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## Investigating Identity Development and “Finsta” Use Amongst Emerging Adults

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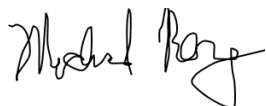
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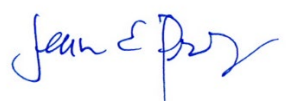
By

Sara Holsing

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Discipline in Psychology and the Elizabethtown College Honors Program

May 1, 2020

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Investigating Identity Development and “Finsta” Use Amongst Emerging Adults

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### Abstract

Finstas, which stands for “fake Instagram,” are a new type of social media. Past research has found that self-presentation and social comparison are important on social media and may have implications for Finstas use and identity development for college-aged adults. In our first study, we hypothesized that social media self-presentation would relate to the content posted on Finstas, the current state of a participants' identity, and what comparison style they engaged with most on their public Instagram. One hundred twelve college-aged participants took an online survey and answered questions to four scales and also a Finsta survey created by the principal investigator that asked about their Finsta use. We found that deep self-presentation significantly related to the sad and angry content posted and supported our first and second hypotheses. This aligns with previous research where self-presentation was considered important for having an online account. Self-presentation did not, however, significantly relate to identity clarity or the type of comparison style engaged with. This could have occurred because another variable could have influenced the relationship between deep self-presentation and identity clarity. In our second study, we investigated if followers of Finsta accounts believed Finstas users to be authentic in their posting. Thirty participants took an online survey containing a Second Finsta Survey and we found that there was a significant difference in Finsta followers who believed that Finsta users are authentic in their content posted. Future research should investigate if Finstas are conducive to healthy identity development amongst emerging adults to recommend appropriate usage and amount of usage.

*Keywords:* Instagram, social media, identity, emerging adults.

### **Investigating identity development and “Finsta” use amongst emerging adults**

Since the invention of the Internet, methods of communication have changed drastically. Social networking sites allows everyone to post about their daily lives which can have consequences for users and have implications for identity development (Yang, Holden, Carter, & Webb, 2018). Instagram is a popular social networking site based around pictures and captions (Moreau, 2019). This specific site has implications for college students, who are in a time of transition and identity development, comparing themselves to what they see amongst their peers and making assessments. Specifically, the more Instagram users interact with the platform, the more they are at risk to experience reduced self-esteem, depression, and dissatisfaction with their bodies (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2018). This is driven by social media social comparison.

In contrast, there has been a new presence of Instagram accounts called a “Finsta” account. According to Forsey (n.d.), “Finsta” is a nickname that stands for “fake Instagram.” On these accounts, users post content that is more unfiltered and authentic to a much smaller audience they select. Their username and profile picture are not normally associated with their true identity. Sometimes this can be because of employer surveillance (Molina, 2017). Others may have an account for privacy and to only self-disclose embarrassing and authentic content with trusted friends (Forsey, n.d.). The presence of “Finstas” contradicts the perception that social media profiles are truly authentic and portray one’s entire life accurately. Moreover, there may be implications for identity development underlying the impression that people cannot truly be themselves on their main Instagram accounts and that Finstas are appropriate outlets for judgment-free development.

### **Social Media**

Social media sites are one of the most frequently used platforms on the Internet currently because of how accessible and omnipresent they are (Hou, Xiong, Jiang, Song, & Wang, 2019). Social media involves many internet-based platforms that help to facilitate electronic communication and the sharing of ideas, opinions, and content such as videos, audio, and photos (Drouin, Reining, Flanagan, Carpenter, & Toscos, 2018). There are many sites for users to choose from. One of the most popular sites for younger age groups is Instagram. This platform is very visually focused and has implications for social comparison amongst emerging adults.

**Social Comparison.** Social comparison occurs when people compare themselves to others to learn about their own abilities and attitudes (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison is used frequently when there is no objective standard and one feels uncertain about one's own abilities (Festinger, 1954). There are two methods of comparison that have implications for ways of thinking and how those ways may affect self-esteem and mental health: comparison of opinions and comparison of abilities.

Comparison of opinions amongst emerging adults is associated with more introspective reflection (Yang, Holden, Carter, & Webb, 2018). This type of comparison causes one to seek more information and discover the self with openness in conjunction with an active undertaking of discovering one's own beliefs (Yang et al., 2018). This leaves room for mistakes during exploration and forgiving oneself. Additionally, comparison of opinion prompts emerging adults to gather information on others so they can make informed decisions, not judgments, and discuss and persuade others when there are social gaps if need be (Festinger, 1954). This information is relevant to the presence of Finstas and how they are used since the types of content posted can have implications for influencing identity development.

