A study of how young Norwegian women present themselves and how others form impressions of them.
Foreword

“Writing a thesis is a solitary task, while dancing that is something which you share with other people.” – My Classmate, probably

Writing a thesis takes time, and it is not a straightforward task. When I started writing this thesis I did not know what to expect. I did not begin with a great deal of enthusiasm and interest for my specific subject. However, after a while I would talk to friends and strangers about my topic with certain eagerness. Even though people did not always understand the academic relevance of what I was writing, they would all say that it was a different and recognizable subject. I guess this is because technology influences how we communicate with each other, and to some technology has become a central part of their live, in such a way that they cannot live without it.

This topic might not be perceived as world changing compared to studies which investigate the development of new economic systems, but it says something about how we interact with each other on an interpersonal and cultural level. It shows how we adapt technology and how technology affects how we interact. For example, I met some resistance when I explained my topic to my boyfriend. He could not understand why I wanted to research something as ‘trivial’ as “silly images on Instagram”. This made me seriously question my work for a while, but I have, finally, come to terms with my uncertainties. It is simply necessary to realize that what you have been working on is not as evident to other people as it is to you. It has especially helped me in the writing process. Working on your own is difficult, but luckily I have had a lot of support. Foremost from my boyfriend, without him I probably would have changed my topic a thousand times. His perspective has helped me become more confident about my own subject, by narrowing it down, and describing it in such a way that excite or intrigue others when I speak about it.

I want to thank a lot of people, my family for believing in me and supporting me all the way from Norway, my supervisor for pushing me further than I thought I could, my director of program for being patient with me, my fellow Usva board members for keeping me social and sane, my fellow class mates with whom I weekly ate lunch with to discuss problems surrounding out thesis, Anna Christina who supported me while finishing the thesis, and Mariska for being my reliable ‘study buddy’ in the library.

Groningen, September 2015

Linn Helen Gundersen
Summary

Technology is constantly changing the way we deal with our identities. On social media we are offered a stage where we can present an image of ourselves to an unimaginable number of people. This thesis focuses on how self-presentation takes place on social media, and how others form impressions based on online self-presentations. Firstly, I look at how Norwegian women who exercise make use of social media to present themselves. Secondly, I examine how viewers form impressions of the women who train based on graphical and textual information posted on Instagram.

The theoretical framework is based on theories of self-presentation, impression formation, and computer-mediated communication in order to study self-presentation and impression formation on Instagram. Central to my understanding of self-presentation are the concepts of ‘the actor’ and ‘the audience’. The actor presents the self by means of verbal and nonverbal communication, while the audience can be both the target for self-presentation, and prompt certain types of self-presentation. The audience is also the main element of impression formation. Verbal and nonverbal communication provide the audience with cues to form an impression of the actor’s identity. Theories of computer-mediated communication elucidate on how self-presentation and impression take place on social media. Lastly, concepts of semiotics and rhetoric were used to establish an analytical framework.

Study 1: The first study focuses on how Norwegian women who exercise make use of visual and textual cues on Instagram to present themselves. Method: Sixty Instagram posts by six Norwegian women are collected and analyzed. A qualitative content analysis, combined with aspects of semiotics and rhetoric, is used to study the women’s self-presentation. Also 610 Instagram comments are collected and analyzed. Results: From the analysis of the textual and visual self-presentation three self-presentation themes emerge: ‘strong but feminine’, ‘healthy and happy’ and ‘the public version of the private self’. Whereas the women who are characterized as ‘strong but feminine’ present themselves as more passive and as objects, with a focus on what they had achieved, the ‘healthy and happy’ women are active, and focus on how one can achieve a strong body. Furthermore, all of the women make use of micro-celebrity practices, both as a way to present themselves, and interact with the viewers. Based on the analysis of the comments we see that most of the commentators are overtly positive about the women. Discussion: The women vary the image of themselves as both self-oriented and other oriented. They present themselves in certain ways, focusing on either showing off or inspiring others. In general, the focus of the Instagram posts lies on the images and the action in the image. When it comes to the comments, the commentators are both a target for the self-presentation and prompt certain self-presentations.
Study 2: The second study addresses impression formation: Zero-history respondents are asked to form impressions of the women from the first study. **Method:** Twelve zero-history participants are interviewed, while viewing a selection of 18 posts from the first study. The interviews are transcribed and coded based on the major themes which derive from the interviews. **Results:** The respondents focus on cues to identity related to exercise when forming an impression, such as the physical appearance and the setting. Secondly, the respondents fill in gaps in order to form impressions. Thirdly, moral and ethical aspects are taken into consideration when forming an impression. **Discussion:** Surprisingly, the respondents are concerned with impression formation on a meta-level. This might be rooted in the fact that they were asked to give their opinion in a formal setting, while being interviewed for a study. This might have discouraged them to speak their mind. It shows that studying impression formation is challenging. Furthermore, the study only shows how the respondents consciously resonate about someone’s self-presentation; it does not focus on subconscious impressions.

**Conclusion:** The women on Instagram make use of self-presentation front to present themselves coherently. Subsequently, the women appear to mimic each other, and the fronts constitute the norm for how others should act on Instagram. This type of self-presentation is an idealized version of the selves. When it comes to the audience, the women have a specific audience in mind when they present themselves. The qualitative interviews show that respondents do not belong to this audience, but indicate how outsiders view the women. Not being familiar with the context causes the respondents to sometimes misinterpret the posts. However, the impressions formed by the respondents are in general positive. This demonstrates that the respondents idealize the impressions even though they lack information about the subject, similar to Walther’s theory of hyperpersonalization.

**Implications:** Firstly, the methodological framework based on content analysis, semiotics and rhetoric shows how we can deduct meaning more objectively. Secondly, studying impression formation does not only include a focus on what kinds of impressions are formed, but also on how impressions are formed and justified by the respondents.

**Keywords:** Self-presentation, Goffman, impression formation, Walther, CMC, identity, visual, nonverbal, communication, social media, Instagram
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Strong is the new skinny, according to a new social media trend. Traditionally, women are expected to be thin and feminine (Williams 2012), however, recently women post pictures online to promote an athletic and muscular body. As a Norwegian native situated in a foreign country, this phenomenon especially caught my eye as Norwegian newspapers have frequently written about the topic the last three years (e.g. Bugge 2013; Jentebølge i styrkesalen 2014; Nå ønsker jentene å være sterk i kroppen 2014). Not only men are going to the gym, a great deal of Norwegian women is also going to the gym regularly. They do this particularly to gain muscle mass, and not only to stay in shape. Many women going to the gym also document their visit and their achievements by posting ‘exercise selfies’ and other images related to exercise and health on social media. Firstly, these posts are perceived as motivational and inspirational, they are meant to inspire viewers to change their lifestyle: exercise regularly and eat healthy. On the other hand, the posts can be seen as visual self-presentation, as they convey certain images of the women. The women who post these pictures become role models for a networked audience on social media. However, the effect of viewing such images have been found to have a negative impact on viewers (Dyregrov 2015; Tiggerman & Zaccardo 2015). This trend is especially being documented on Instagram with hashtags such as #fitspiration or #girlswholift. In total, more than 10 million pictures have been posted on Instagram with these hashtags together¹.

The ‘strong is the new skinny’ phenomenon on social media shows how applications and online connections have become a central aspect of our everyday lives. Through our smartphones we are almost always connected to the internet, anytime and anywhere. Some social media seem to attract specific groups of people: Women dominate the social medium Pinterest (Smith 2014), celebrities (e.g. Hambrick et al 2010; Marwick & boyd 2011; Stever & Lawson 2013), journalists (e.g. Lasorsa et al. 2012; Hedman & Djerf-Pierre 2013) and

¹ A quick search on webstagram show that each of the hashtags count more than 5 million images. [http://websta.me/search/girls%20who%20lift](http://websta.me/search/girls%20who%20lift) and [http://websta.me/search/fitspiration](http://websta.me/search/fitspiration)
politicians (e.g. Hwang 2013) use Twitter. Now and then, the news report about how users flee from Facebook to other social media, especially teens (Matthews 2014; Whitney 2014). The popularity of social media fluctuates, and new platforms emerge regularly. The various social media platforms offer users the possibility to upload, create, and share content with others. Most social media sites or applications have an easy interface, which makes it accessible for almost anyone, both young and old. Compared with the origin of computer mediated communication, online participation today does not require as much textual interaction with other users. The increasing popularity of social media such as YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest show that our online communication is becoming more visual. On the other hand, text is still essential online. For example, Instagram can be considered a predominantly visual social media. Similar to Twitter, Instagram is a visual microblogging service, where users are invited to post pictures accompanied by a short text. Users of Instagram who view the posts can write comments.

Social media especially affects how we project ourselves online and offline. Social media offers tools and possibilities to construct an identity, or an image of oneself. Uploading a photograph of oneself, or writing a status update about one’s day on a personal profile page can give indications of the author’s personality, or at least how the person wants to be perceived. By the means of social media, everyone has the opportunity to present themselves from their best side online, almost like how celebrities present themselves. Normally, when we think of a celebrity, we think of the image which that person creates in the media. We do not know him or her personally, what we in the news or on social media see is a carefully constructed image. Today, everyone is constructing an image of themselves. Through social media, we select which information we want to share, what kind of pictures we post, and we write in certain ways in order to create a certain image. In a way, we copy the way celebrities present themselves, not only in how we use social media but also in the fact that we all have an online and an offline self. Figuratively, the world is smaller, but at the same time it is unimaginable big: On social media we can reach out to friends and family, but we can also reach out to strangers, from other continents. In other words, social media is like a stage, where online popularity can be measured in the number of likes, comments and followers.

This thesis consists of two studies: Firstly, based on the trend ‘strong is the new skinny’ on social media, I look at how Norwegian women who exercise present themselves on Instagram. Secondly, I address how others form impressions based on what the women post on Instagram.
1.1 Problem and Significance

Firstly, my interest for the topic of self-presentation, impression formation and social media was ignited by danah boyd’s research on social media. This type of research is interesting because it shows how users integrate social media as a part of their daily lives and thus also as a part of their interpersonal relationships (boyd 2007; boyd 2013). Secondly, this research topic is interesting because social media may change the way we communicate and also because social mediums change rapidly. Thirdly, this topic is important because the self-presentations on Instagram involve the use of both visual and textual communication cues. Most past research has focused on textual self-presentation (e.g. Papacharassi 2012b; Marwick and boyd 2010; Walther 2006). Some research has even ruled out the positive effects of visual self-presentation, preferring visual anonymity when disclosing information with strangers (Joinson 2001; Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell 2001). What early research did not taken into account is that people who communicate online are not necessarily strangers. Lastly, there has not been much research on self-presentation in relation to impression formation on social network sites. How images are used to present an identity and which role they have in impression formation have not been researched. Most research has focused on either the experience of those who present themselves or the audience (Tanis 2003; Ellison et al 2006).

1.2 Purpose and goal

My aim with this study is to contribute to theoretical insights on how visual and textual information is related and produce meaning in the context of self-presentation on social media. By analyzing how people present themselves online, I can illustrate how people communicate with each other on social media. Moreover, I aim to illuminate how one can approach and analyze visual communication on social media. This research is distinguished by the qualitative approach to both the Norwegian women’s self-presentation and the interviews in order to map out how impressions are formed.

The goal of this thesis is to shed light on the complexity of self-presentation and impression formation on social media. This is done by addressing concepts such as cues to identity, micro-celebrity, public and private, and audience. Firstly, this thesis elucidates social practices on social media, such as how images and text are used to communicate. Secondly, it addresses how people perceive and negotiate these cues. In other words, how these concepts
related to self-presentation are interpreted and how impressions are formed. As a general question about self-presentation I want to look at the following question: *How do Norwegian women who exercise make use of Instagram to present themselves?* Secondly, I want to look into: *What kind of impression do viewers form of the women who exercise based on their Instagram posts?*

### 1.3 Thesis structure

**Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 discusses the conceptual framework of my research topic and highlights the relevant theory. I address the concepts of self-presentation and impression formation. In particular, I explore how these two concepts make sense in computer-mediated communication, especially, in relation to social media.

**Chapter 3**

In Chapter 3 I address Study 1, which concerns self-presentation on Instagram. Firstly, the theoretical framework is operationalized into a research approach. Secondly, the research methods I have used in order to answer my research questions are outlined. Thirdly, I discuss the research findings in light of the theoretical and analytical framework. Lastly, all the results are discussed and compared in order to come to an understanding of self-presentation on Instagram.

**Chapter 4**

Study 2 focuses on impression formation, and is addressed in Chapter 4. Firstly, the research methods are presented and discussed. Secondly, the main themes which derived from the interviews are addressed and discussed.

**Chapter 5**

In the last chapter I summarize and present the most important ideas of presented in this study. I discuss theoretical and methodological implications and come to a conclusion of the two studies, by discussing selective self-presentation, the imagined audience and the online phenomenon of fitspiration.
CHAPTER II
Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I establish a conceptual framework and discuss the necessary theoretical concepts in order to understand how to analyze and interpret the Instagram posts with respect to self-presentation and impression formation. Elaborating on the theoretical framework is important in order to understand what one wants to research. The main objectives of this theoretical framework is to come to a better understanding of how text and photos are used in the construction of one’s self-presentation, and how impressions are formed in computer-mediated settings.

Since most research mainly has focused on textual self-presentation online (e.g., Marwick & boyd 2010; Marwick & boyd 2011; Walther 2006), I highlight both the textual and visual aspect of self-presentation in a computer-mediated environment. First, I focus on the rationale behind strategies for presenting the self. Self-presentation is conceptualized as a socio-psychological concept. I address central notions from Goffman’s book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956; 1959). Different techniques and tools which users may employ in order to present the self are examined. Furthermore, the chapter emphasizes how impression formation is related to self-presentation. Secondly, this chapter addresses computer-mediated communication, such as what implications social media has on the concepts of self-presentation and how this affects my research. Furthermore, I explore impression formation in light of self-presentation in a computer-mediated environment. Lastly, I focus on how I can approach and interpret self-presentation and impression formation. By introducing concepts such as visual rhetoric and semiotic, I illustrate how one can study self-presentation and impression formation in a CMC setting qualitatively.

2.1. The Everyday Presentation of Self

The concept of self-presentation derives from Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical concept of social life as a theatrical performance. He, metaphorically, compares the act of interacting
with people with the act of staging oneself for a play, through performing a role or character. Figuratively, life becomes a stage to Goffman, and people we meet are our audience. These ideas were developed in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), and this concept has had an influence on much of the research in fields such as social psychology and computer-mediated communication.

In our daily lives, we are especially concerned with how others perceive us, and spend much time altering ourselves in order to meet expectations or present an ideal self. This kind of alteration can be both conscious and unconscious, but the bottom line is that this concern is rooted in a wish to control the impressions others form of us. Just like the performance of an actor on a stage, we try to convey a certain image of ourselves to others. The concept of self-presentation is, essentially, socio-psychological, and covers how one presents oneself to others in order to try to convey one’s identity, or an idealistic image of oneself. This process is led not only by what we say, but also through the use of nonverbal communication, such as clothing, accessories or gestures. Goffman points out that self-presentation takes place when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey (1956:1).

In accordance with this view, Brown (1997) defines self-presentation as “any behavior intended to create, modify, or maintain an impression of ourselves in the minds of others” (2). Hence, self-presentation is a behavior which is linked to the interaction with others, and is central to the development of interpersonal relationships. This is especially because self-presentation is closely related to the impressions we form of other people.

### 2.1.1 The Actor

Goffman’s approach to self-presentation has provided research with a handful of useful concepts and notions which are related to the act of presenting oneself. Notions such as *performance, front stage, backstage* and *actor* are all central to Goffman’s dramaturgical approach. In the following section I address these notions in order to show how and why they still are useful in a modern technological environment.

One of the two main elements of self-presentation is the actor, or the performer. He or she is the one who performs a role before an audience. I refer to the person presenting him or herself in this research as ‘the actor’. The audience one performs for is the second main
element, and is addressed below (section 2.1.3). Considering that people are occupied with how others see them, the actor, unintentionally or intentionally, presents himself by assuming a role. Based on this role, the audience can form an impression of him. Goffman distinguishes between two extremes of self-presentation, as he calls it: The actor who wants to present his own reality to an audience and the actor who adapts his presentation to those who are watching (Goffman 1956:10). On the one hand, the actor presents himself or herself as he wants, or he adjusts the self-presentation to the audience. This implies that the motivation behind presenting oneself does not only depend on how others form impressions of us, but also on the fact that people feel compelled to stage an ideal image of the self or become like their ideal (Baumeister 1982). We can differentiate between what Baumeister calls a “self-constructive self-presentation” and an “audience-pleasing self-presentation” (1982:4). He points out that whereas the self-constructive self-presentation is derived from one’s own standards and ambitions, the audience-pleasing self-presentation is motivated by the expectations of a certain audience.

Goffman uses the term performance to describe “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Goffman 1956:8). In other words, the performance is the actual self-presentation. The performance consists of a front, which “is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (Goffman 1956:13). Along these lines, the front can be interpreted as one’s standardizes approach to self-presentation; the actual image or impression one wants to convey. To Goffman, the front relies on two aspects: the setting and personal features. The setting includes “furniture, decor, physical lay-out, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the space of human action played out before, within, or upon it” (Goffman 1956:13). By relying on the setting to construct a self-presentation, one relies on associations. This implies that aspects in one’s vicinity are related to one’s self-presentation. Furthermore, the self-presentation has to be adapted to the setting. In other words, the way the actor presents himself has to be appropriate to the setting. On the other side, a front relies on personal characteristics, such as work status, clothes, gender, “size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodly gestures; and the like” (Goffman 1956:14-15). For example, the actor can make use of theatrical properties (props), such as clothes, accessories or other objects in order to convey a certain status to others. Wearing expensive designer clothes can

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2 Not to be confused with the term front stage
indicate that the person wants others to perceive him or her as rich. In fact, Goffman perceives these traits as sign vehicles, and he points out that whereas some of these signs are fixed, such as gender, others can be modified. Goffman writes that, for example, facial expressions “can vary during a performance from one moment to the next” (Goffman 1956:14-15). Self-presentation is not only constructed through verbal self-description, but also nonverbal communication and association.

Public and private-self versus front stage and backstage
When it comes to self-presentation, Baumeister (1982) distinguishes between the private self and the public self. Just like a celebrity, there are some aspects of our lives that belong to our public selves and some that belong to our private selves. This resembles Goffman’s (1956) notions of a front and a back region, he points out that some performances belong to the front stage, while others belong to the backstage. To use Goffman’s metaphors, in a theatre one is expected to assume a role when on stage in front of an audience, by contrast, backstage, this expectation does not rule, as no one from the audience can see or hear you. In comparison, private and intimate details about celebrities belong to the private self in the back region, while information about their work and promotion of themselves is a part of their front, their public persona in the front region.

Intentional and unintentional impressions
What is interesting about self-presentation is that it is not always intentional. Often, it is viewed as a controlled process, relying on strategic choices and decisions in order to affect how others see you. If we view self-presentation in light of this understanding, it can turn into a means of manipulating others. However, Goffman (1956) emphasizes:

> Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain. Sometimes the individual will be calculating in his activity but be relatively unaware that this is the case. (Goffman 1956:3)

Hence, self-presentation does not only include controlled processes, but also automatic processes (Goffman 1959, Schlenker 2012, Leary & Kowalski 1990). Schlenker (2012) highlights that the chance of acting automatically are higher in situations which are familiar, as a result of habituated actions that do not require cognitive effort. Familiar situations can be, amongst others, spending time with close friends or family. Imitation is another example of an automatic process, such as mimicking actions of your conversation partner. Imitating one’s conversation partner might be seen as flattering (Schlenker 2012). In addition, actions, for
instance body language, can be both intentional and unintentional, as we can only control it to some degrees. Goffman (1956) condenses these ideas into two sorts of sign activity: ‘cues given’ and ‘cues given off’ (2). ‘Cues given’ refers to the intentional aspect of our self-presentations, what we actually say or do, while ‘cues given off’ refers to the unintentional aspect of our self-presentation. Imagine someone giving a speech; this will make the relation between cues that are given and the cues that are given off more apparent: The speech might be written with eloquence. However, if the speaker cannot convey his message adequately, the speech will not be received well by the audience.

2.1.2 Self-Presentation or Impression Management?

In the previous section, I addressed and explored some of the most important notions concerning self-presentation. In this section, I want to touch upon what the difference between self-presentation and impression management is, and whether one can call it a difference.

The concept of self-presentation is difficult to pinpoint, since there are many related notions. Some examples are self-expression, self-awareness and self-disclosure. Self-expression refers to the expression “of your thoughts or feelings especially through artistic activities (such as painting, writing, dancing, etc.)” (Merriam Webster Dictionary online 2015), self-awareness is considered the “knowledge and awareness of your own personality or character” (Merriam Webster Dictionary online 2015), while self-disclosure is the “the act of revealing personal information to others” (Archer 1980:183 in Joinson 2001). As we can see, all of these notions are related to the self, and can be connected with the presentation of self. This is because they all communicate or convey information about the self to others. However, individually, these concepts do not adequately describe or address self-presentation.

Another challenging aspect about the conceptualization of self-presentation is that the notion is used interchangeably with ‘impression management’. Leary and Kowalski (1990) argue that the terms self-presentation and impression management can be seen as two different concepts. However, they decide to make use of both concepts in their literature review of the concept. Their conceptualization of impression management (and self-presentation) is based on that one is “fostering impressions in other’s eyes” (Leary & Kowalski 1990:34). Schlenker (2012), conversely, emphasizes the difference between the two terms. He underlines that impression formation does not only include the controlling of how others see the individual self, but also the controlling of impressions of groups, objects, events or ideas. (Schlenker 2012:542). Impression management can thus cover much more than the
expression of personal identity, being a concept that covers impressions in general; it can also be related to a brand’s identity. Schlenker then argues that the notion self-presentation only refers to the controlling of impressions of people themselves (Schlenker 2012:542). He elaborates that:

The study of self-presentation involves examining (1) how people, as agents, try to shape the attitudes and behaviour of audiences through the presentation of self-relevant information, and (2) how people, as targets, respond to the self-presentation activities of others. (Schlenker 2012:542)

My conceptualization of self-presentation corresponds with this approach, as it covers both the act of presenting the self, and the audience response. The audience response can be defined as impression formation (which I discuss in section 2.1.3). One’s self-presentation can be reflected in the impressions an audience forms, and impression formation can indicate whether or not one’s self-presentation is successful.

While discussing self-presentation I have quoted Goffman, from a sociological view, and Baumeister, Schlenker and Leary and Kowalski from a social psychological perspective. Since self-presentation is composed not only by communication, but also by psychological factors such as underlying motives and automatic and controlled processes, it is not unreasonable to see it as a psychological concept. However, in this research I wish to look at the meaning of the self-presentation, and thus how self-presentation is conveyed textually and visually in a computer-mediated environment. I will not focus on the psychological factors behind self-presentation and impression formation. Research also shows that self-presentation is not only a topic within social psychology, but also within other disciplines, for instance marketing, political science or sports psychology (Schlenker 2012). For example, Schlenker (2012) points out that people present themselves online by balancing “a beneficial portrait of self with being able to back up the portrait if needed.” (552). Other research on online self-presentation has addressed the interaction between zero-history participants, and how they both present the self and form impressions of others (e.g. Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell 2001; Joinson 2001; Hancock & Dunhan 2001). Zero-history participants are respondents who are not acquainted with each other or with the research subjects. Furthermore, research on self-presentation on online dating sites, show that expectations of meeting in real life affects self-presentation (e.g. Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino 2006). For example, Ellison et al (2006) posit that the probability of meeting each other in real life lead people to present themselves more realistically and honestly in online dating. Self-presentation on social network sites is a recurrent topic. For instance, Marwick & boyd (2010; 2011) have
made use of Goffman’s view of self-presentation in their research of, on the one hand, normal users on Twitter and, on the other hand, how celebrities present themselves on Twitter. In a later section I discuss how self-presentation can be understood in a computer-mediated environment (2.2.3).

2.1.3 The Audience: Impression Formation

In general, we are curious about the people we meet. When we get to know new people, we cannot help forming an impression of them, asking questions to figure out who they are, or judging them based on what they are wearing or how they say things. As I mentioned, self-presentation is constructed by two aspects: the actor who presents the self and the audience who watches and form an impression. We have just discussed the actor in relation to self-presentation, and in this section I want to move on to the audience and address their importance as a part of self-presentation.

Firstly, the audience is the target for the self-presentation. Hogan (2010) points out that the audience consists of the people we want to present ourselves to. By being the target of self-presentation, the front one presents is constructed by carefully selecting details with the purpose of creating a specific impression (Hogan 2010). Furthermore, Schlenker (2012) stresses that an audience can both be realistic and imaginary. This entails that an actor, on the one hand, presents himself in a desirable way to an actual audience. On the other hand, he might have a specific audience in mind, for which he wants to present himself. For example, on social network sites, an actor does not always know his audience, and the reach of his self-presentation may be more extended than expected. To give an example, the actor can present an image of himself directed at people he wants to impress.

Secondly, self-presentation can be a result of a negotiation between the actor and the audience (Schlenker 2012). The audience might not only be the target for the presentation of self, they can prompt different types of self-presentation. In other words, the actors might want to adapt their self-presentation to the expectations of the audience. Pleasing an audience in order to gain rewards, can also be seen as a motive for self-presentation (Baumeister 1982; Schlenker 2012). For example, through appealing to the audience expectations, the actor may increase his popularity or liking if he succeeds. This leads me to the second aspect of the audience: their impression formation. Impression formation refers to how impressions are formed. Tanis (2003) also uses the term ‘person perception’ in order to describe “the processes by which people get to know and to think about other persons” (4). When
presenting the self, or communicate with others in general we radiate a social presence, as they call it in CMC research. Tanis (2003) refers to Short et al.’s (1976) theory of social presence and points out that:

Social presence is conveyed by features that are deemed important in interpersonal communication, such as nonverbal signals (including facial expression, direction of gaze, posture, dress, physical distance), proximity and orientation (physical distance between and relative positions of communicators), and the physical appearance. (Tanis 2003:5)

These social presence features are in fact social cues, which indicate something about one’s identity to others. Tanis argues that the term ‘social cues’, or ‘social presence’, for that matter, is not an adequate term. Essentially, the concept of ‘social cues’ refers to nonverbal cues. However, the term has been interpreted in different ways in various research (Tanis 2003:14). In order to clarify which cues have been referred to as social cues, Tanis makes a distinction between ‘cues to identity’ and ‘cues to meaning’. He states that the “distinction broadly refers to the dual purpose on the part of the receiver of extracting information about the source, and of understanding its content at the same time” (Tanis 2003:16). He continues by explaining that, on the one hand, meaning can be extracted from textual communication, while, on the other hand, cues to identity can be found in photographs or biographic data. Tanis (2003) found that cues to identity “reduced ambiguity in that they gave the participants a sense of knowing who they are interacting with” (120). Furthermore, he found that images had a positive effect on the perception of other people. However, this result is not necessarily positively related to interaction and collaboration. Tanis notes that “overall, an effect was found that when interacting in the absence of cues to identity, participants felt more certain about the interaction” (2003:121). As Tanis elucidates, both the ‘cues to identity’ can be used in order to understand how the women in this study presents themselves visually and textually. Cues to identity include both what Goffman calls ‘cues given off’ and the ‘front’. Not only verbal communication can influence impression formation, also nonverbal signs, proximity and orientation, and physical appearance seem to be important features. We judge others, we compare ourselves with others, and we form impressions based on what we see and hear from others, emanated by them intentionally or unintentionally.
2.2. Goffman’s Legacy: Online Self-Presentation and Impression Formation

Today, one does not only present oneself face-to-face, but also online. We present ourselves to and communicate with people online, some of whom we do not know. Through computers or smartphones we entertain existing relations and form new relations with others. While doing this, we form impressions of them based on the information that is available. In this section I explain how technology affects self-presentation and impression formation. Theories of computer-mediated communication can help us understand and research online self-presentation and impression formation. I start off by introducing computer-mediated communication and show how it is relevant to studies of self-presentation and impression formation.

Essentially, Goffman’s concepts and understanding of self-presentation and impression formation belong to face-to-face settings. However, these processes are also present in computer-mediated communication. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) concerns all forms of communication and interaction which occur via electronic devices, such as computers or smartphones. CMC is also a term which covers the field of studying communication which takes place in a computer-mediated context. Studies within the field of computer-mediated communication have concentrated primarily on how it affects interpersonal communication and relationships (Walther & Parks 2002). The field of CMC is integrative and combines various theories from a wide range of fields; some examples are technology, media research and linguistics, and sociological and psychological theories (Thimm 2008).

2.2.1 Theories of CMC and Interpersonal Communication

As computers, smart phones and tablets are essential in our lives, we adopt the various technologies to such a degree that they influence how we interact with others: We send each other messages with different applications, we skype with friends in other countries, we post snapshots of ourselves to show what we are doing. However, the various theories of CMC do not view the function and effect of computer-mediated communication in the same way. In order to understand these differences, we must take a look at what Walther calls first-generation and next-generation CMC (2011). First-generation CMC includes “text-based e-
mail, chat, and discussions” while next generation CMC also feature “photos, graphics, avatars [and] videos” (Walther 2011:446).

