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Amy J. Nguyen

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Amy J. Nguyen  
Exploring the Selfie Phenomenon:  
The Idea of Self-Presentation and Its  
Implications Among Young Women

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to explore how female users identify the act of uploading selfies as an expression of external affirmation or as an act of empowerment in terms of redefining beauty standards that are reinforced in society. In addition, this study attempts to provide a foundation for understanding the selfie phenomenon and its relationship to perceived sense of self-worth in young women from the usage of Instagram. As the literature review indicates, there is a lack of research presented on the user's emotional state in relation to using Instagram.

Thus, the most appropriate research design for this subject was a qualitative study. The interview questions were open-ended and structured to acquire knowledge about participant's ability to believe in themselves, assumptions taught about what it means to be a woman, and motivations for personal aspirations and happiness. The sample consisted of eleven participants. The findings in this study provide valuable information that build on the current literature of social networking sites and its implications on the users' emotional state. Results from the findings include handling rejection and criticism, conflict between external expectations and personal aspirations, comparison to others and independence. This study provides a framework for future explorations of identity construction through self-presentation and social media use in a rapidly changing, communication environment. It is important to continue research in the area of selfies as a category on its own due to the endless ways it is incorporated in our lives.

**EXPLORING THE SELFIE PHENOMENON: THE IDEA OF SELF-PRESENTATION  
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS AMONG YOUNG WOMEN**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2014

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Popular social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, etc., have been aptly described as the public display of connection and provide people opportunities to satisfy the need to socially identify with others, who share similar interests and are often comprised of their closest friends and peers (Paul & Brier, 2001; Pembek et al., 2009; Rademacher & Nelson, 2008; Zhao et al., 2008). Among one of the popular SNS is Instagram, a photo-sharing application first introduced on October 6, 2010, for the iPhone platform and later expanded to other mobile devices. Instagram enables the users to snap photos on their mobile devices, apply a filter to transform or enhance the image, and upload to their “followers” (i.e., friends/peers) as a way of documenting the moment. The Press Page from Instagram released the following present-day statistics for the application: 200 million active users monthly with sixty-five percent of users are from outside of the United States, along with 20 billion photos shared with 1.6 billion “likes” daily for all photos uploaded, and averaging at 60 million photos per day globally (Instagram Press, 2014).

With such astounding statistics in a short amount of time since its release, it does not come as a shock to discover that Instagram has sparked a new trend of sharing oneself as a visual medium in the form of *selfies*. Oxford Dictionary defines selfies as, “A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website” (OxfordDictionary.com, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the definition of selfies

will emphasize only of *a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone, and uploaded to Instagram.*

Recently, there has been a great deal of literature in the area of SNS and the adverse effects they have on the user's self-esteem and social relationships (Barker, 2012; Forest & Wood, 2012; Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013; Seinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). In particular, it is found that female users who base their self-worth on their appearances tend to share more photos online and maintain larger online networks for SNS than men (Stefanoe, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011; Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012). After reflecting on the current literature regarding contingencies of self-worth and social networking site behaviors, as well as thinking critically of the emerging variation of selfies in the current cultural trends, this study will examine the rise of the selfie phenomenon with particular attention on Instagram and its usage among young women in ages 18-29 years old.

Arnett (2000) considers individuals in this age range appropriate because it marks the developmental period of emerging adulthood in which individuals engage in their most extensive identity exploration in relation to issues concerning appearance and body weight. According to Arnett (2000), this developmental period is true for both men and women, but, for the purpose of this study, the attention is on women. It is central to focus on women during their emerging adulthood stage since their reliance on technology have made them a distinctive group; their social lives are so enmeshed with their real life-relationships, along with the impact it can cause to their own self-perceptions and sense of self-worth. In regards to the terminology describing emerging adulthood, Arnett (2000) reasons there is a distinction between individuals that fall under emerging adulthood versus young adulthood based on the extent of heterogeneity. He states, "...in emerging adulthood, there is little that is normative. Emerging adulthood is very

much a transitional period leading to adulthood, and different emerging adults reach adulthood at different points” (p. 477). He also considers young adulthood a term better applied to those who are in their thirties. In this study I will refer to *emerging adulthood* as a developmental period that encompasses women of ages 18-29 years old, based on observation that those in this age bracket are still in the process of obtaining education and training for a long-term adult occupation.

Thus, my research question, *"How are young women's perspective of their physical appearance affected by the usage of uploading selfies onto the social media platform, Instagram?"* seeks to explore how female users identify the act of uploading selfies as an expression of external affirmation or an act of empowerment in terms of redefining beauty standards that are reinforced in society. There is evidence to support the impact of sharing oneself to any SNS causes more harm to women's confidence, which assumes that users have a 'healthy' perception of their appearances initially, but that is quickly deflated by any negative criticisms posted to their uploaded pictures (Toma, 2013, p. 208).

This research topic is relevant to social work in consideration of the implications that young women who engage in the photo sharing process are at a high risk for internalization of negative ideals that lead to self-objectification, dissociation, and/or self-harm (Erchull, Liss, & Liechiello, 2013, p. 583). Such consequences include depression or falling short of their potentials by continuously seeking external affirmation of their appearances, regardless if they have a lack of self-love or too much self-love (Aubrey, 2006, p. 161).

In these instances, users of Instagram can pick up explicit and implicit cues of other people being blissful, wealthy, and successful from photos shared than from a status update since photos can invoke immediate social comparison and feelings of inferiority (Winter, 2013;



Krasnova, Wenninger, Widjaja, & Buxmann, 2013). Krasnova et al. (2013) coined it as an “envy spiral” in regards to social media, in which users attempt to compensate by self-presenting superior photos than their peers, leading to self-promotion that triggers more self-promotion within peers. Krasnova et al. (2003) believes this is problematic as the world on social media alienates users further from reality.

