Instagram Influencers and their Youngest Female Followers

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the content teenage girls are surrounded by on Instagram, specifically focusing on influencer self-presentation and the impacts it can have on Instagram’s youngest female users. To do so, this research identifies and analyzes the top ten most popular influencers followed by a concentrated sample of 13–16-year-old girls. Theoretically informed qualitative analysis is used to analyze the influencers’ profiles by applying Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical approach (1956). With reference to Angela McRobbie’s (2008) work on “girl culture” and Alice Marwick’s (2015) work on “insta-fame”, the ways in which influencers code femininity and persuade participation in consumer culture are considered. The findings reveal how influencers represent the modern-day version of mass magazines intended for women and how the ideals established by women’s magazines of the past have resurfaced through influencers.
Keywords

Instagram, Facebook, Instagram influencers, social media influencers, celebrities, influencer marketing, social media, insta-fame, microcelebrities, insta-models, teenage girls, Erving Goffman, Angela McRobbie, Alice Marwick, feminism, self-presentation, identity, North America, Canada, Ontario
Summary for Lay Audience

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the popular content Instagram’s youngest female users admire on Instagram. To do so, this study identifies and analyzes the top ten most popular Instagram influencers followed by a sample of 13-15-year-old girls living in London, ON. I identify similarities among the top ten influencers’ posts to suggest the impacts they might have on how teenage girls present themselves on Instagram as well as how they come to understand of themselves as young women. I consider some of the strategies popular influencers use to attract or appeal to teenage girls and how influencers persuade or influence the decision making, attitudes, and/or behaviours of their youngest female followers. The findings reveal how influencers represent the modern-day version of mass magazines intended for women and how the ideals established by women’s magazines of the past have resurfaced through influencers.

An “influencer”, or “social media influencer” (SMI) is defined as, “A key individual with an extensive network of contacts, who plays an active role in shaping the opinions of others within some topic area, typically through their expertise, popularity, or reputation” (Chandler & Munday, 2020). Influencers are essentially social media users who have accumulated large numbers of followers. They are seen as being “opinion leaders” (Casaló et al., 2020; Martensen et al., 2018), which are individuals who “have a great amount of influence on the decision making of other people…and on their attitudes and behaviors” (Casaló et al., 2020). Influencers have been described as “the new role-models of today’s preteens and teenagers” (Götz, 2020).
Co-Authorship Statement

I, Amanda Jenkins, acknowledge that this thesis in monograph format is a result of collaborative efforts. In this thesis the primary intellectual contributions were made by the first author who led the design and implementation of the research (developed the ethics application, conducted the literature review, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and led the writing of the thesis). The contribution of Dr. Thomas Streeter and Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase was primarily through the supervision of the research, theoretical and methodological guidance, and intellectual and editorial support.
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Chapter 1

1 « Introduction »

In Western societies, for many children every day is sort of like recess. Children unabashedly experience the world and may often easily lose sight of restraints, orders, rules, and systems. At recess, many children feel free; free to run in the wind and to roll in the grass. Free to dig their fingernails into the dirt and to pluck out the dandelions, so that they can weave them through twigs, and make themselves a crown. However, at recess, most children know that there is a fence. At recess, they may feel free, but they understand that their freedom has a limit. Most people spend childhood learning these limits and learning how to adapt to them. For some, it may only take being punished for crossing the boundary one time, and the intensification of anger and discipline from an authority figure to force them into the realization that they must learn to distinguish right from wrong, acceptable from unacceptable.

Being an Instagram user complicates this experience. Individuals often become Instagram users as early as 13-years-of-age, according to the app’s policies (Instagram, 2022). At this age, users are just beginning to leave their recess days behind and open the doors to high school for the first time. Young teens are at a very important developmental stage in their lives in which they undergo a process of socialization (Little, 2016). Socialization is defined as “how we learn the norms and beliefs of our society. From our earliest family and play experiences, we are made aware of societal values and expectations” (Little, 2016). When teens enter high school, much of our time is spent trying to discover who we are as people, who we want to become and how we fit in with the rest of our peers and the societies we live in. The values and morals depicted by the people we are surrounded by, including our family, friends, teachers, etc. help us determine how to act as well as develop a sense of identity. Instagram complicates this experience. The people closest to us will always play a major role in our development. However, when we become Instagram users, we must also learn the values and expectations precipitated by the app itself as well as by other users. Rather than explicitly
being told “No”, or “Right” from “Wrong”, Instagram’s technical features and social structure condition us as users to behave in a certain way (Zulli, 2018).

Instagram is a recent addition to the ways in which socialization has become mediated. Youth today are part of the “social generation” (Wyn and Woodman, 2006), which is defined as a “new and distinctive form of consciousness which is produced by changing social conditions” (Allaste & Tiidenberg, 2015). This highlights the importance of taking into consideration the contention that “young people today are growing up in a world that is significantly different, and is experienced as different, from the world in which their parents grew up” (Allaste & Tiidenberg, 2015). Young people growing up with Instagram today are faced with a challenging journey towards self-discovery. Not only must they learn and adapt to the values, norms, and expectations precipitated by those in their immediate community, they must also learn and adapt to the values and expectations precipitated by those in their online communities. Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman (2021) describe Instagram as “the online equivalent to the high-school cafeteria: a place for teens to post their best photos, find friends, size each other up, brag and bully”. Much like the cafeteria, the goal on Instagram is to be seen, to be liked, and to be popular. Unlike the cafeteria, there are over 2 billion people using the app each month (Rodriguez, 2021). This, combined with the overwhelming presence of celebrities, makes it hard to be seen. Many young people aren’t concerned with impressing thousands of users on Instagram. They are more concerned with impressing their followers, which typically consists of a few hundred friends and acquaintances. However, the presence of celebrities and the potential to become “insta-famous” persuades users, teenage girls especially, to mimic the behavior and self-presentation of the most popular users they follow.

Instagram functions based on algorithms that prioritize accounts with the highest engagement. Accounts with the highest numbers of likes and comments are awarded with visibility and opportunity. This has resulted in the understanding that “Successful users…are those whose online activity garners attention from their followers and networks” (Zulli, 2018). Influencers have come to represent the epitome of “successful” Instagram users and the leaders of online communities for teens. An “influencer”, or “social media influencer” (SMI) is defined as, “A key individual with an extensive
network of contacts, who plays an active role in shaping the opinions of others within some topic area, typically through their expertise, popularity, or reputation” (Chandler & Munday, 2020). SMIs are users who have accumulated large numbers of followers. They are seen as being “opinion leaders” (Casaló et al., 2020; Martensen et al., 2018), which are individuals who “have a great amount of influence on the decision making of other people…and on their attitudes and behaviors” (Casaló et al., 2020). Young people follow influencers for guidance on how to look, act, and behave in ways that will garner online attention and allow them to feel a sense of community, belonging, and acceptance. Götz (2020) states, “influencers…are the new role-models of today’s preteens and teenagers”. Influencers have become important actors in young peoples’ development.

Teenage female socialization in the era of social media has been much commented on, and the scholarly literature on the topic has been growing. Empirical studies of females in the early teen years, ages 13 to 16, however, have been few. This may be due in part to ethical challenges involved with interviewing minors at sensitive moments in their lives about personal issues. Instagram influencers and micro-celebrities have also been much discussed, often in derogatory terms (Bilton et. al., 2021) and sometimes as objects of scholarly analysis. Yet the crucial role of influencers in the socialization of young teens has rarely been explored empirically.

This research identifies popular Instagram influencers followed by teenage girls between the ages of 13 to 16 and living in London, ON. The profiles of the top ten most popular influencers identified from the data are analyzed to gain a better understanding of influencer content. I identify patterns and similarities in the influencers’ self-presentation to reveal the values and ideals underlying influencers’ posts that may be influencing teenage girls. Erving Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgical approach is applied to examine the self-presentation practices employed by the influencers. Working from feminist perspectives, such as Angela McRobbie’s (2008) perspective on “girl culture”, this research enters ongoing debates surrounding the relationship between consumer culture and femininity, highlighting the economic persuasion that underlies the content posted by influencers. This research demonstrates how female influencers especially appear to embody the values associated with Western neoliberal post-feminism or “popular
feminism” (McRobbie, 2008) and discusses the impact this may have on the images teens choose to post.

1.1 « Scope of the research: The understudied 13-14-year-old female Instagram user »

Instagram is one of the most popular social media applications used by teens, with young people joining the app as early as 13 years-of-age, according to the app’s policies (Instagram, 2022). Research on the youngest Instagram users has analyzed the behaviour of teens on Instagram (Chu et al., 2016; Han et al., 2016; Jang et al., 2016; Reed, 2015; Malvini Redden & Way, 2017; Song et al., 2018), motivations for Instagram use (Huang & Su, 2018; Sheldon & Newman, 2019), the relationship between Instagram use and mental health (Frison & Eggermont, 2017; Lup et al., 2015; Martinez-Pecino & Garcia-Gavilán, 2019; Weinstein, 2017), as well as self-presentation practices and norms (Chua & Chang, 2016; Hasan & Wibowo, 2019; Kapidzic & Herring, 2015; Hong et al., 2020; Yau & Reich, 2018). The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the popular content some of Instagram’s youngest female users admire on Instagram. I investigate some of the self-presentation practices popular influencers use to attract to, or appeal to a female audience between the ages of 13 – 16 that may persuade or influence their decision making, attitudes, and/or behaviours (Martensen et al., 2018). The relationship between self-presentation on Instagram and identity formation is explored, and how influencers may have an impact on both for their youngest female followers. Questions of fame and visibility are considered (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Marwick, 2013;2015; 2018; Tifentale, 2015), along with representations of gender (Burns, 2015; Caldeira, 2016; Caldeira, 2020; Caldeira et al., 2021; Claxton, 2019; McIntyre, 2019; Willem et al., 2010) and identity (boyd, 2014; Fallon, 2014; Framroze, 2017; Wiederhold, 2018), social comparison (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016; Chae, 2018), as well as narcissism and self-branding (Dumas et al., 2017; Eager & Dann, 2016; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Khamis et al., 2017; Sheldon & Brynt, 2016).

Research that analyzes teens on Instagram has typically been inclined to include all Instagram users who are in high school, including users who range anywhere between 13-18/19 years old, or excluding the 13-year age category all together (Gogus & Saygin,
2019; Kleemans et. al., 2016; Vermeulen et al., 2018). These studies are often based outside of Canada (Hübner Barcelos, & Alberto Vargas Rossi, 2014; Freberg et al., 2011; Kleemans et. al., 2016; Vermeulen et. al., 2018; Weinstein, 2017). There is a lack of information on younger Instagram users in general, specifically those who are under the age of 16. Users who are 13-15/16 are just entering high school, whereas users who are 16-18/19 are moving closer towards adulthood. While older users are more aware of the implicit strategies popular users employ to persuade their followers into placing a sense of trust in them, younger users are at a higher risk of being persuaded and pressured by the values implied by influencers; falling prey to the hidden global economic forces that are at work behind influencers’ Instagram posts.

Research that explores Instagram influencers and their female followers tends to focus on older Instagram users and/or includes a wider age range of users (Caldeira et al., 2020; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018; Gentina et al., 2014; Freberg et al., 2011). In addition, the influencers analyzed are often selected randomly, without considering who the influencers’ followers may be (Cano, 2019). The present study focuses on 13-16-year-old girls and the most popular influencers they follow to gain an understanding of the content younger users are surrounded by and the impact this content may have on their perceptions of femininity and personal self-presentation. The initial goal was for study participants to range between 13-15 years old. However, two participants turned 16 during the recruitment period. This bumped the age range of participants up to 13-16.

Focusing analysis on females 13-16 is important because “Visual sites like Instagram attract girls more than boys” (Roberts, 2019). In addition, according to Forbes (2019), “the average American girl spends 6-10 hours a day on social media being pushed products and images that are not proven to work or are not real” (Roberts, 2019). Instagram blurs the line between fiction and reality, as “filters, makeup, lighting, angles and posing mean that the images consistently fed to young girls are not based in reality” (Roberts, 2019). Instagram influencer, @thegirlyouhate posted, “Women need to start owning up to plastic procedures” (Pauline, 2020). The influencer continues, “there is millions of young women looking up to social media influencers with the ‘perfect’ butt, hips, lips, jaw, boobs, you name it, claiming it to be natural, having teenage girls wondering if there is something wrong with their body” (Pauline, 2020). Instagram
filters, photo editing tools, and influencers make determining what’s real on Instagram challenging. Roberts (2019) has shown that “when girls see a highly rated image, their brain (most likely the nucleus accumbens, or reward circuit) instinctively associates it with being better, no matter the content” (Roberts, 2019). As influencers are known for being “highly rated’, they offer young girls an unavoidable avenue to compare themselves to, pressuring girls into striving to embody unrealistic, edited, constructed, and enhanced appearance ideals.

The term influencer has long existed in the English language, but only in the last ten years has come to mean something like ‘a person with large numbers of internet followers who seek to turn their popularity into a commercial advantage’. Influencers are essentially individuals who are widely recognized and emulated on social media platforms. This places them in a position of power and enables them to impact or shape the actions, opinions, and decision-making of others (Casaló et al., 2020; Martensen et al., 2018). Influencers, in the broad sense of the term, have been around for centuries or more, through celebrities, government leaders, and religious figures alike. However, over the last decade we have witnessed the rise of a new type of influencer, the “social media influencer” (SMI). Scholars have rigorously been investigating the phenomena of SMIs working to define this novel concept of fame (Abidin, 2018; Enke & Borchers, 2019; Marwick, 2013; 2015; 2018; McCorquodale, 2019; Ouvrein et. al., 2021). Social media influencers have been defined as “people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them [on social media]” (De Veirman et al., 2017). They are seen as “being a trusted tastemaker in one or several niches” (De Veirman et al., 2017) and they play “an active role in shaping the opinions of others within some topic area, typically through their expertise, popularity, or reputation” (Chandler & Munday, 2020). Social media influencers are perceived as being famous on a social media platform because they have accumulated a sizeable following and continue to attract the attention of many people on the platform (Khamis et al., 2017; Marwick, 2015; Senft & Baym, 2015). In the past, fame was limited to a select few who had managed to capture the world’s attention, either through mainstream media, professional sports, business, politics/government, etc. Today, as Hu et al. (2020) states, “Empowered by the advances in information and communication technologies, ‘ordinary people' can become ‘digital
influencers' by creating and posting content on social media”. Instagram, in particular, continues to foster the development of influencers.

Out of the 7080 accounts followed by participants, 1662 can be considered influencers. While many academics have sought to define the phenomenon of SMIs (Abidin, 2018; Casaló et al., 2020; Enke & Borchers, 2019; Martensen et al., 2018; Marwick, 2013; 2015; 2018; McCrorquodale, 2019; Ouvrein et. al., 2021), this research reveals that there are many different types of SMIs and that the number and popularity of SMIs continues to grow, especially among young teenage girls. There are now more opportunities to become SMIs through Instagram specifically. Thus, the appeal of becoming an SMI is growing and the possibilities are growing along with it.
Chapter 2

2 « The industry, the technology, feminine identities and teenage girls »

Instagram has evolved immensely since its inception in 2010. The following section explains some of the most significant updates that have contributed to the growth of influencers, the commercialization of Instagram and Instagram monetization, and why this matters for teenage girls. Influencer marketing is defined as well as the regulations for the representation of influencers in advertising set out by the Canadian Code of Advertising. I explore the growing appeal of becoming an influencer, how teens are targeted by companies seeking brand ambassadors and how this involves a pressure to embody stereotypical female roles and traditional ideals of femininity. Lastly, I provide a recounting of the Haugen revelations as reported in The Wall Street Journal (Wells, Horwitz, & Seetharaman, 2021), showing how Facebook’s internal research confirms that Instagram is toxic for teenage girls, in part because of the pressure to live up to the ideals presented by popular influencers and celebrities.

2.1 « The industry and the technology »

Facebook bought Instagram in 2012 for $1 billion (Rusli, 2012). In 2018, it was estimated that Instagram was worth $100 billion (Simon, 2021). According to Forbes (2018), “Instagram Is Eating The World” (Dhillon, 2018). This is largely due to the commercialization of Instagram. The commercialization of Instagram began in 2015, when “the company announced plans to open the Instagram feed to all advertisers” and allow companies to target ads to users based on “interest, age, gender and other factors, just as they can on Facebook” (Goel & Ember, 2015). However, young people were and are the main targets of advertising on Instagram. Goel & Ember (2015) explain how marketers and investors saw “big money for Facebook and the brands in ads shown to Instagram’s users—a generally young, passionate group who share, like, click and comment on posts at a much higher rate than users of other services, including Facebook”. Thus, advertising on Instagram was initially appealing because of the
potential to reach and target young audiences. Recent data gathered by Statista (2021) on
global Instagram audiences confirms that this is still the case, indicating that as of July
2021, “Over two thirds of Instagram audiences were aged 34 years and younger”, which
“makes the platform particularly attractive for marketers” (Statista Research Department,
2021). Over the years, Instagram has developed sophisticated targeting tools to help
businesses reach potential consumers and the platform has been transformed into a
marketplace. The tools that were once limited to businesses are now available to all users
and as West (2021) states, “now everyone, from corporations to startups to influencers,
has an Instagram business profile”.

Instagram’s transformation began with the initial launch of Business profiles in
2016 (West, 2021). Instagram’s founders, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, built the
platform with the intentions of it being “a place to relax and appreciate beautiful photos
and videos posted by people and companies that users have chosen to follow” (Goel &
Ember, 2015). When Facebook bought Instagram, Facebook’s chief executive Mark
Zuckerberg “said he wanted to preserve that experience” (Goel & Ember, 2015). The
advertising expansion raised concerns that “Filling the feed with unexpected ads from
random companies could alter that [experience]” and “turn off Instagram users” (Goel &
Ember, 2015). The company prevented this through the launch of Business profiles, “And
since then, the new profile has introduced a new way of social marketing” (West, 2021).
At the time, Business profiles were only available to users who already had a Facebook
Page for their business (Perez, 2016). The profiles included “a specialized set of tools for
business owners”, “analytics and the ability to turn Instagram posts into ads directly from
the Instagram app itself” (Perez, 2016). The new tools allowed for a seamless integration
of advertisements into users’ Newsfeeds. Through just a few clicks, businesses could now
transform their Instagram posts into ads and promote them to audiences using the
suggestions provided by the app (Perez, 2016).

