Behind the Scenes: Self-Presentation on Instagram versus Finsta

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Abstract

In a rapidly advancing technological world, it is important to consider how well-documented psychological mechanisms play out in relevant online settings. The present studies do so by addressing self-monitoring of self-presentation on Instagram and finsta accounts. A "finsta" account is a second Instagram account that is typically much more private than the original Instagram account. An online survey was administered to 309 participants, ages 18-61 ($M =$ 21.19, $SD =$ 4.66), to assess self-monitoring, identity, self-esteem, and frequency of social media use across multiple platforms. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 emerging adult finsta users to explore experiences of using both accounts. Correlational analyses revealed a significant positive correlation between finsta use and self-monitoring. Independent samples t-tests revealed a higher mean score of self-monitoring among finsta users than non-finsta users. Chi-square tests of independence indicated that females, non-heterosexual individuals, and white people are more likely to own a finsta than males, heterosexual people and non-white people, respectively. An inductive thematic analysis of interview responses revealed themes of Instagram as a self-monitored space, finsta as an unfiltered space, motivations for varying types of self-presentation, developmental changes in use of both accounts, and greater negative feelings towards Instagram than finsta. This research elaborates on previous psychological literature on self-monitoring and self-presentation by addressing the lack of psychological research regarding finsta accounts. Future research should examine the relationships between motivations for social media use, self-esteem and online behaviors, as well as include new finsta users, rather than those who created their accounts years ago.

Keywords: psychology, Instragram, finsta, emerging adult, self-presentation, self-monitoring

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In his book, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", sociologist Erving Goffman explores how human beings constantly try to manage how we present ourselves to others. Individuals look to others in social circumstances to understand what is appropriate and manage behaviors according to specific contexts. Similarly, psychologist Mark Snyder defined the behavior of self-monitoring as the practice of "self-observation and self-control guided by situational cues to social appropriateness" (Snyder, 1974). Both self-presentation and self-monitoring refer to behaviors which people resort to in social environments to appear favorably to others. Social media is a particularly intriguing social environment to explore these behaviors as it may potentially exacerbate the self-monitoring pressures which exist in the physical world while also allowing individuals to experiment with self-presentation and various identities.

While many researchers have shown interest in social media, there is no existing psychological literature that focuses specifically on "finsta" accounts. Instagram is a social media platform, and a "finsta" account refers to a second account on that same platform. While the original account may be public or accessible to many, the finsta is private and typically accessible to only a select group of followers. A user's behavior on two separate accounts on the same social media platform may have much to reveal about motivations, identity exploration, and self-presentation on social media, as well as what specific factors play a role in behavior on the "real Instagram" versus the "fake Instagram" or "finsta". Therefore, it is important to consider the existing literature on identity, self-monitoring, and self-presentation as it may relate to finstas.

Literature Review

Identity

The dominant paradigm for modern identity development research has been the identity status paradigm, which categorizes adolescent identity development into identity exploration and identity commitment (McAdams, 2015). Identity exploration mostly occurs during emerging adulthood—a developmental period spanning the ages of 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000). The moratorium status within the identity status paradigm, which is characterized by high-exploration and low-commitment, rises in the teens, and peaks at 18-19, implying that identity exploration peaks in the early part of emerging adulthood (Kroger et al., 2010; Waterman 1999 cited in McAddams 2015). Considering that 75% of individuals aged 18-24 use Instagram (Perrin & Anderson, 2019), it is likely that processes of identity exploration may also be evident on this platform.

The very participation in social media begins with the creation of one or multiple online personas, making it an environment in which individuals can explore and "try out" different identities (Turkle, 1999). Individuals higher in self-monitoring have been found to present a more consistent online and offline self while those who engage in less self-monitoring are more likely to indicate experimenting with the presentation of multiple selves while online (Fullwood et al., 2020). It is important to note that this finding refers to the comparison of behaviors offline and online rather than across various online environments.

Self-monitoring Self-presentation

Monitoring self-presentation on social media can be extremely tedious. Focus group discussions with teens about uses of Facebook and Instagram highlighted many self-presentation practices including, but not limited to: taking great efforts to appear interesting and attractive based on perceived audience perspectives, avoiding presentation of negative emotions which may be perceived as attention-seeking, and posting only at specific times (Yau & Reich, 2019).

Furthermore, to succeed in these efforts, social media users must be sure of who their possible audiences are. Duffy & Chan (2019) referred to the belief that others (including friends, family, future employers, authority figures, etc.) are monitoring one's account and will form certain judgements based on one's self-presentation on that account as *imagined surveillance.* They also considered how the social media world exists within cultures of prejudice based on ethnicity, sexuality, sex and gender and therefore imply varying degrees of vulnerability to the consequences of imagined surveillance among different populations. Those who are more prone to scrutiny in our society may also be more vulnerable to the disciplinary outcomes of account surveillance, and therefore may behave differently on social media, including possibly having greater self-monitoring and self-presentation tendencies. As some of the very few researchers to have included finstas in their studies, Duffy & Chan (2019) describe these accounts as a solution to the pressures of imaginary surveillance via increased control over privacy of posts. By closely monitoring and controlling followers, users believe they can avoid judgement and negative consequences from observers. Furthermore, considering that anonymous social environments have been found to lead to the presentation of socially undesirable personality traits (Hu et al., 2017), it is plausible that finstas may also motivate negative disclosures as users feel less restrained by social norms.

