



FAÇADE:

The Signs, Symbols, Uncertainty, and Identity of Postmodernity

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INTRODUCTION

As the outward representation of self, and ultimately the mediator between the subjective realities that we inhabit as individuals and groups, identity is a conception that underpins an understanding of how and why we interact the way that we do. And in a moment where despite the need to cooperate in the face of universal challenges (Dorst, 2018, 2022; Snowden & Boone, 2007) our (often online) interactions lack unity (Devlin et al., 2021; Geer & Sullivan, 2022; Newman, 2022; Quilty, 2022), this understanding seems imperative.

While the topic of identity – and self – has long been a cornerstone in various academic disciplines, this research takes a transdisciplinary approach to the subject, grounding both explanation and methodology in a time preceded (and surely succeeded) by rapid contextual evolution.

Drawing explanatory power from theorists in both psychology and sociology, this research offers new understanding into the perceptual processes that underpin identity construction and communication. Following, contextualisation of this understanding within the postmodern environment informs a unique methodology, one that offers foundation for further research and an understanding of subjective perception within the social environment of Instagram; an environment that has not only has come to dominate, but one that also mirrors, a postmodern context in which the signs and symbols of identity are readily apparent.

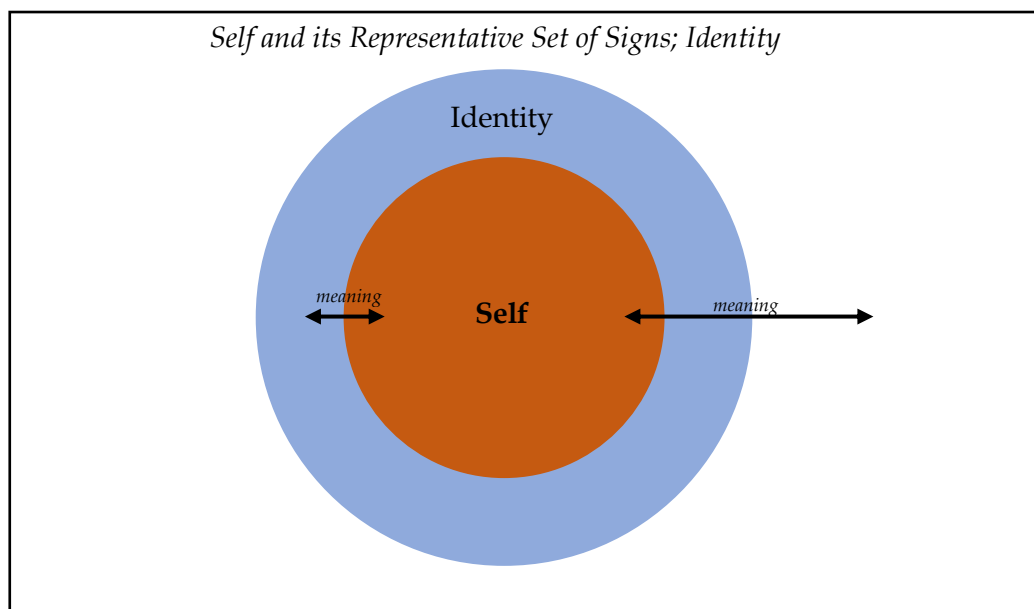
BACKGROUND

1. Identity and its Processes

1.1 Identity

Identity, as an entity, is a representation of the self (de Valverde et al., 2017). The self can be thought of as the unseen “agent, thinker, and knower, the executive function that experiences and reacts to the world,” (Talaifar & Swann, 2018) imbued with values and memories; it “serves as a kind of gyroscope for keeping behaviours consistent” (Turner, 2012).

And if this is the case, then identity can be considered as the composition of signs and symbols that communicate self; what we do and how we appear (Covington, 2008). "Identities tell us who we are and they announce to others who we are" (Burke, 2020); as “cognitive schemata with the capacity to affect behavioural choices” (Serpe & Stryker, 2011) they act as a mediator, a permeable membrane through which we filter information to form our realities, and others construct their own perceptions.

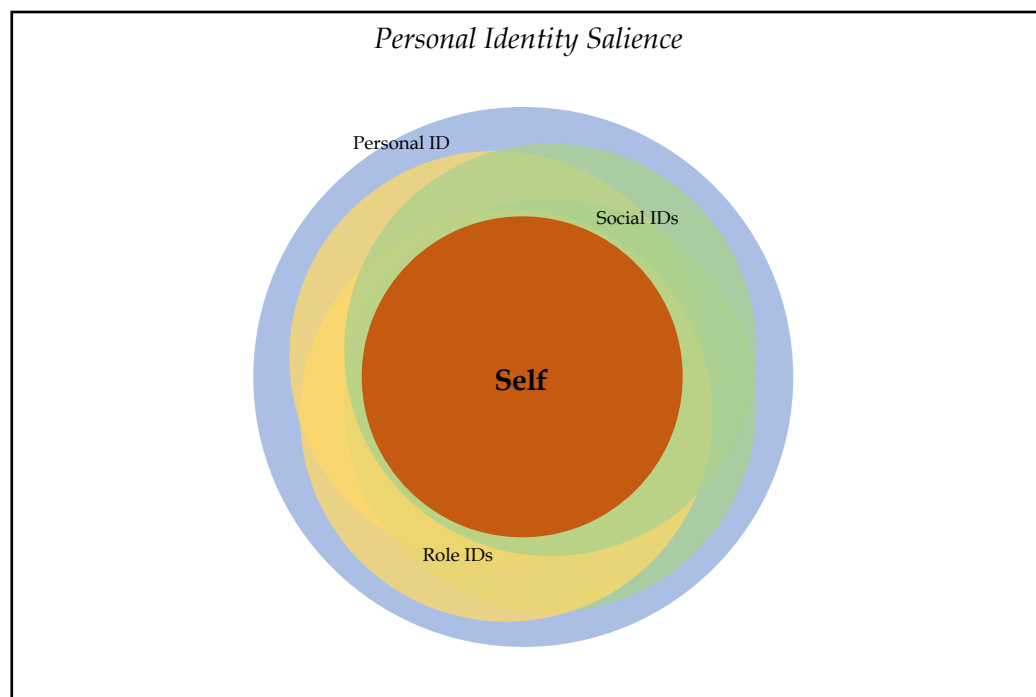


Personal Identity

Despite how we oft considered it, identity is neither singular nor static but rather multilayered and flexible, with the concept of 'personal identity' the most significant, especially in the case of this research.

Turner (2012), among others (Burke, 1980; James, 1890; Serpe & Stryker, 2011), refers to multiple identities, describing identities as "internalized self-designations associated with positions that individuals occupy within various social contexts... [they]are designations that people make about themselves in relation to their location in social structures and the roles that they play by virtue of this location."