Early research compared CMC with face-to-face situations, these theories focused on the differences between the two settings, deeming CMC inferior as a result of lacking nonverbal cues. Walther (2011) emphasizes that “the absence of nonverbal cues in CMC is said to prevent communicators from detecting demographic, personality, and interpersonal characteristics of others.” (447). Furthermore, theories focused on the type and number of cues which a medium could convey. Since, first-generation CMC was ‘limited’ to text-based mediums, interpersonal communication through computers, for example, was seen as poor compared to FtF-communication. Face-to-face communication was perceived to include “multiple-cue systems, simultaneous sender-and-receiver exchanges (providing great immediacy of feedback), natural language, and message personalization” (Walther 2011:448).

Due to a ‘lack of cues’, interpersonal communication via CMC could lead to uncertainty, misunderstandings and even asocial behavior, such as flaming (e.g., Lea et al. 1992). In light of this, CMC was considered more appropriate for non-personal communication, for instance task-oriented communication. In this view, people should rather make use of face-to-face communication when it comes to self-presentation and impression formation, where one can touch, feel, look at or hear one another. These theoretical approaches have a restrictive view of CMC which appear to favor traditional communication channels and neglect the developments and innovation in communication which CMC has facilitated. Although these CMC theories are not directly relevant to my approach, they do include interesting aspects such as textual and nonverbal cues and social presence which are relevant when researching self-presentation and impression formation.

More recent theories and approaches to CMC, affirm the feasibility of developing and strengthening interpersonal communication through CMC. In this section, I address two theories which are more directly related to self-presentation and impression formation: social information processing theory (Walther 1992) and hyperpersonal communication theory (Walther 1996). As a response to the view that the lack of nonverbal cues in CMC would only facilitate impersonal and task-related communication rather than interpersonal communication, Walther (1992) proposes Social Information Processing Theory. He suggests

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3 See for example Social Presence Theory (Short et al. 1976) and Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986).
4 Such as for example group problem solving and decision making (e.g., Beckwith, 1987; Phillips, Santoro, & Kuehn, 1988).
5 Examples are face-to-face or via telephone
that users adapt the cues that are available in CMC to such an extent that social information can be communicated and interpersonal relations could be formed. This is based on the assumption “that humans are driven to interact with one another” (Walther 1992:68). Thus, instead of limiting relational effects, the ‘lack’ of nonverbal cues leads users to become more active, when communicating and forming impressions. In other words, users have to compensate for the ‘shortcoming’ of the nonverbal cues by adapting “their interpersonal […] communication to whatever cues remain available through the channel that they are using.” (Walther 2011:458).

Walther elaborates on the theory of social information processing theory and introduces the hyperpersonal model, suggesting that CMC, in fact, fosters hyperpersonal communication which might even exceed face-to-face communication when it comes to interpersonal communication (1996). The hyperpersonal model includes elements from the social information processing theory and the SIDE theory\(^6\). Walther lists four dimensions of the model: the receiver, the sender, the channel and the feedback systems. Walther (2011) argues that instead of failing to form an impression of the sender due to lacking nonverbal cues, the receiver seem to “fill in the blanks with regard to missing information” (460). The second aspect of the hyperpersonal model is the sender. Walther (1996) emphasizes that in CMC, the senders have the possibility to present themselves selectively. This implies that CMC users can select what kind of cues they want to include and what kind of cues they want to exclude. Senders can “construct messages that portray themselves in preferential ways, emphasizing desirable characteristic[s] and communicating in a manner that invites preferential reactions” (Walther 2011:461). The channel is the third aspect of Walther’s hyperpersonal model. It refers to how the attributes of the medium support “the deliberate construction of favorable online messages.” (Walther 2011:461). Some of these affordances are addressed in the following section about social media. Lastly, feedback refers to the reciprocal process between the sender and the receiver. When exaggerated impressions are formed based on idealized self-presentation, the two aspects mutually confirm each other and reciprocate, turning into a feedback loop. For example, when an actor adapts his presentation of self to the anticipation of his audience, the audience will continue expecting the same type of presentation.

\(^6\) Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects
Next to the four dimensions of CMC, Walther lists several important affordances of CMC which aid the presentation of the self in CMC context: 1) content is editable, 2) time needed for editing, 3) control over self-generated content, and, lastly, 4) the reallocation of cognitive resources. Firstly, Walther points out that in CMC, users have the ability to edit the content and appearance of what they post. This affordance is related to the synchronicity of the medium. An asynchronous medium allows users to flexibly edit their message. The second affordance is the time spent editing messages. CMC allows “the user almost unlimited time for editing (and) composing” (Hesse, Werner & Altman 1988:151 in Walther 2006:2541). However, this depends on the synchronicity of the medium. Whereas one can spend a large amount of time editing a message in an asynchronous medium, spending the same amount of time editing in a synchronous medium might not be appreciated by the communication partner. Thirdly, Walther (2006) stresses that in CMC the “writer composes and exchanges messages in physical isolation from receiver, masking involuntary cues.” (2541). The sender has full control over what is communicated and how it is done. When presenting oneself in CMC, the senders can avoid undesirable nonverbal cues. Lastly, Walther emphasizes that the fact that one’s communication partner is not physically present allows users to reallocate cognitive resources. Instead of being distracted by nonverbal cues or other external stimuli, the receivers can focus on understanding the messages of others and editing one’s own message. In visual communication, the last dimension is not entirely applicable, as users are visible, but not physically present. Visual presence allows the communication partners to take visual cues into account, such as nonverbal cues in the pictures. These cues, however, might be carefully selected by the user, and might be more intentional than nonverbal cues in a FtF-setting. The rest of the dimensions which Walther points out, do not necessarily change in visual CMC.

2.2.2 Social media, Social network sites, a definition

Before we continue with the conceptual framework, I want to clarify what Instagram is in order to understand how self-presentation takes place on Instagram. This section concerns what social media is. I present the Instagram interface and how it works, and explore the concept of user generated content. Before I present Instagram, I want to discuss the terms social media and social network sites. I begin this section with considering what social media is, followed by central functions and why it is an important field to study. Lastly, I address Instagram and its features in light of the preceding discussion.
Social media is defined as “websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Social Media 2015). Similarly, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (60). Even though these definitions are quite clear, the term social media is still difficult to grasp, as there are many different sorts of social media and a multitude of attempts to define them. Each social medium offers users various possibilities of interaction and participation. For example, Pinterest is a website where users can share content with other users by uploading or ‘repinning’ content from others. On Twitter, users can ‘tweet’ messages to each other or ‘retweet’ what others have tweeted. In any case, the core of social media is focused on content generated by users, and any other participation by the users. Social media is thus an umbrella term which covers all the types of online platforms where people can participate and interact. At the core of social media lies user generated content (UCG), which refers to any kind of content which is uploaded to a social medium. We share photos or status updates with friends who are in our network. An interesting aspect of social media is that, compared to traditional media such as television and newspapers, there is basically no gap between the people who produce content online and those who consume it. Users of social media cannot be defined as a mere audience or mere readers. On the contrary, users of social media have the possibility to participate and add content themselves, by commenting, liking or creating other content as a response to what they have seen.

In order to come to a better understanding of social media, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) try to classify social media into genres: “collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds” (60). Furthermore, they categorize these genres of social media based on computer-mediated communication theories. Kaplan and Haenlein rate the various genres on the basis of the type and amount of communication cues they facilitate with the purpose of creating a practical guide to social media for businesses. Even though the classification is intriguing, they do not motivate or show the relevance of the choice of theories. This makes me question why they have chosen these particular theories. Additionally, the categorization does not cover all types of social media adequately, as they generalize social media based on the amount and types of communication cues. José van Dijck (2013) categorizes what she calls social media platforms

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7 See section 2.2.1 for a detailed discussion of CMC theories and communication cues.
differently, by dividing them into social networking sites (SNS), sites for user-generated content (UGCS) and trading and marketing sites (TMS). Further, van Dijck stresses that SNS focus on interpersonal communication, while UGCS facilitate creation and exchange of content and TMS want to promote products. van Dijck’s categorization criteria are based on how the medium is used rather than the presence of communication cues. However, even with this division, the differences between the social media are not straightforward. Moreover, van Dijck (2013) argues that social media can be seen as “webs of people that promote connectedness as a social value” (11). She argues that instead of social media, ‘connective media’ might be a more appropriate term. On the one hand, connective refers to how our participation is based on technological processes. On the other hand, it refers to how we as users are connected with each other. Even though this is an interesting point, I will keep referring to the various websites and applications involved as social media.

Often, social media and social networks have been used interchangeably. However, as the previous discussion demonstrates, social network sites are just one type of social media. Social media is, furthermore, not a particularly appropriate term, as it is not necessarily more social than other media. For instance, Lomborg (2013) claims that like social media traditional media can also have a social role, as we organize our lives around them. For instance, we watch TV with our families or go to the cinema with our friends. However, on social media the focus on interpersonal interaction is more central than in traditional media (Lomborg 2013:15). Interpersonal communication is facilitated through the affordances which social media accommodate.

The Function of Social Network Sites
There have been many attempts to define what social network sites are (boyd & Ellison 2007; boyd 2010; Ellison & boyd 2013). Contrary to other definitions, boyd and Ellison (2007) choose not to call social media such as Facebook social networking sites. Instead they use the term social network sites. They stress that the term ‘networking’ refers to engaging in new relations, and argue that that is neither the main function of those type of sites nor what makes them stand out from other types of CMC (boyd & Ellison 2007:211). boyd and Ellison’s (2007) first definition focused on three characteristics of SNSs: the profile, the friends lists and the possibility to interact with people on one’s friend list:

We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a
connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the
system. (boyd & Ellison 2007:211)

On social network sites users can create a personal profile, as a way to present oneself
digitally. On some social network sites, the user has the opportunity to adjust privacy settings
in order to control who sees his profile. For instance, on Facebook one has to send a friend
request to become a part someone’s friend list. While on Instagram, one can freely follow
other users, as long as they have a public profile. Conversely, it does not mean that the user
you follow will follow you back. boyd and Ellison point out that such structural qualities
which are related to visibility and accessibility is what differentiates the types of SNS.
Furthermore, a social network site facilitate actual relationships online. On the other hand,
people can also engage relations with people they do not know. However, since 2007 social
media and technology have changed rapidly, which have led Ellison and boyd (2013) to alter
their definition of social network sites:

A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely
identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or
system-level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and
3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their
connections on the site. (158)

The three main features of social network sites are still central in this conceptualization: the
profile, the friend list and the interaction which SNSs allow. Ellison and boyd’s adjusted
definition of SNSs is more extensive than the first approach. New to this conception of SNSs
is the idea of SNSs as a platform for communication which focuses more on the user
generated content rather than profiles (Ellison & boyd 2013). Ellison and boyd (2013) argue
that compared to profiles in 2007, modern profiles “are not simply self-descriptive, static text,
but rather a dynamic combination of content” (155). On SNSs we are met with a stream of
content generated by ourselves and by others, and our interaction is based on this stream of
information rather than profile-to-profile communication. Additionally, social networks sites
offer some particular affordances when it comes to content: persistence, visibility,
spreadability and searchability (boyd 2010; boyd 2013). Persistence refers to that uploading,
creating or experiencing content on social network sites does not happen simultaneously.
Furthermore, a message might be available for a long time. Visibility refers to that content is
visible to an extensive audience. Sometimes it is difficult to grasp the content’s reach.
However, most SNSs allow users to restrict the access to their profiles. Spreadability involves
how easy it has become to share and spread content on social media. Lastly, with search engines and search functions available content can easily be searched for.

Studying social media in general does not involve a straightforward approach, as both technology and social media platforms change rapidly. Besides the change in technology, our “practices, expectations, and social norms have also co-evolved” (Ellison & boyd 2013:152). Ellison and boyd suggest that scholars should not only focus on the people they are studying, but also on the technology and how it works at that time. Thus, to understand how users make use of social network sites (or social media in general), it is necessary to understand the technology behind the site.

**Instagram**

In this section I argue for whether or not Instagram is a social network site. Moreover, I address Instagram’s user interface. The user interface refers to the technological affordances and how information is presented to the users. In other words, it refers to the design and functions which Instagram allows. I start with some general information about Instagram and its short history.

Instagram is a photo- and video-sharing application and social network site, where users can upload photos or videos directly from their phone and share with friends and followers. It offers its users special filters which one can add to the photos in order to change colors. Instagram can firstly be seen as a social network site. Furthermore, the focus lies on the sharing of content, which also makes it share aspects with content communities. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) emphasizes that “The main objective of content communities is the sharing of media content between users” (63). Instagram was launched in 2010, and has grown to become one of the most prominent social media next to Facebook and Twitter. Until 2012, it was only available for iOS users, after that it became available for Android users. In 2012, Instagram was bought by Facebook. Users with a Windows-phone still do not have access to the original application, and have to use a beta-version (Instagram 2014). Like Facebook and Twitter, Instagram is free for its users. Unlike the two other SNSs, one has to install the application on a smartphone in order to create a profile. The name Instagram derives from ‘Instant cameras’ or Polaroid cameras and ‘telegram’: “the snapshots people were taking were kind of like telegrams in that they got sent over the wire to others” (Instagram 2015b). Every month, 150 million users are active, of whom about 40 percent come from the U.S (Instagram
2014). On average 55 million photos are posted, and 1.2 billion likes are registered daily (Instagram 2014). Until now, users have shared 16 billion photos, thus Instagram provides scholars with almost countless amounts of data to analyze. Even though most of the data is publicly available, it poses some ethical problems for the researchers (See 3.1.2).

**Main menus and user generated content**

In this section I only address the profile page and a user post as seen on a mobile device or on a laptop browser. For a more detailed description of Instagram’s user interface, see the appendix (Appendix V).

Only pictures and videos on one’s device can be uploaded. However, it does not mean that the content has to originate from one’s phone. It is also possible to download pictures or videos to one’s phone, and then upload them. On the other hand, the intention of Instagram is to post pictures directly from one’s phone. It is also possible to take a picture or record a video directly with the Instagram camera feature. Once an image or video has been chosen, it has to be positioned within a square frame which is 615 x 615 pixels (Picture 2). When the image is in the preferable position, one has to click the arrow in the upper right corner, and one can start editing the photo. What is special about Instagram is that one can add filters and edit the images before uploading them. Firstly, one can choose between the different photo filters which Instagram offers (Picture 3). These filters often give a vintage or retro feeling, as if the images were taken years ago. Secondly, one can choose the intensity of this filter, and thirdly, it is possible to edit other qualities of the picture such as adjusting the angle of the photo, the brightness, contrast warmth etc. It is not necessary to edit the photo, the user can also choose not to. When the photo is done, the user has to click the arrow in the upper right corner. Then one has to choose whether or not one wants to send the image to all of one’s followers or directly to one person (Picture 4). Secondly, with every picture one posts it is possible to add a short text, also called caption, or leave it blank. One can also add hashtags ‘#’ to the caption. Captions and hashtags make it easier for others to find the picture through searching for that specific word or combination of words. It is also possible to tag other people in one’s caption and add the location where the picture was taken. Like Twitter, one can add a ‘@’ followed by the username of someone in order to tag him in a post or comment. The person will get a notification that he or she is tagged, and on the other hand, clicking on the tagged username will lead you to the person’s profile. Furthermore, the user gets the

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opportunity to share the picture on other social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Foursquare and Flickr. However, unlike other social media, Instagram posts are not intended to be reposted or shared by others on Instagram self. It is not possible to directly save images from Instagram, but various applications have been developed in order to save images. When the post is uploaded it comes in the news stream of the people who follow you. People can like the pictures by clicking on the heart-button and write comments by clicking on the speech bubble (Picture 5). One does not have to follow the specific user to write a comment or like the picture. On a mobile device, the caption, number of likes and the comments are underneath the image. Since the caption is directly followed by comments, it is easily perceived as a comment. On the computer, though, these elements are situated on the right side of the image, and there is a clear difference between the caption and the comment (Picture 6).

A profile page is constructed by all the pictures the user has uploaded, personal information about the user and information about the amount of posts, followers and how many accounts the user is following (Picture 7). The photos are chronologically organized, viewing the latest picture uploaded first. Pictures stay in one’s profile until they are deleted by the user himself and are thus persistent. On a computer it is only possible to view the photos on a profile in a grid\(^\text{10}\) (Picture 8). Both on the mobile device and in the browser it is possible to follow users by clicking on the ‘Follow’ button. The user can add any information he likes on his profile. There is a text slot, which is often used to write personal information, such as interests or country of origin. One can also choose to disclose one’s full name or not on Instagram. The user can also choose a profile picture in order to identify himself. It is not possible for others to click on the profile picture in order to make it larger. If you click on followers or following a list of users appear, both close friends and random people can follow one’s profile. Unlike Facebook, and similar to Twitter, relationships on Instagram do not have to be reciprocal. One can be followed without follow the person back. However, the Instagram users have the option to keep all of the content of their profile private. A private profile only shows the number of posts, followers, following and profile picture followed by a symbol of a lock and the message: “This user is private” (Picture 9). Instead of directly following the user, one first has to be accepted as a follower. Only when one is accepted, one can see the photos posted. If a user has a public profile, it is also possible for non-users to

\(^{10}\) The grid is five columns wide and has an unlimited number or rows.
access the profile with a computer browser. This means that the visibility of posts depends on whether or not the users choose to keep their profile private.

In light of the definition and theories of social network sites, Instagram thus fosters relationships between the user and strangers and user’s friends through its nonreciprocal friend list. Instagram relies on user-generated content to work. Without the pictures that people upload, there would be no interaction between users, as interaction can only happen through a picture. People can interact with each other by liking or commenting on pictures. Images are quite persistent on Instagram, as they stay on one’s profile until they are deleted by the user himself. Unlike Facebook, Instagram does not specifically encourage other generated content on people’s profiles. The only type of other-generated content is comments. Furthermore, the content on Instagram is not directly shareable. Instagram does have a share function in order to share the images on other social media, but Instagram does not facilitate the reposting of other images on Instagram. However, it is possible to use external applications to save images from Instagram and upload. The images one upload can be easy to find due to hashtags, but because there are so many images uploaded every day, it is difficult to navigate through all the images. Instagram is similar to Twitter and Facebook. In a way it could be seen as a visual version of Twitter, but with a few other functions. Whereas interaction on Twitter is foremostly textual, interaction on Instagram is both visual and textual. The posts are visual, while the comments are textual. On Facebook, it is also possible to comment by sending a picture.

2.2.3 Digital Self-Presentation

As we saw in the previous section, users of CMC have to adapt and select the available cues in order to present themselves and form impressions of others. Secondly, one has time to carefully select cues and reflect on one’s own self-presentation. At the same time, one also has sufficient time to form impressions of others. Self-presentation and impression formation is seen as important when developing and managing interpersonal relations. In this section, I address research on textual and visual self-presentation, followed by research on self-presentation on social network sites.

11 Applications such as Instagrab lets people download Instagram photos or videos without taking a screen shot.
Since early research on CMC focused on first-generation CMC, studies on self-presentation online also focused on textual presentations. The hyperpersonal communication theory is mainly focused on textual interaction, and textual self-presentation. Further, most research on self-presentation in a CMC environment suggests to support the theory of the hyperpersonal model (e.g. Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell 2001; Joinson 2001; Hancock & Dunhan 2001; Walther 2006). For example, Walther (2006) studies how people adapt the available textual cues in CMC to present themselves to various targets. Walther found that participants altered their approaches when writing to a high school student compared to a college professor. For instance, messages written to a high school student are characterized by informal language, while messages to a professor include more complex language. Walther’s research suggests that users of CMC adapt their self-presentation to their audience.

**Visual self-presentation**

Visual self-presentation has not been the focal point of CMC research. A few studies have focused on visual self-presentation in CMC. One example where visual self-presentation is central is the online dating platforms. On online dating platforms people interact with the expectation of eventually meeting one another. The relationships develop online, and might continue to be shaped offline (Gibbs et al. 2006, Ellison et al. 2006). With this in mind, users of online dating sites might have to justify the idealized self-presentations. Gibbs et al (2006) emphasize that contrary to mere textual presentation:

> Online dating participants have the opportunity to represent themselves using a wide range of multimedia content, such as text-based description, photographs, and video recordings, and to interact using both asynchronous and real-time communication tools, such as e-mails, instant messaging, and chat rooms. (Gibbs et al 2006:153)

In other words, the members can make use of various media in order to construct a convincing self-presentation. In comparison with textual self-presentations, the presentation of self becomes more complex. Ellison et al. (2006) found that in some cases members turned to photographs in order to form an impression when the biographical information in someone’s profile was too subjective. Further, Ellison et al revealed that users made use of certain strategies in photos in order to present a more appealing self (Ellison et al. 2006). For example, users adapted their own self-presentation after assessing how others presented themselves. In another study, Whitty (2009) discovered that “women were more likely than men to present a photo of themselves and made greater attempts at ensuring an attractive
image of themselves was presented” (1720). Accordingly, women are more prone to post pictures in general, and more concerned with what they post and how they are perceived.

Siibak conducted studies focusing on the self-presentation of young boys and girls on social network sites (2009; 2010). In her first study, she discovered that teenagers present themselves through profile images. Furthermore, ‘good looks’ was a central factor for the teens when selecting a photo for self-presentation (Siibak 2009). Not only the looks seemed to have an effect on popularity, also the photo editing skills. In the second study, Siibak (2010) researched how young boys presented themselves in an online photo community. A content analysis was conducted with the purpose of identifying strategies for visual self-presentation. She discovered that the young boys were concerned with how they presented themselves in the profile images, conveying a metrosexual version of masculinity. These studies seem to suggest that young people make use of certain visual strategies in order to present themselves on social media. With these studies, Siibak also shows that visual self-presentation is becoming more frequent.

The Complexity of Self-Presentation on Social Network Sites
As I discussed in the previous section on Instagram, social network sites facilitates self-presentation and identity management. A central aspect of SNSs is the fact that one constructs a personal profile, which one uses to communicate with other users (Chambers 2013). As studies of CMC are focusing on self-presentation on social media, the interplay between textual and visual cues become interesting to research. Researching social media demands another approach than has been used when researching textual CMC. The emergence of social media has rendered self-presentation into a complex process: On the one hand, it now involves both self-generated textual and visual cues. On the other hand, self-presentation on social media includes other-generated textual and visual cues, such as comments or likes. As we will see, the relationships between the two are not straightforward. In this section, I address studies of self-presentation on social network sites.

Early studies of self-presentation in social network sites focused sites such as MySpace or StudiVZ and the early versions of Facebook (e.g. Boyle & Johnson 2010; Krämer & Winter 2008). These types of SNSs have developed rapidly, and early research might not be applicable to the newer versions of the social network sites, as these evolve with possible effects on self-presentation and impression formation or simply disappear. E.g.

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12 German social media which is similar to Facebook
MySpace does no longer exist. However, both preceding and recent research on these sites might indicate how we can approach and study new social network sites. As Instagram was launched in 2010, it can be considered a reasonably new social medium. In her quantitative literature study of Facebook research from 2007 to 2011, Aalen (2011) found that studies on identity, self-presentation and impression were the third most frequent research topic after ‘risks, privacy and private life’ and ‘consequences for different professional sectors. boyd & Ellison (2007) also emphasize that research on social network sites have focused on, “Impression Management and Friendship Performance” (219). Alongside the rise of social network sites, there has been a strong focus on interpersonal communication. What makes it so interesting to study self-presentation on social network sites is, as Tufekci (2008) points out that “being seen by those we wish to be seen by, in ways we wish to be seen, and thereby engaging in identity expression, communication and impression management are central motivations [behind using social networking sites]” (21). It has also been suggested that people use social network sites in order to manage and strengthen existing relations (Chen & Marcus 2012; Boyle & Johnson 2010). This is certainly an interesting aspect of social media. With this in mind, self-presentation on social media is often not a strategy to create first impressions, but to maintain the relationships one already has. Users of social media have to be aware of what they post, since close friends can refute self-presentations at any time. In other words, social media users are often forced to legitimize their self-presentations. I discuss the aspect of legitimizing self-presentations in relation to impression formation in CMC later in this chapter (section 2.2.4)

Further, several researchers indicate that being active on social network sites through editing one’s profile, having a public friend list, liking pages and so forth, indicate that users are busy with self-presentation (e.g. Boyd & Heer 2006; Lampe et al. 2007; Tufekci 2008). On social network sites we communicate with each other through text, images and videos. In other words, social network sites invite users to mix visual and textual content in order to express themselves. Some social media are especially devoted to certain types of content. Pinterest, for example, is an image sharing site, where one can pin images from various websites or from one’s own computer on virtual boards. Users are expected to pin images which reflect their interest. Twitter, for example, is considered a textual medium; users are limited to 140 characters when communicating. However, one can also post an image together with the text. As I already discussed, on Instagram, the users post images with a caption, and other users can interact with the post by writing comments. The creation of online content is
perceived to be central in self-presentation and interpersonal communication (Livingstone 2008). Put differently, social media provide users with a range of opportunities and tools in order to compose a self-presentation. They are upheld by the activity of users, both by their interaction with each other and the adding of content. Without the participation of users, there would be no social media.

**Goffman Applied to Social Network Sites**

In Goffman’s terms we can view the profile and activity on social network sites as the self-presentation. Is it possible to apply his ideas to digital self-presentation even though Goffman’s concept of self-presentation was based on face-to-face interaction? On one hand, there is an actor who is editing his or her own profile and participating in a social network site. Online, the self-presentation, or the performance, to use Goffman’s terms, is constructed by posting text about or images of oneself. Secondly, there is an audience: people in one’s friends list, followers or lurkers. Put differently, social media, and especially social network sites can be considered to be a stage where one can present oneself to friends or followers.

Chambers (2013) compares Goffman’s notions of front stage and backstage with the “private, semi-public and public displays of online networked interaction” (70). On social media the boundary between private and public is, however, not always clear. Papacharassi (2012b) suggest that “Online social platforms collapse or converge public and private performances, creating both opportunities and challenges for pursuing publicity, privacy, and sociality” (1990). This is a central issue on social network sites, namely the challenge of balancing private and public information. Social media content reaches out to an unimaginable audience, and many do not understand the reach or the purpose of social network sites. Can they be considered like a diary or a place where one connects with other, random people? For example, people have tweeted a picture of their new credit card, including the security code (Gilbert 2012). On the one hand, celebrities seem to strategically share personal information on social network sites such as Twitter, in order to maintain the news exposure of them (Broersma & Graham 2013).

Further, we can also find examples of cues given and cues given off in social network sites. For example, Chambers (2013) points out that “Social network site users recurrently give off unintended expressions not only through their Friend lists and Wall posts but also through the genre and pose of their photos, their musical tastes and the topics and tone of their

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13 A lurker is a user of a web page or an application who only observes the content, and does not participate with the other users.
written interactions” (70). Put differently, it means that self-presentation on social network sites, next to being deliberate through image selection, is constructed implicitly and maybe unconsciously through expressing one’s interests. For instance, when we like something on Facebook it can give people an indication of who we are or what we are interested in. Users are not necessarily aware that their likes turn into social cues, thus the action “like” can be compared with Goffman’s notion of signs given off.

**Me and My Friends**

Let us have a look at empiric research on self-presentation on social network sites. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) have researched how identities are constructed on Facebook. They observed that ‘the Facebook selves’ which were constructed reflected identities which the users also would want to present in an offline context. This does not mean that the identities are actually presented offline. In their analysis of Facebook profiles, Zhao et al. discovered that users assembled their identity implicitly instead of explicitly. They found that both content posted by the user himself and other users, such as friends, influenced the construction of one’s identity on Facebook. Put in another way, self-presentation on social network sites seems to be composed not only by what one posts about oneself, but also by the content friends post on one’s profile.

Further, it is suggested that one’s list of social connection on social network sites can “serve as important identity signals that help people navigate the networked social world, in that an extended network may serve to validate identity information presented in profiles.” (boyd & Ellison 2007:219). Secondly, boyd (2011) argues that on social network sites, people in one’s friend list constitute the ‘imagined audience’:

On social network sites, people’s imagined – or at least intended – audience is the list of Friends that they have chosen to connect with on the site. This is who participants expect to be accessing their content and interacting with them. And these are the people to whom a participant is directing their expressions (boyd 2011:44).

Central to one’s self-presentation is the people who we are friends with on social media. On Facebook, these are often the people who can see what you post, depending on what kind of privacy measures one take. However, it does not mean that all of one’s friends will see what one posts. Furthermore, boyd (2011) emphasizes that despite the fact that one’s imagined audience do not see everything one posts, the idea one has of the imagined audience affects
the self-presentation. In other words, the imagined audience is the target for the self-presentation.

**Micro-Celebrity**

In order to analyze self-presentation on social network sites, I also find the concept of micro-celebrity useful. It was first presented by Senft (2008) to explain how young girls who use YouTube interact with other users and make use of certain tactics to gain popularity. Senft sees micro-celebrity as an online performance, where people use video, blogs and social media to gain popularity. In other words, it concerns how people try to brand themselves with the use of technology. The concept of micro-celebrity has been refined by Marwick and boyd (2011), they define micro-celebrity as a practice which involves that (1) “audience is viewed as a fan base,” (2) “popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management and” (3) “self-presentation is carefully constructed to be consumed by others” (140). In their analysis of how celebrities adapt micro-celebrity practices, Marwick and boyd found three strategies for maintaining a fan base: *affiliation, intimacy, and authenticity and sincerity*. These are strategies which are plausible to expect to be used by the women I research. Senft (2013) later changed her theory of micro-celebrity to “the commitment to deploying and maintaining one’s identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same” (346). In her new definition, Senft compares the online self-presentation with that of artists. Micro-celebrity is a self-presentation practice, mimicking how celebrities present themselves online.