Due to lack of research from academic studies of Instagram’s effects on users’ emotional states, it is the intent of this study to provide a starting point for such a topic in hope of shedding light on a novel research area for Instagram that is considered more than just a social networking site. The following chapters discuss the literature in order to gain a solid understanding of the selfie phenomenon, the qualitative methodology used to explore the research question, findings, and a discussion section that attempts to interpret and make value of the findings.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

This chapter highlights the rise of the selfie phenomenon in recent years and its induction into American mainstream society, especially with the development of the popular photo sharing application, Instagram, to provide framework for this study's investigation into implications of sharing selfies among young women, ages 18-29 years old and any contingencies of self-worth. For the purpose of this study, *contingencies of self-worth* refers to, "...a domain or category of outcomes on which a person has staked in his or her self-esteem, so that person's view of his or her value or worth depends on perceived success or failures or adherence to self-standards in that domain" (Crocker & Wolf, 2001, p. 594).

Further research has been conducted to explain how women with a larger network size may be associated with a larger social networking circle, and thus, the larger social circle equates to more people to communicate with. Along with the larger size in social networking sites, it can intensify the need to self-disclose with varying levels of information, as it would mean higher feedback from friends and/or peers (Salehan & Negahban, 2013, p. 2634). This might shed light as to why women during their emerging adulthood stage are active agents in making choices about what cultural models to follow and how to project an image that can further perpetuate the cycle of objectification of women's and their sense of self-worth through the act of uploading selfies.

## **Selfies & Instagram**

Selfies is not a relatively new concept; in fact, it is believed the first American self-portrait photo produced in 1839 was of Robert Cornelius using a daguerreotype, who took a photo of himself outside of his family's store in Philadelphia, PA (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institute for the National Portrait Gallery).

It is unclear when the term selfie originated, but for the purpose of this study, I will be focusing on selfies shared from early 2004 to present time. The earliest images that were tagged with #selfie (read as: hash tag selfie) emerged in early 2004 to a photo-sharing website named Flickr to describe self-taken portraits. In 2005, Jim Krause, a photographer, also mentioned the term selfie in his book, *Photo Idea Index*, which discusses various techniques for shooting photographs. He defined selfies as, "...one of those images that is taken by aiming the camera at yourself" (Krause, 2005, p. 148).

This concept of selfies did not fully pick up until the arrival of a start-up project that revolutionized how photos are captured on mobile phones and transforming them as a mean of communication that enabled people to connect more easily. This start-up project would later become Instagram, which launched officially to the App Store for the iPhone 4 platform on October 6, 2010; three and a half months after the release of the iPhone 4. The iPhone 4 was released on June 24, 2010; this proved to be a unique innovation as Instagram was based for the iPhone 4 largely for the phone's incorporation of the high resolution *Retina display*. Retina display refers to, "...a brand name used by Apple for liquid crystal displays that have a pixel density high enough that the human eye is unable to discern individual pixels at a typical viewing distance" (Costello, 2013). Essentially, the Retina display is designed to smooth the

rough edges of the pixels to provide a high quality image than previously available on other mobile devices (Costello, 2013).

The iPhone 4 was also the first iPhone that came equipped with a front facing camera. With the front facing camera, users now have the ability to snap photos of themselves without requiring assistance from a second person. According to Kevin Systrom, CEO and co-founder of Instagram, the idea of Instagram is unique in it and altered the way individuals connect via SNS. Systrom (2011) states, “I think we discovered a way to turn ordinary, everyday scenes into magical moments captured in digital form. By doing so, we were able to translate photography from being a form of self-expression into a form of communication. I believe the latter innovation is the real game-changer for us” (Systrom, 2011). Within twenty-hours of being launched, Instagram reached number one status on the App Store for the iOS platform on the iPhone and became the App of the Week, in addition to holding the record for the quickest application to reach one million downloads universally by December 2010 (Lux, 2011).

On November 19, 2013 Oxford Dictionary officially announced that selfies is the Word of the Year in their database and added the ubiquitous term to their dictionary (BBC News, 2013). In the same fashion, American Heritage Dictionary followed suit and announced selfie as one of the many words being inaugurated into their collection for 2013. According to one of the executive directors of American Heritage Dictionary, Steve Kleinedler, “We don’t enter that many words from pop culture...when we do they are ones that tend to be very widespread, very ubiquitous, used without further explanation” (Steinmetz, 2013). In addition, the editors believed selfies is a term that best summed up the culture of 2013. It does not come as a shock that 2013 eventually was dubbed as, “the year of the selfie”. In fact, doing a self-search for #selfie on Instagram yields more than fifty variations of the word selfies and the photos that are tagged.

Hash tags are usually written as one long word, for example, #selfiesaturday (reads as selfie Saturday). Other variations of the word selfie include group selfie, selfie (insert any days of the week), funeral (selfies taken at a funeral), after sex (selfies taken after sex), etc., Virtually any possibility to group the term selfie and any other word together exists in hash tag form and on Instagram.

In fact, in January 2014, a popular EDM DJ (or Electric Dance Music Disc Jockey) duo called, The Chainsmokers, released their song #SELFIE which became viral in both U.S. and the U.K. culture (Murray, 2014). The song details about a young woman at a club, speaking to her friends and is presumably preoccupied taking selfies and uploading them to her Instagram account, but worries that she does not receive enough likes, which she then suggests to delete and post another selfie and agonizing over which filter to use. At the same time, she also criticizes other females for their outfits and exhibiting the same behavior as her. The song proves to be catchy as the end of each spoken verse, she says, “But first, let me take a selfie” (Murray, 2014).

### **Implications of sharing oneself on social media**

With the launch of Facebook in 2004, one of the obvious elements of self-disclosure or image construction is the profile photo; the default photo allows the user the choice of identifying themselves to the entire Facebook community (Watson, Smith, & Driver, 2006). With the emergence of profile photos, the idea of self-presentation is no longer limited to text-based presentations. The profile photograph is now a central part of online self-presentation, and one that is critical for relational success (Hancock & Toma, 2009, p.368).

The choice to have a default profile photo is not limited to Facebook, but is included in other social networking sites also, such as Twitter and Instagram. The appeal of selecting any

image and allowing the user to display how they want to be identified with a characteristic or personality fulfills a gratifying need to be liked (Lin & Lu, 2011, p. 1152). Being liked on social media sites is conveyed by the number of likes received from friends and/or peers in Facebook to the frequency of being retweeted in Twitter and the number of heart emoticons received in Instagram following a post or status update.