Self-Disclosure

It is important to note that self-disclosure does not entail a lack of managing self-presentation (Schlosser, 2020). Individuals may choose to disclose authentic information about themselves selectively to create a desirable impression while leaving out negative disclosures. Past research on how others interpret a user's self-presentation and self-disclosure depends on the extent of the perceived self-presentation efforts and the nature of disclosures. A 2020 study

which analyzed Instagram selfies revealed that users who engaged in greater self-disclosure (i.e. revealing personal information) in their posts received more likes than those who did not; whereas individuals who engaged in greater self-presentation (i.e. using filters or edits) received fewer likes than those who did not (Hong et al., 2020). Therefore, users may appreciate self-disclosure as an effort to communicate and engage with others but see exaggerated efforts to manage impressions (such as filters and effects in this case) as unfavorable. So, while efforts to manage self-presentation on social media are in part motivated by a desire to appear well-liked (Yau & Reich, 2019), taking these efforts to an extreme may result in the exact opposite.

Furthermore, not all disclosure is met equally with appreciation. A user's well-being and self-esteem may impact the nature of their online self-disclosure and others' perceptions of them. People with greater levels of psychological distress tend to engage in negative self-disclosure on social media platforms, especially on image-based platforms such as Instagram (Luo & Hancock, 2020). When comparing Facebook interaction to in-person interaction, people with low self-esteem are more likely to see it as a safer place to express themselves, say that it offers more opportunities to connect with people, and see advantages in disclosure compared to people with high self-esteem (Forest & Wood, 2012). However, psychologically distressed individuals are more likely to post inauthentically and engage in negative disclosure which leads to negative psychological outcomes and may harm interpersonal relationships (Luo & Hancock, 2020). Therefore, while psychologically distressed individuals may be more likely to see social media as an opportunity to connect with others, the nature of their self-disclosures are also more likely to hinder their connections with others and their own psychological well-being.

Efforts to manage self-presentation and engaging in self-disclosure are reflective of distinct motivations behind social media use. A 2014 study revealed that most Facebook users

disclose more intimate information on private messages compared to public statuses; although, those who did post more intimate and private information through public statuses were motivated by self-expression and a desire for a sense of relief (Bazarova & Choi). Researchers emphasized that social media motivations must be understood for predicting disclosure patterns which, made evident by Luo & Hancock (2020), may have important consequences. Lin et al. (2014) also addressed privacy as a factor in self-disclosure on social media by comparing network density (the extent to which members in a social network are connected to each other) to network size (the number of followers or friends one has on a social network). An interpretation of the findings noted that people with denser networks have trusted relationships within the network that provide a comfortable environment for both positive and negative disclosures, while people with larger networks are more concerned about presenting only a positive image of themselves to a large audience.

Finsta

The aforementioned studies open the possibility that the finsta—being a private account with a select group of followers and, therefore, one with less self-monitoring pressures—may be a means for personal disclosure for users motivated by a need to express themselves or a desire for emotional relief. It may also provide an environment in which experimentation with different identities is more likely. Findings from Luo & Hancock's 2020 study also raise concerns that if finstas do in fact lead to greater self-disclosure, they could be potentially harmful for individuals with low self-esteem. Furthermore, applying the previously mentioned research findings to users of both Instagram and finsta accounts make it plausible that this population is motivated by both emotional expression and self-presentation desires and therefore fulfills them both by switching back and forth between accounts and engaging in varying forms of disclosure and self-

presentation. The present studies seek to incorporate finsta users into psychological research regarding social media usage.

Study 1

The first study aims to observe whether demographic populations, self-monitoring, self-esteem and identity play a role in the use of Instagram and finsta accounts. Four hypotheses of this study include:

1) Those who have a finsta are more likely to be a part of demographic categories which are prone to more scrutiny in our society. Specifically, participants who identify as ethnic or sexual minorities. This hypothesis is grounded in Duffy & Chan's (2019) discussion of finstas as a solution to imagined surveillance. Based on this discussion, it would be expected that individuals who may be more vulnerable to the consequences of imagined surveillance would create finstas to have an environment in which they do not have to worry about such surveillance.

2) Those who have a finsta are more likely to have a social identity orientation rather than a private identity orientation. This is based on Check & Cheek's (2018) theory that individuals vary on how much importance they place on the various aspects that comprise their identities. Those who place more value on personal aspects such as personal traits, views, and private experiences would score higher on a measure of private identity, while those who place more value on social traits and interpersonal experiences and views would score higher on a measure of social identity. It would be expected that individuals who choose to create a secondary account on Instagram to regulate their social environments place more emphasis on the social aspects of their identity rather than the private ones.

3) Those who have a finsta are more likely to have either higher or lower scores of self-esteem compared to non-finsta users. A measure of self-esteem is included in the study based on previous findings on how self-esteem may affect the nature of self-disclosures and psychological implications. Therefore, it is important to test how finsta users score on measures of self-esteem to understand whether they may be more prone to positive or negative self-disclosures on the platform.

4) Those who have finsta accounts are more likely to score higher on a self-monitoring measure. Individuals who have finsta accounts by definition have separate regular Instagram accounts. Therefore, it is expected that Instagram users who experience a lot of pressure to manage their impressions on Instagram will create a separate finsta account. In other words, Instagram users who do not care as much about how they are perceived on their accounts would not feel the need to create a separate account, while those who care more would.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited via email and social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat) at a medium-sized college in the Northeast. Psychology students were offered research credit for participation. There were 309 participants who ranged in age from 18 to 61 years old ($M = 21.19$, $SD = 4.66$). The sample was predominantly female, white and straight. 74.9% of participants identified as female, 73.8% of participants identified as white, and 69.8% of participants identified as straight or heterosexual. Sample demographics are presented in Table 1.

Procedure

The first study consisted of an online survey administered through Qualtrics. The survey opened with a demographic questionnaire pertaining to age, race, gender, and sexuality. Next,

participants were asked to fill out measures of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974), self-esteem

(Rosenberg, 1965), and social and personal identity (Cheek & Cheek, 2018). Lastly participants

were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used various social media accounts,

including Instagram, finsta, Tik Tok, Facebook and Snapchat.