### 2.2.4 An Imagined and Networked Audience

In this section impression formation of online self-presentations is addressed. The early research on impression formation in a CMC context examined how respondents form impressions of others with whom they had no relation (e.g. Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell 2001; Joinson 2001; Hancock & Dunham 2001). In line with Walther’s research on early CMC, Hancock and Dunham (2001) found that compared to FtF conditions, respondents in CMC conditions formed more extreme impressions. However, this research was conducted in a computer-mediated environment where the respondents only could communicate via text. Tanis and Postmes (2003), on the other hand, examined the effect of both visual and textual social cues on impression formation. They looked at how portrait pictures and biographical information affect ambiguity and positivity of impressions. Tanis and Postmes found that, on the one hand, images of and biographical information about one’s conversation partner lead to
the reduction of ambiguity; the respondent felt that they could form a more clear impression of the target. On the other hand, the presence of cues to identity tended to result in positive impressions. Tanis and Postmes (2003) stress that images and biographical information “give people a strong sense that they know with whom they are interacting; despite the fact that objectively their knowledge of the person is scant” (690). These are interesting effects which certainly are relevant to the study which I conduct. Both studies also seem to support Walther’s theory of hyperpersonalization in CMC. However, these studies were focusing on first impressions and conducted in relatively controlled environments. With the development of social media, researchers are faced with other challenges when investigating impression formation. Some social media profiles are reserved only for friends or family while others are publicly available to anyone.

On social media, one’s actual audience is not the same as one’s imagined audience. Depending on which social medium one uses, followers of friends can give an indication of who might see one’s self-presentation. However, Marwick and boyd (2010) argue that the number of followers or friends does not give a correct image of who actually sees one’s presentation of self. This also depends on whether or not one’s profile is public. With a public profile, ‘anyone’ can see what is posted. This makes it difficult to define one’s audience. Nonetheless, we can argue that since self-presentation is constructed with the motivation to influence the impression others form, the strategies for presenting oneself, such as conversation style, etc. are based on certain audiences. This is similar to what Walther (2006) discovered when studying how people interact with various audiences. Moreover, on social media we cannot talk about a specific audience. Even on certain niche forums it is not certain who is actually watching. Marwick and boyd (2010) describe the social media audience as a networked audience. They write that:

> the networked audience is unidentified, but contains familiar faces; it is both potentially public and personal.[…] the networked audience includes random, unknown individuals, but […] it has a presumption of personal authenticity and connection (Marwick & boyd 2010:129).

Navigating multiple audiences, thus, include various facets as the audience is close and distant, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. In comparison with Walther, Marwick and boyd (2010) stress that the social media audience has an effect on the sender’s response and how content is created. Specifically, a sender can target certain audiences through the being selective when presenting the self. With a vast amount of information available, one question arises: How do people form impressions of self-presentations in social media?
With the emergence of social media, visual communication is more widespread and common. This involves that we have to take visual cues into account when researching social media. Van Der Heide et al. (2012) researched the various effects of textual and visual cues on social media in impression formation. It is shown that text still plays an important role to viewers. Van Der Heide et al. (2012) discovered that personality traits were conveyed more effectively, when presented as standalone text than a standalone image. Secondly, they found that when textual and visual cues were combined, positive images had the tendency to communicate extravert personalities more effectively. This implies that visual and textual cues have different effects in social media, depending on whether or not they are standalone or are combined. The relationship between the two is not straightforward, and indicates that impression formation is extremely complex in social media.

Chambers (2013) argue that users have access to more extensive background information about people in one’s online social network than compared to offline. On the basis of this social context in social media, we have more social cues which can aid us when forming an impression. One central aspect of impression formation in CMC, and especially social media, is the concept of warranting. This theory was introduced by Walther and Parks (2002) when addressing various theories of CMC. Warranting is rooted in a natural skepticism that users develop in relation to the possibility misrepresentation online. The theory posits that

an individual is less likely to distort his or her self-presentation when the receiver has access to other members of the sender’s social circle, since others can corroborate the individual’s real-life characteristics and hold that person accountable for misrepresentation (Walther 2011:466).

As users of CMC, we tend to seek out whether or not the information we have been presented is true. Warranty can, for example, be said to be assured by providing photographs as evidence (Ellison et al. 2006). As I mentioned earlier, Ellison et al also point out that the prospect of meeting each other offline led users of online dating sites to not exaggerate their self-presentation. Social media, thus, pose interesting questions about perceived authenticity. This is a concept which is central in my research on impression formation. Not only what one posts or discloses about oneself is related to impression formation, but also what others post or write about you or to you. What others write or say about you is also central in warranting theory. In line with this, a few studies have researched how friends and other-generated information in combination with self-generated information affect impression formation (e.g.
Walther, et al. 2008; Walther et al. 2009; Hall et al. 2014). The studies of Walther et al. (2008) and Walther et al. (2009) both show that other-generated cues have an impact on impression formation, and support the warranting theory. Hall et al. (2014), on the other hand, found that other-generated cues did not have a prominent effect on the perceived validity of a person’s self-presentation. On the contrary, Hall et al.’s study indicates that self-generated cues were considered as more important warrants. Again, impression formation seems to be a complex construct.

2.3. The Interpretation of Self-presentation and Impression Formation Online

Studies of visual computer-mediated communication, visual self-presentation and computer-mediated communication, in general, are not related to one specific method. In that relation, this research can be considered experimental or explorative, as I mix several frameworks and concepts in order to understand self-presentation in a social media context. Nevertheless, central to the understanding of self-presentation is the study of meaning and signs. In order to analyze and understand how the women present themselves, I want to make use of a framework based on a combination of rhetoric and semiotics. With concepts of rhetorical analysis I can examine how the women communicate with images and text to present themselves to an audience. Firstly, I address semiotics and important concepts which I can utilize to analyze predominantly visual self-presentation. This is followed by how semiotics is related to rhetoric and the rhetorical concepts which are interesting in relation to analyzing self-presentation and impression formation in CMC.

2.3.1 An Analytical Framework

In this section, I address the concepts of semiotics or rhetoric, in order to show how they can add to my analysis of textual and visual self-presentation. Semiotics and rhetoric is not, however, discussed in full detail in this section, but I refer to various elements which are significant in order to elucidate how the women in my study present themselves.

Semiotics can be defined as the study of signs and how signs are used in communication. For example, semiotics can shed light on how we communicate with images and the meaning behind it (Jewit & Oyama 2001:136). Certain elements in images can be said to evoke certain meanings. For example, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) point out that visual
structures in a photograph can indicate a social interaction between the subject depicted and the viewers. Social interaction can occur through contact, social distance or attitude. Below I address the notion of contact and social distance in relation to photographs.

A subject in a photo can establish contact with the viewer in two ways. Firstly, the subject can demand the viewer to look at him or her by looking directly at him or her. Kress and van Leeuwen emphasizes that “The participant’s gaze […] demands something from the viewer” (1996:122). However, the exact extent of the demand relies on aspects such as the facial expression of the subject in the image. For instance, Kress and van Leeuwen illustrate that a smile can be considered as an attempt to increase affection, while a cold stare can be viewed as a way to induce a feeling of inferiority, whereas a sensual look might invoke a desire in the viewer (1996:121). Secondly, the subject in an image can offer him or herself to the viewer. When eye contact is not possible between the viewer and the subject, the subject turns into an object of the gaze, an object of contemplation.

Furthermore, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) indicate that ‘physical distance’ depicted in a photograph can signify the relationship between the subject and the viewer. For example, a close up of the subject may give the viewer a feeling of closeness and intimacy. The viewer is allowed as near as only close friends or family would be allowed. On the other hand, a picture taken from a distance might give a feeling of being a bystander, an outsider. The relationship between the subject and the viewer is then more public, or formal.

In order to elaborate on how semiotics and rhetoric is related I want to turn to Roland Barthes’ article “The Rhetoric of the Image” (1977). Roland Barthes proposes a semiotic approach to analyze images. However, he calls this approach the rhetoric of the image. This is because central to his understanding of the image is the rhetorical study of figures of speech. Barthes points out that there are three types of messages that can be derived from an image: the linguistic message, the symbolic message and the literal message. Firstly, the linguistic message refers to any text which is provided in relation to the image. When there is no text, there is no linguistic message. This is the textual context of the image. The text is constructed by both the denoted meaning and a connoted meaning. The denoted message refers to the text’s literal meaning, while the connoted message implies any associations a viewer can have with the text. Another interesting aspect of Barthes’ article is how photo and text is related, he points out that a relation is evoked either through relay and anchorage. Whereas relay refers to when the relation between the image and text is not evident, anchorage indicates that the text
or the image establish the meaning or context for the other (Barthes 1977). Secondly, we have
the literal content of the image, the literal or denoted image. This refers to the actual content
of an image without any further interpretation; the characteristics of an image such as colors,
composition and technique. In other words, the denoted image refers to the visual strategies,
but not what these imply. Thirdly, one can make connotations about the image, the connoted
image. Semiotics does not only say something about the textual meaning, but also the visual
meaning, as signs can be visual. The image can thus be interpreted symbolically. In line with
my research, the connoted image says something about how the visual strategies are utilized
and what they might indicate symbolically.

Visual rhetoric can be defined as both a product of communication and as a field of
study. As a framework, visual rhetoric seeks out to explain how we communicate with
images. Visual rhetoric as a field of study has, traditionally, been used to analyze news
photographs or advertising. These are two types of visual communication which often
contains clear persuasive elements. The advertisement wants to persuade viewers to buy a
product, while the news photograph might contain a narrative, in the sense that it is telling a
story and complements a news item. Photos on social media also have clear persuasive
components: the person who uploaded the photo wants to tell a story or wants to present him
or herself. The act of presenting the self involves influencing others to perceive one in a
certain way. As a product of communication, visual rhetoric is the visual symbols we use “for
the purpose of communicating” (Foss 2004:304). In other words, visual rhetoric can be
photos, videos or a drawing. In this context, the self-presentations on Instagram can be
considered visual rhetoric.

Kjeldsen (2000; 2009) has written a few articles on how to analyze visual rhetoric.
The framework which he proposes is based on social semiotics and Kress and Leeuwen’s
theory that describes how to read images. According to Kjeldsen’s framework, both the visual
message and any following textual message have to be analyzed as a whole to understand the
rhetorical significance of the post. Kjeldsen’s approach does only look at the rhetorical
utterance, but in my study I want to include a more empirical approach by looking at the
impression formation also, thus not only at the rhetorical message but also on how this
message is experienced. Some central concepts of traditional rhetorical theory that are useful
for my research are how one can appeal to an audience. Going back to ideas of ancient
Greece, Aristotle proposed three means of persuasion: ethos, pathos and logos. Ethos refers to
how the speaker establishes his character, and is constructed through a combination of traits.
In relation to ethos, it is interesting how the communicator present himself as authentic. Pathos, on the other hand, is related to how the audience is moved through emotional appeals. Lastly, logos concerns logical and rational arguments, such as statistics of the use of other types of data.

In conclusion, the concepts of semiotic and rhetoric can help me make sense of the results of the content analysis, and constitute the basis for my analytical framework. With the help of semiotic and rhetoric visual and textual elements which might seem arbitrary get a deeper meaning. In the method section of Study 1 (3.1) I discuss how I have coded the Instagram posts, and an operationalization of the codes can be found in Appendix I.

2.4. Research Questions revisited

The research questions I presented in the introduction are broad and overarching. Based on the conceptual framework, I have specified the questions. Below are the refined research questions and sub-questions which have led my study.

In the first study, I focus on the visual and textual aspects of self-presentation. As we saw in the previous sections, self-presentation is a broad notion, which has been studied in various ways. Firstly, aspects such as actors, props, audience, impressions, performance and setting are central to the understanding of self-presentation in general. These concepts are related to Goffman’s theory of presentation of self in everyday life. Whereas the actor refers to the person presenting themselves, performance, props and setting give indications about how one can present oneself using the available traits and elements. Secondly, technological elements, such as image and text, and online identity can guide me in the research of how self-presentation takes place on Instagram. In the theoretical framework, I show how studies of visual self-presentation are lacking and should be researched more. Furthermore, new theories of social network sites demonstrate how self-presentation also takes place online. Thirdly, semiotics and rhetoric provide me with an analytical framework in order to understand the visual and textual self-presentation. These first questions are based on the self-presentation of the women on Instagram:

RQ1: How do Norwegian women who exercise apply the technological affordances of Instagram to facilitate their self-presentation?

- How are photographs and text used as cues for self-presentation on Instagram?
- What kind of images are the women presenting of themselves on Instagram?
- In what way do the comments relate to and reflect the women’s self-presentation?

With these questions I shed light on how the women present themselves and what kind of image they present. The questions cover the technological affordances that have been addressed in relation to CMC theories. I expect the women to focus on showing their identities through their Instagram posts, or at least an ideal version of themselves. Furthermore, I expect the women to present themselves in a somewhat similar manner, with slight differences depending on their motivation/intention for posting the posts. For example, I suppose that women who post more exercise photos are less concerned with how others see them, and want to inspire their viewers. On the other hand, I expect that women who mostly post photos on which they are posing and not doing an exercise are more self-serving; they want to show off. Based on the comments, I expect the commentators to be overtly positive about what they see.

Impression formation is dependent on the information which is made available by or about a specific person. As we saw in the conceptual framework, the audience and cues to identity are central aspects to impression formation. Furthermore, Walther points out that CMC-users seem to search for warrants in order to justify their own impressions. The second study draws on the second research question, which refers to how impressions are formed.

RQ2: How do viewers form impressions of the women who train based on graphical and textual information posted on Instagram?

- To what extent do cues to identity play a role in impression formation?
- What kind of impressions do the respondents form based on the available information?
- To what extent do warrants play a role in impression formation?

The first set of questions refers to the interviews, while the second set of questions covers the comments others have posted on the Instagram posts. I focus especially on the effect of visual and textual cues on impression formation. In relation to the interviews, I expect the respondents form less positive impressions than the commentators, as they are not particularly familiar with the exercise scene in Norway.
CHAPTER III

Study 1: Self-Presentation on Instagram

This chapter reports on the first study which has focused on self-presentation on Instagram. Self-presentation in CMC involves carefully selecting cues which one wants to present to other users of CMC. In this study I look at how women who exercise make use of Instagram’s technological affordances to present themselves. This research does not only look at how the women present themselves, it also looks at how viewers interact with the women through comments and how the commentators are related to the self-presentation.

3.1 Method

This section highlights the choices of method I have made in order to research self-presentation on Instagram. In the following section I address qualitative content analysis as the methodological basis of my research. I have chosen to conduct a qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts, with a starting point in rhetoric and semiotic. The section clarifies how I proceeded when it comes to sampling and data collection. Further, it justifies my decisions related to coding and analysis. Lastly, I elucidate which assessments I have undertaken when it comes to validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

The topic of my research could be approached both qualitatively and quantitatively. However, I want to look deeper into the posting practice of women who exercise on Instagram and come to an understanding how they use social media to present themselves. Thus, I have decided to approach my research topic qualitatively. As a result, I have chosen to apply qualitative content analysis in order to make sense of the women’s posts. Another approach that would have been interesting, in line with self-presentation, is how the women who post understand their own self-presentation.
3.1.1 Qualitative Content analysis

This section covers the method used to answer RQ1 and the following sub-questions. As I mentioned above, I have decided to make use of qualitative content analysis of the women’s posts in order to investigate what the women convey, how they present themselves through images and text and how they interact with viewers. Content analysis is often used as a quantitative method, but can also be used qualitatively. Quantitative content analysis can be used to investigate “standardized meanings”, such as “finding out the number of men and women shown in magazine advertisements” (Schreier 2012:2). Qualitative content analysis, on the other hand, is convenient when researching data that does not have an obvious meaning and demands further interpretation (Schreier 2012:2). Not only do I want to analyze text, I also want to analyze visual content, such as photos. Rose (2001) argues that content analysis can also be applied to visual elements; she calls this visual content analysis. She argues that even though content analysis was first seen as an approach to analyze text it can be used to analyze images (Rose 2001:54).

Visual content analysis does, however, pose a problem when it comes to the “expressive content of an image” (Rose 2001:67) Rose (2001) points out that since content analysis almost solely concentrates on elements such as the content, colors or composition of the image, it does not say much “about the production or the audiencing of images” (Rose 2001:56). Audiencing refers to the term by John Fiske which describes how an image’s meaning is renegotiated, or maybe discarded by some audiences in particular cases (Rose 2001:25). The content analysis as a method, thus, provides us data which needs to be further analyzed in order to indicate meanings. Accordingly, I want to interpret the results of the visual content analysis with a semiotic and rhetorical approach in order to elucidate the images more. A rhetorical and semiotic framework is useful for an interpretation of intention and how it appeals to an audience. Bell and Millic (2002) show how semiotic constructs contribute to “the basis of reliable and replicable (what critics might call nonsubjective) generalizations about a field of representation” (220). In other words, the analytical approach, do not only help us deduct meaning, it helps us deduct meaning in an objective way. On the one hand, it might limit the way the images are understood, but on the other hand, it makes it easier for research to test and replicate studies.
Sampling
My research interest was in the presentation of self on social media. I wanted to know how women use text and images to create a complex self-presentation. As a result, I turned to the online trend of athletic and muscular women post pictures of themselves, as it is extensively visual and it seems to promote a female ideal which challenges the traditional body image of a woman: thin and feminine (Williams 2012). This phenomenon is especially visible in Norway, as the news reports that a new body ideal has entered the country (Bugge 2013). A search for the phrase “strong is the new skinny” in the Norwegian newspaper database Atekst results in 38 articles from 2012 until 2014. Norwegian newspapers report that the number of women who are going to the gym to gain muscles have increased (Kringstad 2014; Tetlie 2014).

I have chosen to focus on Instagram, mostly because this is a platform which is used by the women I want to research. Users can add hashtags to their posts in order for others to see the posts and maybe get in contact with them. Currently, there are more than 15 000 pictures tagged with the hashtag “#styrketreningforjenter” on Instagram. Furthermore, Instagram is interesting because the social medium gives its users the opportunity to choose between a public or private profile. Public profiles make it easier to sample and collect data. Instagram offers fast posting and sharing functions, which enables the users to document the moment through taking a photo and writing a short caption. Especially, the user has the possibility to capture and share moments immediately. This is interesting for studying self-presentation, it allows others to react and communicate directly with the poster through comments or likes. Instagram is one of the most popular social mediums in Norway, with around 1,173 million Norwegian profiles, of which 60 percent are women (Ipsos 2014). In theory, this is more than 1/5 of the Norwegian population. However, it is not certain whether or not these profiles are unique. For instance, some profiles might be related to businesses.

I sampled the subjects based on the following criteria: their gender, nationality, the topic of their posts, and their popularity. The women had to be Norwegian, they must have posted at least 10 exercise photos within the last 2 months on Instagram and they had to have more than 1500 followers. I have chosen Norwegian women because women and exercising is a topic that Norwegian newspapers frequently write about, as I discussed above. My sample consists of 6 Norwegian women and from each user I gathered 10 posts. I found two other

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14 [http://websta.me/search/styrketreningforjenter] [downloaded 05.10.2015]
15 “Styrketreningforjenter” is Norwegian, and translates to ‘fitness for girls’.
users on a discussion forum for fitness. On the forum Instagram users were discussed, and I checked the users’ Instagram profile, and picked the ones which suited my criteria, and excluded those who did not. Two of the users have both been prominent in the national newspapers in Norway. I found the remaining users by searching with the hashtag “styrketrening”\(^\text{16}\) and “styrketreningforjenter” on Webstagram\(^\text{17}\). The search results featured the most recent posts. This type of sampling is purposive, as I selected a sample which were the best suited my criteria. Furthermore, I have used a sort of maximum variation sampling method by ensuring that there are some variations in the sample; for example the women have a different amount of followers. However, they can all be characterized as relatively popular users on Instagram, because they have more than 1500 followers. Based on this variation, my sample cover a somewhat wider range of the phenomenon, it includes “both extreme and typical cases” (Palys 2008:698). To ensure a greater variety I could also include users with fewer followers, but I have decided to only look at popular users in this study. This is because they might express the phenomenon in a more comprehensive manner than users with fewer followers. Their popularity might say something about how widespread and accepted the phenomenon is.

When mentioning the women, I refer to them as ‘the poster’ or ‘posters’, this is a term which is commonly used online in relation to content posted on a website, especially message boards and forums. For example, if a person posts something which is discussed afterwards, the commentators refer to the person who posted the content by calling him or her ‘the poster’. On Instagram the women post pictures of themselves accompanied by captions, these posts are then commented by other viewers that may or may not know the poster. The relationship between the person who posted the post on Instagram and the commentators becomes a bit clearer by making such a differentiation between the two.

The comments were collected from each of the 60 Instagram posts. I collected the 20 latest comments from each post. In total, I sampled 610 comments. Some posts did not have any comments. Some comments were in languages which I do not speak, hence, they were not considered as a part of this research. Ultimately, 587 comments were analyzed. I copied and gathered all the comments in an Excel sheet.

\(^\text{16}\) ‘Styrketrening’ translates to fitness or strength training, ‘Styrketreningforjenter’ translates to fitness for girls.
\(^\text{17}\) Webstagram is an interface which allows people to search through Instagram without a profile.
Collecting, Processing and Coding Data

The collection of the photos took place on the 2th of February 2015. The posts were all posted on Instagram between the end of October 2014 and the beginning of February 2015. Posts chosen for my content analysis had to be appropriate to my research question (Rose 2001:56). I based the collection firstly on the type of picture featured in the post. Hence, only pictures of the poster herself were selected, as I only want to look at the self-presentation of the user. This meant that no other person could be present in the photo. Photos had to depict the women in a training situation, thus before or after training, or while showing off muscles at home. In addition to the photos, the accompanying captions were sampled. Captions are the texts which are posted with the photo on Instagram. When posting a photo, the user is asked to write a description of the photo. In total my sample consists of 60 posts: 60 photos and 60 captions. I made a screenshot of each post and saved it as a picture file. All the captions were copied from Instagram and pasted into an Excel sheet where I could code them. I also created an Excel sheet with a table to code the images. Each picture and caption was assigned a row in the sheet, and the coding categories were listed in columns. The last column in each sheet was used for commentary and observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection criteria for photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of subjects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The codes I have used in this study are based on codes which I discovered in my previous study about self-presentation and femininity (see Gundersen 2014). In this previous study I conducted I tested some initial hypotheses that lead me to continue this research. Codes are a way to label and describe the images (Rose 2001:59). Rose (2001) points out that the coding categories have to be exhaustive, exclusive and enlightening: “every aspect of the images with which the research is concerned must be covered by one category, […] categories must not overlap” and lastly, the categories must lead to analytical implications (60). It is especially important that the codes have “analytical significance”, as Rose emphasizes:

That is, the codes used must depend on a theorized connection between the image and the broader cultural context in which its meaning is made; ‘theorized’, because making this connection entails drawing on a theoretical and empirical understanding of the images under consideration. (Rose 2001:60)

The codes cannot be chosen at random, and have to have a relation to theory in order to shed light on the research question one wants to investigate. In the following section I show how
the codes are related to theory. Furthermore, the codes have to be so specific so that others could use the same categories and come to the same conclusions, this render the “coding process replicable”, as Rose stresses (2001:62). The replicability of research is important, as it says something about the feasibility and consistency of the method.

I coded the photos to analyze visual self-presentation and captions to analyze the textual self-presentation. Firstly, I made an overview of each user, their name, how many posts they have in total, how many followers, how many they follow and what type of poster they were. I based the type of poster on observations I made of each user, such as what kind of posts they posted.

**Coding Photographs**
I started by giving each post a unique identifier and registered the date of collection. Secondly, I noted the date the post was posted and how many comments and likes the post had. Thereafter, I coded the photos with the following categories: point of view, gaze, facial expression, posture, clothing and accessories.

**Point of view**
Point of view can say something about whether or not it is a *selfie*, or that the photo was taken by a *photographer*. Point of view can say something about the social distance: Kress and van Leeuwen connect the size of the shot with the social distance which the picture creates between a viewer and a represented participant (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996:130). The size of the shot refers to how much of the represented participant is seen in a picture. A selfie lets the viewer see the picture from her own perspective, and thus lets the viewer come close. If the viewer was present the distance would allow “us to smell or touch the other person” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996:130). The viewer imaginarily comes closer, and hence more active. The photo becomes more personal in comparison to a picture taken by someone else. When a photo is taken by someone else, the photographer can vary the distance between the represented participant and the viewer much more than when the photo is a selfie. A picture can be taken further away to create an impression of distance to the subject; the viewer is a stranger and is kept on a distance. Further it can say something about the control the represented participant has over the photo, and the presentation of self in the photo. When the subject is taking the photo herself she decides what it looks like. While, if someone else takes the photo, the self-presentation in the photo is controlled by someone else. The subject might
give instructions about how she wants the picture to be taken, but ultimately the photographer chooses.

The gaze
The gaze of the represented participant can say something about the relation and contact between the viewer and the subject and self-presentation. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) points out two types of relations between the viewer and the image and the person depicted: ‘demand’ and ‘offer’. The first is a direct address, where the represented participant “demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996:122). This is made explicit through that the eyes of the depicted meets the eyes of the viewer, and the viewer become the object. The second is an indirect address, where the viewer is the subject and the depicted becomes the object. The viewer is “an invisible onlooker” and the image “‘offers’ the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case.” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996:124). An illusion occurs; the viewer does not have the impression that the person depicted knows that he or she is being observed and the represented participant is acting as if no one is watching (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996:126).

In this study, the depicted can look directly at the viewer (demand), look at the mobile phone (offer) or look away (offer). Looking at the phone might be related to a more controlled self-presentation. By looking at the screen, the depicted sees how the picture look like and hence has more control over how the photo turn out. Looking away from both the phone and the viewer might signify that the subject is busy with what she is doing rather than acknowledging the camera.

Facial Expression
The expression can say something about the emotion the women want to convey, in this study the five types of facial expressions were coded: gentle smile, big smile, exaggeration, concentrated and neutral. A gentle smile can be seen as invitational, soft and naïve, empathic, and warm, while a big smile is more aggressive and demanding, it might signify proudness and overtly happiness, carefree, extravert and enthusiastic. An exaggerated look might signify self-irony and humor. The concentrated look is showing that she is serious with training while a neutral face might signify a coolness and indifference.
The Posture
The posture can say something about their personality, how open they are, and it refers to how
the body is arranged in the picture. The various poses in this study are *the booty touch*,
*standing or sitting facing the camera*, *flexing muscles* or doing an *exercise*. A ‘booty touch’ is
when the depicted is arching the back and pushing out the buttocks and chest. It might be
considered as sexy or feminine, because the bottom is accentuated. Standing or sitting while
facing the camera is a neutral pose and it does not focus on showing muscles. Flexing muscles
signify strength and control. The exercise can be considered as a sign of strength and show
off.

Clothing
Clothing and accessories can also say something about the personality because they are props
that can be used to signify to others how they are. Also the type of clothes can say something
about how the women wants to present themselves; tight clothes might be used to accentuate
the body, and especially the muscles, on the other hand tight clothing or little clothing might
indicate a sexualization of oneself. Not wearing clothes might indicate a focus on the muscles.

Coding Captions
I coded the captions as it is interesting to see what the women write about, how they write and
how the caption is related to the image. The captions were not coded separately from the
images, as the caption can shed light on the image, and the image on the caption. To analyze
the captions, I used the following coding categories:

Theme (including hashtags)
I looked specifically at the content of the caption, because it is interesting to see whether or
not the women describe their image, and what they write about. The topic could cover
exercise, clothing, situation, food or about self.

Language
The language of the caption can say something about whether or not the women want to reach
out to an international audience or not.

Relation between text and image
The relation between the caption and image was identified as either *relay* or *anchorage*. When
the image and the caption can express the same, the relation is anchorage. On the other hand,
when the photo captions are not directly related to what is depicted, the relation is called relay. The relation was determined by considering the caption and picture together.

**Rhetorical analysis**
As an addition to the content analysis, I also looked at how the subject appeals to viewers in the caption, through either ethos, logos and pathos. Here I look at both image and text. Ethos is when the person appeals to the viewer by emphasizing one’s own character and credibility. Pathos is an emotional appeal which is meant to move and influence through feelings. The last appeal, logos, is through reason. The poster wants to appeal to the viewer through facts or arguments.

**Coding Comments**
The comments were analyzed with the content of the posts in mind, as it constitutes the context for the comment. One can only understand the comments by regarding the image and caption. When coding the comments I looked at the topic of the comment, who commented, what kind of interaction it was and the tone of the comment.

**Topic**
The various topics can tell something about what the viewer focus on, and how they perceive the post.

**Commentator**
The type of commentator can indicate whether or not the women are other-oriented or not, and how much they interact with their audience.

**Intracoder reliability**
As I did not have another person coding with me, I ensured intracoder reliability by narrowing down the descriptions of the categories in the code book. I also repeated the coding process three times in order to reduce discrepancies in the coding. This way I could ensure that I achieved more consistent results. However, it would have been useful to let someone else code the same sample, in order to see if they could reproduce equivalent coding.