In doing so, identity theorists also recognise varying types of identity, Stets and Burke (2000) identify three: personal identity or individual self-conception that is carried everywhere; social identity as part of a group; and role identity associated with a specific role. Each influencing behaviour to varying degrees depending on the context, these types of identity operate via a salience hierarchy; the higher in



the hierarchy that identity is – the more salient – the greater its influence. Turner (2012) is “sceptical that there is a neat linear hierarchy of prominence... among identities, as is posited by most identity theories, but I would argue that some are more general than others; the more general is the identity and the more likely it is relevant and salient in a wide variety of situations.” For example, students behave in a very specific way, with their social and role identities as students within the classroom motivating a level of quiet and attention that contrasts to the social and role identities that gain salience in the playground setting.

Having said that, the most ‘general’ of all identities is the ‘personal’ identity; the “identity standard” as Burke (2004) terms it. When we refer to someone’s ‘identity’, thinking of them as a singular and static person, it is likely to this that we refer. Personal identity can be considered the most direct representation of self and consistently carried across interactions informing and underscoring other forms of identity. Turner (2012) describes it as “the fundamental cognitions and feelings that people have about themselves that are generally salient in almost all situations”. So even in a classroom setting, but especially out in the social heterogeneity of the playground students are primarily themselves.

1.2 Identity Processes

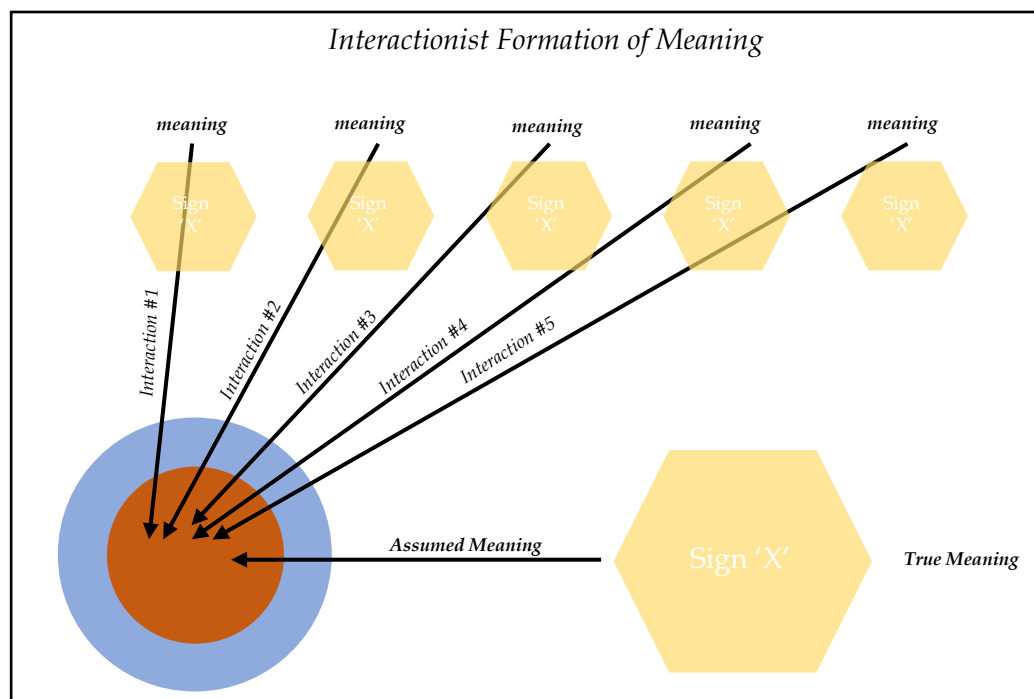
One of the key offerings of this research, a novel explanation of identity processes, comes via the synthesis of two theories across disciplinary boundaries in the social sciences – symbolic interactionism and categorisation.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism – or simply ‘interactionism’ – is a theory used primarily in micro-sociology that explains how we learn about the world and ultimately how we form our perception of the world; in part how self and

identity is formed. First conceived of by John Herbert Mead (1934) interactionism asserts that that society is formed from the interactions between people, but importantly that we interact via shared signs and symbols. Signs and symbols are objective entities – they make up our shared reality – but they communicate to each of us meaning with varying degrees of subjectivity due to the uniqueness of our own experiences with them; it is an association based on pattern recognition. Symbolic interactionists “stress the import of subjective experience to human social behaviour, and they view society as an outgrowth of interaction, society as basic to the development of self, and self-concepts as guiding social behaviour” says Serpe and Stryker (2011).

Anything can constitute a sign or symbol, abstract ideas or basic objects, because each carries meaning. For example, interactionists often study languages as sets of signs. Words have a relatively low level of subjectivity because our experiences with them have created clear meaning; ‘desk’ refers to a very specific thing, it’s defined in the dictionary. In contrast, the signs and symbols of ‘identity’ – corporate identities for instance – can be far more subjective. Some of us were ‘lucky’ enough to go McDonalds as children and got the ‘Happy Meal’ repeatedly. As a result, the McDonalds brand is imbued with positive meaning in spite of what we have later come to learn about its food; who wasn’t excited by a free toy or the playground? On the other hand,



some of our parents refused to take us to McDonalds despite our pleas in the wake of their sponsorship of every sporting event on the planet. Labelling it 'unhealthy' these parents built negative meaning behind the McDonalds branding before we ever had the chance to revel in the glory of a Double Big Mac, and because of that we do our best to avoid the fast-food chain.

Thus, those of us who have similar experiences with a specific sign or symbol (or set of signs and symbols) draw similar meaning and have similar perceptions. In turn, those of us who have similar experiences of the world (the entire set of signs and symbols) – siblings for instance – will have very similar worldviews.

Categorisation

Categorization – our ability to identify an entity as part of a larger abstract group – is similarly a process of pattern recognition but importantly should be considered to build upon interactionist processes. One of our most fundamental cognitive abilities (Cruse & Croft, 2004), categorisation in the social context allows us to simplify complexity in order to navigate it implying “that people are defined and understood not only as individuals but also as belonging to certain social categories such as age categories (e.g., child or adult)” (Trepte & Loy, 2017). From the interactionist perspective we are capable of defining categories by either signs and symbols (appearance as an indicator of age) or the meaning we assign to them (student or teacher in the context of school).

Self-categorization, as the name implies, refers to our ability to place ourselves into social categories, and derives from Turner's (1999) Self-Categorization Theory. Building upon his prior work with Tajfel (1974, 1978a, 1978b; 1979), Turner asserts that following the categorization of the social plain, we identify with a certain category – social identity – distinguishing in-group and out-group and directing behaviour as we assimilate group norms, behaving as a group member rather than an individual in the process of depersonalisation. Identification as a student motivates rule following in a school context for instance. Identifying with a group serves a variety of

important functions (Choi & Hogg, 2020), Hogg (2000, 2007, 2014) recognising its capacity to reduce uncertainty and offer important direction, while Maslow (2019) may cite the satiation of various human needs.