On the contrary, comparison of abilities is associated with competition with others (Yang et al., 2018). When an individual is engaged with this style, it causes them to view other comparison targets as competition against their own abilities (Park & Baek, 2018). In order to be on par with other competitors, individuals may try to engage in tactics like practicing to increase their abilities against others (Yang et al., 2018). Additionally, this comparison style has been associated with lower self-esteem amongst individuals (Yang et al., 2018). Although this has been examined with other platforms like Facebook, which is similar to Instagram, this has not been examined on Instagram itself which is significant since the main purpose of the platform is to share visuals with other users and has the younger user demographic I am seeking to investigate. Seeing other people and the daily events of their lives may lead to feelings of competition and the comparison of abilities since most people post pictures of achievements such as new relationship statuses, academic accomplishments, and even physical appearance goals.

In terms of physical appearance, this area is particularly competitive and popular for social comparison to occur on social media networking sites. Huang, Lin, and Zhang (2019) found people who are involved in programs such as Weight Watchers may establish goals in the beginning of their weight loss journeys and reach out to social networks for support through social media platforms. This may be helpful in the beginning when they are unsure of attaining their goals.

As people become closer to their goals and surround themselves with people with similar progress and goals to their own, social comparison and feelings of competition may emerge and people in the support networks may be viewed as competition. Furthermore, these feelings of competition may drive people to bring perceived competitors down and to sabotage their journey as they try to achieve their own goals better and faster (Huang et al., 2019). Therefore,



appearance-focused achievements, such as weight loss, may be prevalent on social media platforms (e.g., a public-facing main Instagram account) and elicit social comparison amongst people who find competition in these groups.

**Self-presentation.** Self-presentation is extremely prevalent and central to social media. According to Baumeister (1982), self-presentation is used when people desire to communicate an image or information about themselves to other people. Social media provides a venue to update friends, family, and the whole world on one's status, opinions, photos of current events, and much more. It is also easily accessible and inherently requires users to create a self-presentation of themselves since they are posting content for others to see.

There are various types of self-presentation. According to Yang, Holden, and Carter (2017), self-presentation can be positive, authentic, or deep. Positive self-presentation is when users highlight their strengths and therefore can be proud of the characteristics, which has been associated with high self-esteem and higher identity clarity (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2017). This is one thing that needs to be examined specifically with Instagram profiles, though, given that Instagram has been known by users to contain polished "highlight reels" of things going on in a person's life but may not typically address behind-the-scenes daily struggles. This can have implications of possible development of depressive symptoms and even identity distress if Instagram's "highlight reel" nature causes users to compare themselves.

Authentic self-presentation includes users creating a self-presentation on their current situation in life without worrying about others' comments or judgments about it. This type of presentation has been associated with being more mindful and therefore more accepting of themselves (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2017). Yang, Holden, and Carter (2017) found those who are more authentic in their self-presentation report less identity distress than others compared to

those who participate in deep online self-presentation because they are more mindful and have higher self-esteem. Additionally, more mindful individuals are more accepting and less judgmental of others and themselves.

Finally, there is deep self-presentation. Deep self-presentation involves users divulging many emotions, feelings, and flaws about themselves and has been associated with lower self-esteem since this can lead to judging oneself negatively (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2017). This research has given insights on how these self-presentations may interact with mental health where Facebook is concerned. Over the decade, Facebook's audience has changed, and a majority of this audience do not have dual accounts (e.g., users just have one account for themselves). This research is still important for considering the content of the new trend "Finsta trend" in which users may consider themselves able to be more authentic and "real" about themselves and their everyday lives on their "Finsta" account versus their main Instagram account.

Online self-presentation has been found to be impactful and crucial for emerging adults because of the transitions that they face. Online self-presentations are integral for transitions to high school, college, and adulthood because emerging adults are learning who they are and how their peers will accept them. Making connections and creating friendships has shown to help buffer students from decreasing levels of self-esteem because they have online social medias to maintain their friendships (Yang & Bradford Brown, 2016). Additionally, authentic, deep, and positive online self-presentations can be related to increased self-esteem because of the positive feedback peers might receive from their posts (Yang & Bradford Brown, 2016). This feedback might be helpful for emerging adults and influence their self-presentations as they learn to navigate new life stages of high school and beyond.

As a result, online self-presentation styles may also fluctuate depending on the goal that one hopes to achieve. One might wish to maintain a friendship, establish a new one, or repair an already damaged friendship and depending on that goal, one will modify their self-presentation accordingly (Tyler & McIntyre, 2017). If one is attempting to maintain a friendship, a user might increasingly strive to maintain the acceptance that they have from that friend by being friendly and outgoing (Tyler & McIntyre, 2017). While influenced by the overall goal desire from social interactions, these self-presentations can now be conducted in virtual form through online social media accounts. This research is important to consider as researchers examine how self-presentation can influence the purpose and existence of Finsta accounts and if statements from Finsta owners of “wanting to be my true self” align with what research has supported.

### **Identity Development**

According to Erik Erikson (as cited in Kroger, 2007), discovering one’s identity during emerging adulthood is an important stage of life. During the time of emerging adulthood (which is later adolescence to young adulthood), emerging adults are faced with identity formation or role confusion (Kroger, 2007). This is when emerging adults either find their own identity or are lost in the confusion, but identity formation is not always as simple as defining it or being confused.