Salehan & Negahban (2013) believed by having a large social network of friends leads to higher intensity use of social networking sites as this results in higher amount of feedback from peers (p.2634). They argued that extensive use of technology could lead to addiction. The study found the use of social networking sites on mobile phones is a significant predictor of mobile addiction (Salehan & Negahban, 2013, p. 2635). Such explanation could provide a link to the upsurge in selfie popularity to Instagram. In addition, Salehan & Negahban (2013) argued, “Internet addiction not only is harming peoples’ personal lives, it is also making organizations more concerned about their employees’ production” (Salehan & Negahban, 2013, p.2632; Chou, Sinha, & Zhao, 2010). This observation supports Salehan & Negahbans’ (2013) hypothesis of the network size positively affects social networking site intensity as the larger the social circle enables people to be more active in their respective social networking site to be continuous in their communication to the masses (p. 2634).

In a similar study by Krämer & Winter (2008) sought to explore the relationship between self-reported (offline) personality traits and (online) self-presentation in social networking profiles (p.106). It is believed users of social networking sites have more control over their self-presentational behavior than in face-to-face communication since they are given the opportunity to manage self-presentation more strategically than face-to-face communication (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). In addition, since the process of self-presentation has to be tailored to a broad

audience, the individual then has to compromise with various self-presentational goals resulting in an increased importance of stable personality traits as a strong predictor for self-presentation behavior (Krämer & Winter, 2008, p.107).

The research was an exploratory study that focused on three personality traits that have been shown to influence self-presentation behaviors: self-esteem, extraversion, and self-efficacy. They selected to investigate StudiVZ ([www.studivz.net](http://www.studivz.net)) as it is one of Germany's most visited website and the most famous Internet start-up. Method of design consisted of an online survey on personality traits and a content analysis of user profiles. Sample included a random selection of 150 StudiVZ members via the messaging function with a short description of the survey and a personal link for the users to complete; 58 responded with a balance of mix of 50% men and 50% women with an average age of 22.98 years old.

Results were limited in the findings. For example: they found that introverted and shy users (both males and females) were more like to prefer online communication, less likely to have profile pages, and additionally, if introverted users were to have a profile page, they were more reserved with regards to self-presentation and displayed less information. Along with this, the study did confirm extroverts were more like to present themselves in a less restrained manner as they chose less conservative profile photos of themselves (Krämer & Winter, 2008, p.113). They also did not find any relationship between self-esteem and self-presentation within the StudiVZ sample.

A limitation to this study is that it only focused on StudiVZ, a popular social networking site in Germany, and even though provided an equal representation from both male and female users, it does not fully encompass the mass users in the United States. However, despite this limitation, there are stable personality traits that were studied and I believe is a viable link to

predictors in online self-presentation into relation to my research of female users who engage in behaviors in sharing selfies.

In a society, such as the United States, that has been a wide emphasis on appearances, women are conditioned to think of their bodies as the premier status over their emotional state or physical capabilities (McKinley and Hyde, 1996). As a result of living in an objectified culture, women tend to engage in self-policing behavior that leads them to self-objectify by internalizing how outsiders perceive their physical appearances. Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello (2013) continue to expand on the research relating to objectification theory and self-objectification in women by investigating negative effects of self-objectification such as self-harm behaviors, stemming from a result of trauma (p.583). They note that previous studies have focused on consequences originating from self-objectification and the predictors of self-harm, and the findings have been relatively consistent. However, for the purpose of their study, they hope the present findings would be more relevant to a broad, international audience (Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello, 2013, p.584).

The study was conducted in the United States via an anonymous online survey. Participants were informed about the survey and the research question *effects of women's exposure to the media on their attitudes and behaviors*. The sample comprised of one hundred and sixty women ranging from 18-35 years old with median age of 23.12 years old. A majority had some college or an Associate's degree. The study sought to test the indirect effect of body surveillance on self-harm through body shame and depression. The results confirmed their hypothesis that body surveillance was related to dissociation and may be a precursor to more generalized dissociative experiences. They explained when a woman takes on the other person's perspective of her body, she must step out of her own body, thus, putting her at risk for feelings



of dissociation and the negative consequences of dissociative experiences (Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello, 2013, p.589).

Their data also produced a significant reason for negative effect resulting in self-harm behavior is the sense of shame of one's own body that originated from internalizing media messages about beauty ideals and engaging in habitual body surveillance (Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello, 2013, p.589). One unexpected finding from the study was a large percentage of the participants responded positively for eating disorders included in media internalization and dissociation. They concluded an area for further research is to include measures for disordered eating.

According to Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) the sexual objectification of the female body in Western culture produces a multitude of negative consequences for women. One result is the internalization of a "viewer's perspective as a primary views of their physical selves (p.173) another term for self-objectification. This process can be detrimental to the individual as they can acculturate to view themselves as objects or "sights" to be appreciated by others, and how the self would appear to others, thus, neglecting what it can do or how it feels for that individual (Aubrey, 2006, p.159). This serves as a link to those who share selfies since the self-snapshots indicate more than just a made up face, but also the clothing or lack of it in the photos as well.

Aubrey (2006) provided two contributions to the literature surrounding media exposure and body image: the first was to investigate the directionality of the relations between exposure to sexually objectifying media and both self-objectification and negative affect about the body (p. 160). She found there was already limited literature between exposure to sexual objectifying media and self-objectification, but a previous research using cross-sectional studies have shown

that exposure to both magazines and entertainment television is associated with body dissatisfaction and affect (Botta, 2003; Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Levine, Smolack, & Hayden, 1994). However, due to the cross-sectional nature of these studies, it could not fully be determined if media exposure creates body dissatisfaction in all individuals.