*“People need to know who they are, how to behave, and what to think”
(Hogg, 2012).*

Explaining Identity Construction via Interactionism and Categorization

What identity theorists have failed to recognise is the influence categorization, and the interactionist processes upon which it is built, have in the construction of personal identity and self. Despite focusing on the instructive role social groups have for social identity, I would posit that personal identity is simply an amalgamation of information from social groups detached from a group setting.

Note: The following explanation is based upon ‘typical circumstance’ and simplified. It is not intended to describe a universal experience but rather to explain processes in terms that may be applied to each unique experience.

Initial Development of Self and Identity

At first, self and a simple identity is formed and defined by the one simple social category and role we inhabit, the child of our family group. Interpersonally intense, this is what Cooley (1902) would term the “primary group”; the initial socialising agents. Here, categorisation is relatively unused – it is one unified category after all – and even when we do encounter others the outcome of self-categorization is for the most part the same; we are members of our primary group.

The homogenous family group communicates information about who we are or should be via signs and symbols; we as group members act with kindness, representative of our valuation of kindness. This meaning is reinforced with positive affirmation, or alternatively punished and assigned negative

meaning, informing self and identity, which in its infancy, before encountering more complex circumstance, exists as a relatively singular form in which personal identity – largely our behaviours and temperament – is a relatively truthful representation of self.

Looking-glass processes – also conceptualised by Cooley – are important too, with the way we are treated (and viewed) by others similarly informing our sense of self and identity. While yes, we are a member of the family group, we are treated specifically as the child – a role – and as such, learn that being playful and carefree is not only allowed but encouraged.

Complexification of Identity

As we enter the far more complex social world, categorization and identity formation is complicated by the diversity of what Cooley would call “secondary groups”. As we step onto the playground a variety of social and role identities mix with the relatively simple self-image and identity of our similarly simple experiences. In this heterogenous environment our ability to read signs and symbols – interactionist processes – of identities becomes essential in simplifying the environment into ordered categories so that instead of being overwhelmed by complexity we are able to navigate it effectively.

This categorization occurs at two levels. Firstly, by signs (or sets of signs), we are able to identify that there are a group of children who wear caps on the playground, and a group who wear bucket hats. Secondly, we are able to categorize based on the meaning tied to these signs; cap-wearers tend to be more outgoing, while bucket hat wearers tend to be more reserved.

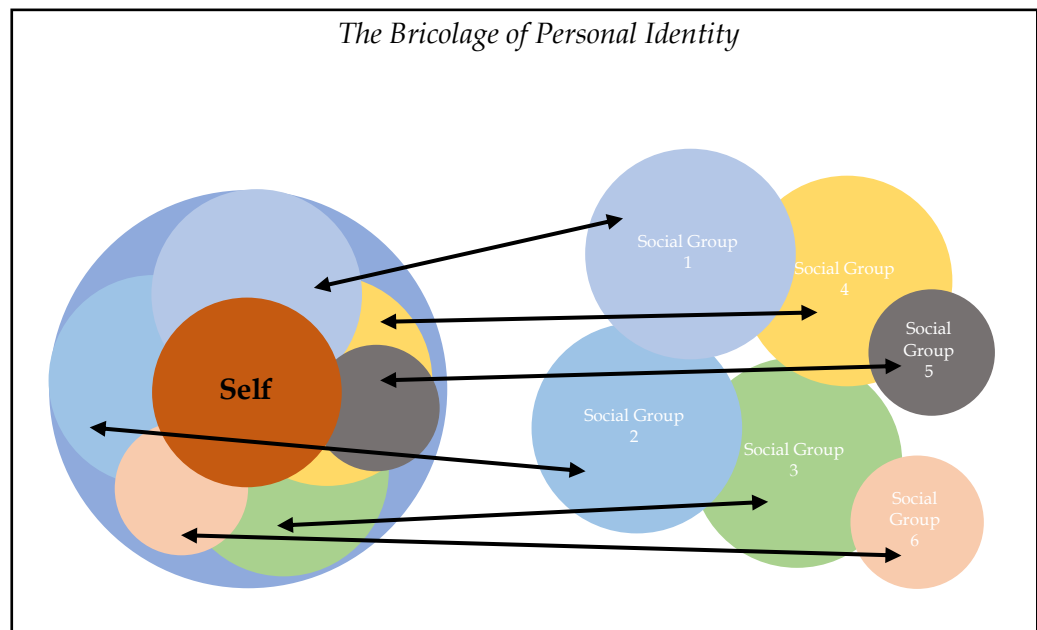
Having to self-categorize and identify with a group, results in the development and salience of social identity as Tajfel and Turner recognise. It is apparent that yes, self informs identity, but also that identity informs self.

You may be an outgoing person – your self – and as a result, self-categorise with that outgoing group, learning that you as a group member should

probably wear a cap. Alternatively, you might already wear a cap, and identify with them based upon that sign, taking on an outgoing temperament as a result. Either way, with social identity salient, we take on group norms (Hogg, 2000) as we learn to inhabit different roles across different groups. Even names can serve as social categories and inform looking-glass processes; think of the 'Chad' or 'Karen' stereotypes.

Maturation of Personal Identity

When personal identity is salient, when there is no clear group with whom we identify, the behaviours and appearance that we call our own still are still derived from the groups with which we identify – self-categorisations. Self-conceptions and the signs and symbols that represent them cannot exist as originals in a vacuum but are instead effectively appropriated from those who we identify with, a bricolage of signs and symbols emerging from our past interactions.



While alone, identification with this hodgepodge of groups still offers us much needed direction in our behaviour while informing others on how to interact with us. This maturation occurs from the point at which we enter the social world, where we must identify with multiple groups, but it becomes especially relevant as identity formation transitions from a 'given' into a 'responsibility' through adolescence and into adulthood. No longer am I

simply a family member or student, but an Australian, in my early twenties, upper-middle class, a traveller, creative, football player, and a roommate. No longer do I act and dress as the child of my parents, but I have a sense of national pride (or shame), I go out on the weekends, I empathise with the full spectrum of class, I try to do adventurous things, I take photos, chat about the league and struggle to make rent.

Personal identity construction is an ever-continuing process, although admittedly, it most likely slows as we solidify into maturity, to which there are certainly benefits; our primary groups will naturally treat us in a certain way having a specific set of interactions with the signs and symbols of our identities, informing looking-glass processes that may be difficult to challenge. Theorists have failed to come to a consensus on the reasons for this ongoing process (Trepte & Loy, 2017), but Tajfel and Turner (1979) cite the search for positive self-esteem as a key motivator.

2. Postmodernity, its Uncertainty and the Consequences for Identity

In our age of postmodernity, complexity underscores a heightened level of uncertainty unfamiliar in previous times that motivate a reliance on social identity and signs and symbols while challenging personal identity construction. Bauman (1997, 2000) describes a “liquid society”, in which complexity and ambiguity underpin an emotional state he terms “unsicherheit” : a German word that describes uncertainty and insecurity. “If I had to identify a theme at the outset of the new decade it would be increasing uncertainty” noted Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the IMF, even before the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*“Enormous uncertainty goes hand-in-hand with embracing these new times”
(Boutellier, 2011).*

2.1 The Psychology of Uncertainty

Uncertainty is as a key motivator of behaviour and should be of major concern considering its characterisation of our postmodern world.