Identity distress can occur if one does not have a concrete sense of self and is defined as being extremely upset or having intense worry over formation of one’s identity and identity issues such as beliefs, values, relationships, or long-term goals (Scott et al., 2014). While emerging adults who are college students have many opportunities to find and explore their identity in numerous ways, they may also struggle with this transition and find themselves in identity distress.

On the contrary, identity clarity, or self-concept, can be defined as the extent of feeling an individual knows oneself in addition to how much one can positively and consistently describe oneself (Schwartz et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2018). So emerging adults going through college could also feel more assured of their identities due to their opportunities and experiences. As a result of this information, the current study looks to investigate the rates of both identity statuses while examining the presence of dual Instagram accounts, one public facing, and the other a privately shared “Finsta” account.

Furthermore, because of the accessibility of social media platforms, college students may turn to those platforms to seek out information about their peers’ feeds to further examine their opinions, abilities, and identities. Although this can be a resource, it also may elicit social comparison and cause emerging adults to question their own identity development and who they are as a person. If they do not come to a conclusion of who they are, this could ultimately lead to identity distress and other negative effects such as decreases in mental health.

Study 1 examined the new online presence of “Finstas,” which contradicted the existence of normal Instagram profiles since they are profiles that cannot be viewed by the general public due to privacy concerns. On these accounts, users claim that they can be more multifaceted by showing multiple versions of themselves and not just highlights (Forsey, n.d.). In contrast, on a regular Instagram account, social comparison is prevalent amongst users’ feeds where everyone is aware of other people’s life’s updates. This may cause people to socially compare themselves more often, especially on ability (Yang et al., 2018). As users may examine and compare achievements, emerging adults with “Finstas” may engage in greater deep online presentation on those accounts than on their public Instagram account.

Past research has included how social media platforms have interacted with social media social comparison, identity processing and identity clarity, and how social media self-presentation interacts with identity development (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2017). These studies have generalized to social media use by young adults in college but not to any specific platform like Instagram, especially with the new presence of “Finstas.” This is important to acknowledge since different platforms have specific purposes, audiences, and unspoken social rules (e.g., what kind of content is acceptable to post). These nuances could affect variables like social comparison, identity processing/clarity, and self-presentation. Many studies have included first year college students rather than other class years collectively. This is also important to acknowledge because first year students may not have the same developments or experiences that upperclassmen have. Lastly, most research on social media have included Facebook which has been around for over a decade, but is different in comparison to Instagram, making some of its implications and findings negligible to Finstas.

### **Current Studies**

Study 1 investigated the gaps in past research where Instagram had not been studied, “Finstas” contradicted the presence of public-facing Instagram accounts, and how emerging adults who have both accounts may have their identity development affected by their accounts. The study investigated these gaps by asking participants about their Finsta content, demographic questions, and assessing their self-presentation and social comparison styles. The following hypotheses were proposed for Study 1:

**Hypothesis 1:** Greater use of “Finsta” accounts for expressing angry or sad feelings will be positively related to deep online self-presentation on their Finsta.

**Hypothesis 2:** Greater use of “Finsta” accounts for genuine humor will be positively related to greater authentic online self-presentation on their Finsta.

**Hypothesis 3:** Those who engaged in deep online self-presentation on their “Finsta” account will have higher rates of identity distress and lower rates of identity clarity.

**Hypothesis 4:** Those who engaged in positive self-presentation on their main Instagram account will have higher rates of social comparison of ability.

**Hypothesis 5:** Those who engaged in authentic self-presentation on their main Instagram account will have higher rates of social comparison of opinion.

For Study 2, we investigated if followers of Finsta accounts believed the Finsta users and the content they posted were authentic and if certain types of content predicted deep and authentic styles of social media self-presentation. There was a general consensus from Finsta users that they were being authentic in their content and we decided to investigate if that belief was shared by their Finsta followers as well. Additionally, we investigated whether certain types of content predicted specific self-presentation styles given that there were strong relationships between some content and self-presentation styles in Study 1. The following hypotheses were proposed for Study 2:

**Hypothesis 6:** Finsta followers will believe that Finsta users are authentic in the content that they post.

**Hypothesis 7:** Humorous Finsta content will predict authentic social media self-presentation on Finsta accounts.

**Hypothesis 8:** Sad and angry Finsta content will predict deep social media self-presentation on Finsta accounts.

## Study 1

## Method

### Participants

One hundred twelve participants were recruited for a survey via convenient sampling from areas such as Elizabethtown College's introductory psychology class pool (with a response rate of 46.7% out of 135 total possible participants), outside emails to people known by the principle investigator, and advertising displayed on the principal investigator's social media (with a response rate of 3.2% out of 1,516 total possible participants). Further demographics of participants can be seen in Table 1. To be eligible for the survey, participants had to have a "Finsta" and a regular Instagram account and be currently enrolled in undergraduate college or between the ages of 18-23 years old. Participants enrolled in introductory psychology courses received credit for compensation through their on-campus mailbox if they were an Elizabethtown College student. Students had access to another link at the end of the survey to submit their mailbox number to receive compensation.