In early 2019, Instagram released the account option as “an alternative to the
business profile” (Tran, 2019). The account option allows any user to create a
“Professional” account, while also maintaining a “Personal” account. When you switch to
a Professional account, you have the option to choose between a “Business” or “Creator”
account. Business accounts are intended for “retailers, local businesses, brands,
organizations and service providers” (Tran, 2019). Creator accounts are intended for “public figures, content producers, artists, and influencers” (Tran, 2019). However, anyone with an Instagram account can now switch to a Creator and/or Business account. Creator accounts were designed specifically to fulfill the needs of “influencers and creators that don’t yet have a business” (Donawerth, n.d). This type of account offers detailed insights on audience demographics, when the best time to post is, contact options and buttons as well as other metrics (Donawerth, n.d), ultimately allowing influencers to build their personal brands.

Professional accounts have altered the user experience, how and why people use Instagram, and the content people expect to see on Instagram. Advertisements have become unavoidable. They appear within the flow of viewing stories or scrolling the newsfeed and facilitate a constant push to purchase products and services. This can be overwhelming for young people as they are constantly surrounded by advertisements that directly target their interests based on their activity both on Instagram and on their smartphones in general. In addition, Creator accounts specifically promote self-branding and positioning the self as a product intended to be consumed by the audience. Both Business and Creator accounts imply that the purpose of Instagram is branding, or self-branding, and selling the self and/or a product/service to as many followers as possible.

2.2 « The commercial sphere and feminine identities »

While the intersection between “youthful femininity” and the commercial sphere is not a new phenomenon (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2008), Instagram influencers, and their ability to manufacture an image that appeals to and attracts the attention of so many people, is. McRobbie is concerned with the ways in which the commercial sphere implicitly controls and shapes perceptions of femininity, arguing that, for very young women today, consumer culture comprises the “primary regime of truth”, with social institutions losing their importance (McRobbie, 2008). Influencers operate at the center of consumer culture and as the “primary regime of truth” (McRobbie, 2008) for many young girls. Instagram users turn to their favourite influencers’ Instagram profiles for advice, guidance, information, updates, products, and inspiration. As Instagram users, we grant influencers power and authority by interpreting their immense popularity to imply
credibility. We assume that the number of followers represents the number of people who support the account, as well as the values portrayed by the account. This has enticed advertising and marketing companies to pay influencers to post specific content, selling specific products/services, defined as “influencer marketing” (Morris, 2020).

Since influencer marketing is now an industrial process and part of the advertising industry, perhaps the best way to explain it is in the words of a marketing company. Influencer marketing, according to the marketing firm Harvard Media, is “the process and act of promoting and selling your business services through individuals that connect to and resemble your target audience” (Morris, 2020). Influencers have become a reliable and effective way for companies to reach and sell their products and services to consumers. This applies to young people in particular, as influencers operate through social media and young people are the most active audiences on social media. One of the main reasons people strive to become influencers is so that they can get paid to post. However, once you become a paid influencer, you also become a spokesperson for the companies that are paying you to post. You lose a degree of autonomy when it comes to constructing your content and your main goal becomes selling whatever it is you’ve been paid to advertise. As regular users, this is easy to forget. We grow to admire and look up to influencers we follow and they become sort of god-like, they can do no wrong and we trust the things they say and the brands they promote. Instagram influencers have effectively been integrated into the advertising/marketing industry due to the level of trust Instagram users place in influencers, and “Consumers often act based off of trust” (Morris, 2020). According to Morris (2020), “Influencer marketing is most common on Instagram, as 89% of marketers identify it as the most important channel for this type of marketing” (Morris, 2020). According to another industry source, influencer marketing is becoming an increasingly popular strategy because of influencers’ abilities to influence consumers' behaviours and purchasing decisions (Ad Standards, n.d.). The growing popularity of influencer marketing on Instagram raises concerns for teenage girls. Instagram isn’t just a place for teenage girls to connect and share photos with friends. Instagram is now a marketplace where teenage girls are targeted by ads that pop up as they tap through their stories or scroll through their newsfeeds and even as they admire some of their biggest role models. Influencers have the ability to brainwash our senses
and blind us to the fact that we are being sold a product or service. Teenage girls are a vulnerable population and should be protected from invasive ads promoting products that may or may not work. This is why the truthfulness behind influencers’ posts is important to consider.

The representation of influencers in advertisements is regulated, to the extent that it is regulated at all, mostly by industry self-regulating bodies, and largely focused on questions of truthfulness. The Canadian Code of Advertising Standards Clause 7 (Testimonials) (Ad Standards, 2019) is described as providing “parameters for truthful ‘testimonials, endorsements or other representations of opinion or preference’” (Ad Standards, n.d.). The regulator continues, “This requirement applies equally to all media and formats, including traditional testimonials, advertorial and native content, and, now, the representations of influencers” (Ad Standards, n.d.). In 2016, Interpretation Guideline #5 was introduced to the Code, “to help ensure that influencer content is not deceptive” (Ad Standards, n.d.). Guideline #5 “requires that the representations disclose any material connection between the influencer and the entity behind the brand, product or service being promoted” (Ad Standards, n.d.). This means that when an influencer posts an ad that is sponsored in some way, it must be clear that the post is an advertisement. According to the Interpretation Guideline, disclosure must “be clear, prominent, and in close proximity to the representation being made” (Ad Standards, n.d.). These requirements were initially vague and did not directly address the expectations and requirements for different platforms. It wasn’t until March 2018 that the “Influencer Disclosure Guidelines” (Ad Standards, n.d.) were added to the Code, delineating best practices and providing examples of “how to disclose a material connection” (Ad Standards, n.d.). Two years later, in 2020, the Guidelines were updated to include “examples from platforms including TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter” (Ad Standards, n.d.).

However, Instagram has become a machine, an industry in and of itself, where people function as products through self-branding. This has made it difficult to determine what is and is not an ad on Instagram. Many of the posts shared by influencers are technically ads, as they promote themselves, their personal brands, and their brand partnerships, but they lack any clear indication of being an ad. This raises the concern
that teenage girls are being fed content that’s often constructed by a team of industry professionals but presented as though the influencer created the content themselves. Teenage girls are given the impression that what they see on Instagram is real, authentic content and that they should be able to embody the same idealistic appearances they see their favourite influencers parading on Instagram.

The new Canadian regulations for influencer marketing place a strict emphasis on being truthful in advertising. The Competition Bureau provides specific guidance in “Influencer marketing and the Competition Act” (Competition Bureau Canada, 2022). The Act states, “Truth in advertising is important. As an influencer, consumers rely on the opinions you share online about products and services, and believe they are genuine and impartial” (Competition Bureau Canada, 2022). This helps prevent false advertising on Instagram by pressuring influencers to be truthful about the products they endorse. However, it is up to the influencer to determine how long they test a product or service before they promote it and how much information they want to share about their experience. Being truthful can help the influencer build their relationship with their followers, however, influencers also have an obligation to the brands they partner with to promote and sell their products. To make it clear that a post is an advertisement, the Act recommends: “Make sure that your disclosures are as visible as possible”, “Make sure your disclosures are clear and contextually appropriate”, and “You should also base any reviews and testimonials on actual experience” (Competition Bureau Canada, 2022). Canada operates under "self-regulatory codes and guidelines for influencer marketing” (Competition Bureau Canada, 2022). However, “The Guidelines are consistent with expectations of regulators in the US and other jurisdictions” (Ad Standards, n.d.). These regulations are intended to help users decipher which posts are ads and when an influencer is sharing sponsored content. The emphasis placed on truth in advertising legitimizes influencers as businesses while failing to address the technicalities of influencer content and the harms caused by promoting such content, for example the harms of body image issues for teenagers (Brown & Tiggemann, 2020).

Influencer marketing has worked to legitimize “influencer” as a career. Advertising on Instagram differs from advertising on other platforms, like YouTube, for example. On Youtube, users sell space on their videos and channel page for advertising at a rate that is
decided by Google (Geyser, 2021). On Instagram, there is no intermediary or set rates for advertising and “Instagram does not compensate its users for running ads on their posted photos” (Geyser, 2021). When a brand partners with an influencer, it is up to the brand and the influencer to come to an agreement on payment or compensation, as well as the expectations and responsibilities associated with the role. While rates vary depending on circumstances, Geyser (2021) argues that “one thing is consistent in nearly all cases - Influencers get paid more if they have both a high engagement rate, as well as a high number of followers”. According to the Financial Times, “if you have an audience of 100,000 followers, you can charge brands $2,700 USD per post’, and “Influencers with four to 20 million followers typically make a cool $6,000 to $17,500 USD every time they upload a sponsored post” (Jadon, 2020). According to Lai (2022), Kylie Jenner is paid $1,494,000 per sponsored post. Influencer marketing has taught us that “Successful users…are those whose online activity garners attention from their followers and networks” (Zulli, 2018). Young people active on Instagram today are growing up in a world in which attention has become a valuable commodity and the potential exists to sell your image through photos you take on your mobile device.

Influencer marketing has reduced many of the challenges that previously stood in the way of becoming an influencer. In Instagram’s early days, it was up to the individual alone to figure out how to achieve insta-fame. This included knowing what to post, when to post, how to reach a large audience, how to appeal to a large audience and so much more. Instagram’s updates, Business/Creator accounts, Instagram’s website (“Instagram Creators”, n.d.), and the plethora of articles, blogs, and other websites dedicated to providing tips for Instagram use have made becoming an influencer a lot less challenging. For example, Hootsuite (Sehl, 2019), Elise Darma (Kailash, 2019), Forbes (Vengapally, 2020), and Later (Galbato, 2021) all provide tools, tips, and courses on becoming a successful Instagram influencer. The website “Influencer Marketing Hub” provides an “Instagram Money Calculator” that allows influencers to calculate their estimated earnings based on their engagement and number of followers (Geyser, 2021). The calculator gives both influencers and companies a general idea of how much money an influencer should be paid per post. In addition, rather than applying to work as an
influencer for a company, the onus is on the company to recruit the influencer and initiate a partnership.

Anita Harris (2004) argues that “It is primarily as a consumer citizen that youth are offered a place in contemporary social life, and it is girls above all who are held up as the exemplars of this new citizenship”. Young girls especially are targeted by ads recruiting influencers or “brand ambassadors”, promising free products in exchange for Instagram content that promotes said products (see Figure 1 for example). The increase in targeted ads recruiting influencers on Instagram demonstrates the demand for influencers and offers young girls the opportunity to find a place in contemporary social life through becoming an influencer. As McIntyre (2020) states, “These new relations which are enabled by information technology have empowered these women to become economic actors in ways that were not previously available to them”.

The data I gathered shows that regardless of number of followers, many young people with Creator accounts categorize their accounts as “Public Figure”, demonstrating an attempt to grab the attention of brands seeking influencers.

To be considered a micro-influencer, the account was required to have a minimum of 1000 followers. Many young people this age have surprisingly accumulated over 1000 followers. While most of these accounts are private, some teens have opted to switch their accounts to Creator accounts, automatically

Figure 1 Targeted influencer/ambassador recruitment ad on Instagram stories.
making their accounts public. Some of the local teens followed by participants had managed to accumulate 5000+ followers, however the majority fell between the range of 1000-2000 followers. This demonstrates an increasing desire among teens to boost their following and to become influencers. Many of these teens categorize their accounts using the categories offered by Instagram. The categories chosen by the micro-influencers followed by my sample range from being typical to far-fetched and bizarre. Some of the most popular categories I identified include: public figure, athlete, grocery store, art, personal blog, shopping & retail, and actor. Some of the more creative categories include: palace, tea room, government official, lawyer & law firm, go-kart track, hotel, chef, sushi restaurant, movie character, musician/band, and hot dog joint.

Smaller brands often partner with local Instagram users and micro-influencers to promote their products/services locally. This allows a brand to reach untapped groups of people living in the same city through a person that the consumers trust. It is essential for brands to partner with users who understand the brand and can represent the brand accurately through the posts they share. Micro-influencers and users interested in becoming micro-influencers can grab a brand’s attention by sharing posts that portray a similar aesthetic to the brand. For example, users who often share photos modelling in bikinis may be approached by a swimsuit company, as the user demonstrates an interest in swimsuits, modelling on Instagram in swimsuits, and experience doing so. Liking and commenting on a brand’s posts can also help grab the brand’s attention. The most popular brands female users appear to partner with are swimsuit companies, makeup lines, active wear/gear, clothing, and skincare. Women posting about consumer goods “seems to reinforce traditional notions of femininity, by enabling women to engage in practices of care, beautification, and mothering” (McIntyre, 2020). This reinforces a traditional understanding of what it means to be a woman and what women should value. As we witness more and more young girls partnering with brands and modelling products that are traditionally associated with women and femininity, young girls are increasingly pressured to embody stereotypical female roles and traditional ideals of femininity.
2.3  « Instagram is toxic for teenage girls »

Many researchers have sought to uncover the negative effects Instagram can have on teens (Adeyanju, et. al., 2021; Adorjan, M. & Ricciardelli, 2021; Butkowski, et. al., 2019; Kleemans, et. al., 2016; Sherman, et. al., 2018; Weinstein, 2017). However, Facebook itself has continually denied the connection between teens’ mental health and Instagram use. CEO Mark Zuckerberg (2021) states, “The research that we’ve seen is that using social apps to connect with other people can have positive mental-health benefits” (Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman, 2021). Former Facebook employee, Frances Haugen, recently shared internal documents from Facebook with *The Wall Street Journal*, revealing evidence that confirms Instagram’s negative effects on teens. What follows is a recounting of the Haugen revelations as reported by Wells, Horwitz, and Seetharaman (2021) in *The Wall Street Journal*.

Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman (2021) reported on internal documents revealed by Haugen showing that Facebook has consistently downplayed the negative effects Instagram has on teens and “hasn’t made its research public or available to academics or lawmakers who have asked for it”. This glimpse behind the scenes revealed how Facebook has not only been researching how Instagram affects its young users, but they have collected evidence that shows Instagram negatively affects young users, particularly teenage girls. The documents showed how Facebook’s researchers “conducted what they called a ‘teen mental health deep dive’ and follow-up studies” (Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman, 2021) over the course of 18 months. Facebook’s researchers found, “Thirty-two percent of teen girls said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse” (Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman, 2021). The researchers also found that Instagram “make[s] body image issues worse for one in three teen girls” and that “Teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression” (Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman, 2021). The researchers “came to the conclusion that some of the problems were specific to Instagram, and not social media more broadly” (Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman, 2021). The findings reveal how Instagram is specifically responsible for negatively impacting teens’ mental health, perceptions on body image, and social comparison.
Social comparison is one, among many of the problems Instagram specifically fosters among teen girls. Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman (2021) state, “social comparison is worse on Instagram”. Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman (2021) describe “social comparison” as, “when people assess their own value in relation to the attractiveness, wealth and success of others”. Celebrities and influencers are unavoidable on Instagram. This has come to mean that images that display “attractiveness, wealth and success” are also unavoidable on Instagram. Facebook’s researchers concluded that “Instagram should reduce exposure to celebrity content about fashion, beauty and relationships, while increasing exposure to content from close friends” (Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman, 2021). This demonstrates how exposure to celebrity content causes social comparison among teen girls and how this comparison can be unhealthy for teens’ development. According to Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman (2021), a current employee “questioned the idea”, arguing “celebrities with perfect lives were key to the app”. The employee stated, “Isn’t that what IG is mostly about?…Getting a peek at ‘the (very photogenic) life of the top 0.1%? Isn’t that the reason why teens are on the platform?” (Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman, 2021). The disconnect between Facebook’s research findings and employees’ perceptions of the app is concerning. However, Facebook’s internal research demonstrates the beginning of revelations surrounding how comparing oneself to images of people that are in the top 0.1% can have negative effects on teen girls.
Chapter 3

« Literature Review »

Researchers have rigorously investigated the phenomena of social media influencers and the presence of celebrities on Instagram (Abidin, 2018; Casaló et al., 2020; Enke & Borchers, 2019; Martensen et al., 2018; Marwick, 2013; 2015; 2018; McCorquodale, 2019; Ouvrein et. al., 2021). Many have also investigated the impacts of Instagram use on young women and teenage girls (Adeyanju, et. al., 2021; Adorjan, M. & Ricciardelli, 2021; Butkowski, et. al., 2019; Kleemans, et. al., 2016; Sherman, et. al., 2018; Weinstein, 2017). However, most of these studies focus on older users (Gogus & Saygin, 2019; Kleemans et. al., 2016; Vermeulen et al., 2018). Few have explored the connection between popular SMIs and celebrities’ self-presentation on Instagram and their youngest female followers’ self-presentation and identity formation. To fill the gap, I combine an exploration of the most popular SMIs and celebrities followed by a sample of teenage girls ages 13-16 with an analysis of influencer self-presentation.