“Uncertainty is the conscious awareness, or subjective experience of ignorance. It is...an acknowledgment of what one does not know, but also that one does not know” says Anderson et al. (2019). And, driven by lowered probability, ambiguity and complexity of available information, (Han et al., 2011) it implies a challenge to the interactionist processes that allow us to make inferences about the world: “The more predictions a stimulus evokes the greater the uncertainty” (FeldmanHall & Shenhav, 2019).

Uncertainty has a distinctly adverse effect, and almost synonymous with fear, it spurs anxiety, Carleton (2012) dramatically proposing that “fear of the unknown is a – and possibly the – fundamental fear of human beings.” This is the case because “uncertainty reflects the inability to perceive the world or know which action to take – two evolutionarily fundamental tasks” (Anderson et al., 2019); challenging our security as Bauman (1997) recognises. As such, the discomfort of uncertainty drives us to reduce it, with the affective response preparing the body “using predictions about what physiological resources will be needed” (Anderson et al., 2019).

“Uncertainty poses a critical adaptive challenge for any organism” (Hirsh et al., 2012).

2.2 General Postmodern Uncertainty

Rising uncertainty finds its foothold in not only the complexification of our world and the challenges we face, but the ambiguity that increasingly saturates it, motivating general behaviour in search of certainty and safety. In doing so, identity and self – the compasses we use to navigate the world – have become subjectively more important.

Complexity and Complex Challenges

While communication technology has evolved continuously over the last century, I would point to the adoption of the internet as one of the defining features of postmodernity; it has networked our society, expanded our worlds, offered endless answers but asked even more questions.

But even before embedment in postmodern society Baudrillard et al. (1994) was critical: "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning." "Complexity without direction" as Boutellier (2011) puts it. But, "the great changes that have faced our societies in the last decades are set to continue" say Kaldor et al. (2016). "The enormous growth in our technical capacity and communication infrastructure, in particular the internet, has led to the combined trends of globalisation, urbanisation and the creation of a networked society."

Of course, the internet brings with it great benefits, offering resources and access to information unlike ever before, but it complexifies our problems: "Over the last three decades, humanity has networked it-self, to great advantage... but, in doing so, we have also inadvertently networked our problems, thereby creating complex tangled webs of relationships in which progress is difficult to achieve" (Dorst, 2018).

General Uncertainty Reduction

In the face of uncertainty, we are motivated to manage it, but often in our haste to do so our strategies prove unproductive. "The demand for certainty is one which is natural to man but is nevertheless an intellectual vice" says Russell (1995). "So long as men are not trained to withhold judgment in the absence of evidence, they will be led astray by cocksure prophets, and it is likely that their leaders will be either ignorant fanatics or dishonest charlatans. To endure uncertainty is difficult, but so are most of the other virtues."

“To teach how to live without certainty and yet without being paralysed by hesitation is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can do for those who study it” (Russell, 2004).

Kaldor et al. (2016), in referencing Boutellier (2011), critically describe the postmodern “quest for perfect safety” that saturates our organisations. And while they do admit that “there are some very good reasons to focus on safety”, referencing its location at the base of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs (2019) they highlight how our preoccupation with uncertainty reduction has manifested itself in politics of “risk management” that largely serves to inhibit progress.

Consequences for Identity

Our social response, to identify with a group with social identity salient, while effective in reducing anxiety, proves similarly frustrating. Recognising, as Russell (2009) does, that “collective fear stimulates herd instinct and tends to produce ferocity toward those who are not regarded as members of the herd”, Hogg (2000) offers an explanation of this phenomenon in terms of social identity processes: “The reduction of subjective uncertainty is a powerful human motive that is particularly well satisfied by the self-categorization and depersonalization processes now believed to be responsible for social identity phenomena and group conduct.”

And, noting the role positive distinctiveness plays in intergroup dynamics (Stets & Burke, 2000) it should be of little surprise that advanced economies are currently experiencing a notable sense of national division (Devlin et al., 2021). For instance, note the heightened levels of political disunity in both the USA (Geer & Sullivan, 2022) and Australia (Green, 2022; Wahlquist, 2022).

Consequences for Signs and Symbols

Enabled by relatively newfound technological and financial freedom, postmodernity has witnessed, and really been characterised by, an escalation in the production and reproduction of signs and symbols; especially in the

age of the internet, brands, icons and content are everywhere. And while leading postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard et al. (1994) observe their proliferation with disdain, we have accepted postmodern signs and symbols with open arms in what should only be considered a natural desire to simplify – even and often unfaithfully – the complexity around us.

“Everywhere one seeks to produce meaning, to make the world signify, to render it visible. We are not, however, in danger of lacking meaning; quite the contrary, we are gorged with meaning and it is killing us” (Baudrillard, 2012).

Not an interactionist himself, Baudrillard’s conception of “symbolic exchange” (2016) – the transfer of meaning through signs and symbols – may mirror that of his sociological peers, but his understanding of meaning offers greater depth. “Artifice is at the very heart of reality” he says, (1994) describing the way in which the ongoing reproduction of signs perverts meaning through several stages until it can be labelled “simulacrum” – devoid of original meaning. With meaning importantly subjective, what may be considered simple sign for one person may be considered simulacrum for another. The Bluetooth logo is a suitable example; while of course it represents Bluetooth technology, its origins as the name and rune of a 10th century Viking are lesser known (Bluetooth, 2023).

From the proliferation of signs and symbols emerges hyperrealities, environments in which real and representation are indistinguishable: “Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: A hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it” (Baudrillard, 1994). Baudrillard offers Disneyland as an example of this, but digital spaces may be better suited to today. ‘Did it really happen if it wasn’t on your story?’ has been an appropriate joke in a time where the communication of experience – a party, a concert, an achievement – can take precedence over the experience itself for both producers and perceivers of

those signs. Social value – “sign value” Baudrillard would term it (2016) – often usurps experiential value.

2.3 Postmodern Self–Uncertainty

It should be of concern that amidst a dire need to navigate general uncertainty, that identity and self – our behavioural guides – increasingly lack definition in a context removed from the identity-clarity of traditional societies. Not only does this make navigation of the world difficult, but understanding as Hogg (2000) does that we are motivated most to manage uncertainties that are “subjectively important,” reducing “uncertainty about or relating to who one is and how one should behave” naturally dominates our cognitive capacity. Cultural individualism along with the dissolution of moral and social clarity – a “boundless society” (Boutellier, 2011) – have made it challenging to look away from the mirror and focus on those universal problems when the major uncertainty we face is ourselves.

“Moral coherence and the institutional design of society. To my mind, these are the most urgent themes of our time” (Boutellier, 2011).

