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Scroll, Snap, Like, Tweet, Repeat:

An Exploration of Social Media and the Self

A Thesis in English

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores how social media effects the construction of selves and how, through these social media platforms, selves challenge simplistic notions of identity, authenticity, and sexualization. Through my research I aim to answer these three questions: How do social media platforms challenge ideas of identity and authenticity? How do people repurpose social media platforms in order to explore identity and authenticity? How do people repurpose offline technologies to create spaces for empowerment online? All of these questions and the research that stemmed from them are specific to the age range of thirteen to twenty-one years old, Millennials and Generation Z.

The process for this thesis was conducted through reading literature on the topics of the self in general, the self and how it is related to new technologies like social media, ethnographic research on teenagers and their use of social media, and the actual terms of service, policy, and about sections of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Additionally, there were in-person interviews and online surveys conducted to take into account the perspectives of Millennials and Generation Z on their use of social media platforms.

This thesis shows that social media platforms challenge conventional ideas of identity and authenticity by asking users to present their multiple selves on different platforms, allowing multiple versions of authenticity. People repurpose social media in order to fit their specific social needs; we see this especially with the finsta platform. In realizing that selfies, self-stalking, and fuckboys are just modern

versions of things from the past we can see how people, specifically girls, are repurposing ideas of sexualization and creating space or platforms online where they feel more empowered. It is hoped that this thesis will inform scholars about the complex relationship between the self and social media and provide new questions to think about moving forward

Table of Contents

Scroll, Snap, Like, Tweet, Repeat: An Exploration of Social Media and the Self

Introduction

Where is your phone right now? In your hand, in your pocket, in your bag next to you, staring at you from your desk, plugged into the charger just feet away from you? When was the last time you used your phone? Seconds ago to answer a text that popped up, minutes ago to respond to an e-mail, not too long ago to scroll through Instagram or compose a tweet or to like a status or to send a picture of your distorted face on Snapchat? Look around you, on the path walking to class, or on the train to work, or even worse, to the person driving next to you on the road. How many of them are glued or glancing at their phones? How often do you find yourself hanging out with friends, but not just them, their phones as well? Do you ever find yourself in an awkward situation, reaching for your phone to make you feel less uncomfortable or find yourself in the middle of doing homework distracted by the black rectangular screen sitting in front of you, longing to ignore the homework just for a minute of scrolling time through your favorite platforms? What is the last thing you do before going to bed and the first thing you do when you wake up? We now live in a world where phones and, more specifically the social media sites we have access to on our phones, are completely embedded in our lives and ultimately part of who we are. As Nicholas Carr points out "tuning out is not an option many of us would consider" (Carr 134).

This thesis explores how selves are constructed with the new terms and conditions provided by social media platforms. My first main point is taking in the

description above and realizing that the worlds of online and offline are extremely integrated and should be seen as one, not as two separate places to present yourself. The technology we use and the social media sites we frequent are very much a part of who we are. By analyzing the postings of one woman across all the major social media platforms and with the help of theorists on the self from before social media existed until now, I will argue that individuals exhibit multiple selves on all the different social media platforms they use, similar to how they would perform different versions of themselves based on the people they are surrounded by or the environment that they are in. Recognizing that how the self is constructed online mirrors how it is already constructed offline helps to close this divide between the two and demonstrate how the two should start to be seen as one entity that is so interconnected and influenced by the other.

In establishing this argument, I will address the complexities of the self. It is difficult to discuss the construction of "the self" in terms of social media or offline lives, because there are different ways to think about this self or selves. One is that we have multiple selves that are created through the environment we are in or the tools that we use. The other is that we have one identity, a specific self, which is presented in different ways depending on the audience and platform. Not only is it easy to slip back and fourth between these concepts of self, it is important to understand both perspectives. The evidence in this thesis, argues that social media exemplifies multiple selves that make up one person as opposed to one identity presented in different ways. While audience and platform are necessary to discuss

in terms of self and social media, they can support a construction of one absolute self; more important are the tools that are available and ever changing, which further the concept of multiple selves. The tools and environment carry more weight because, not only do they help to shape multiple selves, which are not passive, the selves then take the tools and make them their own.

The second major point I make is that these distinctive social media platforms and various selves that arise out of them challenge simplistic notions of identity and authenticity, allowing there to also be multiple versions of self, all of them authentic. My analysis of how one age group has completely commandeered the platform of Instagram to cater to their own social needs, reveals that how their multiple selves are presented to the world is important to them, because each is authentic, i.e. there is not a "real" and a "fake" self at work here. Last, the things we think of as new (like Instagram and selfies) are all really modern versions of things that have already existed offline, but looking at them through a gendered lens allows us to see how teenage girls and young women have repurposed their online versions (like Instagram) into sites of empowerment. This connection of social media to the past further explains the blurring of the boundaries between online and offline.

This thesis relies heavily on the reader's knowledge of social media platforms, so before we go further I will provide descriptions of each major platform that is highlighted throughout, explain what they are and how they work. Additionally, it is important to note that, when discussing the self and the users of

social media, I am referring to a specific age group – from around thirteen years old to mid-twenties (otherwise classified as Generation Z and Millennials).

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking site that allows users to easily connect with friends and family and share content such as pictures, links to news (or fake news), videos, status updates, upcoming events, and so on. In terms of privacy, there are different settings users can choose to allow their shared content to be publicly accessible or accessible only with their select group of friends. Facebook allows users to maintain a friend list by either "friending" them on the platform or accepting their friend request. A user's Facebook page or profile is referred to as a "wall," where friends can post to share a relevant article or a YouTube video or just say "hi." Now there is a new feature that allows users to stream live videos using Facebook Live, allowing friends to watch what you are doing in real-time. When Facebook first originated it was more about the individual person, but as it has evolved there are now group pages and business pages, which businesses use as a tool for social media marketing. Furthermore, Facebook has such a strong presence in this technological age that it has become universal. Many other websites or even social media platforms (like Spotify or Venmo) allow users to login to their platform with their Facebook user name and password.

Twitter

Tweeting essentially allows users to microblog. Twitter exercises a purposeful message size restriction. All tweets are limited to 140 characters or less,

promoting careful use of language (or showing how hard it can be to concisely get your message out there). Twitter also has privacy settings that allow users to choose whether they will be public (anyone can follow them) or private (they have to accept users first). Who a user follows is what comprises their Twitter feed. Users can follow friends and family, strangers (if they are public or if they accept the request), news organizations, institutions, and celebrities. This allows for quick updates about what people think is worthwhile revealing about their day – often with an attempt at making it humorous. When someone finds what you have tweeted relatable, funny, or important they can retweet it, and it will come up on their profile or they can quote tweet it and add their own commentary. These functions are what allow a post to go viral. Additionally, Twitter has become increasingly political and, for many, serves as a platform for sharing articles about what is going on in our political climate and who is doing what about it. Others use Twitter to curate news stories or advertise social or cultural events. Like Facebook, Twitter has also grown into a platform for businesses to market themselves. Again, the funny factor comes into play, because that is what really seems to work in terms of gaining attention and followers on Twitter. A great example of a business owning the Twitter platform is Denny's, "America's Diner".

Figure 1: Denny's Twitter Feed

People go crazy for the Denny's Twitter – they have 377K followers. Twitter has a lot of working parts combined into one platform – politics, humor, celebrities, but it also just depends on who you personally choose to follow and what kind of content you produce yourself.

Instagram

Instagram is a platform dedicated to sharing pictures and videos. That being very broad, there is a wide variety of what kind of profiles one can come across on Instagram. Clicking on the Explore Tab, represented by a magnifying glass towards the bottom left of the app, can really show the multitude of Instagrams that exist out there – accounts dedicated to working out, makeup, partying on college campuses, food, yoga, dogs. It really goes on and on. As for posting the actual content, users can post directly through the app or from existing pictures in their camera roll, with the option to edit their post – brighten it, fade it, saturate it, take away shadows, add

warmth, etc. From there, the photo needs to be captioned with the appropriate tags to other accounts pictured and the location added. People go through and "double tap" or like your post. There are a lot of little details that go into Instagramming – including deciding the right time of day to post, what filter to use, what caption to choose, how the image matches ones aesthetic, whether to follow this person back, and what is one's following to follower ratio? Recently, Instagram has become more centered on businesses using the platform for marketing their products. Now users can be listed as a business and pay extra to promote posts, but even prior to that companies would use Instagram as a form of social media marketing. There is also the new addition of Instagram Stories, which is essentially what Snapchat is (explained below). Chapter Two also goes into much more detail about Instagram and the new platform that has surfaced from Instagram – finstagram.

Snapchat

Snapchat is seen as giving a look into someone's more everyday life. It is a combination of a messaging platform and a social networking platform. Users can send individual pictures and videos to people on their friend list or post onto their Story, which can be viewed by all of their Snapchat friends as a reel rather than privately between two people. What makes Snapchat distinctive is the transient quality of the content that is shared. Unlike other social media platforms, Snapchat's content "disappears" after up to ten seconds if it is sent to individual people and after twenty-four hours if the content is put on a Story. By "disappears" I mean that the snap is not visible to the friend it was sent to anymore or to the friends that have

access to that users Story and Snap Inc. automatically deletes the content of users

Snaps from their servers (unless they receive "valid legal process asking to preserve

content") (Snap Inc. Privacy Policy). There are still ways the content can be saved

though – through screenshots. Snapchat does notify the user immediately when a

friend has screenshotted their picture or video, but there are ways that people have

avoided that through tutorials or other apps. Another important part of Snapchat is

the addition of filters. First, it started off with just changing the brightness or color

of the snap, but now the filters recognize your face and can add puppy ears or a

rainbow coming out of your mouth. One of the new fads that has arisen out of

Snapchat is the idea of the "streak" or "KTS" (keep the streak). This tracks how many

days you and another person have privately snapped, represented by the fire emoji

and the number of days next to the person's name. If you miss a day the streak is

broken. I currently have a 372-day streak with my brother, and it is very upsetting

to lose a streak.

All of these social media platforms ask for users to present themselves in

different ways, while maintaining a certain overall brand of "yourself." This thesis is

an exploration of how we construct a sense of self in terms of social media. It is

important to understand the basics of these platforms in order to theorize about the

self. Chapter One discusses different theories of self in conjunction with social

media. Chapter Two deals specifically with Instagram and the ideas surrounding

authenticity and that platform. Chapter Three pulls from the previous chapters to

look at social media and the self with a gendered lens. There is a substantial amount

of literature that claims technology and the rise of social media are ruining us, but it does not tell the whole story. I am not trying to claim that social media is all good, but it is definitely more complex than we think. A survey of where a specific age group stands in relation to social media at this exact moment is limited, because we do not know where we will stand even one year from now; however, it suggests that the effects of social media are more positive than most scholars paint them. In the age range that I focus on, teenagers and young adults are coopting and remaking social media to serve their social needs – challenging notions of identity, authenticity, and sexualization.

Chapter One

The Fourth Dimension: A World Where Online and Offline are One, but Selves are

Many

On social media sites, users believe their profile to be demonstrations of who they are. Thus, through communication with different platforms of social media and through carefully curating content across different social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, users construct real, ideal, and false selves that intersect, constructing multiple versions of the self. Many scholars, such as Sherry Turkle, Minas Michaikyan, and Peggy Orenstein, who study the concept of identity online seem to support the idea that the online self is pre-corrected or performed in some way that suggests an idealized self online, but they also all acknowledge the multiplicity of selves online and that they can be fluid or many-sided. Furthermore, the self in is often split into two – online and offline, but considering how much technology is ingrained in us today, I would argue that this separation is no longer valid. Taking these complexities into consideration, how can we deduce a contemporary understanding of the self in terms of social media? And how does social media reshape the relationship between the on-line and off-line?

The understandings of these various platforms are age specific, so this exploration of social media and the self is centered mostly on teenagers and college students. My argument focuses on the ways in which new technologies are affecting our brains, how people construct a sense of self, and the definition of authenticity, filters, and boundaries. With these themes, I will argue against a dichotomous way

of constructing the self as simply real and ideal (good and bad), or as the on- or off-line self; I intend to explore how, through varied platforms, multiple selves are constructed on social media. As Evan Spiegel, co-creator of Snapchat explains, "virtual life should conform to real life, where you express who you are in different moments and around different people" (Time 29). The multiplicity of selves arises as a product of the new dimension we live in where the online and offline are seen as one.