**3.1.2 Ethical Issues**
On the internet people share a great deal of personal information about themselves with a large number of strangers. This might be because the poster does not understand the reach of the social medium, or as a result of a strategy to ‘broadcast’ themselves to increase their following base or popularity. As the field of internet research is developing quickly a few
questions arise when it comes to ethical issues: When is something considered public online, and when is it considered private? Does one have to ask for permission when using publicly available content in research? Does the poster know that what he or she posts online can be central for research? How do I, as a researcher, have to deal with issues like these? These are just some of the several challenges which arise when researching internet activity. Especially, the issue on whether or not internet can be seen as a public or private space is central. Kozinets (2010) points out that the internet can be understood metaphorically as either a text or a space:

Applied to the topic of internet research ethics, these metaphors lead us to certain conclusions and encourage us to adopt certain procedures. If the internet is a place, then is it like a public space? Is the capture of computer-mediated communication then similar to the transcription of conversation overheard in a public park? If the internet is a text, then is the use of computer-mediated communication like the citations of or quotation from a published book? (Kozinets 2010:141)

Kozinets points out here that people struggle with putting a certain label the internet, it thus depends on the researcher’s interpretation. However, the questions is not only how the researcher interprets internet, it is also important to assess whether or not the internet community one wants to research is closed or open for public. Moreover, the type of interaction one wants to research is also essential. On Instagram one has the possibility specify whether or not you want your profile to be private. By default anyone can see a profile and the accompanying posts on Instagram (Instagram 2015). Thus, one could argue that it would be reasonable to ask for permission to use posts from private profiles in research, while for public profiles one could make exemptions. Nonetheless, the identity of the person in question should be kept secluded in the research. When conducting internet research it is necessary to identify whether or not one is conducting human subject research. Research is defined as human subject research when it concerns the collection of information about humans (Kozinets 2010:141). However, Kozinets points out that research on online communities or cultures is not considered human subjects research “if the researcher does not record the identity of the communicators and if the researcher can legally and easily gain access to these communications of archives” (2010:142). As the focus of my study is not on the specific individuals and their identity, In order to keep the women in this study anonymous I blurred out the names and any other personal information available in the posts I have used as examples in this thesis.
3.2 Research Findings and Analysis

In this section I am going to present the findings of my first study. The intention of this section is to develop a synthesis of the research findings. The women I have researched in this study are actors who perform their self-presentation on Instagram. In the sections below the following research question is addressed:

*RQ1: How do the women apply the technological affordances of Instagram to facilitate their self-presentation?*

Firstly, this section explores the ways Instagram posts have been managed by the female Norwegian users, researching the various ways in which Instagram is used by the women to present themselves. It examines the actual techniques and means which the women have employed, such as the use of visual and textual cues. The findings presented in this section are based on the results from the visual and textual content analysis of 60 Instagram posts.

By posting different pictures of themselves, the women give an indication to others of what they are like and who they are. Poses, the facial expressions and the types of clothes are all visual aspects which are central in the presentation of self. To give an example one of the girls stands in a dressing room, flexes her arm muscle while she is making an exaggerated facial expressing, almost screaming while she is looking at her phone. In her caption she writes: “This body went up and down 16 times. I repeat, 16 times in a dip stand today! I never thought I could ever do that. #proudgirl #Lykkeisgettingstrong”18  Another girl is photographed from behind during an exercise where she is lifting herself up. She is wearing colorful clothes, and her face is not visible. She writes: “One more from my workout this morning, weighted chins”. In the following section, I analyze how the women present themselves on Instagram in relation to the first question posed above.

### 3.2.1 Sample description

The results of this research are based on a content analysis of 6 women. The women were, roughly, between 19 and 29 years old. In the table provided below an overview is given of the number of followers, how many users the women are following, how many posts they have posted and the type of ‘fitness interest’ the female users have. One of the girls chose the word

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18 Translation of “denne kroppen gikk ned og opp 16 ganger, I repeat, 16 ganger i dipsstativet idag det hadde jeg aldri trodd jeg noen sinne skulle klare! #stoltfrøken #lykkeblirsterk”
‘fitness’ as a part of her username, the others used their first name or full name as their username. W1 is the most followed subject in my research with 206,521 followers, and W6 is the least followed subject with 1895 followers. The woman with the least followers was the subject who had posted the most posts when I conducted my study, while the most followed woman was also the one who received the most likes on her posts. The women were categorized either as fitness athlete, bikini fitness athlete, weight loss or lifestyle. The different categories also reflect the type of fitness the women engage in. The category fitness athlete indicates that the person participates in fitness competitions which demand them to be lean and muscular, but not too muscular (Venuto 2012). Bikini fitness athletes, on the other hand, compete in competitions where they are expected to be somewhat muscular, but the judges also focus on aspects such as hair and facial beauty (IFBB 2011). Weight loss and lifestyle are more casual categories, as the individuals do not compete, but exercise in order to lose weight or as leisure activity. Three of the girls can be categorized as fitness athletes: W1, W2 and W4, while W3 is a bikini fitness athlete. W5 is categorized as a lifestyle and W6 is exercising to lose weight.

Table 1: Sample description and overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Following</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Total likes on Instagram (sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W1</td>
<td>1025</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>206521</td>
<td>Fitness athlete</td>
<td>84685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2</td>
<td>2613</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>25992</td>
<td>Fitness athlete</td>
<td>6075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W3</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>5215</td>
<td>Bikini fitness</td>
<td>3308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4</td>
<td>1057</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>3678</td>
<td>Fitness athlete</td>
<td>2234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W5</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>2363</td>
<td>2529</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>1326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W6</td>
<td>2,909</td>
<td>1030</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Weight loss</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2 Cues to Identity in Self-Presentation

“Taking selfies to post, just so that i have something to pass the time with when i do my cardio #selfie#hellgym #cardio #pastime #training #bikinifitness#betterbodies”

– a caption written by W3

Since the focus of Instagram is to share images with others, the image itself is the most central part of this study. However, text is also an important part of the Instagram posts, which this section will demonstrate. The posts contain both visual attributes and textual cues which can tell us something about the woman who posted it. To summarize, I have focused on the point
of view, gaze, facial expression, setting, posture and clothing in the analysis of the visual cues. Furthermore, I also examined the captions in order to get a complete understanding of the Instagram posts. With an image you can give an impression of not only what you look like, but also who you are or want to be as a person. By varying the visual cues, it is possible to present oneself in different ways. At the same time, the caption might extend the context of the image. In other words, it can add meaning to the visual content which cannot solely be found in the image. In relation to the caption, I address the language used, the topics, relation between image and caption, and rhetorical appeal. All of the captions have been interpreted in light of the images they accompany.

Both the visual and textual cues are a part of what Tanis (2003) calls cues to identity, as they can lead the viewer to make certain assumptions about how and who the women are. Furthermore, they also belong to what Goffman calls the front of the performance. To Goffman (1956) the front “is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (13). This is similar to what Tanis pointed out; the visual cues are elements of one’s self-presentation that always have an influence on the viewer. In the appendix V is an overview of all the results, both per woman and total results.

Social distance
What one first notices about the images on Instagram is the content and how it is taken. A selfie is a self-portrait taken with a phone camera or another type of camera, where only the subjects face or parts of her body is visible. In this study category ‘point of view’ refers to the perspective of the photo, thus it tells us whether or not the photo was taken by the subject herself (selfie) or by a bystander.

This study shows that the sample was equally divided between selfies and photos taken by a photographer (see Figure 13 in Appendix VI). These results are quite surprising, as the post were not sampled on the basis of their point of view. These numbers, however, change when we look at each woman individually (Figure 14). Some women do not post any selfies, while others almost only post selfies. For example, W1, W2 and W6 are mostly depicted in photos taken by a photographer, while W3 and W5 post the most selfies.

19 With the rise of selfie sticks, a selfie is not only taken at an arms distance. The selfie stick allows people to fasten their smartphones or cameras to a stick, and take a photo from a distance.
By varying the type of point of view, the women can vary the social distance in the picture. The social distance refers to the size of the picture frame, thus how close to the subject the viewers are allowed by the picture (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). Kress and van Leeuwen argue that the closeness and/or distance which are constructed in an image can say something about the relation between the subject and the viewer. The photos taken by a photographer keep the viewer at a distance. This is due to the physical distance between the subject on the photo and the photographer, and thus between the subject and the viewer. In this manner, the viewer views the picture as an outsider. A selfie, on the other hand, is taken by the person herself, which allows the viewer closer compared to when a photographer takes a picture. Due to the minimal distance between the subject and the viewer an imaginary closeness can develop. Depending on how the picture is taken, the image is either seen from the subject’s point of view, or the viewers see the picture from an intimate distance, which only close friends or family would be allowed in real life. In other words, the various social distances can indicate the interpersonal relationship between the subject and the viewer.

One example of a picture taken by a photographer is picture 10 (Appendix V) where W2 is viewed from a distance. There is a short distance between the viewer and the subject. However, since the photo is taken by a photographer, there is enough distance between the photographer and the subject for the whole body to be visible. In the picture, W2 is doing an exercise, and because her whole body is visible, her technique of exercise is shown. It is like she is instructing the viewers on how to execute the exercise. The photo resembles an instruction illustration of exercise. In another example, W1 is photographed much closer than W2 (Picture 11). Compared with the first picture, only parts of W1’s body is visible. The focus does not lie on the exercise she is executing, but on what her arms and bottom looks like while doing the exercise. The viewer is allowed close, in a way it almost seems that the viewer is standing next to her. When we compare these two photographs taken by a photographer, we see that the social distance of the first picture of W2 is impersonal and distant, while the other picture of W1 is close and personal. Another interesting point about photos taken by a photographer is that the subjects give an impression of having a celebrity like status. They have someone who helps them with taking the photographs.

When we look at the selfies, we see that the viewers are allowed relatively closer to the subject. Picture 12 is an example of a selfie in which the viewer views the subject from an intimate distance. There is no face visible in the photo, but W4’s neck is sweaty, and only a part of her upper body is visible. The focus of the picture is not on W4’s looks, but on what
she has done before taking the picture. The sweat and the muscular arm give the viewer an indication that she has been working out. In real life we would only be able to see W4 from this point of view if we were standing extremely close to her. In another picture, we see W3 taking a selfie in a mirror in a gym (picture 13). This picture resembles the picture of W2 when it comes to distance, as almost the whole body is visible. However, the viewers are allowed a bit closer than in picture 10. Furthermore, the image is viewed from the subject’s point of view. Instead of showing an exercise, the picture of W3 proofs that she is at the gym. At the same time, W3 is pushing her bottom out in the booty tooch posture, so that more of her body is visible. The photograph is, thus, not only proof of her being in the gym, but she is also showing the viewer what she looks like, by putting accent on her bottom. The focus is clearly on her female curves, as she is wearing tights and a loose hooded sweater. What is striking about these four examples is that even though some are taken by the subject themselves, and some by a photographer, the women vary the social distances depending on what they want to focus on in the picture. Whereas W2 focuses on the exercise in picture #, W1 focuses on her body. On the other hand, W4 is showing that he has been exercising by showing her sweaty neck, while W3 is proving that she is in the gym by posing a selfie where she wants to show her looks.

To conclude, the women vary the social distance in the pictures, and thus the interpersonal relationship with the viewer, depending on what they focus on. For example, if the focus of the picture is to show an exercise, the picture is most likely taken by a photographer which is standing at a distance. The social distance is then impersonal and distant. On the other hand, if the women want to show how they are feeling, the picture is a close up of their face or sweaty body parts. The viewer is allowed much closer to the subject. Thirdly, when focusing on showing the body, there is not necessarily a face visible. Instead we see the body from the women’s own perspective; as a reflection in the mirror. Surprisingly, even though we see the women from their own perspective, the photo is distant and impersonal.

**Direct and Indirect Contact**

Whereas the gaze of the subject in the photo can indicate what kind contact there is between her and the viewer, the facial expression can say something about the magnitude of the contact and the intentions of the poster.
**Gaze**

As can be seen in figure 1 the women mostly look in their smartphone while taking a picture (35.0%). Secondly, a large proportion of the photos – 31.7% – do not contain a gaze, since the photo was taken from an angle which did not include the face. The figure also shows that in some of the photos the women are looking away, and on a few photos the women were looking at the viewer (6.7%). When we look at the individual results (Figure 2), we see that all of the women look at their smart phone screen at some point. Some do it more than others, such as W3 and W5. On the other hand, we see that, compared to the other women, W1, W2 and W6 are looking more away from the camera. This is mostly due to the fact that these pictures are taken while the women are busy with an exercise. Another point related to the gaze and exercise, is that the face is often not visible during an exercise. Furthermore, we also see that only three of the women look at the viewer directly.

In relation with Kress and van Leeuwen’s theory of direct and indirect address (1996), the findings indicate that the women mostly offer themselves to the viewer, as they do not look directly at the viewer. Consequently, the women become passive objects which the viewers can observe. On only a few photographs, the subject is establishing eye contact, and demanding attention from and engaging with the viewer. Below I have picked out four examples, to show how the women vary the direct and indirect address.

Firstly, picture 14 is an example of looking in the camera. We see that W5 looks at her smart phone while she takes a selfie. By observing herself on the screen of her phone while taking the photo she controls how she looks and how others will see her. At the same time she offers herself to the viewer, as she does not meet the eyes of her viewers. The viewer is drawn to her exaggerated expression and the arm which she is flexing. However, since she is controlling her self-presentation, she is also in charge of how the viewers see her. In a way, she indirectly demands the viewer to view her in a certain way.

Picture 15 is an example of a picture without a gaze. W4 does an exercise with her back towards the camera while she is photographed. She seems busy with the exercise, and gives the impression of not even being aware that there is a camera present. This is probably not the case, since executing the exercise shows the viewer how muscular she is.

In picture 16 W6 flexes her muscles and poses for the camera while she is looking away from the photographer. This picture is a conventional example of what Kress and van Leeuwen would call ‘offer’. W6 becomes an object to look at. The viewers are invited to
admire her muscles, as she is posing like a ‘champion’ with her arm raised in a fist while tightening her biceps. By looking away and flexing simultaneously, she is acknowledging the camera, but at the same time she pretends not to know that there is a camera present.

In another example, W2, however, poses for the photographer (picture 17). She looks in the direction of the viewer, which shows that she is aware of both the camera and a possible audience. Her look is seductive, as she is looking directly at the viewer with a smirk. Essentially, the picture is a commercial for her gym, and it seems like she is trying to persuade the viewer of joining her gym. She does this by both demanding their attention by directly addressing them and seducing them with her sensual look and sly smile.

Kress and van Leeuwen argue, in relation to indirect address of ‘offer’, that a relationship occurs between the viewer and the subject “in which the viewer must have the illusion that the represented participants do not know they are being looked at, and in which the represented participants must pretend that they are not being watched.” (1996:384). However, as the example of the picture # show, the women do acknowledge both the existence of the camera and the viewer by looking at the phone screen. Even though W5 is not demanding the attention directly from the viewer, the she controls how the viewers see her. This implies that even though she is offering herself to the camera, she is regulate what the viewer sees, and is in full control of how the viewer see her.

In general, this study shows that the women do not interact with the person viewing the picture. Instead they offer themselves as “items of information, objects of contemplation” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). Siibak (2010) also found that the men in her research were rather offering themselves than demanding attention from the viewer. However, there were not a significantly higher percentage of men who could be classified as offering compared with demanding. Siibak (2010:418) characterizes the men in her study as more passive and narcissist, since they mostly did not engage with the viewer. The women in my study, like the men in Siibak’s research, become objects to look at. The women I have studied are frequently posing in the photos, and are displaying to the viewer that they are aware of the camera. Instead of seeking contact, they show off both what their bodies look like and what they can do.

**Facial expression**

Disregarding photos without a visible expression, Figure 3 shows that most of the photos depict the women smiling gently (25,0 %) or looking concentrated (21,7%). In some photos
the women have a big smile or a neutral expression. Only on a few photos the women have an exaggerated expression. The individual differences (Figure 4) show that W1 and W2 post the most photos on which they have a concentrated expression. W3, W4 and W5, on the other hand, post the most photos with a gentle smile compared to the others. W5 also posts the most photos with a big smile. Below, I show how the facial expression is used to diversify self-presentation.

In Picture 18 we see W5 smiling gently at her smartphone. Her face is dark as a result of a shadow, which covers the right side of her face. She has folded up her t-shirt, in order to show her stomach. It is clear that she wants to show her muscles, and that the focus is on her body, and not her face. The gentle smile can be seen as invitational, soft, and naïve. W5 seems proud of her achievements and since she is not exaggerating her expression, we are invited to admire her and what she has accomplished.

An example of the concentrated look can be found on Picture 19, where W1 is executing an exercise while looking out in the air. Her body is in focus, as the rest of the picture is blurred out. The concentrated look shows us that she is occupied with working out. She gives the impression that she is not distracted by the photographer taking the picture. Additionally, W1 is not showing any particular emotion while doing the exercise. It shows that the particular exercise is not difficult for her to do so. At the same time, W1 do not look into the camera, thus she does not look as if she focuses on the photo being taken, but on the exercise. She gives an impression of being serious about what she is doing, while at the same time posing for the camera.

The third type of facial expression is the big smile. In picture 20 W2 is grinning towards her smartphone while taking the picture. The phone is not visible in the picture, and it seems like she is looking directly at the viewer. As we can only see her face and her thumbs up in the picture, she draws the focus to herself and how she is feeling, and not on what she has achieved or what her body looks like. Her big smile is more ‘aggressive’ and demanding than a gentle smile. Compared to the gentle smile, the big smile might signify more explicit proudness and happiness.

W6 is looking at her phone with a neutral expression in Picture 21. She is taking a photo of herself while gently flexing her arm. Her head is located on the left side of the photo and is partly hidden behind her phone, whereas her arm is located in the center of the picture.
Our focus is drawn to the arm, and is not distracted by her cool and indifferent expression. With her neutral expression, she shows that she is serious about her achievements.

Lastly, the exaggerated expression can be found in Picture 22. We see W6 sticking her tongue out and making a funny face. The post indicates that she had a tough workout, but by making that expression she exaggerating her exhaustion. Instead of utter exhaustion, she is expressing self-irony and humor. She shows that she is pushing herself further, and that she will not give up after a tiresome exercise session.

What we see is that the women, on the one hand, express happiness related to exercise, either before or after training. The women present themselves humbly while showing their muscles by only smiling gently or looking neutral. Furthermore, with a big smile, the women express euphoria when it comes to exercising. On the other hand, the women express how serious they are during the actual exercise.

**Front stage and Backstage performances**

The women’s clothing and the setting, in which they have taken the photo, can indicate whether or not the post belongs to the front or the back region. In relation to clothing I looked at whether or not the women were dressed appropriately, and how much skin they show. When it comes to the setting, I looked at where the photo was taken, and how the various settings can be characterized with regard to front stage and backstage performances.

**Clothes**

In this research I also looked at what kind of clothes the women wore on the pictures. Clothes are attributes which can say something about the person wearing it. To Goffman, clothing is a part of the personal front (1956:14). On almost half of the photos the women were wearing a tight singlet (Figure 5). In a couple of the photos the women wore either tight or loose t-shirts, and in some photos the women wore a sweater or a jacket. However, in a few photos the women wore just a sports bra, were naked or wore a bikini. Most of the women wore tights in the photos (Figure 7). In a few photos the women wore tight shorts, a bikini or jeans. The most common combination of clothes was tights combined with a singlet (38,3 %) or a tight t-shirt (20,0 %) (Table 5 in Appendix IV). Below I show how what women wear related to the front stage and backstage.

*Front stage: Clothed*
In almost all of the pictures of W2, we see that she is wearing a singlet and tights in the gym (e.g. Picture 10, Picture 20 & Picture 31). This type of clothing is suitable for both the setting. In a gym, one is expected to wear fitness clothing such as a t-shirt, singlet, tights or shorts. A tight singlet does not only show the arms and shoulders, it also accentuates the upper body. The t-shirt is mostly neutral, but might accentuate the upper body if it is tight. A sweater or jacketed cover up most of the upper body, and can also be seen as a neutral piece of clothing. Wearing tights accentuates the leg muscles and butt. Tight shorts do also accentuate the lower body, but also show more skin. Not only do the clothes show off the muscles, they can also indicate how serious the women are about exercising.

*Backstage: Showing skin*

When the women are wearing only a sports bra or a bikini the women show more of their body, since the pieces of clothing do not cover much of her body. Showing skin sexualizes the women, as the focus is on their body and what they look like without clothes. They become sexual objects to look at. One example is Picture 33, where W3 is posing for the viewers in her bikini. She is pushing her breast and butt out, standing a bit twisted towards the camera. Instead of focusing on her muscles, the focus lies on her breast and how skinny she is. However, in some examples this is not the case. In Picture 34 we see W5 standing with the back towards the camera. She is not wearing any clothes to cover her upper body. Unlike Picture 33, the focus here lies on her muscles. She is showing us how strong she has become. In some pictures the women were only wearing a bikini. Wearing a bikini was often related to them writing about bikini fitness or doing a competition in the caption. A bikini accentuates the body, the muscles are on show.

What we see is that the women adjust their type of clothing to the setting. In a front stage setting, such as a gym, where other people are present the women are appropriately dressed. Whereas in a backstage setting, the women wear more revealing clothes and show more skin.

*Setting*

Figure 9 shows that the most popular setting were photographs taken in the gym (56.7 %). The rest of the photographs were either taken at home, decontextualized, or in a dressing room. A few photos are taken in a bathroom and one outside. When looking at the individual differences between the women, we see that W1, W2, W3 and W4 mostly take photographs in
the gym, while W6 only takes 2 photos in the gym and W5 does not take any pictures in a gym.

Front stage

In picture 23 we see W4 taking a selfie in a gym. Being in a gym can indicate that she is more serious about exercising. It is also a public place where other people can see that a photo is taken. It becomes a front stage where one is expected not to violate the social norms. Executing an exercise or posing in front of a mirror with clothes on might be socially accepted, but lifting one’s t-shirt to show muscles might not be. In the post by W4 the social norms become clear, as she writes “Sneaky photo at SIB”\(^{20}\) in the caption. In the comment sections viewers comment that it is difficult to take selfies at that particular gym. W4 replies: “Hahaha, it is impossible to take pictures in general (without any unpleasant looks)”\(^{21}\). It seems like taking a picture in the gym is frowned upon by others in the gym. Most of the pictures taken in a gym depict the women during an exercise. However, a few depict the women posing or standing straight. In the latter cases, it is clear that the women are alone, whereas in the picture 23 of W4, we see the contours of people in the background.

Backstage

In Picture 24 W3 is taking a selfie of her back at home, wearing only a bandeau top and sweatpants. Taking a photo at home might indicate that she is exercising at home without equipment. There is no evidence that she has been to the gym other than the body itself. On the other hand, taking a photo at home allow the woman to take photos that belong to the backstage, photos which one might not dare to take in a public place, such as a gym or dressing room, where other people are present. Some of the backstage photos, like Picture 25 were taken in a dressing room. W5 is taking a selfie in a dressing room mirror. The dressing room can be considered back stage, but because there might be other people present, there are some social norms which apply: as the changing rooms are shared, one has to be careful with taking pictures in order to respect other’s right of privacy. However, on all the photos taken in a dressing room, there are no other people present. A few pictures were also taken in a bathroom. There are clear indications such as tiles, mirrors or garbage bins (Picture 26). A

\(^{20}\) Translated from: “Snikfotografering på SIB #trening #treningsforum #fitness #fitnessbloggen #curvesworkout #elitetrener #trengerfotograf 😅”

\(^{21}\) Translated from: “Hahaha, er umulig å ta bilder generelt (uten noe mindre hyggelige blikk) ✅ @henriettealstadsaeter”
bathroom is more private, when only one person is present; one does not have to think about other people when taking the photo.

Decontextualized

W6 is depicted in a photo which is difficult to place (Picture 27). We see that she is in a room, but there are no indications of where this room is. It could be at her home or at a gym. Most likely she is in a gym, but a decontextualized setting makes it more difficult for viewers to imagine where she is. The woman puts the focus on herself in the picture, and not on where she is.

The women adjust their self-presentation in the settings to the social norms, especially in public settings such as a gym, or semi-public settings such as a dressing room. Some types of photos are considered outside of the norm, and are thus more risky to take. Furthermore, backstage photos are more intimate and personal compared with photos taken in a public setting. Lastly, decontextualized pictures draw the attention to the women themselves, and not where they are.

Posture and Action

Next to the setting, the pose in which the women are depicted was analyzed. The Figure 11 shows that most of the posts depict the women while they are doing an exercise (61,6%). Secondly, the women on the photographs were standing straight or sideways (26,7%), doing the booty tooch (21,7 %) or flexing (11,7 %). In only one photo there was no clear pose. The individual differences indicate that W5 is the only woman who do not post exercise photos (Figure 12). W3 is found to post the most ‘booty tooch’ photographs, while W1 and W2 post the most exercise photos.

Exercise and strength

Exercises and flexing in photos can be seen as showing off. By doing this, the women are showing the viewer what they have achieved and how strong they are. In Picture 29 we see an example of W4 doing squats with what seems like heavy weights. By doing this she is showing her strength and her self-discipline, but at the same she is showing the viewers how to execute the exercise correctly. Thus she is not just demonstrating her skills she is encouraging others to try the same exercise. On only a few photos the women are flexing. As we see in picture 30, W6 is holding her arms up to show the viewer what she has achieved by training. She is looking directly at the viewer, claiming his or her attention, and smirking a little. By doing this, she shows how proud she is of what she has accomplished without
exaggerating. The exercise photos signify how strong the women are; they are proving their strength by executing challenging exercises in the photo.

Neutral
Pictures in which the women either stand straight towards the camera or a bit sideways can be considered neutral. This is because they are not flaunting their body in the best ways possible, such as sticking certain body parts out or flexing muscles. In picture 31 W2 is standing sideways towards the mirror. She is just standing up straight. The picture is more a proof of her being in the gym rather than showing of her body. However, by standing straight, one can also show off one’s leg muscles, as the focus is on the whole body, and the legs become visible in the photograph.

Feminine and sexy
On some pictures the women push their bottom out and do a booty tooch. By doing this pose the women might want to be seen as sexy and feminine, as they are accentuating the bottom and the chest. In picture 32 W3 is standing sideways while she is stretching her back and thus pushing her bottom and chest out. The viewer is drawn to focus on the body parts which the poster wants them to focus on. The women are showing their body in the best way they can. This type of post accentuates the female curves instead of skills and strength.

Images and Captions
On Instagram the image is the main focus for viewers, and since it is central, it is not possible to discuss the caption without the image in mind. I give examples of captions and discuss them in light of the topic, relation to the image and rhetorical appeal.

It was found that the women write their captions either in Norwegian (40,0 %) or English (38,3 %). One caption is a mix of English and Norwegian, and the rest of the captions only contain emoticons. That the women are writing in Norwegian can indicate that the women are focusing especially on Norwegian viewers and, friends and family. By writing in English, the women can reach a much greater number of viewers, as it is a universal language. When we look at how the women use different languages in their captions, we see something interesting. The user with the most followers almost only posts emoticons, and do not write anything in her caption other than one or two hashtags. The two following users, W2 and W3 almost only write their captions in English. This might explain why they are so popular, or indicate that they want to reach out to a larger audience than those who know Norwegian. The three last users, W4, W5 and W6 almost only write their captions in Norwegian.
It is not surprising that exercise is the most frequent caption topic, considering the type of pictures the women post. More than 80% of the captions contain a reference to training. These captions can be divided into five sub-themes: describing the exercise (1), writing about feeling related to exercise (2), progression and discipline (3), location (4), and body and muscles (5). Almost all of the women write about exercises, however, W1 and W6 rarely mention exercises. W1 refers to exercising once while advertising for her gym, and W6 writes once that she has had a nice leg session. W3 & W4, on the other hand, almost only write about exercise in their captions. As I mentioned above, some of the captions only contained smileys. Lastly, the women write a bit about clothing and one caption about feelings. I begin by addressing the captions related to exercise. Some of the examples below have been translated from Norwegian to English, the original caption can be found in the footnotes. Captions written in English have not been altered.

Table 2: Results within the category ‘Caption Topics’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Topics (n=60)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smileys</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describing exercise

When writing about exercise, the women were mostly describing the exercises in detail to the viewers. Below are two examples written by W5:

[W5]: “Lifted 6x100 kg in sumo deadlift yesterday! Training is so fun these days. And that the weight is increasing is always a bonus. #traininghappiness #energybomb #lykkeisbecommingstrong”

[W5]: “The obligatory #holdyourbreathandpushyourbuttout pose after an INSANELY good leg exercise. Especially nice with 6x60 kg in clean and jerk again.”

In these examples W5 explains what exercise she is doing, how many repetitions she did and the amount of kilos she has lifted. Accompanying the first caption example is a picture of the W5 showing only her stomach and legs. The caption thus extends the meaning of the image,

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22 Translated from: “6x100 kg i sumo markløft gikk opp i går! Trening er så gøy i disse dager 😊 Og at stengene vokser er jo alltid en bonus 😊 #treningsglede #energibombe #lykkeblirsterk”

23 Translated from: “Den obligatoriske #holdpustenogstikkutrumma posen etter en SYKT god beintrening 😊 Spesielt deilig med 2x60 kg i frivending igjen 😊”
as it is explaining something else than what is on the picture. The caption works as an explanation for how W5 has gained her muscles. Both her muscles and the caption describing how many kilos and repetitions she has done, and how she is feeling is enforcing her character as a strong woman who enjoys exercising. The second example shows how anchorage works, as it describes what she is doing in the picture; she is posing for the viewers. But, in addition to telling the viewers what she is doing, she also tells them what she did before the picture. By doing this, she gives the viewers a context to understand the picture better. With this post she appeals to her viewers emotionally, by gently smiling into her phone and expressing joy about training and that she gets energy from training. By writing her caption like this she is showing the viewer how much she enjoys exercising. She might inspire the viewers to try the same, by following her descriptions.