Individualism

While Hogg (2014), in his Theory of Self-Uncertainty describes how “societal change and personal life events sometimes make one feel uncertain about one’s self and identity” Bauman (2000) illustrates how individualisation has underscores the role individualism is transforming identity formation “from a ‘given’ into a ‘task’ and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing the task and for the consequences.” No longer do we follow in the clearly defined footsteps of our primary groups as we did in traditional society, rather in adolescence we are told we can be anything or anyone; how are we supposed to decide?

Not only is identity construction now a task, but it is one hampered by, and derived from, an ambiguity left in the wake of our decaying and interdependent moral and social spaces (Sztompka, 2002): “The question of

how we want to live is before us more or less all the time. This is a relatively recent phenomenon: in traditional societies, the question is hidden behind conventions and rituals that regulate daily life, and that seem to have done so for as long as anyone can remember. Modern societies have broken free from this mould, only to find that the newfound freedoms and choices come with challenges, and that confusion and suffering are unavoidable consequences” (Kaldor et al., 2016). And while it is important to note the challenge this ambiguity poses for general uncertainty reduction, it poses the greatest challenge as we search for meaning about self.

Moral and Social Ambiguity

Postmodernity’s lack of moral clarity in particular leaves us uninformed in respect to beliefs. Decisively secular, the moral sphere is dominated by ideas of individual liberty, pragmatism and efficiency in the wake of the Enlightenment that, while undeniably positive, undermines individual security (Kaldor et al., 2016). And, without established moral guidelines, Richard Rorty (1989), posits that secular morality hinges on the simple question of “are you suffering?” No longer is there a “reassuring thought about who we are or could possibly be” says Boutellier (2011), “[no] higher power...no wide-open perspectives, no grand designs, no epic narratives.”

“If no one tells us who we are – God the Father, the prime minister, the teacher, or any other compelling ideologist – then we must do it for ourselves” (Boutellier, 2011).

As religious belief systems fade into the distance, so too do the other social structures to which we used to look to for direction. The once clear relationships we had with and within the family, the state, the news – “structures and mechanisms that guide the behaviour of groups of individuals” (Boutellier, 2011) – are now far more ambiguous. Strict hierarchies have been replaced by a decentralized “social ordering by nodes” (Boutellier, 2011) that not only makes the social plain far harder to interpret, but privatizes information and the signs and symbols that carry it; who should we look to in search of answers?

Focus of Primary Research: *The Consequences for the Signs and Symbols of Self and Identity*

There is no research specifically into how identity and its signs and symbols operate within our an uncertain postmodernity; this is the focus of this projects primary methodology.

How are we adopting the signs and symbols of identity? What do they look like? What is the nature of the meaning they carry? How do we as both individuals and a collective read them? What do we learn about our identities from them?

METHODOLOGY

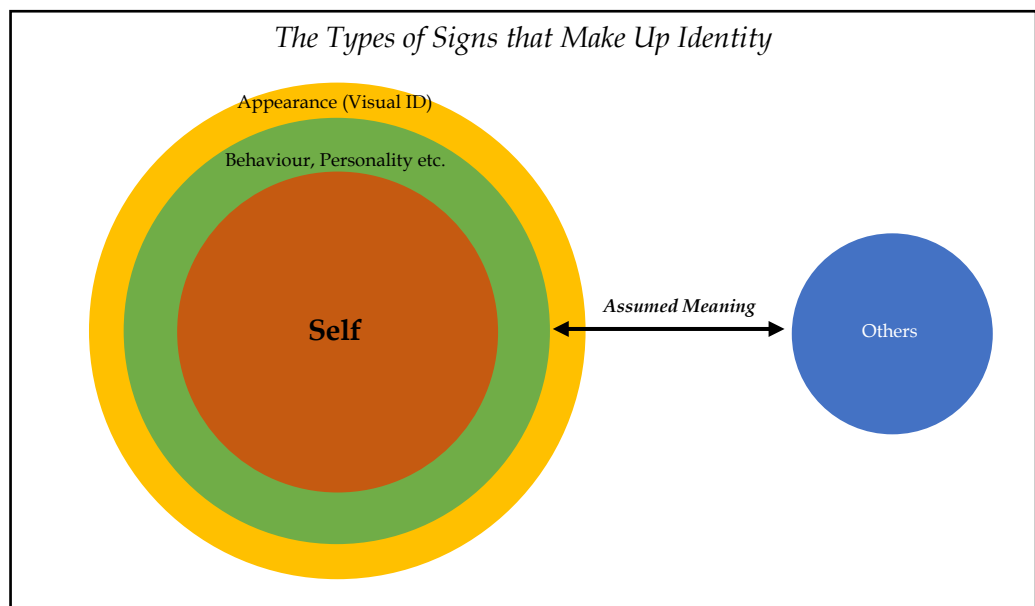
1. Overall Approach

This research, both secondary and primary, has been an explorative examination of who we are, the way we interact, and the world we inhabit together. I have taken an intentionally transdisciplinary approach to a novel focus area with consideration and circumvent knowledge barriers that appear between disciplines as per not only Dorst's (2022) directive but also of that of the social sciences literature as well (Serpe & Stryker, 2011). This holistic stance has enable synthesis of knowledge across disciplines to understand social structures and generate general theory. Serpe and Stryker (2011), as structural interactionists recognise that "both quantitative and qualitative methods can be strategic" in testing theory, and as such, a primary research methodology was designed to fit the timely and appropriate context of Instagram.

2. Primary Research

Visual Identity

No matter the identity salient – social or personal – we all have the same set of signs and symbols on which to draw; personality, behaviours, actions, speech. Self at the centre is the core referent, with identities communicated through personality, our actions and speech ultimately the most complex and nuanced set of representative signs; people have to speak to us, get to know us, for this set of signs to become relevant.



At the other end of the scale, before anyone ever interacts with us, the signs and symbols from which they draw meaning, is the visual component of our identity, our appearance. Our identity's most superficial and simplified set of signs, Baudrillard would consider appearance a representation of self several times removed. Whether appearance is highly curated as Goffman's dramaturgical analysis describes, or entirely accidental, it is the set of signs and symbols that make the first impression, setting the stage for looking-glass processes before interaction ever occurs, and offers an opportunity to study identity in its simplest terms.

“The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited” (Goffman, 1956)

Context

Instagram was selected as a context within which the visual signs and symbols of identity could be explored. Logistically it offered accessible visual data, but it also serves as a microcosm of postmodernity. By this I mean that the postmodern environment, especially through the pandemic period, has come to be characterised by digital spaces, of which Instagram is one. And, secondly while of course the platform exists within the general uncertainty, users – those predominantly in their adolescence and young adulthood – represent a group in which self-uncertainty is especially high; as discussed, the quest for identity begins and is typically its most challenging through this period. They present a novel group, whose interacts with digital spaces have been varied, emerging into the social world before smartphones left the internet in our pocket.

Furthermore, Instagram represents a space in which image, original, reproduction and copy are central. Here social meaning evolves more rapidly than ever before, conceptions of self and identity perverting and shifting in something representing Baudrillard postmodern dystopia; it is an ideal space to explore these ideas.