First, I will examine what the terms authenticity, filters, and boundaries mean in our four-dimensional world before discussing theories of self in the context of the technology and social media of today. These three key terms were chosen as a structure to analyze social media and the self, because, through extensive readings about how technology is affecting our sense of self, I have seen that these three themes seem to keep resurfacing. Merriam-Webster offers three definitions for the word "authentic": "real or genuine: not copied or false, true and accurate, and made to be or look just like an original copy" (Merriam-Webster). Most social media sites have some claim to authenticity in their statement, about section, or policy, appealing to the fact that you can "help friends to know you better" or "share your life" on their platform (Facebook Terms of Services). People are thought to be authentic online when their profile or what they post is equivalent to how they are offline, in the "real world." Thinking of authenticity in terms of how accurately online and offline identities match further creates this separation between the two realms of on- and off-line, which is not accurate. Let's take a look at Twitter's

mission statement: "to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers" (Twitter About Page). Words like "instantly" and "without barriers" seem to suggest this lack of boundary between the on- and off-line. The fact that content is created and shared immediately implies that it becomes second nature and that it is just a part of normal life. Just as easily as we could share our thoughts with the person sitting next to us, we could also tweet our thoughts out to our array of followers.

When thinking about the online self and these terms of authenticity, it is important to keep in mind everything that we are not seeing (we often forget about that). In *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs, and Wearable Devices to See and Shape*, Jill Walker Rettberg discusses the idea of filtered reality and how filters are much more than just a tool used to enhance pictures on Instagram. Rettberg explains how the "filter has become a pervasive metaphor for the ways in which technology can remove certain content and how it can alter or distort texts, images and data" (Rettberg 20). In the most basic sense, a filter enhances the pictures we post, helping to perfect whatever users want to post, but filters are also a way of keeping things out. In that sense, our social media feed is filtered, because people choose which part of their lives to post. Now platforms are filtered in a more structural way. A prime example is the new Instagram algorithm, which instead of showing a user all the possible posts of the people they follow, it caters their feed more specifically to the people who's content they like, direct message, search for, and know "in real life." In this context, cultural filters, the rules

and conventions that guide us, are just as important as the technological ones, filtering out possible modes of expression so subtly that we often are not even aware of all the things we do not see. Cultural filters are constructed by society to make these sort of unspoken rules on social media about what is appropriate to post, further promoting to filter yourself and your online identity. The fact that filtering happens so subtly or even unconsciously explains why people do not even realize that they are posting crafted versions of themselves on one platform and possibly tweaking them for another. Generally, filters are thought to be what make pictures inauthentic or fake, but in reality filters are a normal constructions of our online and offline society that people abide by everyday, so maybe filters are more authentic than we think?

Authenticity also brings up the discussion of boundaries. Ever heard of the saying "pics or it didn't happen"? In this new dimension the boundaries between "real" life and the virtual are slim to none. In "The IRL Fetish," Nathan Jurgenson points out that "this idea that we are trading the offline for the online… fails to capture the plain fact that our lived reality is the result of the constant interpenetration of the online and offline" (Jurgenson). The two realms, online and offline depend on each other, which therefore make them one. The fourth dimension is this "one" and means that there is an alliance between online and offline – they are so interconnected now that they cannot be simply split into two. Think about how easily we (mainly Millennials and Generation Z, although many parents of these generations are trying to teach themselves) navigate this new dimension, talking to

people in front of us while simultaneously taking a Snapchat. Similarly, think about how easily we can switch from platform to platform with the help of double tapping our home button to show all of our apps that are open. In seconds we can glide from Twitter to Instagram, retweeting a funny meme to editing a picture of us pumpkin picking earlier that day.

These three terms – authenticity, filters, and boundaries – help us to think about a variety of theories of the self. The self is a hard thing to define and has been discussed and argued about over time. Academics of all disciplines and philosophers have strived to understand the enduring truth of human nature as it continues to express itself and be affected by the forces at work around us. In order to discuss the impact of new technologies and social media on the self, this chapter will focus on theories of self that consider social forces and environment as primary in the development of the self, but that also acknowledge the reflexive nature of the self. To help put these theories of self into context, I will use an example of a college student's social media identities threaded throughout. The student is a female and a senior at Drew University. She uses many forms of social media, but the four main platforms that will be discussed here are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat.

In *Conceiving the Self*, Morris Rosenberg tries to define self-concept in terms of the "extant self (how the individual sees himself), the desired self (how he would like to see himself), and the presenting self (how he shows himself to others)" (Rosenberg 9). It is clear that it is not helpful to focus on one version of the self;

there are different working parts that come together. The desired self mentioned by

Rosenberg definitely reflects an idealized self that many believe to be what is

presented online. However, that self could just be representative of one platform.

Let's say Instagram, where users try to take the perfect picture (the desired self),

but not true of their Twitter self, which presents a presenting self, where users can

jokingly complain about their life as if it is a "public diary" (Finsta Interview).

Jessica's Instagram is aesthetically pleasing and full of beautiful selfies or fun

pictures from events (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Jessica's Instagram Feed
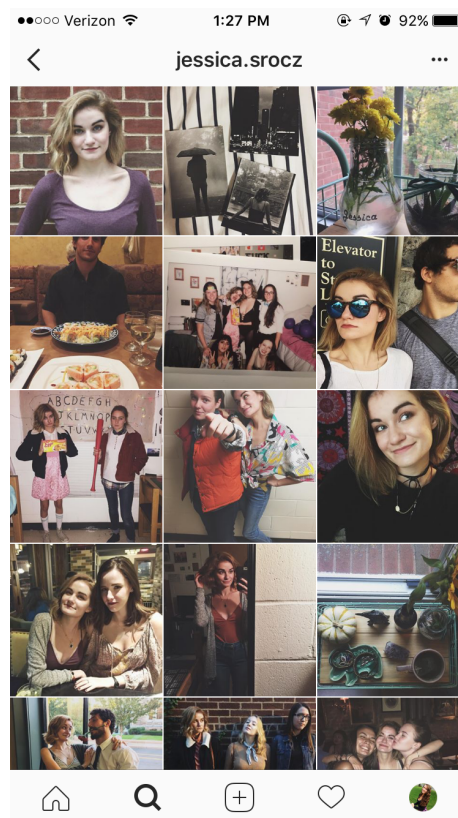
 Contrast her Instagram with a tweet like "My face is so versatile. Some days Im so

oily u might mistake me for a glazed donut Other days Im so dry that if I smile my

face cracks open" (Twitter). This tweet sheds light on the fact that different platforms allow for multiple selves to arise. That tweet would not be found as the caption to one of her Instagram selfies, because that platform is more for showing off the desired self (how good one looks or what exciting activity one is up to now), whereas Twitter leaves room for presenting a self that complains or makes fun of one's extant self.

Rosenberg attempts to break down this binary of looking at the self in terms of who you "truly are" deep down and how you appear to others. He states, "whereas dispositions may be felt as more of what we truly are, the identity elements tend to be experiences as more of what we surely are... the self-concept component of which he is most certain is the social identity element" (Rosenberg 16). Similar to calling this idea of who you "truly" are into question is calling the idea of the separation of on- and off-line life (real/true versus virtual) into question. If the "true" self is such a tricky subject then how can there be such a distinction between the real and the virtual? It is not that simple to just cast these two realms as completely separate, because they do in fact influence each other. In one particular Instagram of a recent headshot, Jessica captions the photo "when u gotta edit them headshots to match your Instagram aesthetics!!!! Ugh the struggles of being a star" (Instagram). This example just touches the surface as to how these dimensions are blending into one. Jessica feels that after taking a photo she cannot just post it. She needs to go through the process of brightening, saturating, or adding filters in order to post the image that matches her desired self. The idea of editing or

adding a filter is so trivial now, it is just part of our regular routine in this world

where the online and offline are molding into one.

In *The Four Dimensional Human: Ways of Being in the Digital World*, Laurence

Scott discusses how the technological age is reshaping people's responses, instincts,

and sensitivities and how this fourth dimension is not something completely

separate, but just a contortion of the original dimensions. Turning the idea of two

separate realms on its head, Scott states, "the old world itself has taken on, in

essence, a four-dimensionality" (Scott xv). Within this context, our visual creations

and online activities blur and remove conventional delineations between public and

private expression producing "someone who is such a concentrated blend of matter

and media," while multiplying and expanding the number of potential selves (Scott

xx). Keeping in mind the two types of selves we just saw Jessica perform on

Instagram and Twitter, now we can explore a third platform: Facebook. This post

(Figure 3) along with many others of Jessica's Facebook posts includes some sort of

announcement or accomplishment, usually having to do with her education or

career goals (landing a role in a play or scoring a summer internship). Additionally,

in light of the recent election, Facebook has increasingly become an extremely

political platform, which will be explored later on.

Figure 3: A Sample from Jessica's Facebook

Jessica Sroczynski
February 12 · Madison ·

Super excited to announce that I have just been offered an internship at the
Center for Communication in Brooklyn for their spring event season!

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➡ Share

Facebook also demands that users "provide real name and information," which is

different from other platforms where you can be more creative with usernames or

handles that may be a rendition of your name or something completely made up

(Facebook Terms of Service). Being asked to provide "real" information leads users

to present selves consistently and be more conscious about what they post, because

it will be attached to their actual name. This platform shows more of Jessica's

professional side. She could post about her accomplishments on any other platform

as well, but probably would not write about her face being a glazed donut on

Facebook as she did on Twitter. Our four dimensional world allows for multiple

selves, but also allows there to be overlap between them.

In *The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity*, Bruce Hood comes

to the conclusion that although we all have this sense of an autonomous, consistent

self, that self is in fact an illusion created by our brain, but one that is necessary,

especially in this day and age, for humans to survive in society. Hood contrasts the

"ego theory," the "sense that we are individuals inside bodies," and Hume's "bundle

theory," the idea that there is "no single entity, but rather bundles of sensations,

perceptions, and thoughts piled on top of each other" (Hood xi). Hood argues that neuroscience supports the "bundle theory" and uses the rest of his book to explain how these bundles form in the brain and create the illusory self, which is much more susceptible to outside influence than we imagine. Our sense of self being molded by our environment and other people is clear from birth. Hood's points connect to this idea when saying, "during these formative years [childhood], the illusion of the reflected self we experience is constructed by those around us through our social interactions" (Hood 36). Basically, we cannot develop a sense of self without other people. As Hood suggests, there are different situations with different people and "how people behave depends on the context in which they find themselves" (Hood 286).

This is in line with Rosenberg's three versions of self, all of which are both presented on and regulated back to us by social media. When it comes to the many different social media platforms, there are a variety of contexts to choose from, which cause people to expose different versions of themselves in a more complex way than Rosenberg describes. Instagram is often thought of as a platform where people can be "artsy", which is potentially why Jessica chose to post an angled beach picture showing off the patterned beach towel, her tattoo, and the ocean on this particular site (Figure 4). On Instagram, users want people to see their perfectly edited picture filtered to not look *too* edited in order to present a life that is cool and amazing your life is (but you don't want them to know how hard you are trying). When Instagram first came out it was very popular to use the hashtag #nofilter. This

alludes to the company's claim of wanting people to show more of their "real" selves

and to the people that use it to show who they "really" are. As Facebook became

more popular, Instagram became the new site to "be yourself," with #nofilter, but as

users changed the platform did, too, and it now offers to allow users to choose "a

filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever" (Instagram

FAQ). Now users *need* a filter and need to follow this "strategic image-management"

in order to be themselves (Salisbury 18). Instagram claims to "allow you to

experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen," but it is

really not as immediate as Twitter or Snapchat because of the new pressures to

present a flawlessly authentic desired self (Instagram FAQ).