### Materials

**Social Media Self-Presentation Scale.** The Social Media Self-Presentation Scale (SMSPS) was adapted from Yang, Holden, and Carter (2017). The scale was modified to say "Instagram" and "Finsta" instead of social media and was taken twice with one set of answers for their Instagram account and one for their "Finsta" account. Participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*) and answered five items on Depth (e.g., "I openly share my emotions on my Instagram/Finsta"), three items on Positivity (e.g., "I usually disclose positive feelings on my Instagram/Finsta"), and five items on Authenticity (e.g., "My self-presentations on my Instagram/Finsta are accurate reflections of who I am"). Higher scores indicated more depth, positivity, and authenticity. The revised SMSP subscales for Instagram

were reliable enough for use, as the internal consistencies were acceptable (Positivity  $\alpha = .84$ ; Depth  $\alpha = .75$ ; Authenticity  $\alpha = .75$ ). The revised SMSP subscales for Finstas seemed reliable enough for use, except for Authenticity ( $\alpha = .50$ ), as the internal consistencies were good (Positivity  $\alpha = .89$ ; Depth  $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Social Media Social Comparison Scale.** The Social Media Comparison Scale (SMSCS) was adapted from Gibbons and Buunk (as cited in Yang et al., 2018) to measure social comparison on the Instagram platform. The scale was taken once and adapted to reflect activity on a normal/public presenting Instagram account. It measured participants' social media social comparison on abilities and opinions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). There were six items measuring comparison of abilities and five items measuring comparison of opinions. "On my public Instagram account, I compare what I have done with others as a way to find out how well I have done something," was an example of a question about comparison of abilities. "On my public Instagram account, I try to know what others in a similar situation would do," was an example of a question about comparison of opinion. Higher scores indicated higher engagement of social media social comparison style on their public Instagram account. The revised SMSC scale seemed reliable enough for use, as the internal consistency was acceptable ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Finsta survey.** A third scale was created by the principle investigator and only taken once by participants for their Finsta. The survey asked about the content of a participant's "Finsta" accounts, the purpose of having one, what distinguished a "Finsta" versus a normal/public Instagram account, demographic information (sex, age, etc.), who followed the participant and how they decided that, who they followed, how many followers did they have on their Instagram and Finsta, how often did they post content (e.g. Within the last 2 weeks, how



many posts did you make?), how much of their content was humorous, expressing anger/sadness, and if their Finsta helped them cope or know where they are in life/with their identity.

**Identity Distress Survey.** There were nine items from the Identity Distress Scale (IDS) from Berman, Montgomery, & Kurtines (2004) that were presented on a 5-point scale (1 = *Not at all*, 5 = *Very severely*). This scale asked participants how distressed they have felt about various issues such as friendships, values/beliefs, career choices, and more and was taken once. One other item from the scale was presented on a 5-point scale where they answered between 1 = *Never or less than a month* and 5 = *More than 12 months* for how long they had been distressed about the other items. Higher scores indicated higher identity distress. The revised IDS was reliable enough for use, as the internal consistency was good ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Identity Clarity Scale.** The Identity Clarity Scale (ICS) had 12 items adapted from Rosenthal, Gurney, and Moore (1981) who pulled the items from a variety of Erikson's publications. These items were presented on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*) and was taken once. "I have a clear idea of who I want to be," is an example of an item. The higher the mean score indicated higher identity clarity. The revised ICS was reliable enough for use, as the internal consistency was good ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

## **Procedure**

Participants were informed that this study was to learn about "Finsta" use and its implications for identity development before they signed an informed consent form in the beginning of the online survey. They completed the scales in the following order: the ICS, the IDS, the SMSP, SMSCS, and the Finsta survey. At the end of the survey, participants were provided with a link to another survey to complete if they were eligible for credit as an Elizabethtown College introductory psychology student. Descriptive statistics were conducted

for scales and social media usage variables. Correlations were conducted to analyze the relationships between Finsta content and self-presentation, identity distress/clarity, and the relationships between self-presentation and social comparison styles.

### Results

I conducted descriptive statistics for scales (see Table 1), social media usage variables, and scale scores (see Table 2) and correlations for identity statuses, comparison styles, self-presentation styles and Finsta content (see Table 3). Average scores on the Identity Clarity Scale were 36.86 ( $SD = 6.95$ ) and average scores for the Identity Distress Survey were 23.66 ( $SD = 7.45$ ). In the Social Media Self Presentation Scale for Instagram, the average score for depth was 10.99 ( $SD = 3.42$ ), the average score for positivity was 13.01 ( $SD = 2.01$ ), and the average score for authenticity was 16.69 ( $SD = 3.33$ ). For Finstas, the average SMSPS score for depth was 18.16 ( $SD = 4.58$ ), the average score for positivity was 8.34 ( $SD = 3.32$ ), and the average score for authenticity was 19.51 ( $SD = 2.98$ ). For measuring Social Media Social Comparison Scale styles engaged on Instagram, the average score for abilities was 20.24 ( $SD = 5.42$ ) and the average score for opinions was 16.01 ( $SD = 3.66$ ). On average, 86.5% of participants said that the purpose of a Finsta was for fun/recreation, 52.3% of said it was for self-expression, and 8.1% said it was for other reasons (e.g., connecting with distant friends, random life updates, ranting, daily stories). For the types of people that follow the participants' Finsta accounts, the most popular responses were friends (79.3%) and other Finsta accounts (73.9%). For the accounts that participants follow on their Finsta, 58.6% of participants said that they follow friends, 10.8% said they follow family, 77.5% said they follow other Finsta accounts, and 8.1% said they follow other accounts (e.g., art, makeup, meme, celebrity accounts). On average, participants had