The method of design for Aubrey's research was a report of a two-wave panel study across a 1-year lag. In doing so, the study would provide an opportunity to explore the relations between exposure to sexually objectifying media and body self-perceptions and was limited to only women under the central assumption of objectification theory that more women than men are targets of objectification (Aubrey, 2006, p.162). The sample consisted of 149 female undergraduates from a large, Midwestern university with the average age being 19.5 years old. Participants in the first wave were given a questionnaire to complete in order to satisfy a requirement for an introductory communications studies course. For the second wave, the same participants were re-contacted 1 year later to complete the study. Participants were asked to complete the following questionnaires: The Trait Self-Objectification, Appearance Anxiety, and Body Shame. The questionnaire was administered through a web interface to reduce anxiety in participants by having to report any sensitive behaviors otherwise would have done with face-to-face interview.

Findings showed college women are somewhat aware of media effects on their body self-perceptions and is very likely they will choose to avoid media so they do not exacerbate their tendency to self-objectify or to feel anxious or ashamed of their bodies (Aubrey, 2006, p.170). A limitation of this study is limited to characteristics of the individuals involved. Future research should focus on characteristics relating to peers and parents, along with testing for other

variables such as examining perceptions of sexually objectifying media and motives for consuming sexually objectifying content (Aubrey, 2006, p.170).

In the article, *Women on display: The effect of portraying the self online on women's self-objectification*, by Dian A. de Vries and Jochen Peter further expanded the objectification research to include online activities such as online self-portrayal of women (de Vries & Peter, 2013). Their goals were to identify if “portraying the self to others online leads to self-objectification in women” and “whether priming with sexually objectifying content with traditional media moderates the effects of online self-portrayal on self-objectifications” (de Vries & Peter, 2013, p.1483). The method of design was a web-based experiment in order for the participants to complete it in the privacy of their own homes, and therefore, increases anonymity and decreases any biases that could result from a lab environment (i.e. interaction with an experimenter may affect self-portrayals). The sample consisted of two hundred and twenty one women aged 18-25 with the median age of 20.8 years old and a large segment of students from higher education background.

Participants were told that the study was aim to investigate women's consumer choices and were randomly assigned to one of the two priming stimuli conditions, along with viewing and rating either two neutral advertisements or two objectifying advertisements. Results concluded, “...portaying of the self to others online increased self-objectification in young women, especially after they had been primed with objectifying media content from an advertisement” (de Vries, Peter, 2013, p.1487). It was also concluded that young women today encounter more objectifying content than earlier generations. This includes involvement on social media sites, in particular to Facebook, which reports a much higher occurrence of self-objectifying incidents. Although, they report will require more testing before a conclusion can be

confirmed.

A large limitation of this study is a lack of a formal test of the theorized mediating the process of understanding the process of online self-portrayal on self-objectification. This study relied on previous research of online self-portrayal of girls and women (Ringrose, 2011; Siibak, 2009) and fits into the framework of the objectification theory. Another limitation of this study only included a sample of Dutch women and lacked the cultural diversity in responses, and therefore, cannot fully conclude that such self-portrayal affect all women the same way. Along this note, the researchers also cannot conclude that online self-portrayals also affect men the same way.

Much of the recent literature in this area has focused on effects of social networking sites (SNS), the most prominent being Facebook and ideas of self-presentation on implicit self-esteem, along with online behavior and the damage it could cause for real-life relationships for both gender (Hum et al., 2011; Toma, 2013; A. de Vries & Peters, 2013). In conjunction, there have been more studies centering at young women on the influence of media and social media of placing women's bodies and appearances at a premium can acculturate women to self-objectify (Aubrey, 2006; Boley et al., 2011; Holmes, 2013; Roberts, 2013). By doing so, it leads women to internalize cultural ideals and view the self primarily of externally perceivable attributes and thus, can extend negative consequences to their well-being leading to dissociation and self-harm behavior (Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello, 2013). Thus, my research question, "*How are young women's perspective of their physical appearance affected by the usage of uploading selfies onto the social media platform, Instagram?*" seeks to explore how female users identify the act of uploading selfies as an expression of external affirmation or an act of empowerment in terms of redefining beauty standards that are reinforced in society.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

This study explored how women value their sense of self-worth through their usage of uploading selfies to Instagram. In order to examine this topic, this research focused on the overarching question: *How are young women's perception of their physical appearance affected by the usage of uploading selfies on the social media platform, Instagram?* As the literature review indicates, there is a lack of research presented on the user's emotional state in relation to using Instagram. Thus, the most appropriate research design for this subject was a qualitative study.

A qualitative study was conducted for a variety of reasons. First, the purpose of this study was to explore how female users identify the act of uploading selfies as an expression of external affirmation or as an act of empowerment in terms of redefining beauty standards that are reinforced in society. Utilizing qualitative methods to investigate the idea of self-presentation and how women value their self-worth provided a well-rounded understanding of this topic, as opposed to using a quantitative method that only assessed the frequency of use of Instagram. Qualitative methods were also used because of the subjectivity and exclusivity of this topic. Much of the current literature discusses social networking site behavior and the implications of engaging in self-disclosure on social media and the link to female user's self-esteem. However, this study is needed in order to provide a foundation for understanding the selfie phenomenon and its relationship to perceived sense of self-worth in young women. This chapter presents the

methods used in this study to unearth this perspective, including a sample section, data collection, and data analysis methods.

## **Sample**

While there has been extensive research to support how sharing on SNS can affect both males and females, this study will only include females. The focus of the study is how females and their perceptions of themselves and their physical appearance can be affected by uploading selfies as it correlates with the idea that engaging in this photo sharing process is another way that the users self-objectify themselves. Inclusion criteria were: individuals that identify as female; between the ages 18-29 years old; access to an Instagram account; uploaded selfies to the Instagram account at least three times or more in a given month; can be of any academic background; fluent in English (i.e. able to read, write, and speak English). The sample size was eleven participants. Originally, the sample size was twelve participants, but due to time constraints and personal circumstances surrounding the last participant, the sample size was reduced to eleven participants.