Jessica seems to use Snapchat as a look into more of her "everyday" life, the

version of self Rosenberg terms "extant". The little things she does that she maybe

would not want to announce to a larger audience. Snapchat claims to be more

spontaneous than other platforms and has a certain edge because it is not

permanent. The site claims that, "our products empower people to express

themselves, live in the moment, learn about the world, and have fun together"

(Snapchat Website). Jessica might not be "having fun" in all of her snap, but they

showcase how Snapchat is a more casual platform to express how you are feeling,

supposedly "in the moment."

Figure 4: "Artsy" Instagram Image   Figure 5: A Snapchat from Jessica's Story
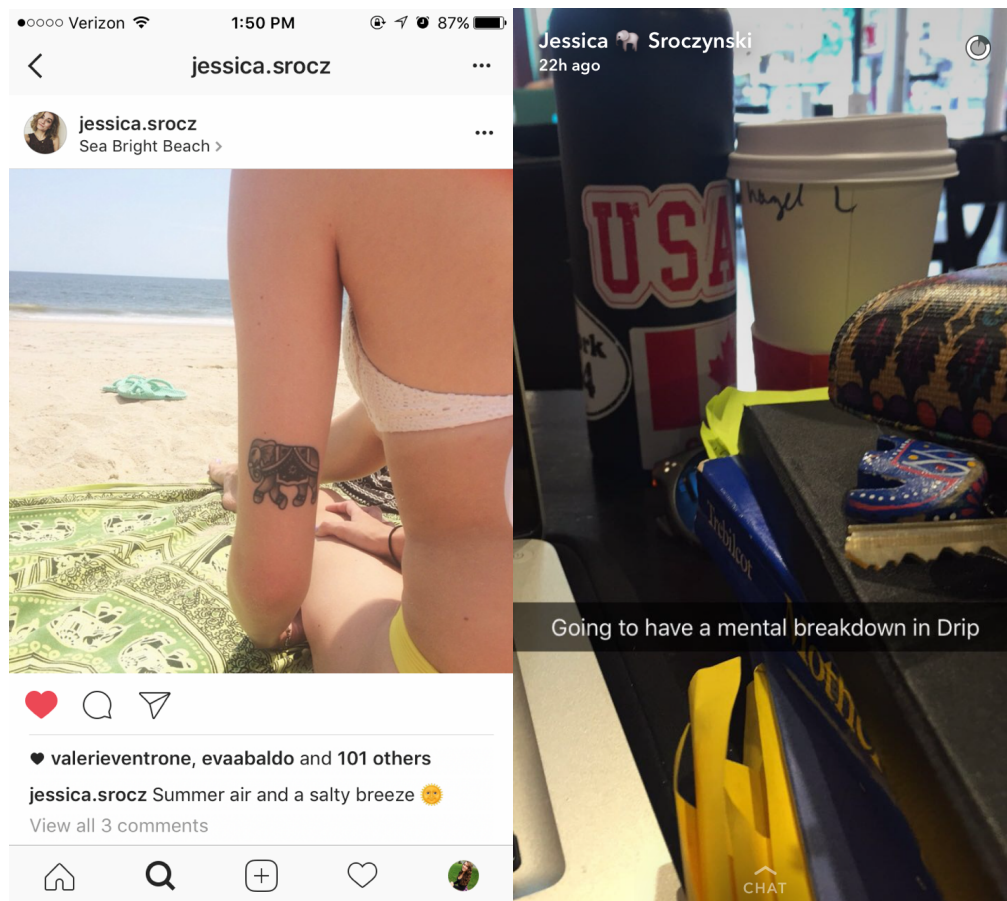
The bundle theory that Hood talks about further supports the idea of the

multiplicity of selves in denying that there is a single entity of a self. The self illusion,

relying on the fact that humans are a social animal, also supports the idea that

online and offline are not as separate as we say they are, because "social networking

sites will continue to expand in popularity and will increasingly shape the sense of

who we are" (Hood 257). In one tweet, Jessica described feeling embarrassed for

doing something she wanted to, but almost did not want to because she knew

people could see (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Jessica's Presented Self on Twitter

Jessica @Jessica_Srocz · 19 Dec 2015
I'm embarrassed that all the people who follow me on Spotify see that I listen to the same ten songs all the time
↩ 1   ⟲   ♥ 6   ···

Although Jessica's thought is expressed through Twitter, the real platform in action here is Spotify. Some might question whether Spotify is considered a social media platform and I would argue it is. Spotify is not just a site to listen to music, but a platform to follow other people's accounts and playlists. As described above followers can see what songs the user is listening to. In a sense, this is shaping "who we are." Jessica would not feel embarrassed if no one was watching, but because her followers can see that she listens to the same ten songs, she becomes self conscious about the music she *wants* to listen to and could potentially effect what she *does* listen to. This is an example of how the online and offline selves influence each other rather than one reflecting the other.

Nicholas Carr in *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, writes about how technology, the Internet, and social media are actually changing how our brains function and the condition of human life. He says, "our ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting" are changing "through the way we live… through the tools we use" (Carr 31). While not claiming that the Internet is all bad, Carr illuminates what we are losing along with the benefits afforded by the Internet. Carr recognizes that as the lines between human and computer interaction continue to blur "the

more we mold ourselves to its [the computer, the Internet, social media] form and function" (Carr 209). The fact that technology is actually changing our brains and how we think and that the self illusion is formed from the brain leads to an understanding of a fourth dimension, a world not separated between IRL (in real life) and virtual, but one where the multiple selves that arise on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter *are* real life, is happening right now.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman uses the concept of theatre to argue that, when an individual comes into contact with other people, he or she will attempt to control or guide the impression that others might make of them by changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance, and manner. Goffman explains, "when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey" (Goffman 3). Ever since Goffman, it is commonly accepted that people put on their daily lives as a staged performance where they deliberately use the differentiation between private and public acts to shape their identity. Although this book is not in the context of online identity, the general theory of presentation of self in everyday life can be applied to how we understand the self today in context of social media. The theory touches on the fact that people act in certain ways to give a particular impression of themselves and usually people like to make good impressions. Therefore, the theory of presentation of self in everyday life seems to support the notion that people idealize themselves in a sense, as Rosenberg argues. This theory, however, also acknowledges the fact

that the self we intentionally present on the social stage matches or diverges from the self pictures we hold inwardly (our extant self). This claim connects with the concept of multiple selves presented by Rosenberg and Hood, because even if the social self is a performance, that does not make it any less part of that person's identity or definition of self. Although Goffman's theory does not specifically state that there are multiple selves, it is implicit in the theory that the "front stage", "back stage", and "off stage" represent the multiplicity of selves. This concept can pertain to online identity, because many social media sites are seen to be platforms where one can perform identity, taking a picture and choosing "a filter to transform the look and feel," but also these same sites have a claim to authenticity and pride themselves on being platforms where you can "help friends to get to know *you* better" (Instagram Privacy Policy & About Facebook).

      In the Instagram photo (Figure 7), Jessica uses a black and white filter to "transform the look and feel," which is further put into context by her caption "nights to myself." On the other hand, Jessica's anecdote about voting in the election (Figure 8) provides her audience with an insight into her past and how she has changed into the person she is today. Therefore, different platforms call for individuals to express themselves in certain ways, allowing people to fully disclose the multiple aspects of their identity.

Figure 7: An Instagram Post

Figure 8: A Sample from Jessica's Facebook
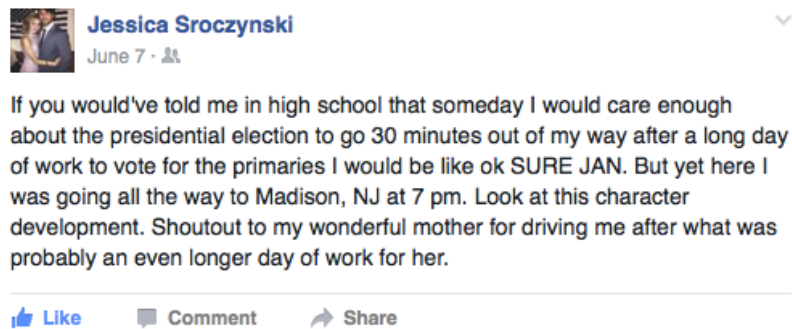
Sherry Turkle takes a similar standpoint to Nicholas Carr in *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, where she argues that, although this constant connection we now possess allows us to do virtually

anything from anywhere, it also has lasting effects on ourselves and our interpersonal relationships with others that lead us into a new type of solitude where intimacy and separation are being reinvented. Turkle recognizes that this new technology is rewiring our brains because "we make our technologies, and they, in turn shape us" (Turkle 19). Turkle discusses many different sites that people use to create an identity or present themselves online, from Second Life to Facebook. As stated before, Turkle, along with many other scholars in this field, claim that these social networking sites are platforms to perfect the performance of self and "write yourself into the person you want to be," but her evidence also relies heavily on the multiplicity of selves (Turkle 188). Turkle references Robert Jay Lifton and his idea of a mature self, called protean, which "emphasizes its multiple aspects" (Turkle 179). The self, as Turkle discusses in Lifton's terms is ""'fluid and many-sided" and flourishes in diversity and reinvention (Turkle 179). Social media platforms are the places to show the many sides of your self. What one posts on Facebook is not the same as what one posts on Twitter or Instagram. In fact, many brands struggle with this because what is the point of having these separate platforms if you post the same things on all of them? Although many people argue that social media sites present the idealized self, it seems that this is not entirely correct. Each platform allows people to provide a look into a certain aspect of their lives, who they are, and what they believe in, where some might leave room for a bit of idealization and others allow for the revelation of some downfalls. Although it is important to recognize "each serves a different purpose", "they must overlap, or questions of

authenticity will arise" (Turkle 183). These multiple facets of identity, unique in their own ways, can all come together though, to create a sort of brand for that self.

Facebook is usually described as more for keeping in touch with family or friends that are far away, or as a more professional site, a platform to post about accomplishments and share political posts. Twitter is all about immediacy and conciseness; expressing how one feels in 140 characters or less. Twitter is also seen as more personal than Facebook, because you can post more candidly about how you are feeling, whether something embarrassing just happened to you or you find something hilarious that you need to share. Instagram is all about aesthetics – less about the words and more about how your picture pops out on someone's feed or how your own personal layout looks all together. Let's take a look at three politically charged posts that Jessica shared on these three separate platforms to show how there are some overlaps between platforms, but at the same time, each presents a specific part of Jessica's self.
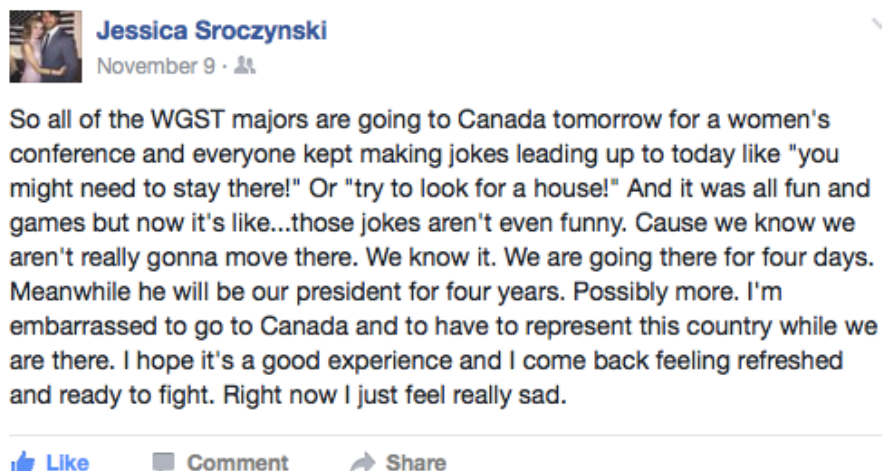
From all three of these posts (Figure 9, Figure 10, Figure 11) one can gather that Jessica is a democratic Hillary supporter and upset by the events during the election (the debates) and ultimately, the results, but each platform shows different aspects of this and in different ways. As stated before, Twitter can be more comical and candid. Jessica feels comfortable talking about her consumption of alcohol on that platform (and does it in a humorous way in Figure 9), whereas she would try to avoid that topic on Facebook.