Results

Participant Demographics

It was hypothesized that participants who report having a finsta are more likely to fall in

demographic categories which are prone to more scrutiny in our society. The survey instrument

used in this study was designed to include response options which were considerate of the

spectrums of sexuality, gender and race. Participant demographic percentages for all response

options under race, gender, and sexuality are represented in Table 1. Unfortunately, due to a lack

of participants who identified with demographic categories that were not white or not

heterosexual, responses outside of these categories were grouped together into the categories

"non-white" and "non-heterosexual" for the purposes of data analyses. Additionally, since 97.3%

of respondents identified as either male or female, participants who had not identified as such

were excluded from analyses pertaining to the role of gender.

Percentages of participants who reported using Instagram and finsta in relation to

demographic categories are represented in Table 2. Chi-square tests of independence were

performed to examine the relations between gender, race, sexuality, and finsta use (see Table 3).

The relationship between these variables was significant. The relationship between gender and

finsta use, X^2 (1, $N = 259$) = 5.454, $p = .020$, indicates that females are more likely than males to

own a finsta. The relationship between sexuality and finsta use, X^2 (1, $N = 254$) = 5.493, $p =$

.019, indicates that non-heterosexual people are more likely than heterosexual people to own a

finsta. These two findings could provide support for the hypothesis that groups more vulnerable to the consequences of imagined surveillance are more likely to create finsta accounts. However, the relationship between race and finsta use, X^2 (1, N = 262) = 4.097, p = .043, indicates that white people are more likely than non-white people to own a finsta. This would not support such a hypothesis. There were no significant differences between demographic populations on Instagram use.

Self-Monitoring, Identity, and Self-Esteem among Instagram and Finsta Users

Mean scores on measures of self-monitoring, self-esteem, and personal and social identity in relation to demographic categories are presented in Table 4. There were no significant differences between demographic populations on measures of self-monitoring, self-esteem, personal identity, or social identity. Data-analysis also included correlational tests for measures of self-monitoring, self-esteem, personal and social identity, and usage of Instagram and finsta accounts (see Table 5). As hypothesized, finsta use was significantly positively correlated with self-monitoring (r(251) = .217, p < 0.01). However, there was no significant correlation between self-esteem and finsta use or between social or personal identity and finsta use.

Furthermore, an independent samples t-test was conducted to test for differences between finsta user and non-finsta users (see Table 6). On the measure of self-monitoring, the mean score of finsta users (M = 13.58, SD = 3.47) was significantly higher (t(151) = 3.520 , p = .001) compared to the mean of non-finsta users (M = 11.96, SD = 3.75). On the measure of social identity, the difference between mean scores of finsta users (M = 23.28, SD = 4.94) and mean scores of non-finsta users (M = 22.14, SD = 5.04) approached statistical significance (t(258) = 1.831 , p = .068). Finsta users and non-finsta users did not differ on measures of self-esteem or personal identity.

Study 2

The second study seeks to explore the experiences of finsta users. Specifically, experiences related to the following research questions:

1. How do people present themselves differently on Instagram versus finsta?

2. What are the driving motivations behind using these accounts?

3. Why do individuals feel a need for two accounts on the same platform?

4. How do users make meaning from the use of these accounts? In particular, how do they relate these accounts to identity?

Method

Participants

Users of both Instagram and finsta accounts (8 females, 3 male, Mage= 20.27, age range: 18-23) were recruited via email. 6 SONA system credits were allotted to psychology students who chose to participate in the study. 2 of the participants were eligible to receive these credits. 8 participants self-identified their race/ethnicity as white. 1 participant identified as Hispanic, Black and White. 1 participant identified as Hispanic. 1 participant identified as Black and Jamaican.

Interview Protocol

Interview questions were split into 5 sections: (a) Instagram use and motivations, (b) finsta use and motivations, (c) users' self-described differences in presentation on Instagram versus Finsta (d) description of favorite and least favorite posts on Instagram (e) description of favorite and least favorite posts on finsta.

Procedure

Once a participant expressed interest in the study, a time was set up for a Zoom meeting. Participants were able to decide whether they wanted to use their video feature or only the audio for the meeting. 10 participants chose to use both audio and video. The first participant used only audio. The primary researcher conducted all interviews with both audio and video features on. Participants were informed that they could terminate the interview at any point and did not have to answer any questions that they were uncomfortable with answering. Once participants consented to the meeting being recorded and overall study procedures, interviews were recorded through Zoom and over Otter.ai. Transcripts produced by Otter.ai were copied into a word document and edited for accuracy. Participant names were replaced with pseudonyms and potentially identifying information was redacted from transcripts. Once transcriptions were completed, all recordings were deleted. Transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose for analysis.

Results

Analytic Procedure

Two researchers independently generated codes for 2 different transcripts. Afterwards, researchers shared transcripts and checked for agreement on each other's codes. After reviewing each other's axial codes, researchers agreed upon one master code list which was organized into a table representing code hierarchies, code definitions, and examples of coded material.

4 naive coders used this table to code responses across all 11 interviews to one question each. Coders were instructed to apply pre-existing codes where they were applicable and to suggest new codes when new themes emerged. The primary researcher reviewed the coding applications for agreement and adjusted the coding table to integrate suggestions.

Afterwards the primary researcher and one of the coders both independently coded responses to 5 additional questions across all interviews. After reviewing each other's

independent coding schemes, researchers agreed upon alterations and additions to the code table to produce a finalized version.

At this point, participant responses for nine of the interview questions had been coded by the primary researcher and another coder. All fully analyzed responses came from questions pertaining to the first three sections of the interview regarding use and motivations for each account and self-described differences in presentation. After reviewing the code frequency, an abridged version of the code table was created to represent the most commonly occurring themes across coded excerpts.