**Feelings related to exercise**

Next to describing exercises, the women also described their feelings in relation to exercise. Below are two examples from W5 and W4:

[W5]: “The energy and endorphins almost takes over – 4 fantastic strength exercises in 5 days. The body loves vacation #legday #workout #e2 #happy #exercisehappiness”  

[W4]: “Repost of one of my most popular pictures on Instagram. One tired, but very pleased and happy girl after having won the Norwegian Championship. Challenging @[name] @[name] #challenge”

Like the captions above, the women express their feelings about training and how they feel after exercising. In the first caption, W5 is expressing that she is full of energy and that she is feeling happy, but at the same time she expresses that her body needs vacation. In the picture she is only smiling a bit, she seems happy, but her facial expression does not convey an image of someone who is overjoyed. In a way, she seems more tired than energetic. The image and caption complement each other, as she explains that her body needs vacations. On the other hand, it seems somewhat contrasting as she is writing about happiness, energy and endorphins while she seems calm and tired in her image. Just like the last example above, she is emotionally appealing to the audience to do the same. She is not focusing on her own character, as she does not show her body or what she has achieved.

24 Translated from: “Energien og endorfinene tar snart overhånd - 4 fantastiske styrkeøkter på 5 dager ❤️ Kroppen elsker ferie ❤ #legday #workout #e2 #happy #treningsglede”

25 Translated from: “Repost av mitt mest populære bilde på Instagram. En stykk sliten, men veldig fornøyd og glad jente etter å ha vunnet NM. Utfordrer @[markusj92] @rannveigmarlenevidere ❤ #challenge”
In the second example, W4 is explaining what kind of picture it is, she tells us that it is a repost, followed by how she feels in that photograph. By describing her feelings and what she has done in the picture, the text anchors the image. At the same time the relation between the image and text becomes somewhat meta, as she describes it a repost of another picture. In comparison with the other example, this post is a mix of ethos and pathos appeals. W4 is showing her achievements in the picture, and at the same time she writes humbly about how she is feeling in the caption. Not only is she proud and happy, but she is also tired. This can give the viewers the impression that she is not completely invincible, but that she has worked hard to achieve this trophy. By showing herself as vulnerable, she also makes herself more relatable.

*Progression and discipline*

Another frequent topic that the women wrote about in their caption was progression and discipline. In their posts the women both show through the pictures and write about how they have become stronger:

W5: “Babysteps ☺ but I'm getting there ☺ #lykkesbliSterk#thatlightningthough”

W4: “Squats is the exercise that takes the most time (in my case) in order to get back the strenght for. Very happy with the development and technique atm. #training #treningsforum #squat #satselixia #fitnessbloggen #elitetrener #athleticfitness #myrevolution”  

In the first example “Baby steps” refers to how W5 is slowly progressing in gaining muscles. It can also be seen as description of her goal. In the picture, we see her standing straight towards the viewers showing off her stomach muscles. The caption becomes a description of what we can see, and we see that she thinks that her muscular body is progressing slowly and is only in the beginning stages. This post can be seen as an ethos appeal, as it shows the viewers that she is working hard and that she is progressing gradually. Her facial expression shows that she is proud of what she has achieved. In the second example W4 is explaining how she is progressing with respect to one exercise: squats. In the picture you can see her doing a squat, and showing her viewers how it has to be done. Together with the text, the image almost becomes an instruction photo. At the same time it shows us how strong she has become, and it is evidence that she masters the correct technique. In other words, she is explaining her progression and at the same time giving advice to her viewers. The post is a

26 Translated from “Knebøy er noe av det som tar lengst tid (i mitt tilfelle) å få tilbake styrken i. Veldig fornøyd med utviklingen og teknikken atm ☺ ☺ #trening #treningsforum #knebøy#satselixia #fitnessbloggen #elitetrener#athleticfitness#myrevolution”
logos and ethos appeal, as she both shows how she got muscles and that she is working hard to achieve them.

Location

Where the women are is also a central aspect of the captions. For example, some women posts pictures to promote their own gyms.

W1: “Every MONDAY there is a FREE rowing lesson at 06:00 at @bergenperformancecenter. So if you want to kick start your week? You know what to do.”

W2: “Getting ready to Hit The Gym @hittroendheim”

In this example, W1 is advertising for a specific gym. In most of her captions she has tagged her gym. The name of the gym is also a part of her profile description. The relation between the text and image can be seen as relay, as she is not describing the image, but telling her viewers that they can get a free rowing lesson. However, she is rowing in the picture, thus, the text is not completely unrelated. With the caption she is appealing to her audience, by inviting them to exercise too, while in the picture she is showing her technique and especially her muscles. In a way she is inviting the viewers to do the same and become like her. Secondly, W1 is encouraging her viewers to go to the gym, in particular her own gym. W2 also promotes her gym in her Instagram posts. In the second example she points out that she is ready to exercise at the particular gym. In the photo of her, we see her posing while lifting two weights and wearing a shirt with the text “Hit the Gym”, which is the name of the gym. The text anchors the image by literally explaining what she is doing. On the other hand, this post is purely promotional, as the picture is taken in a vague setting, we cannot see where she is, and the focus seems to be on the gym and her as a person. At the same time the post becomes an ethos appeal, like the first example with W1. W2 is wants the viewers to go to her gym, and she is presenting herself as a spokesperson for that gym by personally endorsing the gym. The post becomes like a testimonial for the gym; as a person she guarantees that the gym is good. However, unlike W1, W2 does not really show her strength in the picture.

27 Translated from: “Hver MANDAG er det GRATIS rotime kl 06:00 på@bergenperformancecenter ☝️ Så har du lyst på en kickstart på uken? Da vet du hva du skal gjøre ☝️”
Body and muscles

By using certain words about exercise the women can show that they know a lot about fitness, such as pointing out the specific muscle groups which they are working on:

W2: Great finisher for glutes, single leg glutebridge on a bosuball! I did 20 reps each leg x 3, inspired by@nathaliamelofit

W3: Delts, back and calves on this weeks last workout #curvesworkout #dels #betterbodies #girlswolift #fitness #bikinifitness #femalefitness #training #hellgym #gymrat #quads

In these examples the women not only give instructions about how to train, but also which muscles they have trained: glutes, delts, back and calves. Using these terms indicate an expertise. Not only do they tell which body parts they have exercised, but they also give the names of specific exercise related to the muscle groups. This also gives an impression of that the women are serious about exercising. In the first example W2 is firstly showing how to do the exercise, and secondly she tells the viewers which muscles she is training with this exercise. The caption anchors the image by explaining what she is doing, this way W2 does not only demonstrate how strong she is or her technique, but she explains what and how. This way she is using both ethos and logos to appeal to the viewers. Indirectly, she is almost arguing that by doing the exercise this specific way, one can become like her. In the second example, W3 is explaining what she has done in her caption, accompanied with a selfie of her in the gym. Instead of anchoring the image, the relation between the caption and the image is relay. The caption does not explain the image, but it extends the context of the image. She is telling us what she has just done and she is showing us that she feels good about it, letting the viewers know why she is in the gym. Unlike W2, W3 is not showing of her character, she is not showing how strong she is, as she is just standing straight towards the camera. Instead, W3 is appealing to the viewers emotions by showing that she is happy after having exercised, she is smiling gently to her phone. On the other hand, her caption is a logos appeal, as she is describing what she has done in the caption factually.

Smileys

Six of the captions consisted of only smileys, these captions were posted by W1 (n=3) and W6 (n=3). Using only smileys in the caption makes it more difficult for people to search for the pictures. This might indicate that the focus is on the picture, and that the women do not feel the need to explain or add anything to the picture. It shows that the women who post the
pictures rely on that people see her picture anyway, as a result of having a large group of followers. This is true in the case of W1, but W6 does not have as many followers as W1, but she does use the same strategy. However, as we will see in section 3.2.3, W6 seem to post comments with hashtags. Instead of writing the hashtags that she wants to accompany the image in the caption, she does it in the comments. By doing this, her caption is not filled with hashtags, but she still makes it possible for people to search for her image by using specific hashtags.

Clothing

A few captions focused on clothing. Especially the brand of clothing was in focus in these posts.

[W6]: Thank you @bodyshapes.no for the great tights and not at least good service it fits like a glove! #bodyshapes #tights

[W1]: @gymshark #gymshark

In these two examples the women are tagging the brand. W6 writes about the brand and her experience with it, in addition to promoting it in the picture. In the picture we only see W6’s lower body. She is wearing tights with the name of the brand on the side of it. W1 only mentions it in the post, in order to tell the viewers what she is wearing in the picture.

3.2.3 The role of commentators

In this part of the chapter I have looked at who commented, what was written in the comments and how it is related to impression formation and self-presentation. Analyzing the comments can give me some insights about what followers and fans think about these women. The table below shows the total number of comments per user. In total, the posts in my sample contained 1638 comments, however, only the 20 last comments per post were visible, thus I could collect a maximum of 20 comments per post. One post by W6 does not contain any comments; she is also the one with the fewest comments in this study. W1 has the most comments, while W3 has the second most comments. In total I analyzed 610 comments.

28 Translated from: “Tusen takk @bodyshapes.no for en fantastisk tights og ikkje minst god service! Satt som et skudd! #bodyshapes #tights”
Table 3: The total number and the number of comments in this sample per user

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Total number of comments (n=1638)</th>
<th>Number of comments (n=610)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W1</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>16,9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100,0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W3</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>70,6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>96,8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>97,0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>95,5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage in the right column refers to the number of comments analyzed in this sample compared with the total number of comments.

I found that it was difficult to relate comments to impression formation. In general the commentators were impressed and expressed admiration in relation to the pictures. Secondly, the focus of the comments was on social presence, thus what the women were wearing, how they look. Another interesting finding was that almost ¼ of the comments were written by the posters of the pictures.

Interaction and Topics

The women in my study also interact with the people who comment on their post. Like celebrities, by tagging fans or commentators the women “perform connection and availability, give back to loyal followers, and manage their popularity.” (Marwick & boyd 2011:145). Marwick and boyd indicate that engaging with the viewers will keep them interested, and it creates an closeness between the women and the viewers. In the table below, we see that W1 interacts the least with her viewers, while W3 interacts the most with their viewers in relation to the total number of comments she has. It is interesting that W1 interacts the least with her public, as she is the most followed user in this study.

Table 16: Results from the category ‘Comments commentator’ per user

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Comments by the poster (n=142)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Comments by the viewer (n=468)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total sample comments (n=610)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,5 %</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>97,5 %</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25,5 %</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>74,5 %</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44,4 %</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55,6 %</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33,3 %</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>66,7 %</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21,5 %</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>78,5 %</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The comments were analyzed in order to find out what kind of topics were the most recurrent and how commentators view the posters. The comments were coded inductively, which means that the codes emerged from the content of the comment. These codes were mutually exclusive, which implies that each comment only belong to one code. I found that the commentators mostly were impressed by and encouraged the women to continue (see table #). Secondly, the comments focused on the looks and clothing of the women. Thirdly, some comments emerged from conversations around the picture, and not from the content of the picture. Exercise was another topic that reoccurred in the comments, followed by tags of users or hashtags. Around 9,8 % (n=60) of the comments contained some kind of gratitude from the poster towards the viewers and commentators. A few comments were in another language than English, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish or unclear (3,8 % n=23). Since these comments were in another language or were unclear I could not analyze them. Lastly, the comments were about food (0,5 % n=3), about social media (0,3 % n=2) or commercial (0,2 % n=1).

Below, I address the six most frequent categories, as the four last categories were not frequent: Awe and encouragement, clothing and looks, situational, exercise, tags and gratitude. Many examples of comments have been translated from Norwegian to English, the original comment can be found in the footnotes. However, some of the comments were written in English, I have not changed these in any way.

Table 15: Results from the category ‘Comment topics’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Topics (n=610)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awe &amp; encouragement</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>25,7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing &amp; looks</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>17,2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>16,7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>13,6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tags</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11,6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>10,3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other language or unclear</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3,8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0,5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0,3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0,2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Awe and encouragement

The code awe and encouragement imply that the commentators are impressed with what they see in the posts and that they inspire the women to continue. These types of comments are expressive and related to sentiment, as they convey amazement and encouragement. The commentator can also express admiration related to exercise. However, as the objective is to give credit to the poster, the comment is not be coded as exercise, but as awe and encouragement. Firstly, the commentators express admiration about what the women can do and how they look:

vuyle: Awesome...
fitbylavkarbo: Wow

These examples show how people react to what the women post, and it shows that the commentators are amazed by what they see in the pictures. The first comment is taken from a post of W1 where she is doing a handstand with the back towards the camera, her back muscles are accentuated, as she is wearing a top which shows the shoulders. Vuyle’s awe might be directed towards what W1 is doing in the picture or her muscles. fitlavkarbo’s comment is a reaction to a post where only W6’s lower body is visible. She is posing with her tights and showing off her legs and butt. This indicated that the viewers are impressed by the women’s muscles and their strength. Secondly, the viewers also encourage the women to continue with what they are doing:

svalestuen: Yes, that’s obvious keep on like this!!
Icmeland: Wonderful – insanely good work

In general, the comments are positive. These two examples show that the viewers are admiring what the women have achieved, and want them to continue exercising. By posting such comments the viewers support the women and stimulate them to post more pictures. A few comments contained only emoticons. When viewed in a Chrome browser, the emoticons are not visible, but with a smart phone, they are visible. These emoticons are all positive, such as thumbs up, happy smileys or ‘in love’ smileys:

29 Translated from: Jepp! Det er klart fortsett sånn!!
30 Translated from: Herlig - vanvittig bra jobba.
The emoticons can also be seen as expressions of awe or encouragement, as they are all positive. The emoticons show amongst others thumbs up, hearts, flexing muscles. Comparable with examples of comments above, the emoticons also express admiration and acknowledgement.

**Clothing and looks**

The second topic clothing and looks refers to comments which deals with what the women are wearing in the picture or how they look. Viewers give compliments about the piece of clothing or ask questions to find out where the clothes were bought:

*darthmar8: Looking really good in those tights*

*Runningtights: hello i have a question its important can I ask what do you wear under runningtights and what the best is thank for answeres and help :)*

In the first example *darthmar8* writes that W6 looks nice wearing tights, the viewer gives the poster a compliments. Not only for her clothes, but also for how her body looks in the tights. In the other example *runningtights* asks W2 where she bought her tights. The viewers are inspired by the looks of the posters, and want to buy the same type of clothes. The poster, on the other hand, replies to this kind of comments:

*W3: The tights is from H&M*  

*W2: I agree @newpuja – love it*

W3 replies with the answer to where one can buy the piece of clothing. In the other example, W2 agrees with the viewer about the piece of clothing, showing that she is also fond of her clothes. Furthermore, viewers comment on how the physical look, such as for example about the look of the women’s bodies.

*jor1989livi: Hot legs!!!!!!*

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31 Translate from: “Tighten er fra H&M @juliealisee 😊”
32 Translated from: “Helt enig @newpuja - elsker den 😊”
hveding548: Beast! The width of the back.\textsuperscript{33}

Jor1989liv is impressed by the looks of W3 legs, while hveding548 thinks that W1 is a beast and has an impressive wide back.

Contextual comments
Sometimes the comments are not related to the content, but to a situation related to the experience of the picture. For example comments are based on what others have already written, they are often completely unrelated to what one can see in the picture:

\textit{Ssolgard: Not in Bergen at the moment? :)\textsuperscript{34}}

\textit{[W4]: No, thank god \textsuperscript{35} home \textsuperscript{35} @stiansol}\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{ssolgard: Haha not tired of Bergen already? :)\textsuperscript{36}}

\textit{[W4]: A bit sick and tired at the end, only rain-dark and reading 24/7. Hoping for a better start in 2015. \textsuperscript{36} it is so amazing to be home, dont need to take the same considerations. Be with the family and get some care \textsuperscript{37} hahahah @stiansol}\textsuperscript{37}

\textit{ssolgard: I understand, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year :) I will see you at the gym next year! \textsuperscript{38}}

This example consists of a conversation between a viewer and W4. Ssolgard (which probably changed his or hers username after this conversation took place) is asking where W4 is at the moment. The conversation is short, but seems personal. Ssolgard knows where W4 lives, and W4 feels comfortable enough to tell him/her about what she thinks about the place and how she feels. These kinds of comments are situational or contextual as they arise from conversations around the picture. The poster is central, and the conversation seems to be between friends. Another example is conversations between viewers without the involvement from the poster. This is only present in the comments on W6’s photos, which has commentators that do not seem to know her personally.

\textsuperscript{33} Translated from: “Beast! Den bredden på ryggen!”
\textsuperscript{34} Translated from: “Ikke i Bergen nå? :)”
\textsuperscript{35} Translated from: “Nei, takk Gud \textsuperscript{35} hjemme \textsuperscript{35} @stiansol”
\textsuperscript{36} Translated from: “Haha, ikke lei Bergen allerede veill? :)”
\textsuperscript{37} Translated from: “En smule dritt lei på slutten, bare regn-mørkt og lesing 24/7. Håper på en bedre start i 2015 \textsuperscript{37} er bare så utrolig deilig å være hjemme, ikke samme hensyn å ta. Få litt familie og omtanke \textsuperscript{37} hahahah @stiansol”
\textsuperscript{38} Translated from: “Ser den, God jul og Godt nyttår :) sees nok på trening igjen til nyåret!”
Exercise

Another central topic in the comments is exercise, and especially questions and tips about executing certain types of exercises. Not only does the commentators ask how to perform a workout, they also give answer other viewers’ questions and give them tips.

Fannynorgaard: Inverted pull ups worked for me at least! Begin at the top and lower yourself down. Really hard! What do you say, @[W5] ?)\(^{39}\)

Svalestuen: Really nice! What is your goal, [W5]? \(^{40}\)

Hannepetrine: Hahaha I also tried 10 kg the other day #becomesweakateverything\(^{41}\)

In the first example Fannynorgaard answers the question of another viewer about how to execute a pull up. Then she asks W5 if she is right, in order to confirm her comment. Svalestuen, on the other hand, appraises W5 and asks her what goal is. Lastly, Hannepetrine is reacting to a post where W6 is lifting heavy weights, she is telling her that she also tried the same exercise, but with less weights. The commentators are active and engaging with the poster about exercise. The posters also engage with the viewers about exercise.

[W3]: I trained my back and legs before the cardio @isabelmatsik :)\(^{42}\)

[W5]: @ingvild__s I, myself am really bad at that, but i often do negative repetions when i cannot do anymore normal ones. Use as much time as possible to lower yourself, and do it about 3-5 times. An elastic band is also a good way to get better at normal repetitions \(^{43}\)

W3 is answering a viewer’s question, and explaining what kind of exercise she is doing. W5 is also answering a question by giving tips about the technique. She tells the viewers exactly how to execute the exercise.

Tags

Tags are hyperlinks marked with a ‘@’ to indicate that a person is linked in a comment. Another type of tag is the hashtag, which is marked with a ‘#’. Most of the comments I analysed were either tags. Mostly, viewers would tag other Instagram users in order to show them the specific picture or tell them something about the picture.

\(^{39}\) Translated from: “Omvendte pullups funket i alle fall for meg! Begynner øverst, så senker du deg ned. Kjempe tungt! Hva sier du, @[W5] ?:)”

\(^{40}\) Translated from: “Veldig bra! Hva er målet, [W5]? ☹”

\(^{41}\) Translated from: “Hahaha og eg prøvde meg på 10kg her om dagen#blittsvakpåalt”

\(^{42}\) Translated from: “Trente rygg og bein før cardio @isabelmatsik :)”

\(^{43}\) Translated from: “Jeg er selv veldig dårlig på det, men jeg kjører ofte negative repetisjoner når jeg ikke klarer flere vanlige. Bruk så lang tid som mulig på å senke deg ned, og gjør det 3-5 ganger. Strikk er også en god måte å bli bedre til vanlige repetisjoner på ☹”
In the first example the user igetreal tags another user and tells the person to check W1 out. The user also uses the hashtag ‘beast’ to describe her, insinuating that W1 is extraordinarily strong. In the second example, the user adamuberig has just tagged the other users without saying anything. The tag is already an instruction. It is also normal for the poster herself to tag other users when she replies to their comments, as users do not get notifications when new comments are posted, unless they are tagged in them. Only the poster get notifications when someone comments her picture. Another type of tag is the hashtag, it is not as common as tagging other users, but it is still interesting to address. For example, W6 almost does not write anything in her captions, but she adds a comment with a lot of different hashtags:

[W6]: #fitness #workout #nutramino #xlife #xlife_no #treningsforum #workout #fitfam #2014 #fatloss #lift #weights #girlswholift #happy #betterbodies #gym #squat #quads #teamdrage #brunette #muscles #flex #selfie #healthy #lifestyle #justdoit #nike #love #fitspo #inspiration

This might imply that she does not really understand how Instagram works, or that she strategically avoids hashtags in her caption, and adds it as a comment as it will not be as striking and constant as a caption. The caption always stay on top, while comments disappear when there are too many.

Gratitude and acknowledgement
Gratitude and acknowledgement are central to the interaction between the poster and her viewers. The women tag the commentator and thank them for the comment.

[W3]: @veroonicamh

[W2]: Thank you and right back at you, beautiful @ingridha

[W5]: Thank you @svalestuen we could do a session at e2 in the Christmas holidays

In the examples above, the women are thanking and acknowledging people who commented on their posts. The people who comment often seem like friends or acquaintances, as the women personalize their gratitude. For example, W2 writes “thank you and back at ya, wonderful @ingridha”, this does not seem like a way W2 would address just a fan. Actually, the user ingridha is also interacting with W3 and W4. She is another fitness woman, like the women in my study.

44 Translated from: “Taaaakk og back at ya, flotteste @ingridha”
45 Translated from: Takk @svalestuen vi får ta en økt på e2 i juleferien
3.2.4 Self-Presentation Fronts

In the previous section it was shown how the women made use of visual and textual cues to present themselves. In this section, we see how two self-presentation roles can be extracted from the visual and textual cues. When we look at how the results are distributed per woman (Appendix VI), we see that some women cluster in groups. In order to make sense of these connections, I show how the women assume different roles when they present themselves. These roles are based on the ways the women present themselves visually and textually in the Instagram posts. The first role is *strong but feminine* while the second role is *happy and healthy*. Whereas the strong but feminine role can be seen as a more self-oriented role, the happy and healthy role is other-oriented. This means that the women in the first role are focused on showing off what they have achieved, while women in the second role might be seen as more inspiring and focused on the viewer. Thirdly, I have an overarching role which shows how the women in both of the role make use of micro-celebrity traits in order to present themselves: *the public version of the private self*. The women cannot be categorized in just one of these roles, but some women are more frequently affiliated with one of the roles than others.

**The Balancing Act: Strong but feminine**

I have chosen to call the first role *strong but feminine*, as many of the women in this study show off both a muscular and a feminine side of themselves. Typically, being muscular is related to masculinity and strength (Williams 2007:93). What we see in this study is that the women who present themselves as *strong but feminine* balance ‘typical’ masculine traits, such as visible muscles, with typical feminine traits, such as curves and a gentle smile. This role is characterized by that the focus of the post is on the women and what they look like. In general, the women show off, by posing in a certain way or flex their muscles.

The posts are mostly selfies, where the focus of the picture is on the poster and their appearance. The women show off their muscular body, but also their feminine curves, especially their bottoms. In the study we see that especially W3, W5 and W6 post posts in this role. W1 and W4 also post a few posts characterized as *strong but feminine*.

The balancing act refers to how some of the women in this study present themselves as strong but feminine, by accentuating both their muscular body and feminine curves. As we

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46 I will not go into a full discussion of what constitutes femininity and masculinity, as this subject is rather extensive
saw above, W3, W5 and W6 mostly post pictures in which they are posing, by either doing the booty tootch or flexing their muscles. The women are rarely seen doing an exercise. W3 takes many selfies in the gym, showing us that she is present, but we only see her exercise twice. The majority of the time she is pushing her bottom out and arching her back. Since we only see exercise twice, there is almost no proof that W3 has been working out or that she is actually muscular. Unlike W5, W3 is not flexing, and we only see her showing off her womanly curves. W5, on the other hand, is never seen in a gym. We exclusively see her in private settings where she is either flexing her muscles or pushing her bottom out. By flexing, W5 is showing her viewers how strong she has become. W1 is photographed while doing an exercise, but instead of showing how to execute the specific exercise, the photographer has zoomed in on W1’s body. The accent lies on her arm muscles and her bottom. The intention behind posting such a picture might be harvesting compliments and likes from the viewers.

**Focus on action: Happy and healthy**

Half of the posts are characterized by pictures which focus mainly exercising, and less on appearance. This is seen both in the pictures and the captions. The women frequently post action photos, where they are photographed during an exercise. W1 and W2 post the most photos which can be considered happy and healthy. As the results point out, the two women nearly only post exercise photos on Instagram. These types of pictures do not only signify strength, they also convey that the women are able to execute the exercises without problems. The women are also shown alone in the pictures, which indicate that they are strong enough and have enough discipline to work out on their own. The women do not present themselves as overtly feminine, but focus on the action. In picture # W4 is squatting with what seems a lot of weights. We do not see her face, as the weights are covering her head. In her caption she is explaining what she is doing, how often and what she feels about the exercise. With the posts that the happy and healthy women post on Instagram the women can instruct others on how to exercise. With a combination of an instructional photo and text, the happy and healthy women show other women (or men) on Instagram how they can achieve a muscular body. These types of pictures focus more on where the women are and what they are doing in the picture. In other words, the happy and healthy show the process of getting fit and the actual exercise, compared to the product of the exercise, which the strong but feminine women show. The women seem concerned with the health outcomes of exercising, instead of the physical appearance. Especially outcomes such as feeling good in relation to exercise are emphasized.
Micro-celebrity: The public version of the private self

With the emergence of social media and the possibility to broadcast oneself to an immense audience, the concept of micro-celebrity is suiting to explain how the women in this study present themselves. As I pointed out in the theoretical framework, micro-celebrity practices resemble how a celebrity presents him or herself. What we have seen in this study, is that the women make use of various strategies to present themselves as either strong but feminine or happy and healthy. Strikingly, it seems like all the posts actually belong to the backstage, as we see the women in private atmospheres, such as a gym or dressing room. In accordance with Goffman’s theory of front stage and backstage, the gym is backstage. Self-presentations situated in the gym show us, behind-the-scenes, how the women are exercising and getting fit. However, the gym can be considered front stage for two reasons. First, for the women in this study, the gym is a central part of their self-presentation, and becomes a front stage as their presentation of self is related to exercise. This is where they show others what they have achieved by working out. Second, there are other people present in the gym, and the women have to adjust their self-presentation to the expectations of the people there. Aspects such as being photographed in the gym add to this idea of the gym being a public place. Locations such as a dressing room or being at home, on the other hand, are

Like other social media, Instagram allows its users to generate an imaginary closeness between the poster and the viewers (Marwick & boyd 2011). In line with Marwick and boyd (2011) the women vary the imaginary intimacy by posting intimate pictures and personally interacting with the viewers. On Instagram, the women, firstly, create closeness by revealing skin and posting intimate photos. W5, for example, posts pictures of herself barely wearing any clothes. In one post we see her showing off her stomach muscles by folding up her t-shirt with the caption “Baby steps, but I’m getting there”. In another photo she is not wearing any clothing on her upper body, and we are shown her naked and muscular back. In her caption she is writing about how she is feeling inspired by her own progression. W3 also shows a great deal of skin in her pictures. In one picture where we see her posing with her back towards the camera, she is only wearing pants and a bandeau top, which only covers a small part of her back. In another photo, presumably taken in a dressing room, we see her posing in her bikini. At one point W4 is also posing in a bikini, but the photo is taken directly after a competition, and is not as revealing as the other photos. It is taken in a public place, compared to the other photos taken either at home or in a dressing room.
These types of posts demonstrate how the women present themselves in an intimate way. What is striking about these posts is that most of them are selfies, the women post pictures of themselves. The women are in control of their own self-presentation; they do not have, or are rarely photographed by a helper. The women are seen controlling their self-presentation by looking in the phone. Even though they are offering themselves to the viewer, they are observing and controlling what they look like on the photo by viewing the screen while the photo is taken. Secondly, the women acknowledge their viewers by reacting on their comments. This is, for example, done through gratitude, engaging in discussion about exercise or answering questions about their clothes. Furthermore, some of the women have a great deal of followers, which indicate that they are popular. The women do also not interact with all of the commentators; they only react to a selection. This is similar to how celebrities on Twitter acknowledge their fan base and keep them interested (Marwick & boyd 2011).

**Concluding remarks regarding the self-presentation roles**

In this section, I have shown how the women assume different identity fronts to present themselves. By means of the visual and textual cues, the women express an ideal identity, and give an impression of who they are. I have shown how visual and textual cues can lead to different self-presentation fronts. The self-presentation roles are not only based on the individual photos of the women, but also give a total image of how they want to be seen.

