#NOFILTER: EXPLORATION OF INSTAGRAM AND INDIVIDUALS' CONCEPTION OF

SELF

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

For this study, I sought to explore the use of Instagram and to understand how an individuals' self-concept is portrayed on Instagram through Goffman's (1959) theoretical frameworks of impression management and performance. Qualitative research in the form of interviews was completed. Eleven women ages 18 to 27, who were active users, were interviewed. The interview transcripts were used with the intent to research the following questions: How do individuals manage their self-presentation on Instagram? What role does impression management play on Instagram? I found that presentations are managed through content of the photo, the photo itself, filters, and captions to create the most positive impression. Impression management creates the theme of 'face value'. Themes of 'face value' and positivity emerge on Instagram. The individual, impression management, and performance are interconnected.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

Graduate school is not for the faint of heart. I would not have succeeded without the love and

support of my family and friends.

"God is within her, she will not fail; God will help her at break of day"—Psalm 46:5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Today, individuals are immersed in the world of social media. Social research has expanded to include not only face-to-face interactions but the interactions that occur online. Researchers such as Sherry Turkle and danah boyd, have dedicated much of their research to the impacts that technology has on the individual and identity. Turkle (1995) started research through the different computer games and the technological advances that will increase the ability for individuals to express identity. Later, Turkle (2011) dives deeper into the impacts that technology may have on their identity. Researcher danah boyd (2008) defined social network sites, evaluated their social impact on teenagers, and extended research on social networks and communication. Although their knowledge is incredibly valuable, there is always room for increased knowledge. I am continuing this thought process of identity within the social networked world with an investigation of Instagram.

Many individuals have access to the networked world through phones, laptops, and tablets. We find that many of the social network sites are used by what some researchers call born digital, digital natives, or the N-Generation (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Chambers, 2013; Tapscott, 1998, Turkle, 2011). Digital natives have the skill to access the many different digital technologies and accept new technological advances with ease (Turkle, 2011). They live much of their lives online, so much so, that the online and offline world seems to blur (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Individuals within the digital generation have not known anything other than technological advances (Prensky, 2011).

My research investigates the creation of an individual's self-concept through the social network site, Instagram. Instagram has now surpassed Twitter for the number of users (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015) as well as being one of the 'newer' social network

applications. The term 'newer' being used loosely due to the ample applications being created

monthly. Instagram, launched in 2010, is a mobile application that allows individuals to post

pictures and videos on a profile that is viewed by other Instagram members of their choosing.

Instagram users are encouraged to modify his/her selected photos or videos, using what this

mobile application classifies as filters. Filters are used as a form of expression. You could argue,

however, not an authentic expression. Each filter may be adjusted to fit the creative needs of

Instagram users. Users are able to change the color, size, saturation, brightness, and a multitude

of other features within these different posts.

Individuals have the opportunity to describe the content that is posted. Often, hashtags

are used to describe that moment in time such as, #bestnightever, #lovethisgirl, #summertime,

and so on. These hashtags give individuals the personal freedom to describe, in their own

language, the moments within the photos. Other Instagram users, from now on called followers,

are able to like and comment on the photos and/or videos. Through these photos and captions,

followers are allowed a peek into the lives of the individuals they follow, as well as their own

followers.

Erving Goffman's (1959, 1978) concepts of performance, impression management, and

front is an ideal framework to better understand the social networked world. As individuals

participate in social network sites, in this case Instagram, they will manage their impressions

through performances. Individuals still maintain a performance where they are viewed in a

positive light. We protect our sense of self through various methods such as impression

management and performances. Instagram posts can be seen as an individuals' performance.

Because of Instagram's public nature, it is likely that content is censored by the individual due to

the impression it my give. Instagram is a form of self-expression. But what can we determine

2

about the self, through these social network mediums? My research questions include the following: How do individuals manage their self-presentation on Instagram? What role does impression management play on Instagram?

In the following chapters, my exploration of self-expression on Instagram begins with a literature review of Goffman's theoretical frameworks of performance and impression management, other social network sites research, the creation of self-concept, individual's self-presentation, and positivity on social network sites. The conceptual frameworks of Erving Goffman are used as a lens to better understand results uncovered by my research. I then present my methods. Qualitative research, in the form of interviews, best examine individuals' self-presentation and impression management. This is followed by a summary of the findings. Finally, I discuss my findings in light of previous research and Goffman's framework.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Instagram is one of the newer forms of social network applications for mobile devices. Individuals post pictures on Instagram as a way to share or to perform. These pictures are often filtered and captioned. Followers watch this performance. Goffman (1959) states that individuals monitor how they are being portrayed. But how does this same act appear on new technology? New technology can be examined using time tested theories such as Erving Goffman's performance and impression management. Below I review Goffman's theoretical frameworks as well as existing research in other social media, with focus mostly on other social media platforms such as Facebook.

Erving Goffman

Goffman's research reflects the importance of understanding the self in all situations as shown in the previous use of his frameworks. Goffman's frameworks are extremely applicable to everyday occasions. On social network sites, individuals evaluate the information placed on their own profiles in order to achieve a desired response from the other users (Kràmer & Winter, 2008). Through Goffman's research we find that regardless of the objectives or the motive for the objectives, individuals will constantly be controlling their actions in a way that sheds the most favorable impression of oneself (Goffman, 1959). Instagram profiles often only hold positive matters in order to maintain a high impression of the individual (Hilsen & Helvik, 2014). Although Goffman never experienced Instagram, many ties exist. Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* speaks to performances and impression management to individuals engaged in Instagram.

Performance. We expect the people in our lives to accept the impression that we give. The impression that is given is supposed to be our character. In what Goffman calls a

performance, individuals are responsible for keeping an accepted character during face-to-face interactions, as well as social network mediums. Performances are given by individuals through their daily interactions, including their social media presence (Suler, 2002). The performance begins as soon as someone posts on Instagram and is a continuous action. Performances can be expressed through profile creation and modifications, identifying friends and networks, and recognition of favorite activities etc. (Cover, 2014). Instagram requires members to create a profile where all posts are held and viewed by others. Instagram gives users the ability to modify their pictures in forms of filters and effects. The picture becomes a performance which followers' view. Filters are used to change the impression or view of the photo. Performances are expected to hold up to ideal standards or disguise anything that may not fit into ideal standards. If unsuitable conduct is fulfilling to the individual, the individual will indulge in secret.

Concealment during performances does occur. Instagram has many different filters that may conceal part of an individuals' performance. Concealment occurs for a couple of different reasons. Individuals within the performance, or what Goffman calls performers, could be engaged in an activity that is beneficial, but is incompatible with the actions of his activity and the gain they could receive from the action. Most errors or mistakes in the performance are often corrected before the performance is viewed, while obvious signs of mistakes were made are corrected as well as concealed. Individuals will retake photos and evaluate filters and captions to create the best product. In the situations or interactions where the performer offers a product, they show only the finished product. Judgements then will only be formed on a refined, polished product.

Followers are asked to believe the performance given. When user-generated media is posted, followers are expected to believe that the message given is an accurate representation of

the individual who created it. Individuals then have a created role to play (Goffman, 1959). This role is performed in which Goffman (1959) calls a front. The front is where the performance takes place (Goffman, 1959). Later in Goffman's research years, he breaks down front into two different sections, the front stage and the back stage (1978). In this case, Instagram is the front stage. The front stage is the constantly monitored. This makes individuals push towards the most positive, yet believable performance (Reinecke and Trepte, 2014). The performance within the front stage becomes our self-presentation (Seidman, 2012). Individuals' back stage are bits of information that one would like to protect, due to expectations of the performance. Expectations include meeting societal standards and values. The concealment of the any differences between their performances and their actual behavior reflects the act of impression management (Morrison, 2014; Goffman, 1959).

