AN EXAMINATION OF WAYS THAT THREE SELF-IDENTIFIED FEMINISTS FEEL EMPOWERED THROUGH INSTAGRAM

BY

JOANNA REES

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art Education in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2018

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Elizabeth Delacruz, Chair
Dr. Michael Parsons
Associate Professor Patricia Gill
Assistant Professor Laura Hetrick
Abstract

This dissertation is a case study on three females’ use of the Instagram™ photographic application. The study examines how three self-identified feminists use Instagram to reflect on their own history and daily life, for self-empowerment and engagement with a supportive community. The motivation for this study emerges from my own experiences documenting photographs of my own daily life and sharing my images on Instagram and other social networking platforms. In addition to conducting a self study of my own engagement in Instagram, I examine how two other women create and share images on Instagram and consider what are the implications of Instagram for art education.

Keywords: photography, Instagram, social networking, female identity, art education, digital learning, pedagogy, curriculum.
To My Mother Janice Rees
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .............................................................................................................. vii
LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1
  The Rise of Digital Imaging and Social Networking .................................................. 2
  The Instagram Phenomenon ....................................................................................... 3
  Problem Statement and Need for the Study .............................................................. 6
  Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................. 6
  Assumptions and Limitations .................................................................................... 8
  Research Questions ................................................................................................... 11
  Methodology ............................................................................................................. 11
  Significance of the Study ......................................................................................... 13

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................. 15
  A Brief History of the Women’s Movement in the United States .............................. 15
  Feminist Thought and Action in Art Education ...................................................... 19
  Feminism and Innovation Culture in Digital Media ................................................. 23
  Digital Media in Art Education ............................................................................... 31
  Feminist Hashtags .................................................................................................. 34
  Lingering Thoughts ................................................................................................ 35

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .................................................................................... 36
  Study Design ............................................................................................................ 37
  Research Questions ................................................................................................ 37
LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Table 1......................................................................................53
Table 2......................................................................................54
Table 3......................................................................................63
LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Figure 1…………………………………………………………………...55
Figure 2…………………………………………………………………...62

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY

Figure 3…………………………………………………………………...71
Figure 4…………………………………………………………………...73
Figure 5…………………………………………………………………...76
Figure 6…………………………………………………………………...77
Figure 7…………………………………………………………………...77
Figure 8…………………………………………………………………...78
Figure 9…………………………………………………………………...80
Figure 10………………………………………………………………...82
Figure 11………………………………………………………………...84
Figure 12………………………………………………………………...88
Figure 13………………………………………………………………...91
Figure 14………………………………………………………………...100
Figure 15………………………………………………………………...100
Figure 16………………………………………………………………...103
Figure 17………………………………………………………………...105
Figure 18………………………………………………………………...106
Figure 19………………………………………………………………...106
Figure 20 .........................................................................................114
Figure 21 .........................................................................................115
Figure 22 .........................................................................................115
Figure 23 .........................................................................................117
Figure 24 .........................................................................................119
Figure 25 .........................................................................................122
Figure 26 .........................................................................................123
Figure 27 .........................................................................................124
Figure 28 .........................................................................................126
Figure 29 .........................................................................................127
Figure 30 .........................................................................................129
Figure 31 .........................................................................................130
Figure 32 .........................................................................................131
Figure 33 .........................................................................................133
Figure 34 .........................................................................................136
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my life, I have used photography to gain insight into people and events. I grew up in rural British Columbia, Canada. As I began my undergraduate studies in Ottawa, Ontario, and then went on to graduate school in Montreal, Quebec, I used photography to express myself creatively and to process transitions in my identity. In 2007 I moved to Taipei, Taiwan, to teach English and begin graduate studies in Art Education at the National Taiwan Normal University. Throughout these moves and transitions, photography has been the constant in my life, documenting my changing understanding of both self and reality. Social networking sites like Facebook®, Twitter®, and WordPress® became my digital online photo-sharing platforms, places where I posted photographs of my daily life and running community. I considered my online photography practices to be both a form of creative expression and personal affirmation. Since moving to the United States in 2010, Instagram® has further enhanced my photography practices and connections online to others. Instagram is a relatively new social media site and mobile photography application that allows users to create and modify images that can then be shared instantly through its own social network. In 2014 I moved to New York and began communicating with the running community through Instagram. For me, sharing images creates both a sense of personal empowerment and community with others. Through my participation in Instagram, I have similarly observed how this mobile application/social media network functions as a creative photographic medium for others as well as myself. For my dissertation research, I have studied these facets more systemically.
My photography has also been used as a tool to develop and express notions of personal empowerment through sharing portraits of myself and other women I am close to. My initial thought is that through my practices in photography and social media I have been able to create my own photographic imagery that draws on, yet is separate from, values and practices also found in contemporary media. My study is conceived through a feminist approach that has been informed by the thinking of Ann Balsamo (2011), Susan Faludi (2006), Lisa Nakamura (2008), and Sherry Turkle (2011). The work of Balsamo has enhanced my conception of the gendered perspective of technology, Faludi has informed my thinking on post-feminism, Nakamura has provided insight on online racial culture and Turkle has documented the social isolation individuals feel from texting and social networking. My research questions are written with the intent to probe participants’ use of Instagram to express their ideas and connect to others online. My motivation for writing the literature review is to gain an understanding on the history of the feminist movements in the USA and digital media scholars, both of which inform my perspectives as a woman and researcher.

The Rise of Digital Imaging and Social Networking

My own experiences with photography and Instagram are concomitant with the rise of digital imaging and social networking in our society. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) a social network can be defined as a web-based service that allows individuals to construct public or semi-public profiles with others who share a similar connection within a networked system. In this line of thinking, an online networked system is like a public (or semi-public) gathering place where individuals meet to exchange ideas (Delacruz, 2013c). There are implications of this notion of a digital gathering place. In 2009, Delacruz described the rise of digital media and online virtual communities (2009a). She observed the shift from the traditional notion of the
gathering place or public sphere (town square, newspapers, etc.) to the Internet, and what this means for art education. Delacruz (2009b) further noted implications of the rapid growth of digital media among young people observing the growing need for critical media literacy in art education and how the roles of teachers needed to shift to address this need.

My dissertation study builds on the notion of a public sphere on the Internet and looks exclusively at a form of mobile digital photography made possible by technology applications (hereinafter apps) that interface with social media. My study looks almost exclusively at Instagram, but also considers Facebook as well. My findings may inform art education programs of study that are concerned with creative uses of digital photographic applications.

The Instagram Phenomenon

In this digital age, publically sharing photographic images has become omnipresent thanks to Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites (Caro, Mann, Mark, Richeson, & Strout, 2012). Since its inception in 2010, Instagram has become a creative and social networking phenomenon, so much so that it was acquired by Facebook for one billion dollars in 2012 (Geron, 2012). Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in October 2010 and was originally conceived as Burbn, a service that let users share their location with friends and had photography tools (Sengupta, Perlroth, & Wortham, 2012). Krieger had a background in psychology and learned how to gauge human emotion through computer interface. Both Krieger and Systrom met as students at Stanford University (Sengupta, Perlroth, & Wortham, 2012). With the release of the iPhone 4 that had a high performing, high resolution camera in 2010 Systrom and Krieger decided to pivot the focus of their app to allow users to take a picture, edit with filters, write a caption, and publish the image with their social network (Sengupta, Perlroth, & Wortham, 2012). The app was renamed Instagram as it was an instant photography telegram
Instagram gained notoriety through its accessible interface that allows individuals to take photographs with their cell phones, modify their photographs with 20 filters and transformation tools that alter tone, color saturation, lighting, contrast, blur effects, etc., and upload their photographs to the Instagram site (Delacruz, 2013d). In addition, like Facebook, Instagram has its own social network where users can share images and video content and communicate. In June of 2013 Instagram added a video feature to its application where users can take 15 second videos and choose from 13 filters that adjust color tone and saturation (Kelly, 2013). At the time of this writing Instagram had somewhere around 500 million active monthly users as of June 2016 with 77.6 million active users in the United States in 2015 (Statista, 2016). The app is increasingly employed as a site for users to tell narrative stories of their daily life and experiences through photography (Stevens, 2016).

Instagram is a site to connect with other like-minded individuals through exchanging likes, comments, hashtags, and following influential users and groups that women find empowering (Odiamar, 2016). Instagram is home to many influential groups and users such as women_artists, womensrunningcommunity, womensmarch, and womenirl. Users can connect through feminist hashtags like #mystory, #everydaysexism, and #imwithher (Blay, 2016). Instagram hashtags categorize pictures of images or videos uploaded (Cleary, 2016). Hashtags can be found in Instagram comments or captions under the content’s post. According to razorsocial.com founder Ian Cleary (2016) hashtags promote more post user engagement in the Instagram community as users connect with like-minded individuals and topics through the hashtag platform (Cleary, 2016).

Instagram has evolved over the past three years since this study began. In 2014 advertising was added to its platform and the app has now become a space for marketers to reach
key demographic groups based on social media use (Wikipedia, 2017c). Additionally, celebrities, media, businesses, and institutions have Instagram profiles. Selena Gomez has the most popular Instagram account with 116 million followers, followed by National Geographic with 74.1 million followers, and Nike with 70.5 million followers (Wikipedia, 2017d). Today Instagram is used as a creative space to share photography with a social network and as a site to become informed on news from influential users. Instagram demographics are young with over 90% under the age of 35 (Smith, 2014). Like Pinterest, another photographic platform, 68% of Instagram users are female (Smith, 2014).

Digital media applications like Instagram can promote the development of online identities, communities, and the acquisition of new technical skills (Rheingold, 2012). As the phenomenal popularity of Instagram has demonstrated, how we take and edit photographs is rapidly changing due to the use of smartphones and tablets, and popular user-friendly mobile applications (Bilton, 2012). In order to use Instagram, users must download the app to their cell phones and sign up for an account. In their Instagram account, users adopt a user name and create a profile that reveals personal information. They may then connect to or follow other Instagram users and see or comment on their photographs. All of the photographs uploaded by users and all of the individuals they are following and being followed by are part of the user’s account. Users communicate through an Instagram newsfeed that appears on the users’ cellphones whenever the users log in to their accounts. The newsfeed contains updates of images and corresponding comments from other users the individual is following. Users can also connect with others by following communities of interest and adding hashtags to their images that are used to identify meanings. For women in particular, sharing images is an expressive

---

1 In a recent article in The New York Times by photographer Nick Bilton (2012) documents his use of photo editing applications such as SnapSeed®, Photosmith®, and iPhoto® on his iPad®.
outpost that is reflective of identity, creativity, and notions of femininity (Microsoft Advertising, 2004). In addition, women are very influenced by images in the media and mimic their appearance in online profiles (Bailey et al. (2013). From this perspective, I want to study how females use Instagram creatively to reflect on their daily life and find empowerment by engaging with a supportive online community.

**Problem Statement and Need for the Study**

From my own experience with Instagram and from the literature informing my topic, it is clear that digital media production and online social networking are hugely influential on women and girls. As art educators, we have a responsibility to engage students in the creative possibilities and critical understandings of digital media (Delacruz, 2009c; Wiener, 2009; Rose, 2009). Although this is true for most people, male and female, young and old, I am particularly interested in the experiences of females. My early observation is that, among other things, Instagram functions as a social networking platform where women and girls can explore their notion of identity and develop digital creative photographic skills with a supportive online community. And we do not know how female Instagram users actually use Instagram, what kinds of images they are producing, or the manner in which they engage with the Instagram online social networks. I believe that art educators should have an understanding of females’ use of Instagram, social media networks, and those applications and sites yet to come.

**Theoretical Framework**

As an art education-oriented study, my inquiry is shaped by the work of media education scholars, art educators, and feminist scholarship. In art education, digital media has long been a topic of interest as a method to promote a global civil society (Delacruz, 2009a, 2010); networked society (Sweeny, 2004); hypertextuality (Duncum, 2010; Taylor, 2007); social
networking (Bae 2015 & 2011; Ward, 2010); Web 2.0 (Buffington, 2008; Delacruz 2009b); digitized photographic representations (Roland, 2010; Jagodzinski, 2008); everyday aesthetic experiences (Duncum, 1999), and privilege (Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2007).

Integral to my study are findings and speculations about the nature of new media culture. For media and communications scholar Henry Jenkins (2006), new media technologies have created a culture of media producers and consumers who are converging in what he calls participatory culture. Media scholar Howard Rheingold (2002, 2012) similarly examines the online behaviors of digital media users. For Rheingold (2002), online communities are places where users can turn to for advice and support. However, for psychoanalysis and technology scholar Turkle (2011) online culture has changed how individuals communicate through mobile devices. To Turkle, the Internet and mobile culture are eroding human encounters in favor of virtual communication. In addition, media studies professor Balsamo (2011) finds the culture of technology is gendered through institutions that promote the work of men over women and minorities. Educators need to voice that women and minorities can be involved in the male dominated process of technological innovation.

Digital media is defined as any technological application that consists of digital photography, video, Web 2.0, Web sites, the blogosphere, social networking, YouTube, and a plethora of digital applications that can be accessed electronically (Buffington, 2008; Delacruz, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Art education scholars such as Roland (2010) and Buffington (2010, 2008, 2007) advocate the use of Web 2.0 in art education. Juan Carlos Castro and Kit Grauer (2010) maintain that new media arts are becoming increasingly common in K-12 schooling. Castro and Grauer (2010) support Wilson (2008) in that teachers must create a third pedagogical site where

---

2 The second generation of the World Wide Web that focuses on user collaboration, sharing of user-generated content, and social networking (Dictionary.com, 2017).
transformational learning can occur. Delacruz (2010) argues that art educators must incorporate technology as a form of civic engagement with the world, connecting the curriculum to the practices of contemporary art and our digital society. Darts (2004) embraces a visual culture approach to engage students with everyday cultural struggles and social justice, and argues that art education should engage in practices that fuse social issues, popular culture, and contemporary art.

Assumptions and Limitations

When it comes to digital and social media, art education is more than just the teaching of art. It is also an opportunity to facilitate transformational change (Castro & Grauer, 2010) and engage in a form of digital culture engagement (Darts, 2004) that promotes a civil society, enriches culture, and deepens the impact of schooling (Delacruz, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). My study provides a unique opportunity to examine a new form of digital media expression that carries significant impact in digital media culture and art education. I assume that art educators will be interested in my findings.

I make several assumptions concerning female Internet use and the Instagram photographic application and social networking site. In examining the types of images produced by the women case study participants, I assume these images are reflective of the users’ aesthetic values and their sense of self. Over the course of my study I also question if my participants find the act of posting Instagram photographs and self-portraits to be empowering. In our contemporary society, feminists are increasingly communicating their agenda through the Internet and the blogosphere (Peay, 2005). Women are also reproducing sexual images in our culture through their online profiles that this study would like to question (Bailey et al., 2013).

---

3 Castro and Grauer (2010) provide an example of their engagement in new media arts through the Gulf Island Film School (GIFTS), which promotes communication and collaborative learning through its unique cultural environment and utilization of digital video technologies.
Furthermore, my study is based on the assumption that women like sharing photos on a smartphone (Gibson, 2007).

It is worth pointing out that while my study participants self-identify as feminists they are not engaging with feminism as defined by Marian Webster.com (2017). Webster defines feminism as “organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests. The participants do understand and support feminism as the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes but they are not engaging in organized political activities that challenge the status of women in our society. Carrie frequently posts images of feminist teaching pedagogy and artworks that references empowered women. However, she is not engaging in feminism in an organized fashion to rally for government or institutional changes that would promote the status of women. Like Carrie, Lauren and myself post images that support female empowerment. However, Lauren’s activity of traveling the world by herself and employing the Mudgirls’ natural building collective empowers women but does not push for a change in their status. Additionally, I post images that promote female health and empowerment through running but do not partner with organizations to advocate for women’s rights. However, the participants benefit from the efforts of second-wave feminism. They believe in equal rights, equal pay, and equal status for women in contemporary culture and society (P. Gill, personal communication, May 3, 2017). The participants are beneficiaries and endorsers of feminism that has helped facilitate an understanding of self but have not prompted political or social action with regards to the feminist movement (P. Gill, personal communication, May 3, 2017).

As a movement concerned with empowerment of women, feminism also engages notions of gender. Despite broader and more complex notions of gender that exist, gender in this study refers to the cultural meaning of being masculine or feminine (Zevallos, 2017). Gender is a
socially constructed concept that sociologist Barbara Risman (2004) finds is “embedded in the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of our society” (p. 429). Risman (2004) further argues that once gender is understood as a social structure we can identify how social conditions produce gender inequality. Gender identities are constructed through early childhood development, socialization, adult experiences, race, ethnicity, and social mores (Risman, 2004). Sociologist Zulleyka Zevallos (2017) points out gender constructions exist in our society, including the concept of cisgender, that denotes your biological body matching your gender identity; and transgender, when one identifies with the opposite biological sex (Zevallos, 2017). In this study, the three participants are cisgendered women who responded to interview questions from a socially constructed dichotomous view of gender as masculine or feminine. Additionally, it should be acknowledged that gender is not a binary construct and there are many ways to conceptualize gender that are not addressed in this dissertation. As noted by Time magazine writer Kathy Steinmetz (2017) 20% of millennials identify as a group other than cisgender and gender is a construct that is questioned by young people in American culture.

My study is limited to the Instagram application and social networking site that requires a smartphone or tablet to use. The study is also limited by the (cis)gender of the participants, the small number of participants in the case study, and the types of material participants chose to share online. However, the reduced number of study participants also present an opportunity for greater depth in case study analysis. In addition, the study is limited by the relative newness of the Instagram application, which was created in 2010.
Research Questions

For this study I ask the following questions to examine how females engage with Instagram. My first question involves the creative use of Instagram and how the study members use it as a powerful tool to engage with others: *How do three women use Instagram to reflect on their own history and daily life for self-empowerment and engagement with a supportive community?*

My second question concerns how Instagram serves as an educational tool in art education: *What are the implications of Instagram for art education?*

Through my study I have gained a greater understanding of my study participants’ creative use of Instagram and how Instagram acts as a platform that fosters community, creativity, photographic skills, and empowerment.

Methodology

To further examine the impact of Instagram and digital media on women, a case study was conducted with three adult women participants between 2013-2016. My study followed the case study methodology described by Robert Stake (1995) who defines a case as a unique subject that is representative of a larger social phenomenon. For Stake (1995) a case study draws on ethnographic and qualitative research methods through interviews, fieldnotes, observation, description of contexts, document review, storytelling, and vignettes to examine a particular social happening and interaction within its contexts. My study examined three women participants who are users of the Instagram application. Data analysis was conducted through a series of semi-structured interviews that question participants’ understanding of femininity and gender construction in Instagram and other online digital media activities. I also analyzed their images shared in Instagram.
My study participants included an Instagram user Carrie, a high school art teacher from Ohio, and Lauren, a retired music teacher from British Columbia, Canada. In addition, I used myself as a case and described my own behaviors on Instagram. Based on my findings, I describe the Instagram usage and creative digital productions of these three female Instagram users.

My methods of data gathering and analysis relied primarily on semi-structured interviews, image analysis, and an analysis of participants’ online creative and social behaviors in Instagram. Furthermore, participants’ Instagram images, texts, and social interactions are examined. Quantitative analysis is also used to count codes found in images and determine patterns and relationships (Rose, 2012).

My study took place between the fall of 2013 and winter of 2016. Data was collected online through Instagram, the blogosphere, social networking sites, semi-structured interviews, and subsequent email and Facebook Messenger communications for both clarification and member checking (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). During the case study phase of my research I examined the activities and imagery of my study participants that are publically shared and archived online on Instagram and Facebook. In a self-completion questionnaire (Cohen & Manion, 1980) I asked participants to reflect on their creative uses of new media technology, their intended meanings in specific Instagram images and their learning and sharing online. I also examined images and texts from their Instagram accounts. I then followed up with a second and third interview to member check with participants. Three interviews were conducted lasting from thirty-five minutes to one hour.

The self-study examined my own experiences with photography and Instagram. I described my photographic development over the last fifteen years through an image analysis of
approximately 60 photographs, 50 photographs from Instagram and 10 photographs from my past as a developing photographer. For the other two participants I analyzed 50 random images from their Instagram account. Through a personal narrative account (Clandinin, 2007; Delacruz, 2013a) I reflected on the meaning behind my photography, which is indicative of my evolving sense of self and femininity. My understandings of photography are also informed by the writings of Susan Sontag (1993) and Barrett (2012). From this phase of my inquiry I gained insight into the types of content that women are producing on Instagram, their intentions, and their strategies.

**Significance of the Study**

Despite gains in women’s equality over the past 100 years in the United States, women and girls still struggle with media projections concerning their value and identity. According to media-studies scholar Rebecca Bullen (2009) the overtly sexual female stereotypes present in mainstream media can cause girls to mimic sexualized content when sending or posting images of themselves in digital media, and this is a behavior that adult women also emulate. Bullen (2009) and Delacruz (2010) also argue that educators need to provide avenues for young people to actively engage with and critically examine new media. Furthermore, art educators Bae and Ivashkevich (2012) argue for an art education that envisions girls as active agents in their own constructions of identity and self-value. In addition, a critical look at online media use is needed to question our social engagements with mobile devices (Turkle, 2011) and the male dominated culture of technological innovation (Balsamo, 2011). Clearly, both creative and critical media education is essential in helping young women create images that reflect their identity and values outside of gender-specific media stereotypes. And art education is the right place for such education to take place. But more research is required. Through a feminist perspective this study
provides needed scholarship on females’ use of mobile photography applications and the 
empowering communities that they engage with. Instagram is also a creative tool that is already 
adopted by teachers and has many applications for photography (Farrell, 2015). It is also worth 
noting that while technology design is influenced by men (Balsamo, 2011) use of Instagram is 
dominated by women (Smith, 2014).
Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature examines the impact of technology on gender and society. To provide context for my study on Instagram, I will examine the work of digital media scholars Balsamo (2011), Turkle (2011), Jenkins (2006), and Rheingold (2002; 2012). A short history of the women’s movement will be discussed in terms of first-, second-, third-, and fourth-wave feminism in order to highlight issues resulting from these movements. Feminist leaders and key political events will be described to establish the history of the feminist movement and its current interests. A review of selected discourse in critical media studies will then follow. The literature review will conclude with a brief review of selected research on females’ engagement with digital media and contemporary new media pedagogy conducted by art educators that informs the research questions. As stated in the introduction gender is understood as a socially constructed concept (Risman, 2004) and the three participants identify as cisgendered women (Zevallos, 2017).

A Brief History of the Women’s Movement in the United States

The feminist movement in the United States has informed and inspired feminist artists (such as Judy Chicago, Cindy Sherman, and Barbara Kruger), feminist pedagogy (Collins, 1979; Sandell, 1979; Thurber & Zimmerman, 2002; Keifer-Boyd, 2003), and our understanding of the gendering of technology today (Balsamo, 2011). Feminist movements are defined by specific attempts to improve the quality of life for women and families, and each movement is best understood in the context of their respective political and social climates. The first-wave of American feminism, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, emerged from the abolitionist and temperance movements, gaining greater impetus after the Civil War as it endorsed liberal
social politics that defined and fought for women’s rights and focused on achieving women’s suffrage. During this time, there were factions and major splits, most notably along racial lines, but the broad aims of the movement succeeded and culminated in 1920, when the 19th Amendment was ratified, giving women the vote. After 1920, there was no longer a unifying goal, although feminist ideas certainly did not disappear and various feminist groups advocated for access to birth control, helped to form trade unions, and promoted reforms in education, healthcare, and the workplace.

Second-wave feminism continued to build on progress made by the first-wave feminist movement in Europe and the United States. Key accomplishments in US second-wave feminism included the development and FDA approval of the birth control pill in 1960, the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Freidan (1963), the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, the purported bra-burning protest against the Miss America pageant in 1968, and the US Supreme Court landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 (Rosen, 2006).

Pay equity, women’s individual control of their bodies, gay rights, and liberation from what was termed *male patriarchal control* were central to the movement. Second-wave feminists no longer saw the role of homemaker as the only future for women across the United States, and this brought about a shift in feminist thought regarding fundamental attitudes towards gender roles and identities. Similar to first-wave feminism, the second-wave movement primarily reflected the interests and values of middle class white women. Nevertheless, second-wave feminism stands as an important 20th century political and social development. It was a time when women came together in large numbers to pursue economic goals and resist oppressive institutionalized social systems and relationships at home, in the workplace, and in society at
large (Edelstein, 2007; Dicker, 2006; Freedman, 2002; Hooks, 2000). Second-wave feminism forever altered the landscape of women’s lives in the United States (Freedman, 2002).

As noted above and elaborated by Birken et al. (2008), second-wave feminism was grounded in the ideas of privileged middle class white women. By the early 1980s, the movement’s failure to recognize the differences among and interests of women of other races, socioeconomic classes, and ages had been noted and substantively critiqued (Mann & Huffman, 2005). Third-wave feminism emerged in the early 1990s as a response to this critique, addressing a wider perspective of women’s experiences and voices, encompassing diverse racial groups, socioeconomic classes, and global perspectives previously absent from second-wave feminist discourse and initiatives. Third-wave feminism continued to fight for the women’s rights established by the second-wave but were still vulnerable in the 1980s and 1990s, including abortion rights and sexual harassment in educational institutions and the workplace. Importantly, third-wave feminists also expanded their activist platform to include a broader range of social issues such as the environment and anti-poverty/economic rights (Dicker, 2008).

Broadening the scope of feminism of second-wavers, third-wave issues include the economic impact of global trade, globalization itself, and the environment. Like earlier feminist movements, third-wave feminism addressed the concept of identity within socially constructed notions of gender, extending this concept to include the intersections of race, ethnicity, economic status, and sexual orientation (Dicker, 2008). Third-wave feminists also adopted technological approaches to activism, thanks to the advent of the Internet. The employment of digital and social media further broadened the pluralistic perspective and reach of the third-wave.