Figure 9: A Tweet About the 2016 Election

Jessica @Jessica_Srocz · Oct 9

I'm glad I'm watching this debate drunk unlike last time when I was too sober and almost burst into a million pieces

♥ 8

Facebook is the platform that everyone gets anxious about whether a college or job they are applying to will find their profile, so they make sure to keep it relatively clean – minimal posts about alcohol, especially if underage. Granted her Facebook post was the day after the election so many people were very somber, but the Facebook post (Figure 10) has a more serious tone compared to other platforms.

Figure 10: A Facebook Status after the Results of the 2016 Election

Jessica Sroczynski
November 9 ·

So all of the WGST majors are going to Canada tomorrow for a women's conference and everyone kept making jokes leading up to today like "you might need to stay there!" Or "try to look for a house!" And it was all fun and games but now it's like...those jokes aren't even funny. Cause we know we aren't really gonna move there. We know it. We are going there for four days. Meanwhile he will be our president for four years. Possibly more. I'm embarrassed to go to Canada and to have to represent this country while we are there. I hope it's a good experience and I come back feeling refreshed and ready to fight. Right now I just feel really sad.

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➤ Share

In her Instagram post (Figure 11), it is more about the photo that she chose to share and less about the words. The image is what grabs people and what bases their affirmation through likes, the words attached in the caption only furthers (or with a bad caption, hinders) the effect of the image.

Figure 11: An Instagram Post about the 2016 Election

Each platform expresses the same main idea, but in multiple ways. Even though these are three separate platforms, where Jessica can express the different versions of herself, she can discuss the same issue on all three, keeping her brand coherent. This consistency exemplifies the very thin boundaries between platforms and between the so called "real" and virtual worlds.

Overall, to make sense of the self in terms of social media is to make meaning of multiple selves – one platform or space to present is just not enough.

Furthermore, making sense of the self in this world where we are always logged on

is recognizing that social media *is* real life. We can no longer promote this idea that

there is a divide between online and offline, because they inform and influence each

other. We're not really friends unless we follow each other on Instagram, pics or it

didn't happen, Google it. Hood explains it in terms of teenagers and how they "feel

they do not exist unless they have an online presence" (Hood 258). Furthermore,

one student that Turkle interviewed explained, "if Facebook were deleted, I'd be

deleted" (Turkle 192). As Twitter claims to be a platform "without barriers", this

new fourth-dimension is a world with very few boundaries. This same idea can be

applied to multiple selves. Just as the boundaries in our new fourth dimension are

scarce, the boundaries between our multiple selves presented on different platforms

are easily navigated. Turkle explains "when identity is multiple in this way, people

feel 'whole' not because they are *one* but because the relationships among aspects of

self are fluid and undefensive" (Turkle 194). This claim of multiple selves works,

because we can effortlessly move among the many aspects of ourselves. Living in

this fourth dimension allows our multiple selves – the honors student, the clumsy

girl who is not afraid to make fun of herself, the world traveler, the yogi, the food

connoisseur, the nasty woman, the guy who just landed the internship, the selfie

queen, the craft-beer lover, the dancer, the beach goer, the partier, the recent

graduate, the Devils fan, the cat person – to flourish and come to light in different

ways.

Chapter Two

Is Authenticity Real? An Analysis of the Types of Authenticity Presented on "Real"

and "Fake" Instagrams

Over the summer, I overheard my fifteen-year-old brother use the word

"finsta". Immediately, I asked him what he was talking about. We have all heard of

Instagram or insta for short, but I had never heard the term finsta used before. He

said it was short for "fake insta" and explained it as a second account on Instagram,

but one that only your closest friends follow, so you can post more freely what you

want. I asked if I could follow it (because I was curious and to be considered a finsta

it has to be on private) and he accepted my request. At first I was really shocked

when I did the initial scrolled through. He posted multiple times a day – unflattering

pictures, up-close and personal selfies, embarrassing videos. None of the posts

seemed to be edited, unless it was poorly edited as a joke. Some pictures could be

posted with no explanation, whereas others could have lengthy captions

complaining or going on and on about something that happened during his day. This

is not typical content that you would find on a regular Instagram (rinsta). I thought

to my self that this must just be a high school thing. Even so, I knew I wanted to look

into it more for the purpose of this paper. I found it intriguing that these teenagers

felt the need to create a second account in order to escape from the pressures and

expectations from their "real" account.

I decided that I wanted to interview my brother and his friends (because they

all had them too) to find out what a finsta was all about and why they felt they

needed to have one. To my surprise, when I returned to Drew in the fall, I

discovered a few of my own friends also had finsta accounts. Weird, right? Isn't it

just a kid thing? Oh, most definitely not. Through talking to these friends, they led

me to friends of friends and even strangers on campus that also had finstas. I quickly

realized that I had a whole other group of people that I could interview.

The data collected for this chapter will be analyzed by focusing on the theme

of authenticity from the previous chapter. Even though rinstas and finstas are under

the same platform (Instagram), they are used as separate platforms and will be

referred to as different platforms throughout this paper. This research further

supports the conclusion from the first chapter that we have not only multiple selves

in this new four-dimensional world, but multiple versions of authenticity. The data

from the surveys and interviews shows that the difference between rinstas and

finstas is a lot more complex than just real versus fake. Both platforms represent

different aspects of a person and various types of authenticity, therefore they cannot

be categorized as "real, ideal, or false", but as distinctive parts of someone's self and

existence (Michikyan).

Methods

I went through the process of getting IRB approval from the university

(Appendix 1), which allowed me to send the minors (with the approval of their

parent/ guardian, of course) an online survey with the same questions that I would

be asking students on Drew's campus (Appendix 2). As the semester went on I kept

hearing of more and more college students who had finstas and I ended up

interviewing twenty people from the ages of eighteen to twenty one – eighteen female and two male participants. The survey pulled in sixteen participants from the ages of thirteen to sixteen – fourteen female and two male. Therefore, it is important to note that the understanding of the two main platforms discussed in this chapter is specific to those age groups – the Millennial Generation and Generation Z. To protect the participants' privacy, I have changed all names and identifying details.

The survey was sent out on October 10th, 2016 and the participants had until November 1st, 2016 to complete it. The in-person interviews were conducted from September 30th, 2016 to November 21st, 2016. The interviews took place on the campus of Drew University in the Ehinger Center. The data from the surveys were processed using Google Forms and the information from the interviews was typed into a Word Document and then transferred to an Excel Spreadsheet. The in-person interviews started out by just interviewing friends or acquaintances that I knew had finstas and evolved significantly by those participants referring other people to me. The surveys were not randomly selected, but sent out through my brother. I provided him with a script that stated, "My sister is writing a thesis about online identity and needs teenagers to take a 15 minute survey about their use of finstas. If you are willing to take part in this survey I just need your contact information and she will send you the link to the survey. On the survey there will be two sections to provide your consent and your parent or guardians as well." In the appendix the questions asked of the participants are listed. Some were closed questions and others were open choice questions. Some of the findings rely on key descriptive

words that participants used in open-ended questions. These descriptors were

chosen based on how frequently participants used them either on the survey or in

interviews. If a descriptor was used more than eight times in reference to either

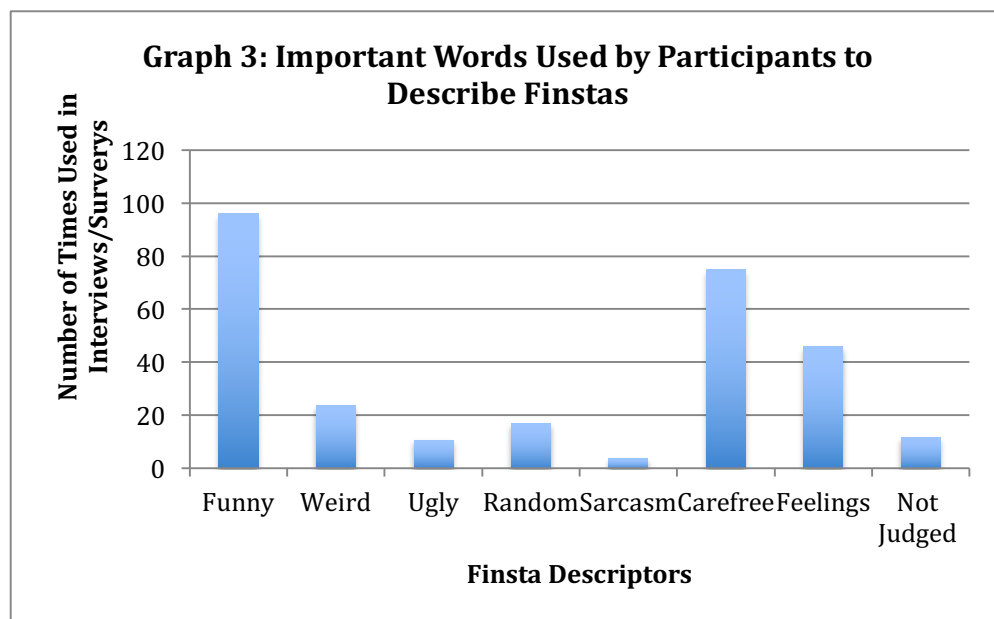rinsta or finsta it was considered a key term.

Findings

Graph one shows the range of age of participants from the survey and

interviews was thirteen to twenty-one. Twenty-eight percent of the participants

were fifteen and twenty-two of the participants were twenty.
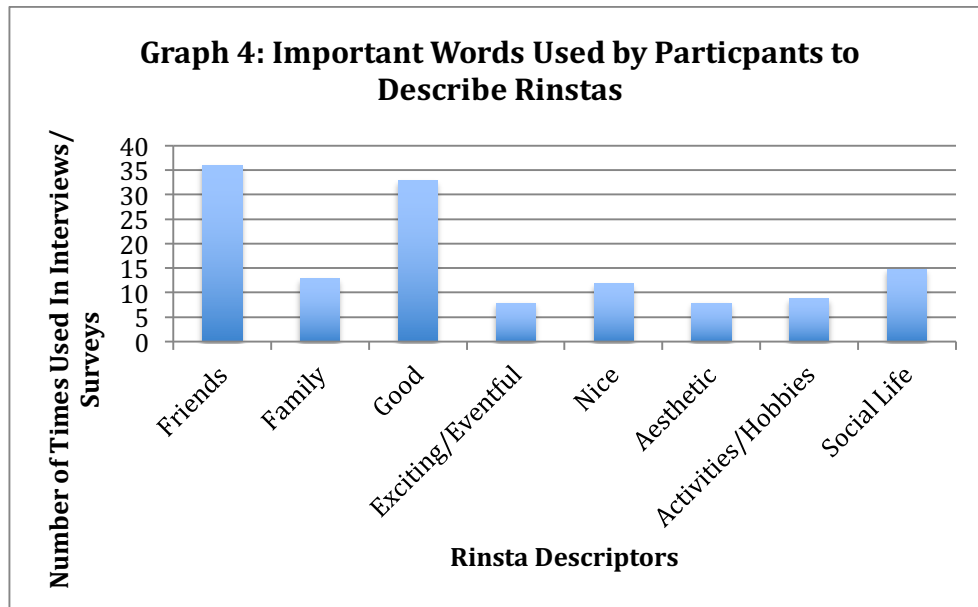
Graph 1: Age of Particpants
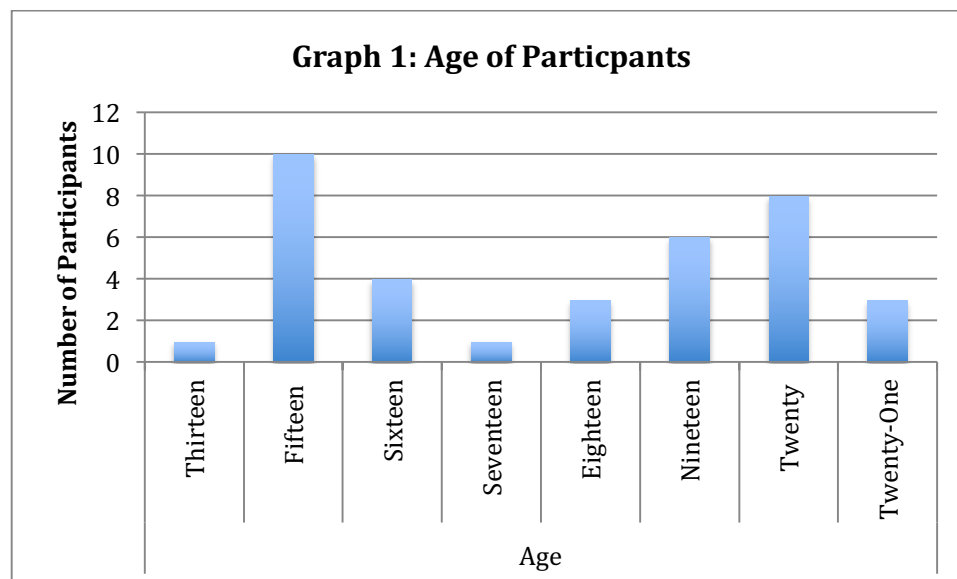
Graph Two shows how many participants chose to make their rinstas and

finstas public or private. For rinstas, twenty-eight percent of participants were

public and seventy-two percent were private, whereas one hundred percent of

participants had their finstas on private.