Impression Management. Instagram becomes another region in which individuals manage their presentations in a socially acceptable way. If not, they may be received in a negative way. Because Instagram is embedded in everyday lives of individuals, it then in turn becomes another region in which the presentation of self and impression management occurs. Goffman (1959) speaks of impression management. In layman's terms, individuals gauge the way in which they appear to others. The creation of self-presentations allows Instagram users to choose the best versions of themselves through pictures and videos in ways that are more strategic than face-to-face interactions (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). However, if they perceive their interactions with others are negative, individuals try to adjust their interactions to be positive (Goffman, 1959). The performer protects the performance. They strive to produce an accepted persona. Social network users may worry about whether their impression is positive, as well as if it is truly portraying who they think they are on Facebook (Turkle, 2011).

6

If an individual doesn't feel as though their performance is being trusted, the performer takes on a defensive stance. Three different classifications exist: defensive measures used by individuals to protect their performances; the different actions taken by outsiders to aid the individual's performance, and the actions individuals take to make it feasible for others to exercise protective measures on behalf of the individual (Goffman, 1959). Individuals often air on the side of caution, knowing that their performance is being monitored. If this disruption of performance cannot be concealed, the individual will make a joke about the situation eliminating any importance in the performance itself or sincerely apologize to the individuals who viewed the performance (Goffman, 1959). Disciplined individuals are rehearsed in the ways of impression management. True reactions or feelings of the individual are concealed while their public reaction is socially acceptable, this causes many different social consequences on the individual self. Questions arise about the individual experience with the Instagram medium: How do people manage their self-presentation on Instagram? What role does impression management play on Instagram?

Goffman's Theoretical Frameworks and Social Network Sites

Classification of social network sites has been debated. Boyd and Ellison (2008) define social network sites as follows:

> We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

(p. 211)

7

Instagram fits into the very large definition of social network sites. On social network sites, individuals create profiles that are available to other users. Instagram is no different. Instagram consists of user profiles where they upload images called posts. Pictures are user-generated and can be altered by filers, saturation, color, brightness, contrast, structure, warmth, fade, highlights, shadows, vignette, tilt shift, and sharpen. The posts are liked or commented on by Instagram followers who are viewing the performance. Individuals will monitor what pictures are posted and be selective about which are shared. Each photo is filtered or enhanced in some way. The filter becomes a way for the Instagram user to manage their impression.

Instagram profiles are public to the many individuals, but privacy often varies across the different sites (boyd & Ellison, 2008). As described by boyd (2007), public display of the connection is vital to Instagram. Individuals will continually manage any impressions that may occur due to the posts shared. Goffman (1959) previously defines a region as "any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perceptions" (p.106). Based on Goffman's definition, Instagram becomes another region in which individuals manage their behaviors.

The Individual

A key aspect of Goffman's theory is that the individual is an agent in creating their identity. Turkle (1995) goes on to explain social media's ability to impact identity. Social media gives individuals the ability to 'play' with their own identities, but what exactly is identity? Finkenauer, Engles, Meeus, and Oosterwegel (2002) approach identity in face to face interactions as "the aspect of the self that is accessible and salient in a particular context and that interacts with the environment" (p. 28). The ability for different forms of accessibility has changed over time which in turn impacts an individual's identity through multiple online forms such as Facebook or video games (Turkle, 2011; Turkle, 1995). Other individuals, or 'friends'

8

have more access to what individuals portray as their identities within computer games (Turkle, 1995). Turkle (1995) describes these as windows. Computer screens become the windows in which society can view the individual (Turkle, 1995), but how does viewing of individual impact the presentations of the self or self-conception?

Through Instagram, we are able to change, adjust, and enhance who we are as individuals through photographs. Are Instagram users posting to portray self-concept? It becomes a confusing dilemma in which researchers are forced to create definitions and labels. Portrayal of identity can be seen through the different Facebook posts (Morrison, 2014). To bring focus to this very broad topic, I bring focus to self-presentation and creation of self-concept through the social network site, Instagram.

Self-Concept. Identity has been broken down into various categories. When trying to define different avenues of self, many different terms are mentioned such as self-esteem, self-identity, self-efficacy. The distinctions behind many of these different terms can be blurry. Much research dives deep into the many facets of self-esteem, however, self-concept is often left in the dust to other more 'interesting' divisions of the self. Self-concept, defined by Richman, Slotter, Gardner, & Dewall (2015), is "a person's sense of 'me': the physical appearance, material belongings, set of roles, prototypes, scripts, attitudes, beliefs, and attributes that a person thinks or feels are characteristic of who he or she is" (p. 65).

Self-conceptions vary from one situation to another (Kunda & Sanitioso, 1989). In this case, I present Instagram as a situation or occasion. Many different aspects of one self may be brought to the forefront in different occasions. Individuals use Instagram as a region in which to present their self-concept. Evidence varies as to whether self-concept is stable or malleable (Kunda & Sanitioso, 1989). In situations where individuals' feel 'safe' in their self-concept,

stability is increased. Whereas if an individual feels unsure of the situation in which they are in or are excluded, their self-concept is malleable. Individuals will pull certain characteristics and present the most favorable ones in uncertain situations (Richman et. al., 2015). Research has shown that individuals who use social network sites more frequently have a higher social self-concept, however, individuals who are more invested tend to have lower self-esteem and more depressed moods on Facebook (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014).

I make the argument that self-presentation is portrayed on Instagram. Expectations of self-presentation exist on Instagram. Individuals using Instagram try to balance what they believe is their self-concept within the confines of societal expectations and power structures. The balancing act is maintained through the self-presentation (Turkle, 2011). Self-presentation is used to bridge the gap between what is socially accepted and an individuals' self-concept. Individuals will manage their impressions to create an environment in which their self-concept is supported (Richman et. al., 2015).

Self-Presentation. Goffman (1959) states that individuals will present themselves in all face-to-face interactions. However, individuals can morph their self-representations through the social networking site, Facebook (Morrison, 2010). We have the ability as individuals to write our own identities (boyd, 2007). Instagram allows individuals to create their own profiles, captions, and posts. Morrison (2014) states that updating a Facebook status may become a way for to produce an individual's life story. Life stories are displayed by the many posts that occur. As discussed throughout much identity research, these posts are extremely public (boyd, 2007).

Because of the incredibly public profiles, we find that self-presentation becomes an important feature within even society's digital world (Turkle, 2011). Boyd & Ellison (2008), in their definition of social network sites, state that self-presentations occur within the structure of

social network sites including Instagram. Social network sites are designed to specifically entice users to post in ways that are specific to the Facebook site (Morrison, 2014). In this case, Instagram is directly connected to a users' photo gallery making it extremely easy to modify and share photos. Online presentations allow extra time for individuals to process their online actions and performance on social dating websites (Hancock & Toma, 2009). The presentations are stored in what Smith and Watson (2014) refer to as an "archived body" (p. 73). Our online activity is monitored to create these archives. Other social network site users view us based on the content that we create. Once user generated content is created, it is a permanent fixture in cyberspace or 'archived'. Individuals can either show or conceal their self-concept or identity through their Instagram profiles (boyd, 2014).

Social network sites allow for individuals to 'update' others on their life experiences and day to day activities. Whether these 'updates' are true representations on Facebook has been debated (Tosun, 2010). While this debate continues on, it is incredibly important to focus is on how these representations are impacting an individuals' self-concept. Individuals will try and control their identity by presenting themselves in a positive way (Smith & Sanderson, 2015).