What follows is a broad overview of research on teen communities, how influencers operate within these communities and how Instagram’s algorithms condition users to behave a certain way (Zulli, 2018). Marwick’s (2013; 2015; 2018) work on “Instafame” and “microcelebrities” is used to explain how there is a hierarchical structure of fame on Instagram and different categories of influencers. This foreshadows how my findings reveal a new type of influencer, the Netflix series celebrity. I explore the representation of women in mass magazines of the past and how they relate to influencers’ self-presentation on Instagram. This is followed by a discussion of research that investigates the relationship between adolescents’ self-presentation on Instagram and identity construction to show how teens self-presentation online impacts their self-presentation offline and in turn, the construction of their identity. Lastly, McRobbie’s work on “girl culture” and concern about the ways in which the commercial sphere implicitly shapes and controls perceptions of femininity is mapped onto influencers and their ability to impact teenage girls’ perceptions of femininity.
3.1 « Literature Review Part 1: Perspectives on identity formation online »

In his famous critique of the narrow, short-term focus of media sociology, Todd Gitlin (1978) wrote,

The dominant paradigm in media sociology, what Daniel Bell has called the ‘received knowledge’ of ‘personal influence,’ has drained attention from the power of the media to define normal and abnormal social and political activity, to say what is politically real and legitimate and what is not. (p. 205-206)

Gitlin's point was that we shouldn't miss the forest for the trees. We shouldn't let the difficulties of finding direct causal influence of media on the micro-level get in the way of the long term, cumulative effects of media, which may be hard to prove in a narrow causal sense but are nonetheless broadly obvious in the big picture. In what follows, I provide a sketch of that big picture, without making strongly deterministic claims.

Quan-Haase and boyd’s (2011) research on teen communities delineates how “Teenagers are members of multiple communities, each corresponding to a unique social setting with a distinct set of relationships, norms, and social behaviors” (Quan-Haase & boyd, 2011). Family ties typically represent the “most central and influential social network”, with communities of peers also representing great importance (Quan-Haase & boyd, 2011). However, “the rise of social media and the proliferation of Internet access to broad swaths of the population have reconfigured the types of communities formed by teens” (Quan-Haase & boyd, 2011). Teens use Instagram to connect with people they know, as well as people who “share their values and interests” (Quan-Haase & boyd, 2011). As Instagram users, it is through the accounts we follow that we feel a sense of community, and for teens in particular, these communities “are important for identity development, feelings of belonging, and social support” (Quan-Haase & boyd, 2011). Analyzing the most popular accounts followed by a sample of teenage girls provides an inside look at these communities, the content teens are surrounded by, the images they admire, and the types of users they look up to.

Instagram’s algorithms have allowed influencers to become the leaders of online communities for teens. This is because Instagram’s algorithms prioritize accounts with the highest engagement and ultimately control the content users see. The algorithms
operate under the guise of “relationship”, “interest”, and “timeliness”, “frequency of use”, “following”, and “session time” (Cooper, 2021). “Relationship” means that the more interaction there is between you and another user (i.e. DMs, tags, comments), the more visible your content will be to one another. According to Cooper (2021), “interest” means that “The algorithm’s job is to give the people what they want” (Cooper, 2021), so your content must “be truly appealing to your target audience” (Cooper, 2021). This implies utilizing the tools provided by Instagram through Business and Creator accounts to monitor your insights and gain an understanding of the type of content that appeals to your followers the most. Cooper (2021) describes “timeliness” stating, “The Instagram algorithm also assumes that the most recent posts are most important to people” (Cooper, 2021). This means that “newer posts are often ranked higher in the newsfeed than older ones” (Cooper, 2021), implying that the more often you post, the more likely you are to be seen. “Frequency of use” refers to how often your followers open the app. If your followers are active on Instagram multiple times a day, they are more likely to see your posts. Less active followers and less likely to see your posts, and “therefore rely more heavily on the algorithm to select what they see” (Cooper, 2021). “Following” refers to the number of accounts your followers follow. The more accounts your followers follow, the less likely they are to see your posts and the more they rely on the algorithm to determine the content they see. Lastly, “session time” means, “If your followers spend a lot of quality time with their feed, they’re also more likely to see every post available” (Cooper, 2021). Thus, Instagram’s algorithms ultimately teach users that “The goal of Instagram is to have one’s images noticed” (Zulli, 2018), and in order to do so, we must be active Instagram users, utilize the tools the app has provided us with, interact with other users, and focus on our appearance and being “liked” for that appearance. The algorithms encourage us to spend more time on Instagram and more time surrounding our lives around planning for Instagram content, engaging with other users, and critiquing our own posts and performances. We’re encouraged to strive to be “liked” by as many of our followers as possible and to embody an image that will appeal to as many people as possible.

The particular emphasis placed on being “liked” for your appearance on Instagram creates an immense pressure for users to strive to post images their followers will admire,
or simply “like”. This has culminated in terms like “insta-worthy” hijacking the meaning of moments and the reasons why we take photos of these moments. Adriana Mariella (2014) states, “I capitalize on any opportunity to beef up my Instagram: I’ll make the simplest dinner with friends look like a night in a Paris café…and I’ll go on outings that I know will look good in pictures”. As Instagram users, we plan for moments or events that could be deemed “insta-worthy”, or we stage moments or events in our lives to make them appear “insta-worthy”. Therefore, how we present ourselves online begins to creep into, not only how we present ourselves offline, but also how we spend our time offline.

Instagram influencer and Vogue contributor, Hayley Bloomingdale, defines “Insta-worthy”, stating, “In short, anything beautiful, awesome, hilarious, or amazing that evokes emotions including but not limited to: laughter, appreciation, jealousy, inspiration” (Bloomingdale, 2015). Despite Instagram’s minimalist design, sharing Instagram photos has become a complex process that often involves knowledge of what Instagram users want to see and expect to see. Systrom and Krieger designed the app with the intentions of simplifying the photo-uploading process and inspiring ”creativity while capturing everyday moments through the lens of your mobile phone” (Systrom, 2013). The name itself, “Instagram”, “implies that the content posted on this site is meant to be instantaneous, quick, and fleeting” (Zulli, 2018). The original intent behind the design was to allow users to feel like they “could literally upload any photo and not have to decide which images were worthy of being captured” (Zulli, 2018). Today, the content users upload to Instagram is anything but instantaneous and is largely determined by conceptions of terms like “insta-worthy” (Bloomingdale, 2015) and “Instagrammable” (Caldeira et al., 2020).

Marwick’s (2013;2015;2018) work on “Instafame” and “microcelebrities” provides a starting point for categorizing influencers, as well as analyzing the strategies and techniques employed by influencers. Marwick examines “three highly followed Instagram users who are using microcelebrity techniques to achieve attention and popularity online” (Marwick, 2015). Marwick (2015) reveals that by positioning themselves “as worthy of the attention given to celebrities” (Marwick, p. 156), influencers are able to accumulate “fans” who faithfully support them. Marwick (2015) defines “Instafame” as “the condition of having a relatively great number of followers on
the app” (Marwick, p. 137) and examines how Instafame is “a variety of microcelebrity” that exists on Instagram (Marwick, p. 138). SMIs are often referred to as “micro-celebrities”, which Marwick defines as “ordinary” users who achieve “a state of being famous to a niche group of people” (Marwick, 2013). However, SMIs, or micro-celebrities, only represent one category of influencer found on social media today. For example, “traditional celebrities”, those whose “fame is conferred by mainstream media or entertainment, such as television shows or professional sports” (Marwick, 2015), also capitalize on the phenomenon, creating Instagram accounts and essentially becoming Instagram influencers. Working from the categories developed by Marwick (2015), I further categorize the influencers followed by participants. How fame operates on Instagram is discussed, as well as how the presence of celebrities has an impact on the Instagram aesthetic, culture, and users’ expectations for Instagram content.

There is a particular “homogenized aesthetic” (Fallon, 2014) on Instagram, as “users see the work of others, adapt their own in direct response to it, and post images seen in turn by others” (Fallon, 2014). This is especially prominent among younger female users, as they tend to follow the lead of influencers by engaging in similar self-presentation practices. Researchers are just beginning to explore influencers’ self-presentation and the impacts on teen girls (Götz, 2020). Götz (2020) argues, “the ‘Instafamous’ define— for those who follow them and take their cues from them – the parameters of what being an attractive woman today involves, and present a consistently similar postfeminist masquerade”. Influencers define femininity for young girls and set standards for what being an attractive woman entails. Through a constructivist worldview and feminist perspective, I test Dobson’s thesis that “women’s empowerment is enabled through their sexuality and compliance with cultural ideals of beauty, while constructing this compliance as driven by individual choice and autonomous desire” (Dobson, 2015). By examining the ways in which the most popular female influencers express their femininity, the findings reveal how influencers draw from ideals associated with beauty and femininity that were constructed by women’s magazines in the past.

Women have been comparing themselves to popular images in mass media since technology made it possible for images to be reproduced and widely disseminated. Women’s magazines were one of the first forms of mass media to entice this trend. White
(2009) explains, “Through construction of fashion images and illustrations, magazines of the late nineteenth century portrayed a desirable lifestyle to their readers”. Much like today, women in magazines were perceived as being ideal representations of femininity and “beauty”. This is how influencers are perceived. According to Englis et al. (1994), “people have trouble defining beauty, but they know it when they see it. And they actively look for it” (Englis et al., 1994). Since the 1800s, magazines been accused of manufacturing images of ideal beauty (Englis et al., 1994; Harris, 2004; Wolf, 1990). Through a selection of specific characteristics and/or specific celebrities, popular magazines, films, and television shows have defined ideal femininity and ideal beauty. Historian Lois Brenner notes, “American history from 1800 to the 1960s can be characterized by a succession of dominant singular ideals of beauty” (Englis et al., 1994). This has created the impression that “The quality called ‘beauty ’objectively and universally exists” (Wolf, 1990). Magazines continue to manufacture images of ideal beauty and culturally encode and ingrain specific beauty ideals in consumers (Englis et al., 1994). These ideals have been carried over to Instagram through influencers.

3.2 « Literature Review Part 2: The relationship between online self-presentation and identity formation »

Subrahmanyam & Smahel (2011) discuss the relationship between identity construction and self-presentation, arguing that online identity construction and online self-presentation go hand-in-hand for adolescents. Subrahmanyam & Smahel (2011) state, “on the Internet, adolescent users seem to go out of their way to present their offline selves and not stay disembodied”. This demonstrates how adolescents ’self-presentation online is related to their self-presentation offline and how adolescents attempt to embody who they believe they are offline through their presentation online. Subrahmanyam & Smahel (2011) also found that adolescents use photographs and videos for self-presentation and “younger bloggers were more likely to post pictures than older ones”. They suggest that using visuals to present oneself may be more important for younger adolescents because “public visual displays of the self may drive their sense of self” (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). However, on Instagram, users also engage in editing facets of the self, using filters, editing tools and a careful selection of images that display
only the best versions of the self. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) conducted a study that included experienced bloggers and Second Life users. Their research demonstrated that “contrary to engaging with the process of whole persona adoption, participants were keen to re-create their offline self online, but engaged in editing facets of the self” (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) argue, “This emphasizes the key premise in Goffman’s work that, when in ‘front-stage’, people deliberately chose to project a given identity”.

This research engages with scholarship that investigates self-presentation on Instagram (Caldeira, 2016; 2018; Caldeira et al., 2020; Dobson, 2015; Harris & Bardey, 2019; Hogan, 2010; Khamis et al., 2017; Rettberg, 2014; Uski & Lampinen, 2014), contributing especially to debates surrounding the application of Goffman’s approach to online media (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Hogan, 2010). Scholars have demonstrated how Goffman’s dramaturgical theory can be applied to online media (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Fan et al., 2019; Hogan, 2010; Merunková & Šlerka, 2019). For example, Fan et al. (2019) analyzes self-presentation on WeChat by distributing a questionnaire to 170 undergraduate students from two Universities in China. Fan et al. (2019) found that “others’ self-presentation influences visitor’s subjective well-being” (Fan et al., 2019). Merunková and Šlerka (2019) applied Goffman’s dramaturgical theory to Facebook by analyzing 50 university students’ personal profiles. Like Merunková and Šlerka (2019), most studies involving teens apply Goffman’s theory to students’ personal profiles. This research takes a unique approach compared to previous scholars by applying Goffman’s theory to the most popular Instagram influencers followed by a small sample of 13-16 girls.

3.3 « Unanswered questions »

In the study, Selfiecity: Exploring Photography and Self-Fashioning in Social Media (2015), Manovich and Tifentale analyzed “15 million images shared on Instagram in 16 global cities during 2012–2015” (Manovich, 2017). The findings brought Manovich to claim that, “the majority of Instagram publicly shared images show moments in the ‘ordinary’ lives of hundreds of millions of people using the network globally…as opposed to being coming from celebrities, Instagram stars, or companies” (Manovich, 2017).
Tifentale’s (2015) theoretical reflections on Selfiecity argue that “symbolic images”, such as “celebrity or scandalous selfies”, represent “highly untypical exceptions that overshadow masses of more ‘ordinary’ images” (Tifentale, p. 4). The data I gathered from the accounts followed by female Instagram users, between the ages of 13-16-years-old and living in London, ON, revealed evidence that contradicts these claims. On average, just over 25% (25.95%) of the accounts followed by each participant meets the requirements of an “influencer”. According to WebFX (2020), “micro-influencers” are accounts with over 1000 followers and “macro-influencers” are accounts with over 100,000 followers. In addition to these requirements, accounts had to be public to allow for analysis. While females ages 13-16 do not all follow the same influencers, I analyzed the top ten most popular influencers followed by a sample of teenage girls to reveal that there are particular "celebrities, Instagram stars, or companies" that are favoured by particular demographics, and the similarities in the content posted by these "celebrities, Instagram stars, or companies" has an implicit influence over the content posted by their followers.

Current scholarly research regarding Instagram influencers often concentrates on the marketing potential of influencers and influencer marketing (Ki, 2018; Ki et al., 2020; Lee & Kim, 2020), the role influencers play in product endorsement (Silva et al., 2019), influencers' advertising potential as well as its effectiveness (Casaló et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2015; Palazzo et al., 2021). These researchers have demonstrated how influencers exercise power over their followers (Palazzo et al., 2021). Crystal Abidin (2016) has studied influencers in Singapore, exploring how influencers' “cultural scripts’ and conventions are adopted and echoed in the everyday self-representations of ‘ordinary’ Instagram users” (Abidin, 2016; Caldeira et al., 2020). While Abidin focuses primarily on fashion trends set by influencers, this study expands upon Abidin’s work to explore the aesthetic trends and social conventions precipitated by the most popular influencers that a sample of Canadian teenage girls are following on Instagram.
Chapter 4

4 « Methods »

The following section explains how participants were recruited, touching on the ethical challenges associated with research involving minors and how my method allowed me to overcome these barriers. I explain how I proceeded to identify the top ten most popular influencers followed by participants, the criteria required for an account to be considered an influencer, and how data was gathered and managed. Qualitative coding was used as a method to analyze the content the top ten influencers share to their Instagram profiles, with posts falling under three main categories: modelling, marketing, and selfies/photos of the self. Goffman’s (1956) theory on the presentation of the self in everyday life is broken down to show how the theory applies to Instagram and how it was used to analyze the influencers posts.

4.1 « Methods »

Research is limited when it comes to the study of a concentrated location and population of teen Instagram users. This is likely due to Instagram’s user settings. When creating an Instagram account, new users are required to enter their birthdate. However, this information is not visible to the public (Instagram, 2019). Users are not required to enter any information regarding their location, where they live, or where they are from. This makes it challenging to target a specific population of users who are of the same age and live in the same city, potentially discouraging other researchers from endeavoring to do so. Therefore, rather than rely on the Instagram app settings to locate and recruit participants, I used a social media recruitment post (Bender, et al., 2017) and asked friends and family to share the post. Being a local resident of London, ON worked to my advantage, as most of the people I know on social media also reside in London and have grown up in the city. I did not specifically ask participants what their socio-economic status was or family culture of origin.

Research is also limited when it comes to the study of 13–16-year-old girls on Instagram. This is because research that involves youth comes with its challenges. One of
the core principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Participants* (2018) is respect for persons, with an emphasis placed on autonomy and protecting those with developing autonomy (TCPS 2, 2018a). The policy states, “Some people may be incapable of exercising autonomy because of youth, cognitive impairment, other mental health issues or illness” (TCPS 2, 2018a). Special measures must be taken for younger participants, “those whose decision-making capacity is in the process of development, such as children whose capacity for judgment and self-direction is maturing” (TCPS 2, 2018b). Younger participants must give assent to participation and the researcher must also seek “consent from an authorized third party who is entrusted to make decisions on behalf of the prospective participant” (TCPS 2, 2018a). This can make the process of acquiring consent tiresome and time consuming as it can involve multiple conversations and taking extra steps to ensure the privacy and welfare of participants is protected. The vulnerability of adolescents also needs to be taken into consideration and certain subjects that are acceptable for adult research may be sensitive, inappropriate, or triggering for adolescents and therefore not approved by ethics.

The youngest Instagram users are at a sensitive developmental stage and when it comes to interviews, certain topics may raise ethical concerns and extra care and precaution is required. To avoid these concerns, I chose to follow participant’s Instagram accounts, rather than interview them. I acquired written or verbal assent from participants and consent from parents/guardians to follow participant’s accounts for the purposes of gaining access to the list of accounts they follow. This gave me an inside look at the accounts 13-16-year-old girls follow on Instagram and allowed me to determine who the most popular influencers are.

Considering the influencer criteria and how popular influencers have become, I anticipated that the number of influencers followed by participants would be high and would include a multitude of different types of influencers that all sit at different places in Instagram’s hierarchy. To make analysis manageable, I chose to limit the sample of influencers I analyzed to ten. I chose to analyze the top ten most popular influencers in an effort to get a consensus of who the most popular influencers are among teenage girls in
general. Analyzing the top ten most popular influencers ensured there would be enough crossover between the accounts participants follow.

To identify some of the top ten most popular influencers followed by 13-16-year-old girls, I recruited 15 girls living in London, ON. through social media, and followed their Instagram accounts. This allowed me to access to the list of accounts each participant follows. For each participant, I scrolled through this list, clicking on each account followed. If the account was public and met one of the criteria listed below, it was considered an influencer account. Subrahmanyan & Smahel (2011) found that “Because online profiles are typically private, it has not been possible for researchers to document the culture of social networking sites”. My method allowed me to overcome this barrier. By following participants’ personal Instagram profiles, I was given access to Instagram’s culture, as seen through the eyes of adolescent girls. My focus is on the accounts teenage girls follow on Instagram, rather than their personal profiles, to better understand how popular accounts influence their youngest followers.