Method

Much like the overall approach taken, primary research was designed to be explorative, building upon background research that asked open ended questions that might provide wider more universal understanding beyond specific signs, symbols and context: “It is assumed that there is sufficient continuity in social life to justify seeking empirical generalizations applying beyond particular interactions. Concepts useful in understanding one

situation can be useful in understanding other situations” (Serpe & Stryker, 2011).

Survey Design

A survey was designed, with three key features (see Appendix 1):

1. The opening section featured questions about the responder to gain an understanding of who they were; their self, their past interactionist experiences that contribute to their perspective.
2. The main survey section featured images from six Instagram profiles with identifying characteristics removed (skin colour, face etc.). These images were analysed for the signs and symbols (semiotics) of identity via eight categories: photo, setting, hair, shoes, bottoms, top, accessories and body language.
3. Responders were asked to make judgements of the featured people based upon personality traits appropriated from popular Myers-Briggs personality test 16-Personalities (2022). Using a Likert scale they asked responders for their perception of the individual’s extroversion, imagination, emotional awareness, organisation and sensitivity to stress.

Data Analysis

Through a process of cleaning, a total of 79 responses was reduced to 57, from which data analysis was conducted:

1. As mentioned, semiotic analysis was used in identifying the signs and symbols of identity
2. Descriptive statistics and graphs that treated Likert data as ordinal offered clear indication of responses – mode treated as a measure for central tendency.
 - a. In this case, Chi-squared tests were used to compare results with a random distribution

3. Further analysis treating Likert data as scale data, considered appropriate in this context and supported by Sullivan and Artino (2013) presented more other opportunities for analysis:
 - a. Mean was treated as, and used as a final measure of central tendency
 - b. T-Tests were used to compare central tendencies with a normal distribution that assumed 'average' results at 3. Significance ($p < 0.05$) was treated as an indicator of 'collective perspective' mean above or below 'average', with results of 0 considered 'significantly' above or below.
 - c. Measures of standard deviation, interquartile range, skewness and Kolmogorov-Smirnov were used as indicators of response distribution. Interquartile range was ultimately selected as an indicator of 'relative sign clarity'; results less than two consider 'high clarity', with result of 2 or more considered 'low clarity.'
4. In identifying 'significant' profile for each of the five personality characteristics, frequency tables of signs and symbols were constructed.

FINDINGS

1. Who are the Responders?

Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Female	25	43.9
Male	31	54.4
Other	1	1.8

Age

	Frequency	Percent
20-21	8	14
22-23	34	59.6
24-25	4	7
26-27	2	3.5
28-29	1	1.8
30-35	5	8.8
35+	3	5.3

Instagram User Status

	Frequency	Percent
No	7	12.3
Yes	50	87.7

Level of Education

	Frequency	Percent
Currently Studying a Graduate Degree	5	8.8
Currently Studying an Undergraduate Degree	15	26.3
Graduate Degree	7	12.3
High School	3	5.3
Undergraduate Degree	27	47.4

Area of Study

	Frequency	Percent
Arts and Humanities	9	15.8
Business and Law	12	21.1
Design, Architecture and Planning	13	22.8
Education and Social Work	1	1.8
Engineering and Computer Science	7	12.3
Health	2	3.5
None	1	1.8
Science	5	8.8
Social Science	7	12.3

Location

	Frequency	Percent
NSW, Australia	40	70.2
Other	17	29.8

Living Arrangements (who do they live with?)

	Frequency	Percent
Parents and Family	24	42.1
Partner	11	19.3
Partner and Children	2	3.5
Roommates	12	21.1
Alone	6	10.5
Child or Children	2	3.5

2. Findings by Profile

Profile A

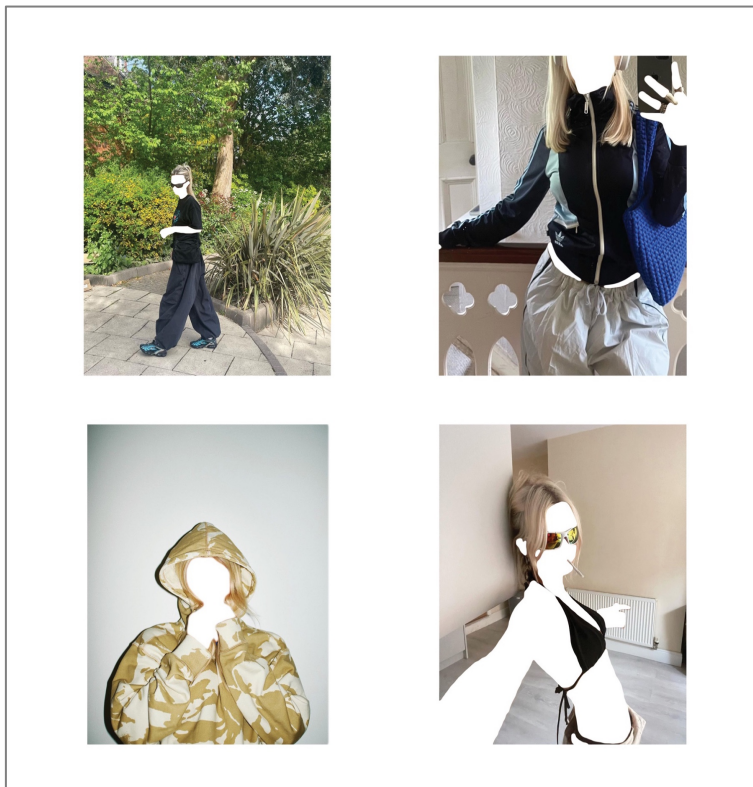
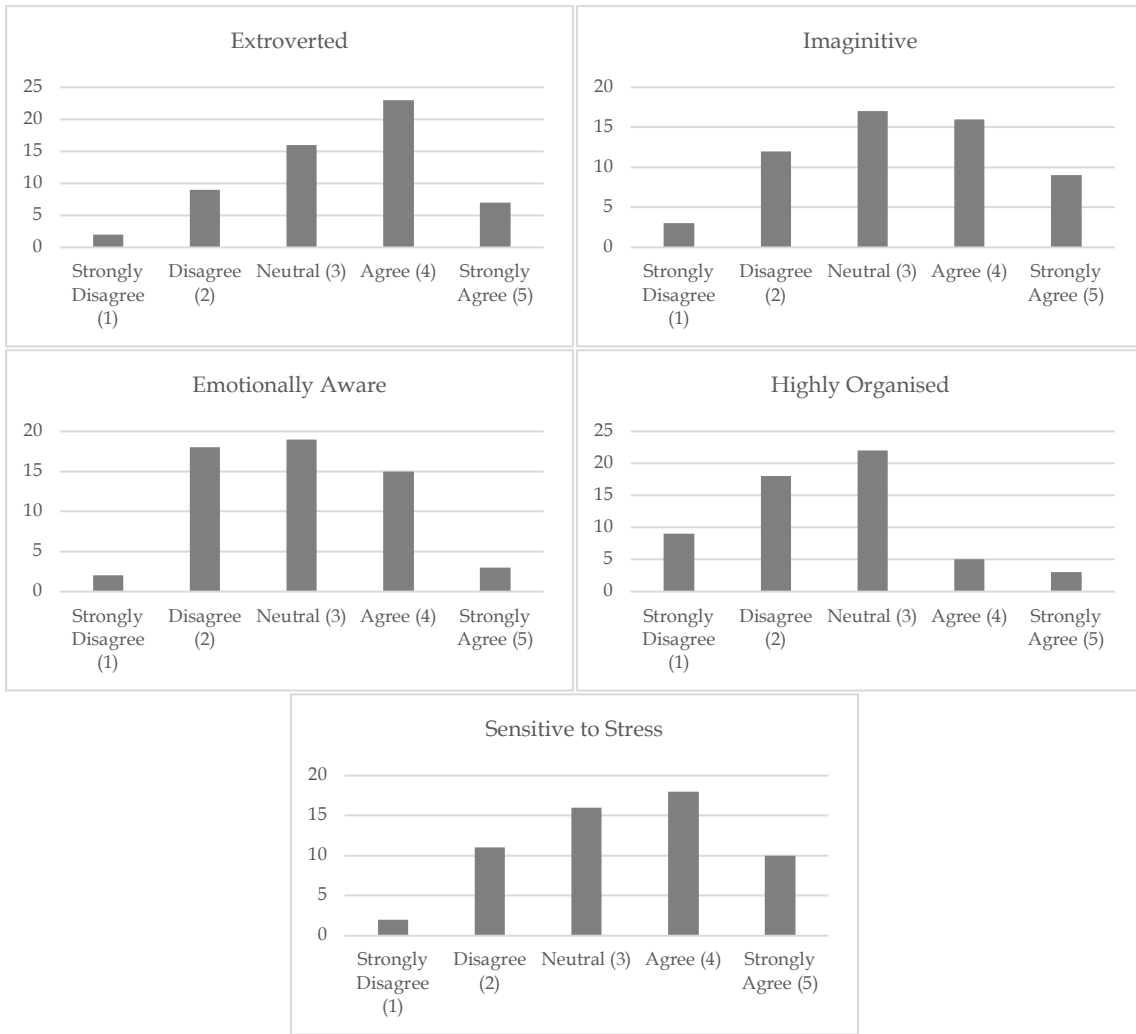