### 3.3 Discussion and Conclusion

The overarching research question in this study sounds as follows: *How do Norwegian women who exercise apply the technological affordances of Instagram to facilitate their self-presentation?* Due to the focus on textual self-presentation in previous research, I have focused on both textual and visual elements in self-presentation:

- *How are photographs and text used as cues for self-presentation on Instagram?*
- *What kind of images are the women presenting of themselves on Instagram?*
- *In what way do the comments relate to and reflect the women’s self-presentation?*

In this section I present the main findings and discuss them against the theoretical framework which was constructed in Chapter 2.
3.3.1 Main Findings and Theoretical Significance

Self-presentation theory posits that everyone is concerned with how others see them. Goffman has shown how real life becomes like a stage where we are all expected to perform versions of ourselves. In order to make sense of self-presentation on Instagram, I applied concepts of Goffman, social semiotics and CMC. A discussion of whether or not Goffman’s theory of self-presentation is still applicable in an online setting seem abundant, as his theories have been used in various articles on self-presentation in CMC (e.g. Marwick & boyd 2011).

An Amalgam of Goffman, Social Semiotics and CMC

- How are photographs and text used as cues for self-presentation on Instagram?

In order to come to an understanding of how photographs and text have been applied as cues for self-presentation on Instagram, I applied Goffman’s terms in combination with ideas of social semiotics and theories of CMC. What the analysis show is that the women have engaged in selective self-presentation; the women only transmit the visual and textual cues which they want others to see (Walther 2011). As the theoretical framework demonstrates, CMC allows the women to present themselves in an advantageous manner (Walther 2011).

Social distance and viewer interaction

It was found that half of the pictures in the sample were selfies while the other half was photographed. These results were quite surprising, as the sample was random. Individually, however, there were differences in what type of photos the women posted. In the analysis, I drew parallels between Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) theory of social distance and the distance available in the images. It was argued that photos taken by a photographer can be both close and personal, and impersonal and distant, depending on the distance between the subject and the photographer. Furthermore, being photographed can induce an impression of a celebrity like status. With selfies the women could also vary the social distance, depending on how the photo was taken. Selfies are, in general, closer and more personal. For example, the perspective is seen from the perspective of the subject herself. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) argue that social distance encourages and demonstrates the interpersonal relationship between the viewer and the subject. As mentioned, the suggested relationships are both close and personal and impersonal and distant, depending on what the women focus on in the picture.

Firstly, when the women focus on the exercise, the relation is impersonal and distant, while when the focus is on how the women feel the picture encourages a closer and more
personal relation. Thirdly, when the focus of the picture is on the body and what it looks like, there is not necessarily a face visible. The viewer is kept on a distance, and view the photograph as a bystander.

Furthermore, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) argue that subjects in a photograph can establish contact with its viewers, although the contact is merely fictitious. The most of the women in this study were found to look into their phones while taking a picture, and many pictures do not even contain a face. By looking in their phones the women control what they look like while taking the photograph. The women seem more concerned with showing off their body of what they are doing instead of seeking contact with the viewer. The direction of the gaze relate to Kress and van Leeuwen’s concepts of offer and demand as two ways of establishing contact with the viewer. The fact that the women are not looking directly at the viewer or that there is no visible face indicate that the women offer themselves to the viewer. In other words, the women present themselves as ‘objects of contemplation’, like a piece of art to look at. These findings are similar to what Siibak (2010) found about masculinity online. Her sample was characterized as passive and narcissist, as they did not meet the eyes of the viewer. However, it is not clear whether or not the women in this study consider themselves as objects or understand that they present themselves this way. We could relate the passive act of standing still and posing to the women being objects of contemplation. On the other hand, women who are doing an exercise are active, but they do not look demandingly into the camera. In other words, their actions in the picture are either passive or active, while their gaze indicate whether or not the women can be seen as objects, or demanding the attention from the viewer.

The facial expressions can be seen in relation with the contact established between the subject and the viewer. In most of the photos the women are either smiling gently or looking concentrated. Whereas a gentle smile can be seen as humble, and draws the focus away from the face to the focus area, such as muscles, a concentrated look give an impression of the women being serious and focused, while not acknowledging the camera. Furthermore, a big smile indicates that the women focus on how they feel; the women express happiness and joy associated with having exercised or going to exercise. A neutral look resembles the gentle smile, as the focus is drawn away from the face and to the muscles or action. The exaggerated look, on the other hand, gives an impression of self-irony and humor. In general, the women are found to express happiness towards exercise, but not during the exercise. While exercising, the women maintain a serious tone. Lastly, when the women want to focus on the
muscles, they do not draw the attention to the face, and keep their expression neutral or humble.

**The collapse and convergence of the private and the public**

Although Goffman’s notions of front stage and backstage theoretically makes sense in present-day conditions, social media has impacted the boundaries between the private and the public self (Papacharissi 2012; Marshall 2010). Marshall (2010) speaks of the blurring of the private life and public life on social media as a result of technological affordances. Despite the fact that Marshall does so in relation to how celebrities present themselves, these ideas also apply to users of social media in general. In this study, the notion of public space, or the backstage, becomes twofold. For example, we see that the women take photos of themselves in the gym, which can be considered a backstage setting compared to taking a stroll through the city. However, the gym has become a place where the women show off. Furthermore, certain social norms guide the accepted behavior in a gym: One might be allowed to be photographed in the gym, while taking a selfie might not be common practice. Performances in the front region have to follow the normative expectations which the region is based on (Goffman 1959). On the other hand, the women in this study also blur the border between their private and public life online. The women challenge the notion of private life by posting revealing pictures of themselves online. These pictures are taken in a closed and private setting. Posting intimate pictures on Instagram do not only result in an imaginary closeness between the women and the viewers, the boundary of what is public and what is private is also blurred. The women publicize an intimate photo of themselves to an incomprehensive number of viewers. This type of sharing seems strategic, as the women want to show off their bodies.

**Cues given and cues given off**

When looking at how the women pose in the pictures, it is not always clear why they do this or whether or not the photos are intentional. Is it possible to detect whether or not the self-presentation is intentional or not? As the study shows, most photos depict women during an exercise. Secondly, the women were standing in a neutral position or posing. Exercising gives an impression of strength and the women are showing self-discipline and demonstrating skills. The neutral pose, on the other hand, show where the women are, and the focus is not on how they look. Lastly, posing elicit femininity and sensuality, as they are accentuating the feminine curves. Since the photos are posted on Instagram, one can expect that the photos are intentional. Schlenker (2012) argues that self-presentation in familiar situations are mostly
characterized by habituated actions. Many of the photos which the women post are similar. It seems as the situation of taking a picture and posting it becomes almost like an automatic process for the women. At the same time, it almost appears as if the women are mimicking each other when it comes to the type of pictures they post and what they look like in the pictures.

The foundation for understanding CMC in social network sites

The theoretical framework demonstrates that social network sites affordances, such as persistence, visibility, spreadability and searchability, affect how users interact with each other (boyd 2010, boyd 2013). The analysis of the captions in relation to the images shows how some of these affordances work. On the one hand, text guides the meaning of an image while, on the other hand, the text can extend the meaning of the image (Barthes 1977). The captions are mostly written in English or Norwegian. Writing captions in English might result in the post being seen by a greater number of people compared to posts with captions written in Norwegian. The caption indicates what the women want the viewers to associate with the image. Especially hashtags are important both for the visibility, spreadability and searchability of the post. The use of international hashtags makes it possible for more people to search for it and find the specific picture.

In general, the textual self-presentation shows that the women focus on exercising in their caption. Based on the captions about exercise, five different themes appear. First, the women address what kind of exercise they are doing in the picture and how. This is often turns the post into an illustration of how to exercise, in order to show how others can do the same. Second, the women write about their feelings in relation to exercise. The women balance a feeling of happiness and exhaustion, showing the viewers that they have had a hard work out. This way the women show that they are also just humans, with real human feelings and emotions. Third, the women convey their progression and discipline by posting about their development. Pictures of muscles are accompanied by captions which describe the development of the body. Fourth, the women address the location they are at, especially gyms. By doing this the women make a commercial for their gym. The women endorse the gym, while they invite the viewers to do like her and join the gym. As endorsers, the women show the viewers what they can achieve by going to that particular gym. Lastly, the women mention specific body parts and muscle groups in their captions. By doing this the women show their expertise and knowledge of the field.
To conclude, text and image is combined by that the text both guides and extends the meaning of the picture. The viewers are both instructed to do like the women by executing the same exercises or going to the same gym. Furthermore, the posts are meant to impress the viewers, both by what the women have achieved through exercising, but also through what they know about exercising.

The Imagined Versus the Real Audience

- In what way do the comments relate to and reflect the women’s self-presentation?

Whereas the women’s visual and textual self-presentation on Instagram can be seen as self-generated information, the comments and likes can be considered other-generated information. The number of followers, likes, and comments are other-generated information which can indicate how popular the women are on Instagram. The study shows that W1 and W3 have the most comments in the sample, whereas W6 has the least comments. Surprisingly, W1 rarely interacts with her commentators, while W3 and W6 interacts the most. We see that the women engage with their viewers, both by acknowledging them and thanking them for the comment, but also by answering questions about clothes or exercise. The women become trendsetters when it comes to exercise fashion, as they inspire people to buy the same type of clothes. At the same time, the women are trendsetters when it comes to exercise, since they answer questions and give tips about exercising. When it comes to the role of the commentators, it is not a straightforward task to identify whether or not the comments are related to impression formation. The viewers, it seems, were both the target for the self-presentation, and on the other hand it triggers a certain self-presentation.

The analysis of the comments shows that the commentators, in general, are positive about what the women post. Brown (1997) points out that by presenting oneself in a positive light in such a way that the viewers are convinced of these qualities, the actor is also “better able to convince themselves” (4). Brown (1997) continues by emphasizing that “people seek to create impressions in the minds of others because it makes them feel good about themselves to do so” (4). Based on the comments, it seems like the women have succeeded in convincing the viewers of their achievements and qualities. With respect to the hyperpersonal model, the audience’s positive reactions lead the actor to continue to present herself in a coherent manner. Walther (2011; 1996) emphasize that the feedback feature of CMC leads to a reciprocal relationship between the sender and receiver:
when a receiver gets a selectively self-presented message and idealizes its source, that individual may respond in a way that reciprocates and reinforces the partially modified personae, reproducing, enhancing, and potentially exaggerating them (Walther 2011:463).

In this study, the women are being rewarded with likes and comments for posting certain posts, which may lead them to post more posts like that. The new, but similar post, is again rewarded with positive comments and likes. The viewers express admiration and also encourage the women to post more pictures and continue exercising. On the other hand, the viewers also give compliments about how the women look, and they want to know where they can buy the same kind of clothes. Another frequent topic was the contextual topic, which is not related to the content of the picture, instead the commentator asks about the posters personal life. These are often longer conversations between a commentator and the poster. Furthermore, the commentators ask questions about goals and how to exercise. The posters sometimes answer these questions and give advice about what to exercise and tell the viewers what they have done. Some commentators tag friends in order to show the post to them. One poster is also found to post comments with hashtags, instead of writing them in the captions. Lastly, the posters express their gratitude towards the viewers by thanking them. by doing this the women are also acknowledging their fans.

The captions, especially the hashtags, and the type of photos the women post give an indication of who the women want to view their posts. For example, the women’s use of specific hashtags appeals to a particular audience who are also interested in fitness. Additionally, the use of many different hashtags increases the searchability, and thus the visibility of the photo; more users of Instagram are exposed to the photo. Fore mostly, as some of the posts both give instructions about how to execute an exercise and are also meant to inspire the viewer, the imagine audience should be someone who is looking for inspiration and are also working out. The women create a sort of niche, by posting the particular type of posts. As the study shows, the real and the imagined audience seem to coincide; the audience appears to be overtly positive about the women. The audience is interested in what the women are doing, and is actively engaging in conversation.

In conclusion, it is surprising that the majority of the comments do not focus on the specific exercises. Instead the commentators express awe and encourage the women to continue. Secondly, the commentators are interested in what the women are wearing and what

47 It is not possible to speak of the lurkers, as there is no way possible for me to research how they perceive the women in this research.
they look like. They are impressed by what they see, and maybe inspired to do the same, or at least buy the same clothes. The interaction shows that the women do not answer all the comments. The women make use of micro-celebrity practices in order to interact with their viewers, and thus keep the viewers active. The commentators are overtly positive about what the women post.

**Coherent Performances**

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**What kind of images are the women presenting of themselves on Instagram?**

The women vary textual and visual cues to create different self-presentation fronts. By creating self-presentation fronts, the women are making use of various strategies to present an specific image of themselves. This type of strategic self-presentation cannot merely be seen as a way of deceiving the viewers, but is also rooted in “genuine attempts to bring our (self-perceived) positive qualities to the attention of others” (Brown 1997:4). Furthermore, the fronts that the women are presenting help the women construct an online identity. Based on the analysis of the visual and textual cues three self-presentation fronts appeared: strong but feminine, happy and healthy, and the public version of the private self.

Firstly, the women who present themselves as strong but feminine are balancing their muscular body and feminine curves. This is done by posing and flexing muscles in the photos. These types of photos are also taken in backstage settings. Secondly, the women who present themselves as happy and healthy mostly post exercising posts. The posts reflect how they feel – happy – and are mostly front stage photos.

Furthermore, the two fronts seem to coincide with the two ways Williams (2012) have argued that fitness magazines motivate women to exercise: the process and the product. When researching how femininity is textually constructed in fitness magazines, Williams (2012) found that the magazine articles, on the one hand, encouraged the women to exercise by focusing on the action – the process of getting fit. On the other hand, the articles focus “on the body as a product” (Williams 2012:159). Whereas the women who present themselves as strong but feminine are focusing on the showing off the ‘product’ – their body and looks, the women who put forward the happy and healthy front are focusing on the ‘process’ – how they get strong, and how they feel about it. With their body as a product, the strong but feminine women are objectifying their body. To Williams, category ‘process’ signify empowered femininity, with signs as “strength, discipline, and action required to complete the fitness routine” (2012:122). This is something we also see among the happy and healthy women.
Similar to Williams (2012) conclusion that the double bind of femininity continues to affect how women should see themselves, my research show that the women balance ‘masculine’ muscles with ‘feminine’ curves.

Lastly, the public version of the private self refers to how the women make use of micro-celebrity practices to present themselves. Like the women Senft (2008) speaks about in her book about micro celebrity, the women in this research make use of Instagram to gain a follower group and become more popular. Through Instagram the women create an image of themselves, which they broadcast not only to friends and family, but also strangers. The Instagram audience is treated similarly to celebrity a fan base on Twitter or Instagram; the women enter a parasocial relationship with their viewers. (Marshall 2010). One the one hand, the women do not have to follow their followers back on Instagram. On the other hand, like celebrities, the women interact with their fans and create an imaginary closeness with the viewers. The women answer some comments, but not all, and they disclose private information about themselves.

As the theoretical framework demonstrates, Ellison et al (2006) pointed out that to online daters photographs are seen as evidence of what someone really looks like compared to textual descriptions. The women are certainly not anonymous on Instagram, they both use their real names and post pictures of themselves in which they are identifiable. Ellison et al (2006) also found that not being anonymous online have an impact on how realistic and honest people present themselves. The self-presentation fronts show how the women present ideal versions of themselves online. The women make certain claims of their identities, by posting images that are supposed to reflect both what they look like and how they are like. By posting a lot of pictures of themselves, the women are also strengthening the possibility of them actually being who they aim to be. The self-presentation fronts show that the women are consistent in their self-presentation. They have internalized their roles as a micro-celebrity, who is either strong but feminine, or happy and healthy.

3.3.2 Limitations and directions for future studies

The qualitative content analysis only looks at 60 photos from 6 women. With this sample, it is not possible to generalize the results. Further, I only look at photos depicting one person, and not the rest of the photos which were posted. The rest of the photos might say something about more about self-presentation of the women as a whole, and not just as someone who
exercise. Furthermore, how representable can a sample of 6 women be considered? In a future study, it would be interesting to look at other type of photos, in order to get a total image of the women, and not just their exercise persona.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to research how the women perceive their own self-presentation and why they post these types of photographs.

Another limitation was that the data was collected and analyzed by only one person. As the identities of the women in this study are confidential, it is difficult for others to test the codes on the same posts. However, it is possible for other researchers to use the same codes to analyze similar posts.

### 3.3.3 Conclusion

The theoretical framework demonstrates how self-presentation on social network sites can be understood in relation to Goffman’s terms of self-presentation. Furthermore, it also shows how CMC has influenced self-presentation. In study 1, we have seen how the women present themselves online by both applying Goffman’s concepts of self-presentation and theories of CMC. The posts which the women posts are directed towards an imagined audience, which also turns out to be similar to the actual audience. The people who comment the women’s Instagram posts are overtly positive in their comments. The self-presentation fronts show that the women conform to the same types of norms when it comes to presenting the self. On the other hand, the women do not only conform to the norms, they are contributing to an expectation of how women should look like and what kinds of pictures are representable. In a way, the women carry forward a changing female body ideal.
CHAPTER IV

Study 2: Zero-history Impression Formation

This chapter reports on the study which has focused on impression formation on Instagram. As we saw in the previous chapter, the women in the study made use of various textual and visual cues in order to present themselves on Instagram. In this chapter, I look at how zero-history participants form impressions based on visual and textual self-presentation on Instagram.

4.1 Method

This section addresses the choices of method in relation to impression formation and how these are suitable to answer my research questions. In this section I am going to explore the method of conducting qualitative interviews as a basis for my research. I conducted semi-structured interviews, with the purpose of exploring how zero-history participants form impressions by navigating textual and visual self-presentation on Instagram. The section further explains the procedure of sampling and data collection. Furthermore, it covers decisions made related to coding, transcription and analysis. The codes I employ in the
analysis of the semi-structured interviews are addressed. Lastly, I explore aspects such as validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

### 4.2.1 Qualitative Interviews

This section covers the method used to address RQ2. I have conducted semi-structured interviews with respondents, to figure out how they form impressions based on Instagram posts. By relating findings from the content analysis to the findings of the interviews, I can see if the respondents renegotiate the Instagram posts. Interview as a research method makes it possible to “access people’s experiences and their inner perceptions, attitudes and feelings of reality” (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009:1). Through a qualitative interview the respondent is able to give his or her own view on a subject and give explanations if necessary. I have chosen to conduct a semi-structured interview, as it lets the participant talk more freely than compared to structured interviews. Brinkman argues that:

> semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee; as well, the interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset interview guide. And, compared to unstructured interviews, the interviewer has a greater say in focusing the conversation on issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project (Brinkman 2014:286).

The semi-structured interview enables the researcher to guide the interview in the direction he or she wants by asking follow-up questions. At the same time it opens for possible topics that one has not thought of before the interview. When conducting a semi-structured interview it is convenient to make use of an interview guide. The interview guide helps the researcher to stay on track, but it also allows him or her to “adjust the sequence of the questions to be asked and to add questions based on the context of the participants’ responses” (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009:1). My interview guide can be found in Appendix II.

### Sampling

For my interview I wanted participants that had to be familiar with Instagram, but should not be active users. In total, I interviewed six men and six women, who did not have an Instagram account. The respondents are all Dutch. This means that the respondents can look at the phenomenon from another perspective than my own, and that of the women they had to form impressions of. This might allow them to approach the Instagram posts with an objective starting point.
The participants were sampled through a snowball effect. I asked my supervisor and friends to ask their friends if they know anyone who fit my criteria and would like to participate. In total 12 participants were interviewed. Half of these were recruited through my supervisor while the rest were recruited through friends, on social media. The participants each received an information letter, informing them about the research topic and asking for their consent to participate in the study (Appendix III). It informed them that their answer and identity would be kept anonymous, and the participants were asked to keep the identity of the women in the study confidential.

**Interview protocol and procedure**

In order to come to a better understanding of how impressions are formed on social media, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 6 men and 6 women individually. The procedure and questions were first tested in preliminary interviews. I tested the questions on one man and one woman to find out if they covered enough of my research questions and whether or not the participants understood what I asked them. The pilot studies lead me to change a few questions and the order of the questions.

In order for the participants to be able to choose a comfortable environment, place and time for the interviews were agreed upon with each of the participants. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet setting, without other people present. For each interview, I had between 30 to 50 minutes planned. The actual interviews took between 25 minutes and 45 minutes. The 12 men and women were divided into two “groups”, and were shown posts which I analyzed in the first part of this study. Before the interview, the participant was instructed that he or she would look at posts of three girls, and that should feel free to speak their mind.

The interview was structured by an interview guide, containing the questions and the instructions for myself (see Appendix II). I began by asking general questions about the participant to make him or her feel comfortable, and to get them in a flow of answering questions. Thereafter, I explained my research shortly in order to give the participant some information about what they could expect from the interview. I did not tell all the goals of this study, as I wanted them to stay as neutral as possible, and I did not want to affect the participants’ first impression of the women in this study.

The 12 men and women were shown photos of three of the six girls. The first six respondents were shown W5, W3 and W2, and the remaining six participants were shown
girls W4, W6 and W1 in the same order. The respondents were viewing five posts of each of the women. The answers of the first group were compared with the answers of the second group. The Instagram posts were organized in a PowerPoint presentation, and shown on a laptop. I started by showing a post of one woman, featuring an image, caption and comments. The first post which was used to elicit a first impression featured a picture of the women in a neutral posture where they were standing towards the camera and showing their faces. I then asked the participant what their first impression of the girl was. Thereafter, I let the participant move back and forth between the first picture and four more posts of the same girl. I did this in order to provide the participants with more cues to identity and let them decide how long they needed to look at the posts in order to form an impression. Whereas the first post of the women was chosen deliberately, the four remaining posts of the girls were chosen randomly, as I have sampled 10 posts of each woman. While viewing the posts, I asked follow up questions about the participants’ impressions of this particular woman. After the participant had expressed his or her impression and thoughts about the posts of the first girl, I would repeat the procedure two times with the posts of the other two women. After having shown all the posts of the three women I asked the participant if they could notice any particular difference between the girls and how they present themselves. I also asked the participant to reflect upon which information on Instagram are important for them while forming impressions.

Each interview was recorded with an app on my telephone, and was later transcribed. The participants had been informed that I would record the interview, and had to agree beforehand (Appendix III). Further, they were also informed that their participation was confidential, and that their answer would be anonymous. Since I used an audio recorder to tape the interviews, I could make observational notes during each of the interviews. This allowed me to be more active during the interview and pay more attention to the participant. For example, I noted which of photos the participant was speaking about. During the interviews I also paid special attention to when the participants were reading the captions and comments and/or viewing the picture.

Transcription, coding and analysis
The interviews were first recorded and then transcribed for a thematic analysis. The transcripts are the “textual basis for analysis” (Warren 2004:523). Each of the interviews were transcribed shortly after they took place, in order to note down the observations and extra thoughts that I had made in relation to the interview. All interviews were transcribed in the
same document. I did not transcribe sounds such as “eh”. When the respondents used words from their own language in lack of an English word, I translated them and transcribed these in English. Whenever the topic of the conversation was not relevant for the research, I extracted them from the interview marked with “[...]”. If the participant laughed or screamed I marked it with “[laughs]”. When a sentence is unclear or the respondent is mumbling, I marked the sentence as incomplete. Not only complete sentences were written down, I also note when the respondent begins by saying something, but changed the sentence halfway.

After having transcribed all the interviews I generated a coding scheme. I based my coding in the overarching topics which arise from the conversations. For each of the topics I extracted relevant codes. All the interviews were coded with the qualitative data analysis and research software ATLAS.ti.

4.2.2 Ethical Issues

When conducting interviews some ethical considerations emerge. For example, how to protect the women’s identities when interviewing others? Since I want to elicit an impression when interviewing the participants, it is difficult to keep the identity of the women I want to research anonymous. For example blurring out the faces of the subjects would make it impossible for the participants to make opinions about facial expressions. At the same time, the usernames of the women were also interesting to this study, as some of them use the word “fitness” as a part of their name. Hence, I also wanted to include the usernames in the interviews. On the other hand, I could manipulate the usernames, by changing the original name of the woman with another name. For example, a name such as FitnessGina was changed into FitnessLaura. Further, in order to make sure the women’s identities would be kept confidential I made sure that the participants would agree with the information letter. In order to keep the participants themselves anonymous I kept the gender and the age, but gave each of them a fictitious name.

4.2 Research Findings and Analysis

In this chapter I am going to present the findings of my second study. The chapter is twofold; the first section addresses impression formation online, while the second concerns impression formation offline. The intention of this chapter is to develop a synthesis of the research findings. Both the commentators and the interview respondents are the audience who forms an impression. In the sections below the following research questions are addressed:
- **RQ2: How do viewers form impressions of the women who train based on graphical and textual information posted on Instagram?**

The chapter addresses the way impressions are formed based on Instagram posts and the subsequent impression which is formed by the respondents in this study. This section also includes several aspects such as the difference between visual and textual cues, cues to identity and warranting. In this section, the findings stems from interviews conducted with 12 respondents.

### 4.2.1 Offline Impression formation

In this section I look closer at the interviews, and what aspects zero-history-participants focus on when forming impressions.

In total I interviewed 12 people, of whom 6 were women, and 6 were men⁴⁸. Each of the respondents was given a fictitious name. As I explained in the previous section, the respondents were divided into two groups. *Group one* consisted of three women; Hanna (25), Helen (21), Theresa (26), and three men; David (21), Thomas (27), and Matthijs (22), while the three women; Alisa (25), DeDe (24), Susan (25), and the three men; Hassan (28), JJ (23) and Ian (29) belonged to *group two*. All the respondents were asked the same questions, but the groups were shown different images. Based on these interviews three overarching topics emerged: *Cues to identity, filling in the gaps* and *impression formation (meta)*. The first two topics are related to what kind of impressions formed. Firstly, the role of the ‘cues to identity’ is addressed. Secondly, I am going to highlight what kinds of impressions were formed based on the available information. The last topic is concerned with how impressions are formed. It addresses impression formation from a meta-perspective. Based on the interviews, cues to identity and filling out the gaps were the most frequent topics which the respondent focused on. The category impression formation (meta) was less recurrent, but still interesting, as it covers a meta-perspective.

The table below gives an indication of the number of quotations per overarching category. Only the most frequent codes were counted. The categories were not exclusive, as one sentence could contain various codes belonging to the different categories. ‘Cues to identity’ is the most frequent topic, but it is also a central part of the two other categories. For

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⁴⁸ Based on this group of respondents it is not possible to generalize my findings.
example, on the one hand, assumptions about the women’s personality were derived from ‘cues to identity’. On the other hand, ‘cues to identity’ was also central warrants when the respondents were evaluating the self-presentations.

Table 4: Overview of topics derived from the interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of interview category</th>
<th>Number of quotations n= 974</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cues to Identity</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>43,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling out the gaps</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>41,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming impressions</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>15,1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cues to identity**

Cues to identity are the cues or features which are central in interpersonal communication, for example facial expression, physical appearance and clothing. In this category I want to highlight what the respondents focus on when making an impression. The codes are inductive as they emerge from the interviews. I coded aspects such as accessories, the physical appearance, clothing and the activity in the pictures. However, not all of the codes were recurrent. Below, I explore the codes which were the most recurrent and interesting, such as the looks of the body, facial expression, body, focus and activity in the picture.

**The Body**

The interviews suggest that aspect such as muscles and the body are central to the impressions the respondents form. For example, when asked what her first impression of W1 is Alisa answers that she looks at her breasts, because they are so big. Hassan also focuses on the muscles to form an impression. Not only does he focus on the muscles, but he compares the muscles mass of the girl with the previous girl, in order to estimate how fit she is. When viewing pictures of W2 Hanna notes that she cannot get a good picture of her muscles, as she is wearing a lot of clothes. On the other hand, she sees that W2’s arms are big, but she is not sure whether or not it is really muscles. Susan also tries to figure out how serious W6 is about exercise by looking at her body:

I guess she is going to the gym or running or something like that. But she doesn’t look like she is doing it a lot in this one. She seems a bit chubby, and for someone who like do sports a lot, I would think… But maybe she is doing it a lot, I don’t know (Susan 25.04.2015).
Based on the body type, Susan starts to doubt that W6 is serious about sports. The respondents seem to assume that the muscles and how the body looks are central parts to the women self-presentation. For example, the muscles give the respondents an indication of how fit the women are, or how serious they are when it comes to exercising.

Facial expressions

Secondly, based on the interviews, facial expressions seem to be important indicators when forming an impression. Ian emphasizes that he focuses especially on the facial expression when he is forming impressions. He says:

The face, because it is what people mostly look to get an impression of the emotions of the person or how she is feeling. The face tells most about that (Ian 06.05.2015).

The respondents indicate that when the women are smiling in the pictures, they seem happy with what they are doing, especially in relation to exercise. When asked what she thinks W3 is like, Hanna answers that she seems focused on working out, “but she smiles, so I think that she likes what she is doing” (01.05.2015). The facial expression in relation to other aspects in the picture is also central. For example, Ian says that, based on her smile in the picture, W4 looks self-confident and open while holding a trophy. A picture with grimace illicit different reactions, Susan is not sure how to read W6 expression in the picture. She does not see the relevance of making a grimace while taking a selfie, and therefore thinks less of W6. Ian, on the other hand, explains that the silly face gives him an impression of her being “self-confident and sure of herself”. He continues by saying that making a grimace shows that W6 is not worried about what people think of her. He gets the impression that she “just seems to do what she feels like”. He feels impressed by her confidence. What we see is that the respondents interpret the facial expressions differently. Susan, on the one hand, expects W6 to present herself as serious in relation to exercise. When W6 does not present herself accordingly, Susan sees it as out of character. Ian, on the other hand, sees W6 as someone who does not care about what her viewers think. He is not disappointed by this ‘out of character’ expression, instead he appreciates her difference.