Influencer Criteria

1. “Verified” by Instagram. “Verified” accounts receive a “verified” badge next to their Instagram name. This indicates “Instagram has confirmed that an account is the authentic presence of the public figure, celebrity or global brand it represents” (Instagram, n.d.).
2. “Business” accounts with 1000+ followers: includes retailers, local businesses, brands, organizations and service providers.
3. “Creator” accounts with 1000+ followers: includes public figures, content producers, artists and influencers.
4. “Macro-influencers”: public accounts with over 100,000 followers (WebFX, 2020).

Business and Creator accounts are automatically public (Tran, 2019). According to WebFX (2020), “micro-influencers” have over 1000 followers and “macro-influencers” have over 100,000 followers. Therefore, Business and Creator accounts are included if they have 1000+ followers. The influencers were ranked by the number of participants following each account to determine popularity. A detailed electronic record was kept that lists all verified, Business, Creator, and macro-influencer accounts followed by participants. Along with the account name and date, I recorded the number of participants
following each account, the number of followers each account had, account type (verified, Business/Creator, macro-influencer), category, and relevant descriptive information found in the users’ bios. All micro-influencers had either a Business or Creator account and were categorized as Business/Creator. Data was collected over a one-month time-period, March 11 - May 5, 2021.

In total, 1662 influencers were identified amidst the Instagram accounts followed by 15 girls from London, ON., all between the ages of 13-16 (See Table 1). On average, just over 25% (25.95%) of the accounts followed by each participant meets the requirements of an influencer. This reaffirms how prevalent, relevant, and unavoidable influencers have become in the lives of young girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Following</th>
<th>Total # of Influencers</th>
<th>Verified</th>
<th>Business/Creator</th>
<th>Macro-Influencer</th>
<th>% of Influencers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-Mar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-Mar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-Mar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Apr</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Apr</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Apr</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Apr</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Apr</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-Apr</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-Apr</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-Apr</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-Apr</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-Apr</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-Apr</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-Apr</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1053</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 The total number of influencers followed by participants, number of verified accounts, Business/Creator accounts, and macro-influencers.

Qualitative coding was used as a method to analyze the content the top ten influencers share to their Instagram profiles. Considering the age of participants, I chose to focus on content shared within the past two years (2019-2021). According to Goffman (1976),

Success here requires nothing more than a small amount of perversity and wit and a large batch of pictures to choose from. The larger the initial collection, the more
surely the analyst can find confirming examples of what he thinks he has found in one picture or would in any case like to depict a case of representativeness declining as the data base increases.

Similar to Goffman’s approach, I started with a large batch of photos. I printed out the photos shared by the influencers from 2019-2021. Once I had an overall view of the content, I was able to start categorizing by recognizing similarities in the influencers’ posts. I acknowledge that this is my view of the similarities and others may have seen them differently. Goffman (1976) states, there are three distinct and general methodological questions that should not be confused: discovery, presentation, and proof. Only the first two will here be at issue, these two allowing me to exploit without a major research investment the very special advantages of working with photographs.

The majority of the influencers’ photos can be classified as photos of the self. The influencers’ photos of the self fall under three main categories: modelling, marketing, and selfies/photos of the self. Each category can be further divided into two parts: modelling (for Instagram vs professional), marketing/advertising (direct vs indirect), and selfies vs photos of the self. While my focus is predominantly photos of the self, the remainder of the influencers' posts can be categorized as “filler photos”, Instagram “carousels”, romantic relationships, and awareness and advocacy. “Filler photos” are photos that are aesthetically pleasing and focus on objects, scenery, locations, etc. Nopuente (2021) describes filler photos as "images that act as ‘breakers’ to space out important posts like your trip to Bali or a cute OOTD. They usually feature random objects or anything that looks #aesthetic”. Filler photos are used to break apart photos of the self and contribute to the Instagram aesthetic. An Instagram “carousel” allows users to upload up to ten photos and/or videos and share them in a single post (Sehl & Tien, 2021). The findings reveal the top ten influencers’ posts primarily focus on the self, documenting the self and the body, and selling the self as a means of gaining attention and acceptance.

Theoretically informed qualitative analysis is used to apply Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgical approach. I analyze the ways in which the influencers “perform”, seeking to identify similarities in the “setting, appearance, and manner” (Goffman, 1956) displayed in the influencers’ posts. According to Goffman (1956), self-presentation
involves the setting, as well as the performer’s appearance and manner. These three aspects work together to project a definition of the situation which can be used by the performer to control the audiences’ impressions and perceptions (Goffman, 1956). My focus is on the influencers’ photos of the self and how they use the setting, their appearance and manner, to control how their audience perceives them.

Goffman argues that individuals wear a mask when they are in the presence of others. Goffman explains, the mask “represents the conception we have formed of ourselves-the role we are striving to live up to” (Goffman, 1956). This applies to how we present ourselves on Instagram. Brenda Wiederhold (2018) demonstrates how users have a tendency to post images of themselves “living their best lives”, and major influencers “share glamorous photos of themselves in far-off locations, lounging in carefully staged shots, or showing off chiseled, professionally retouched bodies” (Wiederhold, 2018). The present study identifies aspects that contribute to the masks influencers wear and how their performances promote ideals associated with post-feminism that aren’t necessarily positive for 13-16-year-old girls. The identified patterns of repetition reveal the values and ideals underlying the images participants admire and the characteristics participants associate with success and/or femininity. This allows me to question the ways in which influencers may potentially have an impact on participants’ own self-presentation on Instagram.

Through a careful selection of personal images, we present a version of ourselves to our followers on Instagram. Through the images we share, we begin playing a role, a role of the version of ourselves that we are striving to be and be seen as. In different social establishments we play different roles. In the workplace, for example, we may enter the role of a hard-working employee; at home, we may play the role of the mother, the father, sister, or brother. Robert Ezra Park (1950) notes,

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role…It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves (Park, 1950, quoted in Goffman, 1956).
Most people want to be the best version of themselves and want others see them in same light. Thus, we often wear a mask when we are in the presence of others and in different social establishments and settings. It is in these situations that we begin a “performance of the self” (Goffman, 1956). Goffman (1956) defines “performance” as “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (p. 13). It is through the art of impression management (p. 132) that we are able to have some influence over our audiences ’perceptions and control over how we are perceived. Instagram sets the stage for performing the self, providing us with filters to enhance our masks and tools to hide our imperfections. Like Goffman (1956), I assume that “when an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation” (p. 8). Goffman (1956) argues that there are many common techniques people “employ to sustain such impressions” (p. 8). By viewing Instagram posts as contributing to an overall performance of the self, we can identify strategies and tools used for impression management and build an understanding of the different masks worn by influencers in their performances on Instagram.

Similar to a stage performance, the performance of the self involves a front stage and a backstage. The “back region” is “where the performance of a routine is prepared” (Goffman, 1956, p. 152) and the “front region” is “where the performance is presented” (p. 152). The “front” is “that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (Goffman, 1956, p. 13). The front region can be broken down into three parts, the setting, appearance, and manner. The front includes “the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (Goffman, 1956, p. 13). Goffman (1956) divides the front into two categories, “setting” and “personal/social front”. The “setting” is defined as “the scenic parts of expressive equipment” (p. 14). For example, “furniture, decor, physical lay-out, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it” (p. 13). The setting is where the performance takes place and includes the background/background items, props, fixed items/landscapes, etc. The “personal/social front” is defined as “the other items of
expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes” (p. 14). For example, “insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” (pp. 14-15). The stimuli included in the personal/social front is further divided into “appearance” and “manner”. “Appearance” includes "those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer’s social statuses” (p. 15) and “manner” includes “those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the on-coming situation” (p. 15). These elements combined comprise the performance of the self in everyday life.
Chapter 5
5 « Description of Research »

SMIs are often referred to as “micro-celebrities”, which Marwick defines as “ordinary” users who achieve “a state of being famous to a niche group of people” (Marwick, 2013). Marwick explains, “Microcelebrity is a mind-set and a collection of self-presentation practices endemic in social media, in which users strategically formulate a profile, reach out to followers, and reveal personal information to increase attention and thus improve their online status” (Marwick, 2015). However, micro-celebrities or micro-influencers, represent only one category of influencer found on social media today.

Marwick (2015) analyzes “the top one hundred Instagram users based on number of followers (as of September 2013)” (Marwick, p. 146) and categorizes popular Instagram accounts as follows: traditional celebrities, brands, “users whose fame is ‘native ’to Instagram” and users “who have achieved micro celebrity on another platform” (Marwick, p.146). Working from the categories established by Marwick, our data demonstrates the existence of a fifth category, the Netflix series celebrity. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Netflix has been releasing original content at unprecedented rates. However, “Data from media analytics firm Ampere Analysis suggests that on average, a Netflix Original gets just two seasons before being canceled” (Lee, 2020). Therefore, many series never become mainstream and the cast is typically only known to those who watch the show. Those that watch the show may interpret the cast as being famous. Thus, Netflix series celebrities fall under a fifth category of influencer because they cannot be considered mainstream, however they can be seen as famous in the eyes of their audience.

Table 2 shows the top ten most popular Instagram influencers followed by participants. The influencers can be organized into the following categories: “traditional” influencers, influencers whose fame was accrued through another social media app, Netflix series celebrities, and brands. The influencers’ popularity is ranked from 1-10, with 1 being the most popular and 10 being the least. Popularity is based on the total number of followers combined with the number of participants following the account.
The Top Ten Influencers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Account/Name</th>
<th># of Followers</th>
<th>% of Participants Following</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>arianaagrande</td>
<td>232M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>kendalljenner</td>
<td>161M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>zendaya</td>
<td>92.8M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>madelyncline</td>
<td>6.1M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>rudeth (Rudy Pankow)</td>
<td>3.4M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>jenniferaniston</td>
<td>36.5M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>emmachamberlain</td>
<td>12.8M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>hichasestokes (Chase Stokes)</td>
<td>4.5M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>madisonbaileybabe</td>
<td>3.4M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>obx</td>
<td>2.7M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 The top ten influencers followed by participants as of May 5, 2021

Ariana Grande, Kendall Jenner, Zendaya, and Jennifer Aniston can be considered “traditional” influencers as their fame was accrued through mainstream media. Madelyn Cline, Rudy Pankow (@rudeth), Chase Stokes (@hichasestokes), and Madison Bailey fall under the fifth category of influencer, the Netflix series celebrity. All four actors play main roles in the Netflix Original series, Outer Banks. Number ten on the list, “OBX”, is the official Instagram account for the Outer Banks series and can be categorized as a brand. Lastly, Emma Chamberlain is the only influencer in the top ten whose fame was accrued through social media. The data demonstrates how the most popular influencers are not “ordinary” users who achieve fame through social media. The most popular influencers are those who have achieved fame elsewhere, typically on a global scale, with Instagram acting as another opportunity for publicity, self-branding, increasing wealth and popularity.

5.1 « The top ten influencers »

This section provides an overview of the top ten influencers and how they use Instagram. The intention is to familiarize the reader with the influencers under analysis and foster a general understanding of their self-presentation on Instagram. Rather than viewing the influencers as people, the influencers are viewed as assemblages of Goffmanian frames or masks, possible selves for participants to consider and admire. The hard reality for teenage girls is that the figures they admire on Instagram are not actual
people, but symbols made of pixels on their smartphones. In some instances, I refer to the influencers by their first names to signal an attempt at speaking from the perspectives of teenage girls.

Ariana Grande is an international pop star and role model for many teenage girls. Not only is Grande the most popular influencer followed by participants, from 2019-2021 she was also the most popular woman on Instagram in terms of numbers of followers (BBC, 2022). In 2019, Forbes crowned Ariana Grande “the new Queen of Instagram” when she became the most followed woman on Instagram, having accumulated 150 million followers (Eldor, 2019). Grande continues to reign today with 240 million followers as of June, 2021 (see Table 5). In less than 3 months (April-June 2021), Grande gained 15 million followers, demonstrating how her popularity continues to grow. Grande is “one of the world's best-selling music artists” (“Ariana Grande”, 2022) and the first female artist “to have five number-one debuts, to have their first five number one singles debut at the top spot, to chart three number one-debuts in one calendar year, and to debut the lead singles from each of her studio albums in the top ten” (“Ariana Grande”, 2022). Ariana is a figure of female empowerment, breaking boundaries for women through her awards and achievements.

Grande uses Instagram as a tool to continue developing her brand, consistently updating her followers on her upcoming projects, music, performances, brand collaborations, television appearances, and products. A huge part of her self-construction relies on events and projects and documenting and posting as many as possible, as frequently as possible. Grande typically posts multiple times a week, with her Instagram making it seem like she can accomplish more than is humanly possible in the time frame. In doing so, Grande clings to relevancy, constantly entertaining and constantly performing. Although her self-presentation involves positioning herself as superior through her inhuman ability to accomplish so much in so little time, it also involves a contradictory effort to be relatable to fans. At times, Ariana shares her thoughts and emotions by speaking directly to fans through written posts shared to her Instagram stories. She speaks openly about her struggles with anxiety and shares posts about mental health awareness, providing lists of mental health resources. In doing so, she enacts empathy and concern for her fans, emphasizing “the fact that her life, like anyone else's,
isn’t picture-perfect” (DeMaria, 2018). Most of Grande’s posts highlight her successes, however these types of posts provide a small glimpse behind the curtain of her performance and demonstrate how her self-presentation on Instagram is constructed. Grande claims that she strives to embody her “truest self” (DeMaria, 2018) on social media and implies that this will allow her fans to do so too. The irony here, of course, is that Grande’s “truest self” is itself a crafted performance in Goffman’s sense, and arguably sets her fans up for more, not fewer, problems with their own identity issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kardashian-Jenner Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall Jenner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie Jenner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Kardashian West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khloe Kardashian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kourtney Kardashian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kris Jenner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kendall Jenner is the second most popular influencer in the data set. All of the Kardashian-Jenner women are followed by participants. Kendall Jenner is the most popular, despite sisters Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner having more followers overall. Compared to the other influencers in the top ten, Kendall Jenner presents herself as famous and successful, though through a different narrative, through a life-story of someone born into wealth, more heiress than self-made artist or entrepreneur. Outside of the family’s reality tv show, Keeping Up With The Kardashians (KUWTK), Kendall Jenner has established a tremendously successful modelling career. She uses her Instagram to extend her modelling career, sharing photos from professional photoshoots for top magazines, magazine cover features, and designer campaigns. Jenner uses Instagram as a stage, or more accurately a runway, where it appears that she focuses on displaying the supermodel version of herself. In addition to professional modelling, she also shares non-professional photos of herself modelling that are exclusively intended for Instagram. Kendall Jenner bridges the gap between the professional modelling world and Instagram modelling. She shows how the modelling world translates on Instagram and provides a blueprint for aspiring models, Instagram models, and influencers to follow through the photos she shares. Lee (2021) argues that Jenner is the leader of this generation of models, known as “insta-models”,

Table 3 % of participants following the Kardashian-Jenner women. Data gathered June 25, 2021.
and that “her reign signals a move towards influencers as marketers, and away from traditional, full-time models” (Lee, 2021). Kendall’s self-presentation on Instagram has sparked a fascination with self-branding and has contributed to the insta-model trend that has become increasingly prevalent among teenage girls.

In addition to modelling, Jenner uses her Instagram for advertising her 818 tequila, her sisters’ brands and products, and paid partnerships. Like Ariana Grande, part of Jenner’s self-presentation has come to include speaking openly about her struggles with anxiety. In an interview with Vogue that Jenner shared to her Instagram, she stated, “One of the most important things, I think, is to destigmatize all mental health issues, particularly anxiety, because a lot of people think they’re alone with it” (Vogue, 2021). To a teenage girl, this makes Kendall seem more real, more like a human being, more like them. It allows Kendall’s fans to imagine that they are closer to Kendall than they actually are, like she’s more of a friend than a celebrity. Of course this is a staged performance, involving one of the largest magazine corporations in the world. By sharing this type of content, Jenner strategically and periodically breaks apart her modelling photos and “humanizes” herself. Allowing her followers to know that she has anxiety is a self-presentation tactic that can turn followers into fans as Jenner comes across as more of a human being that experiences regular human emotions and suffering.

Zendaya is also a professional model and major fashion icon who, like Kendall, uses Instagram to share professional modelling photos, magazine cover features, and photos from designer campaigns. Zendaya is also an extremely talented and successful actress and singer, starring in The Greatest Showman (2017), the newest Spider Man movies, and the HBO series Euphoria. Zendaya mainly uses Instagram to share professional modelling photos and clips from her movies and television series’. Unlike most of the influencers in the top ten, Zendaya rarely engages in paid partnerships with brands on Instagram. She also refrains from sharing details about her personal life and relationships, putting up a more career-oriented front on Instagram. Zendaya incorporates an element of relatability into her self-presentation by being “outspoken about the issues and movements that are important to her” (Emmanuele, 2020). She advocates for human rights, sharing multiple posts in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Her Instagram encourages followers to speak up about the things that matter to them.
However, her reserved style inhibits fans from getting to know her on a personal level. She distances herself from her followers and rarely allows a glimpse behind the curtains of her performance.

Jennifer Aniston is the 6th most popular influencer in the top ten. Even though the television series Friends first aired in 1994, the series continues to be immensely popular among people of all ages, including teenage girls. While Jennifer Aniston has had many famous roles since Friends, the main cast of Friends and the official account for the Friends series are all popular among participants. Jennifer Aniston is new to Instagram, when compared to other popular influencers. Aniston joined Instagram in 2019, posting a selfie including the rest of the Friends group (Nordyke, 2019). The caption reads, “And now we’re Instagram FRIENDS too. HI INSTAGRAM” (Aniston, 2019). The photo immediately went viral, setting “a Guinness World Record by hitting 1 million followers in just five hours and 16 minutes” (Leskin, 2019). Since then, Aniston has used her Instagram to share with followers content that depicts who she is as a person, outside of the characters she’s played on screen. Her posts are playful and cute as she attempts trends like “TBT” (Throwback Thursday), “FBF” (Flashback Friday), selfies, and creative captions and hashtags. She shares behind-the-scenes photos attempting to show glimpses of her real life, like sitting awkwardly in the car to avoid wrinkling her gown before an award show (Aniston, 2020a). Aniston also uses her Instagram for advocacy, sharing a post in support of George Floyd (Aniston, 2020b), as well as posts about the importance of wearing a mask during COVID-19 (Aniston, 2020c). Lastly, Aniston largely uses Instagram for advertising, paid partnerships, and product endorsements.