Account Creation and Privacy Settings

Participants were asked to specify the ages at which they created their Instagram and finsta accounts, as well as whether their Instagram account was private or public. This information, along with demographic data, is listed in Table 7. The ages provided for creating an Instagram ranged from 10-20 years old, with a mean age of 13.23 years old. The ages provided for creating a finsta ranged from 15-22 years old, with a mean age of 17.55 years old. For the purposes of calculating these means, age ranges provided by some participants were converted into their averages. For example, Sydney had responded, "It was eighth grade, so probably like, 13, 14, something like that". Therefore, the number 13.5 was used to represent his age within the mean calculation. Regarding privacy settings, 64% of participants kept their Instagram accounts public, and 36% of participants kept their accounts private, choosing who could view their accounts. Finstas, by definition, are private accounts.

Reasons for Using Insta vs. Finsta

Insta. 9 out of the 11 participants (82%) discussed using an Instagram for the purposes of social connection. This typically referred to keeping in touch with friends, but also included

connecting with people with similar interests. For example, in response to the question, "what do you use Instagram for?", Bailey responded, "I use it to keep up to date with other people". 7 (64%) participants also described using their Instagram as a means to present themselves. This included Alex who explained that she used it for "sharing pictures of my life" and Jordan who used it for "pictures of myself". 5 (45%) participants also mentioned using Instagram for advocacy and politics. For example, Erin explained, "I like to post activism on things, like ways to participate". 7 (64%) participants explained the reason they created an Instagram in the first place was because everyone else had one.

Finsta. The most common reason for using finsta was also to present the self. 7 (64%) participants described motivations of showing people who they are—however the specifics of this category were different from motivations for using Instagram and revealed a desire to show a more personal side of themselves compared to the corresponding Instagram category (see Table 8). For example, people wanted to share their inner thoughts and feelings, their sense of humor, and some even described their finsta as a diary, or mentioned a desire to show the "private self". 6 (55%) participants also discussed using finsta as a means for emotional release, especially in terms of venting or ranting and getting something off their chest. For example, in describing why she made her finsta, Alex says:

> I basically just made it as like a diary of photos that I enjoyed and I wanted to rant about, or if I wanted to express my emotions but I didn't want to say it in this big long Instagram caption on actual Instagram, then I would post it to my finsta.

5 (45%) participants expressed their motivation for using finsta as needing a space where they did not have to censor themselves. For example, Casey explains his reasons for creating a finsta by stating:

I wanted a place where I could be more open with what I posted. Because like my parents

and the adult friends and all these people follow my Instagram, so I wanted a place where

I could just post whatever the fuck I want because I was going through an emotional time

and I wanted to be like, 'hey guys I'm not alright, here are some memes'.

Lastly, although all participants had a finsta with a much smaller circle of followers compared to

their Instagram accounts, 3 (27%) participants explicitly stated posting for only a select group of

followers as a reason for using finsta. For example, Alex explained that she "wanted to post

something for a more secluded amount of people".

Feelings towards Insta vs. Finsta

Participants were explicitly asked what their feelings were towards Instagram accounts

and whether these same feelings extended to their finsta accounts. Responses were generally

coded as "negative", "positive" or "indifferent" in terms of affective descriptions. Presence of

codes regarding feelings towards both accounts are presented in Table 9.

Insta. In terms of feelings towards Instagram, 4 (36%) participants expressed only

negative views, 3 (27%) participants expressed both positive and negative views, 2 (18%)

participants expressed only positive views, and 1 (9%) participant was indifferent. 1 participant

did not respond. Negative views most commonly included seeing Instagram as a waste of time or

as a negative impact on self-esteem. For example, Sydney said:

I definitely realize that pretty much at any given moment that I'm spending on Instagram,

I could definitely be doing something better. I think it's kind of silly. Like I realized, you

know, the whole jumping through hoops to, you know, find this perfect thing to post on

your main account. I definitely see that it's silly and there are better things that we could

probably all be doing with our time.

Additionally, Erin said, "I definitely feel like it has such a negative role in self-worth and how people view themselves or how they try to present themselves", referencing a negative impact on self-esteem. The most common positive perspective of Instagram was that it was a good form of outreach—whether that be for spreading information related to advocacy and politics, or a good platform for artists and businesses. Devon was one of the participants who held both positive and negative feelings towards Instagram. After explaining the negative effect she believed it had on body image, she explained:

> I also think Instagram is really good just because it's an outlet for artists, any new businesses, startups. Someone that you're trying to get the word out there, Instagram is good. So like Instagram would be good to spread out the word, get information. Especially during what just happened in our past couple weeks with the Black Lives movement and the coronavirus pandemic, where you could just get so much information from Instagram and also see where they have donations and keep an update about what other companies are doing, I think Instagram is amazing. But if you're looking at it in our generation and how we use it, it's definitely not the best.

Finsta. In terms of feelings towards finsta accounts, 3 (27%) participants were indifferent, 2 (18%) participants saw both positives and negatives, 2 (18%) participants held only positive views, and 1 (9%) participant held only negative views. 3 participants did not respond. Those who discussed negative aspects explained that a finsta account should not be the space for one to vent and release their negative emotions. For example, Bailey says:

> It's almost like insecure. Like you shouldn't need your finsta for that. I feel like, if you feel like you're going through a bad day, you should talk to your friends about it in the

privacy of texts or with your parents. You shouldn't post that. I think it's kind of asking

for attention.

The 4 participants who held positive views of finsta mentioned various different reasons. One

participant appreciated that finstas included more honest representations of people, another

participant saw it is as space for people to express themselves when they lacked the confidence

to do so in other spaces, and 2 participants saw finstas as a place to see informational posts due

to a smaller amount of followers with similar interests. 2 participants also mentioned the ability

to follow whoever you want – one of which attributed using the account as an informational

account to this because his feed would not be bombarded by posts of friends who he follows on

his regular account. Otherwise, participants were indifferent to finstas, and made statements such

as, "even though it's something I do all the time, I do feel pretty indifferent to it" (Jordan), or,

"Well, I mean the way I view finsta and Instagram is: a finsta, it's Instagram. It's like an alternate

Facebook account. Like it's the same thing, just someone uses it for a different purpose" (Casey).