Finally, third-wave feminism is further characterized by its many contradictions, including the notion of post-feminism in which women do not identify as feminists; though
believers in gender equality, post-feminists perceive feminists as either exhausted superwoman or unkempt, hairy lesbians (Jones, 1994). Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie (2009) posits that post-feminism came about in the 1990s when the traditional idea of feminist as a women’s rights activist was no longer relevant in the mass media or feminist scholarship. For McRobbie, post-feminism emerged from female professional success and the unpopular notion of feminism in the media. Post-feminism is also individualistic. Women are assumed to have their own life plan, career, and not be dependent on a man for economic success (McRobbie, 2009). Post-feminism has also been defined by feminist journalist Faludi (2006) as a younger generation of women labeled by the media in the mid-1980s that rejected feminist values which promoted career success in favor of the traditional female role of wife and mother. Feminist art historical scholar Amelia Jones (1994) defines post-feminism as being a movement that is shaped by photographic and written texts that assume a postmodern art and cultural discourse. According to Jones, post-feminism is a more diverse version of feminism where, similar to the third-wave, women from different races, social classes, sexual orientations, and economic standings may come together to disrupt the homogenized image of women in the American media. For Jones, a post-feminist figure would be the fictionalized television character Murphy Brown, who is a single mother in her 40s. Post-feminist artists such as Barbara Kruger argue their work differs from earlier feminist artists, whose works are more explicitly feminist. An example of this is artist Cindy Sherman, whose self-portrait photography critiques the visual construction of women in the film and television while Barbara Kruger’s signage comments on consumerism and capitalism over a singular feminist perspective (Chadwick, 1990). Like Jones (1994) and McRobbie (2009), feminist artist Faith Wilding (1998) finds new media technologies can reinforce sexist stereotypes. She defines a new type of feminism called cyberfeminism where feminists can
congregate together online to fight sexist media perceptions.

An understanding of the feminist movements in the United States is important to this study because technology is gendered and impacted by the status of women in contemporary society (Balsamo, 2011). Documentary filmmaker Barbara Wiener (2009) recommends that girls be provided with educational opportunities to collaborate in digital productions and reflect on their engagement with the media. Cultural scholar Nakamura (2009) recommends that scholars and educators focus on how the Internet acts as an environment that represents identity. She finds color blindness where racism is not acknowledged to be problematic online (Nakamura, 2009). Girls need to see how their digital projects affect others, as well as have positive adult mentoring to develop their own unique digital voice. In an example of such an approach, language scholar Chloe Rose (2009) argues that the creation of digital stories as multimedia texts (by girls) may foster or actualize desired notions of identity, lived experience, and self-knowledge. The digital story allows individuals to explore their connection to the world through the narrative and artwork they are able to create (Rose, 2009). As Bullen (2009), Jones (2001), Wiener (2009), and Rose (2009) assert, educational interventions are very much needed in contemporary education to deconstruct sexist and stereotyped media-perpetuated values that promote negative thinking on self, schooling, and society. An understanding of the feminist movement also help to formulate the experiences of case study participants who shared empowering images online and identified as feminists yet were not politically active.

**Feminist Thought and Action in Art Education**

Alongside the feminist waves, feminist thought and action have been developing in art education since the 1970s when Sandell (1979) and Collins (1979) worked to develop feminist art education and gender consciousness within the field. In the 1990s and 2000s, Freedman
(1994) and Keifer-Boyd (2003) promoted/engaged in a feminist pedagogy and curriculum that focused on visual culture, race, class, and social issues. In the 2000s, Thurber and Zimmerman (2002) initiated transformative feminist-inspired leadership models that focused on actualizing connections between art educator networks, community, pedagogy, curriculum, and society. Each of these, along with many others, has shaped art education theory and practice with a feminist perspective.

Sandell (1979) defines feminist art education conceptually as “a hybrid between feminism taken as an ideology, and the theory and practice of art education” (p. 18). Sandell (1979) argues that the feminist movement can be viewed as an educational model in art education as it combines the notions of an individual experience with formal and informal institutions. Collins (1995) argues that art educators need to raise the feminist consciousness in the field by acknowledging differences in treatment based on gender, having an awareness of institutional structures that oppress women, dismantling the attitude that the male experience is the norm, and discontinuing the use of images/curricula that reinforce a negative stereotype of women. Similar to the feminist artists she admired, Collins finds that curriculum based on the traditional canon of Western art promotes male-dominated teaching practices and curricula that does not include the voice of female artists in art education. Freedman (1994) argues that to address issues of gender in art effectively, the students’ understandings of gender in visual culture should be examined in relation to their conceptualization of gender in works of art. For Freedman (1994), the purpose of including visual culture in art education is to connect visual images to social issues and events in daily life. For example, feminist visual culture pedagogy can examine the student’s response to the image of women in visual culture, the notion of women as respondents to visual culture, and the
gendered characteristics of cultural production by students, all of which can contain sexist representations.

Additionally, this study is informed by the work of art educator Bae (2015, & 2011) whose work examines Korean immigrant teenage girls’ reaction to media images on a popular Korean social networking site, Cyworld. Bae (2011) found her participant related to images of Korean girls in media over traditional Western standards of beauty. Additionally, one of Bae’s participants created digital collages of Korean and Western fashion images that she displayed on her user homepage to reflect her identity and engage with a digital community (Bae, 2011). Through sharing images online Bae’s (2015, & 2011) girl participants connected with a like-minded female Korean community. Bae’s Korean girl participants experiences with finding community in social media mirrors that of my case study participants who gained empowerment by connecting with the Instagram community.

Furthermore, art educators Lai and Lu (2009) observe: “Learning takes place as students construct knowledge and negotiate meaning through socially interactive conversations and non-threatening intensive collaboration” (Lai & Lu, 2009, p. 61). Through Lai and Lu’s pedagogy, students were able to articulate their perspective on female representations in the media alongside the adoption of a critical view towards their social and educational environment. Art educators have similarly weighed in on these considerations. Stout (2000) believes that feminist pedagogy should teach students about the complexities and diversity of life through an intercultural pluralistic curriculum. Stout (2000) recommends curriculum that allows students to read about the lives of artists and the values, meanings, and multiple perspectives of their lived experiences. Garber (1990) finds that feminist art education is linked to social theory through the feminist movement’s connection to civil rights and social issues. Art educators must consider
that not all female artists are feminist artists and remember the difference between the feminist position and the feminine that denotes the socially determined qualities of women. Keifer-Boyd (2003) finds that feminist pedagogies are linked to critical pedagogy through the shared goal of civil empowerment, social equity, and destruction of oppressive hierarchical structures. Keifer-Boyd (2003) explains that both approaches share an awareness of the imbalance of power relationships. Keifer-Boyd (2003) argues that gender-constructed social practices affect interpretations of art, including the interpretation of what is considered art.

In a pedagogical experience with feminist artist Judy Chicago and adult students through the Envisioning the Future Project in Pomona, California, Keifer-Boyd (2007) found that Chicago’s pedagogy encourages content-based art with a personal, social issue, or a tangible visual message. Keifer-Boyd observed that Chicago’s pedagogy involved shared class readings and research. The process of creating the art included the goal of empowering and enabling students to express themselves. Chicago’s ultimate focus was on the final artwork product, however, since that is what would be presented to the art world. As Keifer-Boyd (2007) noted, Chicago’s pedagogical approach is a storied with research and content-searches that take place prior to making art. For Keifer-Boyd and Chicago, the teaching process is not the goal, but it is important and necessary in reaching the goal. Keifer-Boyd (2007) concludes by stating that power balances (from the teacher-student relationship to the role of women in society in general) should be openly discussed and identified in art education.

In conclusion, the field of feminist art education is significant to my study as it engages with the traditional issues associated with feminism and its waves more broadly—that is, the evolving status of women and girls in contemporary society. As this section of my literature review has discussed feminist art education is greatly needed as it promotes meaningful
pedagogy and curriculum that engages with contemporary art and visual culture (Freedman, 1994; Keifer-Boyd, 2007). Thurber and Zimmerman’s (2002) leadership model is meaningful as it promotes collaborative leadership that actualizes self-esteem and empowerment alongside other teachers, fostering a caring community of professionals.

**Feminism and Innovation Culture in Digital Media**

This section of the literature review examines feminist media scholar Balsamo’s (2011) conception of culture and technological innovation, social scientist Turkle’s (2011) belief that technology is impacting our social interactions, and media scholar Jenkins’ (2006) description of convergence culture and the ways in which new media producers of the Internet, the blogosphere, and social networking and are reshaping communication in contemporary society. The views of communication scholar Rheingold (2002; 2012), who identifies how individuals communicate collectively through their mobile devices and new media to disseminate information, to interact socially, and to purchase products, will also be considered here. This section will conclude with additional research that highlights gender differences with technology and social networking (Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013; Landoli & Norris, 1997; Davis, 2011; Gibson, 2007; Magnuson & Dundes, 2008).

Similar to the feminist waves that were responses to the social conditions of their day, Balsamo (2011) finds culture to be an integral aspect of technological innovation. Balsamo defines culture as “a socially shared symbolic system of signs and meanings” (Balsamo, 2011, p. 5). She argues that technological innovations both reproduce and transform culture. Technological innovations are not objects but rather products, products that historically constitute and are constituted by new cultural understandings. The articulation of new technologies is performative—the innovation creates and expresses new meaning in cultural
reproductions. The process of designing technology is an important aspect of cultural reproduction and social negotiation. According to Balsamo (2011), the engineering, science, and math industries in the United States are male-dominated due to social factors such as the demographics of male faculty who teach in engineering programs, the biological reproductive practices of women, the life responsibilities of women with engineering credentials, gendered socialization patterns, the classroom experiences of female students within engineering programs, the historical notions of the professional engineers as a heroic man, mass media representations of women and men in relation to technology, and the gendered narratives that circulate in engineering, science, and mathematics textbooks. As noted by Smith (2014) Instagram users are predominantly women, however the company CEOs and executives that design the application are listed as men (Wikipedia, 2017c). Balsamo (2011) argues that we must acknowledge that technology is gendered and demonstrate how women and minorities are involved in technocultural innovation and contexts:

As a base level, this approach demonstrates how culture is not only an inevitable part of the designing process, but also an important, under-utilized creative resource in the process of technocultural innovation. It suggests ways that design participants can identify and understand the technocultural meanings that not only influence the technology under-development, but also the participants themselves. These insights, drawing on work in feminist epistemology, illuminate the nature of agency that manifests in the practices of designing new technologies. (Balsamo, 2011, p. 37)

In order to counter sexism in technology, Balsamo (2011) recommends that engineers and policy makers recognize the importance of the media as a powerful socialization device that
impacts the expectations and treatment of women worldwide. Balsamo (2011) also points out that there is no global consensus on how to improve women’s lives. She proposes that classrooms be opened up to multiple information flows including web-pages, screens that display text messages, and different kinds of visual material that allow the student to attend the class virtually through new media. “The use of multiple screens enables multiple conversations to happen simultaneously” (Balsamo, 2011, p. 155).

Similar to Balsamo (2011), Turkle (2011) has observed how digital mobile technology has changed human behavior and communication. According to Turkle (2011), mobile technology has eroded boundaries between the real and virtual worlds: “These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time (p. xii). Turkle (2011) finds technology to be seductive when it meets our human vulnerabilities. She argues that we are lonely but fearful of intimacy and substitute text messaging and social networking communications for the demands of friendship and love. Turkle also observes that what we most want in public spaces is to be alone with our personal networks: “It is good to come together physically, but it is more important to stay tethered to our devices” (Turkle, 2011, p. 14). For Turkle, texting is the modern Goldilocks where people are not too close, not too far, but at just the right distance. Turkle does not find mobile communications to be a positive development. To Turkle we have long used technology to make us more efficient at work; now it makes us more efficient in our private lives:

I once described the computer as a second self, a mirror of mind. Now the metaphor no longer goes far enough. Our new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through
Turkle finds that virtual places offer connection without commitment. With e-mail, text, and Facebook, we can connect with or ignore people we care about when we want or need to. With text messaging, it is easy to put those in front of us on pause while we engage with our mobile devices. We can also lose sense of our physical life and self to our social networking presence, seeing friends as fans of this constructed sense of self. Turkle (2011) further describes how high school students feel presentation anxiety over their Facebook profile, which they know will be judged by their peers.

Unlike Turkle’s (2011) observations on the debilitating relationship individuals may foster between their mobile device and social networking communications, Jenkins (2006) finds that once a media venue establishes itself at satisfying some core human demand, it functions within the larger system of media communication options. To Jenkins (2006) convergence alters the relationship between technologies, genres of communication, markets, and audiences. Convergence occurs when people take the media into their own hands and generate their own cultural productions, economic interests, and affiliations (Jenkins, 2006). For Jenkins, while corporations are still very much in command of programs, technological offerings, and access to new media sites and productions, users are also active agents in fulfilling their own agendas; in doing so, they create their own culture that is only partly monopolized by the interests of corporate capitalism. The notion of personal agency against the backdrop of corporate, commercial media proliferations is of particular interest to my study.

Instagram is a prime example of Jenkins’ (2006) conception of media convergence and Turkle’s (2011) observation on communication through technology. Instagram uses the new media platform of social networking and user participation to converge with old media platforms.
such as photography, exhibitions, media outlets, and older forms of communication (Hoffman, 2012). Instagram and social media users are participatory, communal, and social (Delacruz, 2013b); that is they seek and interact with an audience, and they use this digital photo-sharing site to document their creative interests and/or daily life. User photographs are published on Instagram, but are often cross-published on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and various blogs, giving these images a life outside the Instagram community. Rheingold (2002) argues that key breakthroughs in business and culture will come from amateur media participants who finesse digital and social media for their own purposes. Rheingold (2002) also describes the phenomenon of different virtual faces we present to different audiences through mobile technologies, connecting identity construction to public performance. A drawback of virtual online activity is a loss of privacy, as more information is shared about users through publicly-shared material on social networking sites. Notions of public performance and privacy are also of interest to my study, insofar as Instagram and other social media sites are both public and semi-private. However, a key problem with technology is that it is gendered, as Balsamo (2011) points out. More women are needed in technology education to mentor and foster a new generation of feminist designers and engineers.

Designing technology is an important part of cultural reproduction and social negotiation (Balsamo, 2011). The social impact of technology has changed how individuals communicate through mobile devices and email (Turkle, 2011). We substitute text messaging and social networking for the demands of friendship and stay tethered to our devices (Turkle, 2011). Similar to many art educators who have been concerned with digital media (Darts, 2004; Delacruz, 2009; 2010; Roland, 2010), Rheingold (2012) argues that the knowledge of how to use digital and online media creatively and purposefully is an essential ingredient for success in the
21st century. Like Jenkins (2006), Rheingold states that digital literacy can make the difference between whether an individual may be empowered or manipulated by the advent of new media technologies. Rheingold (2012) finds that social media can affect individuals differently; while rewarding for some, it can be negative or addicting for another. For Rheingold, media participation is power, promoting an interconnected literacy through online communication. In this line of thinking, Rheingold finds that virtual communities also present the opportunity for collective knowledge where information can flourish through participating members’ knowledge and discussion. For Rheingold (2012), an understanding of how to control one’s image online is paramount, since it can prevent one’s digital identity from being virtually controlled by others.

The work of Balsamo, (2011), Turkle (2011), Jenkins (2006), and Rheingold (2002; 2012) point to the importance of participatory new media digital culture. For Balsamo, technology is an important aspect of cultural reproduction and social negotiation; for Turkle (2011), our individuality and intimacy is lost due to the demands of our devices. Jenkins (2006) finds participatory culture is focused on connections across multiple media platforms; for Rheingold (2002), the Internet is dominated by individuals who communicate virtually in tandem with digital fluency. Balsamo is concerned over technology’s ability to repress gender through design and engineering and Turkle finds technology to erode of human connection and communications. Conversely, both Jenkins and Rheingold find virtual communities to be a source of power within our society, as an individual’s identity can be enhanced or manipulated based on his or her engagement with participatory new media culture. While Rheingold (2002) identifies that loss of privacy is an issue users face in social networking and virtual communities, he would argue, along with Jenkins (2006), that the social and knowledge support provided by online communications could potentially offset negative outcomes.
As Turkle (2011) has pointed out, new media has introduced new realities that are not positive for human development. Design scholars Ce Ce Landoli and Wendy Norris (1997) argue that old media is expressive while new media is conceptual; that is, it uses math and symbols to convey reality. The Internet forces us to confront and question new understandings of reality as the borders notions between humanity and technology are blurred. The quality of information online is rarely considered and facts are not checked. People can meet others through virtual communities while real communities are dwindling. Virtual communities are still bound by class and culture yet notions of self can be perpetually reinvented.

Aspects of the Net foster the creation of multiple identities that differ from the real life persona… We consistently play out multiple roles in our daily lives, viewing each role as essentially real. However, in cyberspace, people are more likely to experiment with people they would not experiment with in real life. Fantasies, fears, and wishes are more likely to extend into cyberspace. (Landoli & Norris, 1997, p. 38)

For Turkle, Landoli and Norris (1997) social networking is increasingly used to maintain and construct social life. In addition, research by media scholars Fatima Awan and David Gauntlett (2013) discovered that students viewed social networking as a tool to maintain connections with peers but not family members. Social networking allowed adolescents to strengthen bonds with existing friends and develop new friendships online. Social networking also reflects media values on gender which female users can mimic. For example, Canadian social scientists Jane Bailey, Valarie Steeves, Jacquelyn Burkell, and Priscilla Regan (2013) studied 1,500 Facebook profile pictures and discovered that young women place a heavy emphasis on being attractive and having relationships with others who are also attractive. The young women also reproduced sexualized notions of gender from mass produced commercial
images into their Facebook profile page. References to their romantic partner, friends, partying, venting, mainstream culture, and advice were plentiful. With regards to global perspectives, communications scholar Naziat Choudhury (2009) studied the Internet use of eight women in Bangladesh and determined that the women used the Internet for personal communication, professional communication, networking, and information gathering. From use of the Internet, women were able to gain empowerment through economic independence, education and knowledge, free expression, independence, and equal rights.

From the research conducted by Awan and Gauntlett (2013); Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, and (2013); and Choudhury (2009) it is clear that social networking is a tool that impacts users’ personal lives and online presentation, alongside global opportunities for networking and professional development. Moreover, as Turkle (2011) has made clear, young people navigate their sense of self online. For example, digital medial scholar Katie Davis (2011) studied 24 youths between the ages of 15-24 and found young people expressed different parts of their identity to others online. Psychologists Kristin Gabrill et al (2005) concluded that students will modify their self-presentation to receive social rewards and conform to gender norms. Furthermore, as Balsamo (2011) has stated technology is gendered. This is evident in the research of media correspondent Owen Gibson (2007), who described an Ofcom study that found girls are more likely than boys to have a mobile phone, use the internet, listen to the radio, and read newspapers or magazines. Only when it comes to playing computer games do boys outnumber girls.

From the work of Balsamo (2011), Turkle (2011), Jenkins (2006), and Rheingold (2002, 2012), it is easy to conclude that technology education is much needed in schooling today. This reality presents many challenges to educators as they struggle to incorporate new pedagogies to
students who have a strong understanding of technology (Prensky, 2001). As educational writer Marc Prensky (2001) has pointed out, educators (digital immigrants, in Prensky’s view) have to be aware of the digital media habits of students who are digital natives. Digital immigrants will always be aware of the past and are socialized differently to the technology that they have had to adopt. Digital immigrant teachers have to learn to embrace the thinking of digital natives and incorporate more technology into their curriculum. In addition, as technology is gendered, educators must be conscious in creating feminist pedagogies that can foster the promotion of girls’ technological development (Balsamo, 2011).

**Digital Media in Art Education**

This section of the literature review discusses digital pedagogy within contemporary art education scholarship. Art education scholars have established that digital media have enriched the curriculum while promoting technological skills and contemporary art practices (Black, 2014; Black & Browning, 2011; Freire & McCarthy, 2014; Knochel & Patton, 2014; Lu, 2013; Tillander, 2011). Joanna Black (2014) found Canadian middle and secondary school new media art programs shared a content driven, student centered curricula. Her most significant findings were that these programs emphasized a pedagogical focus on artistic and creative practices as opposed to technological skills. For Black and Browning (2011) the adoption of new technologies by educators is a slow process as many teachers avoid using technology in their classrooms. Once educators felt confident in using technology expressively their pedagogy would thrive (Black & Browning, 2011).

In addition, Lilly Lu (2013) argued that it is art educators’ responsibility to explore the possibilities of digital media as students can learn about visual culture and contemporary art practices. Likewise, for Michelle Tillander (2011) technology can inspire creativity with new
methods of producing art. Moreover, Manuelle Freire and Erin McCarthy (2014) maintained it is crucial that art educators share digital media pedagogies to promote contemporary new media approaches in the curriculum. Aaron Knochel and Ryan Patton (2014) examined the possibilities of digital publishing and called for educators to share research and pedagogies online. Like Knochel and Patton (2014), when designing pedagogy Freire and McCarthy (2014) argued that educators should foster students’ media literacy though a curriculum that engages with digital technology:

We demonstrate that through exposure to and analysis of new media art, students can learn how to apply their media knowledge and technological skills for creative practices, while cultivating the skills to analyze a wider spectrum of media in our digital culture. We maintain that it is in such circumstances of artistic practice that art education can, ultimately, also foster cybermedia literacy. (pp. 28-29)

Digital pedagogies present opportunities for educators to learn from the technological cultures of their students (Duncum, 2013; Ho, 2015; McClure, 2013). For Paul Duncum (2013) youth of today are influenced by remix culture where student art is shaped by peers in a combined effort to create new products. Duncum (2013) calls for educators to consider the impact of youth subcultures on art educational pedagogy and incorporate cultural remixes into the curriculum. Similarly to Duncum (2013), Alexander Ho (2015) found video games helped students better understand art, design, problem solving, narrative, and conceptual ideas. Like Duncum (2013) and Alexander Ho (2015), Ching-Chiu Lin and Bertram Bruce (2013) examined how digital arts can engage youth. They concluded art education can connect individuals and
community inquiry through digital technology. Alongside Lin and Bruce’s (2013) findings, Marissa McClure (2013) observed the interactivity of digital media enriched children’s engagement with art-making and offered further possibilities of understanding technology. For Alexandra Overby and Brian Jones (2015) technology in art education can benefit girls as careers in technology are still male-dominated. However, like Black and Browning (2011), Overby and Jones (2015) cautioned that art teachers need to become more tech savvy when adopting technology in their classrooms and to teach students to be critical consumers and producers of digital culture (Overby & Jones, 2015). In a similar line of thinking Olga Ivashkevich (2015) called for art educators to use technology to promote social action:

> Art educators can not only bridge the participation gap by making digital tools available to all of their students; they can also help youth to become expert prosumers who are able to interpret the meaning and consumer appeal of their favorite artifacts and media texts as well as transform these products in a thoughtful and skillful way that explores their alternative meanings, challenges stereotypes, and stimulates civic engagement.

(p. 43)

Like, Ivashkevich’s (2015) comments on the possible impacts of student media, Dennis Inhulsen and Deborah Reeve (2014) assert that literacy is dependent on the understanding of video and images: “Where effective communication was once the product of being able to read and write, the new literacy depends not only on reading and writing but also on integrating images, animation, video, and sound” (Inhulsen & Reeve, 2014, p. 450). As contemporary art education scholarship attests, new media pedagogy benefits students through creative

**Feminist Hashtags**

Instagram hashtags can also be used to connect users to feminist communities. Hashtags are a word or a phrase preceded by the # sign that link an image or digital post to a particular topic. Writer Zeba Blay (2016) recounts how hashtags have been used on Twitter to describe feminism with #EverydaySexism, #Fem2 meaning feminism 2.0 or the future of feminism, and #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen that voiced how women of color can be excluded from feminist discussions online. Business woman Susan McPherson finds that women rule social media and produce more posts on Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram (McPherson, 2014). For McPherson hashtags can spur social activism through voicing women’s and girls’ issues. The hashtag #LeanIn references the 2013 book *Lean In* by Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandburg that describes her recommendations for professional success and experiences as a female executive (McPherson, 2014). The hashtag is used by women to communicate challenges with their professional goals (McPherson, 2014). New York City created the #ImAGirl campaign that featured diverse girls aged seven to twelve in activities like reading and playing sports (McPherson, 2014). Furthermore, social media strategist Nisha Chittal (2015) pointed out that women protested the treatment of female actresses in Hollywood by journalists with the hashtag #askhermore in the lead up to the Academy Awards. Moreover, social media activism can spur real political change. In 2016 women on social media found solidarity through the hashtag
#nastywoman that referenced President Trump’s treatment of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, #ImWithHer referenced support for Clinton, as does #IAmANastyWomanBecause (Robin, 2016).

**Lingering Thoughts**

The creation and proliferation of multiple online social media platforms has fostered online communities such as Instagram where users can congregate, share knowledge, and engage in social networking. Mobile devices promote instant communication and coordination of actions both locally and globally. Online social networks are now a dominant form of social organization, and users must have strong digital literacy skills or risk being manipulated by others.

The role of new digital media and electronic communications networks has played a large part in late feminism and in human societal, political, technological, and creative development generally. I would argue that the issues and initiatives of feminism confront the notions of the kind of people we aspire to be and the rights we long to have—that is, citizen polity, universal rights to political engagement, access to education and health care, civil rights of marginalized people, fostering a positive and engaged self-image, protection of the environment, and the overall welfare of women and girls worldwide. I would further argue that educators should engage in student-centered feminist approaches in new media art education pedagogy.
Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

My study of Instagram images seeks to demonstrate how the application is a source of creativity and self-expression. For this study I engaged in a case study with two users and included myself as a participant through descriptions of how the three of us used Instagram. By using a case study methodology and semi-structured interviews I examined Instagram photographs and social interactions of two women alongside my own engagements. Participants reflected on their use of the application and its impact on their creativity. Semi-structured interviews utilized open-ended questions and dialogue between myself and study participants to facilitate inquiry into their use of Instagram. My methodology was structured through an approach that drew on the practices of case study and image analysis. Images were analyzed using a charting process developed by Delacruz (2013d) that organized each image according to the date, time, Instagram filter used, formal elements, location, textual context and information on the image’s creator. Rose’s (2012) method of content analysis added understanding through an examination of the interrelationships between the image codes. In addition, Barrett’s (2012) method for interpreting photographs enriched the image analysis through a more personalized description of the work of art that considers the image as a cultural artifact.

In 2012 I received IRB approval to interview participants about their photographic work published on Instagram and engagements within social networking sites. Participant interviews were recorded, transcribed, and emailed to participants for member checking. Digital screen shots were used of each participant’s Instagram photographs and posts.
Study Design

The purpose of this study was to understand the images and behaviors of selected women using the Instagram photographic application and its implications for creativity and art education. This study considers the perspective of three women Instagram users through the case study methodology (Stake, 1995). Using narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007; Delacruz, 2013a), image analysis, (Barrett 2010; Delacruz, 2013d), and drawing on the development of my own online photography I connected my experiences of Instagram with the two other participants.