868.06 followers on their Instagram account ( $SD = 576.42$ ) and 76.84 followers on their Finsta account ( $SD = 95.7$ ).

There was a significant positive relationship between deep social media self-presentation on Finsta accounts and angry content posted on Finsta accounts ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ) as well as sad content posted on Finsta accounts ( $r = .51, p < .01$ ). There was a significant negative relationship between authentic social media self-presentation on Finsta accounts and humorous content ( $r = -.27, p = .006$ ). There was a significant positive relationship between deep social media self-presentation on Finsta accounts and identity distress ( $r = .26, p < .001$ ) but the negative relationship between deep social media self-presentation for those accounts and identity clarity was not significant ( $r = -.14, p = .15$ ). There was a non-significant positive relationship between positive social media self-presentation on public Instagram accounts and social media comparison of abilities ( $r = .06, p = .53$ ). The relationship between authentic social media self-presentation on public Instagram accounts and social media comparison of opinions ( $r = .11, p = .24$ ) was also positive, but non-significant.

### **Discussion**

Our first hypothesis was supported by the findings in which Finsta use for posting sad and angry content were related to deep social media self-presentation, suggesting participants who posted sad or angry content on their Finsta felt more comfortable posting more personal content in comparison to their public Instagram account. Many participants described the purpose of their Finsta as posting personal content that cannot be distributed on their public facing Instagram account, so this aligns with our first hypothesis.

Our second hypothesis was not supported. We found that greater use of humorous content on Finstas significantly related to decreases of authentic self-presentations. This might

indicate that although participants posted humorous content, they may not have posted that content in an attempt to be funny. It may have been an attempt to express other emotions. This could be because humor is used as a mask for other things such as sadness or depression because these emotions are still a stigmatized topic amongst emerging adults, therefore causing the use of dark humor instead. Overall, our findings support previous research in which self-presentation on social media is integral to having an online account (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2017) and may relate to the type of content distributed depending on the presentation a user wants others to see.

Our third hypothesis was partially supported where deep self-presentation was associated with higher rates of identity distress, but not significant rates of lower identity clarity. This partially aligns with prior research where having an intense worry over values, beliefs and relationships can cause identity distress to occur (Scott et al., 2014). The hypothesized connection between the deep self-presentation and identity clarity does not appear to be driving the rates of distress, but potential fears of acceptance could be.

Our fourth and fifth hypotheses were not supported. There was a positive relationship between positive social media self-presentation and social media comparison of abilities and also a positive relationship between authentic social media self-presentation and social media comparison of opinions, but these were not significant. Although there was some stronger data supported in our study regarding self-presentation styles, this could have possibly been because that comparison styles may not have been conducive to Finsta accounts. This could have been influenced by the new existence of this account and that the specific intentions behind Finstas are contradictory in comparison to public Instagram accounts.

In our first study, we found that negative emotions in Finsta content, like anger or sadness, were very important for self-presentation styles. We did not find substantial support for

previous research findings regarding comparison styles or identity distress and identity clarity in our research. Our results indicated that deep self-presentation, where users shared negative emotions, did relate to high rates of identity distress. In comparison, lower rates of deep self-presentation did not relate significantly to higher rates of identity clarity. Another surprising finding was that humor had a significant negative relationship with authenticity and as users posted more funny content, the less authentic they presented.

Although Finstas have been stated to be used as a safer social outlet, participants may not find more identity clarity despite posting more personal content. Instead, this might mean that posting and reflecting on their more personal content might not help participants in their identity development and might be used for something unknown. Furthermore, the aspect of authenticity needs to be investigated more since that was an influential factor for creating a Finsta for participants where users stated they could be more authentic and vulnerable. Future research should explore what is driving this relationship since Finstas are a new phenomenon, there is no prior research on this area, and to see if other aspects of a Finsta are helpful in identity development.

As a result of the findings, we decided to investigate in Study 2 if the followers of Finstas believed that Finsta user were being authentic in their content. Additionally, we investigated if specific types of content posted, like humorous, sad, or angry content, predicted deep and authentic self-presentation styles in Finsta users from data pulled from the first study.