Emma Chamberlain is the only influencer in the top ten whose fame was accrued through social media. Chamberlain began her career as an influencer on YouTube in 2017. After gaining the attention of millions of young people on YouTube, she expanded her brand to other platforms. Chamberlain’s content appeals to so many young people because of her comedic style. New York Times reporter, Bromwich (2019) calls Chamberlain “the funniest person on YouTube”. Chamberlain has also been called “the most important YouTuber working today” (Lorenz, 2019). When Chamberlain joined YouTube, her style was unique; she was doing something people hadn’t done before. Bromwich (2019) describes Chamberlain’s videos, “So far the content of her videos has
not been the point: She makes cupcakes, or tries her hand at sewing...she interrupts the proceedings constantly to speak to her audience. That’s where her videos actually happen”. Chamberlain speaks directly to her viewers as she attempts generally mundane tasks, mocking herself along the way. There is a deliberate kind of self-mockery that goes on with her style that makes her more accessible and in touch with ordinary girls’ experiences. From 2017-2019, Bromwich (2019) argues, “Chamberlain invented the way people talk on YouTube now, particularly the way they communicate authenticity”. Chamberlain has a unique ability to be herself in front of a camera. She presents herself as unconcerned and makes it appear like she doesn’t care what she looks like, often sharing content that shows her with disheveled hair, without makeup, and looking like she just rolled out of bed. Rather than hiding her imperfections, part of Emma’s performance is shining a spotlight on them and poking fun at herself. Her ability to unapologetically share content most popular influencers wouldn’t dare, like a mirror selfie in the bathroom with the caption “poo poo break” (Chamberlain, 2021c), is what has allowed her to become one of the most famous SMIs among teenage girls.

The fame Chamberlain has accrued through social media has allowed her to branch into other industries. Through Emma’s content, she has become “famous for her love of coffee” (Santiago Cortés, 2020). She used this as the basis for creating her company “Chamberlain Coffee”, which launched in 2019 (Santiago Cortés, 2020). Chamberlain’s YouTube character is still alive on Instagram, however she uses Instagram to continue building her brand, to reach her fans in a different way, and to capture the attention of Instagram users, rather than Youtubers. Chamberlain uses Instagram as a marketing tool for “Chamberlain Coffee”, sharing photos and tagging the brand account, as well as advertising paid partnerships with brands like Adidas and Luis Vuitton. At times, Chamberlain takes her self-presentation more seriously on Instagram, sharing photos where she is modelling professionally or modelling for Instagram. These photos make her Instagram appear very similar to Kendall Jenner’s Instagram, in particular. However, Chamberlain also shares more comedic, less intentional photos like a photo of her curled up in a ball sitting at the edge of the pool with the caption “hot girl summer” (Chamberlain, 2021b).
Much like Emma Chamberlain, Madelyn Cline, Rudy Pankow, Chase Stokes, and Madison Bailey use Instagram as platform to build their personal brand and popularity. However, these influencers’ fame initially stems from their starring roles as the cast of the Netflix series Outer Banks. The Outer Banks cast and brand account make up half of the top ten. This is impressive as Netflix is constantly updating their content, adding new, original series and movies every week. When a new Netflix original series is released, subscribers can binge the entire first season in as little as one or two days. Subscribers are immediately able to move on to watching a new series because Netflix updates its content so frequently. In addition, other streaming services like Amazon Prime, for example, are becoming increasingly popular, giving people even more content to choose from. It is both impressive and surprising that the Outer Banks series as well as the cast have become so popular among teenage girls.

Netflix Original series often come and go in terms of popularity and longevity, with many series ending after one season. OBX however, is set to release season 3 on Netflix (Peters, 2022). According to Wired (2020), it has been widely reported that Netflix “decides to renew or cancel its shows based on a viewership-versus-cost-of-renewal review process, which determines whether the cost of producing another season of a show is proportionate to the number of viewers that the show receives” (Lee, 2020). Netflix’s vice president of original programming Cindy Holland states, “The biggest thing that we look at is, are we getting enough viewership to justify the cost of the series?” (Lee, 2020). Forbes (2020) reveals “almost no other program on the world’s most popular streaming platform went as viral as [OBX] did in 2020” (Bean, 2020), with OBX ranking third on Forbes’ top 25 most popular shows on Netflix in 2020 (Bean 2, 2020). Bean (2020) argues, “the question shouldn’t have been, ‘Will Outer Banks be renewed? ’Really, we should be asking: ‘Will Outer Banks become the most popular show on Netflix?’”.

Outer Banks is an action-packed mystery that follows a group of teens on a treasure hunt. Replete with teen romance, drama and a battle between classes, there is never a dull moment in OBX. The show “follows the socioeconomic warfare between the elite Kooks and working-class Pogues in the North Carolina region known as the Outer Banks” (Walsh & Puckett-Pope, 2021). Protagonist John B (Chase Stokes) explains in the Pilot,
“Outer Banks, where you either work two jobs or have two houses” (Plate, et. al., 2020). Main characters, John B and his friends, JJ (Rudy Pankow), Kiara (Madison Bailey), and Pope (Jonathan Daviss) are part of the working-class “Pogues” and Sarah (Madelyn Cline) is part of the elite “Kooks”. John B and Sarah shatter the status quo on the island when they fall in love amidst the constant chaos the characters endure. The couple thwarted the boundaries between fiction and reality when they announced that their romantic relationship was in fact real through a series of Instagram posts. As the couple’s relationship developed on the show, their relationship in real life developed along with it, and on June 16, 2021, they confirmed their relationship by making it “Instagram official” (Bailey, 2020). This not only helped the couple boost their personal popularity on Instagram and their status as influencers, it also helped boost the overall popularity of the show and the other main cast members.

Madelyn Cline, Chase Stokes, Rudy Pankow, and Madison Bailey use Instagram to promote the series, as well as their personal brands and brand partnerships. All four influencers strategically use Instagram and their self-presentation on Instagram to increase OBX’s popularity as well as their own popularity. They share behind-the-scenes footage from when they were filming OBX, moments when they are all hanging out as friends and are out of character, clips from the show and advertisements for the show. All of which work to boost their followers’ interest in the show and trigger a reminder of the show so that it stays relevant. They also use Instagram to share moments from their lives outside of the show. Stokes and Cline share photos of their relationship, adventures, and travels together. Bailey shares photos of her relationship with her girlfriend, time spent with friends, Instagram modelling and professional modelling, as well as paid partnerships. Pankow limits his Instagram to professional photos of the self, paid partnerships, and OBX footage and advertisements. The ways in which these influencers use Instagram has propelled their careers and allowed them to reach a new level of fame and status.
Chapter 6

6 « Analysis »

The following analysis focuses on the photos of the self shared by the influencers over the past two years (2019-2021). I break down and explain the different categories the influencers' photos of the self fall under, including selfies vs photos of the self, marketing/advertising (direct vs indirect), and modelling (for Instagram vs professional). I argue that self-presentation is not limited to a narrow association with the selfies. Similar to Caldeira (2021), I understand self-presentation “as encompassing not only the technical production of a symbolic media text…but also the exercise of curatorial agency—seeing the users’ choices of how to represent themselves, what to share, and what to exclude as productive acts” (Caldeira, p. 6). I consider all content the influencers share as contributing to acts of self-presentation and overall performances of the self. The similarities in the influencers’ photos and self-presentation practices provide insight into the types of images teen girls are surrounded by, as well as the underlying values and ideals precipitated by popular influencers.

6.1 « Photos of the self »

Despite the explosive popularity in selfies over the past few years, it seems they no longer dominate as the primary mode of self-portraiture on Instagram. There are only so many ways you can pose while holding a smartphone, before all of your selfies start to look the same. While Instagram users may share a few selfies here and there, it has become more common to share staged photos of the self that are not captured by the self, but captured using a self-timer or a “photographer”. Professional photographers are no longer necessary as younger generations have mastered smartphone camera technology and photo editing tools, inheriting the skills needed to capture and produce professional looking photos. With photos of the self, the photographer is less important. What is more important is how the photo is staged, what is featured and what is highlighted. Photos of the self have become more popular than selfies as having someone else take the photo for you allows for a greater variety of photos and eliminates the pressure ensued by the close-up selfie shot. Users have also begun to ditch the smartphone camera and replace it
with a high-quality camera and a tripod. This allows users to stage photos of the self exactly how they want to, and, to the average users’ eye, the results are almost as close to professional as you can get.

In the first few years of Instagram, the aesthetic was very different from the one we see today. Figure 2 shows a comparison of two images shared by Ariana Grande, the first is from July 2012 (Grande, 2012) and the second is from August 2020 (Grande, 2020b). This comparison reflects how the Instagram aesthetic and Instagram photography have changed over the past eight years. The image from 2012 represents a typical selfie from the early days of Instagram, when it was more common for users to apply one of Instagram’s set filters and photos had a more amateur quality. The image from 2020

Figure 2 Ariana Grande’s selfie in 2012 compared to Ariana Grande’s photo of the self in 2020.

represents a photo of the self that is more typical today. Advancements in smartphone camera technology and the increasing availability and affordability of high-quality cameras has allowed for professional-looking photos to become standard and expected on Instagram.
Using a self-timer or a “photographer” introduces the background into the image, which can either enhance the shot, draw attention away from yourself, or draw attention to yourself. Depending on the user’s intentions, the background can be used to manipulate the impressions the audience receives when they view the image (Goffman, 1956). Goffman (1956) notes, “In most societies there seems to be a major or general system of stratification, and in most stratified societies there is an idealization of the higher strata and some aspiration on the part of those in low places to move to higher ones” (p. 23). The influencers represent the higher strata and their followers the lower. In order to maintain their position, the influencers incorporate “sign-equipment” (Goffman, 1956) into their performances that demonstrate a concern “with injecting an expression of wealth, luxury, and class status into the performance of their daily [lives]” (p. 24). Goffman argues, “Perhaps the most important piece of sign equipment associated with social class consists of the status symbols through which material wealth is expressed” (p. 24). The influencers manipulate the setting, which includes the background and sign-equipment featured in their posts to gain control over their audiences’ perceptions and reaffirm their wealth and status. The backgrounds of the influencers’ photos of the self depict luxury vacations, tropical weather, and expensive homes located in places where the sun always appears to be shining.

Goffman (1976) discusses the intentional use of sign-equipment and “scenic resources” in self-presentation to influence audience perception. Goffman (1976) states, One should, at least in part, attend to how those who compose (and pose for) pictures can choreograph the materials available in social situations in order to achieve their end, namely, the presentation of a scene that is meaningful, whose meaning can be read at a flash. (p. 27)

In this research, scenic resources consisted of private jets, boats, hotels, palm trees, and backyard pools which are used as sign-equipment to convey material wealth and to reaffirm social status. The issue for Goffman (1976):

…is how social situations are employed as the scenic resource for constructing visually accessible, instantaneous portraits of our claimed human nature. Posed pictures can therefore turn out to be more substantial than one might have
thought, being for students of a community’s ritual idiom something like what a written text is for students of its spoken language.

In other words, similar to Gitlin (1978), posed pictures become received knowledge or interpreted as common sense.
Another common technique the influencers use to convey wealth and status is tagging the names of the designers and brands they are wearing. They subtly indicate their wealth by tagging designers only the extremely wealthy can afford like Versace, Louis Vuitton, Givenchy, and Dior. They also tag their hair and makeup artists, the photographer and anyone else involved in making the look and the photo happen. They

Figure 3 Kendall, Emma, Madison and Ariana use the background and sign-equipment in their photos of the self to convey material wealth and social status.
set themselves apart from ordinary people by indicating that they have a team of people working behind-the-scenes to ensure that they are picture perfect. Using this technique allows the influencers to gesture towards their wealth and gives followers a glimpse into the lives of the rich and famous.

**Figure 4** Zendaya and Emma Chamberlain gesture towards their wealth and status by tagging exclusive brand names and companies.

### 6.2 « Indirect and direct marketing »

Two forms of advertising/marketing are evident in the self-branding strategies employed by the top ten influencers: indirect and direct marketing. Indirect marketing is “a more value-driven marketing type that focuses on promoting your brand, products, or services without being ‘promotional’” (Marketing Tutor, n.d.). Indirect marketing is advertising that is more discrete and focuses on “educating potential customers, creating brand awareness, and developing relationships with them” (Marketing Tutor, n.d.). By tagging designers and brands, the influencers are creating brand awareness for the
accounts they tag. They don’t directly ask you to make a purchase, however they do draw your attention to the accounts tagged, which can lead to future purchases. Direct marketing, on the other hand, focuses on “selling products or services through ads (video marketing), email campaigns, etc.” (Marketing Tutor, n.d.). Direct marketing more explicitly advertises a product/service with the intent of getting the customer to make a purchase (O’Grady, n.d). There are many different ways influencers can disclose that a post is an advertisement on Instagram as the guidelines outlined in “Influencer marketing and the Competition Act” (Competition Bureau Canada, 2022) do not provide one standardized way of doing so. This can make it harder to spot advertisements and advertisements can often be confused with an influencers’ own posts.

One of the most common ways influencers disclose ads is through the “Paid partnership” label, which appears above the image and under the user’s account name. The influencer can choose whether or not they indicate which brand the partnership is with following this label (see Figure 5 for comparison). Another option is to tag the brand in the caption and/or the photo to indicate that the photo is an advertisement. The influencers also use the hashtag feature, followed by the brand name and “Partner”. For example, Chase Stokes and Madison Bailey both use “#AEPartner” to indicate that the post is a paid advertisement for American Eagle (Stokes, 2021b; Bailey, 2021b). Influencers also simply use “#ad” and tag the brand in the caption. These features all indicate that the influencer is being paid to post the photo. Simply tagging the brand in the photo, as seen in Figure 4, does not indicate that the influencer was paid by that brand to post the photo. However, the influencer does promote the brand by doing so and further develops the brand partnership.

When an influencer partners with a brand, they represent the brand through the images the brand pays them to post. This is what Goffman (1956) calls a “performance team”, or “team”. A “performance team” is “a set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine” (p. 48). The difference between a team and a group or clique, is that teams “co-operate in maintaining a given impression, using this device as a means of achieving their ends” (p. 52). In a paid partnership, the goal is for the influencer to sell a product/service for a company by promoting it on Instagram. The influencer must
cooperate with the company to promote the product/service in a way that is aligned with the company’s goals and values. Although the influencer is the one who shares the content, the brand is the one behind the content and typically in charge of directing the content and approving the content. Brands partner with influencers “who can be trusted to perform properly” (Goffman, 1956, p. 56), people who will promote the product/service in a positive light. Kendall Jenner is a partner with Moon, an oral care company that sells teeth whitening products, toothpastes, and other “oral beauty products” (Moon, n.d). By partnering with Jenner, Moon can guarantee an increase in sales. In one post for Moon, Jenner shares a quick video clip of herself skipping happily towards the camera, with a private jet featured in the background (Jenner, 2020). Part of the caption reads, “As I’ve spent more time learning and caring about my oral beauty routine with MOON, I’ve found the confidence to show off my smile more often” (Jenner, 2020). Jenner helps to
bolster Moon’s reputation and status by showing that it’s a product A-list celebrities support. She also plays on the audiences’ emotions by connecting Moon with the idea of building confidence and a willingness to smile more often.

The brands influencers partner with also have an impact on the influencers’ reputations. When an influencer partners with a brand, they come to be associated with that brand. Partnering with big name and/or exclusive brands is a symbol of status on Instagram. For example, Kendall Jenner partners with Calvin Klein, Emma Chamberlain with Louis Vuitton, Madelyn Cline with Coors Light, and Madison Bailey with Fendi. The cast of OBX has had many opportunities for brand partnerships since OBX’s debut: Cline and Stokes partner with American Eagle, Bailey and Pankow partner with Bubble, and Cline partners with Lacoste. This has allowed both the OBX cast and the brands they partner with to reach larger audiences. In another example, Stokes and Cline partnered with the company Sweet Earth Foods to host a “Veggie Lovers Virtual event” (Reed, 2021), which Stokes promoted on his Instagram. This particular partnership gave Stokes and Cline another opportunity to promote their relationship and continue their love story publicly. Brand partnerships are strategic, often hidden within an influencer’s performance and working to benefit both the brand and the influencer.

Indirect advertisements are common when influencers are promoting brands and products/services that they created themselves. For example, Kendall Jenner promotes her 818 tequila through a series of photos of herself partying with friends and big name celebrities drinking 818 tequila. The carousel is captioned “the other night…@drink818 is out! find it near youuuu” (Jenner, 2021). The photos feature Jenner and her sisters Kylie, Kim, and Khloe, as well as artists Justin Bieber, Benny Blanco, Travis Scott, and Kid Cudi. The advertisement is subtle as the audiences’ attention is diverted towards the celebrities featured in the photos, who all appear to be having fun drinking Jenner’s tequila together. The most frequent and prevalent indirect advertisements can be found on Ariana Grande’s profile. Grande’s Instagram is overwhelmed by posts that update fans on her new music and music video releases. The posts do not indicate that they are ads in any way, however they do indicate dates of releases and where to watch, download, or purchase the new music and music videos. These constant updates ensure that fans are aware that something new is coming, or is here, and persuade fans to seek out Grande’s
new content. Fans then go on to increase views on Grande’s videos, increase listens, downloads, and purchases on Apple Music or Spotify, and ultimately increase Grande’s overall popularity.