Research Questions

The initial questions posed by this study aimed to examine the conceptions of gender and identity in the Instagram application and digital media. Initially, this study questioned how the case study participants identified as a feminist and depicted notions of gender in their photography. However, after engaging in the study I came to realize that my study examined how the case study participants used Instagram to reflect on their daily life and engage with a supportive creative community that fostered empowerment.

1. How do three women use Instagram to reflect on their own history and daily life for self-empowerment and engagement with a supportive community?

2. What are the implications of Instagram for art education?

The research questions are of value for art education as they demonstrate the search for a community of like-minded individuals within the context of a photography-based social media application. Instagram is as much a particular social media community as it is a platform to share images and edit photography. This study is unique because the Instagram community is interested in engaging with new digital photography skills and sharing images online. The participants use Instagram as a platform to engage with a new online community, develop photographic skills, and reflect on daily life.
Participants and Source Selection

The context of this study is an extension of my engagement with Instagram and digital photography within social networking. My research is motivated by my own experiences as a photographer and forays into the Instagram community. In addition to my self-study, the two women participants are individuals whom I have been in contact with through Instagram and art education. While my own experiences with photography and online social networking have informed many of my questions for this study, the participants have also inspired questions through their unique engagements with Instagram, photography, and art-making. The study participants are all Caucasian, female, heterosexual, middle-class, and cisgendered. This study is limited by their understandings and perspectives as they are not representative of a more diverse racial, sexual, or economic demographic group in our society. However, they are representative of a large demographic of Instagram users (Rettberg, 2014) and therefore the findings may be transferable to similar individuals in similar circumstances.

My two participants go by the Instagram names Carrie and Lauren⁴. Carrie is an Instagram user in her mid-thirties whose photographs are of her daily life, friends, art education practices, and engagements with yoga. Carrie’s photographs focus on the quiet happenings of nature around her and unique moments in her art classroom. Her work is also spiritual and influenced by yoga. Similar to Carrie, Lauren’s work concerns happenings with her family and the natural or urban world around her. Lauren is in her sixties and a retired music teacher whose work documents her community, Etsy businesses, and the building of her cob house. In 2013 Lauren traveled the world and documented her experiences on Instagram. Her work often references her travels and unique perspectives as a female musician, business owner, and home

⁴ All names in the study have been changed.
builder. With the same research questions in mind, I also conducted a case study of my own Instagram usage.

**Research Design**

My inquiry is grounded primarily in the work of Stake’s (1995) case study methodology. According to Stake, case studies are organized around a small number of research questions. Researchers may then ask about the issues that reveal dominant themes or shortcomings of the case. The holistic researcher must choose criteria for selecting content that will inform the case and its findings. In my study, participants’ creative behaviors, interactions, and motivations were examined through observations about their online behavior and creative works in Instagram and through semi-structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Data was collected over the course of three years beginning in September 2013 and concluding in November 2016. From this analysis, I have produced generalizations and new understandings about Instagram usage by these individuals. As case study researcher Stake (1995) has stated “We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts” (p. xi). From my examination of women of different ages and cultural experiences, I have gained understandings of how photographic images taken with mobile technology can reflect creativity in daily life.

This study is also shaped by a narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007; Ollerenshaw, 2002; Delacruz, 2013a) approach. Science scholar Jo Anne Ollerenshaw (2002) defines narrative inquiry as research where the researcher learns from participants in a setting. “The learning occurs through individual stories told by individuals, such as teachers or students… The stories constitute the data, and the researcher typically gathers it through interviews or informal conversations” (Ollerenshaw, 2002, p. 331-332). The writing of narrative inquiry uses everyday
language and conveys the holistic quality of the experience (Delacruz, 2013a). The methodology is shaped by the experiences of the informants (Ollerenshaw, 2002; Delacruz, 2013a). Narrative inquiry differs from pure-case study research as it seeks to voice the experiences of the research participants over understanding the rationale between a problem, event or happening (Stake, 1995).

In conveying the participants’ stories when engaging with Instagram, I used a narrative strategy in reporting the findings of my three participants by using their own words as they described their interests and activities in Instagram. The participants’ statements informed my understanding of their use of Instagram. These reflections colored my interpretation of their photographic works and helped answer my research questions. I also studied my own online behaviors and used a narrative approach in describing my artwork and life experiences online.

**Self-Study.** For my self-study, I collected data from my own reflections on photography and digital media in different points in my life. In addition, my self-study used the first-person voice that referenced my own experiences and humanity (Kidd & Finlayson, 2009). I also described how my own photography (self-portraits and documentations of my daily life) is indicative of my own sense of self. From this standpoint I related my own experiences to the main questions of this study to gain better understandings of the creative uses of Instagram and implications for art education. As researcher Carey Noland (2006) has noted, self-portraits can be indicative of the subject’s understanding of self. By investigating my photography, I described my transitions from 35mm film to a website, the blogosphere, and finally social media. My experiences within these shifts to digital and social media mirrored societal engagement with new media and its prominence within culture, commerce, entertainment, and social communications.
Data Collection and Analysis

Scholar Henry Wolcott (1994) finds there are three major modes that qualitative researchers utilize to gather data: participant observation, interviewing, and studying materials prepared by others. Wolcott recommends that researchers treat descriptive data as fact and assume or hope that the data can “speak for themselves” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 10). Wolcott further recommends that researchers have a systematic way of identifying key factors and relationships in data. Finally, the data must then be interpreted before researchers can form their conclusions and findings.

In my study, data collection follows Wolcott’s (1994) model and focus on (a) gathered images that my two female participants share on Instagram, (b) semi-structured interviews with the two participants, and (c) my self-study of my own photography and engagement with Instagram. Participant interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis. I also made observations in my researcher journal (field notes) as interviews were conducted or immediately following these interviews. The following sections briefly describe each of my data collection strategies.

Collection of Participants’ Images, Texts, and Information about their Online Behaviors

My participants’ images were collected directly from Instagram and downloaded to an image archive that I maintained for each participant. In addition, a screenshot was taken of each collected image to document the hashtags, likes, and user comments accompanying these images for later analysis. These images were saved on my personal laptop computer and backed up on a USB drive. The images were labeled according to the creator’s Instagram name, data, and subject matter.
To better understand the Instagram photographs of the participants a random sampling of fifty images from their Instagram pages were examined in October of 2015. At the time Carrie had 4391 posts, 218 followers, and was following 388 Instagram profiles. One out of every 87 images were sampled for a total of 50 analyzed images. Lauren had 1252 images, 1334 followers, and was following 2243 Instagram profiles, one out of every 25 images were sampled for a total of 50 analyzed images. I had 4647 posts, 467 followers, and was following 180 Instagram profiles, one out of every 85 images were for a total of 50 analyzed images. In addition, for my self-study I analyzed 60 of my own photographs, 10 photographs that demonstrated my photographic development and 50 photographs from Instagram.

Participant behaviors are also described through my observations about their engagements with the Instagram community. These behaviors include but are not limited to participants’ communication with other Instagram members who comment on participants’ Instagram photographs, along with participants’ other communications with Instagram users, including some of the images that participants have “liked” or commented about. Information about each participant’s online behaviors associated with this study is kept in a descriptive written account that I maintained throughout this study.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

As noted by researchers DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), semi-structured interviews utilize open-ended questions that allow the participants to reflect and share their ideas. Semi-structured interviews last between 30 minutes to several hours, probe personal beliefs, and solicit detailed question responses with time allotted to reflect on the interview questions posed by the researcher (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews differ in comparison to structured interviews where: “[T]he interviewer asks all respondents the same series of
preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories. There is generally little room for variation in responses except where open-ended questions (which are infrequent) may be used” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 649). In addition, the structured interview calls for the interviewer to have a neutral role where her opinions are not expressed on the respondent’s answer in order to produce a balanced report through interested listening that does not evaluate responses (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

For the semi-structured interviews I prepared a list of planned questions (see list below) that were shared in advance with participants. Interviews with study participants took place over the phone or through Skype due to geographic location. Carrie is based in Ohio, and Lauren lives in British Columbia, Canada so the participants were mostly interviewed over the phone. I interviewed each participant three times, for approximately thirty-five minutes to one hour per interview between 2013 and 2016 while I provided a self-study in August of 2016. I asked participants to reflect on creative strategies, subject matter choices, and intended meanings in their Instagram photography. All interviews were audio recorded and I wrote transcripts of each interview to check and review for accuracy. After transcribing the interviews I looked for emergent themes that appeared in participants’ statements. Next, I sent a transcript of the interviews to participants using email or Facebook Messenger. After reviewing the interview Carrie wrote back to clarify certain meanings that might have been misunderstood in the initial interview. Lauren accepted my transcripts of all interviews and did not ask for any meanings to be corrected. However, we had a member checking interview over the phone on September 19th, 2016. Carrie and I member checked over Facebook Messenger. Carrie was more private than Lauren and did not want her Instagram account identity revealed so it is blurred with the Photoshop healing brush tool in all images. In the first interview, I asked Carrie and Lauren to
share their biography and answer the following open ended questions. In question five I asked participants if they were feminists and to reflect on any gender specific images posted on Instagram:

1. Tell me about your photographic work with Instagram.
2. Describe the connections you have made with individuals or communities through Instagram.
3. What connections have you made in your life through Instagram?
4. How is your photography influenced by Instagram?
5. Are you a feminist? Are there any gender specific images that you share on Instagram?
6. How do you use your Instagram photography to connect with other social networking sites and the blogosphere?

My second interview questions for Carrie and Lauren were similar to the first interview. However, this time I asked the participants to reflect on their photographic work published on Instagram over the last year. I wanted them to reflect on their engagements with Instagram and social media since the last time I had talked to them:

1. Tell me about your photographic work with Instagram over the last year.
2. Describe the connections you have made with individuals or communities through Instagram.
3. How has Instagram expanded your understanding of photography?
4. Are there any gender specific images that you share on Instagram?
5. Describe your engagement with Facebook or other social networking sites.
My third interview questions were the in the same line of thinking as the second interview. Question 2 asks participants to consider their identity as a feminist and if this impacts the content of their Instagram posts:

1. Tell me about how your photography has evolved over the last two years?
2. Do you identify as a feminist? Is your photography feminist in any way?
3. Do you have any other comments on your photography, the Instagram community, or social media engagements including Facebook?

While interviewing participants I let the conversation flow organically in the open ended model developed by Spradley (1979). Follow up interviews were developed as I examined the participants’ responses to the earlier interviews. Examples of follow up questions were: How many people do you follow on Instagram? How frequent are your interactions on Instagram? How often do you comment on other people’s Instagram and what kind of comments do you receive? How do you exemplify feminist principles in your Instagram photography? When asking questions on feminism and gender I tried to have the interviews be as open ended as possible.

During the initial interview and in follow up emails I asked for the participants’ background information on their work experience and education. Initially I asked Lauren about her educational background and work experience in the first interview. With Carrie, I followed up on those details in the third interview as I was already familiar with her background before the first interview began. Examples of follow up questions for Carrie: What is the name of the school where you work and tell me more about the curriculum you are teaching? Is this the photograph you were referring to that referenced feminism in your work? What are your most used hashtags? When did you start your second Instagram account? With Lauren I asked for
educational details and information on her photography and social media perspectives: When did you go to school and attain your Education degree? What is the name of the user who had videos of pen and ink drawings that you mentioned? Describe the reviews of your *Two Tall Women* CD? How do you conduct research online? What are your thoughts about using Facebook versus Instagram?

For educational psychologist scholar Steinar Kvale (1996) the qualitative research interview is constructed through conversation, narrative, linguistic features, context, and the interrelationship of this knowledge. In addition, Kvale (1996) finds the meaning and interpretation of the interview is determined by language contexts that are not immediately apparent. My interview strategy built on Kvale’s (1996) methodology of narrative, interview transcriptions, and verification of interview material. These semi-structured interviews were approximately a half-an-hour to an hour in length and attempted to gather data from the women study participants regarding their experiences with Instagram, photography, gender, identity, and digital media. With descriptive data, Wolcott (1994) recommends informants present their accounts in their own words in formally taped interview sessions. Wolcott advises that qualitative researchers introduce their studies with a descriptive account that allows the data to speak for itself. This study followed Wolcott’s use of descriptive data for follow up interviews where the participants provided written responses to my follow up questions through email and Facebook Messenger. Following Kvale’s methodology, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, including both what I said and what the interviewees said. After each interview transcription, I started to analyze the data by looking at what stood out as important. Using the methodology of ethnographers (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012), I left the right third of my fieldnotes and interview paper blank to note detectible patterns and themes that the data seemed
to be conveying. The left two-thirds of the page had transcribed interview material or fieldnotes while the right one-third stayed blank so I could record emerging insights (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012).

The first interview consisted of a series of open-ended questions mentioned earlier that related to the participants’ engagements with Instagram, photography, and gender. When conducting the first set of interviews, I asked structured questions that Spradley (1979) defines as questions that need an explanation in order to gather data. Using similar questions that I asked in the first interview, during the second interview I asked participants to talk about their images and comments posted to Instagram in the last year. However, before scheduling the second interview, the transcribed first interview statements were sent to the participants for member checking to insure the accuracy of the interview transcript text and initial findings. My image analyses of participants’ Instagram photographs were also sent to the participants for member checking to validate my analysis. Participants were sent these two sources of emerging findings to check for accuracy.

In the second interview, I used the same open-ended interview format where I asked probative and responsive questions that were formed based on data the study participants had previously communicated. During the semi-structured interviews, I listened deeply and asked follow up questions to what the interviewee was saying and questioned further (if it seems relevant to what I am trying to find out). Then the second interview was transcribed and analyzed. After the participants reviewed the second interview transcript and image analyses, a third interview was scheduled where I communicated any information that still needed to be shared in the study. The third interview was part of my member checking strategy, and helped clarify and finalize my interview and image analyses findings.
Collection of Data for Self-Study

Material for my self-study was collected by examining my Instagram behaviors, WordPress blog, and Facebook activities. The majority of material collected concerned my own creative and online activities in the form of photographs and blog posts shared between 2001-2016. The photographs collected were taken while I was an undergraduate student in Ottawa, Canada, a graduate student in Taipei, Taiwan, and a doctoral student in Illinois and New York, USA. Instagram images collected consisted of photographs shared over the last four years.

Researcher’s Field Notes and Observations

For Emerson, et al. (1995), researchers’ fieldnotes present and frame the research subjects and the situations they are engaging with. Participant interviews and audio-recordings can further add depth and meaning to researchers’ fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 1995). When interviewing a participant, researchers should write fieldnotes to capture the meaning of behaviors and actions observed (Emerson et al., 1995). Fieldnotes can also help the researcher make deeper connections with the data by interpreting and analyzing events as they occur and through subsequent reflection.

Researchers should also be familiar with the jargon and language used in the culture they are describing (Kvale, 1996; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). In my study, this includes the technical terminology of Instagram, apps, and social networking communications such as hashtags, emoticons, and likes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through an analysis of my fieldnotes, interviews, and an examination of images, texts, and social interactions of study participants (including myself) using Instagram. Wolcott (1994) finds description, analysis, and interpretation figure
prominently in data analysis. He defines description as observations made by the researcher and reported to the researcher by others (Wolcott, 1994). Analysis is identified as addressing the essential features of interrelationships within data and how it functions. Interpretation addresses the meaning and context of the data and summarizes what is to be made of it all (Wolcott, 1994).

**Analysis of Participants’ Images, Texts, and Online Social Behaviors**

Participants’ images and texts were analyzed through a description and coding system that described characteristics discernible in each collected image (Delacruz, 2013d; Rose 2012). For Rose coding “means attaching a set of descriptive labels (or ‘categories’) to the images” (Rose, 2012, p. 90). Adapting from Delacruz’s (2013d) ideas I identified the following characteristics in the images: subject matter, composition, formal and aesthetic qualities such as color, lighting, patterns, or texture, and degrees of realism.

As evident through the concepts noted earlier, study images were analyzed for visual and text content; aesthetic and design qualities; methods used to create each image; and characteristics and behaviors of the creators (Delacruz, 2013d). When analyzing an image I looked for commonalities and differences in color, contrast, composition, lighting, subject matter, location, comments, likes, and date of publishing. I made notes of the image’s visual content and any comments that would influence an understanding of the image. Through analysis I tried to categorize the subject matter the participants were producing. Frequent patterns identified were the strong saturation and contrast of the participants’ images’ colors. Hefe and Lo-fi were common filters used. These filters added high saturation and dark contrast to an image. They make the presentation of subject matter appear to be more vivid and memorable through brighter colors and stronger contrasted lighting. The filters alter the mood of an image.

---

5 The Instagram filter Hefe adds saturation and dark contrast to an image. The filter Lo-fi adds purple tones, high saturation and contrast.
through their enhanced colors and lighting. Landscape and architecture were common subject matter used. Through comments and likes that documented the participants engaging with an online community patterns emerged that included supportive and encouraging exchanges about the images they posted. Carrie’s images contained few comments but many likes that supported the content she referenced. Lauren’s images contained many exchanges with her followers. For instance one image has twenty-one comments and another has six comments. Comments included “Magical”, “Lovely pic”, “I have not been there for so many years. It still looks beautiful”. Most common comments included complementing Lauren on her work and Lauren thanking her followers. For Rose, codes should be clearly defined so that another researcher would be able to replicate the coding process (Rose, 2012). I used the descriptive characteristics mentioned earlier (subject matter, composition design qualities, methods used to create images, location, and comments etc.) to code the images and create frequency counts. Finally, Rose (2012) recommends that researchers connect the relationships within the codes to a large social context that in this case would be empowerment. Empowerment in this context is exemplified by the participants’ creation and sharing of images, the voicing of ideas and values, and by engaging in positive and supportive ways with their online community.

In addition, participants’ online social behaviors were analyzed through documenting and examining my observations about their interactions on Instagram, user comments, and likes. Selected Instagram images were collected from the participants’ Instagram profile in October 2015 to provide a sense of how Instagram is used.

Collected images were also further analyzed using Rose’s (2012) method for analyzing images and Barrett’s (2012) technique for criticizing photographs. With Barrett’s (2012) method the viewer provides a formal image description that references that internal context of the image,
subject, medium, form, and interrelationships among all four elements (Barrett, 2012). Barrett (2012) also provides a framework for describing the image through subject matter, form, and questioning the artist’s intent.

Images were analyzed using a chart that documented the image’s subject matter, location, composition and framing, degree of realism, formal and aesthetic qualities, apps and filters used, text content added, nature of comments added, dialogue between creator and number of comments, and likes. Most of the data from the descriptive coding categories was information retrieved from viewing and analyzing the image. I recorded the subject matter, location, type of composition and framing, for example a landscape photograph, or macro photography. The degree of realism was listed as realistic, meaning an in-focus image, or abstract, an image with subject matter that was difficult to discern. Most of the photographs analyzed were in focus and coded as realistic. Realistic images appear to be in focus photographs of the subject matter with few or no distortions. The occasional image that was out of focus or heavily distorted such that the subject matter was not clear was coded as abstract. The aesthetic qualities of the image referred to aspects such as color, lighting, saturation, and tone alongside the subject matter. For example, one of Carrie’s sunset images was listed as “soft sunset colors”. The apps and filters used were discerned from studying the image and member checking with the case study participants. The text content added, nature of comments added, and likes all provided information on the image’s appeal and reception within the participant’s Instagram community. Similarities existed between the filters that participants used and the overall style of their photographs.

The participants would often saturate their images using the Lo-fi, Hefe, and X-pro II filters. Common changes to images were more vibrant colors and stronger contrast that increased
the tone of flowers and foliage in landscape images. By using an Instagram filter participants were choosing to enhance their photographs alongside the Instagram aesthetic. Photography website Snapwire (2017) finds Instagram’s filters to be reflective of mood through color, tone, and contrast. By selecting an Instagram filter the user is choosing colors that will inform the mood and overall feel of their photograph. As Instagram is a platform to experiment with photographic filters users are selecting a filter to conform with the aesthetic of the site and investigate new ways that their enhanced images can be presented online. For example, I tend to use the Valencia filter due to its yellow tones that can brighten up the colors and skin tones in an image. For me this filter helps my photographs to appear more polished over an unfiltered image. However, not all users use filters. Carrie’s Instagram feed also contains many landscaped images that are unfiltered while Lauren experimented with filters from other applications like Google’s Snapseed. Like Carrie and Lauren, my images had rich colors, contrasts, and exposure, and black tones to capture images of the city and parks in New York. In Chapter 4 of this study, I discuss participants’ uses of filters and some of the effects they produced.

When summarizing the image data I printed out a hard copy of the selected Instagram images and the completed an analysis chart. Next, I reviewed the data and looked for patterns across the images. I used colored highlighters to highlight different commonalities such as subject matter, composition, text content added by viewers, location, and Instagram filters used. Typically, I made note of certain commonalities within each image analysis. For example, Carrie’s images could be broken down into the following subject matter categories: nature, spiritual, selfie, yoga, and art education. Stylistically Carrie’s photographs contained point and shoot perspectives of the natural world and aesthetically were focused on light, color, and reflections. After noting the commonalities in the image chart with the highlighter I wrote the
results of the data in ink beside the chart’s column. Next I created another chart that more succinctly charted the subject matter, composition, and formal characteristics across all her analyzed images. Table 1 references a chart used to document the qualities of one of Carrie’s images. Table 2 charts highlighted codes and patterns across Carrie’s fifty analyzed images.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IG-er name and short description of the person</th>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Composition and Framing</th>
<th>Degree of Realism</th>
<th>Aesthetic Qualities</th>
<th>Apps and Filters used</th>
<th>Instagram homepage of creator and link to image</th>
<th>Text content added by the creator to the original post</th>
<th>Nature of comments added by viewers</th>
<th>Dialogue between creator and comments</th>
<th>Likes and reposts added by viewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Image of a sunrise with a black background and sunrise background on a country road</td>
<td>Kent, Ohio</td>
<td>Point and shoot composition</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Backlight foreground emphasizes the soft pastel colors of the sunset</td>
<td>No filter</td>
<td><a href="https://instagram.com/p/tnZejEnT_JK?k=UfVp9y-DTK6ensQ=SVNM0/htaken-by_Carrie">https://instagram.com/p/tnZejEnT_JK?k=UfVp9y-DTK6ensQ=SVNM0/htaken-by_Carrie</a></td>
<td>Today’s sunrise</td>
<td>No comments added</td>
<td>No dialogue between creator and comments</td>
<td>12 likes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.* Example of using a chart that documents the aesthetic qualities of the image, the number of likes, and the engagements between the user and viewers. Carrie's Instagram username is blurred to preserve her anonymity.
Table 2. A breakdown of descriptive characteristics present in Carrie’s Instagram image analysis that are based on the aesthetic qualities of an Instagram image.

Figure 1 is a chart of Instagram filters from 2013 that a user could select to enhance an image’s contrast, color, tone, and saturation. Here the viewer can see a visual comparison of the different Instagram filters and visualize how they impact the images presentation. For example, the filter Hefe has saturated colors, high contrast, and yellow tones. In comparison Gotham is a high contrast black and white filter with bluish undertones and the Lily filter promotes yellow tones, desaturated colors, and high contrast. It could be said that this filter gives an overall ‘nostalgic’ feel due to the yellowing tonality as it provides a visual appearance of aging the image [as older photographs often yellow over time due to exposure to light and the resultant breakdown of chemicals on the paper]. By selecting one filter over the other the viewer is
consciously choosing how they would like their image to be altered and viewed with a certain appearance or feeling that the image represents.

Figure 1. A list of the available Instagram filters that a user can select to modify an image in 2013.

In addition to Delacruz’s (2013d) method for charting images, Barrett’s (2012) method of criticizing photographs was also used for image analysis. Barrett describes his analysis of photographs through critical processes. For Barrett, “[c]riticism is informed discourse about art to increase understanding and appreciation of art” (Barrett, 2012, p. 3). Barrett finds that criticism of photographs results in a fuller understanding and appreciation of the image. Using Barrett’s (2012) method for describing photographs, the viewer writes what they notice about the photograph through a data gathering process that lists facts. Descriptions answer questions such as: “What is here?”, “What am I looking at?”, “What do I know with certainty about this image?” (Barrett, 2012, p. 17) According to Barrett, when observing and taking notes on photography the subject matter should be described alongside the presentation environment (Barrett, 2012).
Barrett’s method of interpretation also considers the style of the photograph or the photographer’s unique aesthetic that in this case would relate to the enhancements made by the Instagram filter. Photographs may also be compared to other images or the work of the same photographer and the narrative present when viewing a series of Instagram images.

**Themes in the Images**

By charting the participants’ Instagram images I identified the following themes in their images: empowerment, positive notions about gender, connection to community, leadership, reverence/stewardship, reverence for nature, and optimism. The manner in which participants’ images and comments convey these themes are described in Chapter 4.

*Empowerment.* Empowerment is a unifying theme throughout this study and is defined by Adams (2008) as:

> The capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives. (p. xvi)

Adams (2008) book *Empowerment, Participation, and Social Work* was written to provide social workers with a framework for empowering social work practice. Adams (2008) found the concept of empowerment to be a multifaceted idea that could mean different things to different people. He found empowerment could represent people’s relationship with power in society, that the concept could be a method of how people could achieve power and assert it, and finally that empowerment could be a social work methodology where the practitioner can help facilitate the empowerment of individuals. For Adams (2008) empowerment is not the primary goal of social work however the practice feeds off anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-disablists, and anti-oppressive
movements that reflect the dominant values of Western countries, such as the US. (Adams, 2008). Further defined by Psychology Professor Julian Rappaport (1984) “Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives” (p. 3). For Rappaport (1984) empowerment pertains to how naturally occurring healing systems happen in communities, families, neighborhoods, and social networks to help people find meaning in life.

In this study feminist art education scholars Sandell (1979), Collins (1979), Freedman (1994), Keifer-Boyd (2003), and have published articles on empowerment through feminist leadership in art education. Empowerment is visible through participants’ images’ subject matter, pose, lighting, and user comments that reinforce meaning. In addition to referencing optimism, Carrie’s alludes to empowerment through the images she posts that feature strong women with empowered body language and facial expressions. Lauren’s post promoting her natural building workshop references the empowerment that women can feel from building a home. Moreover, my work references empowerment through marathon running and the feeling of pride in being able to hold a marathon finisher’s medal.

