its utility within virtual spaces has been debated amongst scholars and critiques the assumption that communities cannot be generated online in the same way they are in “real-life” stating “community has never been reducible to locality” (pg. 180). Boellstorff outlines just how important social relationships are.
by discussing communities as a network of (informal and expansive) groupings, where interactions around niche categories, interests, topics, did not prevent a sense of belonging to the community as a whole. While Instagram use as a whole cannot be evaluated in this study, this use of community has similar applications to how participants evaluate Instagram. Determining the importance of Instagram demanded an attention to participants' own definition of importance and transformed the conversation into two areas of interest, both of which support the notion that online communities are not inferior or secondary to communities in the physical world. Instagram therefore was considered important for participants on functional and social levels.

Functionally, Instagram is important, or useful, for spreading information between and among users, such as news and individual experiences, even across platforms. Putting out information or resources is especially critical during larger national or global events, such as social movements and political coverage, although participants did acknowledge some degree of confirmation bias within their communities. On an individual level, Instagram can function in a negative, positive, or neutral sense, depending on the information the user is seeking, and whether that information reaffirms the user's preconceptions about a situation. Instagram therefore functions to share information, and in doing so has the capability to educate users on the topics and people that enter the platform, internal or external to Instagram.

Instagram is also important in terms of why the application is used—to socialize, document, educate, share, and connect. Communities are generated through shared experiences, and Instagram can be used in a variety of ways. A comment from one participant shows not only the difference in use, but how niche communities view self-expression.

You know I would say that …I think coming from the disability community, I think that we use Instagram kind of- in different ways then non-disabled people do. I think there's a
lot of non-disabled people that just post 'cause they want to boost their self-esteem. Whereas I think myself and some of my other disabled friends use it to actually stay connected.

This quote is of particular importance because it unpacks technological, emotional, and physical affordances. The technical affordances allow the disability community to remain connected and share their experiences with one another. Emotional affordances then come into play as those moments are shared on Instagram, representing what an individual is going through or feeling. And physical affordances become relevant based on the particular needs (or desires) of the individual, and what accommodations work best so that users with varying levels of ability can still form communities and present themselves authentically.

Although they recognized both functionality and socialization, the importance of Instagram was debated by participants, who noted that social media as a whole has only recently developed, and was previously considered not just a pastime or luxury, but entirely unnecessary. The majority of participants (n=14) ultimately decided however that the importance of Instagram is measured by the user, and references the utility of Instagram. During my fourth focus group session in which all five participants were present, one participant made a comment which prompted the rest of the group to nod in approval:

“It [Instagram] currently is [important], as a new way to socialize, but it honestly depends on what is happening in the world. Also how are we defining importance? What does it [Instagram] do?”

This question, surprisingly, did not evoke much further conversation among participants, rather, the conversation settled with the fact that the importance of Instagram depends on how it is used, and who it is used by. Participants may agree then with affordance theory, since they are
increasingly aware of the technological affordances Instagram offers, their own physical affordances on the application, and the emotional affordances to create communities.

Instagram therefore serves as a versatile tool, providing critical information such as resources for news and education, spreading awareness through platforming social movements and individual experiences, as well as adding to bodies of knowledge on various topics. Another advantage lies in personal connection and engagement for users, whether it be a business endeavor or close friendship—particularly during times of stress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

While finding information beyond Instagram is also recommended and encouraged by participants, part of what makes Instagram so accessible is the ability to hear first-hand accounts of individual experiences. Although this level of accessibility is not unique to Instagram, participants emphasized the design, and by extent recognized the technological affordances Instagram has in that the layout does not show much of the discourse that occurs in comparison to, say, Facebook. The first-hand accounts on Instagram become particularly useful tools for social justice, in that the voices of minority groups are intended to be heard, understood, and amplified. When such situations arise, participants found Instagram to be a platform that aided in supporting social movements, through raising awareness and promoting various resources for users to review. A strong sense of community is enforced through expanding understanding of individual perspectives, for example the promotion of Black Lives Matter.

During data collection for this study, a movement swept through Instagram on June 2nd, 2020, known as Blackout Tuesday. Prior to becoming a viral, collective effort, Blackout Tuesday derived from the music industry, in which two black women, Brianna Agyemang and Jamila
Thomas, both music executives, pushed for action against the injustices toward Black Americans using the tag #TheShowMustBePaused (Agyemang and Thomas 2020). Despite the fact these executives did not mention in their efforts to post photos of a black screen, the hashtag quickly evolved after being picked up by other industries, was adapted to #BlackoutTuesday (among other variants such as #BlackOutTuesday, #blackouttuesday, or #blackout) and spread across social media, including the spaces project participants engaged with.

On Instagram, users who participated in the movement posted one completely black photo, often accompanied by the tag #BlackoutTuesday, and a statement about the larger issue at hand: systemic racism in the United States. The posts in general signified that the user is in support of Black Lives Matter, but criticism arose soon after the posts began (Agyemang and Thomas 2020). Namely, white individuals who also used the hashtag #BLM or #BlackLivesMatter, were in effect preventing what the initial tag was trying to achieve - creating space for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) to voice their opinions and concerns about their lives in America (Agyemang and Thomas 2020). In an effort to show solidarity, white users tagging #BLM, #BlackLivesMatter, and #BlackoutTuesday, were inadvertently blocking BIPOC content from being shared or viewed with those tags.

Additionally, many users were accused of performative activism, or activism done to increase personal social capital, rather than genuine support toward a movement, cause, or issue (Gray 2018; Ira 2021). A related term, virtue signaling, is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “the action or practice of publicly expressing opinions or sentiments intended to demonstrate one's good character or the moral correctness of one's position on a particular issue.” Although these phrases are defined in similar ways, participants did not use virtue signaling as often, nor as a synonym for performative activism.
Participants applied performative activism in a pejorative sense, to users who on the surface amplified causes in need of awareness, yet never cited resources, took any concrete action, or indicated that the posts were to promote anything other than a favorable social status among like-minded peers. The Blackout Tuesday movement was a timely demonstration of this issue, and shed light on the fact that marginalized voices, primarily those requesting to peacefully share experiences, are all too often overshadowed by both individual and collective action, even if that action is well-intentioned, and is conducted on a platform that they imagined to be politically neutral. One participant described this perceived neutrality in the context of politics, and seeing people’s opinion change over time through posts: “It’s been really cool to see how like social media has influenced people, I’m not sure some people would back the messages behind what they post verbally – but social media gives this kind of barrier we can share that within like a safe environment…I wonder if people feel more comfortable sharing it on Instagram than in person” This example of performative activism, in the context described by the participant where Instagram is a safe barricade, is emblematic of all three aspects suggested to achieve well-being. In an attempt to identify as a supporter of BLM, prove that support by posting, and back that post with action, the well-being of an individual is maintained. A community is sought out, built, and affirmed by curating an identity, while toxic habits such as performative activism are monitored.
Curation and Performance of Multifaceted Identities

The performance and curation of identities on Instagram are related through affordances. Both performance and curation are a form of social action, where performativity effects change and curation ensures that change is viewed as ‘reality’ through ‘evidence’ such as photos, captions, and repetition of similar posts. The multifaceted identities described by participants involve performance and curation through the organization of accounts and the influence of the Instagram algorithm.