Graph 2: What Privacy Settings Users Choose for each Platform
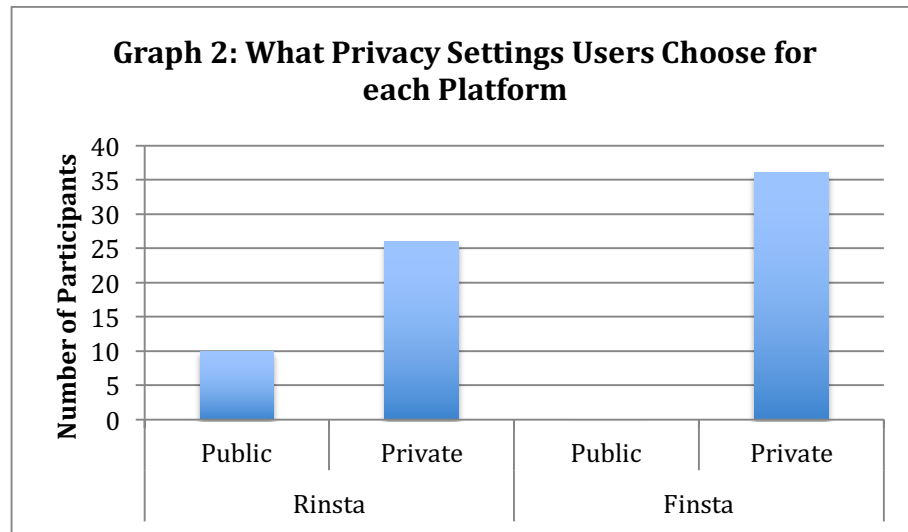
Graph Three shows out of the eight descriptors used by participants, the most frequent for finsta were "funny" (34%) and "carefree" (26%).

Graph 3: Important Words Used by Participants to Describe Finstas

Graph Four shows that for rinsta the most popular terms used were 'friends" (27%) and "good" (25%).

Graph 4: Important Words Used by Particpants to Describe Rinstas

Number of Times Used In Interviews / Surveys

Rinsta Descriptors

In response to the closed question "On which platform do you think you could be more 'yourself'?" sixty-four percent said they could be most "themselves" on finsta, while only twenty-five percent felt the same about both.

Graph 5: On Which Platform Do You Think You Could Be More "Yourself"?

Number of Participants

Rinsta   Finsta   Both/ "It's complicated"
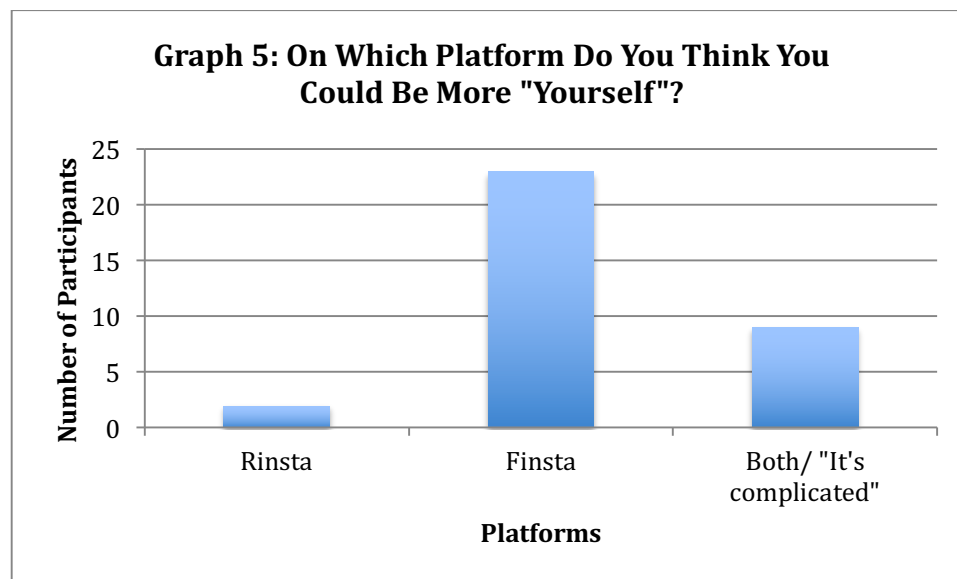
Platforms

Graph Six complicates the findings from graph five. Eighty percent of

participants say that both platforms reflect themselves "offline" in a certain way.

This graph shows that it is not as simple as one platform is more real than the other.

Note: not all participants counted in "both do" used that exact wording, but further

reflected that idea by explaining what parts of themselves are represented on each

platform.

Graph 6: How Do Each of These Platforms Reflect Yourself Offline?
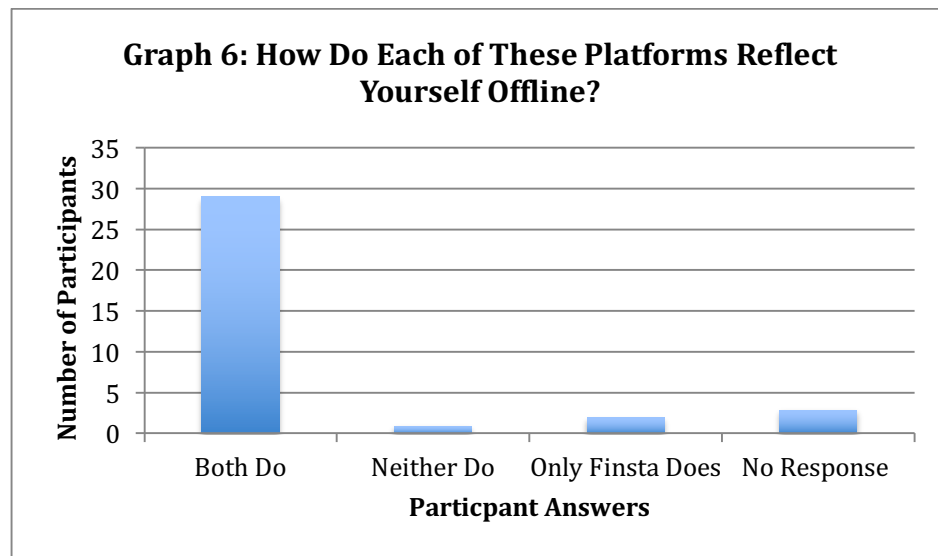
Discussion

One of the questions asked of participants was "how do you feel about the

actual name finsta and what it implies"? This question was originally geared toward

making them really think about why finstagram accounts are considered "fake"

Instagrams, whereas the regular Instagrams are thought to be "real". At first glance,

in the very beginning of my interviews, I came to the conclusion that one's real

Instagram seems to be more fake and the fake Instagram, ironically enough, is more

real. It makes sense. Think back to Jessica's Instagram from the previous chapter –
aesthetically pleasing, beautiful selfies, special events, and edited to go with the flow
of the rest of her feed. Compare that with a post of someone's face, up close, taken
from a low angle with a lengthy caption complaining about how a package that they
have been waiting weeks for has yet to arrive. It seems like the finsta provides a
view into someone's more every day life, whereas the rinsta is fake in the sense that
it is all polished to be perfect. I was not the only one who thought this way. In the
New York Times article, "On Fake Instagram, a Chance to Be Real", Valeriya
Sarfonova argues that finstagram has become the "real" Instagram.

> "But life isn't all rooftop parties and 45-degree-angle selfies. Some young
> adults, weary of trying to live up to their annoyingly perfect online avatars,
> have created 'finstagrams,' or fake Instagram accounts, that present truer
> versions of themselves than their main profiles. These locked, pseudonymous
> accounts capture something rarely seen by people who follow these same
> users on their main accounts: reality" (Sarfonova).

Thinking of these two accounts in the dichotomous way of real versus fake
contradicts what I argued in the previous chapter, that multiple selves are
constructed across platforms. It is unfair to claim that finstagram is "reality" because
both rinsta and finsta are reality in their own aspects. One platform is not "truer"
than the other considering the dimension we live in where platforms like Instagram
and finstagram are part of our lived reality. In our interview Julia explains, "on my
finsta I am a weirdo, but that is also part of me. I wouldn't say one is more 'me' than

the other" (Finsta Interview #3). Each one of these platforms, rinsta and finsta, presents our reality, but in different ways, allowing for multiple selves to come to life.

When analyzing the interviews and surveys I found the words "funny", "weird", "not perfect", "ugly", "embarrassing", "random", "sarcasm", "carefree", "feelings", and "not judged" used by participants mostly for describing their finsta (Finsta Interviews – Refer to Graph 3). On the other hand participants used phrases like "places I go" "friends" "family" "good" "exciting" "nice" "aesthetic" "activities" "hobbies" "social life" "my style" "laid back", and "things I'm interested in" to explain what their rinsta represented (Finsta Interviews – Refer to Graph 4). Clearly these platforms are used for very different reasons. Since finstas are private it gives the users more freedom to be "carefree" and post ugly or embarrassing pictures in order to show the funny side of their personality, because they will not be judged based on the audience they have. The fact that users feel like they are not judged on their finsta alone does not make finstas a "truer reality" or a more accurate representation of who someone "really" is. Jenelle explains in our interview "on my finsta it's not completely my self because a lot of the time I'm being facetious and sarcastic, it's more like a funny alter ego" (Finsta Interview #14). Mandy rationalizes that "sometimes the finsta is less like me just because it is exclusively for those shitty moments and that's not who I am in it's entirety, whereas my Instagram is more who I am, it's more well rounded, what food I like, what books I'm reading" (Finsta Interview #8). Therefore, rinstas and finstas represent various parts of

people's lives and one is no more of an accurate representation of a person than the other.

The finsta community often likes to think that their finsta is this outlet to completely "be yourself" and not worry about what anyone thinks, which is why you can post literally anything. There is still that same sense of "impressing people kind of thing" like there is on any social media platform, but in the form of a certain pressure or standard to be funny (Finsta Interview #15). Every single participant that was interviewed mentioned the word "fun" or "funny" in reference to the fact that their finsta allows them to display their specific humor or for the necessity to be funny on their finsta. Regular Instagram accounts may seem to be "less real" because of the filter, aesthetics, and the fact that people try to post about the more exciting events in their lives rather than everyday, little things. Keep in mind though, that users describe Instagram as exemplifying the activities and hobbies they like, their personal style, and their friends and family. All of these qualities create a profile that is a part of reality, whether edited to be a bit brighter or not.

The stark difference in answers I received from the questions "on which platform (rinsta or finsta) do you feel like you can be 'more yourself'" to "how do each of these platforms (rinsta and finsta) reflect yourself offline" further confirms there is this impression that finstas exude this "realness", but in actuality each platform plays off of the idea of multiple selves. Regarding the question about being more yourself, majority of participants answered finsta for both the minors and the college students (Refer to Graph 5). Their reasoning behind that varied from the

platform allowing them to be more weird, personal, casual or goofy. There was a

minority of participants who thought it was more complex than that, explaining that

both platforms are just different sides of them. There was one outlier who thought

that their rinsta was more them self because "I think people would get a better

understanding of who I am… finsta I am more random or funny" (Finsta Interview

#16). The answers regarding the question about how each platform reflects the

participant's offline was surprising considering the majority of participants thought

their finsta painted a better picture of themselves. Many answers echoed the tone of

"both of them show who I am as a person" or "both of them are equal in how they

reflect my life," complicating the findings from the previous question (Finsta

Interviews #1 and #6 – Refer to Graph 6). Others explained specifically what parts

of their personality that each platform represents.