Positive notions about gender. In this study participants published images that promoted female gender empowerment. Carrie conveyed her feelings of women’s repression in society through her images documenting women in media and visual arts. Lauren posted images that conveyed positive notions about gender through her documentation of the building of her cob house with the MudGirls. My experiences with the running community also referenced gender empowerment through my marathon finishes.

Connection. The concept of connection can be defined as a contextual relationship or association that relates to personal intimacy, ideas, or sequence (Merriam-Webster, 2017a). In
this study connection is a concept linked through notions of gender, spirituality, and empowerment through participants’ Instagram photography. For example, Carrie connects art education, yoga, and nature to her photography on Instagram. The concept of connection is also event in participants’ photographs through subject matter elements, lighting, framing, and user comments. For example we might see a photo where the participant connects with nature, a social issue, a special place, or an activity like creating art or running. The user comments and likes reference this connection. The number of photographs published on a particular topic also demonstrates the strength of the participant’s connection to the event such as Carrie’s connection to nature, Lauren’s connection to travel, and my connection to distance running.

Connection to community. The online community is a place for users to connect with like-minded individuals, make new friends, and share values (Rheingold, 2002). Throughout this study participants felt connected to their online Instagram community through the images they shared and engagements with other users. For example Lauren felt connected to other travelers through Instagram and from the experience of sharing her images online and from commenting on her own work and other users. Carrie also demonstrated a connection to community through her a yoga sessions and work in art education. My images documenting marathon finishes are connected to the running community and demonstrate the results of my training that I’ve accomplished the support of many friends and Instagram users.

Leadership. Leadership is defined as the activity of leading a group of people, organization, or the ability to do this (Business Dictionary, 2017). Leadership involves establishing a clear vision and sharing that vision with others so that they will follow willingly. In this study leadership is evident through the participants’ engagements with their local cultures and communities. Carrie is a leader through her teaching, yoga, and Instagram photography that
she uses to communicate her message of empowerment. Lauren leads through her travels, Etsy businesses, and the building of her cob house. I try to be a positive example through my running and promotion of women’s fitness.

Reverence/stewardship. Reverence is a concept that looks back to the Hebrew word *yare* and literally means to stand in awe and have deep respect or honor (Wellman, 2017). Reverence is a religious notion that references a holy fear and respect for God (Wellman). The concept of stewardship references biblical principal of ownership through our obedience to everything God has given and created (Whelchel, 2012). Additionally, stewardship alludes to responsibility and accountability for our possessions. Stewardship also speaks of reward for hard work and faith towards God and his Kingdom (Welchel, 2012). Altogether, the concept of reverence/stewardship denotes pride and respect for work and care for the earth. In this study the themes of reverence/stewardship are visible through the participants’ commitments to their work and personal endeavors. For example Carrie demonstrates reverence and stewardship through her images that celebrate the earth and art education. Through her photography Carrie also comments on how humbled she is by the earth and honored she feels to participated in art education. Lauren makes the concept of reverence/stewardship visible through her Etsy craft businesses and work on her cob house. Additionally, I demonstrate reverence for the strength and endurance of the human body through my marathon running training.

Reverence for nature. Participants displayed a respect for nature in their Instagram photographs that documented the natural world around them. Nature is the most dominant theme of Carrie’s photography. Carrie often spoke of how nature impacted her photography and that her documentation of the environment around her was her motivation for sharing images on Instagram. Lauren also demonstrated a respect for nature and used Instagram as a site to
communicate the world around her whether it was Canada, her global travels, or her cob house. Respect for the natural world is further evident in my own work that documented the organic architecture of New York.

**Optimism.** Optimism is a belief that this world is the best possible world and an inclination to anticipate the best possible outcome (Merriam-Webster, 2017c). The concept of optimism is visible through subject matter, colors, comments, and framing that highlight a positive mood in an image. Participants pictures of children reference optimism as does Carrie’s work in art education, Lauren’s Stand and Witness video series, and my photographs of children in Taiwan.

Additionally, the participants’ engagements with Instagram referenced daily life and reflected how Instagram is an online community to immediately communicate events. Overall, the participants used Instagram as a site to connect with others, develop photographic skills, and share their photography with a supportive online community.

**Analysis of Interview Data and Fieldnotes**

After conducting interviews with the research participants I closely examined interview transcripts and fieldnotes to identify and describe themes, patterns, and variations present in interview data that was coded (Wolcott, 1994; Kvale, 1996). Cultural anthropologist scholars Gery W. Ryan and H. Russell Bernard (2000) define coding as follows:

Coding is the heart and soul of whole-text analysis. Coding forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text. The fundamental tasks associated with coding are sampling, identifying themes, building codebooks, marking texts, constructing models (relationships among codes), and testing these models against empirical data. (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780)

Coding the data such as transcripts and fieldnotes seeks to establish patterns that are discernible in the data, to group those patterns into conceptual categories, to look for connections
between behaviors found within and across categories, and to look for broader themes that may be present (Hay, 2005). Through the creation of codes that describe the data collected, the researcher is involved in the analytic process of categorizing specific segments of their data. For Charmaz, “Coding helps us to gain a new perspective on our material and to focus further data collection, and may lead us in unforeseen directions” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515). Codes that I used to analyze interviews including the following: views about their photography, interest in nature, interest in daily life, interest in education, views about feminism, and views about social media and online engagements.

In addition to coding my transcripts and fieldnotes after interviewing study participants, I searched for themes that emerged within codes that could be developed further through follow-up interviews and additional research (Wolcott, 1994; Kvale, 1996). Writing reflections on my fieldnotes assisted in discovering meanings in the fieldnotes and the texts being analyzed. For example, I reflected on Carrie’s desire to communicate social justice through her Instagram images per our member checking interview and Lauren’s use of her Carroway Crochet business through Etsy and Instagram.

**Analysis of My Self-Study Data**

In my self-study data, I described my engagements with photography and social networking through an analysis of 50 images that I collected from my Instagram feed and an additional 10 images that I collected from my Facebook and Wordpress blog. I described how as a photographer in the early 2000s my work documented my friends and community as an undergraduate student in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. After moving to Taipei, Taiwan in 2005 for graduate studies my photography was shared on my Wordpress blog and in social networking through Facebook and Twitter. In 2011 my photography changed with the purchase of an iPhone
and the Instagram application. My analysis of this data occurred through image analysis and reflective inquiry that examined my experiences with photography, Instagram, and social networking. Table 3 is an example of an image analyzed during my self-study.

Figure 2. An Instagram image of my parents walking through the Rose Garden at Butchart Gardens, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.
Table 3. An example of an image analysis of one of my own images using Delacruz’s (2013d) method of charting the characteristics of Instagram images.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IG-er name and short description of the person.</th>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Composition and Framing</th>
<th>Degree of Realism</th>
<th>Aesthetic Qualities</th>
<th>Apps and Filters used</th>
<th>Instagram homepage of creator and link to image</th>
<th>Text content added by the creator to the original post</th>
<th>Nature of comments added by viewers</th>
<th>Dialogue between creator and comments</th>
<th>Likes and reposts added by viewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@reesjoanna Joanna Rees Female (F) Latino (C) Adult (A)</td>
<td>An elderly couple walking through an arched garden path covered with pink and rose colored roses.</td>
<td>Urban, Butchart Gardens, Victoria, British Columbia,</td>
<td>Full frame composition from behind of a couple walking through the garden path. We see their hands and sandals as they pass through the rose garden</td>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Pastel colors and soft lighting that illuminates the rose color of the flowers and garden path. The soft colors and subject matter give the picture a dreamlike, romantic feel.</td>
<td>Earlybird.<a href="http://instagram.com/reesjoanna">http://instagram.com/reesjoanna</a> <a href="http://instagram.com/p/bWfLggo9q73/">http://instagram.com/p/bWfLggo9q73/</a></td>
<td>No text content added</td>
<td>No comments added by viewers</td>
<td>No dialogue between creator and comments</td>
<td>3 likes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mixed Methods and Triangulation

This study used multiple methods of inquiry: image analysis, interviews, case study and self-study research to describe the behaviors of selected Instagram users. Stake defines triangulation as follows: “Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2000, p. 443). Hesse-Baber (2010) who finds that using a mixed-methods research approach can strengthen validity and reliability: “Conducting a mixed methods study can enhance the validity and reliability of findings as well as allow for the exploration of contradictions found between the quantitative and qualitative results” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 465). Such approaches comport well with mixed-methods research such as mine. My case study methodology examines the Instagram behaviors of three female Instagram users through image analysis and semi-structured interviews. The advantage of using a mixed-methods approach is that these various methods provide more data than a singular method. Exclusive reliance on one
method could limit the amount of data gathered and present more restricted findings (Cohen & Manion, 1985).

In this study triangulation was conducted through an analysis of semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, Instagram image analysis, narrative inquiry, and self-study. I compared the data gained from each method and looked for similar patterns and insights that informed my study (Cohen & Manion, 1985). My triangulation methods adopted those modeled by Sevingny (1978) who used the combined practices of subject observation along with supplementary data to enrich research findings. I saw the potential discovery emerging from different data sets as an opportunity to explore the nature of Instagram as a photographic and social media mobile application. I conducted my analysis based on my understandings of the participants’ Instagram images and interviews. During this study I shared my interpretations and understandings with participants to verify the validity of my findings.

**Member Checking, Validity, and Persuasiveness of the Accounts Provided**

In this study, member checking and validity were sought through shared interview transcripts and image analyses with participants. The process of member checking involved verifying with study participants that the data collected and described accurately reflected their statements (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). I also checked to see if my descriptions of their images were accurate. Member checking is an important component of qualitative research to insure the statements of study participants are not taken for granted and is checked for accuracy in the accounts provided (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

According to Kvale, “Reliability pertains to the consistency of the research findings” (Kvale, 1996, p. 235). Validity can be determined through the soundness of the investigation and research questions, the strength of the study methods, the trustworthiness of interview reports,
the consistency in the interview transcripts, the results of interview analysis, and the reporting of the study to the interview subjects and the academic community to determine if the study is valid (Kvale, 1996). My study used Kvale’s recommendations (1996) and determined its validity through the strength of the research questions, participant interviews, verified interview transcripts, coded fieldnotes, image analysis, and triangulated findings.

**Limitations**

This study is limited by many factors including the small number of homogenous participants, the time allotted to complete the study, the context of analyzing images from Instagram, and the online format. The small number of participants has limited the amount of data gathered for this study as their reflections, narratives, and photographic content is drawn only from the experiences of three purposefully selected cisgendered White women instead of the general population, which would provide more depth and context. My self-study is limited to my own experiences but adds meaning to the study through my experiences with photography and Instagram. The study is also limited by the fact that I interviewed participants by phone and social media and not in person. Interviews and an analysis of images and statements shared over email do not have the same depth and meaning as direct observation and face-to-face communication; however this also allowed me to have participants not in my immediate proximity.

**Summary of Methods**

In this study, data was collected and analyzed through case study methodology that examined the behavior of two women participants through interviews, fieldnotes, image analysis, and member checking. My self-study examined the content, visual themes, informative text, and user comments visible in each image. Data analysis of my own online activity was informed by
coding strategies described earlier. I utilized triangulation (Cohen & Manion, 1985) and member checking (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006) to validate my findings.

My study contributes to understandings about how mobile creative digital and social media can be used for empowerment. Understanding this phenomenon is paramount in art education, as we need to be informed about how online social and digital technologies are utilized in our contemporary culture. In the following chapter, I outline each participant’s story as a separate case study of Instagram usage and describe how their images fit one or more of the themes that I discussed above.
Chapter Four

CASE STUDY

My dissertation study concerns the examination of three female subjects, Carrie, an art educator in her thirties, Lauren, a retired musician and teacher in her sixties, and myself, a former art educator who has just turned forty, with the ideas to look for ways in which we expressed our feminist beliefs through our Instagram activities. This chapter presents an overview of the case study participants Carrie and Lauren and their Instagram photography. In addition, I provide a self-study as a case on my own Instagram photography. From 2013-2016 I studied case study participants using semi-structured interviews with open ended questions using a methodology developed by Spradley, (1979). I also conducted an image analysis of 50 images selected from each participant’s Instagram site through a framework developed by Delacruz (2013c, 2013d; Barrett, 2006). My study revealed several findings about the participants’ engagements with Instagram and the photography they shared through Instagram. Over the past three years I’ve found that our Instagram photography evolves with time. Carrie’s images were focused on nature, architecture, and spirituality. Over time, her photography became more political on Facebook and her Instagram account was made private in 2016. Lauren’s Instagram images were originally snapshots of family but came to encompass her world travels in 2014, and finally the building of her cob house and Etsy artwork in 2016. My work initially documented graduate student life in Illinois but came to be focused on life in New York City and the distance running community from 2014 onwards. Overall, my study considered how each subject connected with friends and other communities through their photography and the Instagram app, and how each case expressed their feminist values. Instagram served as a site to

6 Cob is a natural building material made from subsoil, water, organic building material (such as straw), and sometimes lime (Wikipedia, 2016).
voice whatever was significant in their lives. Implications for art education rest in the creative nature of the Instagram app that can be used to document and share photographs, make connections with others, and develop photographic skills as the case subjects demonstrate.

**Carrie Case Study**

Carrie is an art educator and photography artist who has been teaching for over 15 years. Carrie lives in a mid-sized town in the Midwest and her photographs are a visual diary of her daily life with nature, yoga, and art education emerging as key themes. Carrie received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Art Education in 2003 and a Masters of Arts degree in Art Education in 2006 from Kent State University. She has worked as a full-time public school art educator since 2003. Carrie’s Instagram photography is spiritual and celebrates the beauty of nature through the Ohio landscape in addition to focusing on art education, architecture, and yoga.

From my examination of 50 images sampled out of 4391 images posted by October 2015 the majority of Carrie’s subject matter was of nature 42% while, yoga 10%, art education 12%, architecture 10%, spirituality 8%, and 4% selfies are other themes. Carrie’s composition used landscape 20%, macro 26%, architectural 10%, overhead 6%, and selfie 4% framing. Overall her photographs had clear focus with a high degree of realism 96%. Only 4% were abstract. Carrie’s images concern nature 46%, color 24%, and spiritual 8% aspects of her subject matter. Carrie uses a variety of filters with Instagram the most common being Hefe 22% and Lo-Fi 24% with Valencia 10%, X-pro 12%, Willow/Inkwell 12%, and no filter also used 16%. The filters add saturated colors, tone, and contrast to her photographs that amplify nature, color, and light. Carrie added comments to 44% of her posts to describe the subject matter of her images. “Today’s sunrise” “Snakeskin and caterpillar” “Wild & wonderful West St. Virginia is good to me”, “Genesis made this. Not finished quite yet” “I could cry. So beautiful. Grateful for the

68
softness and quiet” are examples of her added text content. In her Instagram sample 38% of images had one viewer (follower) comment that usually complimented the natural beauty of her photographic images. Examples of viewer comments on Carrie’s photographs are “Beautiful”, “So pretty”, “Looks amazing”, “Lovely”, “That sky!”, “heart.” Sixteen percent of images had dialogue between the creator and her commenters where Carrie usually thanked her followers for their comments. Carrie’s most used hashtags are #carriesfarm and #lakeerielove. In Instagram hashtags make it easy to index and search for topics of interest within the user community. Many of Carrie’s images are posted without any comments or hashtags. Her style is mostly characterized by images of nature that capture light and the changing seasons in daily life. Carrie also references her teaching, the status of women in our society, and social issues such as civil rights and current events. The aesthetic style of her photographs is exemplified by landscape photographs, with natural light, no filter, and vivid colors that capture the saturated colors present in the physical world.

Overall, Carrie’s images are characterized through her documentation of nature and her work in art education and yoga practice. Describing her work Carrie stated “I do a lot of nature photography. Light and color always really matter to me.” In addition, Carrie uses Instagram as a visual diary to publish her photographic perception of daily life. This suggests that to Carrie Instagram is about communicating the moment through images and photography to a receptive creative community.

I conducted interviews with Carrie over the phone in 2013, 2014, and 2016. The first interview took place on Tuesday September 3rd, 2013. As I interviewed her over the phone it was an informally unstructured interview that was about 40 minutes in length. I audio recorded the interview and took notes while we talked over the phone. I transcribed the recorded interview for
later analysis. I know Carrie through our professional association in the National Art Education Association Woman’s Caucus. I consider Carrie to be a professional colleague and we let the conversation and questions flow easily rather than sticking to a particular script. Our conversation began with Carrie talking about Instagram. She stated it’s “a good way to get multiple perspectives and viewpoints out there. It can be a lens from which people experience the world, whatever is under it.”

Figure 6 is one of Carrie’s image’s that references the natural world with a rocky beach and flowers in a shape of a heart. In this image Carrie is contrasting the cashing waves with the heart-shape flower arrangement placed on the foreground rock. I selected this image as it is representative of Carrie’s early Instagram work that contained many heart images found in nature. This image contains a heart created out of flowers and the photograph references nature, romance, and beauty. Intertwined themes that are common in her early photographic work. The colors and aesthetic of the image are also representative of Carrie’s photographic style at that time. The colors are saturated and the filter appears to be Lo-Fi. Carrie’s use of the Lo-Fi filter highlights the dark contrasts of the rock’s surface with the waves and saturates the pink and yellow colors of the flowers. The photograph was constructed to demonstrate Carrie’s affection for the natural world and love as referenced through the flowers that are arranged in a heart shape. This image references the concept of reverence for nature through the depiction of the flowers arranged in a heart shape formation and the contrast of the colors of the heart to that of the waves and rock. The heart also references connection to the earth, as evidenced below, though its shape that signifies love and bright yellow, pink, and purple flowers.
Later in the interview I questioned Carrie about her pictures of flowers and nature (see Figure 3), and she responded:

I feel that I’m connected to the earth and that it’s a big part of my spirituality and my own healing and own therapy. Like self-therapy and self-care sort of thing. And I really listen and look at the earth and try to capture that- if I can. I feel like I can’t capture it all. So that’s that. Yesterday with the flowers that was totally spontaneous. I was driving somewhere and all these stores were closed because it’s a holiday and I needed to walk outside so I had a ten-minute walk in the field and I felt like it was absolutely beautiful. It was very spiritual for me I really felt like divine presence hold me in that space and I wanted to capture a little bit of that.

For Carrie, taking photographs of nature in daily life is an essential component to her artwork, spirituality, and perspective on the world. In addition, Carrie finds Instagram to be a medium to
communicate with others through social media. Here she describes how her photography is influenced by friends that she becomes closer to through Instagram:

What I’ve found with a lot of people is that my photos resonate with them and that we become closer because they see my Instagram. Like they want to get to know me better or they realize we have some connection. I’ve actually had relationships evolve more positively from using Instagram in real life (laughs softly). It’s not just an online relationship. We go out with people and have dinner with them.

As Carrie states above Instagram is a site to connect with others through photography. Carrie finds social bonds can be encouraged through the sharing of Instagram images. Publishing images on Instagram helps Carrie to foster a connection with her followers, friends, and others who appreciate her photography. Yoga is another element in Carrie’s photography as she is a trained yoga teacher. The image below documents her engagements with yoga. Figure 4 represents a circle of flowers and candles that was arranged after a yoga session at Carrie’s house. Figure 4 is significant as it is an example of Carrie’s yoga practice. The image depicts candles and flowers arranged on a wooden floor in a circular shape. Light from a window is visible on the image’s lower right side. The content of the image references themes of yoga, spirituality, the natural world, and friendship through the shared experience of the event. Aesthetically, the colors of the images are bright and saturated similar to the style in Carrie’s early Instagram work. Like Figure 3 the colors are saturated and have a strong contrast with the light. Here Carrie is referencing yoga and capturing a snapshot of her practice that is communicated to viewers. She has saturated the colors and increased the lighting contrast with the Lo-Fi filter to enhance the bright and loving mood of her photograph and to highlight the
difference in subject matter between the flowers and rocks. Additionally, the darker colors of the filter evoke the darker colors of 35 millimeter film and give the photograph a nostalgic feeling. The bright colors and subject matter emphasize the themes of connection, reverence, and empowerment that Carrie finds in her yoga practice. Carrie is connected to the activity of yoga, has reverence for its discipline, and is empowered by the act of documenting her practice and sharing it with others.

Figure 4. A circle of flowers with a candle in the center, referencing a yoga session.

For Carrie it is important to create and share images that are a part of her life (see Figure 4). She stated:

Yeah, it’s that I want to take photographs that are real in my experience and capture everything. Even if I take photographs that have a totally different meaning on how others will interpret it I take the photo for a reason. Like I’ve taken it because I feel it’s important to share. The yoga stuff of me I feel that it’s my identity and I want to be as real as possible in my experience.
In the statement above Carrie is finding empowerment and connection through her yoga practice. Here she is connecting yoga to her identity and demonstrating the empowerment she finds from the experience. For Carrie, her images of yoga are a true representation of her identity. Carrie chooses Instagram filters that enhance her depictions of nature to be as realistic as possible with stronger lighting contrast and brighter colors as seen in Figure 4. In this image Carrie is demonstrating a reverence to yoga with her image that honors the practice and celebrates it. The yellow mood of the filter enhances the lighting and colors of the image and makes it appear more cheerful and happy like Carrie’s yoga practice. Figure 4 is also optimistic with its bright colors, lighting, circular shape that hits the sunlight emanating from the lower right corner of the picture plane. Yoga, art education, and nature are the focuses of Carrie’s life and photography through Instagram. Carrie’s Instagram images reference her daily life and she has spoken about how her photography helps promote partnerships with friends online:

Yes, I totally feel connection, which is the theme of my life for the last couple of years. I just feel really connected to everything. I’ve feel like Instagram has come into my life for a reason and helps foster connections between people in a really positive way. I feel like Instagram is one method of getting through to other people, in a spiritual way that pulls back some of the layers of these things that divide us and help make clear what really matters to us.

From Carrie’s statements it is clear Instagram is a site to share her photography with friends and make new connections. Carrie reflected on both Instagram and Facebook and said, “I post things on Instagram I will not post on Facebook. Like the whole Carrie Mae Weems thing.”
Carrie documented her experience with Carrie Mae Weems’ exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art in the black and white images displayed as Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7.

Figure 5 is the first image in Carrie’s series, an exterior shot of the Cleveland Museum of Art that invites the viewer into the museum. The photograph captures the museum from a distance with a tree to the top left corner and large front lawn visible. Carrie’s selection of Weems’ series is significant as the artwork tells the story of a single black woman and her relationships with friends, her lover, and daughter from the perspective of her kitchen table (Eckardt, 2016). Weems’ Kitchen Table series empowered women of color and inspired other women artists concerned with their own representation (Eckardt, 2016). The image from Weems’ series that Carrie chose to photograph and publish on Instagram is a replica of a portrait of the artist standing defiantly in front of her kitchen table, confronting the viewer by gazing directly into the camera. In other images in the series Weems sat at the kitchen table and interacted with friends, children, and her lover. However, in the image Carrie selected she stands powerfully under the kitchen lamp with her hands placed firmly on the table and a direct look that seems to imply she is standing her ground. In addition, Carrie used a photograph of the Hindu god Ganesha (Figure 7) from the Cleveland Museum of Art to document her experience of feminine spirituality at the museum. The Ganesha is a male Hindu god with an elephant head and four arms. Carrie’s inclusion of the Ganesha is meaningful as the deity is a symbol of success, learning, and destroyer of obstacles (Das, 2017). In Carrie’s photograph of the Ganesha the deity is pictured in black and white, against a tapestry with an authority that gazes at the camera and light reflecting from above. Carrie used the hashtags #cmwexperience, #appropriation, and #instanarrative to voice her experience of Weem’s work, art appropriation, and narrative through Instagram. By using the hashtag appropriation Carrie notes that she is creating her own meaning
through her photograph of a pre-existing artwork. Carrie’s Weems’ photographic series demonstrates her reverence towards Weems, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Ganesha. Through this series Carrie is illustrating the respect and connection she feels for Weems’ work as a depiction of female strength and respect for the museum as a site of culture. Carrie is also posting images that convey positive notions about gender, and empowerment through her inclusion of Weems’ strong body language in her kitchen table photograph.

*Figure 5. An exterior photograph of the Cleveland Museum of Art.*
In Figure 8 an adolescent girl is pictured dancing as part of a female dance troop in front of a crowd that is pictured behind the girl. In Carrie’s photograph the girl’s hands are raised in celebration as is the hands of the woman behind her. A large red scarf is tied to the girl’s left wrist and the dancers are dressed in red tops and yellow bottoms, joyful colors that add to the
image of a celebratory dance. The girl’s head is adorned with flowers and leaves which blends into the green foliage pictured behind her. The colors are saturated and it appears Carrie is using the Lo-Fi filter, the same filter used in Figure 3. Carrie was inspired by the power and venerability of the girl’s dance. Like the Weems’ series that references female empowerment Carrie constructed this image to celebrate the girl’s expressive enjoyment of the dance. In this photograph Carrie is again referencing gender and empowerment through the body language of the girl, celebratory dance, and the choice of Lo-fi filter that uses a darkened background to create a nostalgic feeling. The image is also optimistic through the expression of the girl dancers and the bright red and yellow colors pictured against the sunlight. The nostalgic feeling is emphasized through the darker background colors that reference the feel of 35 millimeter film. The active physical expression of the girl and bright sunlight speaks of optimism for the future.

Figure 8. An image of women dancing that references Carrie’s thoughts on gender.
With Figure 8 Carrie commented that “she thought about gender when taking this photograph” as she felt inspired by the girl and female dance troop. In the image’s comments, I commented “Great photo!” and Carrie responded that she found the dance troop to be empowered and vulnerable with their hearts wide open. In Figure 8’s comments Carrie also referenced our case study interview conversation that inspired her reflection on gender. To Carrie the image of the girl dancing is feminist through her empowered body gestures and shared experiences with other women. Carrie further reflected on how she feels like it is to be a woman today:

    I feel like the connection is about women and our relationships as we help each other when dealing with others who repress you or disrespect you I want to think about all the strength, courage, and integrity that we have for ourselves and share it with my friends to build each other up, as a lot of the world wants to tear each other down.