What is inappropriate for Insta is appropriate for Finsta

55% of participants described that their finsta contained anything that seemed inappropriate for

their regular Instagram account. This was either stated generally, such as Devon's statement that,

"A lot of what I just can't post on my regular Instagram that I do post on this one. I'm very

selective" and Charlie's comment that, "I don't think the pictures are that bad, it's just like ugly

selfies, but the stuff I'm actually writing I would never post on my real Instagram". Some

participants also went into specifics about what was inappropriate for Instagram yet appropriate

for finsta. This included, pictures involving alcohol or drugs, and personal rants. For example,

Sam explains:

Finsta is a lot more private. Like you're not gonna see me going on like a huge emotional

rant, like a personal rant, on my regular Instagram. I don't want a lot of people to see that

side of me.

Change in Use of Insta & Finsta

Insta. 8 (73%) participants expressed that the way they use their Instagram account has

changed since they first started using it. Half of these individuals explained that they used to care

more—either about the number of likes or comments they were getting, or about other users'

opinions of them. 5 (45%) participants also commented on a change in the frequency of usage. 4

(36%) participants said they use Instagram less frequently now, one of which also specified that

they post less pictures of themselves now. Another participant mentioned that they post more

pictures of themselves now. 2 (18%) participants also discussed being more authentic to

themselves now on their Instagram accounts, with 1 participant specifying that she stopped

editing pictures of herself.

Finsta. 8 (73%) participants expressed that the way they use their finsta account has

changed since they first started using it. 4 (36%) participants specified that they used to

overshare on their finsta and they are more filtered now. For example, Avery said, "My finsta

has just become way less controversial if that makes sense. There's not much to guard, like it's

just not going to be something that's super personal, more people could follow it now". 2 (18%)

participants also said that they have stopped using finsta as a space for gossip; such as Jordan

who said:

In high school I used it a lot to complain. And vent and things. Especially with everything

that was going on with my boyfriend, which, you know, isn't good. I shouldn't be like

posting about other people which I obviously don't anymore

2 participants also discussed being more authentic on their finsta now than they used to be. For example, Erin explained:

> And then for my finsta I feel like I'm pretty honest about my humor which is, in my opinion, very weird humor and just very obscure, and I feel like I am like that on there. So, I feel like I've definitely moved towards a better representation of myself. When I first started using it though, definitely not. Definitely was like, just selfies, or like just stuff that really wasn't talking about things that I care about.

Insta vs. Finsta

While the first two sections of the interview elicited discussions pertaining to Instagram use and finsta use independently, the third section asked participants to explicitly compare their two accounts and explain what differentiates them. The responses were characterized by two major themes. All participant responses reflected that Instagram is a self-monitored environment while finsta is an unfiltered environment. There were various ways through which these themes were expressed.

Finsta: The Unfiltered Space. In differentiating the two accounts, finstas were described as a space for spilling emotions, for being impulsive or carefree, for expressing one's funny or ridiculous side, for being more honest and real, and the accounts were described as more random and more personal than Instagram accounts. All such descriptions were categorized under the theme of finsta being an unfiltered space.

Instagram: The Self-monitored Space. Instagram, on the other hand, was the more self-monitored space. Instagram accounts were described as more put together and presentable; more thinking was involved in the crafting of an Instagram post compared to a finsta post; participants were more confident with their presentation on Instagram than on their finsta; and nothing

negative or emotional was permitted on Instagram accounts, unlike the finsta. Codes pertaining to these two major themes are exemplified in Table 10. Table 11 displays the presence of these codes across participants.

Aside from these 2 themes, in differentiating the two accounts, 5 (45%) participants also mentioned different feelings towards the two accounts. 3 (27%) individuals described finsta as a more negative space. 3 (27%) participants said they enjoyed posting to their Instagram accounts more. For example, Alex exemplified both of these themes in stating:

> I like posting on my real Instagram better than my finsta because I feel like at this point my finsta's become a negative space. So I've thought about a lot of the time deleting it and starting something else, or completely just deleting it entirely just because it isn't a great space for me anymore, but I know it was really helpful at the time.

1 individual said they enjoyed their finsta account more.

Subjectivity

All research is subject to researcher bias and thus it is important to discuss the implicit biases and previous experiences which may have influenced the work presented here. I created an Instagram account at age 12 or 13 and a finsta account at the age of 15. I used both accounts throughout high school and slowly stopped using my finsta account throughout my first year of college. I significantly decreased the amount I post on Instagram since then as well. I began this study in my junior year of college and, due to my own experiences, had my own preconceptions of how individuals present themselves differently on Instagram and finsta. Prior to starting this project, my friends and I discussed how interesting we found the contradictory self-presentations we had observed on the two accounts. Therefore, the creation of interview questions and selection of measures included in the survey may have been influenced by these experiences. I

had explicitly asked participants to describe how the two accounts were different, emphasizing differences, rather than similarities of these accounts. While my own experiences may have influenced my choice of measures to include in the survey, I believe that my literature review justifies their relevance to the study as well. Lastly, both studies relied heavily on a convenience sample.

Aside from my own influences on the research, I believe it is important to note other contextual factors which may have affected these findings. Interviews were conducted during the summer of 2020—a period in which participants' lives were likely affected by Covid-19 and social and political unrest. In fact, multiple participants mentioned Black Lives Matter protests, Covid safety precautions, and self-isolation when discussing the content and frequency of their posts. During a period in which physical social interaction presented a threat to safety, social media may have become increasingly important to participants. Therefore, participant responses may have been influenced by the extreme circumstances through which we were living at the time.