> "My real Instagram does show the things I'm interested in and you get a taste
>
> of who I am if you scroll through it. Finsta you will see more of the products
>
> of those interests or interactions with my friends that are not necessarily
>
> that important but still memorable to me" (Finsta Interview #18).

The fact that most participants could distinctively state how each platform

represents certain aspects of themselves discredits the idea that only finstagram

represents a true reality and further illuminates how multiple selves are at work in

our fourth dimension.

It is also hard to argue that one platform is more real than another because

the concept of authenticity is a human construct and extremely unstable.

Authenticity is particularly dependent on personal contexts such as social, cultural, political, and religious characteristics. Just as the previous chapter explained the importance of recognizing the multiplicity of selves, the same concept can be applied to authenticity. When asked which platform she can be more her self on, Morgan explains that to her, finstas and rinstas "feel like they are both very different sides of me. It's hard to say. I really think its like 50/50" (Finsta Interview #15). That explanation is due to the fact that there are not only multiple selves, but also multiple facets of authenticity. In "The #notfilter Self: The Contest for Authenticity among Social Networking Sites", Meredith Salisbury and Jefferson D. Pooley identify "authenticity types" from nominal, real-time, creative, segregated, and spontaneous authenticity (Salisbury and Pooley 8 – Refer to Table 1). Finstas and rinstas represents combinations of these versions of authenticity – the one that seems like a more raw or natural representation of self (quote on quote real) and then being authentically human by abiding by the filters that are normal constructions of society.

Types of Authenticity:

- Nominal: "The notion that users should present a single identity tied to their real names".

- Real-Time: "A product of immediacy" and a "contrast to the deliberate self-polish that characterizes static-profile maintenance".

- Creative: A "space for creative self-expression" and "artistic self-fashioning".

- Segregated: Allows you to "choose who gets to know what" by presenting "different aspects of ourselves according to who we are speaking with".

- Spontaneous: "Fleeting, low-stakes exchange without reputational consequences".

Finstas fall into the categories of real-time, spontaneous, and segregated authenticity. Salisbury describes real-time authenticity in terms of Twitter – "inviting users to adopt nicknames" and a "contrast to the deliberate self-polish that characterize static-profile maintenance" (Salisbury and Pooley 9). This can be applied to finstas as well because users generally pick handles that are a humorous play on their own name and post "weird out of the ordinary pictures I wouldn't post on my rinsta", going against the "self- polishing" generally seen on rinsta (Finsta Interview #15). Spontaneous authenticity is described in terms of Snapchat and how it is a "fleeting, low-stakes exchange without reputational consequences" (Salisbury and Pooley 12). Although finstas are permanent, unlike Snapchat, it is a lower-stakes exchange because of the smaller audience on the platform and the fact that the audience is "closer friends or people who understood my humor" (Finsta Interview #1). The type of audience the platform provides allows the users to be more spontaneous and post "random" pictures, sometimes without fully thinking through what they are posting. Segregated authenticity allows you to "choose who gets to know what" by presenting "different aspects of ourselves according to who

we are speaking with" (Salisbury and Pooley 15). As stated before, audience is one of the main factors that distinguishes a finsta from a rinsta because of the selected audience. The specific audience of people that will not judge for what is posted represents the group of people that this particular user feels comfortable sharing their humor or embarrassing moments with, segregating their rinsta self from the finsta self. The fact that finstas hold the characteristics of these three types of authenticity does not make them anymore real than rinstas because rinstas embody their own forms of authenticity, making each of them their own unique parts of reality.

Rinstas exemplify the nominal and creative authenticity that Salisbury and Pooley discuss. Nominal authenticity is described in terms of Facebook as "the notion that users should present a single identity tied to their real names" (Salisbury and Pooley 8). Rinsta handles are generally some variation of the users real name or their real name is displayed right above their bio. Although Instagram is very different from Facebook and was a platform that arose in a kind of rebellion against Facebook, they are now very much linked. Not only did Facebook buy Instagram, but Instagram, at least the rinsta platform, has adopted this idea that users should realize the identity presented on that platform is very much linked to their real name – where family members and potential employers can see what they are up to. As Nick puts it in our interview, "when you have an account by any kind linked directly to you by name it is a public presentation of who you are " (Finsta Interview #18). Creative authenticity is explained by Tumblr as a "space for creative self-

expression" and "artistic self-fashioning" (Salisbury and Pooley 10). Salisbury and

Pooley bring Instagram (rinsta) into the conversation because the app stresses

"expressive freedom" (Salisbury and Pooley 11). Rinstas do exude a version of

authenticity – the part of people that is artistic or creative. Granted some rinstas are

more creative than others because some people naturally have more artistic sides to

themselves, but part of that platform and that creativity is wanting to look good –

having the right picture, the right filter, and the right caption. Jenelle describes the

process she goes through when posting a photo to her rinsta.

> "With my real Instagram it comes from a picture that I really like first. I
>
> usually have multiple options I pick the best one and then I edit it with after
>
> light and I always use the same filter every time so that my Instagram looks
>
> consistent. And then when I'm posting it I'll spend some time on the caption,
>
> but I usually try to keep it short. I like to put a location on my real Instagram -
>
> I'll put a real location like where it was taken and then I share" (Finsta
>
> Interview #14).

Most participants explained how it could take them a bit longer to post on their

rinsta because they have to go through this process, but adding filters and making a

post match the rest of your aesthetic is tapping into their more creative self. Taking

the time brighten up a photo or saturate it to look a little more sun-kissed does not

deem the rinsta platform as phony or a less true version of a self, but allows users to

employ the tools in front of them to present their artsy personality. Finsta feels

more natural because that is part of the way that version of authenticity is

constructed. The reason why finstas might feel more familiar or normal is because we do not recognize the social construct of authenticity at work, but we are all aware on some level of how our rinsta version is a construct. This does not mean that our rinstas are fake or less true, one version of the social construct of authenticity is just more identifiable than the other.

The type of audience that each platform draws in also affects how people present themselves. The larger the audience, the more people see what an individual posts; therefore the person may be more selective. New platforms come about as a backlash to the versions of authenticity that change as audience change or grow. Not only is authenticity a social construct, it is also subject to change. Just as human identity is multidimensional and dynamic (a work in progress rather than a fixed state), authenticity can vary because it "is always relative to something else" (Salisbury and Pooley 2). New platforms are created to challenge the construct of authenticity. These new platforms claim to be more authentic then the one's before them, but really they are just added into the mix of multiple authenticities correlating to multiple selves. This was originally part of the up rise of Instagram after Facebook and then Snapchat coming into the picture after Instagram. Instagram lured users in with the promise of "being authentic" (in the generic sense), using the hashtag #nofilter, but now Instgrammers are expected to pick the best filter. Snapchat played with the fact that their app allowed users to "live in the moment" – another claim to authenticity – because their posts were not permanent (Snapchat Website). Now with all of the geotags and filters for your face, it is

starting to become a little bit less about "living in the moment," which is why finstagram has come in to add to the changing versions of authenticity. Part of the finsta paradox is that it is called fake, yet thought to be more real, putting an interesting twist on the construction of authenticity.

Another key word that came up in many of my interviews and survey answers was the word "aesthetic." This generation just throws that word around all the time, while I did not know too much about it until I took a humanities course in college. Aesthetics has its roots in philosophy and the appreciation of beauty, yet now it is used to describe a teenager's Instagram feed. In her interviews with American teenage girls, Nancy Jo Sales says that aesthetic is "used to describe a sense that social media posting *is* art – or can be art, if it's 'aesthetic' enough" (Sales 64). Sales thinks of aesthetic generally in terms of "social media posting", but really it is very specific to certain platforms like tumblr, Instagram, and VSCO cam (an editing app similar to Instagram, but not as popular and usually sans caption). Since these platforms are heavily image based the term aesthetic is used to affirm someone's feed – because it is nice to look at, it is a little different, and it all flows suitably together. The flip side of that is "basic." Being called basic is an insult because it means that you are just too mainstream and follow along with any new trend – wearing Uggs or drinking a PSL (pumpkin spice latte). How do these two defining terms relate to authenticity and social media? The difference between finsta and rinsta in terms of the categories of having a nice aesthetic or being basic is that "there is less of a pressure to keep your aesthetic going on your finsta" (Finsta

Interviews #1). These differences go back to why rinstas are a type of creative authenticity, whereas finstas are more real-time or spontaneous authenticity. Even though authenticity is considered a social construct does not mean it is not real, it still has tremendous "real world" power. Individuals try to present their "authentic selves" on social media platforms, but then also must worry about their aesthetic and not being labeled as basic – further deepening the paradox that is authenticity.

I guess now it is time to reveal that I made a finsta for myself during this process. At first I was hesitant because I did not want me having one to influence how I analyzed the platform, but now I look at it more from the perspective of a participant observation. Plus I was so intrigued while studying finstas that I just knew I needed to have one. When something happens that is annoying me the first thing I think of is how can I make this into a finsta post. For example, I was at the library writing a portion of this paper and even though the entire second floor had a total of three people working there, this man decided to sit directly across from me and eat an apple very loudly. I was irritated by this and the first thing I thought of was how can I sneak a picture of this man to let my finsta friends know how displeased I am right now by this situation. Instead I just decided to tweet about it. The fact that I felt the almost immediate need to post about this event on some social media platform shows how integrated our online and offline worlds are. Instead of putting headphones in or moving my seat, I went right to my phone. I wanted to let others know about what was happening because they can relate or affirm my reason for being annoyed. Even though there are different selves on

different platforms with varying versions of authenticity, they are all penetrating

into our IRL selves and creating this multifaceted fourth dimension where the

distinctions between a dualistic 'fake' and 'real', 'good' and 'bad', and 'online' and

'offline' life dissipate.

Chapter Three

Looking at the Multiplicity of Self and Authenticity through a Gendered Lens: How

Different from the Past is this "New Landscape" that Girls are Navigating?

Now I want to take all the conclusions I have come to about the multiplicity

of selves and of authenticity and the idea of a fourth dimension and look at it

through a gendered lens, focusing on how teens in the 13 to 20 cohort present

themselves on social media in terms of gender. As many scholars have duly noted,

girls deal with being sexualized in every sense of their life, an issue made more

complicated by new technology and social media. These arguments are further

supported by an exploration of selfies, self-stalking on social media, and the rise of

the fuckboy, but I would like to argue that these problems will be easier to address

once we recognize that online and offline life are too enmeshed to be separated as

two worlds. Furthermore, the research on these topics like selfies, self-stalking, and

the fuckboy reveals that they are not new, just modern versions of things that have

already existed in the past. In fact, new platforms like finstas are providing girls with

ways to address those not so new issues and challenge typical notions of

sexualization and self-objectification.

In her book *Girls & Sex: Navigating the Complicated New Landscape*, Peggy

Orenstein explains,

> teens have always been acutely aware of how they are seen by their peers.
>
> Social media amps up that self-consciousness: rather than experimenting
>
> among a small group of people they actually know, they now lay out their

thoughts, photos, tastes, and activities (as well as their lapses in judgment)

for immediate approval or censure by their 947 BFFs, many of whom are

relative strangers (Orenstein 18).

Even though there are multiple selves presented online and different versions of

authenticity, girls have to navigate this extra part of themselves – their sexual self

and how that is being created and viewed. Obviously boys also have a sexual self,

but not one that is as deeply analyzed or criticized on social media platforms. The

sexualization of girls in our forth dimension is much more prevalent than of boys.