## **Study 2**

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Thirty participants were recruited for a survey via convenience sampling from Elizabethtown College's introductory psychology class pool (with a response rate of 30.9% out of 97 total possible participants). To be eligible for the survey, participants had to have an Instagram account, some knowledge about Finsta accounts, and be currently enrolled in undergraduate college or between the ages of 18-23 years old. Participants enrolled in introductory psychology courses received credit for compensation through their on-campus mailbox if they were an Elizabethtown College student. Students had access to another link at the end of the survey to submit their mailbox number to receive compensation.

### **Materials**

**Second Finsta Survey.** This survey took questions from the Social Media Self-Presentation subscales and revised them. The scale was taken once and adapted to reflect onlookers' interpretation of Finsta users and how authentic their self-presentations were. It measured perceived Finsta user authenticity on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). There were 11 items; "I believe that people are honest when they post about their feelings on their Finsta," was an example of a question. Higher scores indicated higher perceptions of authentic self-presentations of Finsta users. The Second Finsta survey was reliable enough for use, as the internal consistency was good ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

### **Procedure**

Participants were informed that this study is to learn about self-presentation and "Finsta" use amongst emerging adults before they signed an informed consent form in the beginning of the online survey. They completed the Second Finsta Survey and at the end of the survey, participants were provided with a link to another survey to complete if they were eligible for credit as an Elizabethtown College introductory psychology student. A one-sample *t*-test was

conducted to analyze the perceived authenticity of Finsta users. Additionally, regression analyses were conducted with data from the first study to analyze the relationships between Finsta content and authentic and deep self-presentation by Finsta users.

### Results

There was a total of 30 participants. I conducted a one sample *t*-test to compare the average of the scores to see if it differed significantly from the midpoint of authenticity scale. A one sample *t*-test resulted in a significant difference between the average rating of perceived Finsta user authenticity ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) and the midpoint of the authenticity scale (3);  $t(29) = 3.22$ ,  $p = 0.003$ . Perceived authenticity was calculated by averaging the 11 items of the subscale in comparison to the perceived authenticity scores by participants. This indicated that Finsta followers believed that Finsta users were authentic in the content that they posted.

Regression analyses were conducted with data from the first study to analyze the possible predictors of deep [ $F(3,107) = 17.96$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = .34$ ; see Table 5] and authentic self-presentation [ $F(3,107) = 5.06$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $R^2 = .13$ ; see Table 4] in Finsta users. Humorous ( $\beta = -0.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and sad content ( $\beta = .34$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were found to be significant predictors for deep self-presentation, but angry content was not a significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p = .09$ ). This indicated that Finsta users that posted more humorous content predicted lower deep self-presentation scores, but those who posted more sad content were found to predict increased deep self-presentation scores.

For authentic self-presentation, humorous ( $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $p = .09$ ) and sad Finsta ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p = .01$ ) account content were found to be significant predictors for Finsta users. This indicated that more humorous content predicted a decrease of authenticity scores while sad content predicted an increase of authenticity scores.

### Discussion

Our sixth hypothesis was supported by the findings where there was a significant difference between the average authenticity scale score and the midpoint of the scale, suggesting that Finsta followers believed that Finsta users were authentic in the content that they posted. This supports that previous statements from Finsta users that their primary use of their accounts was for personal use are congruent with their followers' beliefs that their use and content is authentic, supporting our sixth hypothesis.

Our seventh hypothesis was not supported and humorous Finsta content did not predict authentic social media self-presentation in Finsta users. These results were surprising and suggested that the more humorous content that they posted, the more it detracted from authenticity. Furthermore, sad Finsta content predicted authentic self-presentation within Finsta users. This might indicate that users are utilizing their Finsta accounts as a safe space and an outlet to talk about their sadness and are especially authentic when talking about their sadness. In contrast, humor still might be a mask for some users who are not completely ready to be vulnerable to their followers.

Our eighth hypothesis was partially supported where sad Finsta content predicted deep social media self-presentation on Finsta accounts, but angry content did not. Humor was a significant predictor of deep social media self-presentation. Where humor is still found to detract from deepness, sadness might be indicating that although people are deeper, they are using their Finsta account as an escape since users have stated that they post content that cannot normally be shared to a wide public audience. It was not a surprising finding that humor detracted from authenticity since humorous content keeps the audience in mind in comparison to sad or angry content which is posted just for the user's emotional expression. Therefore, posting



emotional content would cause Finsta users to self-present as authentic where humor is posted with the audience in mind, detracting from authenticity. If this is the case, these findings support Yang and Brown (2016) who found that people can increase their self-esteem by receiving positive feedback on their self-presentations. This would in turn cause Finsta users to continue sharing deep and vulnerable content. It is possible that using Finstas as an outlet for negative emotions can get positive, reassuring feedback from the small group of permitted followers.

Overall, sadness seemed to be the most important predictor for authentic and deep self-presentation on Finsta accounts since it predicted both presentation styles in Finsta users compared to humor or anger. Humor detracted from authenticity and deepness and while anger did not indicate authenticity, it did positively relate to deepness.