Positivity Bias. Individuals on Facebook will put their best foot forward and their own feelings of themselves may or may not be seen (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Qiu, Lin, Leung, & Tov (2012) state that on Facebook, positive emotions are more likely to be seen then negative emotions. Users are pressured to retain a positive impression. However, it is important to hold keep an authentic self-representation. Research has been found on Facebook and StudiVZ that suggests that if authentic self-presentation is found, user well-being is high (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). Maintaining a favorable impression, may lead an individual to engage in dishonest, unauthentic, or selective sharing (Baym, 2010; Goffman, 1959). This is usually guided

by the following tensions: self-enhancement and authenticity (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Self-enhancement is an individual's need to seem as attractive as possible to anyone watching the performance, while authenticity refers to the need to appear as honest to their profile as (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Individuals put their best foot forward not only to maintain a 'healthy' self-performance, but to increase their self-worth or self-concept. Research shows that when individuals present themselves in a positive light they will perceive audience's feedback to be highly supportive (Yang & Brown, 2016). Self-enhancement may be due to any intrinsic rewards the individual may experience as a result of their performance (Sui & Humphreys, 2015). Self-presentations are often self-affirming in which their posts are an enhanced version of their own self-concept (Toma & Handcock, 2013). Individuals are motivated to uphold a positive self-image, yet, stay within the realms of their own self-concept. Individuals will stay authentic to their own self-concept through self-presentation (Toma & Hancock, 2013).

Summary

Social network sites are defined in broad terms by boyd and Ellison (2008). Social network sites are becoming an incredibly relevant portion of the lives. Instagram is a completely new social network site. It becomes a place where individuals share pictures that the individual has edited by use of filters, and different effects. The posts reflect positive impressions of oneself as well as being a form of expression. Individuals share multitudes of information through these social network sites. however, individual reflection occurs in order to determine what impression they want to portray to others. Individual put on performances in which they manage the impressions that others view.

Goffman's (1959) concepts of performance, front, and impression management lend themselves to micro-level research on the social network site Instagram. Through this lens, we

are able to better understand an individual's creation of self-concept on Instagram, self-concepts of the participants, and the perceptions of positive bias. Questions posed throughout this research include: How do individuals manage their self-presentation on Instagram? What role does impression management play on Instagram? As society adapts to the incoming user-generated technologies, it is important to focus on the ever evolving impacts on the individual.

I opened with multiple questions about Instagram such as: What do you enjoy most about Instagram? Is this your social network site of choice? Why do you share on Instagram? I also ask about the different filter use due to its ability to change the presentation or presentation. Goffman (1959) states that the front stage is the part of the performance seen by individuals. Filters becomes part of this presentation. Questions include: What filters do you use? What are your favorite filters? How do you decide what filters to use on Instagram? How often do you use filters or the other enhancement options within Instagram? How many different enhancements do you use (past the use of filters)? Why do you change photos or videos that you post through filters? Individuals will continually push towards putting their best foot forward or give the best impression possible (Goffman, 1959). In order to better understand the process of impression management, questions like: What do you post about? How do you decide what to post about? How do you decide on the post' caption? Do the posts show others who you are? After viewing your Instagram feed, how do you feel about yourself?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

With the aim of understanding individuals' self-presentation and impression management, I used semi-structures interviews. I interviewed a total of eleven women. Participants were found through snowball sampling and recruitment in an introductory college course.

Data Collection

Participants were North Dakota State University students, an architect intern, and a meat inspector, between the ages of 18 to 29, who are active Instagram members. Duggan et. al. (2015) determines that individuals between the ages of 18 to 29 are most likely to be Instagram users. Because of the high percentage of Instagram users falling into the age range of 18 to 29, they become the dominant participants of the Instagram world. Participants are required to be active Instagram users. Within this study, I define active as individuals who are on the application at least once a day and post at least twice a day. Posts for these participants were their own posts, comments on other posts, or likes of other Instagram users' posts. It is also important to note that individuals who use their Instagram accounts regularly have more opportunities of self-presentation and impression management on the medium.

Participants were recruited through the North Dakota State University (NDSU) course 110: Introduction to Sociology as well as snowball sampling. Eight students enrolled in the NDSU course participated. With snowball sampling, I contacted associates who know of individuals who would fit within the research guidelines. Three participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Each participant gained through snowball sampling suggested others, however, no further interviews were conducted because theoretical saturation was

reached at this time. A semi-structured set of research questions were asked to each participant (see Appendix D). Follow-up questions were asked in relation to participant responses.

Eleven interviews were completed by way of Skype. Participants identified as Caucasian women between the ages of 18 and 29, majority were 18 through 23. All participants state that they post in some form twice a day. Individuals also mentioned that they use Instagram to pass the time, so they would look at the application more than once a day. Women were students or professionals. Their education ranged from high school degrees to a Master's degree, however, most were just beginning their college career. One woman completed a Master's Degree, while another woman has completed her Associates degree. Participants were asked to complete a demographic survey before the interview was completed (see Appendix D). Interviews were recorded with the purpose of transcribing data. Psydeunoums were given as well as changing any identifiers that a participant may have to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Identifiers are characteristics or situations that may reveal who the participant is. Table 1 has been created to break down the demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Table

Participant	Pseudonym	Participant Gender	Participant Age	Occupation
1	Alli	Woman	(18-23)	Student
2	Andrew	Woman	(18-23)	Student
3	Austin	Woman	(18-23)	Student
4	Dillon	Woman	(18-23)	Student
5	Jordan	Woman	(18-23)	Student
6	Marlena	Woman	(18-23)	Student
7	Taylor	Woman	(18-23)	Student
8	Zoey	Woman	(18-23)	Student
9	Blake	Woman	(23-29)	Student
10	Kimberly	Woman	(23-29)	Professional
11	Samantha	Woman	(23-29)	Professional

Interviews took between 13 minutes to 36 minutes long. Recorded transcripts created 56 single-spaced pages of data in which then were used to determine codes. IRB approval was received. Approved procedures were followed as described in Appendix A and B. Participants were held at the highest of regard throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Coding took place in multiple stages using an inductive approach. First, research was coded by hand using initial transcriptions keeping Goffman's frameworks in mind. Codes discovered included impression management, presentation, normalization, comparison,

judgement, and approval. From there, previously hand coded transcripts were uploaded into Dedoose for a second round of coding. Dedoose is a web based program that can help organize research data. Transcripts and recordings of videos can be uploaded to the program where then researchers are able to code the data. Codes, found by myself, can then be evaluated using qualitative methods and qualitative methods.