Discussion

Self-Monitoring

The present studies highlight the relevance of self-monitoring to emerging adult users of Instagram and finsta. Results from the first study revealed a positive correlation between finsta use and self-monitoring scores. Furthermore, individuals with finsta accounts had higher self-monitoring scores when compared to non-finsta users. In-depth interviews with finsta users provided greater insight into these findings. Participants explained Instagram as a space for the self-monitored self. Participants only posted pictures in which they felt confident or presented a polished image. The majority of their accounts were accessible to the public. Therefore,

Instagram accounts can be considered as a social identity that individuals are confident with the world seeing. Users post on these accounts with the knowledge that anyone can see the posts and can judge them correspondingly.

Finstas, on the other hand, are a space for the unfiltered self. Users allow access to a small group of trusted individuals, releasing themselves of the pressure to self-monitor. Without the fear of judgment, they are free to post authentically and much more in-depth about their lives, thoughts, and emotions. This creates a dichotomy in which everything which is deemed inappropriate for Instagram is appropriate for finsta. When individuals are driven to post something but are concerned about judgement or feel uncomfortable sharing that information with a large and ambiguous audience, the finsta account serves as a social platform without any rules or expectations.

Therefore, it is not surprising that users who are high self-monitors, use finsta more frequently. For someone particularly concerned with matching their behaviors to social contexts, an environment like Instagram, with a large, diverse, and often countless audience can be overwhelming and stressful. The correlation between finsta use and self-monitoring becomes even more clear when considering how finsta users describe their motivations as a desire to present a more personal side of oneself, venting about strong emotions, and having a space in which one does not have to censor themselves. Although causation cannot be implied, such motivations, in combination with concerns about appropriateness on Instagram has the potential to lead to more frequent use of a finsta.

The theme of Instagram as an environment with high self-monitoring pressures emerged among a population of finsta users. This is important to note because it is possible that Instagram

users who do not own finstas do not feel such pressures. Instagram use was not correlated with

self-monitoring, and self-monitoring scores were higher among finsta users than non-finsta users.

Self-Esteem and Identity

Interestingly, although interviewees discussed finsta as a unique space to be true to

oneself, measures of self-esteem and identity did not correlate to Instagram or finsta use in this

study. This may either be because these variables are truly unrelated, or due to the methodology

employed.

Based on previous literature, it is evident that motivation behind social media use predicts

behavior on the platform. For example, while most Facebook users disclose more intimate

information on private messages compared to public statuses, those who did post more intimate

information on public statuses were motivated by self-expression and a desire for a sense of

relief (Bazarova & Choi). When this is applied to the present findings, several parallels emerge.

Finsta users discussed these same motivations of self-expression and emotional release.

Additionally, although finsta is a more private account compared to the Instagram, posts are still

"public" compared to a direct message to one individual. So, perhaps these motivations lead to

greater self-disclosure on finsta in the same way they have been found to on Facebook.

Furthermore, levels of self-esteem influence the nature of self-disclosure on social media.

For example, individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to view Facebook as a safe place

for self-expression and self-disclosure (Forest & Wood, 2012) and are more likely to engage in

negative self-disclosure (Luo & Hancock, 2020). Again, these findings parallel discussions with

finsta users in this present study. Many finsta users described finsta as a safer place to express

themselves and discussed emotional vents or rants which exemplify negative self-disclosure.

Based on the previous literature regarding Facebook users, this may be due to a lower self-

esteem. Meaning, individuals who create finstas are motivated by a desire for self-expression and self-disclosure and may have a lower self-esteem which leads to greater public, negative self-disclosure. However, because the survey in this study did not account for the various motivations that participants held for using Instagram or finsta accounts, no such connections could be drawn. Furthermore, these studies did not assess participants at the time at which they created their accounts. So perhaps these motivations and lower self-esteem were relevant to the participants at the time of account creation, but no longer relevant at the time of participation in these studies.

The choice of identity measures employed in this study may also have hindered the findings in terms of failing to find a connection between the use of accounts and identity. Scores on private and social identity measured the extent to which participants viewed themselves in terms of personal versus interpersonal traits. This may have been a more meaningful measure to use if motivation for Intagram and finsta use was included in the survey as well. For example, those motivated by self-expression may have differed on identity values from those who were motivated by social connection. Thus, a lack of control for the variety of motivations users have for using their social media accounts may have influenced the lack of significance of identity and self-esteem in this study. Future research should attempt to explore the nuances in the motivations for use of Instagram and finsta as they relate to self-esteem, identity and online behavior.

Demographics of Finsta Users

Findings indicated that females, non-heterosexual individuals, and white people are more likely to own a finsta than males, heterosexual people and non-white people, respectively. Demographic differences in finsta and non-finsta users were compared based upon Duffy &

Chan's (2019) suggestion for future research. They suggested that those who are more prone to scrutiny in our society may also be more vulnerable to the disciplinary outcomes of account surveillance, and therefore may have greater self-monitoring and self-presentation tendencies on social media accounts. A higher pressure to self-monitor on Instagram accounts would therefore motivate the creation of a finsta. While the finding that non-heterosexual people and females are more likely than heterosexual people and males to own a finsta may support this hypothesis, the finding that white people are more likely than non-white people to own a finsta does not. Furthermore, the survey used in this study does not address any underlying mechanisms that may have resulted in such group differences and mainly relied on a convenience sample that may have influenced findings. Further research must be done to explore the reasons why different demographic groups may vary in motivations for social media use and online behaviors.