From my interview with Carrie in 2013 it is clear that Instagram is a positive site for her to comment on her feelings about feminism and express the beauty she sees in nature and daily life. Figure 9 is an image of a morning snowfall at sunrise at the school where she teaches. I commented on Carrie’s Instagram feed that I found the image to be “so quiet and beautiful.” Figure 9 represents the natural world and Carrie’s documentation of her daily life as an art educator. Here she is taking a photograph of a winter sunrise with the school’s snow covered picnic tables in the foreground. The colored light from the sunrise is visible in the blue colored snow and the smooth snowy covered tables remind the viewer that it is morning and students have yet to arrive in school. Carrie comments “Love how the light changes every few mins in the morning” and this image exemplifies her relationship with photography, nature, light, and education. Figure 9 demonstrates the reverence Carrie feels towards nature and art education.
The Lo-fi filter added contrast to the light, a dark mood that enhanced the morning shadows, and a nostalgic feel that makes the viewer re-examine the snow and the picnic tables. Here the contrast between the yellow lighting of the sky and dark tones of the filter references the feel of 35 millimeter film creating a mood of nostalgia. The light from the sky highlights the picnic tables and snow that are the focus of the picture. It also connotes a school yard which often invokes nostalgia for simpler times. Furthermore, Carrie is expressing her reverence for nature and art education by photographing this subject matter.

Figure 9. An image of an early morning snowfall from school.

Carrie creates images on Instagram organically as her life and day progresses. She stated, “Essentially, I’m just going to go with my day and see where it goes. I feel weird if I don’t take a picture every day because the pictures are not for anyone but me and it makes me feel better to take photographs.”

My second telephone interview with Carrie took place on September 13, 2014. In this conversation Carrie again reflected on Instagram and its connection to her life. We talked for
thirty minutes over the phone and I recorded and transcribed our conversation. Over the last year Carrie’s Instagram photography has been more focused on the natural world surrounding her life and inner spirit. Carrie observed:

   My Instagram profile is a really good reflection of how connected I am to my spirit. Instagram is a self-reflection tool as it is always about my inner-self and the workings of my mind. Since I’ve moved to this location I’ve become more connected to Lake Erie as I work near the lake and live on the lake. Instagram is not so much about my professional life as a way to help negotiate my sense of self. It’s a tool to express how I’m feeling in a very abstract way as the last few months have been a challenge.

In comparison to her use of Facebook Carrie finds her work on Instagram to be more immediate and “a more authentic reflection of what my daily life is.” She finds Instagram to be “more of a genuine picture of who I am in real life over Facebook that is more of an example of my edited, projected self.” Through this statement Carrie is implying that she feels more comfortable expressing her online identity on Instagram as she has found it to be a supportive community in comparison to Facebook where users can be more judgmental of content that other users post. Carrie finds empowerment though her interactions in Instagram which she finds to be a more positive experience than Facebook. Carrie has stated that because users can only like images on Instagram it is a more encouraging space that promotes a positive affirmative culture.

Furthermore, Carrie uses Instagram as the main venue for her photography and a medium to connect with professional photographers like Cheryl Koralik, Jorge Columbo, and Ami Vitale. Instagram has also allowed Carrie to stay connected to former students. “My former students at
my old school always wanted to follow me on Instagram and I reached out to students that I would be able to stay connected to help them to express to their full potential.”

Figure 10. An image of an art work from one of her students.

In Figure 10 Carrie commented on her Instagram photo “I feel so honored that I get to hold such precious treasures in my hands.” Figure 10 is a reference to Carrie’s attitude towards art education and how much she enjoys working with students and interacting with their artwork. This image was constructed to demonstrate Carrie’s art education practice and daily life in education. The photograph depicts Carrie holding a small clay sculpture in her hand. The sculpture appears to be of an animal or figure with a smiling face, torso, legs, and no arms. Rows of brightly colored painted clay bowls are pictured in the background and we can assume that Carrie is teaching a lesson on ceramics and preparing her students to paint their sculptures. This image is significant as it references Carrie’s daily life and experiences as an art educator. The saturated colors in the background reference Carrie’s work in art education. The strong colors highlight her hand and warm skin tones in the foreground with the Hefe filter. By highlighting
her hand Carrie is signifying the empowerment she feels as a teacher and her appreciation for her student’s artwork. Here Carrie is demonstrating optimism about art education, its community, and to the student artwork that she oversees. Through this image Carrie is fostering reverence for art education and the innocence and potential we see in children’s artwork. Furthermore, Carrie has also stated that Instagram is a site of reflection on daily life and is also expressive of her concept of self:

Instagram is my public expression of my inner self. It helps me formulate and remember who I am through my photographs. I’ve posted over 3200 photographs and I can look back at some of the earlier stuff and it reminds me of where I’ve been and how far I’ve come. It’s a real reflective tool as well as a contemplative tool.

For Carrie, Instagram is a platform where she can reflect on her photography and consider the meaning present in the narrative of her images. Carrie finds empowerment through her photography and in sharing her images with a like-minded creative Instagram community. By sharing her photography on Instagram Carrie is able to reflect on her daily life and develop relationships with her followers, friends, and a like-minded only community that are supportive of her creative work. Furthermore, Carrie has stated that Instagram has helped her grow as a photographer by engaging with its community of artists and photographers that supported her work. Additionally, Instagram has helped Carrie to stay connected to her former students. Over time the work that she has published on Instagram has grown to reference her deep experiences with nature and mirror her identity as an art educator, yoga teacher, and an individual who advocates for gender empowerment.
Carrie referenced Figure 11 that depicts the Virgin Mary behind a glass case and holding baby Jesus and with a reflection of trees against the glass. This image was edited with the Willow filter and demonstrates Carrie’s perspective of the Virgin Mary and what she feels it is like to be a woman today. The Virgin Mary is pictured behind glass and in an enclosure that mirrors Carrie’s thoughts on the sexist and economic limitations women face in our society. The image references the concepts of gender and empowerment through her enclosed portrait. This image is empowering as we can consider the metaphor of women on display within a glass cage. Here Carrie may be voicing how women are put on display in society and can feel trapped within social expectations. For example women are expected to look attractive, raise children, and meet patriarchal norms where men have authority over women and children. In a patriarchal society men have power in political leadership, moral authority, and social privilege (Wikipedia, 2017e). The Virgin Mary is pictured in black and white and her face is obscured by a vertical line that runs down the center of the image. Carrie has commented “Mother/Goddess Divided/Divine”
and used the hashtags #selfportrait, #illusion, #reflection, #seekingunity, and #sacredfeminine. Carrie’s comment and hashtags speak of her feelings of relating to the Virgin Mary. The image is feminist to her as it references the Virgin Mary and asks viewers to consider the concept of the Sacred Feminine, a belief that everything on earth is born feminine and feminine energy is the source of love, nature, and creation (Hanchin, 2017). In our interview Carrie stated that Figure 11 references female energy and her connection to nature:

> With femininity I see it as seeing my divine feminine. The divine birthright of all women to connect with that deep female energy. So it connects a lot to my own worship of nature and seeing nature as mother earth- that creates all living life. My experience of femininity is deepened through this.

From Carrie’s quote we can see that she uses her Instagram photography to voice a female energy that is deepened through this practice. By publishing her photography on Instagram Carrie is able to connect with nature and a female energy that she shares with her followers. Ultimately for Carrie Instagram is a forum to share her photography, connect with other artists, and reflect on current events, nature, feminism, and daily life. She is aware that the images she posts are edited and will be publically consumed. Through the following statement Carrie is referencing how she enhances her photographs with Instagram filters and is aware that her images will be judged by others on the social network. She admits that she uses Instagram to present a more attractive version of reality to her followers that she feels comfortable with. As Instagram filters enhance reality and photographs are edited, Carrie can present a version of her reality that is different than its truth. She states:

> I am aware that I am presenting a prettier version of self and even in a darker
space that people are not aware of. My Instagram is not public and this expression of self is not fully of what I would share. I also don’t like to take pictures just for a response or for approval. My photography is more an expression of what I want to get out into the world and share.

Like our first interview in 2013 Carrie’s second interview touched on how she used Instagram as a site to express her creativity through the medium of photography and reflect on notions of gender. Additionally, in our 2014 interview Carrie spoke of the positive difference her images can make through education, feminism, and the visual arts.

On June 27th, 2016 Carrie and I had our final interview over the phone that lasted half an hour. Here Carrie described how her photography has evolved over the last two years along with her engagements with Facebook. In February 2016 she closed her original Instagram account and put her energy towards an Instagram account she had started in October 2015 that focuses more on experiences in nature. Like her previous Instagram account her new account is marked private to the public. Carrie decided to close her previous Instagram account as she wanted a fresh platform to present her images of the natural world. However, Carrie allowed me to access both her new and old accounts for the purpose of this study. Carrie’s new account is more about the sacred moment. Carrie explained that over time with Instagram she’s gotten better with editing and seeing photos with a critical eye. “I censor myself a lot less, it feels more like an authentic voice. I’ve started to notice what really speaks to me in a landscape.” Wide open space is something that really appeals to Carrie’s eye due to her love of nature. At first when Instagram added more editing features Carrie resisted this, but now she’s been embracing the new editing features as an understanding of how the editing process is part of the art work. This has been a big shift for Carrie and her work at school as teaching Photoshop has influenced her Instagram
photography. Now she does less filtering and more editing. Carrie prefers her photographs to be edited with Photoshop that allows variance in editing the colors, tone, contrast of an image, and provides the tools for layering and collages to be created. Instagram’s filters and photographic editing tools are more limited in comparison to the transformative tools of Photoshop that can completely change an image’s content. Instagram’s tools can enhance an image with filters and through color, lighting, and tonal adjustments but cannot change the image’s original content.

Carrie finds that what she’s teaching influences her photography. Reflecting on Instagram she has developed a narrative voice especially with the hashtag #carriesfarm that references her natural home environment in Ohio. Photography also serves as a visual diary: “I know I am not physically writing as much as I used to and keeping the photo journal of my life has been really wonderful for my reflection and self-development.”

In my 2016 interview, Carrie self-identified as a feminist and believes women are created equal to men. Although, she finds women are not seen or treated that way as referenced in Figure 12:

Our society is set up to prove that women are not equal and are not the same as men. Through feminism I understand how the different ways that we identify can be problematic in society as it disrupts hierarchies. As a feminist I try to foster empowerment so women can do the best of what we can do. I feel called to be a feminist as part of my mission in life is to help people achieve their power. I’ve learned so much through my feminist mentors on how to awaken this role. Once we unlock this for ourselves we are creating more balance in the world and this is leading to more understanding and revolutions in our own life.
Figure 12. This image was posted in Carrie’s new Instagram account and references how women are portrayed in the media.

Figure 12 is an example of how Carrie uses her photography on social media to comment on feminist issues and civil rights. Her collage references gender empowerment and the connection women have to media. Here Carrie is commenting on the sexual exploitation women can face in other cultures and promoting empowerment by making this injustice public. In this image Carrie has superimposed a photograph of the front page of *The New York Times* over an image of tall trees in the winter. During our interview I asked Carrie to send me this image and she emailed the photograph over Facebook messenger without any comments or hashtags references. The newspaper headline states “ISIS System of Rape Relies on Birth Control” and the black and white image has a dark somber tone through the headline’s content and overlapped leafless trees. During our interview Carrie spoke of how she finds a feminist voice in her photography and Instagram use:

> It’s not what I think about when taking photos although it is part of who I am.
One day in Starbucks I saw an article in the New York Times about women in the Middle East who were raped and I just felt this heavy weight of my privilege. Another day I saw a tree branch that had been stuck by lightning that was splintered. How I juxtaposed the moment was layering together the image of the women and the splintered tree. This was how I coped with this moment and I tried to bring two things together to make new meaning and help me to understand more, especially for women. This image is on the newer Instagram account. After I posted this, women followers who usually don’t say anything on my account spoke up. That’s an example where feminism is present in my work.

As Carrie’s photography and perspective are rooted in feminism she has also found her spirituality has gone deeper into the earth and that nature is a source of wisdom. For a long time, Carrie wondered why we took photographs like the manner in which John Berger (1972) implied and questioned if we are living life for photography or to document the experience. Carrie realized that photography helps her see experiences that she hasn’t noticed before. Furthermore, Carrie feels a deep connection to the earth and for the past year and a half, she has had a traumatic physical injury. Reflecting on this experience Carrie stated:

The earth showed me light when all I could feel in my body was pain. I have a lot of gratitude and awe on how life is presented through nature. And honestly every day that I go out I see something that I did not see through nature. This provides curiosity, wonder, and I have a relationship with the earth to see it grow and change. I’ve realized that this a very integral part of who I am and I can’t see myself disconnected from it.
Carrie’s interest in nature and art education connects to how she likes to see her students grow and change like the earth’s four seasons. It seems she likes to watch her students evolve through images on Instagram similar to how she documents the changing seasons. Carrie is still connected to Yoga but her relationship with the practice is now different. As her body heals, complex poses are not a large part of her repertoire so she does a lot of meditation and chanting. “I’ve been doing more dancing and studying yoga practices through dance which is awesome as there is no prescribed way to dance you just let your body do what it needs to do.”

Carrie doesn’t share the same content that she shares on Instagram as she does on Facebook. Commenting on the 2016 Orlando nightclub shootings, Carrie shared Figure 13, a photograph of a heart of white petals and then painted part of it like a rainbow to symbolize gay rights. “On Facebook normally what I share is a social commentary that would benefit more than just myself through the sharing.” Figure 13 is significant as it references the Orlando nightclub shootings through the painted rainbow colors that signify gay pride. The white petals are arranged in a heart shape and are set against a white background. The rainbow colors in the center of the picture plane are the focus of the image. Two leaves are placed in the center of the heart to signify nature and the color green. The image does not appear to have had a filter applied. However, Carrie has saturated the colors and brightened the lighting on the photograph to emphasize the subject matter. Carrie has commented “Art as therapy and prayer” with the hashtag #carriesfarm, her most used hashtag. Here Carrie is referencing her connection to art education, community, and empowerment as she uses the forum of Instagram to comment on social issues.
Figure 13. An image of a heart made out of petals with rainbow paint in its center to commemorate the victims of the 2016 shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando.

From my analysis of Carrie’s interviews from 2013, 2014, and 2016 I surmise that Instagram is a site to communicate her engagements with and deep connections to daily life, art education, and nature to friends and followers. For Carrie images are posted on Instagram because, “I love taking photos and sharing them. I use it like a journal. It helps me reflect on my life.” In addition, Instagram is a platform for Carrie to engage with friends and connect with other photographic artists within the site’s community. However, Carrie’s engagement with Facebook has become more political with time and she uses it as a platform to make comments on the status of women and social issues such as civil rights. In a conversation we had over Facebook Messenger last September, Carrie stated “I post on social media to share information. I use it as a platform to communicate what's important to me.”
Many of Carrie’s Instagram followers are friends in real life. Carrie prefers to keep her account private and rarely allows people that she doesn’t know to follow her. Some of her Instagram friends are acquaintances and only a few are strangers. I followed up with clarification questions over Facebook Messenger primarily during the summer of 2016 in order to probe further inquiry and clarify details. In our conversation over Facebook Messenger Carrie stated: The strangers have become online friends. One woman and I exchanged numbers and text. A German woman and I decided we need to meet some day in real life. And I actually bumped into two IG friends while we were both at the lake taking pictures. One of my friends makes these awesome mandalas out of natural objects. I'm really inspired by those. I also really love Cheryl Koliak's photography of Grand Bassam. I think I inspire a lot of people. They tell me I do. And I see some of my visual voice echoed in some of my follower’s pictures.

This is empowerment of self through imitation by others, because as the old adage goes, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Here Carrie is feeling empowerment as her work is being validated through its inspiration of her followers. This is demonstrating her leadership and connection to her online community. Like Lauren, Carrie maintains an online relationship with many of her followers and has made friends in real life through Instagram. Such friendships are formed as her followers and people she follows on Instagram are sharing images of their own daily life which others can relate to and comment on. Carrie follows 292 users on Instagram. The frequency of her interactions is subjective and occur almost daily.

I comment probably almost every day on one or two images. I receive comments of appreciation of beauty like “wow” “Awesome” and
sometimes solidarity like “I feel you” or something like that. Or sometimes it’s like, “I was reading about…” and it’s based on the subject matter in the comment or the photo. Like a conversation.

Responses to Carrie’s comments on Instagram includes words of thanks and positive conversation. For example, a user wrote “Love him” beside an image Carrie had posted on the artist Andy Goldsworthy. Carrie comments on “a handful” of users regularly and comments on the users she follows almost daily. Most of her comments are positive and reflect statements that she would use in real life such as “Like wow that’s beautiful. I like the way you did this. This makes me think of… Stuff like that.”

Carrie considers herself to be a feminist. She promotes feminist teaching principles in her teaching from “artworks I show to ways I show up in language, dress, behavior, and also my expectations for how my students interact with one another.” Carrie encourages boys to break gender stereotypes and express their authentic self.

For example, my athletic boys sometimes struggle at some point in their art development where they question if they can be athletes and artists because art is sometimes seen as girly outside of the art room. I actually found myself adding more men to my art presentations for this reason. I tend to lean toward women’s art. That’s one example of many. I’m definitely not perfect and always reflecting on how I can become a better teacher.
Carrie teaches kindergarten to Grade 8 and only sees some of her students for thirty minutes each week. In the classroom, she states that she does not overtly voice her identity as a feminist educator but it is an ever present aspect of her teaching:

I don’t have time to proclaim who I am as a feminist educator. I just do it. You know what I mean? It’s just there. Who I am and what I’m about. In interactions, in curriculum choices, in consequences, in rewards, modeling, classroom management, as a colleague. In every way as much as I can within the seams of my knowing. I know examples help so here’s one: I have a lot of young women that seek me out to express their emotions, ideas, family situations, etc. Some of them are my students, some are my helpers. I have an 8th grade student (I teach K-4 and 8th this year) who is doing her work on her fear of getting fat. We talked a lot one on one about the pressures of looking a certain way as a young woman. There really aren’t any answers for her, but we talked about how messed up that is. Where does it come from? Why do we feel that? I just helped her name the gender bias really. And reminded her no matter what is happening outside of her there is a treasure inside that matters to the world. I told her what I see in her. Her strength and intelligence and humor and kindness.

This interview excerpt demonstrates Carrie’s connections with her students and her optimistic belief that she can help them feel empowered through her teaching and art education. By acting as an empathetic leader, Carrie believes that her students feel they can approach her with real concerns on gender bias and other complex human issues. Here Carrie is using her position to make a positive difference in her small part of the world—her classroom. Additionally, Carrie
finds that feminism is present in her relationships with her colleagues. She collaborates with others and team teaches in two grades. For Carrie collaboration between colleagues is bringing the richness of feminist practice to reality and transforming her school and district. Carrie enjoys working hard at her teaching as she gets to bring her feminist philosophy into action.

**Lauren Case study**

Lauren is a woman in her sixties who worked as an educator and musical performance artist for much of her life. My interviews with Lauren had a different tone than with Carrie. Lauren would mostly describe her life and activities in a succinct matter-of-fact way while Carrie spent more time answering questions in greater detail. Born in England, Lauren immigrated to British Columbia, Canada in the 1980s with her husband and family. Taking a break from teaching to raise her three children, Lauren had a career as a children’s performer before returning to teaching in the 1990s. In 2013 Lauren took a year’s leave from teaching to travel around the world for seven months. She retired from teaching in 2014 and began to build a cob house on Mayne Island in British Columbia in 2016.

My first interview with Lauren happened through Skype on November 18, 2013. To start our conversation Lauren described her background in education and music. In the 1960s she attained an education degree from the North Riding College of Education in Scarborough that was affiliated to Leeds University. Lauren graduated from Leeds University in 1971. From 1971 to 1973 she taught kindergarten at Downham Infant School in Norfolk, England. During this point in her life she met her now ex-husband Colin and got married in 1972. In 1974 Lauren taught first grade at Clackclose Community Primary School until 1976 when she had her eldest daughter. Later in the 1980s Lauren moved to Canada and with her three children and took a break from teaching to raise her family. As a young parent living in Maple Ridge, British
Columbia, Lauren saw parents taking their children to McDonalds for birthday parties and started doing children’s entertainment and music programs for Maple Ridge Parks and Recreation.

In 1989 Lauren returned to teaching after her three children were grown and she moved back to England with her family. She taught elementary education at East Winch Church of England Primary School, in Norfolk. Lauren upgraded her teaching certification in 1992 when she returned to Canada and got an Education degree from Simon Fraser University. Lauren returned to full time teaching in 1996 and started doing music with special needs students. Lauren taught special needs education in the Maple Ridge School District from 1996-2013, officially retiring at the end of 2013. Lauren started her Master’s in Education degree at Simon Fraser University in 2010 but withdrew from her studies after her mother died in 2014. Her uncompleted action-research Master thesis examined different types of learning through hand clapping games and how they impact children’s development. In December 2013 Lauren embarked on a 7-month trip around the world traveling by herself to France, Italy, Greece, Bali, and Hawaii.

Like Carrie, Lauren’s Instagram photography also focuses on the natural world. However, her images tell the narrative of her travels in Europe and Asia and focus on interactions with other global travelers. As of October 1, 2015 Lauren had published 1252 images on Instagram, with 1334 followers, and was following 2243 Instagram profiles. I sampled one out of every 25 images for a total of 50 images.

The subject matter of Lauren’s Instagram photographs is her varied environment. Subjects range from a garden in Canada, her hotel room in France, to grandchildren at Disneyland. The location of Lauren’s photographs are sites in different parts of the world where
she has traveled or lived. She sold her house in 2013 and traveled the world for seven months visiting much of Europe and Asia. Upon returning home Lauren’s images focus on rebuilding her life in Canada and documenting the construction of her cob house on Mayne Island. Europe and Asia at 34% were the most common locations of her photographs followed by her home in British Columbia, Canada at 28%. Examples of image locations include: The Fraser River, BC, Vancouver Island, Maple Ridge, BC, Bristol, England, Hawaii, and Bali, Indonesia. Lauren posted fifteen-second video narratives to Instagram and created the “Stand and Witness” series where she begins the film at her feet and pans the camera upwards to reveal her location that can vary from British Columbia to her travels in Europe.

Travel is a favorite subject of Laurens at 46% followed by nature at 44%. Her “Stand and Witness” video series accounted for 16% of her subject matter followed by acrylic painting that she posted on Instagram at 6%. Lauren’s images are generally framed through landscape 26%, a snapshot composition 26%, a focus on architecture 18%, a video16%, or close up macro compositions 6%. Lauren’s images are realistic with aesthetic qualities that record the world she is experiencing around her. Color and contrast are strong characteristics of her photography. Eight percent of Lauren’s images were processed using the Snapseed image editing application to saturate colors and increase contrast. Like Carrie who also photographed nature, Lauren’s images used similar Instagram filters with Hefe 16% and Lo-fi 14% selected frequently to enhance lighting, color, and contrast. However, most of Lauren’s filters were unknown at 40%.

Lauren is a popular Instagrammer and her posts receive an average of 100 likes per image with many comments and dialogue exchanges between followers. In comparison to Carrie who has 281 followers, and myself with 467, Lauren has over 1334 followers. Lauren had comments added to 39 out of the 50 Instagram images sampled, Carrie had a total of 19 images with
comments, and I had 9 photographs with comments added. Lauren engages in conversations with her followers in comments and she often thanks them for their support of her photography. Like Carrie and me, Lauren uses hashtags but with more frequency. Examples include: Painted all afternoon yesterday. Feeling the love 😊 #love, #valentines, #painting, #art. Ship at #sunset, #hawaii, #oahu, #honolulu, #beauty.

Lauren became involved in digital media through music. She had an indie record label and released the album “Two Tall Women” with her daughter Beth in 2003. They toured around Scotland and England, getting reviews from folk music blogs such as Rambler. At that time Lauren released her own press-packages and got on to ReverbNation.com, a big music-networking site.

Lauren has always been seeking ways to gain followers online, originally through MySpace or in developing her own website, http://www.Laurencarrmusic.com. In 2002 she used online networking to develop different projects such as “Music for Coffee Beings”, an album that was distributed in coffee shops in the Canada and the USA that featured a variety of performance artists. Two Tall Women did have one song featured in the 2004 “Music for Coffee Beings” compilation. Lauren performed vocals and was the songwriter, she played guitar, and bouzouki. “Music for Coffee Beings” wasn’t for sale, it was a compilation album sent to coffee shops across Canada for them to play with a write up about the artists, a picture, and their contact information. From there she got into blogging and used Instagram accounts and Facebook pages to promote her creative work. Lauren started Instagram in 2013 to promote her Mybeautifullife blog and as a means of tracking her travels.

As a woman working in the field of education and music Lauren considers herself to be a feminist and stated:
I proactively promote women and my record label promotes women as it’s such a male dominated field. I have no problem with men but I guess I am a feminist as I always hear men saying, “What’s your problem you just perform with other women?” And I don’t just perform with other women. Look at the Beatles you never hear of an all-male band but you have all women bands. I try not to label my bands all women but I do promote them as I think they need this. This is what the albums and Violet Femmes blog is about. It’s not that I’m not promoting men it’s just that I’m dedicating my space to women.

Lauren views the music business as being dominated by men. “I’ve seen myself being submissive towards men and had to struggle to get my needs met when it comes to using studio time that I’m paying for without being seen as being a bitch.” She further elaborates that “It’s a struggle within the industry and is an interesting dynamic. Men might communicate their needs more directly in the studio and women have to be pushed to voice what they want.”

Lauren googled how to use Instagram and how to gain followers through articles on the internet and social media blogs. An avid social media user Lauren uses Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Tumbler to share her music. She explains:

I can be a bit obsessive with Instagram but with Twitter I don’t use the Tweet deck and I am not as active as I am on other social media platforms. I know that Twitter does attract a lot of interest, as I would see my digital sales on iTunes go up whenever I tweeted or get hits for my videos on YouTube for kids on my LaurenelaSunshine TV channel and thus make advertising income. I have Twitter, Violet Femmes, Laurenela_Sunshine, and Lauren_carr accounts.
On YouTube I have a Lauren’s Cob house and Lauren Sunshine TV.

**Figure 14.** An example of Lauren’s early photography that documented her life in rural Canada. In this image she comments “Down on the farm. Fraser Valley beauty” and her image has six likes. Lauren did not request to have her Instagram username removed from images.