In this stage of my coding process, codes were reevaluated in order to organize and manage the data. Within the program, I was able to select all data related to one specific code. By seeing all data related to the same code, I was able better organize and explain the code's importance. In the last stage of coding, review in light of Goffman's frameworks was completed. Although the research was evaluated with Goffman's frameworks in mind, other codes arose that didn't appear within Goffman's work. These codes include: perfection, positivity, natural, envy, and face value. By using three different stages, an inductive review of the data was finished to reveal the themes found in Figure 1and final codes found in Figure 2.
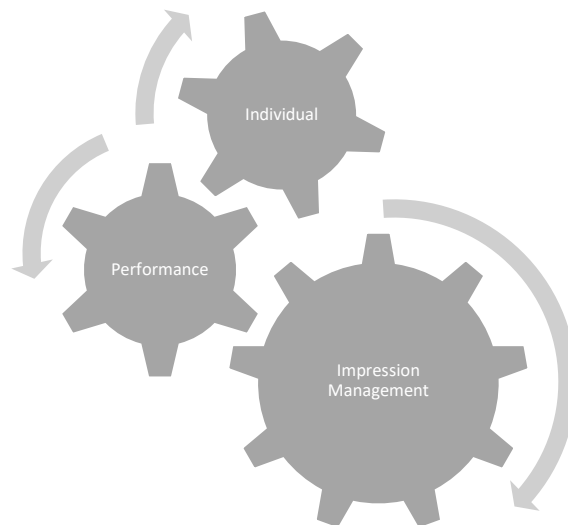
Figure 1. Goffman's Theoretical Connections to Research
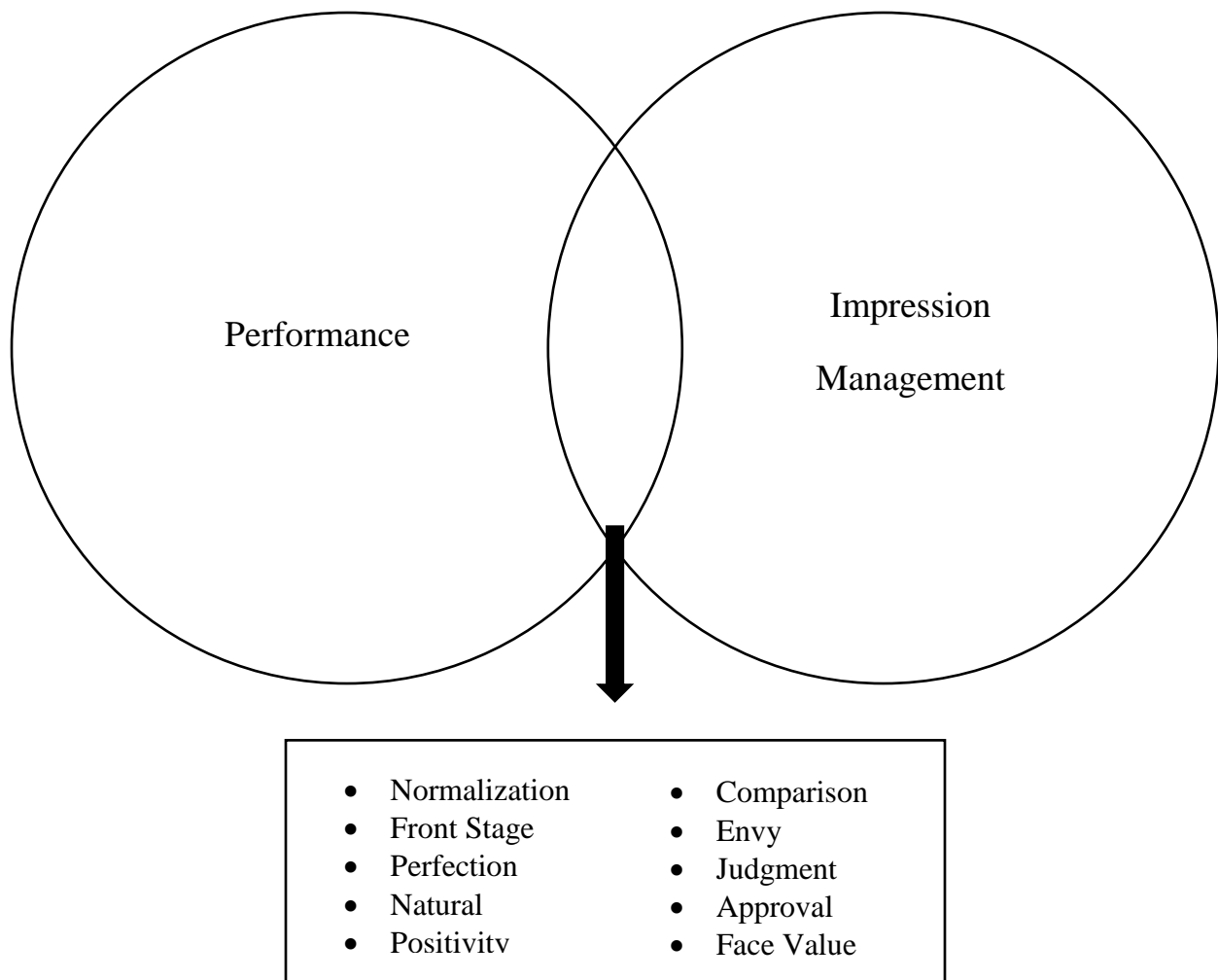
Figure 2. Venn Diagram of Codes By Goffman's Theoretical Category

Reflection on Researcher Position

Research is affected by many different individual, situational, and even world events. Wagle and Cantaffa (2008) discuss how researchers and participants have different relations throughout the study with their research. The research touches my everyday life. I am an insider in the social network world as I, like most my generation, am a member of Instagram. As researchers, we cannot hide from our identities (Fine, 1998). In this situation, I need to realize that "who I am" is going to affect my research and that pulling away from my research and being neutral may be an impossible feat. A researcher's personality and physical presence may

18

increase data or it may also intimidate and limit ones' freedom of expression (Wagle and Cantaffa, 2008). It is also very important to mention that perceptions of positive bias are impacted by the question structure itself (Kunda, Fong, Sanitioso, & Reber, 1993).

Arguments are made as to whether research can be objective. Researchers study participants who are bias. Researchers will always have some sort of purpose to their research. Objectivity can be questioned if their research was influenced from an outside financial source such as a grant; work related research; or if a researcher is personally invested in the research. These situations can cause questionable objectivity. Most researchers are tied to their research based on interest. I find that social network sites influence many different aspects of my life which could impact objectivity. Although I am part of the Instagram world, it is my job as a researcher to try and remain as objective as possible. Accepting that objectivity is reflexive, is the key to strengthening the validity of research (Guba &Lincoln, 2005).

I must mention that objectivity is nearly impossible to reach, however, I have taken the appropriate steps to try and reach objectivity. I removed myself from the application to reduce any personal investment I may have in the photos presented on Instagram. To avoid any bias, I limited my Instagram use to avoid interjecting the common themes I have witnessed. Questions were created knowing that my bias may impact the questions asked. My questions were reviewed by a peer as well as my committee. This allows any leading questions or pointed questions to be discovered and corrected before any research takes place.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Goffman's theoretical frameworks guided the discussion of the analysis. The performances are used to maintain impressions or to give an idea to views who an individual is or who the individual wishes to portray. The performance can be anything from how we talk, what we talk about, how we look, what we wear, and beyond. Through these performances, impressions are managed, often in the most positive way (Goffman, 1959). We as individuals want to put our best self forward using incredibly positive.

Performance

Goffman (1959) describes the performance as the actions of maintaining a certain image. Instagram performances are the self-presentation that individuals' subconsciously and consciously perform both in their face to face interactions and social media presence (Turkle, 1995, 2011). Each post becomes a performance of an individuals' life (Morrison, 2014). Posts are shared to portray the everyday life of Instagram users as supported by comments such as "I just want other people to see what I'm doing and just kinda share cool things about my life" (Zoey, pg. 1) and "I just like sharing my life" (Kimberly, pg. 1). Some individuals use Instagram as "my little photo album" (Blake, pg. 2) and "[Instagram] is almost like a timeline of the, more like individualized timeline, of what is going on and events in your life" (Andrew, pg. 5). However, the performance of on social media is not for only for the respondents own need, but for the followers needs as well. Andrew states that she is "catering to that" (pg. 1) and "yeah [it] is for the audience only" (pg.2). Kimberly's statement also supports, "[I'm] hoping to inspire someone" (pg.2).

Due to the performance, respondents shape how an impression of self is seen. Instagram allows participant to process their actions and the performance before it is submitted to the

20

public (Handcock & Toma, 2009). Posts are created to reflect the events, situations, and thoughts of an individual in such a way that the individual posting keeps the desired impression. This is supported by statements like "I think that pictures can really show like who you are, captions show what you think about your pictures and stuff like that" (Taylor, pg. 5). Samantha states, "I always try to inject a little bit of my personality into pictures. I think that goes into the captions, the way I write them" (pg. 4). Zoey continues by stating, "I think that an Instagram post can tell a lot about who a person. Someone's profile can tell a lot about who they are, because on your profile you can put a little description so I mean definitely" (pg. 7).

Impression Management

Goffman's theoretical framework of impression management is an everyday process that occurs during interactions that portray oneself (Goffman, 1959). Participants will think about the impressions that they give and post in relation to how they feel that the post will be evaluated. Individuals will strive to reach an accepted persona (Goffman, 1959). To reach this accepted persona, comparisons occur. Impression management happens involuntarily, however, the action of impression management is known to many of the respondents. Alli states, "I don't want peoples' opinions to influence what I do or post or feel, but they do at the same time. It is hard not to let that affect you" (pg. 3). Instagram users work to control the impression of oneself since Instagram allows individuals to portray themselves in whatever light they choose. Dillon states, "there are those people who post pictures kinda put up a front or a wall to make it look like they are more happy then what they are" (pg. 7). Zoey states, "that's the thing with Instagram, you can make your profile look however you want and make people perceive you however you want them too…you are in control of how you want other people to see you" (pg. 8). Participants will control how they are viewed by evaluating their posts.