Feelings about Accounts

7 (64%) finsta users interviewed held negative views of Instragram. 3 (27%) of these individuals saw the good in it as well. However, this left 4 individuals, 36% of the sample, who held purely negative views of Instagram, yet continued to use this account. Meanwhile, only 3 (27%) individuals held negative views of finsta, and 2 (18%) of them also held positive views, leaving only 1 (9%) finsta user who held purely negative views of finsta yet continued to use it. This finding may be interpreted in multiple ways. First, it may be explained by the fact that participants were required to be finsta users, weeding out any individuals who were previous owners of a finsta account that they chose to delete. Including such participants would have allowed for a greater understanding of possible negative aspects of finsta accounts. Additionally, it is possible that many of those who only use a single Instagram account, use it in the way participants used their finsta accounts, and therefore have fewer negative feelings towards it. In

other words, there may be individuals who set their Instagram accounts to private, allow access to a small group of close individuals, and use it freely without great self-monitoring, eliminating any need for a finsta. Such individuals may not have negative views of Instagram compared to those who are higher self-monitors and feel the need for a separate finsta account. Avery, who held negative views of Instagram and positive views of finsta reflects this interpretation in saying, "I think that I use my finsta the way that I wish I used my rinsta [real-Instagram]. Like I don't follow people who I don't care to follow". This also reflects the social pressure, especially among emerging adults, to own and behave in a particular way on an Instagram account. Avery's remarks, as well as discussions with other participants regarding a need for a more private, personal space, emphasize a social pressure to own an Instagram account with many followers. Avery clearly felt as though not following those who she did not care to follow was not an option on her regular account, and this contributed to her preference for finsta and dislike for Instagram. This would also explain why these participants, although they feel negatively about Instagram, do not just delete their original accounts and use solely their finstas as their primary account.

Development

Study 2 participants, all of whom were emerging adults, often referred back to their use of accounts in high school and how it was different. Some described their previous use of finsta as "oversharing", and many described a potential decrease in self-monitoring on their Instagram accounts in explaining that they care less about others' opinions or likes than they previously had. Unlike Instagram, finsta in its essence is not a platform on which social pressures motivate people to high self-monitoring behaviors such as editing their pictures or checking with friends before posting. As individuals mature with the app and feel less of a need to self-monitor on their regular Instagram, the finsta account may become a less sought-after environment. When

interpreting these different themes in combination, it forms a very feasible narrative in which young people create a finsta to avoid the social pressures of the regular account and have the space to work out their inner thoughts without filtering. Then, as they become older, whether due to a change in perspective about regular Instagram use, or external developmental causes, they no longer need this online space for these reasons.

Concluding Remarks

These interviews build off of Duffy & Chan's (2019) description of the finsta as a solution for the pressures of imagined surveillance through the lived experiences of young adults who use this platform. In this way, these studies support the psychological community's established theories of self-monitoring and self-presentation and place them within a relevant modern context, as well as reveal areas for future research.

Future research may expand on the development theme found in this study by replicating it with adolescent participants. Considering how much participants spoke about changes in use of Instagram and finsta since high school and how many created their finstas in high school, it would be interesting to hear from high school students about their experiences on these platforms. Furthermore, kids are growing up with social media and these studies may encourage the use of social media as a tracking tool for developmental psychologists as a part of future research methodology.

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Appendix

Table 1

Demographics of Study 1 Sample

Factor	Total Sample
Race	
n	260
%Asian	7.3
%Black or African American	5.0
%Hispanic or Latino Native	10.0
%White	73.8
%Other	2.7
%Prefer not to say	1.2
Gender	
n	295
%Male	22.4
%Female	74.9
%Non-binary / third gender	0.7
%Prefer not to say	1.4
%Prefer to Self-describe	0.7
Sexual Orientation	
n	295
%Straight / Heterosexual	69.8
%Gay or Lesbian	5.8
%Bisexual	17.6
%Prefer not to say	4.4
%Prefer to self-describe	2.4

Table 2

Percentages of Sample who own Instagram and Finsta Accounts

Demographics	% Owns Instagram Account	% Owns finsta Account
Male	96.7	31.6
female	96.6	49.0
White	96.6	50.0
Non-white	96.7	37.0
Heterosexual	96.3	40.8
Non-heterosexual	97.1	57.1

Table 3
Crosstabulation of Demographics and Finsta Use

	Gender		df	χ^2	Sig.
	Male	Female			
Owns Finsta	18	99	1	5.454	.020
Does not own Finsta	39	103			
	Race				
	White	Non-white			
Owns Finsta	85	34	1	4.097	.043
Does not own Finsta	85	58			
	Sexuality				
	Heterosexual	Non-heterosexual			
Owns Finsta	75	40	1	5.493	.019
Does not own Finsta	109	30			

Table 4
Mean Scores of Self-Esteem, Self-monitoring, Social Identity and Personal Identity Measures

Demographics	Self-Esteem	Self-monitoring	Social identity	Personal Identity
Male	29.15	13.36	22.91	37.05
Female	28.32	12.44	22.49	37.02
White	28.12	12.91	22.87	36.88
Non-White	29.04	12.30	22.24	37.06
Heterosexual	29.35	12.41	22.94	37.06
Non-heterosexual	26.26	13.47	22.01	36.96

Table 5
Correlation Matrix of Self-Esteem, Self-Monitoring, Social Identity, Personal Identity and Frequency of Instagram and Finsta Use

	Self-Esteem	Self-Monitoring	Social Identity	Personal Identity	Inatagram Use	Finsta Use

Self-Esteem					
Self-Monitoring	-.097				
Social Identity	-.107	.303**			
Personal Identity	.256**	-.065	.267**		
Instagram Use	.014	.077	.109	.086	
Finsta Use	-.082	.217**	.097	-.070	.253**

*Note.*** indicates correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6
Comparing Finsta Users and Non-finsta Users on Self-Esteem, Self-Monitoring, Personal Identity and Social Identity Measures

	Finsta User		Non-Finsta User			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	t-test sig.
Self-esteem	28.36	6.04	28.27	5.66	.132	.895
Self-Monitoring	13.58	3.47	11.96	3.75	3.520	.001
Social Identity	23.28	4.94	22.14	5.04	1.831	.068
Personal Identity	36.71	5.18	37.20	4.46	-.829	.408