Self-Curation

Self-curation is a form of self-expression. Instagram benefits from self-curation by capitalizing on visual culture, where the user benefits by influencing visuality. Visual culture caters to a worldview organized by seeing, and in doing so, often overlooks other modalities of socialization, different styles of communication, and subsequently additional methods of self-expression. Since physical affordances such as vision play a role in self-expression, Instagram, quite apathetically, takes advantage of the majority users by indulging visual culture, which then connects to the power dynamics enforced between all three affordances, technical, physical, and emotional. Fortunately, as Boellstorff points out, there is a gap between virtual and actual self in online culture that allows an individual to define their own role (or express themselves), ranging from completely different, distinct identities to an extension of the “real” identity (or identities) presented offline.

The curation of these multifaceted identities however, at least on Instagram, relies heavily on visuality. Visuality refers to the ways vision can be shaped or constructed through social contexts and interactions (Sturken and Cartwright 2018). Participants unknowingly defined these
terms in their own words during the study and referenced Instagram ultimately as a means of expression during the initial survey, interviews, focus group, and photovoice analysis. The opinions voiced by participants all pointed to preconceived notions about Instagram and how users present ideal versions of themselves. These versions, manipulated by photo-editing tools, filters, angles, and lighting, all serve visual culture by supporting the idea that perfection is desirable, and if achieved, will yield rewards such as influence, or power. The photographs participants submitted show similar targets of self-curation, and can be divided into external and internal intentions, bearing in mind that intentions may overlap, depending on the person and perception of the photo.

What is considered ideal within self-curation is relevant to the individual and expressed with a specific intent. What I am calling External Targets of self-curation represent the facets of performed identity where participants post about characteristics that relate to how they interact with people and their environment. The audience for external targets is whomever the user seeks approval from, that is not internalized, rather, approval stems from their community. Examples include posts of activities and events, hobbies, endeavors, achievements, and ambitions. The images worked to self-curate an identity around what participants value, and how they want to be valued - with the intention of sharing those values as a user. During interviews, the relationship between posting and curation became apparent (and, upon analysis, a topic of debate) when participants were asked if they feel they can fully express themselves on Instagram. One of my first interviewees noted:

I am very aware of like what I'm posting and how it's going to be interpreted and how anybody can see it, and like, think anything they want of it so I would say that there are things that like I wouldn't post- not because I think it's bad but just because of how like it would be interpreted, so I definitely would say that I feel confident on Instagram but I definitely am curating my feed like I'm not just posting whatever.
When asked the same question, another participant in a later interview stated they do not feel they can fully express themself: “No. I think that's part of the reason why I have multiple accounts.” A third participant, who also happened to operate multiple accounts, explained: “It’s [posting] reinforcement. You project this image of yourself and when it's validated it hardens that identity. “What struck me about this quote was the participants' usage of the universal “you” pointing to the ubiquitous experience of having to perform (or project) an identity for the sake of connection and engagement with other users. These opinions show the awareness between multiple audiences, as alluded to by the second participant, and address how self-expression - to its full capacity - is interpreted and engaged in.

With the external target, the value, and arguably, the level of self-expression can be measured by involvement. As much as a participant, or a user for that matter, self-curates with good intentions, outside perception is a critical determinant of identity. Since participants are both producers of their own identity, and consumers of how they are perceived, frequent changes are made as a result of social interaction.

One popular method of external interaction users engage in across most, if not all, social media platforms is “liking” content. Some platforms, Facebook, for example, present more than one way for users to “react” to presented content with corresponding emoji images, such as a heart for “love” (rather than a thumbs-up, for “like”). A “like” in that case may more accurately represent what the intention was when the user engaged with the post. On Instagram, there is only the capability for a post to be liked or not liked by individuals, and several participants spoke to how the number of “likes” ultimately did not impact content or identity changes.
Reflecting on the statistical data parsed from the online survey, participants stated that they like a post most often receives likes because it was made by a friend. What participants did care about was the overall level of engagement, including likes, comments, views, and mentions. Several participants spoke casually about desiring social approval through Instagram, but one interviewee describes this external model best: “We tailor things to be a safety bubble in regard to similar opinions, politics, and content, but we would do so anyway outside of the online atmosphere.” This quote is of particular importance however, because it notes the merging of digital and physical space, and recognizes that reality is reflected on Instagram, just as much as Instagram reflects reality.

The internal target of self-curation behaves similarly to external, in that the intention is to frame the participant in the best light, evoking happiness, but the posts themselves depict a participant’s interpretation of their own personality and morality. The audience for the internal target is, therefore, the account holder. Data pulled from the survey supports the internal target of self-curation by documenting participant levels of satisfaction with their own profile, versus if someone offered to redesign their profile, depending on how the question was interpreted. Since profile satisfaction is targeted to the user, self-curation involves documenting less experiences for the approval of their community, and focuses more on personalized experiences, interests or motivations. Several participant images for instance documented art, either creating art, witnessing it, displaying their skills- which allowed for a rather meta-analysis, since the submissions were images or screenshots of posted photos, and within those posts were the pieces of artwork. Self-curation, expression, and art all operate through various mediums of personal exposure, and are intended to share information, foster connections, and distinguish the self as a unique individual.
Alternate Accounts

The use of alternate accounts on Instagram was described by participants as splitting identities into separate categories. This phenomenon, where an individual operates multiple accounts to organize, categorize, or otherwise distinguish different parts or versions of oneself, is similar to what Boellstorff (2015) describes in detail as “alts” within Second Life. There are certainly parallels between alternate accounts and the embodied avatars within Boellstorff’s ethnography, such as the existence of a “primary avatar” versus the “Main Account” a participant holds on Instagram. Yet, the difference lies in that alternate avatars tend to be in opposition of the primary avatar, and can even embody other forms such as animals or robots. In Second Life, the existence of alternate avatars are contingent on the fact that the primary avatar represents the “real” person behind the screen (Boellstorff 2015 pg. 133). Alternate accounts on Instagram, however, still are very much a part of a whole self, just split into multiple identities, and performed through specific accounts. Another slight difference is that Boellstorff acknowledges alternate avatars, as a social concept and means of embodiment, are widely accepted among the residents in Second Life. This assumption does not hold true based on participant narratives about alternate accounts on Instagram. In fact, discussing alternate accounts was somewhat taboo, as specific types of accounts were addressed (See Appendix G and H).