Clothing

Further, the interviews seem to suggest that clothes are central to the respondents when forming impressions. Especially, whether or not the subject is wearing clothes is a central topic. Matthijs states that W5 is dressed the way one could expect someone to be when they are going to work out. Based on that assumption, he thinks that she is not showing off in the
picture. For example, David assumes that since W3 is almost nude in a picture, it will give "her a lot of attention, a lot of likes, a lot of comments." The lack of clothes is seen as "too revealing, too weird" (David 21.04.2015). Just like W6's grimace, the lack of clothes is considered as strange and out of character. The women who are not wearing clothes challenge the expectation of the respondents. The respondents do not expect to be allowed this close to the subject, and thus feel uncomfortable when viewing posts of the subjects in intimate situations. To the respondents there are two types of nakedness: the showing off and the more sensual. Whereas W5 is seen to show off in the pictures where she is showing skin, W3 is considered more sensual. The respondents find the picture of W3 wearing a bikini in a dressing room too intimate.

Focus and activity in the picture
Focus and activity in the picture refers to the focus of the picture, and the activity which the subject is doing and why that is important to impression formation. Especially the question as to whether or not the women are showing off in their pictures is an issue which the respondents cover. Matthijs says:

She seems to be […] focusing a bit more on the surroundings than on herself, because you see these weight lifting things in the background. […] she has covered one arm with her hair for some reason, and the other arm with her phone. Well you have to really look for it, and if you have to look for it she is not intending to show off her body as such, but more showing that she is proud of what she is doing and the environment that she is doing it in (Matthijs 24.04.2015)

He points out the focus of the picture is not on W2, but on the surroundings. The way she is posing makes it difficult for the viewers to see her muscles, thus he does not get the impression that she is showing off. Moreover, Alisa sees pictures where the women work out as less showing off. Hanna argues that by exercising in the picture, W2 is not showing her body off, but she is showing how to execute the exercises. In general, the women who were depicted while exercising were considered more positively than women who only pose. For instance, pictures where the women are posing are perceived as showing off, as Alisa emphasizes:

Well, this one she makes herself, and she is definitely showing a bit off: ‘Look what I have accomplished. See my curves’ that is also what she says here: ‘Curvesworkout’. [Respondent is looking at a selfie of W3] So, this is a picture I don’t like so much, because this is more
Based on the interviews, it seems like being passive is related to an impression of showing off. Being active and doing an exercise is also seen as showing off. However, it is also considered proof of how the women acquired muscles and indicates that the women are indeed strong.

Photographer
The type of photographer was also an aspect which stood out in the interviews. Whether or not the picture was a selfie could tell the respondents something about the women. To Hassan, the fact that someone else has taken the picture shows that she does not seem worried about how others see her. He argues that it almost seems that she does not know that she is on the picture. Alisa, on the other hand, sees the fact that W4 is being photographed as evidence that she is professional, and that someone is helping her. Thomas also emphasize that a photographer indicates that the women are at such a level when it comes to exercising that they have help documenting it.

Concluding remarks
I found that the body and especially muscles were central to the impressions formed. Not only did the respondents focus on the muscles when they formed impressions, they also made assumptions based on how big the muscles were. The body indicated to the respondents whether or not the women were serious about training or not. Another type of social presence which was central to the impression formation was the facial expression. Facial expressions can tell the respondents something about how the women feel and whether or not they are enjoying what they are doing. Furthermore, clothing gives the respondents the impression that the women are sporty. This is because there is an expectation of “being sporty” related to wearing sports clothes. Not wearing clothes, on the other hand, give the respondents an impression that the women are showing off or asking for attention.

In addition, the focus of the picture and the activity in the picture is central to the impression formation. Similar to the impressions the clothes can give, the activity in the picture also lead the respondents to say something about whether or not the women are showing of. Whereas exercising gives the respondents the impression that the women are serious, posing or not doing exercises give them the impression that the women are just showing off. The action in the picture also affected the tone of the impression. Whereas exercise photos were perceived as positive, posing photos were judged more negatively.
Lastly, being photographed indicated that the women are at a certain level when it comes to exercising. The women have progressed so much that they need help in order to present themselves and document their progression. The role of the ‘cues to identity’ in impression formation shows that the respondents develop certain expectations of how the women should make use of the cues to present themselves.

**Filling in the gaps**

The topic filling in the gaps refers to the assumptions which the respondents made based on the information available. As we will see in the following section, the respondents feel that they do not know enough about the women in order to form a complete impression. Walther theorizes that instead of failing “to form an impression, receivers fill in the blanks with regard to missing information.” (Walther 2011:460).

**Identification**

When asked about whether or not they can identify with the women, many of the respondents relate the stories to themselves. However, in some cases the respondents do not see any similarities, and thus do not feel like they can relate to the women. Helen cannot identify with the interests of the women in the picture, but she compares the activity in the picture with her own interests:

> I think she is very dedicated to it and spends a lot of time [training], but I don’t think that this is her whole life. I think they are genuinely taken, but there is always a part of someone’s life outside of their hobby. I enjoy arts, but I don’t go to museums all the time. I think she has also got something that makes her want to eat fries (Helen 06.05.2015).

By using her own interests and life as a ground for comparison, she argues that interests are only one part of one’s life. JJ also relates the activity in the picture to his own interests:

> I can understand the first two pictures and then the third picture not really, and the two last pictures I can relate, because I make music, and that is also something I am proud of, because that is something that I practice and which I want to get better in, and she has to do sports, and work out, so (01.05.2015).

Ian describes W1 as serious, and can compare himself with her by explaining that he is serious, hardworking, and stands by what he says and does. With this comparison, he transfers the qualities he has sensed in W1 to himself in order to understand her. And since he has ascribed W1 with such qualities, he’s image of her is positive. David, on the other hand,
explains that he is not interested in forming an impression of the women. He argues that he would be interested if the subject was a personal friend, based on the fact that people are naturally interested in their friends and their daily lives. He is justifying why he is not interested. Susan also expresses the same attitude:

I don’t think I would like to know, it is just some girl, and to me… Like sometimes, on my Instagram for example, like I would follow a girl if I think she is really pretty or she has really nice makeup, then I would like to know more, like her style of living, her clothes, but I don’t know, she doesn’t really appeal to me. So yeah, I don’t really care so much about her (25.04.2015).

Next to the justification of why the respondents are not dedicated to make an impression, they also compare the women’s posting habits with their own. They might do this in order to express a difference between them and the women, because they do not see any similarities and cannot identify. Hanna points out that she would not post that sort of photos herself. She emphasizes that she does not think it is wrong to post the pictures if the women are proud of it. However, if it was a friend of her, she would ask more critical questions about why the pictures were posted. David also states that he would not post like the girls, because he does not need the attention.

When asked whether or not their impression was positive or negative, most of the respondents indicate that they have a positive or neutral impression. The respondents search for similarities between themselves and the women in order to explain and justify the positive impression. On the other hand, the respondents argued that neutral impressions were based on the fact that they were not specifically interested in the women.

Intention and goals behind posting
One question which was posed by the respondent was “Why are the women posting these pictures?” As there were no obvious answers to the question, the respondents search for clues and make assumptions in order to understand the posts better. Theresa points out:

“No, obviously it is really difficult to say much about her. Also, with the other girl, you don’t really know why she is doing it. You just sort of assume the most basic psychology behind social media, and why people put things on Facebook. Then you can sort of recreate a picture.”
Theresa has an idea of why the women post these pictures, based on experience from other people. Matthijs, on the other hand, is trying to figure out why W2 has posted her posts. He highlights, argues for and discards various reasons for why she would post the posts. Ultimately Matthijs is not sure why, but he has some plausible ideas which helps him understand the post. David assumes that the posting will result in likes, which gives the subject confirmation of her progression, and her as an athletic person. He further argues that this type of attention will make her feel good. In other words, the respondents expect that the women might post with the intention of get confirmation and attention from others.

Next to the intention behind the posts, the respondents want to know the goals behind the exercise, and make assumptions about the goal. The questions the respondents ask is “Is she doing it for herself or for someone else? After having seen a picture of W4 with a trophy DeDe argues that the subject is exercising to win competitions. Based on this motivation, DeDe justifies why W4 would go to the tanning salon and why she wins. Even though she has justified W4’s goal with training, she does not identify with her motivation. While for W6, DeDe ascribes another goal:

“I only can guess that she is trying to lose weight, that she is not happy with how she is at the moment. But that also goes for the first girl, that she is not happy at the moment, maybe. But for this girl I would say more, yeah.”

DeDe points out that W6 exercises because she is not happy with herself. In a way both of these goals can be personally grounded. Matthijs has the impression that W2 is happy with what she is doing, and that she seems to be doing it for herself. He bases this on that she is not focusing on her body in the pictures, but draws the attention to the surroundings. While for W3 Matthijs expresses:

“Because I get the impression that she is trying to show off a bit more. And of course it is not wrong or even bad to be proud of your body or whatever you are doing, but sharing them with as many people that seem to have seen this, well, it always gives me a negative feeling. Because I think you’re doing it for yourself. I would be doing it for myself. So if you are doing it for other people then maybe it is not your dream.”

As opposed to W2, Matthijs argues that W3 is posing more, and is thus doing it to show off, which leaves him with a negative impression.
**Personal life and personality**

The respondents make impressions of the women’s personality based on what they see and read in the posts. Missing information is filled in by assumptions. The respondents form certain expectations of the women, individually and as a group. In order to form a complete image of the women, the respondents rate the women individually based on how they fit with the other two women they have seen in the group. By grouping the women, the respondents create an ideal. To give some examples:

She looks a bit more manly, if you see what I mean. Also the way she dresses. The first girl wanted to be strong. And for some reason that is always associated with being a man, but she is still dressed up very feminine. And this is I think, the other way around (Matthijs 24.04.2015).

She seems a bit more serious than the last one. She has got more muscles, I guess. Bigger arms, bigger legs (David 21.04.2015)

I think that she is a girl, more than the other girls I saw before, this is a girl who wants to show her beauty to other people (Alisa 24.04.2015)

To Matthijs, W3 is perceived as manlier than W5, based on the way they dress, even though they both want to present themselves as strong. Whereas W5 is seen to dress femininely, W3 dresses more masculine according to Matthijs. By comparing the women, the respondents develop a scale of expectancy of how the women should present themselves. For example, more muscles indicate to the respondents that the woman is more serious than the others, and more make-up illustrate that the woman is vainer than the others. To the respondents, the comparison justifies why certain impressions are formed. The expectations may also be based on that the first picture shown of each woman is a reasonable neutral image, showing the women standing towards the viewer while taking a selfie of themselves.

When it comes to personality, the respondents have the impression that the some of the women are happy and proud about their exercising. Matthijs sees W2 as a happy girl which is content with what she is doing. Helen has the impression that W3 is proud and confident because she is putting an accent on certain body parts. At the same time Helen does not rule out the fact that she might be insecure. Theresa argues that posing a certain way might indicate insecurity. She says:

So yeah, she is sucking in her gut, nobody has a belly like that. Not even if you are muscular, it doesn’t look like that. So, it is very much, I think that she is trying to show off her shape, as
it were. Again, it is usually, in my experience, a self-esteem thing. I mean, if you’re secure about yourself, you don’t really have any reason to display yourself like that (Theresa 01.05.2015).

She continues emphasizing that this kind of posing gives her the impression that W3 “feels the need to change who she is before she can be socially accepted by others” (Theresa 01.05.2015). Ian also has an impression that one of the women is insecure. He also bases this on the way W6 is posing in the picture, he argues “that she is posing, and doing something that is not her idea, but is kind of other people’s idea” (Ian 06.05.2015). Based on this assumption, he characterizes her as a bit insecure, and she is eager to please, and that is all I can go by right. So maybe she is someone who would like to gain new friends and be respected by more and other people, looking for friends and respect (Ian 06.05.2015).

Contrary to being seen as insecure, the women are also being characterized as serious. Theresa explains that she did not see W5 as serious in a picture where she was posing. However, seeing photos where W5’s muscles were visible she changed Theresa’s impression; she saw her more as focused on the progress of developing and building muscles. Ian thinks that W1 is serious because she is posting photos in which she is exercising. He also has “the impression that she is serious and takes what she does seriously, also other things, presumably, homework, friendships” (Ian 06.05.2015). He assumes that the qualities which he first ascribed to her in a training context also apply to other contexts. DeDe mentions that the muscles indicate that W2 is spending much time working on her body, leaving her with little time for other things. However, pictures which do not depict the women in action give Alisa the impression that the women are less serious about exercising. Put differently, the respondents form more positive impressions of women who are seen exercising. The women are ascribed qualities such as serious, strong and focused.

*Micro-celebrity*

Popularity was another subject which was frequent during the interviews. Aspects such as hashtags, activity on Instagram, followers, likes and comments could indicate something to the respondents about the women’s popularity.

David notices how active the women are on Instagram and connects it to popularity. For example, he points out that by following a lot of other users, many users might follow the women back. Thomas also makes an assumption about how the women use Instagram. He
indicates that W3 knows exactly what photos to post in order to get more followers and comments. The respondents also notice the women’s use of hashtags in their posts. Helen relates the use of hashtags to her own use of hashtags, in order to explain how W3 is using hashtags to attract new followers to her posts:

From the use of hashtags it is a bit of popularity as well. And to make an harsh conclusion, it is a little bit seeking attention for it, with the hashtags. but then again, she is proud of her body probably. So why shouldn’t she (David 21.04.2015).

Hanna and Susan both point out that comments written by the woman herself are used to inspire the viewers, and that a lot of comments indicate that the women can be considered popular. Susan emphasizes “I think it says a bit about how many serious followers she has, so how many people actually respond to her” (25.04.2015). Also the amount of likes can indicate how popular the women are. David argues:

I guess the amount of likes is also very important. To her of course, it is very important. It gives her like a good feeling. It also says something about, like, the picture itself and her profile. When it has almost 300 likes, it means that she has a lot of followers and that a lot of people like her picture (David 21.04.2015).

Concluding remarks

In this study I found that the respondents did form impressions and made assumptions, even though they insisted they did not have enough information to form an impression. Thus, in order to understand the women better, both their personality and intentions, the respondents make assumptions. On the one hand, the respondents relate the assumptions they make to themselves. This was done either to express whether or not they identify with the women. The respondents compare their own personal qualities or interests with assumed qualities of the women. Secondly, the respondents question the women’s intention behind posting the specific posts and their exercise goals. The respondents want to know why the women post these types of posts on Instagram. The goals varied per woman, for example some assumed that W6 exercise to lose weight based on the look of her body. Furthermore, we see that the respondents for impressions of the women as strong and serious. These assumptions are based on the looks of the muscles for example. Some of the respondents also touch upon the subject of micro celebrity. Aspects such as the number of comments and likes indicate to the respondents how popular the women are on Instagram.
Impression formation (meta)

The interviews were coded in order to say something about the impressions formed, also on a meta level. This is done in order to say something about how the impressions are formed. The respondents do not only mention what they think about the women, but also how they come to certain conclusions. Such as what the informants focus on when they are forming an impression. On the other hand, I have also focused on the specific aspects (social cues/social presence) which the respondents mention when they talk about the impressions. The respondents touch upon subjects such as morality, online versus face-to-face, warranting and the role of the image and text.

Ethics and Morality

One interesting finding during the coding of the interviews is the fact that many of the respondents seem reluctant to make an impression of the women based on the few photos that they see. The respondents try to justify their impressions with a certain morality in mind. The respondents constantly reassure the interviewer that this is “just an impression” and that it is not possible to create a full impression of someone based on “just a few pictures.” Matthijs explains:

> I cannot have a full opinion about someone without knowing at least the bigger parts of what the person is doing. So I can have critique on her powerlifting, but that cannot be an opinion about her as a person, because then I have to know more (Matthijs 24.04.2015).

Matthijs further explains:

> You never have enough information about someone you don’t know […] for real. Maybe that seems a bit old fashioned. It is always hard to have an opinion of someone you do not really know, and it is really easy as well. Because then you do not know the consequences or whoever you are talking about, and then it is easy. And it is likely that it is not true. And that makes it harder. And that is the dilemma I am having now (Matthijs 24.04.2015).

The respondents are aware that they do not have enough information, and that it is not enough for a complete impression. Both Thomas and Ian point out that it is difficult to form an impression based on a small set of pictures. Thomas says that he has an impression, but that he does not judge her only based on a few photographs. Ian also feels that he does not have enough information about the women. He argues that even though he has formed an impression, he cannot form a complete and valid impression based on just a couple of pictures. The respondents want to make it clear that what they express is ‘just an impression’.
The lack of personal information in the pictures makes it difficult for the respondents to make an impression. Furthermore, the respondents are somewhat self-conscious when forming an impression. Susan expresses “I feel like I am a lot more judgmental about this girl” (25.04.2015). While Hanna says “She looks a bit chubby, to be honest. Is that weird?” (01.05.2015). The respondents are aware that they might be expressing opinions which are subjective and based on what might be insufficient information. JJ says that “When it comes to judging a person just based on a few pictures, I just keep in mind that I don’t know this person at all” (01.05.2015). The reluctance which the respondents show is difficult to place, but it might be based on the fact that the respondents are being interviewed in a formal setting and thus face the possibility of being judged by the interviewer. The respondents are cautious with their words and try to come with other explanations for why they form certain impressions.

**Face to face**

As I mentioned, the respondents do not feel that they know enough about the person which they are forming an impression of. The impressions which they do form are first impressions, and they are mindful about this first impression. In that relation, some respondents mention that it would be useful to meet the subjects in real life. Helen tells us that she has enough information to form a first impression but that one can only form a complete impression after having met a person, preferably several times. Furthermore, she would like to see the subjects doing something else than sports. David also tells us that “If you meet her, it would be completely different than just looking at her profile. It is a different experience.” (21.04.2015). He makes a difference between the impression you can get when you see someone online and the impression you can get when you see people in real life. Theresa also points out the difference between online impressions and face-to-face impressions:

> I think if I really want to get any of them I would have to actually meet them in real life. Well, if you are still on Facebook and they are trying to present themselves in a certain way, I mean, we do that in real life too, of course, but it is easier to hide yourself on Facebook. I don’t know. It is much more difficult if it is real life, and you have body language that gives you away. People are not as capable of lying when they are face to face, or becoming aggressive or that kind of things. So I think definitely just face to face is the best way. (Theresa 01.05.2015)

Theresa uses Facebook as an example, as she does not have Instagram herself. However, she points out some interesting points which count for social network sites in general: it is easier to convey yourself differently online compared to real life. Nevertheless, her approach is
negative; she assumes that people are prone to lie about themselves. Ian expresses that he thinks that it is easier to form impressions when you met people face to face. He says that by just chatting online “it is a much bigger effort to give an impression I think, because everything is text” (Ian 06.05.2015). JJ would like to meet the subject one or talk to her friends instead of basing his impression on pictures. Based on the lack of available information in the Instagram posts, and the fact that they are static, the respondents indicate that meeting the subjects might lead to a more complete image.

Warranting

The difference between the category ethics and morality and warranting is that ethics and morality is about making an impression, on a meta-level, while warranting is about the specific impression given off and how it can be justified to the viewers. The respondents were looking for cues in the pictures, such as evidence of editing and the quality of the picture, cues to identity, information about the activity in the picture and life outside of sports. Based on these aspects the respondents made assumptions about the honesty of the posters and whether or not a post was genuine. Helen is justifying a post by W2 by arguing that her muscles show that the picture is realistic:

Ehm, well not with this one, ‘All I do is lift’ [reading the caption]. It is never really all you do. I think it is quite realistic. But then again I think it only shows her sporty side. It does show what she does. It is not only selfies at the gym. With the muscles you can see that she has done it for a longer time, so it is not just for the picture. She is not lying to the world. She can lift this. Yeah, touché (Helen 06.05.2015)

At first Helen points out that a life consisting of only exercising is not realistic, but then she points out that W2 is only presenting her “sporty side”. In order to justify W2’s sporty side, Helen concludes that exercise must be a big part of her life, since the muscles are so big. Matthijs, on the other hand, is focusing on whether or not the images are edited in order to characterize them as realistic:

Well, I have to go through these again. If you see realistic as: are the pictures real? Then I think they are real, because she doesn’t seem to be photoshopping them or whatever, also the lighting has not been overdone or whatever, because this picture is quite unclear. So she is not looking for very esthetic pictures I think. She is smiling more in the pictures than she maybe would be in normal life. But then again you have to be smiling in pictures nowadays. Pictures are for smiling, that doesn’t say much. And to that extent I think that the pictures are real and genuine, and also honest (Matthijs 24.04.2015).
Matthijs focuses on the fact that the pictures have been taken. However, he does point out that the pictures are not particularly aesthetic. Susan shows that she is aware that the photo is edited, she states that she thinks that W1 “really took care of the pictures, at least at this one, the last one, she blurred out the rest, so she is more in the center. So she puts a lot more thought into this” (25.04.2015). Susan also adds that the photograph might have been taken several times before she was happy with it, which shows that the subject puts a lot of thought into posting her pictures. In other words, she is aware that the poster has carefully edited and selected her picture. To Alisa the setting and the activity in the picture are important when asked if the picture is realistic:

It could be, but it is less convincing, because you don’t see the environment. So you have less things to see with which you can test if she is telling the truth, what she wants to bring over.
You don’t really see her doing sports. And the other girl you do. It could be but then why don’t you see pictures of her doing it? (Alisa 24.04.2015).

Alisa questions the setting of the picture; she does not think the pictures of W6 are believable, because she does not see photos of W6 training in a gym. Hanna, on the other side, looks at the quality of the image, when judging the whether or not a picture of W3 is realistic. She emphasizes:

The lighting is a bit dark, so maybe she takes a very positive angle, and a very positive lighting and filter, I don’t know. So I don’t know if this is what she really looks like, because in all the other pictures she has a lot of clothes on. So I don’t think that she posts very realistic pictures. I think that she will look a bit like this in real life, but I’m not sure (Hanna 01.05.2015).

Hanna doubts whether or not the picture is realistic based on the lighting and angle of the picture. However, she is not able to come to a conclusion of whether or not the self-presentation is realistic. Thomas is also skeptical. He thinks that the pictures are taken with the best angle, and furthermore, he sees the picture as too focused on the muscles. Thomas notes that “You won’t see her like this every day on the street. So it is not realistic. And it is probably the best angle she got, so it is not realistic, but you have to take it with a grain of salt” (28.04.2015). The respondents are well aware of the possibilities of selecting, changing and editing posts online, and are thus questioning the posts. The respondents are not completely skeptical about what they see, but they seek out warrants in order to prove their expectations right or wrong.
**Image versus text**

The respondents in this research state that they focus on the image rather than the text. While Hanna mentions that the caption is not that interesting to her, Thomas, on the other hand, states that he only focused on the picture and not on the text. The caption, however, is also important. When asked what he focuses on when forming an impression, David answered that he focuses on the picture mainly, because that is the main part of the post, followed by the description and the number of likes. Susan also points out the same pattern;

> At first I looked at her, but it didn’t say a lot to me, so I had to figure out what she was doing. Actually, I was trying to read this, but there wasn’t a lot. And this image just pop in my eye (Susan 25.04.2015).

Susan explains that the caption did not tell her a great deal, thus she is not left with a lot of information to go on. Theresa also looks at the caption in order to understand the posts. She says:

> The first thing I look at is the picture. The picture just sort of draws the eyes towards it. You look at it, once you look at the picture and you realize you don’t have enough context, that’s when you look at the text (Theresa 01.05.2015).

David read almost every caption of the pictures out loud before he started talking about the post in general. He notices how many likes and comments the post gets. Later he explains:

> Well, [the caption] says something about the picture. It explains a bit. I don’t like it when it’s only hashtags or something, it doesn’t add anything. Well here she says, “I am in a good mood” I mean, that explains why she is smiling. ‘Early workout’ I guess that gives you information when you see it at the time when she posts it: Why would she be in the gym at that time, because it is an early workout. It gives them a bit more information (David 21.04.2015).

Even though the image is in focus, most of the respondents seem to also focus on the caption, in order to get more contextual information about the image. Eight out of the twelve respondents were reading the captions during the interviews. They either read them out loud of mentioned that they could not understand it because it was in a language they could not read. Both Hanna and Thomas read some of the captions, despite the fact that they said that they did not focus on them. However, since this research only focuses on what they explicitly mention, it might be that the respondents who did not mention anything about the captions also read them. As we see here, the respondents turn to the captions for more information in
order to interpret the pictures. Sometimes the caption does not give the respondents sufficient background information. For example, the caption “Say hello to my little friend” written by W5 lead to a few confusing situations:

Say hello to her little friend? What does that mean? Who is her friend? Is that her phone, or? (David. 21.04.2015).

She says: ‘Say hello to my little friend.’ I don’t know what the little friend is. It might be her arms, strong arms. And someone says “that vein”, so you can see that she is sportive. (Matthijs 24.04.2015).

What is her little friend? The phone? I don’t know, my little friend? Maybe the muscles, that’s what she means. I don’t know. (Hanna 01.05.2015).

She says ‘Say hello to my little friend’. I am not sure what she is talking about, but I imagine that she is talking about her phone. That is the only thing she is holding. You would have to have some more context to really say. I mean, sure, the people who actually know this girl would know what she is talking about. (Theresa 01.05.2015).

The respondents do not understand what she refers to, thus they try to come up with plausible interpretations. Other times language might be a problem. When the respondents do not understand the language of the caption, they either skip it or fill in the gaps. Also many of the comments are written in Norwegian. Without understanding them, Matthijs automatically assumes that the comments are positive:

it is quite clear what the comments might say. It wouldn’t say “could you bring me maybe some milk from the supermarket this afternoon?” Because why would you say it. So yeah, they seem quite positive. Because my Norwegian is not that good, but I can still see that they are quite positive. So, no, it is mainly her own explanation and the comments are just what other people have to say. I might be a commentator as well and I don’t know what she is doing, so it doesn’t give me new information (Matthijs 24.04.2015).

The respondents seem to notice the comments, but they do not take them into account when forming an impression. Thomas states:

As you notice, I don’t look at them right away. Yeah, it doesn’t change my image about her. Maybe about the second one, maybe the lesser image, I would say it got a little bit better because she is more an instructor kind of type and she is maybe telling other people something. I don’t know. It is difficult to say (28.04.2015).
He starts by stating that the comments do not change his image of the women. However, based on what W3 wrote in a comment he did change his image. The impression changed from slightly negative to more positive as he came to the conclusion that she was more like an instructor in her comments than what she could convey in her pictures. Hassan on the other hand does not see any correlation between comments and his own impressions:

Here’s the thing, the picture is on its own, right, it is a pretty good picture right. She is working out, she is showing others that ok, if you work out you can achieve what I have achieved. But then [the comments] come in [the respondent is read a comment, laughing]. I don’t see the correlation, So that is bullshit (Hassan 24.04.2015).

He thinks that since the comments he read are not directly related to the picture, they are not interesting for him. Susan also points out that the mostly skips the comments.

Concluding remarks
I found that most of the respondents were not comfortable with forming an impression ‘just’ based on the pictures they saw. They did not feel that they had enough information about the women, and were thus cautious with their impressions. This makes it difficult for the respondents to form an impression, but they indicate that they have a first impression. Secondly, some respondents indicated that they would like to meet the women, in order to get a more complete impression of them. Thirdly, the respondents were actively searching for cues and evidence for their impressions. For example, muscles indicate to the respondents that the women are exercising frequently. On the other hand, the respondents do also argue that the pictures do not necessarily represent the women’s real life. The respondents compare the self-presentations of the women they are viewing with each other to get a ‘complete’ picture of the women. Patterns of expectance lead the impression formation and make it possible respondents to justify their impression. Lastly, the respondents all indicate that they focus on the image rather than the text. However, almost all of the respondents do indicate that they read the captions.

4.3 Discussion and Conclusion

The overarching research question in this study sounds as follows: How do viewers form impressions of the women who train based on graphical and textual information posted on Instagram? Theories of impression formation in CMC-settings have focused on the effect of cues, and the verification of information. With these elements of impression formation in
mind, I have chosen to focus on the following aspects when it comes to impression formation based on Instagram:

- To what extent do cues to identity play a role in impression formation?
- What kind of impressions do the respondents form based on the available information?
- To what extent do warrants play a role in impression formation?

In this section I present the main findings and discuss them against the theoretical framework which was constructed in chapter 2.

4.3.1 Theoretical considerations related to Impression Formation

Self-presentations are often adapted to the expectations of others. This is especially true when the performer has an ideal audience in mind, whether it is realistic or imaginary. In the previous chapter, we saw that people who comment on the Instagram posts were overtly positive and encouraging. However, what happens when the audience is not the intended, when the audience has no affiliation with the self-presentation?

The role of cues to identity

- To what extent do cues to identity play a role in impression formation?

In relation to theory of self-presentation, an actor presents himself to others by adapting his ‘cues to identity’ to the situation and the audience. As Tanis (2003) points out, cues to identity are related to the impressions other people form of a person’s identity. As expected, cues to identity are central to the forming of impressions. The interviews suggest that physical appearance, such as the body, facial expression and clothes, is the most central element of the impression formation. These aspects do not only help the respondents deduce personality traits, but also allows them to identify with the subjects. The cues to identity which were central to impression formation are also all related to the theme of the posts, that is exercise. We saw that, even though the respondents were not particularly familiar with the exercise trend on Instagram, they seemed to develop certain patterns of expectations based on the pictures. For instance, not wearing a lot of clothes in one was seen as out of character.
Furthermore, the focus of the picture and the photographer were aspects which had an impact on impression formation. Firstly, pictures depicting the women posing were viewed more negatively than pictures which depict an exercise. To the respondents, being active and exercising did not only prove how strong the women are, but also how serious they are when it comes to exercise. Secondly, women who were photographed by a photographer were seen as more serious compared to women who only posted selfies.