McRobbie (2008) is concerned with the ways in which popular/commercial culture use the values associated with post-feminism or “popular feminism” (McRobbie, p. 532) as a means of gaining teenage girls’ attention and trust. McRobbie argues that “This usage or instrumentalization of feminism…provides corporate culture with the means of presenting itself to young women as their ally and even champion of ‘girls’” (McRobbie, p. 531). Influencers and influencer marketing now provide corporate culture with the same opportunity. At the time of McRobbie’s writing, there was an “intensity of commercial interest in young women” (McRobbie, 2008). Today, that interest evidently persists through influencer marketing. By partnering with influencers like Ariana Grande, Kendall Jenner, and the other influencers in the top ten, companies are able to directly target teenage girls through people they trust. McRobbie (2008) states, “By these means, and through this address, consumer culture seeks to…position itself as the site of truth in regard to what it is to be a young woman today and to be recognized as such” (McRobbie, p. 545). Through influencers, influencer marketing, and Instagram’s advertising tools, teenage girls have become an extremely accessible market.

The paid partnerships the female influencers in the top ten promote work to reinforce stereotypical perceptions of femininity and expectations surrounding women’s interests and values. There is a heavy focus on the promotion of beauty and skincare products, activewear and swimsuits, cooking products, and fragrances. Grande partners with r.e.m. beauty (cosmetics) and ULTA Beauty (cosmetics, fragrance, skincare); Jenner partners with Skims (underwear, loungewear, shapewear), Kylie Cosmetics, and Alo Yoga; Zendaya partners with Lancôme; Cline partners with Set Active (activewear) and Marc Jacobs Fragrances; Chamberlain partners with Bad Habit Beauty (skincare) and Pacsun (clothing and swimsuits); Aniston partners with vital proteins (cooking) and LolaVie (skincare); Bailey partners with Mejuri (jewelry) and Essie (nail polish). In doing so, the influencers “reinforce traditional notions of femininity” (McIntyre, 2020) by associating femininity with consumption and encouraging teenage girls to focus on their appearance, their body, as well as practices of beautification and care (McIntyre,
2020). Roberts (2007) observed how beautifying practices can provide girls with a sense of empowerment as they allow “an embodiment of the imagined self” (Bae, 2011). Roberts (2007) concluded that postfeminism, “articulates a model of feminine identity unthinkable outside consumption and [constructs] a logic in which ‘empowerment’…is shown as dependent on self-confidence and sexual attractiveness” (Bae, 2011). Roberts (2007) continues, “all of which, needless to say, must be purchased” (Bae, 2011). The promotion of beautifying practices is overwhelming and unavoidable on Instagram. Teenage girls are constantly surrounded by self-improvement ads that draw attention to ostensible flaws in their appearance that they may not have noticed before, like not having white enough teeth. These ads may potentially persuade girls to purchase products they may not necessarily need and may contribute to the belief that being a woman requires being beautiful and that being beautiful may often require purchasing beauty products and services.

6.3 « The commodification of the feminine self »

The female influencers in the top ten demonstrate the overwhelming presence of a particular type of femininity displayed on Instagram. According to McIntyre (2020), “digital media devices have made the production of a distinct female self possible”. This self is defined as the “entrepreneurial self”, in which the “boundaries between work, consumption, intimacy, and markets are dissolved” (McIntyre, 2020). Influencers document their personal lives in order to convert private moments into commodities through Instagram posts. This is expressive of a post-feminist culture as, “experiences in one’s personal life are conceived as assets that can be commodified” (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; McIntyre, 2020), and “the commodification of the feminine self is interpreted by participating women as ‘empowerment’” (McIntyre, 2020; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Despite having established careers in the music, television, film, business, and fashion, Grande, Jenner, Zendaya, Aniston, Chamberlain, Cline, and Bailey are all established Instagram influencers. These women use Instagram to increase their fame and increase their net worth. Grande and Jenner are reportedly two of the highest paid celebrities on Instagram, with Grande being paid $853,000USD per post and Jenner $608,000USD per post (Hall, 2021). Each post these women share, it would seem, helps
to boost their popularity, and holds potential to make a profit, whether or not the post is a paid partnership. From success updates to relationships, each moment these women capture and share on Instagram become assets that can be commodified.

Duffy & Hund (2015) discuss a form of entrepreneurial femininity called “the ideal of ‘having it all’”, which “draws upon post-feminist sensibilities and the contemporary logic of self-branding” (Duffy & Hund, 2015). The ideal of “having it all” is depicted through three interrelated tropes: “the destiny of passionate work, staging the glam life, and carefully curated social sharing” (Duffy & Hund, 2015). The way in which influencers perform on Instagram has been “socialised”, meaning their performance’s have been “moulded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented” (Goffman, 1956). The influencers’ performances combine “the destiny of passionate work, staging the glam life, and carefully curated social sharing” (Duffy & Hund, 2015) to present what is perceived as being an idealized performance.

One of the ways in which the influencers thwart the boundaries between work, consumption, intimacy, and markets, and depict the ideal of “having it all” is through the presentation of their relationships. Over the past two years, most of the influencers in the top ten have used a strategy known as making your relationship “Instagram official”, to help boost their popularity and to contribute to their self-branding. Making a relationship “Instagram official” has become a common practice that specifically appeals to teenage girls. Making a relationship “Instagram official” means that a couple has decided to post a photo together to announce their relationship to their followers. In doing so, the relationship somehow becomes more “official” and is interpreted as a promise of commitment. The artificialness behind the activity contradicts genuine intentions as users plan and construct when and how they will present their relationship for the first time publicly. However, Chase and Madelyn’s decision to make their relationship Instagram official allowed the imaginary to cross with reality for fans, feeding into the fantasy that what we see on screen and on Instagram is a true representation of real life. What was originally assumed to be acting, turned out to be the “real thing” for the couple. This makes the show, as well as the couple, seem more authentic and real, while at the same time allows fans to continue believing in fairytales and true love. By making their
relationship Instagram official, Cline and Stokes were able to increase their own fame and the popularity of Outer Banks as a whole, reaffirming their relationship as a construct.

Ariana Grande is another influencer who engaged in similar practices when she confirmed her marriage to Dalton Gomez through a series of Instagram posts. Grande uses the posts to show off her picture-perfect wedding and picture-perfect wedding dress, playing into the fairytale narrative most young girls grow up dreaming of having. Grande’s Vera Wang Haute custom gown was estimated to be worth “anywhere between $100,000 and $150,000” (Capital FM, 2021) and she was described as “looking every bit as angelic as we’d expect her to” (Capital FM, 2021). McIntyre (2020) asked popular influencers and bloggers to share their personal journeys to success, finding that “What was common to all of these stories was the role that digital technology played in transforming the meaning of ‘intimacy’ by turning it into an economic practice” (McIntyre, p. 55). By sharing their relationships on Instagram, the influencers transform intimate moments into an economic practice as the posts are used to boost their following and engagement rates. The posts allow followers to buy into the fairytale narrative while at the same increasing the influencers’ potential to make a profit. As fans fall more in love with them and their relationships, fans become driven to consume more of their content and make purchases based on their content.

While the focus of this research is on the female influencers’ self-presentation, male influencers, Chase Stokes and Rudy Pankow provide insight into relationships on Instagram from a male perspective as well as further insight into how influencer marketing and advertising operate on Instagram. Stokes and Pankow both have a different approach when it comes to sharing their relationships on Instagram. Chase is blunt, sharing intimate photos and captions expressing his love for Madelyn Cline. For Cline’s birthday, Stokes posted a series of photos with the caption “It’s quite rare to meet somebody and feel everything change. Thank you for making the coldest days warm, for your infectious love, and being the best dog mom to Lil mi” (Hearon, 2021). Pankow, on the other hand, is more secretive and reserved. From his Instagram, it doesn’t appear that he is even in a relationship, until recently, that is. In August (2021), Pankow shared a photo of himself and his girlfriend for the first time (Pankow, 2021). The caption
indicated that he uploaded the photo in response to defamatory rumours that were going around about his girlfriend. Part of the caption reads, “Unfortunately I’m here to call out disrespect and harassment someone who I love dearly is getting on a daily basis. It has gotten to a degree where lies are being spread and accusations are being said that go beyond the normal ‘hate’” (Pankow, 2021). Pankow stands up for his girlfriend and defends her relationship as he continues, “I’m happy in the relationship I’m in. I know I might not actively show it on social platforms…but this is my personal decision to keep most of these moments for myself” (Pankow, 2021). From the point of view of teenage girls, these are narratives, not realities. They are “fairytales”, but more specifically stories about gendered social relations and power, offering troubling maps of meaning for how to be female.

Success updates contribute to the influencers’ idealized performances and thwart the boundaries between work, consumption, intimacy, and markets. One of the main reasons people post to Instagram is to keep followers updated on details of their lives. However, the life updates provided by the influencers consistently portray moments of success and invite people to invest either their time, money, or energy into whatever it is that the post is highlighting. Thus, influencers’ life updates can more accurately be seen as success updates. For example, Ariana Grande often uses her Instagram as a platform to update fans on her new music, the status of her music, and her most recent successes. Grande’s recent posts share moments from her wedding, her performance with the Weeknd at the 2021 iHeartRadio Music Awards, the release of her album “Positions”, awards won for her music and performances, and her upcoming feature as judge on Season 21 of NBC’s The Voice. While this can be interpreted as empowering young women, it can also be discouraging.

The rate at which Ariana’s success continues to grow is intimidating and unnatural. Ariana typically posts multiple times a week, with content covering such a wide range of topics and events that she draws into question the possibility of one human accomplishing it all. If we look at the last month alone (June, 2021), it appears as though Ariana has created a new perfume, joined James Corden on The Late Late Show, partnered with the campaign TransSanta (Grande, 2021) to raise money for trans youth in need, filmed scenes with NBC for The Voice, performed with the Weeknd, got married,
and still had time to spend with her dogs, friends, and family. Grande performs an “idealized view of the situation” (Goffman, 1956) that is unrealistic as she focuses on highlighting her successes at an unnatural speed. In doing so, she draws attention to the fact that her Instagram posts are a part of her performance and how the Ariana Grande we see on Instagram is not a person, but a collection of representations produced by an industrial system.

Success updates and work life strongly overlap for the influencers, which works to romanticize work life and overworking. Lufkin (2021) explains how this romanticization of work has resulted in a “cult” of overwork, where overworking is seen as something exciting, “a status symbol that puts us on the path to success, whether we define that by wealth or an Instagram post that makes it seem like we’re living a dream life with a dream job” (Lufkin, 2021). For Emma Chamberlain, her job is to be an influencer and promote Chamberlain Coffee. She documents her daily routines on both YouTube and Instagram and incorporates coffee promotions throughout. In one Instagram post, for example, she wishes her followers a happy earth day, while at the same time promoting Chamberlain coffee. She poses drinking the coffee, tags the brand in her caption and mentions, “ps, free reusable straws with every order on chamberlaincoffee.com in honour of earth day” (Chamberlain, 2021a). Work for Chamberlain also involves modelling for high fashion designers and promoting brand partnerships, much like Jenner and Zendaya. Work is romanticized by the influencers as it appears glamorous on Instagram. The work that these women do is reserved for individuals with social status and the focus is on appearances. It implies that if you are beautiful enough and popular enough, you can live the glam life too. As Duffy and Hund (2015) state, “this socially mediated version of self-enterprise obscures the labor, discipline, and capital necessary to emulate these standards, while deploying the unshakable myth that women should work through and for consumption” (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Instagram robs us of an ability to see backstage, which limits our perceptions to what can be gauged from the “front” (Goffman, 1956), or the “mask” that people wear when they post to Instagram. We are unable to see the labor, discipline, and capital that goes into the construction of the front. This obscures our perceptions and forces us to focus on the front and what we can see in the image, rather than what goes on behind the scenes or what it took to produce the image.
6.4 « Celebrities and insta-fame »

Historically, distance has been kept between celebrities and fans. Celebrity culture exists in exclusive places, like Hollywood and Los Angeles, where only exclusive people are granted access. It’s almost as if places like Hollywood and its portrayal over the years have built a wall that separates celebrities from the rest of the world. Fans get to know celebrities through different media that essentially construct an image of who the celebrity is or who that particular media outlet wants the celebrity to be seen as. Whether it be film, television, a breaking news story, or an article in a magazine, people work behind the scenes to create characters for celebrities and narratives of their lives that weigh over onto how the celebrity is perceived in real life. Macaulay Culkin, for example, will always be known as Kevin McCallister from the Home Alone film series. Instagram, however, has been reconstructing the wall that has separated celebrities from fans for generations. Instagram works to create the impression of providing a door that allows regular people to enter celebrity culture.

The ability to follow celebrities and the potential to become insta-famous offers users the hope of constructing their own images and becoming insta-famous. Fashion magazines offered windows into a glamorous world; Instagram creates what feels to users like a door into that world of glamorous self-construction. We are now given an inside look at how celebrities live, based on the images they choose to share. With this, ordinary teenagers can’t help but consider that they also have the ability to pose and post content like celebrities do. Even if they are not able to afford the same luxuries, staging photos on Instagram allows users to pretend like they are able to. Boasting luxury, wealth, and success has almost become a staple of Instagram content. This, combined with the multiple advanced photo/video-editing tools available has resulted in regular Instagram posts looking like the front-page cover of Vogue magazine. Instagram also enables fans to speak directly to celebrities, through comments or direct messages, thwarting the boundaries of the past. All of the sudden, celebrities don’t seem so far away anymore. Becoming a celebrity seems like more of a possibility than an impossibility. A culture that was once assumed to be exclusive and limited to exclusive celebrities is now open to anyone determined enough to become “insta-famous”, or anyone determined enough to pose on Instagram as though they are famous.
Life looks a lot different for the women in the top ten than it does for the rest of the world. While the majority of the world is going to school, attending classes, working a typical 9-5 job, these women are either attending or performing at exclusive events, award shows, or international concerts, filming for Netflix, or modelling for magazine covers. Their presence on Instagram signals that this type of life is normal and achievable. Instagram shrinks the distance between fans and celebrities and allows “ordinary” people to connect with famous people in ways that weren’t possible in the past. Marwick (2015) explains how there have been “two major changes in celebrity” since the rise of social media. The first is that traditional celebrities “have embraced social media to create direct, unmediated relationships with fans, or at least the illusion of such” (Marwick, p. 139). Instagram allows fans to feel like they can directly communicate with celebrities by commenting on their posts and/or direct messaging. While the chances of a celebrity responding or even reading your comments/messages are low, the possibility still exists. Goffman notes, “It is a widely held notion that restrictions placed upon contact, the maintenance of social distance, provide a way in which awe can be generated and sustained in an audience” (Goffman, 1956). The ability to contact celebrities does allow fans to feel closer to them, however it is rare for celebrities to respond. Many celebrities also have a team of people running their social media accounts, so they most likely will never see your message(s) personally.

The second change Marwick (2015) describes is that through their social media posts, celebrities allow fans to feel as though they are personal acquaintances (Marwick, p. 139). This is defined as being a “parasocial interaction”, which is “the illusion of real, face-to-face friendships with performers that is created through watching television shows or listening to music” (Marwick, p. 139). Instagram has made fame seem more achievable and realistic. Despite the tremendous careers and years of experience Ariana Grande, Kendall Jenner, Jennifer Aniston, and Zendaya have had, their presence on Instagram, the way they use Instagram and the ability to interact with them on Instagram humanizes them and creates the illusion that the lives they live can be attained by “ordinary” people. Emma Chamberlain is an example of an “ordinary” user who transformed into a celebrity by sharing videos of her everyday life and routines. Despite becoming a full-blown celebrity, “Emma” hasn’t forgotten what it was that got her to
where she is today. She capitalizes on being herself, on being an ordinary human being and sharing ordinary human being moments that make people laugh. Unlike most celebrities and popular SMIs, “Emma” is less concerned about her appearance and more concerned with making people smile. “Emma” shares selfies without makeup and filters, showing teenage girls that social media doesn’t always have to be about sharing your “best self”. This makes “Emma” more relatable and real to her fans. “Emma” has shared 504 Youtube videos and 715 posts to her Instagram (as of Nov 26, 2021), allowing fans to really feel like they know her.

Influencers like Emma Chamberlain provide teenage girls and aspiring influencers with hope that there is a possibility of achieving fame through social media. Zulli (2018) states, “so long as some Instagram users do profit from visibility and attention on the site, there exists the possibility for any user to capitalize on selfies and strategic product placements” (Zulli, p. 139). Instagram’s Creator account tools combined with the ability to take professional-looking photos allow more opportunity to become an influencer. However, receiving “the level of attention required of influencer status and necessary to become a valuable commodity” (Zulli, p.139) is not easy. According to Zulli (2018), “For maximum attention, Instagram experts encourage users to have a ‘shtick’ or a theme to set one’s account apart from the millions of images that Instagram is inundated with” (Zulli, p. 144). Chamberlain’s shtick is comedy. Chamberlain’s style has been so influential that “There is an entire subgenre of videos that mimic her style, and a host of YouTubers who talk, or edit, just like her” (Bromwich, 2019). This is an example of how influencers’ self-presentation has an impact on their followers’ self-presentation.
6.5 « Instagram and fashion magazines: The historical context»

Over the course of my analysis it became evident that Instagram influencers and their profiles are like modern day women’s magazines. They provide young women with guidance on how to look, act, and behave in ways that demonstrate “ideal” femininity. Influencers on Instagram draw from the categories highlighted in early women’s magazines as popular influencers can be seen to have a “schtick”, theme, (Zulli, 2018), “niche or field” (Khan, 2020). For example, the foodie, the world traveller, the fitness guru, the working mom, the fashionista, the party planner, the interior decorator, the wedding photographer, etc. (Zulli, 2018). Influencers focus on lifestyle and instructions that essentially surround informing their followers on how to live better, with many female influencers curiously highlighting domestic ideals. While magazines for “ladies” in late 19th century London were known for “patterns for embroidery, sheet music, recipes, advice on domestic and personal matters” (Drucker, 2018), influencers on Instagram today can often be seen posting images that display motherhood, cooking, decorating, personal relationships, and fashion trends.