This issue is explored more fully by Nancy Jo Sales in *American Girls: Social

Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers*. She focuses on the use of phones, the

internet, and social media by girls from the ages of thirteen to nineteen. Sales

presents online activity as a second world and argues that in order for girls to grow

up in a more suitable environment they have to realize this separation and pay more

attention to the "real world we inhabit together" (Sales 375). I do not think it is

possible now to have that strict divide between the "two worlds," especially for

Generation Z. They grew up into a world where smart phones and social media

profiles were deeply rooted in their childhood and teenage years (and will continue

to be for the rest of their lives at the rate it is going now). Scholars like Nancy Jo

Sales make a great argument, but do not understand what it is like to grow up in

such a technological world. Many scholars who write about teenagers and social

media compare how children are developing now to how it was when they were

children. They focus on things like the difference between spending more time

online versus reading a book. They believe that these worlds are better separated and that how they grew up was a superior way to develop as a young adult. At the end of her book Sales pleas to readers to "find a way of navigating ourselves and our children back there, to the world of true and lasting connection" (Sale 375). The "there" she is referring to is "the real world," but the fact of the matter is, social media is a part of our generation's every day lives. There is no way to get around it. Sales explains that "for most American girls, social media is where they live" and she does not think this is a good thing (Sales 9). Thinking about these platforms the way Sales does ignores the fact that social media is a large part of an overall dimension where the "real" and "virtual" influence each other. Once we can start seeing the online and offline as one, then maybe we can start to understand how to deal with some of the issues that have been raised in terms of the sexualization of girls online or ideas surrounding interconnectivity versus solidarity and what that means for intimacy. Forcing teenagers and young adults to divide themselves between two worlds that are so very intertwined is not the solution.

Selfies

In 2013, The Oxford Dictionaries named selfie the word of the year. They defined selfie as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website" (Oxford Dictionaries). Posting selfies became a way to present, express, or show off yourself on social media sites, mainly Facebook and Instagram. Girls and boys both do their fair share of posting selfies, but it is safe to say that girls are faced with more

scrutiny because they need to navigate the fine line between being cute, flirty, hot, sexy, or slutty. Sales explains that the negotiation is partly to come off as sexual, but within certain parameters. She notes that girls post "a sexualized self within the limits of what [they know will] be seen as acceptable to parents, colleges" (Sale 111). In a social trend study, Pew Research Center found that "among millennials, women are more likely than men to have posted a selfie (68% vs. 42%)," so they are exposed more, and therefore open to more criticism (Pew Research Center 48). Selfies have also been found to reproduce traditional gender stereotypes. In "How gender-stereotypical are selfies? A content analysis and comparison with magazine adverts," Döring et al explain "young females' selfies more often use social-media-specific gender expressions like the kissing pout implying seduction/sexualisation and the faceless portrayal (implying focus on the body solely), while young males' selfies more often contain muscle presentation (implying strength)" (Döring et al 961). There is a clear construction in how gender plays into the concept of selfies, so the question is, are selfies empowering or oppressive? This issue is complex and there is not really a clear answer. Some girls feel that seeing their selfies on social media boosts their confidence and allows them to claim a space in the public arena, making them feel good about themselves, but others face backlash for coming across as too sexy or slutty even.

Ruling that social media sites are a "second world" and need to be separated from the "real world," as Sales implies, will not help us getting any closer to answering questions about the purpose of selfies in a girl's life or how to come up

with solutions to this sexualization of girls online. Although this seems like a "new landscape" that they have to navigate, as Orenstein puts it, the underlying issues of "sexual commodification, sexist objectification, and pornification are actually quite familiar" (Ringrose 112). Meaning, that since these issues are familiar, to help navigate the "complicated new landscape," we cannot say that 'new' means 'separate,' as implied by scholars like Orenstein and Sales. We have to learn to look at online and offline as this fourth dimension to understand what is really going on and find out ways to make it better from there.

Going back to the Finsta Interviews, how does the idea of a selfie change from rinsta to finsta? First, in my interviews, none of the four males ever mentioned the word selfie. Nick described a picture that he posted as "a picture of me smoking a cigarette," so even though it could be classified as a selfie, he did not describe it as such (Finsta Interview #18). This complicated the Pew statistics above, showing that females post more selfies. If women easily referred to the pictures of themselves that they posted as selfies, but Nick avoided using that word, the data may be skewed. It also suggests that there is a feminine connotation attached to the word itself. In terms of the functions of a selfie from rinsta to finsta, it generally matches up with the ideas of multiple selves and authenticities. The female interviewees agreed that their rinsta was for posting "cute" or "pretty selfies," (52%) whereas they were "more inclined to post ugly selfies" on their finsta (34%) (Finsta Interviews). Again this goes back to the fact that one platform is not more

"real" than the other, but that each allow for multiple selves and different versions of authenticity.

What do the connotations of "cute" and "pretty" versus "ugly" on rinsta versus finsta mean for how girls view themselves on these different platforms and more generally? It seems that the idea of selfies on rinsta reinforces the dominant ideologies surrounding the sexualization of girls, while finsta challenges the thought that selfies posted on social media sites have to be on the pretty, hot, or sexy spectrum. Finstas made room for there to be an unapologetically ugly side of yourself posted on social media. You may argue that ugly is on the spectrum of sexy, just the wrong side of it, but the difference is that on rinstas girls care about whether they come across as ugly or not, but on finstas it does not matter to them. Orenstein says, "selfies can impose another tyranny on girls, another imperative to dish up their bodies for inspection by others and themselves, another way in which their value is reduced to the superficial" (Orenstein 21). Orenstein's point may be true of Facebook or rinstas, but my research suggests that with finstas it is not about their looks at all and there is no underlying relationship to girls and sexualization. It could even be a rejection of the sexualization of girls all together.

Rinstas reflect the familiar sexualization that women have always gone through, moved online, whereas finstas challenge it. I would argue that finstas are a good outlet for girls to not have the pressures of worrying about how they are sexualized. Even if girls do post pictures that would be labeled as too sexy or slutty on their rinsta, they are not attacked for it on finsta, because as one girl I

interviewed said, on finstas "you wont get judged" (Finsta Interview #12). There

might be a standard regarding humor that was mentioned in the last chapter, but

there is definitely not a standard for girls to perform their sexuality or negotiate the

blurred lines between cute, pretty, hot, sexy, or slutty. The fact is that this platform

provides the closest thing possible to a neutral space where girls do not need to

worry about being sexualized as much as they would otherwise. It is important to

note how prevalent finstas exist for this generation in a dimension where the online

and the offline are one. Furthermore, my interviews reveal that many parents follow

their child's rinsta, but do not follow their finsta – indeed many parents do not even

know that their children have one. Recognizing that finstas exist and how essential

an outlet they are to teens and young adults can help us better understand how to

deal with the sexualization of girls on other platforms.

The idea of girls presenting themselves in a certain manner through pictures

or documenting their lives for others to see is not something new that just surfaced

with social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Looking at the history of

photography, Sales points out that the Kodak Instamatic camera was marketed

specifically to girls as a way for them to create "an idealized self" and use the

pictures they took as "a kind of self-promotion" (Sales 79). The way cameras were

marketed to boys was much different. Kodak tried to appeal to the adventurous side

of masculinity, "which deserved documentation" (Sales 78). Even in the sixties there

was a gendered difference with how girls were presented through photography,

who was supposed to use what forms of photography and what for, and girls were

still held to a sort of "sexy spectrum," similar to today, in terms of their beauty and

appearance. "In these advertisements, as in so many of the ads featuring the Kodak

Girl, her camera serves to complement her beauty as much as the stylish clothes she

wears" (West 125).

In this specific add, first of all, let us just note the explicit gendering of the

camera. Since cameras were originally marketed towards brave, exploratory boys,

Kodak had to switch their strategy to make this new camera marketed at girls so

easy to use that even a girl can do it. Furthermore, the sales pitch here is focusing on

the idea that the camera is part of a girl's appearance by describing the product as

"Kodak Instamatic color outfits" (Kodak Instamatics). The cute girl, with manicured

nails, in a bright red outfit, was competent enough to use the camera and therefore needed it, almost as part of her outfit, to create this appearance. Part of what the history of photography reveals is that for girls the creation of idealized images of themselves through Instamatics was not much different from platforms like Facebook and Instagram today, because girls still use them to show off their self in terms of beauty. The fact that these ideas have been instilled in girls in terms of their appearance, dating back to Kodak advertisements, shows that this problem was not created with the rise of social media and this so called "second world." The focus on how girls look and the importance of negotiating the sexy spectrum is something that girls have always had to deal with; so blaming the "virtual world" for the problem of female objectification is not fair. Realizing how these two worlds inform each other will in turn bring us closer to understanding how to tackle the sexualization of girls in the fourth dimension.

Stalking yourself

Most social media users will occasionally find themselves on someone's Instagram, 34 weeks back, stalking their profile. Sometimes you just get in so deep and do not realize that you have spent a solid fifteen minutes creeping on this person's page, whether it is an ex, a friend of a friend, or a complete stranger. Well to make this even weirder, stalking *yourself* on social media is now a thing. Basically a user will check their homepage to see how other people see them. It could just be as simple as a wanting to see a general overview of their aesthetic on Instagram, or going way back to see what they tweeted months ago. It could also be as intense as

editing a caption for 67 weeks ago, going back and deleting old pictures, or checking

more recent posts over and over again for up to a week to see how it is doing on

likes and comments. Social media sites even encourage this idea of looking back or

stalking yourself. There is an app called Timehop that shows you what you posted

on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram "one year ago today" (Timehop). Facebook has

developed their own version of this called "On This Day," which is essentially the

same thing, but shows what you did on this day each year for as many years back as

your profile goes. Laurence Scott explains this new trend as a "desire for everyone

to 'build a history' online" because the "the past is privileged" (Scott 103).

Additionally, Orenstein describes how social media platforms "have also reinforced

the relentless externalization of girls' sense of self" (Orenstein 17). The more a girl is

concerned about her appearance, the more she checks her profile and the more she

checks her profile, the more she is concerned about her appearance. It is a cycle

revolving around the self, how others see the self, and how that affects what the self

might change about itself or how it will present itself in the future.

Why are people obsessed with looking back at their own profiles? Are they

obsessed with how they appear to others? There is this expectation for inspection

by others on social media, but it is interesting to think about on top of that, the

inspection of someone by themselves. Orenstein explains that for girls it "all comes

back to the issue of: Am I pretty? How many friends do I have? How do my profile

pictures look? Let me stalk myself" (Orenstein 21). The idea of "stalking" yourself

seems like a new concept that has come out of this social media age and is being

criticized for the effect that it has on how girls view themselves. Before social media, it was theorized by scholars like Morris Rosenberg in *Conceiving the Self* about how one would perform the self for other people, but with this new idea of stalking yourself, it makes us act as our own audience. In fact, like self photography, this is not a new concept. Rosenberg presented in his theory of self that there is the extant self, which is "how the individual sees himself" (Rosenberg 9). Maybe it sounds so extreme because we use the term "stalking," but this idea of "self-objectification, requiring the individual to stand outside himself and to react to himself as a detached object of observation," is not a new concept (Rosenberg 8). This is another example of the idea of social media turning a fairly common occurrence into a "new landscape" that we all need to help girls navigate. It is an age-old issue that can be further examined by recognizing its past and seeing how it is now implemented in this fourth dimension.

Once again, just as finstas have challenged the idea of the sexualization of girls through selfies, finstas have challenged the idea of self-objectification or stalking yourself on social media. Orenstein briefly addresses stalking yourself and writes that there is a pressure on young women "to continuously monitor their appearance"; she is referring to platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and rinsta (Orenstein 12). Based on my findings, finsta users say that there is "less of a pressure to keep your aesthetic going on your finsta," and therefore less of need to implement the idea of self-objectification or stalking yourself on that specific platform (Finsta Interview #1). Jenelle explains that with her finsta she doesn't

"really care what it looks like aesthetically like how all the pictures look together, but for rinsta I care about that" (Finsta Interview #14). The idea of caring about aesthetics on rinsta implies that there is self-objectification going on that is clearly missing from the finsta platform. The fact that finstas allow girls to deal less and less with sexualization and self-objectification really makes it a unique platform, which provides them with a type of liberation.