Table 7
Study 2 Sample Demographics of and Account Information

Particpant	Race/Ethnicity	Sex	Age	Age Insta was created	Age Finsta was created	Insta Privacy Settings
Alex	White	F	23	12-13	15-16	Public
Skyler	Hispanic, Black, White	F	18	12	17	Public
Sydney	White	M	20	13-14	17	Public
Bailey	White	M	21	15	20	Private
Charlie	White	F	20	14	19	Private
Sam	White	F	20	12	17-18	Public
Jordan	White	F	20	12	17	Public
Erin	White	F	18	11	15-17	Private

Avery	Black, Jamaican	F	20	13	15	Public
Casey	White	M	22	20	22	Public
Devon	Hispanic	F	21	10-11	17	Private

Table 8

Presenting the Self on Instagram vs. Finsta

Participant	Instagram Self-Presentation			Finsta Self-Presentation						
	Pictures of myself	Pictures representing my life	Presenting myself for others to see	Diary	Feelings	Inner Thoughts	The Private Self	What I am really doing	Discussing my mental health	Uncensored self
Alex		X		X						
Skyler					X			X		
Sydney										X
Bailey		X								
Charlie					X		X			X
Sam		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jordan	X								X	
Erin		X								
Avery										X
Casey		X					X			X
Devon		X						X		

Table 9

Feelings towards Instagram and Finsta

Participant	Instagram Feelings			Finsta Feelings		
	Positive	Negative	Indifferent	Positive	Negative	Indifferent
Alex	X	X	-	-	X	-
Skyler	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sydney	-	X	-	-	-	-
Bailey	X	-	-	X	X	-
Charlie	-	X	-	-	-	-
Sam	-	X	-	-	-	X
Jordan	X	-	-	-	-	X
Erin	X	X	-	X	-	-
Avery	-	X	-	X	-	-
Casey	-	-	X	-	-	X
Devon	X	X	-	X	X	-

Table 10

Differentiations Between Instagram and Finsta Accounts

Theme	n	%	Example
Finsta: the unfiltered space	11	100	

spilling emotions	4	36	But I wouldn't post something where I look terrible or I'm not gonna write a really sad caption spilling my emotions, whereas I would absolutely do that on my finsta (Charlie)
impulsive / care-free	4	36	My my finsta is just way more like impulsive, like virtually no thought given to it, if any like. And then on the other hand, my Instagram's like, if I'm posting something I go through the process before of like should I post this this? Was this a good photo? How will I be perceived? Whereas my finsta, I don't care who thinks what of them (Erin).
more honest / real	6	55	Like on Instagram, like my rinsta I really don't want people to know how my life specifically is. Because I just don't want to really. I wouldn't be giving updates on my life and like blah blah blah. But if I am upset or something, my finsta shows that (Skyler).
more random	3	27	My Instagram has a theme, my finsta is just a collection of random images (Alex).
my funny / ridiculous side	5	45	I think moments where I'm particularly happy, it's a great day, I had, just like a lot of happiness, I guess that type of personality comes through on my real Instagram. And then the finsta is like the more ridiculous parts of my personality (Charlie).
more personal	8	73	I feel like my Instagram is the face that I put out to the world, and it's-- it's not fake, like I personally don't feel like it's fake, it's just me. And then finsta is much more like inner thoughts. I smoke a lot of weed. Like I don't post about that at all on my Instagram. Finsta, yes. So it's a lot more personal stuff, I guess, on there (Jordan).
Instagram: the self-monitored space	11	100	
more put together / polished	8	73	If I was applying for a job say and for whatever reason they wanted to see my social media for whatever weird reason, I would show them that account. And then they would see, hey this kid you know dresses nice and you know has the occasional friend. So it's a lot more presentable. You know, it's what I would want people I don't know to see, or like people that I don't trust in a deeper kind of level to see. And then the finsta is, you know, all bets are off for like a select group of people who I trust to like know me beyond the dressing nice façade (Sydney).
more confident w presentation	4	36	My Instagram I don't think I've posted anything that I regretted. For my finsta I've definitely posted things that I've regretted. Like if I scroll down in my finsta, I find things out like 'Oh my god', like, 'why did I post that' like, what was the point? Whereas on my Instagram, I feel like I'm like 'oh, okay, it's fine', 'I don't really care'. 'I do want people to see this'. But just going on my finsta, like makes myself look bad. Like just not good (Sam).
nothing negative or emotional	3	27	I feel like my real Instagram is better about showing the best side of things and it doesn't necessarily bring in any of the bad days or anything, so I guess that's what it leave out (Alex).
less thinking w finsta / more w insta	5	45	I would definitely say [finsta] it's more unfiltered, as in like, it's very sporadic. I see this, I think it's funny, I'll post

it. But if I post something on my rinsta, like a story, I still think about it, and how it will be perceived by people. Not really pictures as much as funny things, or joke posts, or whatever. I would just say there's a lot more screening involved and thought in rinsta (Skyler).

Table 11

Presence of Differentiation between Finsta and Insta Codes

	Finsta: the unfiltered space						Instagram: the self-monitored space			
	Finsta is for spilling emotions	Finsta is impulsive / care-free	Finsta is more honest / real	Finsta is more random	Finsta is my funny / ridiculous side	Finsta is more personal	Insta is more put together / polished	Less thinking with Finsta / more w Insta	More confident w presentation on Insta	Nothing negative or emotional on Insta
Alex		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Skyler	X		X			X		X	X	
Sydney	X				X	X	X		X	X
Bailey						X	X			
Charlie				X	X		X	X		
Sam					X	X	X			
Jordan	X				X		X			X
Erin		X	X			X	X			
Avery		X	X			X		X		
Casey		X	X			X		X		
Devon	X		X	X			X	X	X	X