McIntyre (2020) demonstrates how the ‘housewife ’ideal has re-emerged as an attractive identity through bloggers and influencers. Despite participants’ age, I identified many mom influencers and family accounts among the accounts participants are following. Some of these accounts include: @melbourneyummums, @adelaideyummum @taytumandoakley, @dbusby, and @abbieherbert. This suggests that an interest in the housewife ideal exists among young girls as well as an aspiration towards embodying this ideal. Grande perpetuates the housewife ideal in her single, Positions (2020), of which multiple updates were shared to her Instagram. The lyrics, “Switchin ’the positions for you (for you, ah). Cookin ’in the kitchen and I’m in the bedroom” (Grande, 2020a), combined with her recent marriage, demonstrate a conformity to the housewife ideal and imply that once you are married, you need to “switch positions” and embody the ideals associated with being a housewife, like cooking. In addition to cooking, the lyrics imply that becoming a housewife also entails being sexually available to your partner. The stereotypical notion of housewife is often considered a narrow view of women that is associated with femininity and in my view, potentially may diminish one’s agency.
Kendall Jenner sexualizes the domestic housewife ideal in her photoshoot with *Vogue Italia*. Fasanella (2019) explains how the main photo places Jenner’s “famous bum on full display”, and “All she wears is what appears to be yellow dishwashing gloves, sheer light brown knee-high stockings and drop earrings”. The photo brings to life a male fantasy of the domestic housewife at home cleaning, without any clothes on. However, this was ostensibly a fantasy of Kendall’s as well, as Kendall was quoted stating that "the shoot was one of her favorites ever” (Fasanella, 2019) and that “Dreams come true!” (Fasanella, 2019).

Naomi Wolf (1990) argues that “Most of our assumptions about the way women have always thought about ‘beauty’ date from no earlier than the 1830s, when the cult of domesticity was first consolidated and the beauty index invented”. According to Wolf (1990), in the early 1800s, new technologies were invented that enabled images of beautiful women to be reproduced and disseminated more widely. It was in the 1840s when “the first nude photographs of prostitutes were taken” and in mid-century when, “advertisements using images of ‘beautiful’ women first appeared” (Wolf, p. 15), along with the mass distribution of magazines intended for women. Emerging in the United States in the 19th century, women’s magazines were known for producing “a ‘natural’ idea of femininity: the domestic wife; the fashionable woman; the romancing and desirable girl” (Beetham, 1996), often positioning themselves through similar statements, such as, “Becoming the woman you are is a difficult project for which the magazine has characteristically provided recipes, patterns, narratives and models of the self” (Beetham, 1996). Thus, magazines introduced what Betty Friedan (1963) defines as the "feminine mystique”. The “feminine mystique” is “the idea that women were naturally fulfilled by devoting their lives to being housewives and mothers”
(Friedan, 1963). *Harper’s Bazaar* was founded in 1867 and was America’s first fashion magazine (Wikipedia, 2022a). Listed on the cover of its inaugural issue was the statement, “A repository of fashion, pleasure, and instruction” (Mooallem, 2016). *Beeton’s Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* was first published in 1852 and labelled “the first cheap magazine to be produced for women of the middle class” (Rappaport, 2001). It included “notes on cookery, fashion, and household management” (Rappaport, 2001). Other popular magazines at the time were *McCall’s* (1873), *Ladies Home Journal* (1883), and *Good Housekeeping* (1885) (“Women’s Magazines”, n.d.). Evidently, the focus of magazines intended for women at the time was on domesticity, fashion, beauty, and instruction (“Women’s Magazines”, n.d.). Women were portrayed in narrow roles and bombarded with “how-to’s” that promoted staying in the home, taking care of the family, and being a “good wife”.

Friedan (1963) argues that “the editorial decisions concerning women's magazines at the time were being made mostly by men, who insisted on stories and articles that showed women as either happy housewives or unhappy careerists”, enforcing domesticity. In the initial stage of mass media’s history, “media were managed exclusively by men”, which caused “The media images of men and women [to be] tailored to men’s preferences” (Davtyan-Gevorgyan, 2016). *Harper’s Bazaar* is one example. *Harper’s Bazaar* was founded by Harper & Brothers, a New York–based publishing firm run by brothers James, John, Joseph Wesley, and Fletcher Harper (Mooallem, 2016). The brothers’ goal was to create “a publication aimed at affluent women that operated as a kind of guide on how to live—and live well—in the modern world” (Mooallem, 2016). An article published in *Harper’s Bazaar*, celebrating the magazine’s 150th year anniversary depicts the early editions of the magazine, stating, “Alongside brisk reports on style and well-mannered instructions on how to tie a bow and pin a bun, there were sharp pieces of fiction and poetry and musings on family, work, and social mores” (Mooallem, 2016). Males were often founders and owners of women’s magazines and so males dictated magazine content and the repetition of images of the domestic housewife influencing women to embody a similar role. Feminist scholar Davtyan-Gevorgyan notes, “men were creating media images of men and women they
wished to see in reality” (Davtyan-Gevorgyan, 2016). Content offering women alternative representations of femininity was not often seen during this time period.

Instagram would appear to offer women agency, power, and control over their identity and how they present themselves. Unlike magazines in the past, women are given the freedom to choose how they look, which images they share, and who they share them with. Of course, Grande and Jenner are not actually housewives; “it is a staged role” (McIntyre, 2020). McIntyre (2020) states, “The traditional ‘housewife ’ideal was located in the private sphere of the home and the actions and behaviour associated with this ideal were dictated by social norms and traditions” (McIntyre, p. 68). The role we see Grande and Jenner playing relies on sharing as an economic practice (McIntyre, 2020). Rather than being seen as a celebration of patriarchal norms, postfeminism interprets this as “a source of power over it” (Bae, 2011). Liberated from the constraints of the past, Grande and Jenner demonstrate their “girl power” (McRobbie, 2008) by performing a version of femininity and translating it into an income.

Bae (2011) explains how the Spice Girls launched “the popular cultural version of girl power”, redirecting the “representation of girlhood” (Bae, p. 28). The Spice Girls represented girl power, popularizing the “sexualized, individualistic, external beauty-oriented consumerist attitude” (Bae, p. 28) that we see today. Grande’s self-presentation is very similar to her predecessors. Apple Music describes Grande as “Instantly recognizable thanks to her signature ponytail, cat ears, babydoll dresses, and breezy self-confidence, her slyly sexual personal brand has, like that of the Spice Girls before her, become an iconic image of young female power” (Apple Music, n.d.). In the article, “What I Want My Daughter to Learn From Ariana Grande”, Laura Wong-Thompson (2018) explains her experience as a mom, listening to Grande's song “Thank you, next” for the first time. She praises the song, describing it as “a breath of fresh air”. She explains how Grande “matter of factly reflects on past relationships that didn’t work out” and “She’s able to laugh and even thank her exes” (Wong-Thompson, 2018). She describes the song as encompassing "growth, hope, gratitude, healing, and moving on” (Wong-Thompson, 2018), noting powerfully, “I hope my daughter will have the same resilience, and with time, also encompass these traits” (Wong-Thompson, 2018). In 2016, Grande tweeted “I’m tired of living in a world where women are mostly referred to as a
man’s past, present, or future PROPERTY” (Hello Magazine, 2015). Grande presents a version of herself here that may empower young women to be independent and to celebrate their femininity and freedom to choose who they want to be.

6.6 « Insta-models »

Despite the transition away from print-magazines, we continue to praise supermodels as representations of ideal beauty in Western societies and young girls, in particular, remain fascinated by their images. In 2018, Forbes crowned Kendall Jenner the highest paid model, “pulling in an estimated $22.5 million pretax, thanks to contracts with Estee Lauder, Adidas, Calvin Klein and more” (Henderson, 2018); “In 2021, Kendall remains the highest-paid model, earning herself a whopping $40 million annually” (Merkl, 2021). Other top models that appeared in the data are Gigi Hadid (20% of sample following), Bella Hadid (20% of sample following), Cara DeLevigne (7% of sample following), and Hailey Bieber (7% of sample following). Zendaya is also a high-fashion model who has been featured in multiple campaigns for luxury brands such as Dolce & Gabbana and Maison Valentino. This demonstrates that there is a persisting interest in model culture among young teenage girls.

The ability to follow professional models, photographers, and magazines, has encouraged the rise of the Instagram model. Instagram photos have become so advanced that it is often hard to tell the difference between professional models/photos and Instagram models/photos. An “Instagram model”, or “insta-model”, is an individual who takes photos posing as if they are a model, with the intentions of sharing the photos on Instagram. These photos appear
professional and as if they could easily be featured in a magazine, however they are typically staged by the individual, or the “model” who is posing in the shot. Madison Bailey provides an example as she labels herself as an Instagram model in her caption. Fig 8 shows Madison posing in a bikini on the beach with a friend. The captions reads: “He’s getting the hang of the *insta model* thing” (Bailey, 2021a). Being an Instagram model has come to hold an implicit criteria that requires posing in a bikini, positioning the female body as the central focus and as an object intended to be consumed by the audience. Madelyn Cline legitimizes this criteria as she frequently shares photos of herself modelling in swimsuits in an effort to promote her swim collection, Aro Swim. Both Madison and Madelyn use Instagram to promote OBX, however, they also used Instagram to debut as Instagram models. Their roles on OBX and their status as Instagram models has helped them launch careers as professional models, who are now featured on the covers of international magazines.

All of the female influencers in the top ten within this research have been featured as cover girls for top magazines and readily share their cover stories on Instagram. The list of cover stories featuring these women is extensive. To name a few examples: Kendall Jenner, Ariana Grande, and Zendaya share their cover stories for Vogue (Vogue USA, Vogue Australia, Vogue Japan, Vogue Hong Kông, Vogue Italia), Jennifer Aniston for Interview Magazine, Madelyn Cline for Harper’s Bazaar Vietnam, and Madison Bailey for Glamour UK. Even male influencer Rudy Pankow shares his cover story with Rival Magazine LA. Being featured on the cover of a magazine remains an emblem of success and a symbol of status and importance. In this research, the strategy of self-presentation seems to be used by many influencers to manage how they are perceived by their followers. By sharing cover stories, the influencers confirm their success with followers and continue to foster their reputation as legitimate celebrities. After all, anybody can pose as if they are a celebrity and/or successful on Instagram. Magazine covers feature only the most known celebrities who have been deemed worthy of recognition by the publication and its staff.

To make a profit, magazines have to grab readers’ attention, and as Kitch (2001) argues, the “Key to that accomplishment [is] the cover, which declare[s] the magazine’s personality and promise” (Kitch, p. 4). Magazines have a vested interest in the people
they choose to highlight on their covers as these peoples’ images not only represent the magazine and what it stands for, they also determine the magazine’s potential for capital gain. It was in the 1890s when the cover first became a selling tool (Kitch, 2001). Despite the fact that “photography was beginning to appear regularly in turn-of-the-century newspapers, the majority of magazines continued to use illustration on their covers because they were dealing in ideals rather than reality” (Kitch, p. 5). At the time, magazine covers that featured women, featured illustrations of women’s faces, rather than photographs of real women. It was thought that “The face of a woman could represent both a specific type of female beauty and a ‘style ’that conveyed model attributes—youth, innocence, sophistication, modernity, upward mobility” (Kitch, p.5). Thus, the earliest cover girls, weren’t actually real girls at all, but figments of an illustrator’s imagination who were drawn into existence. The illustrations of women on the covers of magazines were perceived as representations of “ideal women” and were intended to be “prototypes after which [people] could pattern themselves” (Kitch, p. 7).

Kitch (2001) notes, “In 1915, when Irving Berlin wrote a song about a young man pining away for the ideal ‘girl’, his title located her where most Americans would expect to find her—on the magazine cover” (Kitch, p. 5). The cover ideals constructed by illustrators became associated with individual magazines, who then used these ideals to develop “distinctive styles” and form their “editorial identities” (Kitch, p. 5). Individuals who appear on the cover of magazines today continue to represent the magazine’s identity as well as who and what the magazine considers “ideal”. By sharing their cover stories on Instagram, the influencers continue to grant magazines the power to perpetuate constructed ideals.

The presence of supermodels on Instagram allows model culture to seep into Instagram’s culture. Kendall Jenner is both a professional model and an Instagram model. When Kendall is not modelling professionally, she is modelling for Instagram and for her followers. In most of the posts where Jenner is modelling for Instagram, she is posing in a bikini in various vacation locales. For quite some time now, it has been assumed that in order to be a model, you must be thin and willing to be photographed wearing very little clothing, with the focus being on physical appearance and your body. This assumption has carried over to Instagram and has been mapped onto Instagram models.
In the Netflix series, My Unorthodox Life, Julia Haart, CEO of Elite World Group, “the largest conglomerate of modelling agencies in the world” (Jenkins, et. al., 2021), gives us what she calls the “global picture”. Haart states,

It used to be the casting agencies and the creative directors. So if they didn’t like your look, or they thought you were too fat, or too this or too that, finished. If we can help our talent create their own brands, meaning, not bikini shots, but who they are, what they’re passionate about, what makes them unique and individual, so that the day they turn 35 and can no longer walk a runway, they’ve got 10 million followers, a sunscreen line, then it’s the casting agents and the creative directors who are chasing after them… it is a massive shift in the power dynamic (Jenkins, et. al., 2021).

Haart’s claims represent a transformation in the modelling world and imply that we are transitioning away from a structure that oppresses women. Instagram offers young women opportunities that were not available in the past. By engaging in practices of self-branding, young women can now establish their own brand and become a valuable asset to a company. We are moving towards a shift in the power structure, where women are given agency to express themselves and choose how they want to present themselves. Haart’s claims imply that rather than conforming to traditional ideals associated with femininity, Instagram empowers women to create their own unique brand. The photos of the self shared by the female influencers in the top ten fail to confirm Haart’s claims. An overwhelming amount of the influencers’ posts exemplify “bikini shots” and demonstrate an understanding that associates being thin with being beautiful (see Figure 9).

Being an Instagram model implicitly requires putting the body on display as if it were an exhibition. This comes as no surprise, as Jenner is known for being the leader of insta-models (Lee, 2021). One of the main trends we see today on Instagram is an exhibition of the female body, where the body is exposed and posed as if it were a consumer product. Female influencers have a tendency to celebrate their femininity by posting images that accentuate and/or sexualize parts of the female body. According to two Instagram users who participated in a study done by Caldeira, Bauwel, & Ridder
(2020), there is “an uncomfortable temptation to share such sexualized content to gain

Figure 9 Kendall, Madelyn, Madison, and Emma “insta-model” in bikinis.

popularity” (Megan, p. 7), and, “the pressure to be a naked lady on Instagram is very real” (Ndiza, p. 7). The abundance of bikini photos shared by the influencers in the top ten highlights this pressure. In addition to bikini photos, Jenner in particular demonstrates the drive to share sexualized content. Fasanella (2019) describes one of Jenner’s posts stating, “Kendall Jenner is known for being unafraid of showing off her runway-ready body, so it wasn’t exactly a surprise when a racy photo of the supermodel
wearing basically nothing but sandals appeared on her Instagram feed today”. Photos like this pressure young girls to succumb to unrealistic societal standards regarding women’s bodies and rather than celebrate femininity, they work to code femininity narrowly and ultimately, oppressively. They imply that women should be unafraid to pose naked, or half naked in front of a camera, but only if you look a certain way, and that sharing these photos to your Instagram can help you gain attention and recognition. If Kendall Jenner does it and in turn receives accolades from followers, magazines, and news articles, why shouldn’t you?

Instagram’s Community Guidelines insist that content must be “appropriate” and restrict nudity, “with some exceptions, like photos of post-mastectomy scarring and women actively breastfeeding. Nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is OK, too” (Instagram, 2018). These restrictions gave birth to the content subscription service known as OnlyFans. Like Instagram, OnlyFans is a platform intended for sharing photos and videos. The difference is that OnlyFans allows users to charge a monthly subscription fee and does not restrict nudity. In order to view content on OnlyFans, you must subscribe to users’ channels and pay their monthly fee. Many influencers have taken to OnlyFans as a means of making money, where they share images that Instagram restricts. OnlyFans breaks the boundaries Instagram has set in place and essentially encourages nudity and pornography. The website advocates, “You could earn between $1,499 and $7,495 per month” (OnlyFans, n.d.), simply by sharing images people will pay to see. Thus, OnlyFans has become popular because of its lax policies surrounding explicit content. While 13-16-year-old girls are not likely considering OnlyFans at the
moment, Instagram is a gateway to OnlyFans. Many influencers use Instagram to promote their OnlyFans accounts and encourage their followers to check out their OnlyFans account for more content. This encourages nudity or proactiveness on social media and normalizes sharing this type of content. The more comfortable young girls and women get with sharing intimate photos of their bodies on Instagram, the more likely they are to be driven to OnlyFans and to create an account.

Instagram influencer and Netflix series celebrity, Francesca Farago, explains the difference between Instagram and OnlyFans in a recent Youtube video shared to her Instagram story. As a star in the first season of the Netflix hit reality tv series Too Hot To Handle, and owner of the swimsuit line, Farago the Label, Francesca is known for sharing sexy selfies. In the video, a fan asks Francesca, “Why are you not uploading hot pics?” (Farago, 2021). Francesca responds,

Instagram hates me. Every time I upload anything, lingerie or a bikini on my story, it gets removed. I have so many community guidelines violations...So, I don’t post anything on my Instagram that’s sexy. If you want anything sexy, I have an OnlyFans account that's literally sexy pics of me...Spain pics, Paris pics, anywhere I travel to, water pics, wet t-shirt pics, shower pics, like the whole everything you could ever want to see is on my OnlyFans (Farago, 2021).