21

The Instagram performance and the impression is evaluated before a post occurs as supported by statements such as "yeah I guess I think about post like umm is this like decent? Does it look decent? Would people judge this picture and what I'm doing in it?" (Taylor, pg. 6) and "There is a lot of factors. When did you last post? Is this post interesting? Are people going to want to see this" (Andrew, pg.3). Evaluation before a post occurs is important to maintaining the impressions set forth. Instagram profiles are extremely public and open the door for public evaluations (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais, 2014). Evaluations occur within other followers' posts as supported by statements such as "What are you doing? Why do you feel the need to post this? (Dillon, p. 5). Individuals judged and/or compared themselves to other Instagram users based on their performances and the impressions that are given.

Individual

Individuals try to remain as true to themselves as possible in order to maintain the impression and preserve the performance as supported by comments such as "little bits of their personality are showing through the photo" (Samantha, pg. 7). Others state, "I try to be as real as possible" (Alli, pg. 4) and "Whether they are being witty or funny or genuinely happy, I think it just comes from us" (Samantha, pg. 7). Andrew claims, "so yeah I think it's a pretty good description of my life" (pg. 5). Blake says, "I would say they show who I am, because I like to be with my friends, having fun, and doing that kinda stuff…so I feel in that way it shows who I am like I'm definitely always with people" (pg. 6). Austin claims, "it explains who I hang out with, what I enjoy, and where I hang out, and the places I go" (pg. 3). Samantha believes that, "you can really see their personality in the way they post things consistently. Some people do not deviate. Some people always use the same filter, so to me, it's a part of picking up those ques"

(pg. 6). Jordan says, "I think that people get the point that family and friends are important to me" (pg. 7).

Normalization

Turkle (2011) speaks to the use of online mediums as mundane. Individuals are using social media sites to share their lives (boyd 2007; Turkle, 2011) as supported by statements about why respondents post such as "I guess so my friends can kinda see what I do" (Jordan, pg. 1) and "I don't know just things that I enjoy" (Austin, pg.2). Instagram as an application itself becomes routine. This is supported by respondent that have explained why they have the application. Some of the respondents made comments such as "[because] it's just normal…like everyone else has Instagram so I have Instagram" (Marlena, pg. 2) shows how embedded society becomes in the social media applications around us. Photos are posted for other followers to view. It is 'normal' for others to view individuals' posts. Even the content of the posts become expected or normalized. Instagram users post about "relatively the same things" (Taylor). Many user reports posting about their lives, events, special occasions, and family as supported by statements such as "pictures with my friends, and family, like the places you go" (Jordan, pg.2), "usually my friends, family, or boyfriend…mostly just the people in my life" (Alli, pg. 3), and "it is mostly just of [my] friends" (Blake, pg.2). These 'typical' posts are a product of performance that is expected in order to maintain the appropriate impression.

Front Stage

Within the performance and impression management, participants are required to keep up appearances. This appearance is portrayed through the front (Goffman 1959). The front stage of Instagram maintains the performance through photos, captions, comments, and filters. The front stage will portray the most favorable self- presentation (Goffman, 1978). It is apparent that

respondents' appearances are extremely important within the front stage. Zoey states, "I want my profile to look really good" (pg. 3). In order to make the photo look acceptable, a great deal of time is used creating a post. Participants state that multiple pictures are taken before they are even filtered or enhanced. Dillon states "I'll look through a few, screen shot them, then look through them again on my camera roll" (pg. 1). While Kimberly said, "I probably take three or four photos before I'm happy with the one I take" (pg. 3).

Not only is the picture itself evaluated before deciding to post, but the photo is then being adjusted using filters and other enhancements. A filter on Instagram is an effect that improves photos. Within Instagram, the filtering of the photos is anticipated as supported by statements such as, "because you have the option to use a filter, I feel like I should or it could make the picture better, so I like take the option to change it" (Taylor, pg. 2). Participants feel the need to maintain the front through the action of filters. The better post will always be selected in order to maintain face while performing within Instagram. Jordan states, "using a filter sometimes makes me feel better about how the photo looks" (pg. 2). Filters become a way to create the perfect performance. Jordon states, "it's like conforming to what society wants you to look like so you get more likes because they see that as pretty" (pg.4). Comments such as "I use filters because…they kinda perfect the picture more" (Blake, pg. 3) reinforce the importance of reaching towards perfection.

Time is not only taken on finding the best picture, but the best caption. Jordan states, "[I] [put] a lot of thought into the captions" (pg. 5). Importance of captions is reflected by statements like "Instagram is about pictures, but it is also about the caption…It just goes with what story you want to give you picture. It's a lot of pressure" (Andrew, pg.4). Often, participants described creating a caption as "that's like the toughest part" (Dillon, pg. 2). Captions are the written

portrayal of the performance to maintain the front and the desired impression. Participants state that captions "[need] to represent the picture" (Marlena, pg. 4), but also need to be original as maintained by Samantha. Samantha says, "I want to make [captions] sound a little more creative and expressive vs. a [descriptive] sentence, to me it's more of a creative expression that goes along with the picture" (pg. 4). Other individuals use "song lyrics or phrases I think are funny" (Taylor, pg. 4) to express. Captions allow individuals the ability give wanted context to the photo. Samantha announces, "captions can really add a lot to a picture, especially describing the context of them" (pg. 4). Dillon goes on to state "[captions] kinda put into perspective what you should think about the photo or what you should think about the people in the photo" (pg. 3). Captions allow individuals more control in the appearance of the front. Posts without captions are labelled as a "bold move" (Andrew, pg. 6). Andrew continues, "they think that their picture says enough by itself" (pg. 6). Participants are giving up control of their front. Participants such as Samantha believes, "'pictures are worth a thousand words'" (pg. 4). By controlling what others read about a photo, the front is maintained within the performance.

Perfection

Respondents will want to share the best of themselves. Reinecke and Tepte (2014) discuss how the best of individuals are shown through authentic representations are required. Goffman (1959) also discusses the need to keep all positive impressions on the front stage. The front stage is where we find posts that are edited by filters and enhancements are used in order to achieve the best or the perfect post. If imperfections are found, Instagram users will "[get] ride of the imperfections" (Jordan, pg. 3). Imperfections are removed through the use of filters as supported by comments such as "I guess I enjoy the filters so much because it makes everything look better…kinda makes everything look a little less imperfect" (Blake, pg. 1). Appearances can

be impacted through other means besides filters, however, filters are frequently used to create perfection. This is supported by comments like "I want that perfect skin, that perfect face, ya know I can wear all the Sephora makeup I want but it still is not a filter" (Kimberly, pg. 4) and "I will edit the pictures to make them look better…[or] if it's me and my friends it is to make us look better" (Andrew, pg. 2). Pictures themselves are not adequate. Blake says, "pictures on their own just seem to look a little gross. I feel like I look gross" (pg.3). Participants focus on creating the best face for themselves. Jordan states, "sometimes I don't really look at what other people look like in the picture. I know it's kinda selfish" (pg.6). Marlena states "just whatever looks best on my picture" (pg.2). Instagram users will want to remain within the performance of their impression in the most natural way.

Natural

Natural posts are the desired face within the performance. The performance is not intended to look fake, but rather enhance ones' natural state (Goffman, 1959). Participants often stated that they want to use filters that appear natural as supported by comments like "there is a couple [filters] that I stick too, not crazy ones [filters] that make it look weird…probably the more natural looking [filters] ones I would say" (Samantha, pg. 2) and "I like to edit so that you can't really tell that there is an edit" (Zoey, pg. 2). This is done to protect the individuals' performance. Participants didn't want "to [do] too much" (Samantha, pg. 6). Alli states, "usually it is just normal, like no filter or black and white" (pg. 1). Other users follow by stating, "I stick to basic filters...I just leave it how it is or just do something simple" (Dillon, pg. 1) and "I just like the normal way it is" (Austin, pg.1). Participants are choosing to keep their posts as 'normal' as possible in order to manage their impressions.