Out of the most common alternate accounts participants only voiced concern over one label: Finstagram. The social controversy that surrounds having an alternate account, specifically one labeled Finstagram, was a frequent topic of discussion during interviews. Even so, out of the twenty-five participants interviewed, eighteen admitted to operating a Finsta at some point in time. What makes having a Fake-Instagram so controversial according to
participants (n=18) is the social stigma associated with an account, and the entire concept as a paradox.

Having a “fake account” to express the more vulnerable or authentic parts of identity contributes to the (contested) norms that regulate a Finstagram (Ross 2019; Dewar et al. 2019). These norms, based on participant discussions from this study, include: limiting follower ratios to close friends, and posting less curated content that can be considered unflattering, vulnerable or otherwise deviant from the accepted social rules of “real” Instagram. There is an expectation that a user is portrayed more authentically on a fake account (Ross 2019; Dewar et al. 2019). However, expectations differ when it comes to groups outside follower restrictions. For example, the participants that had a Finstagram in the past, or had never had a Finsta account, thought negatively of those who did, dubbing it a juvenile practice and potentially triggering to those with mental illness, depending on the content posted. The term triggering has a myriad of colloquial associations. For participants ‘being triggered’ is generally catalyzed from another action, such as a sexist comment, racism in the workplace, or a distressing image. Merriam-Webster supports this definition, describing ‘triggering’ as “(especially of something read, seen, or heard) causing someone emotional distress, typically as a result of arousing feelings or memories associated with a particular traumatic experience.” Posts that would be considered triggering were only alluded to in participant discussions, but it was made clear this sort of content is more likely to be found on a Finstagram account, since the social norms that dictate main accounts do not apply.

The paradoxical nature of Finstagram accounts was a frequent subject of debate throughout each phase of the study, but participants ultimately agreed these accounts are also shaped by identity. Although some participants labeled a “fake account” as other names such as
Spam Account or VIP Account, Finstagram or Finsta was the most well-known- and all participants were aware that Finstagram Accounts exist. These different names all essentially appeared to represent the same type of account, where privacy is thought to be achieved by narrowing the audience and posting content that is more authentic. Drawing from various participant descriptions of what a Finstagram is, the resulting definition can be found under the list of terms.

Various Finstagram accounts share some similar qualities, but each account, or post for that matter, can be exercised for different purposes depending on the users’ motivations. Notably, the accounts are always distinguishable from a Main Account, and are no longer subjected to the social rules that govern behavior or expectations on the Main Account. Participants emphasized that Finstagram accounts are meant only for close friends, and often depict behavior that would not necessarily be acceptable on a Main Account or in a professional sphere. Examples include parties, not-safe-for-work (nsfw) activities such as drug and alcohol use, and mental health documentation. Yet, there are certainly implications for the user behind the account, contingent upon what sort of activities are being displayed to various areas within the online community, and subsequently offline in the physical world.

For example, given the understanding that a Finstagram is considered a more “real” or accurate portrayal of a user, not all posts are centered around the curated presentation of an ideal life. Participants mentioned an array of accounts depicting several behaviors not uncommon to party culture, signs of mental distress, or forms of explicit content. Generally, participants addressed the Finstagram Accounts as a source of comfort for account holders, and a source of insight for followers.
Though some uses of Finstagram may be viewed as maladaptive, the act of self-disclosure brings users a sense of interpersonal connection and fosters deeper understanding of the individual and audience, depending on the depth and breadth of the topic (Emeraldien, Aulia, and Khelsea 2019). Similar statements were made by three participants, concluding that there is a paradox of authenticity on Instagram. The Finstagram is where users post more vulnerable content about their life, whereas the Main Account is tailored for more professional relationships, and features more constructed content. The paradox blurs the line between inauthentic and authentic identity presentation on Instagram, and calls attention to the complex culture of self-advocacy and appreciation for all aspects of an individual’s life.

**The Instagram Algorithm**

Relying on social media for updates on recent events and personal lives requires a level of trust in the developers and algorithms conducting the site. For participants, the expectation is that the user should have primary control over the content shown to them. However, due to continual adjustments and upgrades to social media algorithms— as well as network ownership—the amount of control a user has over the content being presented and connections being made has changed. While not all stimuli is the result of the Instagram algorithm, participants (n=15) fear that the algorithm is censoring some posts or even entire accounts, which can contain content relevant to identity formation and maintenance. When participants take in new information that is presented to them, that content adjusts meanings associated with that material. An excellent quote from one participant details what they discuss as an “attention economy” placing blame, or perhaps responsibility on the algorithm for what content is shown on Instagram, and having an awareness that Instagram profits off of consumer attention, stating:
“I do think it's interesting where, like certain posts that are more- I don't really know what- posts that Instagram thinks are more important- I don't know if anybody knows! It [the algorithm] just kind of feels like just another way that it [Instagram] feeds the attention economy 'cause I definitely think it's an attention economy, where like that most important part of [the algorithm] I do think can be monopolized. Like if somebody can promote a post or can pay for their post to be like promoted in the algorithm, like that's going to get more traction than if they're trying to like, I don't know what, like create a social movement or something...so I don't love it but I understand why it's there even though it kind of makes it feel like- like I remember -I've been on Instagram for so long that I remember when it didn't have an algorithm and it kinda just feels like it's been like corporate-ized or whatever.”

One of the most critical adjustments made to the Instagram feed was the implementation of the engagement-centered algorithm in 2016 (Agung and Gede 2019). Claiming to prioritize “the moments you care about,” Instagram has since removed the announcement of this highly criticized change, and has not elected to return to a reverse-chronological presentation (Titcomb 2016; Barnhart 2021). Participants were quick to notice and discuss the algorithm switch, emphasizing that posts used to be presented in real-time, but are now filtered to posts the user interacts with most, driving content with the lowest levels of engagement further down the feed. The less user interaction a post gets, the less visibility the content creator will have. Therefore, some posts made by friends and family, even if the user follows those accounts, will fall within that threshold.

This loss of agency extends to the control, or perceived control, one has over their own content, therefore impacting the practice well-being. Participants speculated that the newly implemented algorithm not only controls, or at least manipulates, what posts are presented to users, but the intermittent advertisements are targeted specifically to the user based on interests, previous likes, and general length of engagement. One participant voiced:

“The algorithms for social media are so weird because they will definitely like purposefully put things in your center of view and then purposely omit things and I feel...
like that’s weird for any social platform to select what you can and can’t see when you log in.”

The interviews also revealed when participants described comparing accounts with friends, extreme differences were noted about the feed and types of ads shown to the user. One participant even pointed out a pattern in ad placement, noting that after every fourth photo, a user will scroll past an advertisement.