### **General Discussion**

As a result of these studies, negative emotions as a whole seemed to be more central to deep and authentic self-presentations than positive emotions for Finsta users. Self-presentation styles seemed to have prominent significant relationships with the type of content posted and this might indicate that Instagram does have an unspoken social norm that users have to be more positive and less negative in their content and emotions shared, therefore causing more public Instagram content to be more positive. This in turn affects how users present publicly and privately on their various Instagram accounts and possibly supports Yang and Bradford Brown's (2016) findings if users are using their Finstas to receive positive feedback about their content from their small pool of followers.

For social media comparison styles, we found little data to support Yang et al. (2018) in their studies in conjunction to self-presentation styles. Although we found positive relationships between social media self-presentations and social comparison styles for users on their public

Instagram accounts, these were not significant. This might be indicating that comparison styles are not concordant with data about self-presentations yet given the newness of Instagram as a social platform and that their study investigated general social media use and not one singular platform.

Authenticity was important as we investigated if Finsta users and followers had congruent beliefs about content being authentically posted since that was a shared reason between those groups as to why Finstas are created. We found Finsta users and followers both believed the Finsta users were being authentic in the content they posted. Additionally, humor was not found to be predictive of authentic self-presentation in Finsta users, but negative emotions were. This shows the frequency and the importance that negative emotions can have especially amongst emerging adult populations who may be facing more challenges as they learn to navigate major life transitions while balancing academics, social lives, and many other things they are involved with or have responsibilities to. But further insights could be gained about authenticity, self-presentation styles and Finstas in general if focus groups were established where participants allowed researchers to review specific content posted to their accounts and ask account owners deeper questions.

### **Implications**

This research opens up more opportunities for future studies and research about the new phenomenon of Finsta accounts. Since there is not much prior research about this specific social media account, more insights could be gained if future researchers investigated other aspects of Finsta usage and users to gain more background and foundations about the accounts. Additionally, since negative emotions were seen to be more predictive of relationships to authenticity, it is critical to acknowledge that these emotions might be popular amongst emerging

adults and should be encouraged to share either through daily conversations or through social media platforms. This sheds light on the important topic of mental health that emerging adults are specifically struggling with, even if not to the clinical degree, as a result of the life transitions they are experiencing.

### **Limitations**

There are many possible limitations of these studies. One limitation is having mostly female participants. This might have been because of the convenience sampling we used or just that mostly females have Finsta accounts in comparison to males. Also, there were not many participants in the second study due to time constraints for executing the research, collecting the data, and having a small participant pool to choose from. Participants could have also contributed to possible inaccuracies from their responses to questions such as how many followers they have, participants not understanding survey questions, or participants not taking the survey seriously or being truthful about their answers. There was poor internal consistency for the Finsta Authenticity subscale, and the revised SMSP and SMSC scales. The poor consistency could have been influenced by the newness of Finsta accounts, indicating that the scale needs to be restructured for Finsta accounts.

### **Future Research**

Future research should seek to include a larger participant pool and more male participants in order to compare emotional expression via social media outlets like Finstas across a wider pool of people from different backgrounds. Future research could also seek to gain access to Finstas to categorize posts instead of relying on self-report which could have led participants to not take the survey seriously and skew results.

Because there was not supporting data about comparison styles for this specific participant pool, future research might want to investigate if previously findings on comparison styles might be supported for the new phenomenon of Finstas since the intent of Finsta accounts is not to compare other people, but to provide a safe space for emotional venting.

Additionally, there were not significant conclusions about the aspects of identity distress or clarity amongst the participants. Researchers could investigate the therapeutic aspects or goals of young adolescents and young adults using these accounts. This research could extend upon existing findings from Tyler and McIntyre (2017) where research on goals and self-presentations may need modified applications for these accounts since they are not intended to impress or influence an audience. Moreover, it might be significant to examine the goals of Finsta users in accordance to self-presentations since users had not stated using Finstas to maintain, establish, or repair relationships. Finsta users' goals might be to find solace and comfort from their peers rather than portray a certain image.

Even though authenticity was a large reason for why people created Finsta accounts, there still needs to be more research conducted about authenticity in regard to Finsta accounts given that humor had a negative relationship with authentic self-presentation and even seemed to detract from authenticity. Future research might want to investigate if humor is used as a coping mechanism for daily stressors or perhaps another role it may play. Internal consistency for authenticity was poor in the first study and the modified scales could have been inaccurate due to newness. Additionally, authenticity was still a big contributor to the acquisition of Finsta accounts, but certain types of content did not indicate authenticity.

Social media platforms are a prominent presence in our lives and are especially prevalent for emerging adults. With the rising presence and utilization of Finsta accounts, it is important to

examine how social media is used especially when there are pressures for emerging adults to either be authentically themselves or somebody else in real life and on their screens. By examining how accounts like Finstas are used amongst emerging adults, researchers can learn how emerging adults are coping with life transitions, like choosing a college and finding peer groups, or learn how emerging adults' online presentations are affected by their peers and world wide web.