Comparison

Comparisons occur in everyday life, as well as on social media platforms. Instagram users compare their lives to other individuals lives on Instagram (Lup, Trub, & Rosenthal, 2015). Meier & Gray (2014) state that these comparisons impact how a female feels about their body image. This is not lost on the respondents. Many respondents recognize that these comparisons do occur as supported by Samantha. Samantha states, "whether it is subconsciously or consciously, you pick up on it. It's a way to compare yourself against others" (pg.5). Andrew follows by saying "you can't help but compare likes to other peoples' likes, even your own posts likes to another [post] of yours" (pg. 7). While Kimberly states, "I totally think that people use social media to go and judge themselves based on other people" (pg. 11). Many participants continue to stress the comparisons made between followers. Jordan states, "it's sometimes harder to not compare" (pg. 7). Individuals will compare against not only individuals they know, but other famous individuals they follow. Andrew states, "I follow some model accounts like seeing theirs, obviously bad" and later states "seeing other people that are prettier, skinnier, are in a better place, ya know I would say I'm probably jealous" (pg. 5).

Envy

Envy is widespread throughout Instagram because of the comparisons that exist (Jordan, Monin, Dweck, Lovett, John, & Gross, 2011). Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy (2015) states that a consequence of sharing personal information on social network sites is envy. Support is given, by Alli, who states, "Sometimes I look through pictures of other people and like her and her boyfriend I think 'why can't I take a picture that cute'" (pg. 4). Participants state "Oh, I wish I could do that" (Jordan, pg. 7), and "I mean I wish I was doing all that fun stuff…like 'Goll lucky!! I'll just sit here on my couch looking through Instagram, and there you are out exploring

27

the world. I'll just explore the depths of a bar of chocolate'" (Blake, pg. 9). Alli follows by stating, "It's a real struggle, but I don't know sometimes I'm like 'oh you are in Florida at the beach right now. That's cool. I'm just freezing in my dorm room'" (pg. 4).

Judgement

Some participants outright realize that these judgements occur. Alli declares, "people are quick to judge" (pg. 6). Judgement occurs when the impression given doesn't match the socially appropriate performance (Goffman, 1959). As supported by comments such as, "Do you not realize that potentially someone like your parents or your future employer might see this? Have you not fully thought it through or do you not care?" (Dillon, pg. 5). While Blake prefaces her statement with "I mean I'm not going to judge a book by its cover" (pg. 10), she later states, "ya get that feeling that it probably wasn't the best thing to post…that wasn't very classy. I'm going to scroll past that and pretend I didn't see it." (pg. 10). Even with Judgement is apparent throughout the research. Zoey continues by stating, "The party life is fine, but if you post a picture with a bunch of booze in it, you are looking for trouble. Just dumb. I think that it is stupid" (pg. 5). Others claim, "I kinda lose a little bit of respect for them because [they] are showing [themselves] in not such a great state" (Dillon, pg. 5) and "you start to get, ya know a little judgmental of your image of who they are" (Zoey, pg. 5).

The judgements even expand into how often one posts. Kimberly says, "Some people that I have on Instagram post a lot of pictures of themselves. I mean a lot. I mean like every day, multiple times a day. It's like c'mon man you need to get a life. You look pretty self-conceded" (pg. 9). Marlena follows by stating, "People that post all the time, I kinda get annoyed with so it's like over stupid pictures" (pg. 8). Judgement about content of the photo isn't the only judgement made. Clothing choices even over editing filters is reviewed. Participants state, "I

28

don't mean to sound really judgmental, but I always look at the outfits they have on" (Zoey, pg. 6) and "I'm like ok why filter yourself so much that it isn't even you" (Kimberly, pg. 6).

However, judgements of the posts lessen if an individual knows the follower personally know as supported by statements like "I know most of the people I follow personally so it doesn't change it a whole lot" (Taylor, pg. 5). Alli says, "I know the individual, so I wouldn't judge them or hurt our friendship over a picture" (pg. 6). However, others state that they do not judge other Instagram users. Others state, "it would only make me feel different about them if they would directly say something staunch try against what I thought or very forward about it but otherwise if like a little not as direct, I don't think so" (Samantha, pg. 8).

Approval

Often when individuals feel that they are not fitting in they will seek acceptance or approval (Richman et. al., 2015). Individuals often post for this approval as supported by Andrew. Andrew expresses, "I always ask my friends about umm 'what do you think I should caption this?'" (pg. 4) and later states "sometimes I'm looking for approval of my caption…making sure people are going to like my caption, because I feel like if I have a bad caption people are not going to like my picture" (pg. 7). Jordan also says, "I typically ask my friends what to caption it…I ask for their opinion even when they are not in the photo" (pg. 6). Likes become a validation of approval. Kimberly follows stating, "Whenever [you] get a bunch of likes or comments on [posts], it's like a big pat on your back. Everybody wants likes. Everybody wants shares. Everybody wants stuff like that" (pg. 3).

Respondents have a need to belong or find connections (Richman et. al., 2015; Turkle, 2011). Approval of a photo can sometimes appear as attention seeking as supported by comments such as "you have some people that seem to be a little more attention seeking in what

they post. I mean they end up with like 300 likes. They feed off of that" (Blake, pg. 8). Andrew claims, "A girl I know posts a picture of a selfie, her boobs were pushed up in the selfie. I guess you could say I looked past it…it was different that me that maybe she was posting it because she wanted reassurance from people or people to tell her she is pretty" (pg. 8). Posts can ultimately be "showing off" (Austin, pg.1). Individuals will not support posts that appear to be attention seeking. Andrew says, "they are just trying to get likes. It's just way too important to them to get likes. It makes you not want to like the picture" (pg. 9). Others state, "The people that post all the time I scroll past" (Marlena pg. 6) and "I'm definitely not someone who cares about the attention so when I see that I'm kinda like 'oh ok whatever'" (Blake, pg. 8).

Face Value

To maintain the impression and performances, respondents may show unauthentic behaviors (Goffman, 1959). Impressions may not be accurate or the full truth of who an individual is in which Goffman (1978; 1959) refers to as the backstage. The backstage is the participants' sense of self where sensitive personal information is stored. However, respondents are aware that each Instagram user has a backstage. Participants recognize that they are seeing "face value" (Blake) of individuals on the social network medium as supported by comments such as "it isn't an actual representation of them, it's their posts" (Marlena, pg. 8) and "They don't get who I am, like my moods, or how I'm feeling that day" (Austin, pg.3). Blake states, "I feel like Instagram, even social media as a whole, is just everything is at face value for everyone" and continues later "I don't think social media as a whole really shows who people are in any…or at all (pg. 9). Taylor goes on to state, "I don't think my posts are that deep. I don't think anyone can read that deep into my posts" (pg. 7).

All personality traits and/or identities are not always seen within these posts. Marlena states, "you can't tell what my personality is or anything over my Instagram" (pg. 5). Blake claims,

> We all have deep down things that we all what with people about ourselves that we obviously don't post about on Instagram. I wouldn't go on there and post a big quote about and talk about my whole life story about my family fights and stuff like that. [It] doesn't show who I am. [It] doesn't show my internal thoughts about life regarding family and relationships and stuff like that.

(pg.9)

In completion of this section, it is significant to the performance of individuals to remain seen in the most favorable state as supported by Blake. Blake says, "I think that everyone posts and reveals themselves in the most positive light that they can" (pg. 9). Filters, captions, and selection of photos allows for individuals to maintain this impression. Continual evaluations are made in order to keep the desired impression. Individuals share pieces of themselves, however, they do not share all of themselves. Kimberly voices her opinion, "In the back of my head, I think about how much I withhold from Instagram. I mean to me I think they are probably doing the same thing." (pg. 9). Most shared information is positive to maintain the impression given.