Instagram’s tailored ads can be customized (but not blocked) within application settings, so that promotions are no longer targeting user interests. However, the algorithm does not stop collecting data from the user, machine learning simply sources ads outside of what is regularly recommended for a specific individual, to get them to click on an ad (Instagram Help Center 2021). The advertisements cannot be completely removed, but participants discussed changing these settings on their accounts made it is less likely for them to engage with an ad, giving back some control power to the user.

Despite acknowledging the levels of control that are available to a user, questions about the Instagram algorithm and targeted ads often brought out passionate responses from participants, due to concerns about data mining. Among other discussions that circulated the algorithm theme, the conversations about data mining generated relevant information on the implications of algorithms, AI software, and identity navigation on Instagram. By far the dominating conversation posed the question: If the Instagram algorithm is curating content for the individual, based on that user’s activity on both Instagram and Facebook (the parent company), as well as third-party sites and apps, is the user in control—or is the algorithm selling the user an identity? This concept outlined by participants is a significant finding, because the
communities users join, the choices involved in identity curation, and the way toxic habits are monitored, are being watched and manipulated by a mechanical audience.

The illusion of control is reinforced by Instagram from a business standpoint, since there is no information publicly available about exactly how the algorithm gathers personal data on the back-end side of development. Participants spoke of various experiences navigating the algorithm, and came to their own conclusions about the ways in which it works, and what should be done to shift the algorithm in favor of certain content. Some speculated that interests and activities are tracked through hashtag use, while others swore that features such as Apple’s Siri and devices like Amazon’s Alexa were listening in for advertising opportunities, based on verbal cues or Google searches- a common concern regarding privacy (Malkin, Egelman, and Wagner, 2019). Others suggested the Discover Page, also called the Explore Page, is a display of the algorithm at work, where seemingly random photos and videos are amassed in one area, but are intended to pique interest, and keep the user scrolling.

Participant’s viewed strategic use of Instagram analytics as a key way to sway the algorithm. To be successful numerically speaking, around half of participants (n=8) found it beneficial to post content that aligns with a theme or aesthetic, and is similar to prior successful posts. Interestingly, the measures of success outlined by participants aligned with their Instagram best practices. This connection is significant because identity is then seen as a mechanism for self-promotion. Yet, as a platform that advocates for individuality and creativity, the data contradicts part of Instagram’s’ vision by recognizing that the algorithm boosts similar types of content, therefore perpetuating homogeneity and contributing to censorship of expression.
Additional suggestions to achieve agency in the context of algorithms included monitoring when and what to post, using hashtags, creating what will ideally receive the most engagement (color schemes, time of day, angles, specific posture, balance etc.). While all of these ideas were vital to understanding user experiences with the Instagram algorithm, participants made sure to mention the importance of taking an active role in how the app is used, and being aware of disadvantages as well as privileges on Instagram.

**Monitoring Toxicity and Practicing Well-Being**

The navigation of toxic environments as well as the monitoring of personal habits or behaviors on Instagram enhances the well-being of participants by maintaining some sense of control and choice over identity. This section overviews the impact of Instagram on mental health and addiction, defines what a digital detox is along with proposed detox strategies, and covers the cyclical nature of monitoring well-being on Instagram through detoxing. Since the levels of toxicity, both external - where participants experience or see outside toxic behavior, and internal, where participants recognize themselves becoming dependent on Instagram for connection or worth, are continuously being evaluated, so is well-being. Well-being in this study is then redefined as an ongoing practice, reinforced by identity performance and introspection.

**Perceived Impact of Instagram on Mental Health**

When participants for this study were asked if Instagram is beneficial or harmful to mental health, a majority of the participants (n=12) agreed that the impact Instagram has depends on how an individual uses the platform. Participant responses varied however when explicitly asked whether Instagram can be beneficial, yet almost all concluded that Instagram can be harmful to mental health.
To better understand both adverse and favorable associations with Instagram, participants listed ways mental health can be negatively and positively impacted. Beginning with the costs to mental health, participants mentioned five main issues: Posting as an obligation rather than for the goal of self-improvement, reflecting on body image insecurities by comparison instead of inspiration, seeing unachievable standards—both in lifestyle and beauty, following toxic people, worrying about numbers and analytics, and keeping up with trends through hashtags and captions. Additional emphasis was placed on Finstagram use, in that “fake accounts” can be used as a tool to document and relieve mental stress, or a detriment in that the user can perpetuate unsafe behavior, or continually trigger themselves to promote self-destructive tendencies. To increase the benefits or avoid these issues, participants recommend four preventative measures: following accounts that promote happiness, keeping in contact with friends, enjoying work connections, limiting your social circle and understanding personal social hierarchies that may influence mental health. Although these methods may be specific to the participants in this study, the insights gained from these conversations were critical in determining how some users demonstrate ways to improve their experience on Instagram.

Improving mental health is another fundamental reason why participants “took a break” from social media. Though the length of time varied, ranging from about one week to over two years, participants stated that taking a detox from social media was beneficial to their mental health. The separation from the constant onslaught of idealistic social standards, politics, and personal everyday updates enriched offline experiences. Additionally, participants spoke of their ability to relax and feel free from the projected persona one demonstrates on Instagram.

The positive environment created by a successful digital detox had interesting, albeit short-term effects on well-being based on prior participant experiences. For a digital detox to be
successful as reported by participants, users must refrain from social media until it is no longer a conscious effort to do so, and opportune time to reduce stress, and focus on the offline world. After reflecting on detoxing, participants explained having a sense of relief, calm, and renewed interest in other hobbies. However, since detoxification from any “unhealthy” practice is difficult, abstaining from social media is no different. Beyond the initial thrill of leaving the online world, many participants realized not only the true extent of their Instagram use, but also the strong desire to go back to the application relatively quickly. The feelings of liberation transformed into fears of missing out, and cravings for connection, thus beginning the cycle anew (See Figure 4).

**Addiction**

Checking Instagram and other social media platforms can be habitual, but an addiction surfaces when everyday functionality is impacted. Left unabated, an addiction to social media interferes in every area of an individual's life (Orlowski 2020). Addiction was a concern mentioned by all participants in this study when asked about taking a social media detox. Even if the participant had not taken a detox, feeling addicted to either their phone, social media, or escaping reality by being online was a topic of discussion. Interestingly, participants also agreed that unlike other addictions, it is accepted or even celebrated to rejoin social media or phone use after the detox is finished. Connection through social media, and therefore Instagram use, is so ingrained in modern society that it is possible to be aware of self-sabotaging behavior such as limited productivity, yet people continue to engage because it has been normalized or expected.