Sexy selfies are apart of Francesca’s brand and she has transformed her body into a consumer product through the images she shares. People expect to see Francesca posing half-naked on Instagram. Allaste & Tiidenberg (2015) argue that “the contemporary striptease culture has normalized talking about sex” and celebrities and influencers have normalized posting sexy selfies. Allaste & Tiidenberg (2015) note, “Sharing erotic photos in a (semi)public sphere is concurrently not experienced as perverted or marginalized by an increasing number of youths”. Sharing photos that expose intimate parts of the body has become acceptable and normal among young people on social media. Influencers like Francesca have seen tremendous success by doing so. Francesca is popular among teenage girls. It seems that her success continues to popularize these types of images.

VSCO is an app that I identified as being particularly popular among teenage girls. I found that many younger users provide a link to their VSCO account profiles in their Instagram bios. VSCO is similar to Instagram in many ways. Like Instagram, VSCO is a
mobile app designed for photo and video sharing. Both apps provide users with photo and video editing tools, preset filters, and a profile for sharing content. However, VSCO places more emphasis on editing photos and videos by providing a greater variety of filters and editing tools to enhance content. VSCO also does not offer the like and comment tools. Tiedemann (2019) describes “VSCO Teens” as appearing “surprisingly eager to sexualize themselves in aspirational Internet profiles”. VSCO has become an app where teenage girls share photos of themselves modelling in bikinis and feel more comfortable doing so. Tiedemann (2019) states, “If your VSCO Teen owns a bikini, then you will find her wearing it on [VSCO]”. This is because other users are unable to like or comment on posts and parents are less likely to be on VSCO than they are to be on Instagram or Facebook, for example. Tiedemann (2019) explains how “VSCO Teens see cues on VSCO and Instagram and YouTube and whatnot, incorporate them into virtual and real lives, and then reinforce them within their friend groups”. Teenage girls model their behaviour on VSCO after Instagram influencers and insta-models. They share bikini photos in an attempt to understand their identity, femininity, and how they fit in with the rest of the women they see online.

According to Wells, Horwitz & Seetharaman (2021), “Facebook’s researchers identified the over-sexualization of girls as something that weighs on the mental health of the app’s users”. It appears that for many, it is not men pressuring women to post sexualized content, it is women pressuring women. As more and more young women share bikini photos, more and more young women seem to feel pressured to do so. In explaining what it’s like being a young woman with Instagram, Daisy Buchanan (2015) states,

Being a woman is bloody difficult. Everything we encounter somehow conspires to wreck our confidence. Our heads are filled with examples of who to be, what is perfect, and how we fail to measure up. Anything that we can claw back and use to rebuild our battered self esteem has to be a good thing. But when we live in a society that constantly reduces us back to our bodies, and uses that as a way to corral and limit us, are the bikini selfies helping or hurting? We might think that we’re in control of what we’re showing, but we’re still inviting people to judge us on our bodies (Buchanan, 2015).
Buchanan (2015) makes a good point. Sharing a bikini selfie may feel empowering by granting women control over how their body is depicted and agency over what they choose to show. However, it also invites people to focus on your body and to critique your body. Putting the body on display reduces you to your body. According to a study done in the UK, Italy, and Spain on children ages 11-16, “the normative pattern for feminine visual identity is increasingly sexualized” (Mascheroni, Vincent, & Jimenez, 2015). Brooks (2017) explains how the study indicates that “there is a connection between the posting of sexual selfies to craft a provocative image online and the female participant’s search for popularity and social inclusion” (Brooks, 2017). Constantly being surrounded by insta-models in bikinis with “perfect” bodies forces teenage girls to compare themselves and persuades them to believe that this is normal and that they should be able to embody these ideals as well. Buchanan (2015) states, “I can’t compete – but looking at the pictures makes me feel as though I ought to be trying”.

6.7  « Reconstructing what the sample girls saw »

Over the course of analysis, it became clear that influencers' popularity ebbs and flows among young girls. Many influencers that were followed at the beginning of analysis either lost participants as followers or gained participants as followers by the end of analysis. Tables 4 and 5 show the comparison between the top ten influencers on May 5, 2021, and the top ten influencers three months later, on August 17, 2021. While all the influencers gained followers in general, some became more or less popular among participants. Ariana Grande and Kendall Jenner started out as the most popular influencers, with 46.7% of participants following their accounts. Three months later, Grande and Jenner dropped down to the bottom of the list to numbers seven and eight, as each lost a participant as a follower, bringing them to 40% of participants following. Outer Banks’ Rudy Pankow and Chase Stokes gained a participant as a follower, allowing Pankow to climb to the number one spot in the top ten and replace Grande as the most popular influencer. Jennifer Aniston, Emma Chamberlain, and the OBX account also became more popular, as each gained a participant as a follower. Madison Bailey lost two participants as followers, which knocked her out of the top ten and allowed Olivia Rodrigo to replace her as the ninth most popular influencer.
The Top Ten Influencers – May 5, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Account/Name</th>
<th># of Followers</th>
<th>% of Participants Following</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>arianagrande</td>
<td>232M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>kendalljenner</td>
<td>161M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>zendaya</td>
<td>92.8M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>madelyncline</td>
<td>6.1M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>rudeth (Rudy Pankow)</td>
<td>3.4M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>jenniferaniston</td>
<td>36.5M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>emmachamberlain</td>
<td>12.8M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>hichasestokes (Chase Stokes)</td>
<td>4.5M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>madisonbaileybabe</td>
<td>3.4M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>obx</td>
<td>2.7M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 The top ten influencers followed by participants as of May 5, 2021.

The Top Ten Influencers – August 17, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Account/Name</th>
<th># of Followers</th>
<th>% of Participants Following</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rudeth (Rudy Pankow)</td>
<td>5.8M</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>zendaya</td>
<td>104M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>jenniferaniston</td>
<td>37.8M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>emmachamberlain</td>
<td>13.5M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>madelyncline</td>
<td>9.9M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>hichasestokes (Chase Stokes)</td>
<td>6.6M</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>arianagrande</td>
<td>260M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>kendalljenner</td>
<td>182M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>oliviarodrigo</td>
<td>15.9M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>obx</td>
<td>4.6M</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 The top ten influencers followed by participants as of August 17, 2021.

Olivia Rodrigo is an 18-year-old American singer-songwriter and actress whose fame has recently exploded globally following her debut single “Drivers License” (2021), which quickly topped music charts and allowed Rodrigo a breakthrough in the music industry (Wikipedia, 2022b). Rodrigo’s album Sour was released shortly after her debut single and has contributed to her continued success. Rodrigo’s music encapsulates the experience of growing up for young women and teenage girls today. She describes the trials and tribulations girls face on social media, heartbreak and loss of a relationship, and the whirlwind of emotions that come along with being a teenage girl. Olivia’s song “jealousy, jealousy” provides a clear picture of what it’s like being a teenage girl with Instagram. The opening verse begins with the lines: “I kinda wanna throw my phone across the room/ ‘Cause all I see are girls too good to be true/ With paper-white teeth and
perfect bodies/ Wish I didn't care” (Rodrigo, 2021). Olivia is describing a common experience brought on by Instagram use. When young girls scroll through their Newsfeeds, they are typically surrounded by images of other young girls and women who look “too good to be true”. The tendency to post only our best photos distorts our perceptions of reality and we are persuaded to believe that what we see on Instagram is a true representation of other people and of ourselves. Instagram allows us to forget about the work that goes on behind the scenes to produce and edit our photos and limits our focus to being on the end result, or end product. We are only given access to what others want us to see, the version of ourselves “living our best lives”. This drives us to compare ourselves and our own self-presentation to others’.

The chorus of “jealousy, jealousy” describes comparison on Instagram as a negative experience, shedding light on the way teenage girls feel. “Olivia” states, “Co-comparison is killin' me slowly/ I think, I think too much/ 'Bout kids who don't know me/ I’m so sick of myself/ I’d rather be, rather be/ Anyone, anyone else” (Rodrigo, 2021). When we are constantly surrounded by images of beautiful people, we can’t help but compare ourselves. “Olivia” explains how this can lead to wanting to be “anyone else”, anyone but yourself. According to researchers at Instagram, “Comparisons on Instagram can change how young women view and describe themselves” (Wells, Horowitz & Seetharaman, 2021). The comparisons young girls make between themselves and other people can creep into their everyday lives and impact how they feel about themselves, view, describe, and present themselves. “Olivia” describes the culture on Instagram and how users present a version of themselves that others will not only admire but want to embody: “All your friends are so cool, you go out every night/ In your daddy's nice car, yeah, you're livin' the life/ Got a pretty face, pretty boyfriend, too/ I wanna be you so bad, and I don't even know you” (Rodrigo, 2021). The culture on Instagram has evolved into being one that praises wealth and “perfect” appearances. For many, Instagram has become a place for sharing images that allows you to boast yours, or your families’, wealth, perfect relationships, and anything that might make your followers jealous of you. “Olivia” states, "All I see is what I should be/ Happier, prettier, jealousy, jealousy” (Rodrigo, 2021). Even celebrities like Olivia Rodrigo, who so many people admire, can’t avoid comparing themselves to others on Instagram and find themselves wishing they
could be someone else. It seems, Instagram is potentially teaching young girls to be unsatisfied with their appearances and to focus on what they don’t have, rather than what they do have. This may negatively compromise young girls' development by fostering a tendency to see only their shortcomings.
Chapter 7

7 « Conclusion »

I was the same age as my research participants when Instagram first launched. At that time, Instagram was almost a completely different app. There weren’t any influencers and celebrities hadn’t quite made their profiles available and known to the public. We took photos on blackberries and reveled in our ability to share blurry photos with our closest friends. We applied filters that made our photos look orange and we thought it was the coolest thing ever. I have been an avid Instagram user ever since, watching the app grow and evolve and watching myself grow and evolve through the content I have shared. The content teenage girls share on Instagram today has also evolved, becoming much more mature, with girls appearing older than they are, compared to the content shared in Instagram’s early days. This may be due to the fact that teenage girls growing up with Instagram today are constantly surrounded by ads, celebrities and influencers with seemingly perfect bodies, living seemingly perfect lives. In my experience, this tendency has shifted the culture on Instagram and the expectations for Instagram content. If I look up to the influencers I follow, then I assume many teenage girls must be too. Most teenage girls are much more impressionable and at a more emotional place in their lives. When you’re a teenager, you feel things the most, you soak things up like a sponge and you become consumed with the people around you and the new relationships you begin to form. Instagram adds another layer, complicating the journey to self-discovery. With Instagram becoming an integral part of teenagers’ daily lives, the content they are surrounded by now plays a big role in how they come to know the world and understand themselves.

Teenagers often learn how to present themselves on Instagram through the content they follow, especially through the influencers they follow. They begin to develop an understanding of themselves and who they want to be seen as through the images they construct of themselves. This is how self-presentation on Instagram relates to identity formation. Influencers have an impact on both, as teenage girls can latch onto certain ideals influencers present and strive to embody these ideals in their own photos. However, Instagram has become so integrated with professional processes and industries
that things are taken out of the hands of teenage girls and beyond what they can imagine. The thought of girls looking at highly professionalized, impossible to reach images but striving to anyways, is something that needs further consideration. Part of the fantasy is that you can reach this impossible to reach image. Because the potential exists to achieve “insta-fame” and targeted ads recruiting micro-celebrities are becoming common, the drive to become an influencer, or to present yourself like an influencer is growing.

Instagram’s youngest female users are understudied. Teenage female socialization in the era of social media has been much commented on, and the scholarly literature on the topic has been growing. However, empirical studies of females in the early teen years, ages 13 to 16, have been few. This may be due in part to ethical challenges involved with interviewing minors at sensitive moments in their lives about personal issues. To fill the gap, I chose to focus on this age group and rather than interview participants, I chose to follow their Instagram accounts to get an inside look at the accounts teenage girls follow and the content they are surrounded by. My method is unique because it allowed me to avoid ethical challenges that come with research involving minors, while respecting the privacy and autonomy of participants. By following participants and closely examining the lists of accounts they follow, I was able to gain a number of insights into how the world looks on Instagram to teenage girls. The limitations of this research are that the sample size, 15, may be considered small to some in extrapolation of findings. In addition, without analyzing the content shared by participants or interviewing them, it is difficult to prove whether the influencers’ self-presentation has a direct impact on participants self-presentation on Instagram. It needs be said that my findings are suggestive rather than conclusive.

Instagram influencers and micro-celebrities has been a growing area of scholarly interest, yet the crucial role influencers play in the socialization of young teens has rarely been explored empirically. Using my method to identify the most popular influencers followed by a sample of teenage girls allowed me to consider why these influencers are so popular, specifically what about their self-presentation has allowed them to become so popular among teenage girls on Instagram, and what ideals do they encourage. Repetition and patterns found in the influencers’ self-presentation allowed me to explore what the
influencers represent to teenage girls, what might stand out to teenage girls, what they might admire and strive to imitate.

In my understanding, Instagram appears to persuade some users to romanticize their lives and to present idealized appearances. Many teenage girls today are growing up comparing themselves to images that are intentionally constructed, edited and, highly professionalized. Popular influencers and celebrities’ self-presentation on Instagram causes social comparison among teenage girls (Wells, Horowitz & Seetharaman, 2021), resulting in some teenage girls potentially assessing their value and worth in relation to the attractiveness, wealth and success of celebrities. The overwhelming presence of celebrities and influencers on Instagram may pressure some teenage girls to live up to the standards set by celebrity images. This appears to have been substantiated by the rise of the “insta-model”, as many teen girls strive to present themselves similarly to popular, successful women on Instagram presenting themselves.

Wells et al. (2021) discuss how teenage girls on Instagram are under pressure to look, act, and behave in a certain way. Clinical social worker, Shevon Jones states, “What girls often see on social media are girls with slimmer waists, bigger butts and hips, and it can lead them to have body image issues” (Wells et al., 2021). While there are many different body sizes and types on Instagram, all of the women in the top ten in this research are thin. The lack of diversity in body types highlights the pressure placed on young women to be thin. In this research, the female influencers in the top ten are in employment partnerships and are paid to promote products, services and images that reinforce stereotypical perceptions of femininity and expectations surrounding women’s interests and values. There appears to be a heavy focus on the promotion of beauty and skincare products, activewear and swimsuits, cooking products, and fragrances subtly imply that being beautiful requires purchasing products and conforming to traditional gender roles. Femininity is often traditionally associated with consumption and teenage girls are encouraged to focus on their appearance, their body, and practices of beautification and care (McIntyre, 2020). The findings reveal how teenage girls are constantly surrounded by self-improvement ads that draw attention to ostensible flaws in their appearance that they may not have noticed before. The ads appear to persuade girls to purchase products they may not need and potentially foster a belief that being a woman
requires being beautiful and that being beautiful requires purchasing beauty products and services.

McRobbie (2008) also warns against the “usage or instrumentalization of feminism” in popular media, arguing that progressive principles can be transformed into “new forms of constraint” (p. 537). The female influencers in the top ten in this research exhibit the values associated with post-feminism or “popular feminism” (McRobbie, 2008) by celebrating pleasure, leisure, independence, and the wage-earning capacity of women. While this celebration of femininity can be empowering, it can also be constraining. Influencers’ posts can predominately be defined as success updates, as they constantly update fans on their achievements. The rate at which influencers post success updates implies that their success is continually growing at unprecedented speeds. This may be intimidating to some as it may result in followers potentially questioning how one human being can accomplish so much in so little time, creating pressure for followers to be able to do the same. The inability to see behind-the-scenes of influencers’ posts skews “the labor, discipline, and capital necessary” to emulate the standards influencers portray in their posts. Influencers perform an “idealized view of the situation” (Goffman, 1956) as they focus on highlighting their successes at an unnatural speed.

McRobbie (2008) is concerned with the ways in which popular/commercial culture use the values associated with post-feminism or “popular feminism” (McRobbie, p. 532) as a means of gaining teenage girls’ attention and trust. Influencers and influencer marketing provides corporate culture with an opportunity to not only target teenage girls, but to gain their trust. By acting through popular influencers, corporate culture can impress certain values, opinions, behaviours, thoughts, and actions onto young girls’ developing minds and sense of self. This research demonstrates that through influencers, teenage girls have become an extremely accessible market.

The findings reveal that influencer and celebrity images are potentially creating ideals that conform to traditional understandings of beauty and femininity. This analysis demonstrates how influencer accounts are the modern-day version of mass magazines intended for women and how the ideals established by women’s magazines of the past have resurfaced through influencers such as the domestic housewife. The domestic housewife ideal has resurfaced and has been reimagined through influencers. While
women of the past were often confined to the role of housewife in the home and deterred from entering the workforce, popular women on Instagram who promote this role do so as a means of increasing their popularity online as well as the potential to make a profit. The wage-earning capacity of women was a threat to patriarchy in the past. Women on Instagram today are celebrated for their ability to make money.

By examining the ways in which some of the popular female influencers express their femininity, this research demonstrates how influencers draw from ideals associated with beauty and femininity that were constructed by women’s magazines in the past. While magazines continue to manufacture images of ideal beauty and culturally encode and ingrain specific beauty ideals in consumers (Englis et al., 1994), this research reveals how these ideals are at times, carried over to Instagram through influencers. As Buchanan (2015) states, “Being a woman is bloody difficult”. We don’t need to complicate the experience for young women by bombarding them with unrealistic expectations surrounding how a woman should look, act, and behave”. The popular accounts teenage girls follow on Instagram have an impact on and potentially influence teenage girls’ decision-making as well as how they perceive the world. This research has important implications for the education and socialization of teenage girls. Teenage girls need to be informed about Instagram, influencers and the work behind the scenes that goes into creating or constructing these alluring, yet not always real images. Teenage girls may benefit from a better understanding of various types of accounts. We should encourage them to consider following accounts that can guide them in the right direction and make them feel good about themselves. We need to pay more attention to the growing impact popular influencers have on Instagram’s youngest female followers’ sense of self, their developing minds, and identities.
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