Positivity

Posts are commonly positive in nature to maintain the most favorable impression possible. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) state that an individual will represent themselves in an optimistic light. This is supported by comments like "I really don't see a whole lot of negative posts on Instagram overall" (Samantha, pg. 4). Kimberly follows by stating, "[they] post the positives" (pg. 7). Participants state, "I want to show a nice happy persona" (pg. 4), "I like to

31

post things that make me happy" (Dillon, p.7), and "everything I post is good or happy" (pg. 5). Austin's statement also supports, "everyone is happy and put together and having a good time" (pg.4). Jordan states, "I would say 9 times of 10, it will be a happy post" (pg. 8). These happy posts are an expected action within the front.

Posts on Instagram may not be an accurate representation. Zhao, Grasmuch, & Martin, (2008) states that individuals may not show who they feel that they are. This is supported by statements such as, "There are those people who post pictures to kinda put up a front or a wall to make it look like they are more happy then what they are" (Dillon, pg. 7). Participants hide behind positivity to avoid negative evaluations or judgements. Kimberly continues,

> If everyone shared what was actually going on in their life, I think that it would obviously be real then, but I don't think that people share their real raw live. I could post a video of my child screaming his head off because I took his iPad away. That's reality. I don't post that. I think that people could relate to that, but I don't post it. I want to appear as a good mom with well-behaved child. I don't want the image of 'that' even though that is reality.

> (pg. 6)

Jordan follows by stating "There's this one girl in particular, she is suffering with depression and disorders, but you would never be able to tell that by her Instagram. Her Instagram shows her as happy all the time, because she wants people to think she is happy. Behind closed doors she is suffering with her illness" (pg. 9). Participants explain that sometimes users do post about bad days. Kimberly states, "I mean some of them actually post like when they have a bad day, like the reality of their diet, of failing…It makes me think that 'oh my gosh I'm not the only one that looks like a slob, or I'm not the only one who fails'" (pg. 7).

I close with the intent to stress how important it is to understand the importance of the performance and impression management on the individual's play, the importance of the front they need to maintain within the performance and impression management, and the importance of the performance and impression management on the content that is displayed on this social network medium. Through this research, we found that Instagram has the ability to impact individuals. Kimberly articulates, "It's just an emotional roller coaster the stuff that you see on there…it totally influences your mind like everything: politics, pictures, fitness, everyone's life this luxurious life that everyone claims to live. Ya know, it influences how you feel about yourself" (pg. 9). Understanding how Instagram impacts the self, will be the next step in unlocking social network knowledge.

In conclusion, Instagram is a place where the performance occurs. Social norms of face-to-face interactions are expected within the social networked world (Turkle 2011). The performance and actions of impression management seen on social network sites, in this case Instagram, are normalized (Turkle, 2011). Individuals will put up a front within the performance (Goffman, 1959; Goffman 1978). Filters and captions are used to create this front stage appearance for the performance and impression management. Filters allow individuals to change their appearance. The performance and impression given is expected to be believable to the audience that is watching it (Goffman, 1959). In this case, Instagram users used the filters and captions to adjust or change their performances and impressions. Instagram users work to post the best or perfect photos, however, they need to look as natural as possible in order to remain authentic representations (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). Positivity is often found within the posts of Instagram (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014).

Through Instagram, some respondents stated that they often compare themselves to others (Lup, Trub, & Rosenthal, 2015) which impacts how others feel about themselves (Meier & Gray, 2014). Participants often stated that they didn't want to have others impact what they posted or how they feel, but 'they do at the same time' (Alli). Comparisons occur within social network sites which may lead to envy (Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015). Judgements of self-presentation occur (Goffman, 1959). Individuals are judged from their clothing choices, to who they hang out with, what their photo is about, and the way in which they edit the photo. Participants often ask others for help when captioning and filtering their photos which points towards the need for approval. Richman et. al (2015) states that approval of self is sought. This also occurs on social network sites such as Instagram. Most participants state that posts reflect the situations, events, thoughts of the individual, but only show what Blake calls 'face value'. Someone's true sense of who they are is not seen within the posts of Instagram, however, the good or best of an individual can be seen through these posts.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Instagram has broken through as one of the favorite applications of the digital natives (Turkle, 2011). Digital natives embrace technology. With this technology, comes different areas of research. An investigation into the creation of self-concept through Instagram occurs within these pages. Instagram is an application in which individuals are able to post pictures with a caption that other users, otherwise known as followers, are able to view. These posts are changed through filters and other enhancements. Users are manipulating their image which makes it an excellent place to explore the application of Goffman's frameworks of performance. Goffman's theoretical frameworks of presentation and impression management were used to better understand the viewing of self on Instagram. Using Goffman's theoretical frameworks, I studied the following questions: How do people manage their self -presentations on Instagram? What role does impression management play?

Through this research I determined that respondents shared in order to give the world a taste of what their life looks like which is supported by literature. Within the literature, Goffman's theoretical frameworks are broken down. Self- presentation are the performances individuals portray as our personalities or selves (Goffman, 1959). Both the literature and my data support the implementation of self- presentation. These self-presentations are built into our daily interactions (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's theories are based on face-to-face interactions. Although Goffman wasn't around in the era of Instagram, Goffman felt individuals perform the vision of who they should be within their face to face interactions (Goffman, 1959). Within the performance, individuals are expected to present themselves. The performance is enacted to manage their impression of self in which Goffman labels as impression management (Goffman, 1959). The process doesn't end with face to face interaction but continues within the social

network mediums. Goffman doesn't see the presentation and impression management as an inter-related process, however, I make the claim that the process of presentation and impression management is a continual process that is inter related and entwined. The individual is unable to perform without taking into consideration of the impression that this may impose on the individual. Social media, such as Instagram, makes this process occur continuously, there is no break.

Instagram allows individuals to share their lives through photos and captions as supported by both the literature and my data. My data also supports that individuals will use the pictures, filters, and captions that support the wanted impression. Filters and captions used will be most beneficial for their presentation and impression. For example, an individual will post a photo that shows them looking as beautiful and happy as possible by enhancing their photos in ways that their followers see as beautiful and happy. Presentation of the content through, filters, content of post, picture itself, and captions are used as a way to manage the presentation set forward to followers. Instagram's users share their 'sense of me' (Gardner & Dewall, 2015) only if it leaves a positive impression just as found in the literature. All individuals want their impressions to be as positive as possible as per the literature and my data. Due to this, we find that participants will conceal what may be perceived as bad or negative, while sharing positive situations. I make the assumption that individuals will place only positive post to enhance the performance and the impression that goes with it.

As the literature and data suggests, we manage self-presentations through the performance, in this case, through filters through filters, captions, and content of posts on their Instagram site. The literature states that individuals have the ability to control, through content, filters, and captions, their performance on social network mediums, such as Instagram (Smith

and Sanderson, 2015). Instagram users are aware of the comparisons, judgements, and envy that occur on Instagram. Due to this, we make changes to our self-presentation or performance to influence positively the way that we are seen by others. The performance on Instagram maintains the impression of the Instagram user. The performance may not show an individuals' self-concept, but rather who they want to be seen as. My data suggests that impressions are managed through the portrayal of positive experiences, situations, and behaviors. The literature also supports this statement.

As literature states, individuals will share only what is positive due to maintaining the positive impressions (Smith and Sanderson, 2015). Instagram users are chasing the perfect performance and impressions. Their accounts in turn can only share information in the most positive light. Impression management increases the positivity of the performance's post as seen on Instagram. Impression management also opens the door for what Instagram users call "face value". In layman's terms, post showed only the best or most positive situations, events, and emotions of their everyday life. This is done in order to maintain the 'perfect' and natural post. My data follows the results of previous research found in the literature. Through these different filters, caption, and posts we are able to determine that positivity will occur more often than not (Reinecke and Trepte, 2014). Posts themselves have positive messages, as well as the picture itself portraying the 'best' or 'perfect' photo. However, this positivity cannot extend past who that person is on a day to day basis. Positivity in and of itself must be authentic or natural to that individual posting (Reinecke and Trepte, 2014). Approval of an individuals' impression is sought (Goffman, 1959). The performance will not be believed if it is too far away from what individuals' self (Goffman, 1959). Data shows that each performance is evaluated which often

leads to comparisons, jealousy, and judgement. While literature states that individuals now have to manage their impressions on a completely different region (Turkle, 2011).