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Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Identity Clarity, Identity Distress, Social Media Self-Presentation and Social Media Comparison Scale*

*Scores for a Sample of College-Aged Emerging Adults (n = 110).*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode	<i>SD</i>	Range	Percentile		Skewness
						25 <sup>th</sup>	75 <sup>th</sup>	
Identity clarity	36.86	37	40	6.95	17-54	32	42	-0.24
Identity distress	23.66	23	17	7.45	10-43	17	29	0.42
Social media self-presentation for Instagram								
Depth	10.99	11	10	3.43	5-21	17	29	0.59
Positivity	13.01	13	15	2.01	6-15	12	15	-1.02
Authenticity	16.69	17	19	3.33	7-24	14	19	-0.43
Social media self-presentation for Finsta								
Depth	18.16	19	19	4.58	5-25	15	21	-0.62
Positivity	8.34	8	6	3.32	3-15	6	11	0.10
Authenticity	19.51	20	20	2.98	11-25	18	21	-0.40
Social media social comparison of abilities for Instagram	20.24	22	22	5.42	0-30	17	24	-0.97
Social media social comparison of opinions for Instagram	16.01	17	17	3.66	0-23	14	18	-1.55

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Mode	<i>SD</i>	Range	Percentile		Skewness	<i>n</i>	%
						25 <sup>th</sup>	75 <sup>th</sup>			
Purpose of Finsta									110	
Fun/recreation									96	86.5
Self-expression									58	52.3
Other									9	8.1
Who follows you									110	
Friends									88	80
Family									20	2
Other Finstas									82	7
Other									1	0.9
Who do you follow									110	
Friends									65	58.6
Family									12	10.8
Other Finstas									86	77.5
Other									9	8.1
Instagram followers	868.06	800	700	576.42	29-4687	514.25	1065.25	3.03		
Finsta followers	76.84	52.5	100	95.7	8-935	30.75	100	6.82		
How many times do you post daily										
Once a day									103	92.8
Twice a day									2	1.8
3 times or more									2	1.8
How many times have you posted in the last 2 weeks										
1-3 times									84	75.7
4-7 times									14	12.6
7-10 times									6	5.4
10 times or more									5	4.5
Percent of humorous content	53.23	16.27	50	27.98	0-100	30	73.75	0.12		
Percent of angry content	16.27	10	10	24.53	0-100	5	25	2.11		
Percent of sad content	23.78	15	10	24.53	0-100	5	33	1.56		
Percent of other content	13.84	3.5	0	20.01	0-80	0	20	7.72		

Table 3

*Correlations between identity clarity, identity distress, social media self-presentation styles, comparison styles, and types of content on Finsta accounts.*

Source	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Identity Clarity	--												
2. Identity Distress	.42**	--											
3. Deep Social Media Self-Presentation on Finsta	-.14	.26**	--										
4. Authentic Social Media Self-Presentation on Finsta	.15	.03	.45**	--									
5. Positive Social Media Self-Presentation on Finsta	.23	-.21	-.66**	-.24	--								
6. Deep Social Media Self-Presentation on Instagram	.22	.20	.20	.07	-.07	--							
7. Authentic Social Media Self-Presentation on Instagram	.49**	-.18	-.05	.34**	.22	.32**	--						
8. Positive Social Media Self-Presentation on Instagram	-.18	.15	.08	.08	.14	-.53**	-.23	--					
9. Comparison of Abilities	-.12	.31**	.18	.15	-.28**	-.10	-.13	.06	--				
10. Comparison of Opinions	.1	.16	.28**	.29**	-.28**	.16	.11	-.09	.54**	--			
11. Sad Finsta Content	-.32**	.2	.51**	.32**	-.57**	-.13	-.08	.19	.15	.23	--		
12. Angry Finsta Content	-.04	.1	.36**	.07	-.38**	.04	-.12	.07	.21	.14	.39**	--	
13. Humorous Finsta Content	.09	-.13	-.44**	-.27**	.38*	.05	.01	-.07	-.09	-.02	-.42**	-.28**	--

*Note.* \*\* =  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

Table 4

*Regression analysis predicted authentic social media self-presentation ini. mean Finsta users on their accounts.*

<b>Source</b>	<b><i>B</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>	<b><i>β</i></b>	<b><i>t</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
Constant	20.09	0.82	--	24.39	< .001
Percent of Humorous Finsta Content	-0.02	0.01	-0.17	-1.72	.09
Percent of Angry Finsta Content	-0.02	0.02	-0.09	-0.88	0.38
Percent of Sad Finsta Content	0.03	0.01	0.28	2.61	.01

Table 5

*Regression analysis predicted deep social media self-presentation in Finsta users on their accounts.*

<b>Source</b>	<b><i>B</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>	<b><i>β</i></b>	<b><i>t</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
Constant	18.36	0.82	--	16.54	< .01
Percent of Humorous Finsta Content	-0.04	0.01	-0.26	-2.94	< .01
Percent of Angry Finsta Content	0.04	0.03	0.15	1.73	0.09
Percent of Sad Finsta Content	0.06	0.02	0.34	3.69	< .01