	Image One	Image Two	Image Three	Image Four
Photo	Uncropped, portrait, off-centre	mirror selfie, cropped, off-centre	cropped, portrait, centred, flash	selfie, cropped, central
Setting	Exterior, nature, urban, path, blue sky	Interior, old architecture (Western)	Interior, white wall	Interior, contemporary architecture (western), residence
Hair	Blonde, pony-tail	Blonde, down (straight)	Blonde, down	Blonde, pony-tail
Shoes	Athletic (blue), socks (unseen)			
Bottoms	Pants (black, baggy, athletic)	Pants (grey, baggy, athletic)		ants (undone, cream), bikini bottoms (black), exposed skin (hips)
Top	T-shirt (Black, graphic)	Jacket (Dark, athletic, Adidas, tracksuit, light blue), exposed skin (hips), zipped	Baggy, camouflage, hoodie (hood up)	Bikini top(Black), exposed skin (torso, arms)
Accessories	Bag (shoulder, black), Sunglasses (sports)	Jewellery (Three, gold rings), Hand bag (blue, textured), Headphones (white), Phone (iPhone)	None	Sunglasses (sports glasses, joint)
Body Language	Aware of camera, direct gaze, unposed, moving, walking	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed, taking photo	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed, joint in mouth, taking photo



	Extroverted	Imaginitive	Emotionally Aware	Highly Organised	Sensitive to Stress
Strongly Agree (5)	7	9	3	3	10
Agree (4)	23	16	15	5	18
Neutral (3)	16	17	19	22	16
Disagree (2)	9	12	18	18	11
Strongly Disagree (1)	2	3	2	9	2
Total	57	57	57	57	57

Mode	4	3	3	3	4
Chi Squared Sig	<.001	0.023	<.001	<.001	0.009

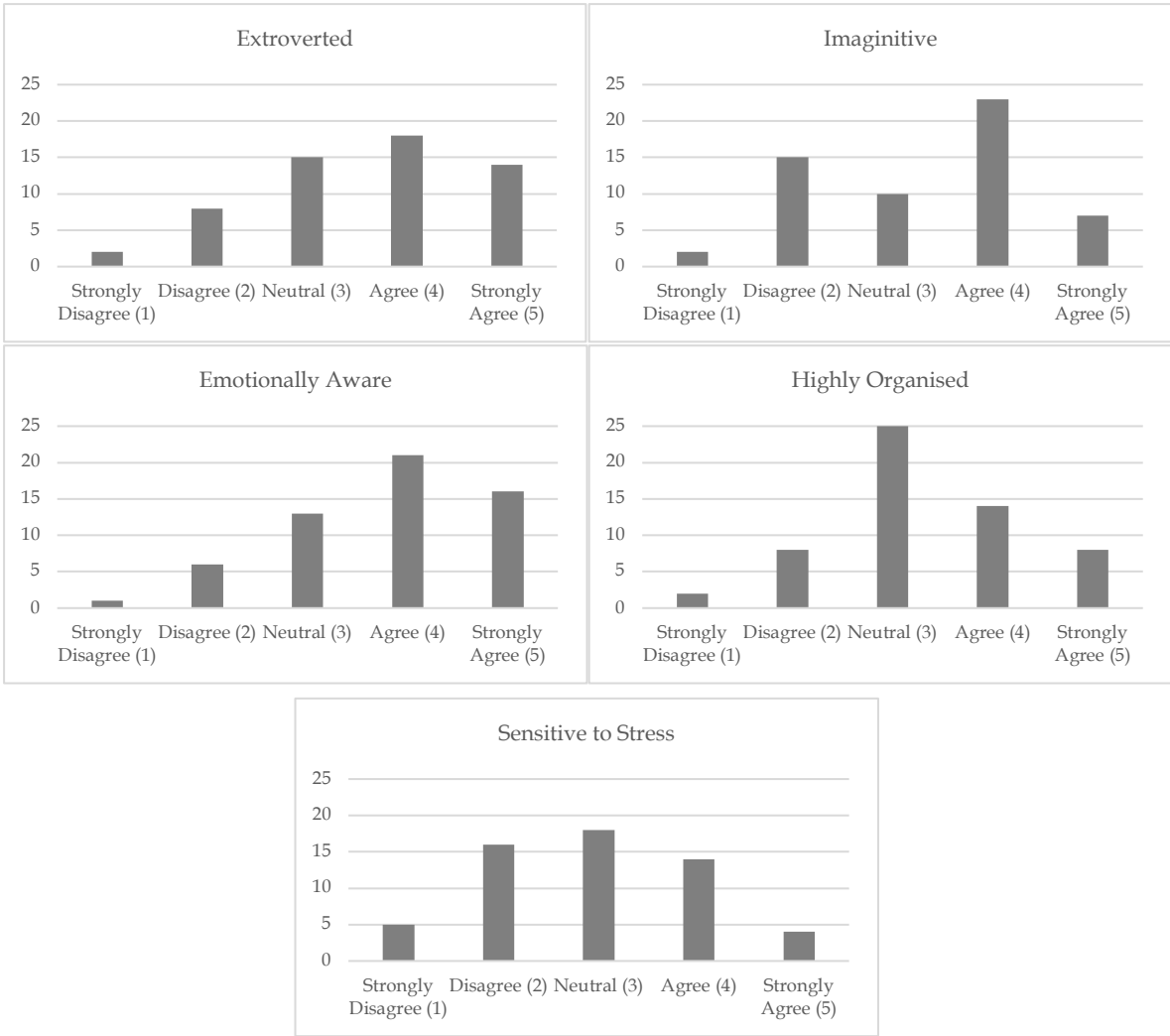
Mean	3.42	3.28	2.98	2.56	3.4
T-Test Sig	0.003	0.066	0.892	0.002	0.008
Collective Perception	Extroverted	Average	Average	Not Highly Organised	Sensitive to Stress