Prior to recruiting participants and conducting interviews, an approval was obtained from the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review (HSR) Committee to ensure this study met all ethical standards (see Appendix D). This study utilized the non-probability method of sampling known as snowball sampling to recruit participants. An email was sent to my friends and colleagues requesting them to forward my recruitment flyer to potential participants that may fit the criteria for my study. In addition, a recruitment flyer was posted on my own Facebook page as a status update so that my contacts were able to see it and pass along the message to those who might fit the criteria (see Appendix A). The recruitment flyer explained the purpose of my study, included information related to the research topic, and

outlined the inclusion criteria. The flyer also contained my contact information via telephone and Smith email account and asked that my contact information be passed along to potential participants and provides how I can reach out to potential participants as well. The criteria listed in my recruitment flyer act as a screening process in itself. When potential participants were identified and agreed to the terms of this study, arrangements were made to meet in person to start the interview process.

### **Data collection**

Before conducting any interviews, participants from the sample were given an informed consent document describing their participation in the study and their rights as human subjects, as well as any potential risks or benefits of participation (see Appendix C). Several precautions were taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants. All transcripts were assigned a pseudonym upon transcription. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed. When no longer needed, all data will be destroyed.

Participants agreed to meet in person for the interview in a mutually agreed upon site that had enough privacy where the interviewee and myself will be comfortable and safe to share and talk without any noise or distractions. Interviews were recorded using the ‘Voice Recorder’ application on the iOS operating system for the iPhone and any hand written notes I needed to jot down for future references. The entire interview process was designed to take no longer than forty-five minutes to an hour. All of the interviews proceeded without any interruption. The interview consisted of a fourteen open-ended questions, with the first three questions gathering

basic demographic information, and the rest inquiring about how women view their sense of self-worth and in relation to the other people in their lives (see Appendix B).

### **Data analysis**

Each question was coded by looking for themes, patterns, and trends in responses across participants. The coding process consisted of the researcher reading each interview numerous times, analyzing the interview content for relevant and/or repeating themes, as well as looked for unusual responses that appear to be unique and can contribute to new data that are not reflected in the literature. The following chapter will assess the results of this investigation and data will be compared to the literature reviewed in this study and discussed further, along with the implications for practice for social workers.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study is to explore the correlation between the usage of uploading selfies to Instagram and self-reported sense of self-worth in women. This chapter contains findings that are based on eleven interviews conducted with females between the ages of 18-29 years old and come from different academic backgrounds. Out of the eleven participants, only four permitted to be audio recorded while the rest declined for personal reasons.

Interviews were conducted in person, transcribed, and then coded using thematic analysis. The interview questions were structured to learn about respondent's ability to believe in themselves, assumptions taught about what it means to be a woman, and motivations for happiness. The major themes that emerged from the subject's responses include handling rejection and criticism, conflict between external expectations and personal aspirations, comparison to others, and appreciation for independence.

#### **Demographic Data**

A total of eleven participants answered all fourteen-interview questions; the first three questions gathered demographic information such as age, academic background, and the frequency of selfies uploaded to Instagram in a given month. The rest of the questions were open-ended that focused on the subject's perception of their own sense of self-worth relative to personal goals and the relationships in their lives.

These participants ranged in ages from 18-29 years with the youngest at twenty-two years old and the oldest at twenty-nine years old; the mean age of participants was twenty-five years old. The academic backgrounds of these interviewees included two with a bachelor's degree while the rest were working towards their master's degree in counseling and social work. Most of the participants (45%) reported uploading only three selfies to Instagram in a given month. Three was also the lowest while eight was the highest for amount of selfies shared in a given month to Instagram by all interviewees.

### **Opting not to be audio recorded**

Originally I recruited twelve participants, but one subject decided she did not want to be a part of my study as she felt a study being conducted about women's self perceptions of their physical appearance and her responses did not make her sound "good enough for other people to read about". I anticipated interviewing and audio recording all my participants in order to capture the true essence of each woman's narrative for each question, but eight out of the eleven declined to be audio recorded. As outlined from my Informed Consent document, it required two signatures from the participants. The first signature signifies their agreement to be interviewed, and the second signature was up to the participant's discretion as they had two options in the interview process: (1) agree to be interviewed and agree to be [audio] recorded or (2) agree to be interviewed, but declined to be [audio] recorded.

I encountered issues during my read through of the Informed Consents with my participants. When I sent out recruitment emails, I also attached the Informed Consent document in the email so that the participants had the option of reading and signing it prior to meeting in person and conducting the interview. Thus, participants were recruited if they met the inclusion

criteria outlined in the flyers/emails and were aware I was not purposefully hiding any information or had motives for them to be a part of my study.

Participants made comments specifically to the “Confidentiality” section, especially when the section reads, *research records will be kept in a locked file on a flash drive, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file...We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.* Participant’s refusal to be audio recorded stemmed from the following comments, “Um...no. I don’t want to be recorded. How do I know that you’re going to use this for something else”, “No, thanks, but that’s really creepy. I don’t want my voice to be on some file for the next couple of years”, and “I don’t want to be recorded in a way that makes me sound dumb”. Collectively, respondents expressed interest for aiding me in my study, but preferred not to be recorded. For the ones that declined to be audio recorded, I typed out their responses fully during the interview process.

### **Handling rejection and criticism**

When individuals were asked how they handle rejection and criticism in an objective manner, only two reported not feeling bothered by this subject. One stated, “I’m an actress so rejection is part of the game. I don’t let it affect how I feel about myself” and the other mentioned, “Usually criticism doesn’t bother me...I am very confident in myself so it doesn’t matter”. However, more than half commented they do not, “handle it well”. Most participants specified they do take it personally and tried to brush it off, but cannot escape that any rejection and/or criticism does bother them internally. The following response demonstrates the same sentiment in regards to feelings of self-doubt from participants:

I think generally I'm fine with constructive criticism. I won't latch, leash out onto them, but I start to second-guess myself. Like what I did, should I have taken a different angle? Should I have warrant something different? I'm much harder on myself.

In addition, two other participants explained how they saw rejection and criticism as a room for growth and development to make them a better person [for themselves], which had the potential to minimize the impact of negative criticisms.