During interviews, some participants expressed their mixed feelings once they returned to Instagram. One participant even deliberated taking a detox after our discussion: “I still feel like it
felt *good* to kind of take [a detox], it made me take a step back and realize how much I was into [updates] and automatically scrolling...yeah maybe I should do that again…”

**Digital Detox**

Most participants in this study (60% n=10) have taken a detox from social media at some point in time. Kent (2020) describes digital detoxing as an individual’s conscious decision to ‘break’ from platforms when life becomes overwhelming, and reviews in her study reasons why her participants chose to detox. Unlike my participants, the group in Kent’s study suggested two main explanations for detoxing that involved *life* being the stressor, rather than the *platform*:

“First, when individual lives were stressful this often took time away from being able to enact healthy behaviors such as eating well and going to the gym. Second, when personal and/or professional life was demanding, they felt they could not contribute to optimal representations of ‘healthy’ lives or view others doing so on Instagram as this contributed to feelings of comparative anxiety, inadequacy and personal disempowerment” (Kent 2020 pg. 11).

The comparison between Kent’s work and my own shows an interesting difference in the way digital detoxing is perceived by these distinct groups, yet, the general definition of digital detox remains the same. A social media detox can vary from person to person, but is considered a complete or partial elimination or avoidance of social media platforms for a specific duration of time, with the goal of improving mental health and stress levels (Kent 2020; Whitley 2020). Several participants spoke highly of the experience, citing the ability to step away from social media was valuable, and that the desire to do so stemmed from wanting to spend less time looking at screens, rather than leaving Instagram specifically. Interestingly, by elaborating on topics related to personal feelings and rationale to go offline, participants unwittingly divulged patterns that were internally thought of as individual behaviors, but these behaviors were
outwardly enacted by other participants in the study as well. In particular, participants touched on subjects relevant to digital detoxing such as addiction, mental health, and detox strategies. The close monitoring of such personal habits, reactions, and behaviors results in solution-oriented responses from participants, leading to reflexivity and enhanced well-being.

**Detox Strategies**

While detoxing from social media is a personal decision, there were a few withdrawal strategies that were commonly attempted by participants. From least effective to most effective, strategies included adjusting mobile phone settings for restricted use, removing the social media application, and deactivating or deleting the social media account are all viable detox options.

Customized phone settings are easy to enable and disable, giving users near full control of the detox process. There are a few different settings available on the smartphone for users wishing to take a social media detox, but want to wean off rather than quit completely. Notably, participants referenced disabling notifications, scheduling screen time monitoring and downtime, and turning on the greyscale color filter. Disabling notifications for Instagram prevents the application from sending alerts to the phone home screen or lock screen, so a user is not prompted as often to check for updates. Additionally, scheduling screen time and conversely, downtime, does permit a user to scroll through social media, but dispatches a popup warning screen time is almost over, and when to log off. Changing color settings to greyscale dives into the psychology of attention, implying that the colorful apps draw in users to click or continue scrolling. With greyscale, the allure of social media becomes much more mundane, effectively training the mind to ignore alerts. Tristan Harris, a former design ethicist for Google, co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, and key speaker in the Netflix documentary *The Social*
"Dilemma," proposes this method to help users take control of their social media habits. While not a substantiated science, Harris has worked to make technology more ethical based on his experience at Google by addressing the negative impact ad-driven tech companies have on users (Harris 2020; Orlowski 2020). Implementing one or all of these settings can reduce the amount of time spent on social media, and help to curb addictive behavior (Harris 2020). Only adjusting phone settings to better digital wellbeing, however, has revealed both strengths and flaws of screen time monitoring and reliance on individual willpower.

For example, a participant who chose to begin a detox by setting up Screen Time filters still had trouble disengaging with Instagram, and pressed the “ignore” button when prompted to log off. Even if the settings were enough on a smartphone, users could access the same social media networks on a computer. Therefore setting adjustments, while useful for fast, short term detoxes, are unreliable for overall success, meaning that a user no longer desires to scroll through Instagram, and is unaffected by prompts to log off. What makes these short-term solutions unsuccessful, by this definition, is that they are easily overridden and changeable to suit user preferences.

Removing the Instagram application from the smartphone home screen is a slightly more successful method for initiating a detox. Though Instagram is considered a mobile-only platform, deleting the app does not remove account data, nor does it deactivate the account. The application is simply unavailable for a user to open. Therefore, while access is restricted to a computer, a user's account is still able to receive notifications (Bradley 2020). One benefit of computer-only access is that individuals have limited capabilities on most internet browsers--aside from Google Chrome--also the most widely used browser according to NetMarketShare at 69.28%. Recognizing that the process for posting on a Mac or PC requires much more effort than
on mobile, most users access Instagram from a smart device (Bradley 2020). Participants agree that not only is posting on a PC time consuming, it is uncommon with the prevalence of smartphones and the assumption that Instagram is a ubiquitous application. The only way a user can quickly, easily, and spontaneously post photos, add highlights or story reels is on the Instagram mobile app.

Understanding the difference between the deactivation and deletion of an Instagram account is crucial for detoxing successfully, based on participant recollection of their own detox experiences. Participant discussions warranted referral to the Instagram Help Center, as the website laid out in more detail how Instagram can be deactivated or deleted. The Instagram Help Center explains that temporarily deactivating an account hides a user's profile, photos, comments, and likes, until the account is reactivated by the user by logging back in. A temporary deactivation is useful for short term detoxes, and must be done on either a computer or mobile browser, rather than the Instagram application. Deleting an account will permanently remove a user's profile, photos, comments, and likes, and prevent signing up again with the same username, or adding that username to another account. Similar to the deactivation, deletion of an account must be done on a computer or mobile browser for the process to work. Deletion must also be requested by the user, so that Instagram can know why the account is being permanently removed. The deletion process can take between 30 and 90 days, depending on how much information is within the account (Instagram Help Center 2021). Data from the account can always be reviewed and saved beforehand, so access to photos and memories is not lost.

Adjusting Instagram settings, removing the mobile application, and deactivating an Instagram account works well for users who wish to return to social networking. Permanent deletion provides an opportunity for users to take an extended break from Instagram, with no
outside access to the platform. Whatever method a user chooses to complete a detox, the experience is considered to have at least some positive effects on general well-being, such as mental health benefits and decreased stress levels (Kent 2020). Taking a social media detox is not necessary to achieve these renewed feelings of happiness, but can serve as an intermission while users focus on the physical world. Participants mentioned that a detox can even be used as a preventative measure, before the habitual scrolling on Instagram becomes addictive. In the event a user does decide to return to Instagram, a community filled with personal interests, family, and friends will be there for support.