To answer these research questions, I utilized qualitative methods in the form of interviews. The participants were Caucasian women between the ages of 18-29 who were recruited through NDSU Course 110: Introduction to Sociology or through snowball sampling. Participants were active users of Instagram. As defined as, individuals who post twice a day and view the application at least once. Posts could be pictures, comments, or likes on Instagram. Most of the respondents were aged between 18-20. The majority of participants were students, while two participants work full-time jobs as a meat inspector and an architect intern. All eleven interviews were conducted through Skype. Interviews consisted of questions related to Instagram use and self-concept (Appendix D). Coding took place through three different stages, initial coding, coding using the software program "Dedoose", and coding while reviewing Goffman's theoretical frameworks. Through this inductive method, I gained additional insight into the use of filters and captions and their ability to reflect self-identity, and the amount of positivity seen on Instagram. More research is needed. I have just scratched the surface of Instagram.

Future Research

Research within social network mediums will only grow with the increased use of technology. The research options are endless. From this research project, research could be completed in regards to malleability of identity to Instagram usage. Research could expand into the malleability of identity on other social media sites. Studying the number of filters and enhancements placed within a post could be further examined. Also, Goffman's theoretical frameworks could be explored on other social network mediums. Research that could potentially lead to a theoretical definition to perfection could be interesting. I have barely scratched the

surface of where research within Instagram could lead. New applications and devices are being created in what feels like the blink of an eye. There will be no end to the knowledge gained from the self and social media.

Limitations

Once again, I have just scratched the surface of the knowledge yet to be discovered. Limitations to this project do exist. A thesis project in and of itself has limitations of time, size, and of course research experience. However, throughout this research I found myself thinking about what more could be done with this research. The knowledge that I gained is appreciated, however, there can always be more knowledge gained. Interviews were held via Skype. Participant were able to choose their own interview location due to the nature of Skype. Focus of the participants could have been impacted based on the environment that the interview was conducted. In-person interviews could potentially change the dynamics of the interview. Time was limited for this project, so although I have reached theoretical saturation. More interviews could be used in order to uncover other aspects about the self and Instagram. Due to all of my participants being female, male or transgender participants may have other opinions that could surface. It was not a requirement to be female, however, this project interested more females then males and transgender.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

NDSU NORTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY

September 2, 2016

Dr. Christopher Whitsel
Sociology

Re: IRB Certification of Exempt Human Subjects Research:
Protocol #HS17034, "#nofilter: Exploration of Instagram and Individuals' Conception of Self"

Co-investigator(s) and research team: Danielle Seehafer

Certification Date: 9/2/2016   Expiration Date: 9/1/2019
Study site(s): NDSU
Sponsor: n/a

The above referenced human subjects research project has been certified as exempt (category # 2b) in accordance with federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects). This determination is based on the revised protocol materials (received 8/26/2016).

Please also note the following:
• If you wish to continue the research after the expiration, submit a request for recertification several weeks prior to the expiration.
• The study must be conducted as described in the approved protocol. Changes to this protocol must be approved prior to initiating, unless the changes are necessary to eliminate an immediate hazard to subjects.
• Notify the IRB promptly of any adverse events, complaints, or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others related to this project.
• Report any significant new findings that may affect the risks and benefits to the participants and the IRB.

Research records may be subject to a random or directed audit at any time to verify compliance with IRB standard operating procedures.

Thank you for your cooperation with NDSU IRB procedures. Best wishes for a successful study.
Sincerely,

Kristy Shirley
Digitally signed by Kristy Shirley
DN: cn=Kristy Shirley, o=NDSU,
ou=Institutional Review Board,
email=kristy.shirley@ndsu.edu,
c=US
Date: 2016.09.02 12:19:10 -05'00'

Kristy Shirley, CIP, Research Compliance Administrator

For more information regarding IRB Office submissions and guidelines, please consult http://www.ndsu.edu/research/integrity_compliance/irb/. This Institution has an approved FederalWide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services: FWA00002439.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
NDSU Dept 4000 | PO Box 6050 | Fargo ND 58108-6050 | 701.231.8995 | Fax 701.231.8098 | ndsu.edu/irb

Shipping address: Research 1, 1735 NDSU Research Park Drive, Fargo ND 58102

NDSU is an equal opportunity university

APPENDIX B: IRB AMENDMENT

Date Received

NDSU NORTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY

IRB Protocol #:

HS17034

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
office: Research 1, 1735 NDSU Research Park Drive, Fargo, ND 58102
mail: NDSU Dept. #4000, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050
p: 701.231.8995 **f:** 701.231.8098 **e:** ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu **w:** www.ndsu.edu/irb

Protocol Amendment Request Form

Changes to approved research may not be initiated without prior IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. Reference: SOP 7.5 Protocol Amendments.

Examples of changes requiring IRB review include, but are not limited to changes in: investigators or research team members, purpose/scope of research, recruitment procedures, compensation strategy, participant population, research setting, interventions involving participants, data collection procedures, or surveys, measures or other data forms.

Protocol Information:

Protocol #: **HS17034**   Title: **#nofilter: Exploration of Instagram and Individuals' Conception of Self**

Review category: ☒ Exempt   ☐ Expedited   ☐ Full board

Principal investigator: **Dr. Christopher Whitsel**   Email address: **christopher.whitsel@ndsu.edu**
Dept: **Department of Sociology**

Co-investigator: **Danielle Seehafer**   Email address: **danielle.seehafer@ndsu.edu**
Dept: **Sociology**

Principal investigator signature, Date: *Christopher Whitsel 11/10/2016*

In lieu of a written signature, submission via the Principal Investigator's NDSU email constitutes an acceptable electronic signature.

Description of proposed changes:

1. Date of proposed implementation of change(s)*: **11/08/2016**
    * Cannot be implemented prior to IRB approval unless the IRB Chair has determined that the change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants.

2. Describe proposed change(s), including justification:
    Additional participants will recruited through snowball sampling. Personal contacts will be used as a core for research participants then will expand the participant pool from there. Participants will be asked for other individuls who may be interested in the research. Snowball sampling was needed since recruitment through the previously accepted IRB has been inadequate in attaining participants.

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Your answers to the following questions will be used to better understand the demographics of the participants.

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your race or ethnicity?

4. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

5. What is your occupation?

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE

Exploration of Instagram
Opening Questions/Ice Breakers:
- What do you enjoy most about Instagram?
- Is this your social network site of choice?
- Why do you share on Instagram?

Filters:
- What filters do you use?
- What are your favorite filters?
- Why do you use filters?
    - How do you decide what filters to use on Instagram?
    - How often do you use filters or the other enhancement options within Instagram?
- How many different enhancements do you use (past the use of filters)?
- Why do you change the photos or videos that you post through filters?

Individuals' Self-Concept

Evaluate your own posts.
- What do you post about?
- How do you decide what to post about?
- How do you decide on a posts' caption?
- Do the posts show others who you are?
    - Why or why not?
- After viewing your Instagram feed, how do you feel about yourself?

Evaluate others posts.
- What do others post on Instagram?
- What do you notice about the different posts on your Instagram feed?
- What do you think about other Instagram users' posts?
    - What do you think about the individual after seeing the post?
    - Do you feel as though these posts show who they are?
        - Why or why not?
- Does an individuals' post influence how you feel about them?
    - Why or why not?

All research questions listed will be asked to all, however, I will ask follow-up questions in relation to the responses of participants.