### **Conflict between external expectations and personal aspirations**

In order to assess the feelings and viewpoints participants held about the expectations and portrayals of women in American culture, they were asked about assumptions that they were taught about what it means to be a woman, regardless if it derived from family, peers, television, etc. Once participants gave responses about the messages they received about what embodies a woman, they were asked a follow-up question in regards their own perspective on what being a woman means to them.

Out of the eleven participants, two discussed support from their parents as a source for positive reinforcement about being a woman and the identity they should form for their adult lives. The first participant recalled how her father's own traditional and strict upbringing influenced his rearing of her and her siblings differently from his own:

My dad was raised to believe that a woman should be [traditional], which meant her goal was to get married, cook, and tend to the husband. But he has been pretty consistent that's not the path he wants us to follow. He wants us to be independent, educated,

hardworking...and being respected is a big thing in our family in the way you present yourself.

When asked the follow-up question about her own perspective on what it means to be a woman, her reply was consistent with the messages her father was trying to instill within her. She echoed his words and emphasized again the importance of being respected as a person.

The second participant had trouble recalling the distinction between a woman's value and worth that she received from her father. On one hand, she mentions he does impart confidence and promote self-love within her, but on the other hand, his profession often negates his positive reinforcement. She shares:

From family, this is tricky because my father works for Playboy. And so, although he always told me and made me believe that I have worth and that I could go to school and I'm smart; I have a brain. I'm independent. I would still get this alternative view that women are subservient to men. And that women are dumb, illogical, and men are more superior. Women cannot be in superior positions because they're illogical. I would always hear things like that so in terms of what it means to be a woman, I would get opposing views. Like, "Yes, you can work hard and be whatever you want to be, and be independent" but I would get this other thing, "No, you're dumb. You're meant to be in the house and do housework and all that matters are your looks"...and then being around the models and being in that industry where you are picked apart based on every little [flaw] thing. I guess it would distort my

view on what it means to be a woman because you just see them as objects that's meant to be looked at.

In response to the follow-up question, she continued to express opposing feelings about what it means to be a woman for her. She acknowledged it's a difficult question to answer and ends her response with, "You have to embody this powerful woman, but no matter what, you're still less than a man".

All other participants provided extensive responses that identified family as the earliest and still prominent force behind the idea of what being a woman should mean to them. One participant recalled,

First and foremost, to be a woman, to be a wife and mother, definitely came from family and culture. That's also something I want for myself, and I don't know if it's because it's been ingrained in my brain that I want it for myself...but I genuinely feel a desire to be a mother and a wife. But there is also the assumption that I should follow my dream and that's more social and not so much cultural or familial, so I do think that pursuing what I want is something that now, especially since so many women are going after a career and seeking that life that typically men had. There's that assumption that I have, that I feel there is a right for me to do that.

This statement is consistent with other views participants discussed about what was conveyed to them from family regarding roles and responsibilities of women, in and out of the home. However, at the same time, participants also chatted about the optimistic messages they

received from friends and peers that were contradictory to the expectations from their family that became a vessel for encouragement. One participant mentioned about the advice she received from her mother as opposed to her friends,

You know, she always told me the goal should be getting married to a rich man and having a bunch of kids...but my friends, they really have a good head on their shoulders. From them, I picked up that I should be strong. They tell me to get my education. Don't conform to getting married and having kids.

When asked the follow-up question about what it means to be a woman according to them, these participants vocalized a different perspective from what was received from their family. Unanimously, participants narrated about the lack of desire to be “superwoman”. Instead, they expressed the importance of acquiring abilities in order for them to be successful and happy such as having perseverance or strong work ethics. A few participants stated the idea of empowerment and that women can go after what they want. In addition, they have also voiced the essence of being a woman is having the freedom to do whatever they want to do. One participant concluded, “To pursue whatever I want without anyone trying to hold me back because of my gender”.

### **Comparison to others**

Around a third of the participants admitted to comparing their life progress to other people (in a general sense) in their lives they perceived to be happier, wealthier, and more successful than them. Several participants cited having moments of, “Should I be on that same path?” when they observed their female peers and colleagues getting married and starting a family while they are still finishing up their master’s degree. In addition, participants also

reported that family contributes to another layer of stress as their own culture and family imposed a strict “timeframe to start a family”.

One participant states actively comparing life progress for her is indirectly tied to how she values her self-worth. She shared, “...instead of just going on about your life, you think, oh great, you always look at other people and always comparing yourself to them...kind of valuing yourself based on those assumptions”. When asked to clarify what part of her life she feels the most comparison of life progress, participant explained the financial success. She continued to explain,

...Success in terms of their happiness and their ability to travel or have free time; I noticed it a lot, but I’m still stuck in school not making a lot of money and I’m comparing myself to people that immediately became entrepreneurs and are doing great and making lots of money. Compare yourself and their success and you’re not doing that well.

Aside from comparing life progress, participants also reported comparing their appearances to other women as well. A majority of participants revealed they are much harder on themselves when it comes to their physical appearances. Several participants echoed the same responses about their selfies in which they do feel self-conscious about the type of selfies they post to their followers, but admitted that it feels good when they receive the notifications on their phone for the number of heart emoticons they have accumulated since sharing each selfies. One participant states, “I don’t feel as pretty as other girls...like I’m not one of those girls that guys think, [oh, she’s hot]. It just feels nice when other people appreciate how I look without all the make-up like those other girls”. Another participant revealed that she spends “a lot of time” on



Instagram sifting through friends' photos and often compares their appearances and body weight to her own.

Participants also reported being quick to judge other women's physical appearance before attempting to appreciate the personality aspect of an individual. However, one participant did clarify about the social comparisons she used to make towards other women. She mentioned,

Body weight is the first thing that comes up. I had problems with my thyroid and I used to be very thin...so I used to define my beauty by my weight [because I was so thin]. So when it happened, I started looking at other people and their body weight...so I'm starting to appreciate women with curves, especially the "Latina" look...you know, with long hair and not overweight. Just curves.

This response is starkly different compared to another participant, who reported, "It's not my trigger to be affected by how other women look. I will feel uncomfortable in a room full of made-up women".