Figure by author

Figure 4: The Digital Detox Cycle
The Digital Detox Cycle

Of all participants in this study who had engaged in a digital detox at some point, 96% redownloaded Instagram. The length and success rate of the detox varied from participant to participant, but as a whole, interviewees expressed feelings of distress in reference to the cyclical nature of the detox/retox process. Participants cited patterned sets of emotions, which influenced behaviors on Instagram and ultimately led to starting the detox. Figure 4 depicts The Digital Detox Cycle as experienced by participants, and consists of up to six zones based within a sequential framework.

The Digital Detox Cycle launches into Zone 1 when a user joins, or subsequently rejoins Instagram after a detox period. Participants describe this zone as a mental reset in preparation to return to the platform, perforated by the desire to reconnect with friends and events online as well as a sense of clarity and renewed expectations. Once the decision is made to rejoin Instagram, the user can quickly log in to their account, redownload the app, or create a new account, depending on what detox method was used. Participants explained Zone 2 as a more gradual process, in which the user eventually feels drained from maintaining an online presence.

The layers of stress involved in identity performance and interactions with other users, catalyzes an evaluation of wellbeing, and promotes self-preservation tactics such as digital detoxing (Bekalu et al. 2020; Whitley 2020). After determining that a detox is necessary, a user enters Zone 3 by selecting a detox method, and preparing for a shift in routine. Participants note this process can cause a shift in temperament in the user on a cognitive and behavioral level in order to accommodate and form a new habit, which is supported by Turel and Vaghefi (2020).
As the detox practice becomes easier, and the user is effectively weaned off of Instagram, Zone 4 signifies detox completion. Participants describe the initial stressors of identity performance, accompanied by seemingly obligatory actions such as liking and posting, as no longer dictated how they felt about Instagram. Zone 5 allows for a full comprehension of the detox cycle, giving the user a liminal space to determine if the detox continues, or ceases. The user’s exit from limbo either leads to Zone 6, where the cycle is broken, and Instagram is permanently removed and never rejoined, or to Zone 1, beginning the sequence again.

The Digital Detox Cycle is not a total or fixed representation of participant experiences, but it does show some of the fascinating patterns and cognitive processes that go into navigating Instagram. Additionally, the social rules developed to properly wean off of-- and return to-- Instagram can effectively be applied to other platforms. Provided the same behaviors and feelings are associated with those applications, for example- Facebook, which acquired Instagram in April 2012 detoxing will continue (Wortham 2012). The Digital Detox Cycle is deeply rooted in emotions, mental health, and self-awareness, exemplifying that though individual experiences may feel isolated, sensitivities to online stimuli get common reactions from different people, as exhibited by participant narratives.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Thesis Summary

This thesis asserts that Instagram is used as a tool for identity performance, which contributes to the redefining of well-being as a practice rather than a state or feeling. Participants were able to demonstrate methods that indicate the practice of well-being on Instagram is dependent upon the development of communities tied to self-expression, the performance of multifaceted identities, and the navigation of perceived toxic environments within the application.

In Chapter One, I introduced the aim of my study, which was to investigate more optimistic topics of the human experience by studying topics of identity and well-being. I then went over why I chose these topics to be explored through Instagram, and situated my study within the context of anthropological literature on identity, well-being, and social media. To contribute to this growing body of work, I proposed to inquire about well-being through an optimistic approach, and redefined well-being as a practice based on the narratives of my participants about identity and Instagram use. My claims were supported by a discussion outlining anthropological disciplines that informed this work, including psychological anthropology, anthropological conceptions of well-being, and digital anthropology.

Chapter Two justified my reasoning for implementing a research design composed of three phases: recruitment, data collection, and data storage and analysis. My research methodology including an initial survey, interviews, focus groups, and photovoice proved to be useful for collecting a triangulation of data, and for categorizing individual versus collective interpretations of Instagram. The timeline for this study also brought attention to how the
methods may have been conducted differently, if not for important factors that influenced or limited the study, in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter Three reveals the theoretical conceptions and frameworks that informed this study, drawing from performance theory, affordance theory, and what I have outlined as a performative theory of happiness, to emphasize how identity is performed with the allotted affordances on Instagram and how well-being is practiced and maintained through participant Instagram use.

The findings discussed in Chapter Four supported the main argument of this study and exposed areas where participants were able to develop methods that promote well-being. These methods are finding and connecting with communities, curating identities, and monitoring what they perceive as toxic habits through digital detoxing. Learning from participant experiences by using a triangulating framework was crucial to the development of themes relating to identity and well-being. Throughout the study, various types of accounts along with multiple categories and themes emerged. Participants broke down what aspects of Instagram were useful, entertaining, and informative, while simultaneously disclosing the disadvantages of having an account, or multiple accounts. With a 96% (n=15) return rate from a digital detox however, there is an argument to be made for both benefits and costs to overall well-being on Instagram.

The major findings below indicate the specific ways in which participants have demonstrated methods to monitor and maintain their practice of well-being through identity performance on Instagram. By implementing these methods, users can work on individual well-being, and develop a relationship with Instagram where, rather than internalizing the fact that the algorithm views user attention as a product, they see themselves as consumers with the agency to
curate identities, if desired, on multiple accounts, perform a more authentic self, and detox when they feel overwhelmed.

**Major Findings**

Instagram presents users with an abundance of choice, dictated in part by the user and in part by the affordances on the platform, including application capabilities such as photography and text captions, as well as the feed generated by posts, stories, and controlled by Instagram algorithm. When presented with an abundance of choice, as users are while on Instagram, forms and ideas of expression, including the performance and practice of well-being, are displayed in a myriad of ways. Some participants disclosed the difficulty in choosing how to express themselves, particularly in a way that is both authentic and socially acceptable, to increase well-being. Although some users find these types of decisions daunting, even to the point where no choice is selected at all, the methods proposed by participants aid in achieving well-being on Instagram. Creating communities, curating identities, and monitoring toxic behavior, all include choices that leave the identity performance for the user to decide, and both external and internal target audiences scrolling through Instagram.

Participants in this study help recognize that although Instagram is a highly ambivalent digital space, identity performance is a crucial component to finding communities, self-expression, and practicing well-being. Goffman (1956) coined impression management in relation to identity performance, calling for a shared perception of self between an individual's presentation, and the audience to that presentation. To mitigate the potential unhappiness that can stem from not expressing oneself, participants demonstrate that choices form identities, and that identity curation is a means of self-expression and organization of those choices. Since
Instagram is one of many social media sites that contributes to the sharing of user experiences, participants are acutely aware of the range of choice, and the infinite number of ways the self can be expressed. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by choice, however, participants prevent these feelings by recognizing that identities do not need to be revealed all on one profile. Due to the technological affordances Instagram offers, as well as the varying emotional and physical affordances of users, Instagram accounts can be separated, organized, and conducted by drawing on different areas of individual self-expression. Through curating identities on multiple accounts, different areas of self-expression are channeled into categories, and used to perform identities and monitor well-being while maintaining authenticity, and adhering to Instagram best practices. a technological affordance that Instagram offers. Appendix H discusses the various types of accounts participants mentioned in greater detail.