**Figure 15.** A photograph of Stanley Park in Vancouver. This image has 149 likes and 21 comments. There are three weeks between Figure 26 and Figure 27 and Lauren appears to be engaging with Instagram more directly by commenting on the photographs of others and in dialogue with her followers.
In contrast to her work on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube that promoted her music, Lauren noticed that the pictures of her natural environment on Instagram would get a response (see Figures 15 and 16). Figure 14 is an example of Lauren’s early work on Instagram. The image is a photograph of her environment in British Columbia and she commented “Down on the farm Fraser Valley beauty and used the hashtags #blackberrylanebandb, #agassiz, #dawn, #farmland, #fraservalley, #mybeautifullife. The subject matter depicts a rural field with mountains in the background. The image is framed with the Nashville filter and blue green colors are emphasized. This image demonstrates reverence for nature and connection to Canada. Here Lauren is sharing an image of her local landscape with her followers and using hashtags to describe its pastoral Canadian origin. Three weeks later Lauren posted Figure 15, an image taken in Staley Park in Vancouver. Figure 18 is a photograph of a tree lined pathway with the sun positioned in the center of the photograph surrounded by a lush frame of green trees. The green trees, light, and winding pathway frame two small figures in the center of the image and the afternoon light is reflected on the manicured lawn on the image’s left side. Lauren commented on the image with hashtags stating “The #pathway leading to #SecondBeach. #Vancouver, #BC, #igrsbc, instaideaz, #igersvancouver, #nature, #beauty, #trails, #tree_captures, #sky, #forests, #parks, #peace, #pictureoftheday, #photowall.” In comparison to Figure 14 that had no user comments and five likes, Figure 15 had one-hundred-and-forty-nine likes and twenty-one comments. The user comments complimented Lauren on her photography stating “Magical!”, “I have not been there for many years. It still looks beautiful!”, and “Beautiful.” Figure 14 and 15 are interesting images to compare as we can see how quickly Lauren’s engagement with Instagram had grown in just three weeks. Both images are of nature and have a strong contrast with black tones emphasized through filters. Figure 14 uses the Nashville filter that promotes the blue tones of the
sky and shadows reflected in the field. Figure 15 uses the Hefe filter to enhance contrasts and yellow tones. The yellow tones increase the luminosity of the light and enhance the saturated green color of nature. Through her selection of filters Lauren is emphasizing the natural beauty of the landscape and highlighting the contrast of light with nature. By documenting the beauty of the natural world around her and publishing on Instagram, Lauren is using the site as forum to express her reverence for her local Canadian environment to others. She explained her philosophy of taking pictures on Instagram:

When I see pictures around the world on Instagram of other cultures or other ways of dressing it makes me value my own. I see these trees and leaves every day and take for granted their beauty. I’ve always been very visual and have been taking these kinds of pictures but now have a platform. My iPhone camera gives me the ability to tap into the beauty of the world. The Stand and Witness video series on Instagram is something that I created as I want to record my encounters when I am traveling around Europe (see Figure 16).
Figure 16. An example of Lauren’s “Stand and Witness” video series in Mission, BC, Canada. In this video series Lauren begins filming at her feet and then pans the camera up to reveal the world around her. In this video we see the lush green trees and field of Mission, BC.

Lauren’s “Stand and Witness” video series (Figure 16) started in British Columbia in 2013. At the start of each video Lauren starts to film at her feet and then pans the camera upwards to show the world around her. Figure 16 is an example of her first “Stand and Witness” post where Lauren pans upwards to reveal a child’s playground and a green soccer field surrounded by fall foliage. Here Lauren is using the video medium to communicate her daily life and environment to other users. Lauren commented “#standandwitness Wednesday October 16th, 2013. Outside my grandchildren’s elementary school. 9:30am #playground, #fall, #tree_captures, #worldcaptures. Twenty-one users comment on Lauren’s photograph and leave complimentary comments like “Very niccce video… !!!”, “Lovely!”, and “Great”. Here Lauren is again documenting her reverence for nature and connection to her online community through the 21 comments posted on her video and engagements with her followers.

Lauren interacts with her followers through comments posted on images and states that she is wearing comfortable shoes and not boots outside. Lauren continued her “Stand and
Witness” series during her travels in Europe where the camera would pan upwards from her feet to reveal the architecture and culture around her. She found that she has experienced many “authentic connections through Instagram more so than I do on Facebook. Facebook seems very generalized but Instagram has a more authentic response to the user’s art.” For Lauren, Instagram is visual media alone. The site is presented as art photographs and pictures that resonates with the viewer visually. She explains:

With Facebook you come across rants and judgement comments in your news feed and stuff like that. You don’t find those kinds of connections happening on Instagram. Facebook is getting more and more judgmental around, food, behavior, and all kinds of things.

Lauren has many followers on Instagram, over 1432. She has achieved a large number of followers on Instagram by consistently interacting with other Instagram users. Lauren explained, “I do have relationships with the followers in that I know them through photography and we comment on each other’s pictures all the time.” Like Carrie who found the Instagram community more meaningful than Facebook, Lauren engages in “conversations about images and culture on Instagram that you don’t have on Facebook.”
Figure 17. A photograph of a field with trees in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. This photograph uses strong contrasts and colors and was edited using the Snapseed app.

Furthermore, Lauren used Instagram to learn about art-making and Instagram’s photographic editing tools like Noir Photo, Snapseed (see Figure 17), and TangledFX. Figure 17 is an image of a row of trees in a field in the Fraser Valley. The sky and clouds make up two thirds of the picture plane with the mountains, field and trees visible in the lower third of the photograph. The colors are saturated and have a high contrast. Lauren comments “Another #fraservalley edit with #Snapseed.” The image has twenty-one comments with users calling her photograph “Wonderful”, “Very beautiful!”, and “Nice shot.” With Figure 17 Lauren is communicating her daily life and experiments with Snapseed to viewers. Her photograph conveys ideas of reverence and stewardship as Lauren is demonstrating her respect for the landscape around her and connection to her online community. Lauren started experimenting with different photo editing applications in 2013 and Carrie also posted edited images after 2015. While Lauren and Carrie are both educators they use the Instagram app differently. Lauren documents her family, travels, home building, and business endeavors. Carrie focuses on nature, yoga, daily life, and art education.
Figure 18. An image from Lauren’s global travels in Marseille, France that demonstrates how she documents the city and interacts with her followers.

Figure 19. A photograph of the colorful houses of Burano, Italy from Lauren’s travels. This photograph has saturated colors that is typical of Lauren’s photography.
On November 9th 2014 I interviewed Lauren over the phone and discussed how her life had changed over the previous year. In this interview Lauren described the year she spent travelling from December the 2013 to the end of September of 2014. Figure 18 is an image from Lauren’s travels in Marseille, France. Here Lauren captures a view of architecture leading through the town and view of a castle on top of a hill. The colors are not saturated and contains little contrast with the architecture and town the image’s main focus. The filter Sutro is used to add muted earth tones and darkness around the image’s corners to frame the image. The muted tones of the Sutro filter add to the romantic feel of the architecture by darkening the edges of the corners, increasing the highlights of the light reflected on the buildings, and creating a sepia tone that references the yellow color of old photographs and as a result, nostalgia. Lauren comments “Marseille No effects. The view from the station. #railways, #castle, #marseille, #view, #traveling, #pamsbeautifullife. Eleven user comments are visible that compliment Lauren on her photograph stating “Gorgeous!!!”, “So nice”, and “Takes my breath away!” Figure 19 is another image from Lauren’s travels in Burano, Italy. Here Lauren photographs colorful houses in front of a canal. The houses take up much of the composition and we see boats above the water in the canal. The bright blue, red, green, and yellow houses are remarkable for their distinct saturated colors and the image has a strong contrast that compares the vibrant colors of the houses to the canal, and white sky above. Lauren comments “Went to Burano today, an island famous for its colorful houses. It takes over an hour to get there and two ferries. A beautiful trip on a sunny day, but the ferry was so crowded on the return journey 😊 #Burano, #color, #architecture, #travelblog, #mybeautifullife. There are thirteen comments on the image with users complimenting the image stating “Lovely”, “Wow this is so amazing”, and “The colors make me smile.” The colors of the image are saturated using the filter Lofi to promote the contrast of
natural light, the primary colors of the houses, and dark shadows. Figure 18 and Figure 19 are examples of Lauren’s global journey in the winter of 2013 and spring of 2014. She published images of her travels to document her experiences and communicate with the Instagram community that she engaged with. The photographs of Lauren’s travels would fit in with the categories of connections, optimism, and empowerment as she described feeling internal power as a result of her travels and depicted the world as a positive environment. Her images captured the beauty of the world and her experiences of how she viewed her surroundings. The filters Lauren used saturated colors, enhanced lighting, and showed her environment as a nostalgic and romantic place. Like her earlier images of the natural landscape of British Columbia, Lauren’s images of her travels capture her daily life and the culture of the world around her. Describing her journey, Lauren recounted the reverence she feels towards the world through her travels as such:

The main part of the planned journey was until the middle of June 2014 and during that time I was traveling alone. This felt right, I didn’t get lonely at all, and I really enjoyed the experience. For this journey I didn’t plan where I was going to be, research where I was going to be, or have specific places I wanted to visit. It was spontaneous travel “spontaneous tourism” is what I call it. I was moved to tears so many times by how beautiful our world is and the people in it. It was a very positive experience and just fantastic through the people that I met. And it was very uplifting. When I returned in September my Mom got sick and passed away and then I heard that my ex-husband Colin had cancer. So now I’m here for my kids and are trying to adjust.
Travel and family are key themes in Lauren’s photography as she navigated between her native England and life in British Columbia, Canada. Lauren’s travel images (see Figures 18 & 19) are significant as many women Instagram users felt inspired by her photography while traveling the world alone in her sixties. In addition, like Carrie, Lauren became friends with several followers on Instagram that she has subsequently met in real life. For instance, Lauren has connected with her Instagram friend Peter, a first nations artist in Mission, British Columbia. She has another Instagram friend, Beatrice, who lives in Florence and showed her parts of Florence that she would not have normally seen when she was visiting Italy in 2013. There are other online friends that Lauren communicates with but that she hasn’t met in person as they are located all over the world. Lauren estimates that there are 20-30 individuals that she has an ongoing connection with. Through Instagram she has forged friendships and connection to others all over the world. Lauren compares her relationships with the people she communicates with online as like having pen pals that she’s gotten to know as people as much as she can.

A lot of information from Lauren’s travels came from Instagram connections. “When traveling I was alone but I didn’t feel alone because of social media.” Lauren explained “my Instagram name is Laurensbeautifullife and these experiences make me realize that they are all part of my beautiful life. I consciously try and post beautiful things on Instagram with images of nature.” However, since returning from her travels Lauren’s relationship with Instagram followers has changed as she is more focused on building her cob house over exploring the world. Lauren finds “I still use Instagram to develop relationships with people that follow me. I found the people I follow are relevant and I try to focus on people that resonate with me.” For instance, there are other people that Lauren connected with through cob building who follow her because of the hashtag #cobbuilding.
Lauren hashtags her Instagram photographs to gain followers when her images are shared on Twitter. Her most used hashtags are #mybeautifullife, #Laurens cobhouse, #standandwitness, #joy, #beauty, #travelblog, #iphoneonly, #fun, #travelling, #globaligers, #culture, #womantraveler, #mayneisland, and #naturalbuilding. Lauren found her hashtags would change as her life changed. For example, she would search hashtags when she was travelling for other female travelers through the hashtag #womantraveler. This is how she would build relationships with other users followers. More recent hashtags focus on the building of her #cobhouse while in 2013-2014 Lauren’s hashtag’s focused on travel.

Lauren does not post many of her Instagram images on Facebook as she finds Instagram to be about constructing a narrative. Her Instagram feed is a place where she can connect with others all over the world and foster relationships through her photography:

My Instagram is about interesting places and images. It’s like storytelling and the artistry of the image and connecting with different people in the world. I know how different individuals will respond to my narratives and I have conversations with other like-minded individuals on Instagram.

As revealed in our earlier conversation in 2013, Lauren continued to make friends through Instagram and found “you have to connect with the picture and the person first.” Lauren’s Instagram connections were fostered through shared interests in traveling, family, and nature. Her main use of Facebook was in maintaining personal connections with friends and promoting her My Beautiful Life blog. Lauren’s use of Instagram is not connected to her teaching. However, Lauren finds that Instagram reflects her authentic self. “People have an expectation of what they will see when they go to my Instagram profile. They see me as open, positive, and interested in beautiful images, with unique perspectives on things.” Lauren stated
that she unfollows people with ugly images, as love, beauty, opportunity, and openness is true to who she is. Over the summer Lauren was on Facebook and saw an old friend writing harsh words about the 2014 British Columbia teachers’ strike. Lauren accepted this point of view and communicated this to her friend instead of blocking her profile as Lauren believed that positive communication was more affirmative. She finds this to be a life lesson on how to respond to people. Lauren does not block individuals who post controversial material on Facebook but she will block images or posts that are distressing. Like her friend Jill who posts distressing images about animal abuse on Facebook. Lauren chose to hide this image on Facebook and hopes the Facebook algorithm does not include similar images in her feed.

Lauren is very conscious of gender in media but does not consciously post about feminism with Instagram stating “I don’t think about that with my Instagram.” However, Lauren finds “from a feminist perspective I think Instagram is a very level playing field, as through my images I became a role model to a lot of women who traveled alone. If I can do it anyone can.” In 2013 and 2014 Lauren gained more followers and made friends with individuals online and in real life that she connected with on Instagram. Lauren also found herself to be viewed as a role model for other women as she explored the world by herself which inspired her followers. She knows a couple who were inspired to travel the world from her photographs and a Facebook friend used her experience as motivation to buy a motorcycle to explore around Europe. Lauren has had friends say to her “you don’t realize how inspiring it is for people to see a woman traveling and building a house, doing things on her own.” Lauren has a Facebook friend who is now a teacher in Saudi Arabia doesn’t have the freedom to drive. Lauren is grateful for her freedom and feels blessed to live in a country where she can do what she wants to do and can
drive but is sad to think of people that can’t do that. Lauren believes that through social media we are connecting with more people and making friends with individuals from other horizons.

Lauren’s level of activity on Instagram has fluctuated since she first joined in August 2013. There were periods when she was a very active member and months have gone by when she hasn’t used Instagram at all. Lauren follows 2404 accounts and averages around ten interactions per week, commenting on users’ Instagram feeds about five to twelve times a week. Lauren usually receives comments relating directly to a posted image. She states:

For example I posted an image of the pumpkin carved to resemble Donald Trump that was done by my son-in-law. People commented on how much the pumpkin resembled Trump, or how they thought it was funny, or how they liked it and it made them laugh. Other comments might be how beautiful the photo is or wishing me luck on the progress of my house, how much they like my house. How very interested in natural building and want to know more.

Encouraging comments from others.

When Lauren comments on someone else’s Instagram she often does not receive a response.

When I asked Lauren about the comments she makes she told me that she regularly comments on one-hundred to two-hundred users in total as their images are posted. However, there are some users that always comment on her images and she always comments on theirs. Here she describes in more detail her comment interactions:

Sometimes when I comment I get a thank you or are you're welcome. Sometimes when I comment on a personal level with someone we will engage in a conversation around personal healing or our philosophy on life. Sometimes comments involve questions and they will answer my questions. Sometimes
people ask where I live and we discuss how nice it would be to meet up in
the future. My comments very according to the type of account my friends
have. Sometimes it will be to encourage others in their endeavors.
Sometimes it will be admiring the quality of their visual photos. Sometimes it
will be an expression that connects to something they are trying to do with
their life, either personal growth, or new projects, or new art works etc.
Sometimes I comment if the image takes my breath away. Short and sweet
'wow'. Most comments and responses are short and concise but sometimes a
conversation can evolve. These latter interactions are less frequent but very
meaningful. Things have really changed in my life over the three years I've
been on Instagram. So obviously sometimes my interactions have been much
more frequent and intense while at other times I've been busy building my
house and really ignoring my Instagram. Also Instagram changed the way that
the feed is shown. Pictures used to appear in the feed in the order they were
posted now there is an algorithm put in place where larger accounts get shown
more frequently. I think this impacts how much interaction I have with some of
my Instagram friends. Sort of like Facebook changed things and now if you
have a business page often people who are your friends and followers don't get
to see your posts unless you advertise and pay money.

From Lauren’s words it is clear that like Carrie she uses comments to communicate with
Instagram users on a personal level. Instagram is a site for Lauren and Carrie to foster connection
with others through photography. In addition, Lauren’s comments vary depending on the image
that is posted and her relationship with the user. As she has pointed out her life and engagements
with Instagram has changed over the last three years with less frequent interactions and the focus on building her cob house.

On July 18th 2016 I had my third and final interview with Lauren over the phone. Lauren reflected on her photography and described her recent activity that was focused on building a cob house on Mayne Island, British Columbia. She stated “My photography is not a focus as the house is where I’m placing my energy at the moment.” Lauren’s is presently focused on her Etsy shops that sell paintings and fiber art. She explains “I started three Etsy shops after my Mom and ex-husband Colin died… My Instagram and Twitter accounts are more business focused than personal focused with photographs, paintings, and fiber art.”

![Figure 20](image)

*Figure 20.* An acrylic painting with the word “Love” painted in an overlapping pattern. Lauren posts images of her paintings on Instagram that she sells on through Etsy.
**Figure 21.** An example of Lauren’s Beautiful Life Words of Quotes artwork that sells on Etsy.

**Figure 22.** A photograph of Lauren’s fiber art that is sold on her Etsy shop Carroway Crochet.

Figures 20, 21, and 22 are examples of Lauren’s artwork that she sells on her Etsy shops. Figure 20 is an image of an acrylic painting with the word “Love” painted repeatedly in red and black against a pink background. Some words have a heart instead of the letter “O” and the color yellow is visible in patches in the mid and lower composition. Lauren comments “Painted all
afternoon yesterday. Feeling the love 😊 #love, #valentines, #painting, #art. Two users compliment Lauren on her painting and she thanks them in comments. Lauren’s motivation for publishing Figure 20 was to communicate her artwork with her followers. Figure 21 is a digital image that Lauren composed with the quote “I cherish the beauty in myself and others. Deepak Chopra”. The image has a soft pastel background with blue, pink, and violet colors. The quote is visible in the upper composition in maroon letters. Lauren comments “A sunny day and time for meditation. Here was today’s Centering thought. There are no hashtags added and Lauren interacts with her followers who compliment her on the image and the meaning of the quote stating “Mayne is so healing, blessed you are to be there on this beautiful day”, “Good one”, and “Beautiful quote”. Figure 22 is a photograph of Lauren’s fiber art. Here we see an image of where with an unfinished tapestry. The tapestry has a pink heart made out of a thick wool in its center and white, gray, and pink stripes have been woven into its bottom half. There is a strong linear element to the composition with the yarn from the loom and the fringe both creating vertical lines that lead the eye towards the image’s top, bottom, and center heart. The image does not appear to have a filter. Lauren writes “I’ve been asked to share my #workinprogress and thank you @hookandweaveco for sharing your work so generously. #weavingloom.” Six comments are listed where Lauren is complimented by users and she thanks them “Looks beautiful!!! Love the pattern and colors!” , “Cute”, and “You are so multi-talented!!!.” Lauren’s images and comments convey optimism and leadership in her Etsy businesses and the building of her cobb house. These images and comments also convey a reverence for nature in their respect for natural materials. As her work references her life as an empowered single woman she is also very connected to her Instagram community. Here Lauren is publishing images of her artwork on Instagram to share her craft endeavors with others and foster relationships with a supportive
online community. Through publishing Figure 20, Figure 21, and Figure 22 Lauren is expressing her creative pursuits to the Instagram community. Like Carrie, Lauren’s images reference her daily life and engagements with the visual arts.

Figure 23. A photograph of the building of Lauren’s cob house. Here we can see the wall constructed with glass bottles that is being built in her bathroom.

Figure 23 is a photograph of the interior of Lauren’s cob house that is being built with glass bottles around a cob wall. Lauren composed this image to communicate the building progress at her cob house. The blue and green glass bottles in the wall are the center of the composition and provide a colorful contrast to the brown cob wall and wood ceiling that is under construction. There is a lot of overexposed natural light visible from the outside with saturated colors, and a high contrast. Lauren comments “The bottle wall going up in my bathroom ☺ #cobhouses, #naturalbuilding, #pamscobhouse, #bottlewall. Three comments are added with two users complimenting Lauren “Wow Pam, great ideas!”, “Very interesting ☺”, and Lauren responding “thanks Lisa”. The image’s light and yellow tones appear to be enhanced with the Valencia filter that softens dark colors and lightens earth tones. The light yellow tones of the
Valencia filter enhance the contrasting colors of the earth, the orange tones of the wood, and the blue colors of the bottle. The filter adds a nostalgic feel with the yellow tones that reference the sunlight outside that is illuminating the earth, wood, and colored bottles.

As Lauren’s focus is now on marketing her Etsy shops and documenting the building of her cob house, she finds “I’m no longer thinking about seeing beautiful pictures. Once I move into my house this might change. I’ve abandoned my Master’s thesis as it was too much to handle when my mother and ex-husband Colin died.” Lauren still considers herself to be a feminist and has noticed a lot of women in business supporting each other. “There is a community of women working collaboratively and following one another in Facebook and Instagram. With the online support group Etsy Teams you are in touch with different women of a similar business interest. There are a lot of women supporting women in social media.” Lauren’s life has changed since returning from her global travels. She has retired from teaching and musical performing. However, Lauren is still infused with feminist endeavors. She is having her house build by the Mudgirls, a female building collective.
In the summer of 2016 Lauren had the Mudgirls, a natural building women’s collective, work on her cob house. Figure 24 is a flyer for women to learn about natural building by attending a workshop held at Lauren’s house by the Mudgirls. In the image a woman is seen building a cob house in the upper right part of the composition and a house under construction is visible in the center foreground and upper composition. In the lower composition is a garden under construction with some boots and building supplies visible. Colors are saturated with darker contrasts and yellow tones with the Hefe filter. Text in all caps is superimposed on top of the image stating “MUDGIRLS NATURAL BUILDING WORKSHOP ON MAYNE ISLAND BC, JUNE 20 – JULY 1 2016, CHOOSE 1 OR TWO WEEKS, FOR INFO: MUDGIRLS.WORDPRESS.COM, MOLLSMURPHY@GMAIL.COM.” Lauren comments “Amazing natural building learning opportunity with the famous Mudgirls. You can come for one week or two. Www.mudgirls.wordpress.com”. With her work with the Mudgirls Lauren is referencing leadership, connections, and reverence for the power of women. There are three
comments on the image where Lauren interacts with a user over cob homes explaining how her home will be constructed by the Mudgirls “How cool! Are these straw & mud homes?” “yes Lee it’s my place on Mayne Island. The main floor walls are clay soil, sand straw and water mixed. See my Laurens cob house page on Facebook for lots of pics.” This image was composed to demonstrate the building of a cob house by the Mudgirls and to encourage other women to attend the workshops at Lauren’s house. This image references empowerment and reverence for female industriousness through the learning of construction skills and the building of her cob house, which societally has been most often attributed to males. For Lauren it was very energizing to see women working together and supporting each other. She hosted “The Power for Woman Over Forty” a natural building workshop that the Mudgirls attended. In both workshops Lauren had women approach her about her age as she’s in her 60s and they felt very inspired by her independent travel and building a house as a single woman. Lauren finds “At a certain age women let go of things that hold them back, the urge for approval that young women struggle with.” Lauren’s house is still under construction as fall approaches and is expected to be finished by spring 2017. Through Lauren’s engagement of the Mudgirls building collective, global travels, and Etsy businesses it is clear she is a feminist role model who inspires other women and men through her independent endeavors.

For Lauren the point of being on social media is the broadening of horizons. “I see a lot of Muslim women on Facebook that are living free wonderful lives, a Jew in Israel, another Turkish friend from Milan, and a Chinese friend that I met in Venice.” Lauren believes meeting people from all over the world on social media and learning about their lives is a way to connect. She shares culture, art, and life on social media and feels it is a way of embracing others. Lauren lives on her own and finds social media to be a way of connecting with other people.
I’m lucky that it’s not just superficial stuff. You see friends or friends of friends comment on and say things that are relevant to your life. Social media can be a generous and beautiful space to be in. Just keep away from the people who judge everybody all the time. There are a lot of laughs and humor on social media.

Lauren does not have a television and social media is her news medium. Lauren mentions that she started a business account for Carroway Crochet because she didn’t want to be promoting her products on her personal Instagram account.

Overall, the Instagram photographs shared by Carrie and Lauren contain similar images and themes. However, Lauren’s work is more about connections while Carrie’s references reverence/stewardship of nature. Their photography also speaks of empowerment of women through their daily life as an art educator, Carrie, and entrepreneurial female traveler, Lauren. Both Carrie and Lauren post images that demonstrate their leadership within their communities and optimism for a brighter future with positive photographs of daily life and the world around them.

**My Self Study**

Photography has always been essential to my work and life, to gain understanding of one’s transitions over time. When I began this dissertation study in 2012 my life was focused on graduate school in Illinois that I began in 2010 and explorations with the Instagram app which was reflected in my photography.
Figure 25. A self-portrait from 2001 taken in Montreal shortly after I began working as a teacher.

As a college student in Ottawa, Canada completing my Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History at Carleton University in 1999 I began taking an interest in photography while working part-time at the Museum of Contemporary Photography. After graduating in 1999, I decided to study the visual arts and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree with a concentration in the Visual Arts the University of Ottawa in 2000. The following year I became a certified teacher and graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree in the Intermediate Secondary Division from the University of Ottawa in 2001 (see Figure 25). Figure 25 is a self-portrait taken in front of a mirror in Montreal with a 35-millimeter camera. There is a reflection from the mirror and the camera’s flash creating an optical illusion where the image is duplicated and layered over the first in the upper right picture plane through a delayed flash exposure. As the self-portrait was taken in 2001 I did not have access to Photoshop and it was challenging to achieve the double exposure effect with film. This image was taken shortly after I began teaching English and Life Skills at Richard Pfaff Alternative High School in Ottawa and I purchased the camera in Figure
29 with my first paycheck from teaching. At the time I continued taking nightlife photography for local Ottawa publications and my photography was published in the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper, *Ottawa Xpress*, and *Onaversal* magazine. This image conveys ideas of optimism and empowerment as I felt excited about my future as a new teacher and empowered by my work in photography and art education. With this image I used photography to voice the empowerment and optimism I felt as a young educator entering the profession of art education and having the opportunity to interact with students and make a positive difference in their lives through the experience of creating art. Figure 26 is an image taken with a 35-millimeter camera in 2001 at Atomic nightclub in Ottawa. This image was shot with long exposure allowing time for the green light to be captured bouncing off the dancing crowd. There is an abstract quality to the composition as dancers are superimposed over each other in green and black light. This image was exhibited in Gallery 115 at the University of Ottawa.