Surprisingly, when participants were asked to clarify about their selfies and the usage of Instagram, a majority of the women responded that boredom is an incentive for them to post selfies. For the participants, when they see friends posting selfies, it serves as a motivation for them to post a selfie also. In addition, participants also have the opportunity to experiment with different poses or angles that would highlight areas that they feel are attractive about them.

### **Independence**

Overall, almost all participants cited their happiness depended on their level of success and fulfilling relationships with family and friends. Each one defined success differently, but

responses have been consistent with being comfortable with who they are and knowing their own self-worth. One participant described her definition of happiness:

Happiness is partially about the journey. I really think my optimism takes me a long way and that optimism is feeling good about the way things are going...success is about continuing to find new parts of myself, never giving up, and really cherishing my relationships and making that my priorities.

In addition, participants believed one other aspect that attributed to being successful is pursuing a career, providing for themselves, and having the financial freedom to walk away from unhealthy relationships. However, collectively, participants did identify that while having a career is crucial, it should not be their entire life or identity. As one participant stated, “It is something you do as a small part of your life”.

## **Summary**

This chapter summarizes and presents the findings from the eleven interviews with women, ages 18-29 years old about the usage of uploading selfies to Instagram and self-reported sense of self-worth. Participants provided valuable information regarding external issues and internal conflict that impact the way they perceive their abilities and self-worth. The next chapter will discuss these findings and implications of this data.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to explore how female users identify the act of uploading selfies as an expression of external affirmation or as an act of empowerment in terms of redefining beauty standards that are reinforced in U.S. society. In addition, this study attempts to provide a foundation for understanding the selfie phenomenon and its relationship to perceived sense of self-worth in young women from the usage of Instagram. The interview questions were open-ended and structured to acquire knowledge about participant's ability to believe in themselves, assumptions taught about what it means to be a woman, and motivations for personal aspirations and happiness.

The findings in this study provide valuable information that builds on the current literature of SNS and its implications on the users' emotional state. Results from the findings include handling rejection and criticism, conflict between external expectations and personal aspirations, comparison to others, and independence. This section will open with an interpretation of the results in relation to the literature reviewed. Finally, this section will conclude with a brief discussion of the study's limitations, as well as the implications for social work practice.

### **Results**

The results in this study show that it is inconsistent with the literature presented when discussing about females users who base their self-worth on their appearances tend to share more

photos online and maintain larger online networks for SNS than men (Stefanoe, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011; Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012). In actuality, the mean number of selfies shared to Instagram in a given month by participants was only three; the lowest number of selfies shared overall to Instagram was also three. Moreover, there was only one participant who aligned with this current literature finding. This participant reported sharing about seven to eight selfies to Instagram in a given month and expressed difficulty in describing traits or characteristics that help her believe in her abilities when she says, “I don’t really think I am capable...I think I’m bad at most of what I do or attempt”.

In addition to being asked about positive traits for participants to identify within themselves, this particular participant had trouble voicing any contributions she has made in her life and if she feels acknowledged for them. It can be inferred that this participant may not hold herself to the highest esteem. She also disclosed that the relationships in her life are “somewhat fulfilling” and admits that she has been neglectful of them for most of her life. Lastly, participant repeatedly states that she does doubt herself and often compares her life progress to that of her friends and peers (for e.g. not settling down and starting a family). This finding is supported by the literature regarding contingencies of self-worth from Crocker & Wolfe (2001) that argues basing one’s self-esteem on other’s approval and physical appearance demonstrates the strongest relationship with low levels of self-esteem.

This is wildly different than all other responses from the rest of the participants. The majority of participants were able to vocalize at least one positive trait within themselves such as having strength to “get up and try again” or being resilient in everyday challenges. Also, the majority of participants expressed having fulfilling relationships in their life from friends and

family members, but acknowledged that they do work hard and put in time to cultivate such supportive systems.

However, the rest of the findings in this study show that it is inconsistent with the literature presented and thus, there does not seem to be a strong correlation in the perceived sense of self-worth with the usage of Instagram in young women, ages 18-29 years old. The bulk of all participants' responses gravitated towards attaining a balance of career and personal fulfillment. While participants accepted certain insecurities within themselves, such as having confidence in their abilities or physical appearances, the resounding theme was striving for individual identity and independence. They placed more emphasis on personal values and ambitions (e.g. pursuing higher education and selecting not to cave to family pressures of settling down and having kids at the moment). For participants, they believed it was much more vital to achieve happiness via personal fulfillment in their professional and personal life rather than conceding to external expectations. Participants declared the importance of instilling empowerment within themselves and being free to pursue whatever they want and not being held back because of their gender.

Furthermore, this study revealed that instead of attempting to satisfy familial and cultural expectations on what it means to be a woman, participants resisted and worked to promote a sense of self-love within themselves and accepted that work and career related goals should not be their entire life nor identity. Participants again echoed the choice for having independence and rather than relying on the efforts of others, they wish to establish financial freedom and endorse a sense of security and stability. For participants, achieving all of this will equate to the ultimate form of happiness. They perceived happiness as a "little bit of everything". Participants expressed that success and happiness means continuing to find parts of themselves, discovering

their own sense of self-worth and their abilities, and cherishing and maintaining the relationships that continue to enrich their lives.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

It is important to note that the findings in this study cannot be generalized to a certain population of women. Instead, I believe the results represent an anomaly in the area of SNS and the implications it has on the user's emotional state. Almost all participants in this study, with the exception of three, are in the process of pursuing a master's level degree related to helping others and providing counseling services. Thus, there is already bias in the findings relative to the perceived sense of self-worth in the participant pool due to their educational background and developing a heightened awareness of societal norms imposed on women, in general. Results in this study are not representative of all females' ages 18-29 years old.

It would also make sense to include other demographic information to encompass ethnic background and ask clarifying questions about the culture participants identify with in order to gain a holistic perspective of the individual. It is relevant to incorporate other demographic information, as the results seem to imply a strong correlation to the treatment and expectations from family and is tied to how users might engage and share photos to Instagram. There is room for research for an indication of a dual identity that exists where certain individuals have to conceal who they are offline and in private, but push parameters of self-presentation "online" in the form of selfies when they upload to their Instagram page. Other important demographic information should include the frequency of checking and logging in to their Instagram page in a given day, along with the number of followers to their page.