The second method participants use to practice well-being is the art of connecting communities. Enhanced through ideas of self-expression listed above, communities are generated according to participants through their multifaceted identities, interests, and experiences. Well-being is therefore impacted when communities are either unified through a mutual understanding between the individuals that make up a community, or a particular group is subject to censorship or debate. There were a few recurring themes that resulted during data collection that demonstrated this, such as the differences in how individuals describe Instagram, how mental health is discussed, how social justice is received, and how Instagram remains an important platform to locate information and educate users. The discussion of ethical life connects nicely to these Instagram uses, because each theme listed here reveals a degree of vulnerability. Keane (2020) elaborates on vulnerability, including the psychological propensity for individuals to share and align perspectives with one another, in an effort to relate. Mental health and social
justice in particular are topics that permit ethical life to emerge through socialization, helping individuals to bond and create that sense of community. By exploring the individual perspectives offered by participants, there is a clear relationship between community, self-expression, and identity performance that connects back to agency and influences well-being as a practice.

The third and final method that participants support, detoxing, is evidence that they operate under the notion that well-being is a practice, and through the agency participants have, as well as technological, emotional, and physical affordances available, are able to navigate or monitor toxic behaviors and habits on Instagram. This method is the final triangulating piece that links expression, identity performance, and well-being together, as the detox cycle is emblematic of choice, curation, and self-preservation. Detoxing from Instagram also expands on the concepts of addiction and self-awareness, where participant narratives help explain the digital detox cycle, and their stories as individuals have fundamentally conceptualized a worldview where well-being is practiced, and Instagram is used as a mechanism to construct identities, create communities, and regarded as a platform that can sustain a cyclical detox pattern, perpetually drawing users in.

**Directions for Future Research**

Through understanding individual experiences on Instagram (among other social media platforms) anthropology has the opportunity to learn more about what it means to be, as Boellstorff suggests, virtually human, and consider how subjective perspectives shape collective realities. The works and ideas of Goffman (1956), Fischer (2014), Boellstorff (2015), Keane (2017), and Thin (2018; 2020) bolster this sentiment through their studies on self, economics, virtual worlds, ethics, and well-being, respectively. Based on my own research, an optimistic
approach is not only a useful tool for exploring similar topic, including the practice of well-being, but it opens up possibilities for further studies on more positive topics, both on and offline. Participant narratives were crucial to developing this approach because their experiences highlighted areas of concern from a subjective perspective, and gave insight into how those concerns are addressed via self-reflective behavior, and result in the suggestions for future research mentioned here.

Additional study is necessary however in order to further build understandings of identity and well-being. One example might be conducting a similar study to this one, emphasizing other ways Instagram is used, if not for practicing well-being. Comparative anthropological research continues to be beneficial, to see if other social media platforms yield similar results. Should this study serve as a guide for any future areas of research, my hope is that as virtual and physical spaces are increasingly considered non-dichotomous, anthropological studies can then dive deeper into human-computer interaction, and ethnography can continue to venture into ever-expanding cultures, stemming from one human-centered reality.
Works Cited


Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Text – Email Template

Dear [Western Student],

My name is Katie Picchiotti and I am a graduate student in anthropology at WWU. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about how Instagram affects well-being, and how identity is performed and constructed on the app. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a Western student!

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to (1) answer online survey questions, (2) interview with me (3) attend a focus group (4) submit 2-5 photos or screenshots from your Instagram profile that make you happy, and (5) a follow up interview to discuss the photos you submitted. You may find a flyer attached that details more information about my study and provides a QR code to a consent form and online survey!

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at picchik@wwu.edu.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Katie Picchiotti

W01423661
Appendix B: Individual Interview Guide

Individual Interview Guide

1. What do you use Instagram for?
2. What kinds of photos do you take? Why?
3. Who do you follow?
   a. How does that make you feel?
4. Do you have a fake-Instagram account (Finsta)? Have you ever? * Alternate
   a. If so, how did it make you feel using that account in comparison to your original? Why?
5. How do you feel after posting?
   a. Do ‘likes’ have an effect on how you feel?
6. Do you feel like you can fully express yourself on Instagram?
7. What draws you into the app? Why do you have Instagram?
8. Have you ever taken a social media detox?
   a. If so, how did you feel before, during, after?
   b. If not, how come?
9. How do you feel about Instagram and politics/social justice?
10. Thoughts on influencers?
11. Do you go on the discover page?
12. Thoughts on the Instagram algorithm?
13. Is there anything I haven’t asked about that you would like me to know?

Note: Question 4 was modified later in the study to read “Do you have an alternate account?” due to the varying language used by participants. The most common term was Finstagram or “fake-Instagram.”
Appendix C: Focus Group Guide and Photo Analysis Questions

Focus Group Guide

1. What are some unspoken social rules of Instagram?
   a. Make a list of rules, rank them
2. How many of you think that Instagram can be beneficial to mental health?
3. How many of you think that Instagram can be harmful to mental health?
4. How many of you have heard of “Finsta”? Can you explain what it is?
5. How would you describe what Instagram is, to someone who does not use it?
6. Is Instagram important? Why or why not?

Photo Analysis Exercise (Having some generic, googleable photos available)

1. Is this a ‘good’ image to post on Instagram?
2. If not, what could I do differently that would make it better?

Photos: Taken from Google Images
Appendix D: Photovoice Analysis Questions

Photovoice Analysis Questions

1. Describe your photo
2. Why did you take this photo?
3. What about your photo makes you feel happy?
4. Does your photo invoke any other emotions?
5. What does this picture tell us about your life?
6. Has capturing these moments impacted your identity / sense of self in any way?
7. Do you notice any themes or patterns in our conversation? (today or throughout study)
Appendix E: Research Timeline Summer 2020