![Image](image-url)

*Figure 26. An example of my nightlife photography that was exhibited and published in publications like the Ottawa Xpress in 2001.*
Figure 27. Images of the Ottawa club scene that were published in Onaversal magazine in 2001.

Figure 27 is an example of commercial photographic work that I completed for Atomic nightclub and Onaversal magazine in 2001. The first two images in Figure 27 are photographs from Atomic’s Last Dance, the last night before Atomic Nightclub closed. In the top image are two DJs enthusiastically performing at the club, in the second image is the happy dancing crowd responding to the DJs’ music. The third image is a group portrait of PLAY, an electronic music collective. The musicians are posing together against a spray-painted graffiti background that signifies their street cred within the electronic music scene. Figure 26 and Figure 27 are examples of the reverence/stewardship I felt towards the electronic music subculture and my enjoyment of participating in the Ottawa club scene. I also felt very connected to the music, DJs, and friends/acquaintances at the events.
In 2002 I began my Masters of Arts degree in Culture and Value Education at McGill University in Montreal. I began to question the relationship between working as an artist and working as a teacher. In 2003 I started teaching Computers and History at Phoenix Alternative High School in Laval, Quebec where I introduced Art 4 (Grade 11) to the curriculum and began a mural project where students would receive visual art credits for painting the school walls. Figure 28 is a photograph of giant mural of a Phoenix from the main stairwell at Phoenix Alternative High School, an institution for at-risk youth. Students were sent to Phoenix when it was clear they were struggling to succeed academically or socially in regular high school. The Phoenix is a symbol of rebirth and renewal in popular culture, a bird immersing from its own ashes alive and transformed (Wikipedia, 2017b). The mural at Phoenix Alternative depicts the bird taking shape through the gold and orange flames that make up its wings and body. The words PHOENIX are painted under the bird’s feet and the Phoenix’s eye stares at the viewer with the head in profile against a black background. Figure 28 fits into the categories of leadership, empowerment, optimism, reverence/stewardship and connection as the photograph is a depiction of the school mascot and placed in a hallway that visually interacts with passing students. The mural references leadership and empowerment through its passionate illustration of the school mascot that encourages the students to learn from the symbol of the Phoenix and rise above their circumstances to create a better future for themselves. By working towards gaining academic credits and a better school culture the Phoenix students felt empowerment and optimism towards their future and reverence for their schoolwork.
After graduating from McGill in 2005 I decided to seek an opportunity in Asia and moved to Taiwan in 2006. In Taipei, Taiwan, I worked as an Instructor at Huafan University for the Department of Foreign Language and Literature teaching a digital media curriculum. Figure 29 is the cover of Discover Taipei magazine, a periodical published by the Taipei City Government’s Department of Information and Tourism. The magazine’s objective is to educate foreign residents and visitors on Taipei culture and events. In 2006 I photographed an exhibit of glove puppets, a cultural symbol of Taiwan (Wikipedia, 2017a). On the cover is an image of a traditional glove puppet behind another image of children playing with shadow puppets. The foreground glove puppet wears a bright crown, with a long black beard, yellow gown, and is gesturing with his left hand. The children have smiles on their faces but are desaturated to bring focus to the magazine’s title and headlines below the glove puppet positioned in the bottom left corner. Figure 29 fits into the categories of leadership, optimism, connection, and reverence/stewardship. Here the glove puppet is wearing a crown which symbolically references his leadership in traditional Taiwanese culture. The gold crown and bright yellow costume of the
puppet speak of optimism towards the future. The puppet’s arm is pointing upwards signifying his authority and belief in success in the future. The puppet’s jewelry and dress further reflect his wisdom and reverence for hard work and prosperity, which are still highly valued traits in current Taiwanese society. Furthermore, the faces of the smiling children denote their optimism for the future and a connection to the puppet culture of their Taiwanese heritage.

*Figure 29. The cover of Discover Taipei magazine with photographs of the Glove Puppet Theater in 2007.*

In 2007 I began PhD studies at Taiwan Normal University in Art Education and connected with Dr. Michael Parsons who recommended I study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). In 2010 I began my PhD in Art Education at UIUC and relocated to Urbana, Illinois. Like Carrie and Lauren, my photography focuses on the natural world and daily life. My images display experiences in New York, Illinois, and Canada. As with the previous two cases I selected fifty random images from my Instagram account. My images were sampled on
October 10th 2015 with 4528 images, 452 followers, and following 171 users. I sampled one out of every 88 images. Of the sampled 50 images 46% are from New York, 26% from Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, and 8% from British Columbia. Subject matter included architectural photographs 30%, images of New York 14%, running 15%, food 8%, and art education 4%. The composition of my work is architectural 30%, snapshot/direct shots 28%, landscape shots 12%, macro 12%, diagonal shots 10%, and portrait 8%. The aesthetic qualities of my images are New York City neighborhoods 22%, black and white 12%, reflections 4%, and architectural 12%, vertical shots 4%. The most common filters used are Willow 18%, Valencia 16%, Lo-fi 24%, Earlybird 22%, and Hefe 10%. I received 490 likes for an average of 19.6 likes per photo. More comments and likes were added to my photographs after moving to New York in 2014 and joining the running community. Typical comments I used to describe images were “Great run around the neighborhood from 52nd and Riverside Park to Central Park and 2 lower loops”, “I usually walk by the Hearst Building on my way to Central Park”, and “A little bit of New York in downtown Urbana 😊.” Comments by others added to photographs usually referenced a running event such as the Cherry Blossom 10 Miler in DC or the Chicago and Illinois marathons.

Similar to Lauren, I used Instagram photography to document and express my perceptions of daily life through travel. Like Carrie, I find photography is a reflective tool that helps me process everyday experiences and gain a richer understanding of daily happenings. After moving to Illinois I bought an iPhone in 2011 and began experimenting with photography using the Instagram app. For me, Instagram filled the perfect creative void. It allowed me to capture moments in daily life that could be instantly processed with filters and communicated through social media.
In 2012 Instagram was an outlet to express my perceptions of daily life through social media. I enjoyed using the app’s filters, particularly Earlybird, Hefe, and Lo-fi. The filters gave my photography a more polished feel with the saturated colors, strong contrast, and frames that darkened the edges of the photographs. I use the Instagram filters because they make my photographs appear more refined and professional. With their brightened colors and lighting, my images have a more optimistic feel which speaks of my positive perspective on the future. Through photography I try to connect with others by sharing images of my daily life and experiences. My early work from 2012-2013 contained images of architecture in Chicago, flowers in vases from a restaurant in Urbana-Champaign, and snapshots from a visit to the art gallery. Figure 30 is a photograph of flowers in coffee budum vases on a windowsill at The Bread Company café in Urbana, IL. The photographs are edited with the Kelvin filter and have an enhanced yellow tone that emphasizes the flower’s green leaves, the red tone of the windowsill, and yellow background colors. The image has no comments or likes and fits into the
category of reverence for nature with its focus on the frailty of the tiny, blooming white flowers and their intricately intertwining green leaves, juxtaposed against the rigid structure of the manmade window sill that has bright sunlight illuminating the center of the image.

As time progressed my life became more focused on travels between New York and Urbana, IL in 2012-2014. Discovering New York was very inspiring and many of my photographs from this period reflect my love of the city, its architecture, and environment. Figure 31 is an image of the exterior of the Hotel Chelsea in New York. The composition captures the hotel’s historic exterior that is photographed from a diagonal vertical angle with the colors saturated using the Lo-Fi filter and natural light illuminating the hotel’s orange brick exterior from the upper left side. The image has six likes and no comments. It fits into the category of reverence for documenting the unique architecture of New York. The architecture of New York City conveys the globally-recognized rich and longstanding history and multifaceted culture of this city.

Figure 31. A 2012 photograph of the exterior of the Chelsea Hotel in New York.
In 2012 I began to experience distance running, a hobby that developed into a passion and continues to this day. After moving to New York in 2014, distance running became the focus of my photography and I began to connect with the fitness community online. I joined the New York Flyers running club and began running multiple marathons per year. Running was also an outlet to help process the stress of my mother’s struggle with Alzheimer’s and a career transition from art education to television marketing. I began working in social media strategy for a television production company, FMW Media Works. Through this work experience and my research study, I recognized that Instagram and Facebook were no longer just tools to connect with friends online, but they had also become an ingrained part of media within our society to distribute actual news and factual information (Carroll, 2015).

Figure 32. A selfie after running my first marathon, the Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon in 2014.

Like Carrie, my Instagram account was initially a site to connect with known friends and acquaintances through shared photography. However, over time I began making new friends on Instagram, particularly in the running community and after moving to New York city. Through
the Instagram community I formed online friendships with runners all over the country and was inspired by their running. One runner in particular is heatherruns74 a forty-two year-old mother of two from Orlando, Florida who runs sub three-hour marathons and posts very encouraging Instagram posts. Heather is usually first in her age group and wins many running awards. In April 2014 I ran the Illinois Marathon in 3:58 (see Figure 32). Figure 32 is a selfie in Memorial Stadium after finishing the marathon and is celebrating the event. In the selfie and I am smiling and holding my finisher’s medal to the camera while event staff and other runners are recovering in the background. I commented “3:58-I’m happy” and three comments are added by other users. The photograph has eleven likes and used the Valencia filter that fades overexposed light. Figure 23 fits into the categories of empowerment, reverence, and optimism as I felt very empowered by completing the marathon which required much discipline and training. In my experience to run a marathon, I had to have high regard for the sixteen forty-mile weeks of training that is required to finish well and personal optimism that my hard work will result in a good race in the future. Finishing a marathon is empowering to me, as it allows me to savor the experience of running 26.2 miles around a city and gaining an understanding of what my body is capable of. I hold deep reverence for the power of the human body and all it can accomplish with discipline and I try to empower others by sharing this internal revelation through images on Instagram.
Figure 33. A selfie after finishing the Bank of America Chicago Marathon in 2014, five months after running the Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon.

Five months after moving to New York I ran the Chicago Marathon and posted a similar selfie on Instagram where I am smiling and holding my finisher’s medal. (See Figure 33). I commented “Ran the Chicago marathon in 3:46:50. It was a good race but my body started to fatigue at mile 16 and I slowed down at mile 22. The last 4 miles were real challenge to get through but I did it and took almost 11 minutes off my first marathon time of 3:58:16.” The image has sixteen comments from users congratulating me on completing the race “Way to go! Bet you feel great!”, “Wow like it!”, and “Wow that is awesome way to go!”. Figure 36 uses the Rise filter and has 113 likes, one-hundred more than when I completed the Illinois marathon five months before. The difference in likes between my first and second marathon is an indication of my growing involvement and influence within the running community. As a woman runner my posts encourage other women to find health and fulfillment with running and I often tag my posts to #womensrunningcommunity, an Instagram community of female runners. Figure 36 has tags #run, #running, #runforlife, #chicagomarathon, #chicago, #marathon, #marathontraining, #medal, #fitness, #instafitness, #runnerscommunity, #womensrunningcommunity, and #smile.
Like Figure 32, Figure 33 references the categories of connection, empowerment, and reverence/stewardships as I felt very happy after completing the grueling Chicago Marathon in 3:46 and was communicating this to my followers.

New York has a very strong running community with the New York Road Runners a non-for profit running organization that has over 60,000 members and I feel I’ve gained more friends and likes as a result of participating in their events (Wikipedia, 2016). I’ve also found that over time as Instagram is becoming more popular and a more widely used social-networking site, my own connections to others in Instagram has increased. As of June 2016 the app had over 500 million monthly active users up from 400 million users in September 2015 (Statista, 2016). The increase in Instagram users has made more friends and acquaintances fill my news feed along with a few strangers that I follow.

Like Lauren, my Instagram use varies depending on how busy my week is. I interact with Instagram about two-to-four times a week usually for about half-an-hour each session. I follow 189 users including many news organizations such as Bloomberg, The New Yorker, Huffington Post, Gothamist, and New York Magazine. Consequently, checking my Instagram feed is a good way to stay in touch with friends and current events. I like most of the photographs posted by friends or users that I follow and will comment on 2-3 images per session depending on the context of the image that is posted. I have several friends that I don’t see that often in real life yet I engage with almost daily on Instagram or Facebook. Most of these friends are from the running community in New York but there are also old friends from high school or from my PhD studies in art education. Many of my comments are complimentary and I try to have a positive voice on Instagram and Facebook. I do not post any political comments on Instagram or Facebook but instead have my own Facebook business page, Adlicious Media, and Twitter account where I
post media and sports links. I feel Instagram has enriched my interactions with friends as I have gotten to know another side of their personality through the images they post and comments. I’ve also noticed there are certain times of the year when social interactions on Instagram or Facebook are more pronounced. For example, over the holidays, after the New York City marathon, and the US Election. During these events I find it is important to connect with others and express kind words over the holidays or after the completion of a marathon and the US Election which impacted many friends and users in 2016.

As a woman I have always been a feminist and supported the advancement of women in our society. Throughout my life I’ve noticed the power imbalance between the sexes. I’ve seen men be promoted to principalships, professorships, and attain leading positions in media while the women in the office are left behind. Often, it can be very political and I try to use my Instagram photography as a positive example of female strength.

Historically, marathon running is steeped with the struggle to have women officially register in the Boston Marathon until 1972 and participate in the Olympic Marathon until 1984 (Switzer, 2007). In 1980 only 10% of marathon participants were women and that number has grown to 43% in 2014 (RunningUSA, 2015). Ultra-marathons attract even fewer women participants at 32% (UltraRunning Magazine, 2014) and that distance is my greatest strength as a runner. I use my Instagram photography to demonstrate that as women we can be empowered through our bodies and the endeavors that we choose to passionately commit to. In 2016 I completed the 89K Comrades Marathon, Down Run in Durban, South Africa in 10:06:20. I was the first woman in my running club to complete the race and had the fastest time out of all male club participants. In addition, my work in media is a field where women can have limited power in comparison to male colleagues (Women’s Media Center, 2015). When I worked at a British
television production company, the Chief Executive Officer and division Managing Directors were all men. Gender inequity persists at nearly all media outlets with men outnumbering women in almost all positions from print and television journalists, to Hollywood executives (Alter, 2015).

![Image of two individuals walking]

Figure 34. Walking my Mom to Mountain Lake Seniors Community in July 2016.

From talking to case study participants Carrie and Lauren it is clear that Instagram is an expressive outlet for photography and a vibrant community where individuals can connect with like-minded users through images. My Instagram photography is used to communicate with old and new friends and promote the health and well-being of women through posts on marathon training. Instagram is also a creative site where I can connect with other artists or like-minded users by sharing images of daily life in New York City or work in media. My current goals for Instagram are to continue connections within the running community and maintain positive social interactions with friends in real life or online through Instagram. My engagements on Instagram are inspired by my mother Janice Rees who was suffering from the latter stages of Alzheimer's disease (see Figure 34). This image references the categories of connection and
reverence/stewardship as I felt very attached to my mother and had deep respect for the assisted living community where she lived. Here my mother is pictured walking back to the facility that will take care of her, feed her, bathe her, and do it’s best to make sure she is living comfortably with the conditions of her disease. The connection between my mother and I is evident through our shared physical form, linked arms, and similar walk.

In Figure 34 I am pictured walking with my mother to her accommodations at Mountain Lake Seniors Community in Nelson, BC. My sister took this photograph and we are pictured from behind with the comment “We have the same body type and walk.” The image shows my mother and I walking together with our feet and legs moving in sync. We are pictured in the center of the image and walking towards the center’s entrance. Two trees frame the image on either side and the sky is overcast with the Valencia filter. One user added the comment “Good shot!” and the image has twenty-five likes. Documenting my mother’s struggle with Alzheimer’s is a narrative in my Instagram feed and on social media to share her condition with friends and family. I used the hashtags #mom, #alzheimers, #walk. I revere my mother because she was very encouraging of my dreams and ambitions and acted as a moral compass always telling me to be a better person and not express negativity or hate. Mom appreciated my photography and enjoyed viewing images of family on Instagram.

In this study all participants presented feminist imagery on Instagram. Carrie displayed feminist imagery with her Weems series (see Figures 5, 6, & 7), image of the Virgin Mary (See Figure 11), and image commenting on ISIS rape (see Figure 12). Lauren’s images feature feminist content through her solo global travels (see Figures 18 & 19) and Mudgirls building of her cob house (see Figures 23 & 24). My images promote feminism through representations of
empowerment and good health from marathon running (see Figures 32 & 33) that may inspire women (Switzer, 2007). From the feminist nature of these images we can see the participants use Instagram as a site to promote female empowerment through their photography. However, not all of the participants’ images reflect gender, Carrie has many images of nature (see Figures 3 & 9) as does Lauren (see Figures 15 & 17), and my images contain snapshots of New York (see Figure 31). In this study participants use images of women to reflect empowerment by presenting representations of strong women who are actualizing their existence either through yoga and art education, traveling and cob house building, or marathon running. By presenting images of strong, independent, empowered women through their daily narratives and interacting with their online communities, participants used Instagram photography to affirm their own positive sense of self and to inspire others. All case study participants have a varied image repertoire that documents their daily life and connects with unique online communities through Instagram. Carrie communicates with other artists who appreciate her expressions of the natural world, Lauren associates with other travelers, artists, and businesswomen, my images are focused on the running community and connecting with other women. Instagram is unique because it is a community of images. There is also the conception of the public self-versus the real-self in Instagram. Carrie is very private and is conscious how here images will be received by others (see Figure 12). Lauren’s conception of self is very public with her career in music, online Etsy businesses, and various blogs and social media pages promoting her endeavors. For myself Instagram is a public space where the idea of self is mediated and constructed within the context of a social media platform where images can be consumed and passed judgement on by strangers. As Figures 32 and 33 depict, my self-portrait with a finisher’s medal after running a marathon demonstrate selfies can be meaningful and empowering.
It’s notable that participants used Instagram filters to saturate colors and promote contrast. Filters like Hefe, Lo-Fi, and X-pro II were frequently used to manipulate the image’s appearances. Furthermore, by selecting filters and choosing to manipulate their photography participants are actively editing and filtering their own online presence. As Rheingold (2012) has stated users have to take control of their own online narrative before someone else does.

**Summary and Discussion**

Media and Communications scholars Nadav Hochman and Lev Manovich question how photo manipulation tools influence user production on social media platforms (Hochman & Manovich, 2013). Hochman and Manovich suggest that social media can be used for reading local social and cultural events through the patterns of imagery posted online. Furthermore, Hochman and Manovich (2013) find that each Instagram filter evokes a different feeling and changes the message communicated by the photography. Instagram filters can suggest a different time or atmosphere and some of the filters were even named to suggest a particular time or aesthetic, such as 1977 or Earlybird which process the image to look dated in the past through darker lighting and use of brown or purple tones that suggests a dated aesthetic of the 1970s. This creates a multi-temporal image that references the actual time when the picture was taken, the time evoked by the filter, and the time span indicated by the application when viewing the photo (Hochman & Manovich, 2013). Instagram’s platform is also based on the present and in the idea of sharing photographs instantaneously. However, many images were taken hours, days, and sometimes years earlier before being published (Hochman & Manovich, 2013).

Digital culture scholar Jill Walker Rettberg (2014) finds the term *filter* to be a metaphor on how we filter our photographs and news. Rettberg (2014) writes that using a filter in technology can remove certain content and alter or distort text, images, and data. For Rettberg
Instagram filters may alter data but the result is seen as adding to the image by making a color image black and white, boost colors, or blurring parts of the image. Filters are also applied to our Facebook newsfeed which impacts how information is presented online (Rettberg, 2014). Additionally, many photojournalists now use smartphones and filters in their work, as a filtered image carries a sense of realism and refined processed enhancement that documentary photographers desire (Rettberg, 2014). Photographic filters can anesthetize our everyday lives with the filter’s enhanced aesthetic of the subject (Rettberg, 2014). For example, a picture of a pile of laundry that we might easily ignore might look beautiful if framed by a filter that highlights its colors and enhances its aesthetic qualities (Rettberg, 2014).

Similarly, in a study conducted by Communications doctoral candidate Yilang Peng (2017) found that filtered photographs added a layer of meaning and history over unfiltered filtered photographs that appeared less appealing to viewers. For Peng (2017) Flickr photos that used filters were more likely to be viewed and commented on. Filters that increased warmth, exposure, contrast, and created a vintage effect were more attractive to viewers (Peng, 2017). Furthermore, Peng (2017) found Instagram users used filters to escape from the stark reality created by digital cameras and to give meaning and celebration to their daily experiences. Filters also provide an unusual way to look at new experiences or to find new ways to look at familiar subjects (Peng, 2017). In addition to changing how photographs that are altered by filters help their creators distance their photographs from reality and elevate mundane everyday moments (Peng, 2017). Moreover, Peng (2017) found that photo filter apps use nostalgic tones to help viewers connect with the past and imitate certain historical styles of photography. This is evident in the work of Lauren who often used a darker filter in her landscape photography that references the look of 35 millimeter film. Carrie’s landscapes were also enhanced with filters that
brightened their colors and darkened their contrast like traditional film, before the advent of
digital photography.

In summary, my study considers how using Instagram can be empowering for users and
addresses how the art education community is interested in learning about photography,
communicating through images, and engaging social media. The next chapter will discuss how
Instagram is a community that teachers and students can use to share their ideas and experiences
creatively and find individuals and groups with similar interests.
Chapter Five

CONCLUSIONS

My case studies began in 2013 and finished in 2016. During that time I conducted three interviews with case study participants, Carrie and Lauren. In each interview I asked participants to reflect on their Instagram photography, interactions and engagements, as well as their engagements with Facebook. Carrie’s interviews contained more personal insight while Lauren’s responses were more succinct. Overall, their engagement with Instagram reflected the individual, and in some instances shared, personalities and interests of each of the case study’s participants. Carrie’s images were predominately of nature as she felt a deep connection with the earth and her images also included many pictures of yoga and art education. Lauren's photographs included many images of her travels and the building of her cob house in Canada. Lauren’s photography is also connected to nature, but architectural pictures and images referencing her Etsy products were also included. For this dissertation, I also did a self-study of my own use of Instagram. My Instagram photography contained images of nature and the architecture of New York; however, it became more focused on the running community as time went by. Case-study participants also use Facebook for self-expression, outreach, and connection to other individuals to broaden their reach and scope, and to form their own concepts of what it means to be self-expressive and to be empowered.

My study also revealed how new friendships, communities, and connections can be fostered through the Instagram app. Carrie connected with other artists who inspired her photography and Lauren made friends with other global travelers and individuals interested in building cob houses. Through Instagram I became linked with others in the running community. Carrie and Lauren also shared new photographic skills they gained from another photography
app, Snapseed, Adobe Photoshop, or other applications; while I experimented with the Instagram filters. Like Carrie and Lauren, I found the Instagram community to be more intimate and friendly than the Facebook community that had evolved into a community of acquaintances and colleagues.

One thing all case study participants have in common is that we aim to make a positive difference through the photography that we share. On Instagram Carrie sought to touch others through the documentation of nature, spirituality, and creative expression through art education. Lauren shared inspiring images of her travels and the construction of her cob house. For myself Instagram is a site where I can contribute my photography to a unique creative community that promotes the health and well-being of women through an active lifestyle and engagement with social media.

**Connecting the Literature Review to this Study**

The literature review connected themes of feminism, feminist art education, and digital media, including Instagram. The field of feminist art education is relevant to my study as it describes the need for progressive change in the status for women and girls in education and society. Feminist art educators can participate with women-centered image communities present on Instagram that engage with contemporary art and visual culture (Freedman, 1994; Keifer-Boyd, 2007).

My art education readings also indicate that leadership is another element that reflects the interests of the case study participants. Participants in this study abide by Thurber and Zimmerman’s (2002) leadership model that promotes a collaborative, empowering, community-based leadership. For example, Carrie promoted feminist leadership within her classroom and community through her posts on promoting social justice (see Figure 16) and women’s rights
(see Figure 15). Lauren inspired other women by traveling the world by herself and building a home with a feminist building collective. I post about my experiences with running and have been profiled by the Instagram group womensrunningcommunity who celebrate women that are trying to be fit and healthy.

The impact of digital media was also examined in the literature review. Turkle (2011) considered how young people construct narrative identities online. In addition, Balsamo (2011) found technology to be gendered through its construction and application. Moreover, according to a recent study by the Pew Research Center by Senior Research Scientist Amanda Lenhart (2015), 71% of teens use more than one social networking site and 91% of teens use mobile devices for online activities at least occasionally. Teenage boys use Facebook most often at 45% compared to 36% of teenage girls, and teenage girls are more likely to use Instagram at 23% compared to 17% of teenage boys. Lenhart discovered teenage girls use visually-oriented social media sites and platforms more than boys who are more likely to own video gaming consoles (Lenhart, 2015). Furthermore, digital researchers Shannon Greenwood, Andrew Perrin, and Maeve Duggan found more young adults use Instagram than older adults with every six out of ten online adults ages 18-29 (59%) engaging with the app (Greenwood, Perrin, and Duggan, 2016). Instagram use with young adults is almost double the use of 30-49 year olds (33%), and seven times the share of those 65 and older (8%) (Greenwood, Perrin, and Duggan, 2016). Additionally, Instagram is used more by females than males. According to digital marketing CEO Salman Aslam, 32% of US Internet users use Instagram. In the US, females are more likely to be Instagram users (38%) than males (26%). Worldwide, 68% of Instagram users are female (Aslam, 2017). As I have outlined here, the gendered use of these social media applications directly correlates with Balsamo’s (2011) writing on the gendered use of technology. Instagram
is a site of Balsamo’s (2011) notions on gendered technology, Jenkin’s (2006) media convergence, and Turkle’s (2011) examination of mobile communication. As Bain (2014), Bae and Ivashkevich (2012), Black (2014), Buffington (2010), and Delacruz (2004) have indicated, digital technology education is needed in contemporary art education. From a feminist perspective, my study shows how three females engage digital technology to express their lives, ideas and experiences. This examination of the case study participants’ use of the Instagram application has subsequent implications for art education.