While the findings in this study deliver a jumping off point into the introduction of selfies and Instagram, it does so at a superficial level. There is still much more to learn about this

phenomenon and its implication on the users' emotional state. Future research should focus on adolescents, males and females, members of the LGBT community, individuals in other age brackets, etc. in order to fully understand the impact of selfies and its influence in users emotional state and motivations.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

The results of this study make a suitable contribution to the body of research directed at people's behavior on popular SNS, especially for the field of social work. One of the strengths of this research lies in the design, where the participant's social context was incorporated to the analyses. This study provides a framework for future explorations for clinicians in the field of social work relating to identity construction through self-presentation and social media use in a rapidly changing, communication environment. It is important to continue research in the area of selfies as a category on its own due to the endless ways it is incorporated in our lives. As social workers, it is important to recognize the multitude of ways in which people can connect interactively and understand the benefits and damages this form of communication can impact their clients and the way they perceive themselves.

This study provides a small contribution to the field of social work as results in this study demonstrate the complexities of sharing oneself on social media and how other parts of participants' lives impact their self-image and does not solely depend on SNS behaviors, which is contradictory to other research and literature previously argued. It is advantageous for social work clinicians to study adolescents and their behaviors on Instagram in order to understand the motivation behind the usage and the relationship to their self-esteem, especially for those whose work involves daily contact with young children and adolescents.

In conclusion, the results of this study show that the usage of Instagram to share selfies has a minimal impact on their perceived sense of self-worth. Participants demonstrated a strong capability to develop a more in-depth understanding of self-awareness and what makes life meaningful for them. The results cannot be generalized for everyone as this participant pool for this study is only a small portion of the population and does not fully represent all women who might use Instagram on a daily basis and have a higher number of selfies shared to their online network. This study merely provides a jumping off point for the topic of selfies, more research should be done about selfies on a global level as it is relevant to all individuals and is a constantly evolving trend that does not seem to slow down anytime soon.



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**Appendix A**  
**Recruitment Letter**

Hi Friends,

I need your help! As many of you know, I am finishing up my master in social work from Smith College. One of the requirements for my degree is that I complete a master's thesis related to clinical social work. I am interested in examining the ways young adult women participate by uploading *selfies* on to social media platforms and how this affects their self-perceptions of themselves through the idea of self-presentation.

*Selfies* is defined as a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website (Oxford Dictionary.com, 2013).

If there is anyone that fits the following criteria, please send them my way! Please pass along my contact information to the individuals and also provide how I could contact them as well.

1. Identify as female and between the ages of 18-29 years old.
2. Have an *Instagram* account and have posted *selfies* on *Instagram* at least three times or more within a month.
3. Can speak and read English.

Thank you very much for your help! If you or your contact(s) have questions, I can be contacted by email or by telephone.

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your academic background?
3. How many times have you uploaded a picture of yourself (i.e. selfie) to Instagram within the last month?
4. How do you handle rejection and criticism in an objective manner?
5. Do you compare your life progress to someone else's? If so, how?
6. Do you excessively engage in any activity?
7. What are the contributions that you make in your life and do you feel acknowledged for these contributions?
8. What traits do you feel you possess that help you believe in your abilities?
9. Are the relationships that you are a part of fulfilling to you and do you take the time to work at those relationships?
10. What are the assumptions that you were taught about what it means to be a woman (i.e. from family, peers, school, television)?
11. What is your viewpoint on what it means to be a woman?
12. In thinking about your appearance as well as the appearance of other women, what tends to snag your attention, and why?
13. What are the messages that you received growing up about women and work and how have they contributed to how you view the work you do?
14. What does your happiness depend on?

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent Agreement



#### Consent to Participate in a Research Study Smith College SSW • Northampton, MA

.....

**Title of Study: Exploring the selfie phenomenon: the idea of self-presentation and its implications among young women**

**Investigator(s): Amy Nguyen, Smith College School for Social Work**

.....

#### **Introduction**

- You are being asked to be in a research study to examine the rise of the selfie phenomenon with particular focus on Instagram and its usage among young women, ages 18-29 years old.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you met the following criteria: (1) identify as female and between the ages of 18-29 years old; (2) have an Instagram account and have posted selfies at least three times or more within the last month; and (3) can speak and read English.
- I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

#### **Purpose of Study**

- The purpose of the study is to examine how are young women's perception of their physical appearance affected by the usage of uploading selfies onto Instagram.
- This study is being conducted as a thesis requirement for my master's in social work degree.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

#### **Description of the Study Procedures**

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: participate in 45 minutes to one hour interview, we will only meet once via face-to-face interaction/Skype/or phone contact, and be asked a series of questions about your Instagram activity and feelings about other's behaviors on Instagram.

#### **Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study**

- There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks.

#### **Benefits of Being in the Study**

- The benefits of participation are gaining insight into certain social issues that pertain to women, having an opportunity to share one's own thoughts and insights to the selfie phenomenon, and, assisting a fellow graduate student complete one of the requirements for her master's degree.

**Confidentiality**

- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file on a flash drive, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. My research advisor will also see the data, but only after all identifying information has been disguised or removed. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.
- The data will be kept for at least three years according to Federal regulations. They may be kept longer if still needed for research. After the three years, or whenever the data are no longer being used, all data will be destroyed.

**Payments**

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely at any point during the study. If you choose to withdraw, the researcher will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify the researcher of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by *April 25, 2014*. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

**Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns**

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me through email or by telephone. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

**Consent**

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study researcher.

.....

Name of Participant (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

.....



[if using audio or video recording, use next section for signatures:]

**1. I agree to be [audio or video] taped for this interview:**

Name of Participant (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:**

Name of Participant (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Human Subjects Review Approval Letter



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**School for Social Work**  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 4, 2014

Amy Nguyen

Dear Amy,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.  
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Andrew Jilani, Research Advisor