**Impressions formed**

- What kind of impressions do the respondents form based on the available information?

Theory of CMC and impression formation indicate that impressions formed based on CMC are more extreme compared to FtF. Walther (2011) emphasize that in CMC “an individual may tend to exaggerate perceptions of the message sender” (460). The receivers do not have access to all the necessary information to form an impression. Consequently, the receiver fills in the gaps and form hyperpersonalized impressions (Walther 1996;2011). That is also what we have seen in the interviews. Even though the respondents feel that they lack information about the subjects, they are able to form impressions; the respondents make assumptions, and create their own stories based on the available cues to identity. For instance, the respondents were found to form impressions based on whether or not they could identify with the subject. The respondents ascribed the subjects with qualities which are recognizable and familiar. By doing that the respondent felt that they understood the subjects better.

Furthermore, the interviews show that the women are ascribed intentions and goals, in order to understand why the women exercise and post these types of pictures. The respondents then make assumptions and develop expectations based on these goals and intentions. Additionally, the respondents construct stories about the women’s personality and personal life based on what they see – cues to identity – and the assumptions. Assumptions and expectations are, firstly, based on the first number of pictures they see, which constitutes their foundation for further impressions. These expectations are all based on the premise that the women are interested in exercise, the respondents did not really ponder about the women’s lives outside of the gym. Secondly, the respondents compare the individual self-presentation of each subject with the other subjects. This is related to the ‘feedback effect’ which is a part of Walther’s hyperpersonal model (1996). Based on the first impression, the respondents
expect a similar self-presentation throughout the interview. If these expectations are not met, it leads the respondents to interpret the self-presentation as ‘out of character’. Lastly, some of the women are considered micro-celebrities. The respondents are impressed by the number of likes and followers the women have, and notice how the women make use of social media in order to harvest compliments.

**Impression formation from a meta perspective**

- *To what extent do warrants play a role in impression formation?*

As I mentioned in the introduction, the respondents make ethical considerations about their own impressions. The interviews suggest that there were not enough cues to identity available for the respondents to form a complete impression. Since the respondents were not able to interact with the women themselves, they feel that they are missing information. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Tanis (2003) found that cues to identity reduced ambiguity when it comes to interaction on CMC. The respondents do state that they would like to meet the subjects in order to form better impressions. Furthermore, meeting the subjects might also help the respondents understand the difference between the online self which they have seen, and an offline self, which they do not know.

The interviews seem to support Walther and Parks’s (2002) theory of warranting. In order to justify and verify the impressions made the respondents look for proof in the posts and pictures to justify their impressions. The respondents are negotiating the available information about the subjects, and look for cues that might warrant the identity of the subjects. The cues to identity in the pictures, such as body and muscles did not only give the respondents an impression of how strong the women are, but also of how disciplined and serious the subjects are. On the other hand, the setting in the picture also indicates to the respondents how serious the women are when it comes to exercise. The warrants the respondents were seeking about the subjects provided them with information about the “true nature of an individual’s off-line self” (Walther 2011:466). In other words, the respondents were looking into whether or not the women were misrepresenting themselves on Instagram. For instance, the respondents were exploring whether or not the photos were manipulated through means of editing programs. In relation to the warranting construct, some respondents indicated that they would need to meet the subject in real life in order to form a better impression.
Lastly, the respondents indicate that they primarily focus on the image while forming impressions. Surprisingly, almost all of the respondents read the caption, even though they say that they do not focus on it. One reason for not reading the caption or comments was the language. Since a great deal of the text was in another language than English, most of the respondents did not immediately comprehend the text. Many of the respondents try to interpret the Norwegian captions and comments by picking out universal words. Some respondents automatically assume that the content is positive. However, understanding the language is not enough to understand the context. The respondents were found to misunderstand or not get the caption, based on lacking contextual knowledge. Since the respondents were not familiar with the fitness trend online, they do not understand the importance of certain aspects of what the women are writing about.

### 4.3.2 Limitations and directions for future studies

One problem I encountered when conducting the interviews was the fact that some of the women have written their captions in English, while some are in Norwegian. As a result participants do not always understand the caption. I offered to translate the caption if necessary, but that meant that the participants have to deal with secondary data; it can lead to problems for the respondents understanding the text correctly, and problems with translations as the original meaning might disappear. Moreover, qualitative interviews with such a small number of participants do not generate generable results. A future study with more respondents might give a better impression of the differences and similarities between the respondents’ answers. Another point I encountered in this study was the effect of the interviewer on the respondents. As the results demonstrate, the respondents feel the need to justify and reflect over their impressions. The presence of an interviewer might have led the respondents to tone down their impression. In another setting with friends, the respondents might reflect this much about how impressions are formed. In a future study, it would be interesting to interview respondents who are familiar with the phenomenon, and compare their answers to the answers of respondents who are not familiar with the phenomenon.

### 4.3.3 Conclusion

Seeing the respondents are zero-history participants, the respondents’ impressions of the women are affected by certain expectations which arise from seeing the pictures. These expectations are based on the fact that the women exercise on a regular basis. For instance,
when it comes to cues to identity, especially physical appearance, such as the body and muscles, were central to forming an impression. The respondents were constantly looking for warrants, not just in order to justify their own impression, but also to make inferences about whether or not the photographs were real. The respondents can only make inferences, and do not understand the context in which the pictures are posted. In other words, the respondents are not part of the intended audience of the self-presentations.

Surprisingly, it was found that the respondents in this research ethically reflected over their own impressions and the act of forming an impression. Furthermore, the impressions were primarily positive. These two aspects might have been induced by the presence of an interviewer. The interviewer or the research setting might have intimidated the respondents to express him or herself in a more positive manner than they would have if it was not a research.
Chapter V: Towards a New Theory and Framework

This thesis set out to explore how young, Scandinavian women present themselves on Instagram, and how zero-history respondents negotiate these self-presentations into impressions. The overarching research questions in this thesis are as follows:

- How do Norwegian women who exercise make use of social media to present themselves?
- How do viewers form impressions of the women who train based on graphical and textual information posted on Instagram?

Two studies were conducted in order to answer these questions. In general, both studies have been experimental when it comes to topic, method and analysis. Firstly, this thesis is important because it has led me to an interdisciplinary approach for analyzing self-presentation on Instagram, by making use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Especially in relation to self-presentation on primarily visual social network sites, as there do not exist one clear approach. With a combination of content analysis, semiotic and rhetoric I have shown how the women present themselves. Secondly, this thesis is important as it has touched upon impression formation based on online self-presentations in an offline setting. Essentially, this thesis is interdisciplinary. Foremost when it comes to the methods used to approach and analyze the two topics.

This chapter starts out with a brief summary of the two studies, followed by concluding remarks about this thesis in relation to self-presentation, impression formation, and fitspiration as an online trend.
5.1 A Brief Summary of the Two Studies

Study 1

In the first study I focused on the self-presentation of young Norwegian women who exercise on Instagram. Central to the first study was how Norwegian women who exercise make use of visual and textual cues. Secondly, the comments were analyzed in order to get an insight in what the roles of the commentators were and how the women interact with them. Lastly, I identified three types of self-presentation fronts based on the visual and textual cues.

In order to analyze the women’s self-presentation, I collected and analyzed sixty Instagram posts posted by in total six women. The posts were analyzed by means of qualitative content analysis, combined with aspects of semiotics and rhetoric. Secondly, I looked at the comments accommodating the Instagram posts, in order to see what viewers focused on and how they interact with the women. 610 comments were collected and analyzed with a textual/thematic analysis.

The analysis of the textual and visual self-presentation shows that the women vary the contact and the relationship with the viewers by changing the social distance, eye contact and facial expression in their pictures. It was found that the viewers are in general kept on a distance, and the women offer themselves as objects to the person viewing the photo. In relation to contact, women draw the focus away from the face and to the muscles or exercise by keeping their expression neutral or humble. Additionally, the posts which have been researched indicate that the women are playing with the convergence of the private and the public by broadcasting intimate pictures of themselves to viewers on Instagram. Furthermore, the action in the picture indicates that the women seem to mimic each other by doing similar poses. The women are not only creating a norm for what kind of pictures should be posted, but also for what the women should look like in the pictures. When it comes to the caption in relation to the image, it was found that the women either appealed to a Norwegian audience or an international audience. The women focused mostly in exercising in the captions, both as description of what was depicted in the photo, but also to extend the meaning of the photo by conveying the progression which had led to the photo being taken.

When it comes to the comments, the commentators are both a target for, and prompt the women’s self-presentation. The commentators most likely coincide with the women’s imagined audience, as they are overtly positive when commenting. Furthermore, the women
can be seen as trendsetters, as they are being admired by their viewers and people want to dress like and exercise like them.

From the analysis of self-presentation fronts, three themes emerged: ‘strong but feminine’, ‘healthy and happy’ and ‘the public version of the private self’. Whereas the women who were characterized as ‘strong but feminine’ presented themselves as more passive and as objects, with a focus on what they had achieved, the ‘healthy and happy’ women were active, and focused on how one can achieve a strong body. The women vary the image of themselves as both focused on the product and on the process of getting fit. On the one hand, the women focus showing off, on the other hand, the women inspire others to exercise by showing themselves in action. Lastly, women were found to make use of micro-celebrity practices online, in order to manage their impressions and interact with their viewers.

Study 2

The second study addressed impression formation based on Instagram posts. Zero-history respondents were asked to form impressions of the women from the first study. Twelve zero-history participants were interviewed, while viewing a selection of 18 posts from the first study. The interviews were transcribed and coded based on the major themes which could be derived.

Visual cues were central, especially physical appearance. The visual cues were more important than textual cues, at least to the respondents themselves. The respondents do not indicate that the captions are important, when explicitly asked about the captions. However, almost all of the respondents read the caption or comments at one moment.

The respondents do not feel that they have enough information about the women, and they fill in the missing gaps by making assumptions about the women. Mostly the impressions are positive or neutral, and almost none of the respondents say that their impression is negative.

The respondents were constantly searching for clues to whether or not the images they saw were realistic. This coincides with Walther’s theory of warranting. Aspects such as muscles and setting could tell the respondents whether or not the women were as strong as they present themselves. Also the activity in the picture was important. Women doing an exercise were perceived as stronger, and as more serious than women who were only posing.
Comments were not central to the respondents. Some respondents tell that they read the comments, but they do indicate that the comments do not change their impression. Only in one case did one respondent change his impression after reading a comment from the poster herself. To him it indicated that she was focused on giving tips instead of only showing off.

Furthermore, the respondents seem to develop expectations of how the women should present themselves based on the first image they saw. For example, the women were expected to wear appropriate clothing and show how they have achieved their muscular body. When some of the women were depicted in a bikini or less clothing, this did not match with the respondents expectations. Instead the respondents thought it was out of character. Impressions of women who posted pictures showing more skin were more negative in general compared to impressions of women who wore gym clothes. Pictures of women, who only pose and do not post exercise photos also seem to prompt negative impressions. Additionally, the respondents also compare the women’s self-presentations with the others in order to assess the women.

Surprisingly, the respondents were concerned with impression formation on a meta level. This might be rooted in the fact that they were asked to give their opinion in a formal setting, while being interviewed for a study. This might have discouraged them to speak their mind. It shows that studying impression formation is challenging. Furthermore, the study only shows how the respondents consciously resonate about someone’s self-presentation, it does not focus on subconscious impressions.

5.2 Conclusion and Implications

This research is distinguished from other studies on self-presentation and impression formation on social network sites by focusing on Instagram, and not Facebook. Firstly, the purpose of this thesis was to explore how women present themselves on a predominant visual social network site. Secondly, this thesis aimed to study how impressions are formed based on self-presentations formed in a predominant visual setting online. Thirdly, the focus of this research was on the online phenomenon of fitspiration.

5.2.1 Main Findings

This research shows that the women engage with the viewers. Not only does this occur through answering comments, but also by establishing an imaginary intimacy between the viewers and the poster. Furthermore, the women adopt three self-presentation fronts in order
to create an online identity. Next, respondents focus on cues to identity which are central to the self-presentation front. Based on the fronts, the respondents form certain expectations of how the women should present themselves. Additionally, the respondents make assumptions and fill in the missing gaps of information in order to form an impression of the women. Lastly, the respondents reflect on their own process of forming impressions. The respondents ethically comment on their own impressions, and search for clues to justify their impressions.

5.2.2 Analytical framework and research setting

Previous research on self-presentation in a CMC setting, especially on social network sites such as Facebook, has not had a straightforward approach. The studies are characterized by being experimental in nature, and focusing on personal experiences measured through interviews. As the purpose of this study was to explore how self-presentation takes place on a visual social network site and how others form impressions based on this information, my approach was interdisciplinary. I focused both on the content of the self-presentations by conducting a qualitative content analysis combined and based on semiotic and rhetoric, and on impression formation by conducting qualitative interviews with zero-history participants. By combining these two methods, I research both how the women present themselves, and how others perceive them based on the self-presentation. In other words, not only is this research an attempt to explore self-presentation and impression formation in CMC, it is also an attempt to find a method of analyzing visual self-presentation on social network sites. The content analysis combined with rhetoric and semiotic analysis of images and text show how meanings can be deducted in a more ‘objective’ manner, as we also have seen in other research (Bell & Millic 2002; Sibaak 2010).

5.2.3 Selective self-presentation

Instagram, like other social network sites, facilitate selective self-presentation. The women in this study seem to present an idealized version of themselves on Instagram. Consequently, the women are creating a brand for themselves; they develop an online identity through selective self-presentation. In the first study, the analysis of the cues to identity shows that the women seem to mimic each other, and are posting similar photographs. Subsequently, by posting similar pictures, the women are developing a social norm of what kind of pictures women should post. Conversely, the norm leads the viewers to form expectations, which implies that the women have to continue following the norm they have developed. Additionally, the online
identities are based on the fronts which the women present on Instagram. Two of these fronts represent character types which the women want to be identified as – strong but feminine, and happy and healthy. Lastly, the women adopted micro-celebrity practices to maintain their image and the relation to their fans and viewers.

The idealized self-presentation may lead us to question how authentic the women’s self-presentations actually are. The idealized self-presentation does not necessarily imply that the women are misrepresenting themselves, but the self-presentation is highly selective, and thus only shows one side of the women. This is, of course, also related to the sample criteria, considering this research exclusively focused on the fitness trend and did not take all the pictures the women posted into account. On the other hand, aspects such as not being anonymous on social network sites make it more difficult for users to misrepresent themselves. This is also something we see in this study, the women post pictures of themselves on Instagram which shows us what they look like. In addition, they show more intimate pictures of themselves than they probably would have in a face-to-face situation. Even though these posts are selected and edited by the women on beforehand, this shows that the women are giving the viewers insight in their idealized private lives. In a way, the imaginary intimacy created by the women might induce a feeling of authenticity to the audience.

5.2.4 A Networked audience

As demonstrated in the theoretical framework, an actor needs an audience to present herself. To the women on Instagram, their viewers are not necessarily only the people who react on the pictures. The number of likes which a post has got can give an indication of how many people have seen a picture, but is still not accurate. Furthermore, Instagram, and social media in general, is a place where the producer of content and the receiver operate almost simultaneously, and feedback happens spontaneously. The women posts pictures on Instagram, and viewers react to the image within seconds after it is uploaded.

The first study demonstrates that the women present themselves for and interact with a specific imagined audience. The imagined audience is expected to be inspired by the women, and it was found that the real audience – the commentators – celebrates the women’s particular self-presentation in relation to fitness. To the respondents in Study 2, however, viewing women with barely any clothing made them feel uncomfortable, while Study 1 shows
that the reactions on the photos are mostly positive when it comes to the commentators. The use of Norwegian in the captions makes it difficult for the respondents who do not know the language to understand what the women write. A picture seems to be enough to form a first impression. However, Study 2 shows that the respondents feel that the captions add a background or context, which might be useful in order to understand the picture and the post in general. Both knowing and understanding the context is important, as even understanding the language can lead to misunderstandings.

By researching how the women present themselves online, I understand what the women rely on to create an image, both textually and visually. However, to an outsider, such as the respondents in Study 2, the ways the women express themselves in photos and captions are not always decipherable. Instead, the respondents were found to search for signs of authenticity and credibility, by looking for warrants in the posts. Even though the respondents did not feel that they knew enough about the respondents to make a complete impression, their impressions were in general positive. This demonstrates that, even though the respondents were not familiar with either the women or the trend, the respondents formed idealized and positive impressions based available information. In other words, the results seem to support Walther’s hyperpersonalization theory of receivers exaggerating the impressions (1996).

5.2.5 Fitspiration as a status symbol and an online phenomenon

As I mentioned in the introduction, Norwegian news cover the phenomenon of an increasing number of women who are doing fitness. This trend is certainly not only found in Norway, as the number of pictures with the hashtag #girlswholift shows. However, this trend might reflect on Norwegian culture. Norway is a considerably rich country, in which the citizens have the time and money to exercise. Exercising becomes a status symbol, and a proof of one’s discipline and qualities. In other words, the exercise photos on Instagram show that the women can afford to spend a considerable amount of time in the gym. Next to work, studies or social life, exercise seems to be an important part of their lives.

When researching such a trend as fitspiration, one could question what the women want to show us by posting such pictures. In a way, the women are promoting a certain body ideal; a visible muscular body which is skinny, and still conveys femininity. In some respects
the women are changing theirs, and are trying to change others idea of a feminine body ideal. However, can this ideal be considered healthy or unhealthy? A study carried out by Tiggeman and Zaccardo (2015) suggests that exposure to fitspiration images, such as the image the women in my study post, can have a negative impact on one’s body image. On the other hand, fitspiration was found to influence motivation positively (Tiggeman & Zaccardo 2015). One could question the motivational nature of the pictures since they have been found to have such a negative impact on body image.
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Appendix I

Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 0: Profile basics</th>
<th>Section 1: Post basics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Username</td>
<td>1) Unique identifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How many posts?</td>
<td>2) Date of Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) How many followers?</td>
<td>3) Date of post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) How many following?</td>
<td>4) How many comments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) How many likes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 2: Coding the posts

2.1 Coding the Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The category analyzed</th>
<th>The possible values</th>
<th>What the value means/what it looks at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The point of view:    | Photographed (The photo is taken by someone else.) | 1. The viewer might be kept on a distance, as a stranger.
| Distance between viewer and subject, and the control the subject has over the self-presentation. (Technological aspect) | 2. The point of view is more objective
<p>|                       | Selfie (The photo is taken by the subject herself) | 3. She gives the control of self-presentation to someone else. |
| The gaze (if face is visible): The contact with | The subject is looking straight at the viewer | Direct address: The subject is demanding the attention from the |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the viewer, physical appearance</th>
<th>viewer – power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The subject is looking at the phone screen/camera (looking at herself)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indirect address:</em> The subject is ‘offering’ herself as an object but she is controlling how the photo will look like at the same time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subject is not looking in the camera or at the viewer, she is looking in another direction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indirect address:</em> The subject is ‘offering’ herself as an object to the viewer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Facial expression (if face is visible):** Emotions and personality conveyed. Physical appearance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gentle smile</td>
<td>Empathic, warm, invitational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big smile</td>
<td>Proudness, extravert, enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exaggeration</td>
<td>Self-irony and humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td>Serious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Cool and indifference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The setting:** Front stage and backstage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>Front stage photo, public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Backstage photo, private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Front stage photo, public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>No clear setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathroom</td>
<td>Backstage photo, private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The posture:** Action in the picture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posture</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Booty Tooch (the subject is sticking her bottom out, with hands on hip and back arched)</td>
<td>Sexy and feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing or sitting straight</td>
<td>Neutral pose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards the camera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexing muscles</td>
<td>Muscular, strong and masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing an exercise with weights, machines or own body</td>
<td>Self-discipline, strength, show off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of clothes (upper body): Exposure</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singlet (Shows shoulders and arms)</td>
<td>Accentuates the upper body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-shirt (Shows arms)</td>
<td>Neutral, but might accentuate body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports bra (shows shoulders, arms, stomach and accentuates breast)</td>
<td>Sexual and focus on muscles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweater or jacket (cover whole upper body)</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naked (Showing naked skin)</td>
<td>Focus on muscles, or sexual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of clothes (lower body): Exposure</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tights</td>
<td>Accentuates the leg muscles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tight shorts</td>
<td>Accentuates the leg muscles and shows skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loose shorts</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2.2 Coding the Captions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The category analyzed</th>
<th>The possible values</th>
<th>What the value means/what it looks at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thematic analysis of caption</td>
<td><em>Exercise</em>: The caption is about the exercise shown in the photo or about exercise in general)</td>
<td>Often factual, focus on the exercise, giving tips to others how to do it – self and other oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Clothing</em>: The subject has written about the clothing she is wearing</td>
<td>Giving tips about where one can buy it, sort of commercial – other oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Feeling</em>: The subject has written about herself, for example feelings or opinions: “I feel so good”</td>
<td>Expressing personal opinions and thoughts, says something about her as a person – self oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Smilies</em>: The subject only post smileys in her caption</td>
<td>The focus lies on the picture, and not on any extra information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation between photo and caption</td>
<td><em>Anchorage</em> (<em>The text guides the meaning of the image, by saying the same as the image, describing the image.</em>)</td>
<td>How the viewer should read the image, what they should think about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Relay</em> (<em>The meaning of the text is not directly related to the image, the visual and the verbal can express two different things, and together they create a meaning.</em>)</td>
<td>Complex self-presentation – wants to express something more than only what one can see in the image.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section 3: Coding the comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The category analyzed</th>
<th>The possible values</th>
<th>What the value means/what it looks at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Awe and encouragement (<em>The viewers are impressed with what they see, and encourage the poster to continue.</em>)</td>
<td>Impressed, encourage the women, want to become like the women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clothing and looks (<em>The viewers show interest in how the women look like and what they are wearing.</em>)</td>
<td>Want to dress like the women, want to look like the women in the picture, idolize them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Situational (<em>Comments which are not specifically related to the image</em>)</td>
<td>Personal, intimate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise (<em>Writing comments about exercising, such as asking questions about the exercise</em>)</td>
<td>Viewers want to know how to do the exercises or become like the women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tags (<em>Hyperlinks to other users of Instagram, or tagging the picture with a hashtag</em>)</td>
<td>Inviting friends to see the picture, tagging pictures with hashtags in order to make it easier to search for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gratitude (<em>When the poster write comments in order to thank fans for their comments</em>)</td>
<td>Acknowledging the fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who comments?</td>
<td>Poster</td>
<td>Other oriented, interested in her followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Viewer</td>
<td>Followers and fans showing their interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II
Impression formation: Interview Questions

*Background:*

How old are you?
What kind of study or work do you do?
Tell me something about yourself.
Do You use social media? What kind? How often do you think?

*Research:*

(Explain shortly about the research)

In this research I am looking at how people form impressions of other people on social media. I will show you a couple of pictures of some women, and I would like you to tell me what your impression is of these women, and what you think about them.

(Show one picture)

What is your first impression of her?

(Show rest of pictures)

What impression do you have of this person after looking at these images?

   Do you have a positive or negative impression of this person?

Do you have sufficient information to make an impression of this person? Why? Why not? What kind of information do you need?

Can you identify with this person?

Do you think that she is presenting a realistic image of herself?

(Repeat this procedure 2 times)

Which one do you have the most positive impression of? And of which person do you have the most negative impression? Why?

Which aspects of these Instagram posts do you think are the most important to you when forming an impression? What do you look at?
Appendix III

Information Letter to Participants

I am a Research Master student at the University of Groningen and I am working on my master thesis. The topic of my thesis is: Self-presentation and impression formation on social media.

In this relation, I would like to interview you. The interview lasts about 30 to 45 minutes. We can together agree on a place and time. The interview will be recorded, please inform me if you are not comfortable with this, then I will not conduct the interview.

All information that is collected will not be of personal character. The answers that you give are anonymous and the recordings will be deleted when the thesis is handed in (August 2015). The information will only be used for this thesis. You have the possibility to withdraw from this research at any time. If you withdraw from the research, all information about you will be deleted.

I would like to ask you to keep the identity of the subjects in this research confidential.

If you have any questions about the project you can contact me by sending me an email: linn.helen.gundersen@gmail.com.

Best Wishes,

Linn Helen Gundersen

University of Groningen
Appendix IV

Graphs
Figure 1: Results within the category 'gaze'

Total Gaze (n=60)

- Looking in the camera: 35.0%
- Not relevant: 21%
- Looking away: 16%
- Looking at the viewer: 4%

Per Woman Gaze per woman (n=60)

- Looking in the camera: W1=6, W2=2, W3=1, W4=3, W5=1, W6=1
- Not relevant: W1=2, W2=2, W3=6, W4=3, W5=7, W6=4
- Looking away: W1=2, W2=6, W3=3, W4=5, W5=3, W6=4
- Looking at the viewer: W1=2, W2=2, W3=2, W4=3, W5=1, W6=1

Figure 2: Individual results within the category 'gaze'

Figure 3: Results within the category 'expression'

Total Expression (n=60)

- Not relevant: 31.7%
- Gentle smile: 21.7%
- Concentrated: 13.2%
- Big Smile: 10.0%

Per Woman Expression per woman (n=60)

- Not relevant: W1=2, W2=5, W3=6, W4=1, W5=1, W6=1
- Gentle smile: W1=2, W2=4, W3=6, W4=3, W5=3, W6=2
- Concentrated: W1=1, W2=1, W3=1, W4=1, W5=3, W6=3
- Big Smile: W1=1, W2=2, W3=5, W4=5, W5=3, W6=4

Figure 4: Individual results within the category 'expression'
Figure 5: Results within the category 'clothing (top)'

Figure 6: Individual results within the category 'clothing (top)'

Figure 7: Results within the category 'clothing (bottom)'

Figure 8: Individual results within the category 'clothing (bottom)'

Clothing (top) (n=60)

Clothing (top) per woman (n=60)

Clothing (bottom) (n=60)

Clothing (bottom) per woman (n=60)
Figure 9: Results within the category 'setting'

Figure 10: Individual results within the category 'setting'

Figure 11: Results within the category 'posture'

Figure 12: Individual results within the category 'Posture'
Figure 13: Results within the category 'point of view'

Table 5: Combination of upper body and lower body clothing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Clothes</th>
<th>Bikini</th>
<th>Jeans</th>
<th>Tight shorts</th>
<th>Tights</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T-shirt (Loose)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-shirt</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweater</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports bra</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singlet</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naked</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bikini</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14: Individual results within the category 'point of view'
Appendix V

Images
Picture 1: The search page on Instagram. Search for hashtags or users (1). See recent images which people you follow likes (2) or see other users which people you follow follows (3).

Picture 2: Choosing a photo from the gallery to upload and position it within the square.

Picture 3: Editing the photo by adding filters or changing brightness etc. Choose a filter (1), increase or decrease the intensity of the filter (2), and edit other qualities (3).
Picture 4: Add text to the photo. Choose between all followers (1) or directly to one person (2). Add a caption (3), tag people in the picture (4), add a location to the picture (5) and share it on other social media (6).

Picture 5: What a post looks like when it is uploaded. Firstly, the username is shown (1), then the picture, followed by the number of likes (2), the caption (3) the comments (4), a like button (5) and a comment button (6).
Picture 6: Instagram post viewed with Google Chrome on a Lenovo laptop. The picture is situated on the left side (1). The caption (2), likes (3) and comments (4) are situated on the right side. Under the comments there is a like button (5) a comment box (6) and a option button (7).

Picture 7: An example of a profile page viewed with the phone application. Firstly, we see the profile picture (1), the number of posts (2), followers (3) and following (4). Underneath we find the personal information (5) followed by the four different ways to view the profile: grid.
Picture 8: An example of a profile page viewed with a browser on a computer. First we see the photo collage (1), followed by the profile photo (2) the personal information (3) and the number of posts, followers and how many she is following (4). Lastly, there are the uploaded photos (5).

Picture 9: An example of a private profile.
Picture 10: W2 being photographed in the gym during an exercise.

Picture 11: W1 being photographed from a close angle while doing an exercise.

Picture 12: W4 taking a selfie, which allows us to see her from an intimate point of view.

Picture 13: W3 taking a selfie in a mirror in the gym, seeing the photo from the subject’s point of view.

Picture 14: W5 takes a selfie in a mirror while looking in the smart phone.

Picture 15: W4 is not looking in the camera while being photographed.
Picture 16: W6 being photographed, the face is visible, but she is looking away.

Picture 17: W2 is looking in the camera, and at the viewer while being photographed.

Picture 18: W5 gently smiling at her smartphone.
Picture 19: W1 looking concentrated during an exercise.

Picture 20: W2 smiling broadly to the viewers and her smartphone.

Picture 21: W6 looking at her phone with a neutral expression.

Picture 22: W6 making a funny face for the picture.

Picture 23: W4 taking a selfie in a gym.

Picture 24: W3 taking a selfie at home in the mirror.
Picture 25: W5 taking a selfie in a dressing room.

Picture 26: W1 taking a selfie in a bathroom.

Picture 27: W6 being photographed in a decontextualized setting.

Picture 28: W6 being photographed outside.

Picture 29: W4 executing an exercise.

Picture 30: W6 flexing for the camera.
Picture 31: W2 standing a bit sideways towards the mirror.

Picture 32: W3 pushing her butt out in a booty tooch.

Picture 33: W3 is posing in her bikini.

Picture 34: W5 is not wearing any clothing to cover her upper body.