Fuckboys

To help us understand more about the current climate in which girls are sexualized, we must examine the fairly new term "fuckboy." Since this term has only recently gained relevance and is more in line with social media and popular culture, there is not much literature on the implications of this label. What we do know is the many different ways it can be defined among youths. In "Tinder and the Dawn of the 'Dating Apocalypse,'" Sales interviews college students and post-grads who are engrossed in new social media used for dating. Based on the evidence she gathered from these interviews, Sales describes a fuckboy as "a young man who sleeps with women without any intention of having a relationship with them or perhaps even walking them to the door post-sex" (Sales). One of Urban Dictionary's definitions of a fuckboy is "a completely perverted, disgusting mindless douchebag boy that wants nothing but sex with you. Fuckboys are usually spotted with their extremely obvious emojis on social media sites" (Urban Dictionary). Clearly one definition is more harsh than the other, but they are both getting at how women are treated by men in sexual relationships. Sexist and misogynist boys and men have always been around,

but Sales characterizes the distinction between them and fuckboys as a reliance on "social media to mistreat and degrade girls and women" (Sales 59). Just as women have always gone through sexualization regardless of social media or not, girls and women have always had to deal with sexists guys patronizing and exploiting them. The addition of technology and social media has just provided a new platform for these practices to continue.

In *Dude, You're A Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, C. J. Pascoe conducted ethnographic research at a high school in California, examining masculinity and concluding that it is defined through dominance and control through the use of words like fag. The idea and actual practice of being a fuckboy comes from this performance of masculinity and compulsive heterosexuality – defined by Pascoe as the idea that heterosexuality is the norm, eroticizing "male dominance and female submission," which is reinforced by the patriarchal society (Pascoe 86). *Dude You're A Fag* was written in 2007, just before the social media we are familiar with today really started to take off. Pascoe gives examples of how masculinity and compulsive heterosexuality is represented in popular culture, reflecting the way it is performed in everyday life:

> the public face of male adolescence is filled with representations of
> masculinity in which boys brag about sexual exploits by showing off girl's
> underwear (as in the 1980s film *Pretty in Pink*), spend the end of their senior
> year talking about how they plan to lose their virginity (*American Pie*), or

make cruel bets about who can bed the ugliest girl in the school (*She's All*

That) (Pascoe 85).

Clearly these examples are still relatable to boys and girls today, except they now

have social media to help them carry out and publicize these actions. Again, the

central idea of a fuckboy – a chauvinistic male pig – is not something completely

new that girls are dealing with. They have been studied and analyzed for years. At

least now with social media there is a new name for them and one that girls are

claiming as their own way to expose the actions of these boys.

Just as finstas have challenged the idea of the sexualization of girls in general

and more specifically on social media, the new term fuckboy also represents a new

type of empowerment for females. Girls will often get called sluts for their sexual

decisions and number of partners and the double standard allows males to escape

this type of judgment. The equivalent for a boy or man might be "man whore", but

again the root of that insult goes back to the idea of a whore or slut, which is

generally thought of in the context of females. The new term "fuckboy" is solely a

descriptor for males and is not just calling out the boy's sexual escapades, but also

his character.

Taking into account that finstas provide a space for girls to avoid being

extremely sexualized or self-objectifying and the fact that girls now have a new term

to call out boys on the poor conduct due to their unchecked privilege, this "new

landscape" does not seem as bad as everyone else paints it out to be. In fact, due to

this "new landscape" or fourth dimension, Generation Z is coming up with

innovative ways to battle the struggles that women have always had to deal with.

Conclusion

When I found myself struggling to write these chapters, I immediately turned to my phone. When I felt that I did not know what to write or I could not carry on, I relieved myself by scrolling through Instagram. When I tried so hard to synthesize my ideas with other authors, and thought I just sounded ridiculous, I picked up my phone and tweeted about how my thesis was ruining my life. These examples might just reflect poorly on my character or work ethic, but I'm fairly certain most people in college and high school can relate. Regardless of the situation, there tends to be a way for us to find solace in social media. Our "offline lives" are so intertwined with our online presence that the boundaries between the two are becoming slim to none. With fluidity and ease, we glide from one realm to the other. While people can argue about whether this is a positive or negative thing, the fact of the matter is that it is happening.

What we do know is that all of these different platforms ask individuals to present themselves in certain ways, allowing for multiple versions of selves to arise and with them a variety of authenticities are accepted. By putting different theorists of self in conversation with each other, analyzing the actual terms of service, policy, and about sections of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, and examining the posts of one user across those platforms, we see how multiple selves are apparent in this new "fourth-dimension", where the online and offline are seen as one. Making sense of the self in this world where we are always logged on is recognizing how social media *is* real life. With the juxtaposition within a platform

like finstas and rinstas, we can see how social media challenges simplistic notions of identity and authenticity. Even Instagram has made it easy to switch from one self, i.e., profile, to the other. Instead of having to log in and out of each account, they created a drop down menu on your profile, where you can effortlessly switch from your rinsta to your finsta to any number of accounts you manage. Even though rinsta and finsta stand for "real" and "fake" Instagrams, the data from my surveys and interviews show that it is much more complex than just real versus fake. Both platforms represent different aspects of a person and various types of authenticity, therefore rinstas and finstas cannot be categorized as one being more real than the other, but as distinctive parts of someone's self and existence. Furthermore, new platforms like finsta and new terminology like "fuckboys" create new spaces for female empowerment. In fact, "new" ideas that seem to have come from the creation of social media, such as the selfie, stalking yourself, and the term "fuckboy", are all modern versions of things that have existed in the past. The "issues" that scholars, like Nancy Jo Sales and Peggy Orenstein, claim to have surfaced due to social media are easier to address and break down once we realize that the online and offline are too involved to be separated into two worlds. Additionally, based on my research, finstas actually help challenge the issues believed to be enhanced by social media like the sexualization and self-objectification of girls. In these cases, users take existing platforms and remake them to suit their own social needs. While businesses are coopting existing platforms to serve capitalist ends, teenagers and young adults are also coopting and remaking social media to serve their social needs.

I have intended my thesis to provide new ways of thinking about identity and authenticity in terms of social media to the point where it opens up more questions moving forward in the future. Salisbury and Pooley's different versions of authenticity were essential in furthering my take on multiple selves, and served as evidence of rinsta and finsta challenging the simplistic notions of authenticity. Moving forward we can question simplistic notions of authenticity even further. It seems ironic that a word like authentic, which implies there is one truth, as opposed to many, can have multiple facets. Is it possible that authenticity is a hopeless criterion for this context of social media, or even in general? With the rise of social media has authenticity become illusory or trivial? If so, how do we make sense of it, when many platforms ask for authenticity to be presented? As I stated in Chapter Two, just because authenticity is a social concept does not make it less real. That idea may be applicable here when questioning the whole idea of authenticity and how we know what is authentic. These ideas of identity and authenticity are complex and there may not be one right definition or understanding, particularly since they can change over time, depending on how the cohort adapts the platforms to their needs. It is important to keep questioning the basis of these terms like identity and authenticity, instead of accepting them as truths.

In furthering the gendered analysis within this thesis, a recreation of the present study with a greater number of male participants might expand upon conclusions drawn about those who use both rinsta and finsta and how they challenge social media norms. It could be that these platforms are more

predominately female or it could be the sample size I was able to acquire in my time interviewing. There is data available from Instagram about how many users they have and their gender identification (as filled out when users sign up), however, this fails to capture the descriptive statistics of finsta users. Furthermore, thinking about how this analysis of social media has lead to examining gender and sexualization differently on these platforms, just like identity and authenticity, raises more questions for the future. If this age cohort is in fact reshaping platforms, why are they doing it? While I argue that they reshape these platforms in order to create spaces of empowerment, are there other reasons or factors? The fact that there is a standard of "funny" on the finsta accounts, as shown through my interviews, offers potential further research. Another reading of this phenomenon is that it is a backlash to the way the larger Instagram platform is used (and marketed). The female participants in this study know what they are doing when they edit their pictures and make sure they take enough time to come up with the best caption, location, and hashtags. Are they making fun of the original platform with their "ugly" selfies on finsta? In recognizing the fact that they are sexualized on platforms like rinsta, do they use finsta as a way to push back with humor? Our sense of what it means to be male or female is a product of our social environment and our sense of "authenticity" seems to function the same way. The way these different platforms seek to construct notions of authenticity that only they can deliver means that terms like identity, authenticity, and self are all constructed, just like gender. The acts and practices that constitute gender "IRL" are still in play "online" and whether these

generations are consciously or unconsciously aware, they are addressing them through the creation of their own new platforms, like finsta.

While there is room for further analysis and we are now presented with even more questions for the future, this thesis has revolved around answering these three questions: How do social media platforms challenge ideas of identity and authenticity? How do people repurpose social media platforms in order to explore identity and authenticity? How do people repurpose offline technologies to create spaces for empowerment online? The existence of competing social media platforms, each offering the tools to present a more "authentic" self, leads users to accept the notion that there are multiple selves and multiple authenticities. People repurpose social media in order to fit their specific social needs; we see this especially with the finsta platform. In realizing that selfies, self-stalking, and fuckboys are just modern versions of things from the past we can see how people, specifically girls, are repurposing ideas of sexualization and creating space or platforms online where they feel more empowered.

My conclusions about how social media helps to construct a sense of self are just applicable to this moment in time. Who knows how things will change in the future, but it is important to document now how the tools that surround us affect all aspects of our lives. It is clear though, that ideas of identity, authenticity, and sexualization are closely tied to social media and their connections should be studied further. Even though I cannot necessarily predict what will happen to social media a year from now, I know that this age group specifically will continue

remaking the platforms to suit what is best for them. If there is another self in the multitude of selves that needs an outlet to be expressed, Millennials and Generation Z know how to transform a platform and create new spaces because of their ability to easily navigate the fourth-dimension.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The Consent Form Used For Interviews and Surveys:

<u>Online Self Consent Form:</u>

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how teenagers/ college students create an online identity through the use of social media platforms such as Instagram. We are asking you to take part because you are known to have an Instagram and go to college. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn more about how teenagers and college students create and perform their online identity.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, you will take part in an interview with approximately 22 questions. The interview will include questions about what you post on Instagram and how often, etc. The interview should take about 15-20 minutes to complete, depending on how thoroughly you answer the questions.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. A potential benefit is that you might get to learn more about yourself through answering these questions.

Your answers will be confidential: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will

make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researchers conducting this study are Sabine Reedy and Professor Sandra Jamieson. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Sabine Reedy at sreedy@drew.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact Bill Rogers, the chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at wrogers@drew.edu.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

Appendix 2

The questions that were asked of survey participants and interviewees:

1. How old are you?

2. To which gender identity do you most identify with?

3. What are the main social media platforms you use and why?

4. For you, what is the difference between these platforms?

5. How often do you post on Instagram?

6. Describe the process you go through when posting a photo to Instagram (from choosing the picture to actually clicking share).

7. Is your Instagram private or public?

8. Do you have a finstagram and why?

9. Describe the process you go through when posting a photo to your finsta (from choosing the picture to actually clicking share).

10. Do you take more time to post something on your rinsta than your finsta? Why?

11. Is your finsta private or public?

12. For you what is the difference between a finsta and a rinsta and what made you feel like you wanted or needed a finsta?

13. Explain the difference between what you post on your rinsta and your finsta.

14. Do you use a finsta because you don't want to lose followers on your rinsta if you post something weird?

15. Approximately what is the difference in the followers you have on your rinsta versus your finsta (number or followers or types of followers)?

16. To what extent do you care about how many likes or comments you receive on either you rinsta or finsta?

17. Have you ever accidentally posted something on your rinsta that was meant for your finsta? How did you feel about that?

18. On which platform (rinsta or finsta) do you feel like you can be "more yourself"?

19. How you feel about the actual name "finsta" and what it implies?

20. How do each of these platforms (rinsta and finsta) reflect yourself offline?

21. Would you be embarrassed if someone found your finsta? Who?

22. Do either of your parent's or guardians follow your rinsta? What about your finsta? If one, then why not the other?