As my study demonstrates, Instagram is a platform for users to share images, culture, and ideas through mobile devices both locally and globally, and for them to connect with others online. Online social networks are now a dominant social practice where users have the opportunity to inspire others and promote progressive gender empowerment. Additionally, according to social psychologist Sanna Malinen (2015), online communities are among the most popular online services globally. Participation in online communities is generated by positive outcomes of user loyalty, online content, and online associations (Malinen, 2015). Furthermore, online participation can increase social capital and promote psychological well-being (Malinen, 2015). Malinen also observed users in photographic online communities were motivated to present their skills, build relationships with other photographers, receive feedback, and promote professional services (Malinen, 2015). All participants in my study had their social capital enriched through connections in Instagram. Carrie befriended other artists like Jorge Collumbo and exhibited photographic work she had previously published on Instagram in local art galleries. Lauren grew a large number of followers, 1,434 as of January 2017, who responded to her narrative of travelling the globe and building her cob house. Through posting images of my running and training I connected with new friends in New York and expanded my network with
others like heather_runs74, an inspirational 42 year-old woman who runs sub-3 hour marathons; sacredsoundsstephanie, an entrepreneur who runs her own yoga studio and documented her experience of running the New York city marathon in 4:32 at nine months pregnant; and kenalegre, a back-of-the-pack runner who documents his training and racing of multiple marathons per year.

As, Rheingold (2002; 2012), Darts (2004), Jenkins (2006), Delacruz (2009a; 2009b), Balsamo (2011), Ivashkevich (2011a), and Turkle (2011) have demonstrated, the rise of new digital technologies has fostered social, political, technological, and creative development. Over the past three years all case study participants have enhanced their own technical and creative development through Instagram. Carrie’s photography has progressively become more focused on images of nature and on documenting daily life. Technically her photography uses more natural light and saturated colors. Lauren’s photography developed a creative narrative of depicting her place in the world through traveling or reflecting on the beauty around her home in British Columbia and the building of her cob house. Over time Carrie’s images appear to be edited more with saturation and tone as do Lauren’s images. My photography has grown from just adding filters to adjusting brightness, saturation, and contrast.

Additionally, the literature review examined the impact of technology on gender and society alongside the work of digital media scholars Balsamo (2011), Turkle (2011), Jenkins (2006), and Rheingold (2002; 2012). A brief history of the woman's movement was discussed (Jones 1994; Rose, 2006; Dicker, 2008) that provided context. The findings of this case study make clear that all participants express their lives, values, and interests through their Instagram images and that they engage with the Instagram community. Carrie frequently posts on the status of women in society, Lauren uses her status as a single woman to inspire others, and I post on
fitness to promote women’s health. The case study participants are aware of the gendered nature of technology and their participation on Instagram has generated positive outcomes within their social networks. Carrie befriended artists and has spoken of the pleasure she feels on maintaining old and new social connections through Instagram. Similarly, Lauren has made many new friends through Instagram, from other travelers to individuals who are inspired by the building of her cob house. Depictions of the running community are part of my Instagram feed and lead to many new friendships and associations. Instagram and Facebook are participatory cultures that foster connections across multiple platforms (Rheingold, 2002; 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Turkle 2011). The case study participants developed enriched human connections through friendships made within their online communities (Malinen, 2015). All case study participants reported their engagements with Instagram promoted well-being, helped build photographic skills, and promoted friendships with other like-minded individuals. Additionally, as Rheingold (2002; 2012) and Turkle (2011) noted, young people navigate their sense of self online. For case study participants, the images they posted were references to their daily life and natural environment.

**Reflections on Instagram and Self-Empowerment**

The research questions posed by this study aimed to examine three participants’ self-expression in the Instagram application and implications for art education. The first research question examined their expressions of identity in the Instagram application and how they engage with a community online. *How do three women use Instagram to reflect on their own history and daily life for self-empowerment and engagement with a supportive community?* After conducting this study it is evident that all participants used Instagram as a tool to reflect on and share their daily life with their online communities.
Carrie keeps her Instagram account private and rarely allows individuals she does not know to follow her. Her posts on Instagram and Facebook sometimes comment on social issues. For example, in Figure 16 she posted an image of a white heart made of petals with a rainbow stripe painted in the center to commemorate the victims of the 2016 shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Regarding her posts on Instagram and social media, Carrie has stated that she posts on social media to share information and use her network as a “platform to communicate what's important to me.” Reverence for nature is another key theme in Carrie’s Instagram photography and her images frequently depict the natural world and light and changing seasons over time.

Nature is also present in the work of case study participant Lauren who often photographed the natural world around her including her home in British Columbia and the exotic surroundings of her world travels. Of her photos of the natural world Lauren found that seeing images posted on Instagram of other cultures “makes me value my own.” Figure 17 and 18 are examples of Lauren’s early work that documents her life in British Columbia. Lauren also used Instagram as a medium to post her “Stand and Witness” video series that showcased her surroundings from the perspective of her feet upwards. In comparison to Lauren, Carrie posted videos infrequently on Instagram. Lauren’s later work documented the building of her cob house (see Figure 23) with the Mudgirls (see Figure 24) and Etsy businesses (see Figures 20, 21, & 22).

Lauren stated “you don’t realize how inspiring it is for people to see a woman traveling and building a house, doing things on her own.” Figure 18 is an example of Lauren’s travels in France and Figure 19 documents her experiences of Italy. Lauren’s travels illustrate her gender consciousness as she is proactively exploring the world as an independent woman. Working in education and music, Lauren considers herself to be a feminist and proactively promoted women.
through her record label, even though she would get criticized by men for only working with women. Lauren’s cob house is also in the process of being built by women and she has held workshops where women can learn building skills and connect with the Mudgirls.

Lauren and Carrie have different objectives for Instagram. Lauren uses the app to share her travels, promote her Etsy craft products, and show pictures of her cob house being built, while Carrie uses the app to share daily photographs of nature and post images inspiring political awareness. Both women use the app to gain photographic skills and communicate with a like-minded online community.

With my self study, I posted images of running culture to inspire other women to be healthy. Like Carrie and Lauren, I also used Instagram to document and express my perceptions of daily life. I appreciated using the Instagram photographic filters and how they could process images much faster than Photoshop. Figure 33 is an example of my early Instagram work with an image of flowers in a windowsill and Figure 34 captures a photograph of daily life while traveling in New York. Later after moving to New York in 2014, I became involved in the running community and my Instagram posts, such as Figure 36, depicted a selfie after running the Chicago marathon. As I became more involved in running, my posts began to inspire other women runners who I communicated with both online and offline. In addition, I consider myself to be a feminist through my work in media where I am the only female employee in sales and marketing at my current company and in the previous organization where I worked. Furthermore, I believe that women respond to images of empowered women in social media and if they see a woman run a marathon or complete an ultra marathon they could think “I can do that as well.” I’ve seen this within my running club where other women have been inspired to run the Dopey Challenge at Walt Disney World, an event where participants run a 5k, 10k, half marathon, and
full marathon over four consecutive days. In our society where we are always encouraged to spend more time sitting to be productive at work, I believe images of women running and taking time to care for their health are very important.

Overall, through this research, I have recognized that Instagram is a site where participants can gain empowerment from their connections with other users and through sharing their images. For example, Instagram is a site where Carrie found empowerment through her engagements with friends and artists that are supportive of her nature photography and comments on art education and social issues. Lauren felt empowered through sharing her solo global travels, Etsy craft businesses, and the construction of her cob house. For myself, connecting with the running community fostered empowerment through our mutual interest in fitness, health, and wellbeing.

Over the course of this study it became evident that Instagram is a site where participants received positive feedback on their photography and developed online friendships that promoted empowerment. Additionally, the theme of empowerment through Instagram is significant and promoted on the app with the hashtag #empowerment tagged to 1.5 million posts, and the account @empoweringwomennow, gained 70.6 thousand followers with 989 posts. The account empoweringwomennow was created by social media strategist Selene Kinder and publishes images of successful women in work, business, and play alongside inspiring quotes. Another Instagram account that fosters female empowerment is @bossladiesmindset with 157,000 followers and 1,563 posts. The account’s objective is to empower female entrepreneurs and publishes images daily of women succeeding in work, friendship, and play.

Instagram is also a site where participants can engage with feminists Instagram groups that promote empowerment, female artists, and women’s rights. Examples of such Instagram
groups include women_artists that profiles women working and exhibiting in the visual arts and educationinfeminism, an account that publishes images encouraging women to become empowered by their body and community. A popular Instagram account representing the interests of girls is @feminist.teenager, with over 52,000 followers and 1,278 posts. feminist.teenager promotes intersectional feminism and supports female gender equality, anti-racism, and women’s health with about 1-2 images posted weekly.

Another highly popular feminist Instagram account is @womensmarch, a group that protests legislation policies regarding human rights, women’s rights, immigration reform, healthcare reform, LGBTQ rights, racial equality, freedom of religion, and workers’ rights. This group also organizes events, gatherings, and political action to address these issues. The account has 542,000 followers and publishes 1-2 images daily. As evidenced by womensmarch and other feminist Instagram sites like those I just mentioned above, Instagram is a place to voice feminist and social issues found within contemporary culture alongside messages of empowerment for women. By reviewing groups and accounts that showcase empowerment we can see that Instagram is site where art educators can engage with a supportive online community through photography and images. This ties into the results of my dissertation that finds Instagram to be a site where users can document and express aspects of their daily life with an online community that supports their experiences and creative photography.

With regards to my study and with regards to Instagram social interactions, the Instagram community has been a place where friendships have been formed for all participants in my study, reinforcing community, understanding, and empowerment. Of her friendships on Instagram, Lauren finds connections develop when users comment on each other’s work. Lauren stated that she did not feel alone when traveling the world due to her Instagram friendships and compared
her online relationships to pen pals. Indeed, connection to community was a positive theme that emerged from the study findings and the friendships participants fostered through Instagram helped promote their feeling of empowerment through the app. Like Carrie, Lauren does not post many of her Instagram images on Facebook as she finds Instagram to be less judgmental and about constructing a narrative. Instagram was a safe space where participants found it to be an authentic representation of their self and identity. However, while the participants identify as feminists they are not actively promoting a feminist agenda through Instagram. The participants are encouraging a humanist agenda through the sharing ideas on art and life through images and commentary, and through support of others online who engage in similar activities (P. Gill, personal communication, May 3, 2017).

Additionally by enhancing their photography with Instagram filters participants were presenting a modified version of their original images. Instagram users are aware that a filter manipulates photographs to create a certain meaning. This is similar to how we edit and manipulate our own presentation on social media profiles, such as organizing our Facebook profile and selecting key images and phrases to publish that we are aware represents our notion of self to our friends and online community.

**Recommendations for Art Education**

The second research question of this case study probed implications for art educators concerning the use of Instagram and news technologies in K-12 teaching and beyond. *What are the implications of Instagram for art education?* As some K-12 schools may have heavy restrictions on using social media in classrooms or for assignments I can’t recommend that art educators should engage students with Instagram without specific permissions from their school districts. According to Lenhart’s (2015) study nearly three-quarters of teens have access to a
smartphone and 30% have a basic phone. However, art educators should be conscious that not all students have access to a smartphone and design curriculum incorporating school cameras or apps available on a desktop computer.

Educators at all grade levels, including post-secondary, can also use Instagram as a learning application by exploring its published images, photographic editing tools, and by researching topics through hashtags for their own artistic development. Instagram is a contemporary technological site that educators can use to better understand the world through social media. Educators can tell their stories through Instagram as Carrie has by sharing images of daily happenings in their classroom (see Figure 10). Students can also follow Carrie’s example and choose important issues and post images about those issues (see Figures 12 & 13).

Additionally, educators can use Instagram as a tool to learn about geotagged locations on Instagram through images tagged within the location revealing information and photographs of the site of interest. Geotagging shares the physical location of an image on a map on Instagram and allows other users to view recently posted images of a specific location. Carrie does not geotag her images but Lauren does, so the viewer can gain an understanding of her environment by clicking on the geotagged location. For example, one of Lauren’s images is geotagged as “Mission, British Columbia”. By viewing the geotagged location one can instantly view a map of the location and recent images posted of the location. From such images viewers can discern the weather, environment, surroundings, and see photographs posted by users at the site. This can be useful for art educators’ artmaking or inspiration for further research leading to conceptual artmaking by their students.

Instagram can inspire strategies for creating images with other photographic editing applications such as Photoshop, Flickr, Google Photos, Pixlr, and Snapseed. By participating in
and investigating Instagram art educators can ascertain different digital strategies for image-making, sharing, and connecting. Educators can bring strategies learned in the Instagram application back to their own teaching for curriculum such as teaching digital imaging with Photoshop or other digital imaging software or apps with their students. The application can also be used to develop photographic skills with the photographic documentation of ideas, and experiences through photography-enabled smartphones or with digital cameras. Technical skills one could learn from Instagram include photographic composition, framing, lighting, using filters, and image editing tools. Instagram is also a free application while Photoshop now costs $10 per month with a Creative Cloud subscription (GCFLearnFree, 2017). Furthermore, there are other free online imaging programs like Pixlr Editor where students can upload an image to the Pixlr website, pixlr.com, and edit it digitally from a desktop computer. Finally, educators can use Instagram for their own expression, curriculum research, outreach, and connection with individuals that have similar interests through online communities.

As this study has indicated, digital stories are a valuable learning tool that can be used in art education. Art education professor Christina Bain (2014) examined how teachers who create their own online digital stories can utilize that knowledge to develop pedagogy to enhance art education curriculum. For Bain (2014) digital storytelling is cross-curricular and an opportunity for art educators to teach students about visual culture. By engaging in student-centered feminist pedagogy educators can encourage students to consider social issues, civil rights, and a more pluralistic society.

With the inclusion of electronic tablets and mobile devices in public schools, Instagram is already being used by teachers in K-12 schooling (Hudson 2012, DeNeed 2012, & Escobal 2012). Art educator Abby Escobal (2012) teaches Instagram in her classroom every Friday and
recommends students take photos of a school event like a scavenger hunt or field trip and upload the images to Instagram (Escobal, 2012). Art educators can also document the daily life of their classroom and use Instagram to photograph student art and share lessons in progress (Escobal, 2012). Escobal (2012) suggests art educators use captions with their Instagram images that promote user and community engagement. Teacher Julie DeNeen (2012) lists creative uses for Instagram across K-12 subject areas. DeNeen (2012) suggests students make a photo collage of their favorite books for English, re-enact word problems for Math, geotag sites of interest across town for Geography, take photographs of the natural world for Science, document sporting events for Physical Education, and review a business for Commerce. Teacher Hannah Hudson (2014) also uses Instagram to document her teaching with a private account to vet any potential followers. Hudson (2014) features a student of the week, has students create images that would be seen in a famous person’s Instagram such as Abraham Lincoln, create photographs that would be posted by a character like Harry Potter, share reading recommendations of their favorite books, record steps in a science experiment, and post an image that could serve as inspiration for writing.

I would recommend that art educators in schools that restrict Instagram become familiar with an accessible photography app, its filters, and photographic editing tools. K-12 art educators could share images created on the online site Flickr which allows users to create a closed network available only to a private group of individuals. Within such a closed social network, the teacher could set up a Flickr site with permission from the school. Using the platform of Flickr, social themes, empowerment, and feminist perspectives could be discussed through

---

7 A closed social network differs from an open social network that can be shared with everyone. Closed social networks are limited to only select users (Petrocelli, 2013).
images. Students could comment on each other’s images using Flickr’s closed social network and use the school’s digital camera if students don’t have access to smartphones.

Art educators can also use Instagram for their own creative and professional development. Art teacher Abby Schukei (2016) has written about using Instagram hashtags like #CandyMinimal, #TypeSpire, and #ThingsOrganizedNeatly to inspire art-making in different mediums. Art educators can also use hashtags to search for the Instagram profiles of other colleagues in their field with hashtags #artedu, #arteducation, and #arteducator. Elementary teacher Emma Farrell (2015) recommends teachers connect with other teachers on Instagram using the hashtags #teachersfollowteachers, #teachersofinstagram, #teachersoninstagram, #teacher, #iteachtoo, #teacherlife, and #teachercreated. By searching for hashtags on Instagram art educators can see all images posted on a particular topic. For example, the hashtags #arteducation and #artteacher displays images of art classes and student art work in process. Art educators can also use Instagram as a platform to engage with other creative communities. Social media manager Sarah Parker (2015) suggests users identify relevant communities and use a mix of popular hashtags and smaller niche hashtags to drive engagement. Parker (2015) advises Instagram users to learn from the posts of popular influencers within a hashtag’s community and pay attention to the images they post. For Parker (2015) the types of images and content posted within a hashtag is part of a community language that users have to understand before they can create their own content. Hashtags are a huge part of the Instagram community and art educators can use them to search for posts and influencers on almost any topic including #abstractart, #color, #graffiti, #illustration, #painting, #photography, #portraiture, #watercolor along with any number of Instagram topics that are affiliated with art, education, empowerment, feminism, and social justice.
Teaching with Filters

An interesting aspect of this study includes how participants used image filters to modify their photographs. From this study it’s clear that the three Instagram participants used filters to shape their images in certain ways and present their ideas online. Instagram filters do a variety of things to images. They saturate or desaturate colors, they sharpen or mute contrast, they cast a certain hue over images, they soften details in pictures, and they may provide a more polished overall appearance. Metaphorically speaking, this makes me consider how teachers might use filters to present themselves to the world in specific ways. Teachers might fashion specific professional identities through the creation of professional websites. They may also selectively fashion a particular kind of identity in the ways they profile themselves and interact through social media sites. In both their professional websites and their social media sites teachers may select and share certain content and information about themselves, while at the same time selectively filtering out other kinds of information. Teachers may choose selected information that conveys a sense of who they are and what they might want viewers to think about them.

In addition to how they present themselves on websites or social media sites, teachers may also filter how they portray themselves in their interactions with others in their everyday life. In their everyday life teachers may select and edit which aspects about themselves they want to share according to how they want others to perceive them. For example what do teachers selectively present when communicating with parents? When interacting with parents, the teacher’s focus will naturally be on students. They will present themselves as professional, knowledgeable, well-prepared, and concerned about the best interests and success of students. In this case, teachers place a sharp focus on students. When interacting within the community teachers may selectively filter in or filter out certain aspects of their professional lives and
identities, selectively accentuating certain qualities that they wish to promote. With the community at large, teachers may exhibit the same kinds of qualities and characteristics that they present to parents but they may also exhibit aspects that reveal their well roundedness and exhibit more diverse interests beyond the classroom, including interests in community life and issues. When interacting with students, teachers may bring into high contract certain teacher characteristics such as high standards and high performance expectations, but they may soften these demands by accentuating empathy and caring for their students. At the same time teachers may soften the way they present themselves to students by showing humor, flexibility and concern for students’ lives. In each of these cases teachers may select and edit certain aspects of themselves that they want to present according to what they perceive to be the needs of each situation.

**Teaching as Connection/Empowerment**

Additionally, themes in this study reveal how the participants conveyed notions of leadership, empowerment, connection, reverence/stewardship, and optimism through their Instagram practice. In Chapter 4 Carrie expressed how Instagram helped her foster connections between people and was a method of communicating to others. Moreover, Carrie stated that she felt Instagram helped her to connect and empower other women through supporting each other’s photographs and building lasting online relationships. This has positive implications for art education as users on the site gave helpful photography feedback. Art educators can support fellow teachers and students’ creative endeavors through commenting on and liking their shared Instagram photographs and finding inspiration and empowerment through this process. Furthermore, both Carrie and Lauren felt that Instagram demonstrated a connection to their life as the site acted as a visual diary of everyday experiences that they could share with others.
Likewise Lauren stated that by sharing images of her travels, artwork, or the construction of her cob house she was able to communicate important parts of her identity with her followers while demonstrating the reverence she felt towards different global locations. Through the Instagram platform users can share their daily life with others and gain positive feedback that students could find is helpful in gaining an understanding of their use of filters and their identity. From using Instagram students may connect the filters they use to their constructed online persona and consider how they edit and curate their conception of self online. Lauren also found her connections on Instagram were more authentic than Facebook as Instagram is a social network that predominately shares visual media and is a creative space to share photography. Lauren stated “You can have Instagram friends that are just artists and develop a friendship with individuals where you connect with people and comment on each other’s work. You connect with individuals through a shared interest.” Lauren’s and Carrie’s Instagram friends were individuals they connected with over a shared interest and though commenting on each other’s work. This relates to students that likely have friends on Instagram who like and support their daily life experiences through the sharing of photography. Connecting through shared interests may also enable students to create virtual friendships with other individuals around the world.

Carrie also used Instagram to stay connected to former students in her art classes and to continue to help them express their full potential by commenting on the images they shared. She stated that Instagram is a reflective and contemplative tool that helps her act as a leader in her efforts to empower her former and current students. In this regard, Carrie uses Instagram to better the world around her and promote connections with students. She has stated that Instagram helps her to “foster connections between people” and that the site is a “method of getting through to other people”. Carrie also mentioned that “connection is about women and our
relationships” and that she communicates with her friends “to build each other up, as a lot of the world wants to tear each other down”. From Carrie’s statements we can see that teachers can use Instagram to find support for their ideas in a positive online community that can be used to promote friendships, learning, and empower others. However, Carrie has also admitted she uses Instagram to present an edited version of herself and that Instagram filters manipulate how an image is conveyed and received by viewers. Carrie tries to foster empowerment and help people achieve their power through Instagram by encouraging their photography and commenting on the images they share. From this practice Carrie hopes to create more understanding of the world, the on-line community, and in her own life.

**Personal Implications**

My engagements the Instagram application initially began in 2011 after I purchased my first IPhone. Instagram was an immediate way to connect my love of photography with my social network and I was soon connecting with friends through images of daily experiences, likes, and processed filters that presented a new aesthetic of digital photography. From writing this dissertation I have learnt how sharing images on Instagram can have a far reaching and powerful impact on the community that I connect with. My Instagram account is public and the stories that I’ve shared about my daily life, running, and my mother’s journey with Alzheimer’s have resonated with others. Through interviewing Carrie and Lauren I’ve also learned about how other women can use Instagram to gain photographic skills and share moments of their daily life with a supportive community that fosters friendship, learning, and empowerment. Carrie has taught me how Instagram can be used to connect with students and act as a platform to express personal feelings on feminism and social issues. Lauren’s images of travel and the building of her cob
house speak of her ability to inspire others along with her engagements with a supportive and entrepreneurial Instagram community.

Through the experience of documenting my own experience with I’ve come to understand how we filter and process the images we share online in a public space. Instagram filters present an enhanced perception of reality that we use to edit our image as scholars, art educators, and women. For example, I often post images from the running community as they are a way to communicate my life to the public without saying anything personally revealing. On Instagram I am pictured running outside but not communicating what is happening internally. This is a filtered construction of reality that is necessary to maintain the boundaries between our public and private identities. By examining the work of Carrie and Lauren and from my own experiences with Instagram I’ve come to understand that the online community we engage with is edited and constructed like our Instagram photographs. But there is a richness there that resonates with the everyday experiences that we choose to share online. It is empowering to have these moments recognized and acknowledged by others who are also sharing their personal narratives online.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This case-study examined the experiences of three female Instagram users. I explored the work of Carrie, an art educator from Ohio and Lauren, a retired teacher from British Columbia, Canada. Additionally, I conducted a self study that considered my own experiences with the application and questioned how Instagram is used to filter perceptions of reality and self. Overall, the case study participants found Instagram to be an empowering platform to share images with others and connect with an inspiring and supportive online community.
As my study reveals, Instagram is a vehicle for women to tell and share their stories. Much can be learned from the images, perspectives, and community engagements of the participants in my study. If it’s finding serenity through nature and yoga like Carrie, working with women on the building of cob houses like Lauren, or through my example of running marathons Instagram can be a site of empowerment, leadership, optimism, connection, and reverence. Finally, as women and art educators we need to use our photographic images and social media endeavors as an example of what others can achieve. This is paramount to promoting empowerment of girls and women in schooling, teacher education, and in society.
REFERENCES
Balsamo, A. (2011). Designing culture: The technological imagination at work. Durham,
z9OWXuoNl9qeji0VnQxY1F1Q245NWhHTi10bmd3bldmZF9scGJBMkk2d2NGVQ


Boyd, d. m., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and


on the risks and rewards of online self-expression. New Media & Society, 14(4), 634-651.


education. *Abbescart*. Retrieved from:


Gibson, O. (2006, May 2). More likely to have a mobile, use the net, listen to radio and read papers: It’s the girl [newspaper article]. The Guardian. Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2006/may/03/news.genderissues


selfies, blogs and wearable devices to see and shape ourselves (pp. 20-32). Palgrave Macmillan, London,


Robin, J. (2016, December 30). 2016 was the year women found solidarity on social media. *MamaMia*. Retrieved from:


monthly-active-instagram-users/

Retrieved from: http://time.com/4703058/time-cover-story-beyond-he-or-she/


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instagram


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchy


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cob_(material)


https://othersociologist.com/sociology-of-sexuality/
APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820

November 5, 2015

Elizabeth Delacruz
Art & Design
143 Art & Design Bldg
408 E Peabody
Champaign, IL 61820

RE: Digital explorations of femininity and identity through a case study with three female Instagram users
IRB Protocol Number: 13316

Dear Dr. Delacruz:

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in your continuing project entitled Digital explorations of femininity and identity through a case study with three female Instagram users. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the protocol as described in your IRB application, by expedited continuing review. The expiration date for this protocol, IRB number 13316, is 11/03/2016. The risk designation applied to your project is no more than minimal risk. Certification of approval is available upon request.

Copies of the attached date-stamped consent form(s) must be used in obtaining informed consent. If there is a need to revise or alter the consent form(s), please submit the revised form(s) for IRB review, approval, and date-stamping prior to use.

Under applicable regulations, no changes to procedures involving human subjects may be made without prior IRB review and approval. The regulations also require that you promptly notify the IRB of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated side effects, adverse reactions, and any injuries or complications that arise during the project.

If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me at the OPRS office, or visit our Web site at http://oprs.research.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Van Tine, MS
OPRS Specialist
Attachment(s)
c: Joanna Rees