March 23rd, 2020 - Gov. Jay Inslee issues Phase 1 Stay At Home order
June 5th, 2020 - 14 Washington counties including Whatcom approved to move into Phase 2
June 5th-24, 2020 - 17 Washington counties not including Whatcom approved to move into Phase 3
June 10th, 2020 - Qualtrics Survey “Instagram and Identity” open to Potential Participants
June 15th, 2020 - Goal of Potential Participants Reached; 25 participants solidified; Survey closed
June 23rd, 2020 - Gov. Inslee announces statewide mask or face covering mandate.
June 30th, 2020 - Individual Interviews Completed
July 10th, 2020 - Call for participant availability for Focus Groups
July 13th, 2020 - Focus Group 1 Held
July 14th, 2020 - Gov. Inslee announces statewide pause on movement to any phase until July 28th.
July 15th, 2020 - Focus Group 2 Held
July 17th, 2020 - Focus Group 3 Held
July 23rd, 2020 - Focus Group 4 Held
July 24th, 2020 - Focus Group 5 Held
July 24th, 2020 - “Safe Start - Stay Healthy” county by county phased reopening.
July 25th, 2020 - Noted that seven participants have dropped study
July 28th, 2020 - Gov. Inslee extends statewide pause on movement to any phase indefinitely.
July 31st, 2020 - Instructions for Photovoice sent out to participants
August 3rd, 2020 - Photovoice Interviews Scheduled
August 10th, 2020 - Suggested Deadline for Participant Photos to be Submitted
August 17th, 2020 - Photovoice Interviews Completed
August 18th, 2020 - Noted that two participants have dropped study, remaining (n=16)
August 24th, 2020 - Participants receive incentive: $10 Amazon gift card
Appendix F: Healthy Washington - Roadmap to Recovery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and At-Home Gathering Size — Indoor</td>
<td>Prohibited</td>
<td>Max of 5 people from outside your household, limit 2 households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and At-Home Gathering Size — Outdoor</td>
<td>Max of 10 people from outside your household, limit 2 households</td>
<td>Max of 15 people from outside your household, limit 2 households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship Services</td>
<td>Indoor maximum 25% capacity</td>
<td>Indoor maximum 25% capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Stores (includes farmer markets, grocery and convenience stores, pharmacies)</td>
<td>Maximum 25% of capacity, encourage curbside pick up</td>
<td>Maximum 25% of capacity, encourage curbside pick up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>Remote work strongly encouraged, 35% capacity otherwise</td>
<td>Remote work strongly encouraged, 35% capacity otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Services</td>
<td>Indoor maximum 25% capacity</td>
<td>Indoor maximum 25% capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating and Drinking Establishments (establishments only serving individuals 21+ and no food remains closed)</td>
<td>Indoor dining prohibited. Outdoor dining, 11PM close, maximum 6 per table, limit 2 households per table</td>
<td>Indoor dining available 25% capacity, 11 PM close. Outdoor dining available, maximum 6 per table, limit 2 households per table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoor Recreation and Fitness Establishments (includes gyms, fitness organizations, indoor recreational sports, indoor pools, indoor 6+12 sports, indoor sports, indoor personal training, indoor dance, ice contact martial arts, gymnastics, climbing)</td>
<td>Ceremonies are limited to a total of no more than 30 people. Indoor receptions, wakes, or similar gatherings in conjunction with such ceremonies are prohibited.</td>
<td>Ceremonies and indoor receptions, wakes, or similar gatherings in conjunction with such ceremonies are prohibited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Sports and Fitness Establishments (outdoor fitness organizations, outdoor recreational sports, outdoor pools, outdoor pools and fishing trips, outdoor racetracks, outdoor 6+12 sports, outdoor sports, outdoor personal training, outdoor dance, outdoor marathons)</td>
<td>Low risk sports (including dance, no-contact martial arts, gymnastics, and climbing) permitted for practice and training only in stable groups of no more than 5 athletes. Appearance based on spectator ratio for these events.</td>
<td>Low and moderate risk sports competitions permitted (no tournaments). Fitness and training maximum 25% capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoor Entertainment Establishments (includes arcades, movie theaters, indoor bowling, indoor concert halls, indoor gardens, indoor museums, indoor bowling, showing of movies, outdoor concert halls, outdoor event spaces, outdoor event spaces on any land, indoor event spaces)</td>
<td>Private rentals/tours for individual households of no more than 6 people permitted. General admission prohibited.</td>
<td>Maximum 25% capacity. If food or drinks are served, eating and drinking requirements apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Entertainment Establishments (includes parks, outdoor gardens, outdoor arcades, outdoor theaters, outdoor stadiums, outdoor event spaces, outdoor venues, outdoor concert venues, outdoor)</td>
<td>Ticketed events only: Groups of 10, limit 2 households, timed ticketing required.</td>
<td>Groups of 15, limit 2 households per group, maximum 200 including spectators.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Use entertainment is no longer prohibited but must follow guidance above for the appropriate venue. Long-term care facilities, professional and collegiate sports remain governed by their current guidance/proclamations separate from this plan.

Appendix G: Types of Instagram Accounts – Flow Chart

Figure by author
Appendix H: Types of Instagram Accounts – Glossary

The categories described here are based upon narrative analysis of participant interviews. As data was collected, these accounts were mentioned in connection to participant experiences, in which accounts were used by participants, seen by participants, or found by participants through Instagram, in attempts to engage in a specific community, for example, accounts dedicated to specific artistic mediums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art and Business</strong></td>
<td>An Instagram account primarily used to capture art, artistic talent, show the progress and process of art, promote business, and reach engagement and growth goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Diaries</strong></td>
<td>A sub-category of a Finstagram account, labeled as a digital diary when knowledge of and access to the account is restricted to close followers, and posts divulge a high level of detailed, personal information about the account holder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finstagram</strong></td>
<td>The combined terms “fake” and “Instagram,” An alternate account that features a much smaller following, usually made up of close friends. The content is less curated, less professional, and free from the social restrictions of the main profile such as the constant expectation to only highlight the good parts of life. Topics act as a digital diary, including maintenance of mental health, inside jokes, and risqué photography. A Fake Instagram is considered to portray a more realistic version of the user’s life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friends and Family</strong></td>
<td>Any account, usually a main profile, that is primarily used to keep in contact with friends, relatives, and family, who are permitted to see the more professional, family friendly content of a user.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influencers</strong></td>
<td>Stemming from the topic “Instagram Influencer” and influencer account is typically run by a single individual, who uses their Instagram account to document their lives, in turn profiting from their audience through Instagram analytics and sales based on brand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sponsorships. There are many niche areas in which an influencer can exert their authority, knowledge, and authenticity, but the level of credibility an influencer has with their platform and audience further guarantees that the product or experience being advertised is trustworthy, reliable, and worth investing in. Example: *The influx of fitness and beauty influencers has surged in popularity, marking a cultural emphasis on health and appearance.*

**Meme Accounts** Accounts dedicated to posting memes (see key terms), particularly content rooted in popular culture or niche, generational humor, or create an account of their own to share among friends. Memes are designed to be relatable, prompting users to identify and develop a sense of humor, as well as make light of cultural phenomena.

**Mental Status** An alternate account that documents an individual’s mental health status, journey, and/or recovery.

**Professional** A main account used by businesses, institutions, corporations, or individuals to market to customers or consumers more directly, and have a space to document company values, employee testimonies, and workplace improvements.

**Risqué Account** An extension of a Finstagram account devoted to sharing intimate or risqué images, occasionally for profit, are privately held and restricted to a specific audience.