Std. Deviation	1.017	1.13	0.973	1.035	1.1
Interquartile Range	1	2	2	1	1
Sign Clarity	High	Low	Low	High	High
Skewness	-0.412	-0.122	0.157	0.38	-0.205
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Profile B



	Image One	Image Two	Image Three	Image Four
Photo	Uncropped, portrait, off-centre	Selfie, cropped	Portrait, central, cropped	Selfie, cropped
Setting	Exterior, nature, plants, waterfall, blue sky	Exterior, urban, garden, plants, people (two, friends)	Exterior, urban, march, people (crowd), grey sky, 'Black lives matter' sign	Interior, old architecture (wooden), nature, people (one, friend)
Hair	Brown, dreadlocks, long	Brown, dreadlocks, long	Brown, dreadlocks, long	Brown, dreadlocks, long
Shoes	Athletic (grey, orange), socks (unseen)		Boots (black), socks (unseen)	
Bottoms	Shorts (brown, cargo)		Shorts (brown, cargo)	
Top	None, exposed skin (torso, arms)	Singlet (black, graphic), exposed skin (arms)	Singlet (dark)	Shirt (white, linen, buttoned)
Accessories	Camera	Microphone	Bandana (orange, patterned), Bag (backpack, black), electric skateboard	
Body Language	Aware of camera, indirect gaze, posed	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed, holding camera	Aware of camera, indirect gaze, unposed, fist raised, moving, marching	Aware of camera, direct gaze, embrace, posed, holding camera



	Extroverted	Imaginative	Emotionally Aware	Highly Organised	Sensitive to Stress
Strongly Agree (5)	14	7	16	8	4
Agree (4)	18	23	21	14	14
Neutral (3)	15	10	13	25	18
Disagree (2)	8	15	6	8	16
Strongly Disagree (1)	2	2	1	2	5
Total	57	57	57	57	57

Mode	4	4	4	3	3
Chi Squared Sig	0.006	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.005

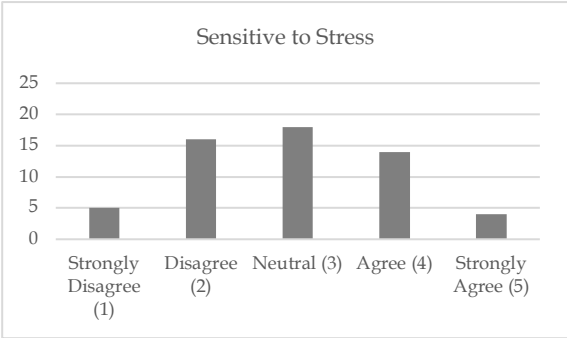
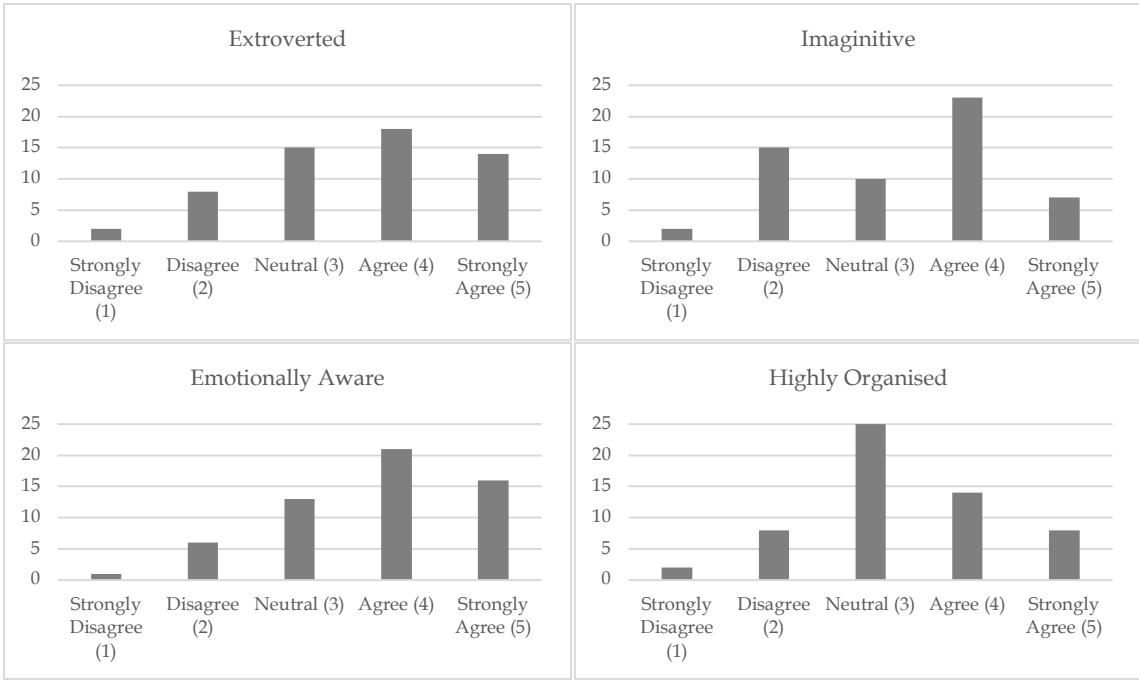
Mean	3.6	3.32	3.79	3.32	2.93
T-Test Sig	0	0.035	0	0.021	0.627
Collective Perception	Significantly Extroverted	Imaginative	Significantly Emotionally Aware	Highly Organised	Average

Std. Deviation	1.116	1.105	1.031	1.003	1.083
Interquartile Range	2	2	2	1	2
Relative Sign Clarity	Low	Low	Low	High	Low
Skewness	-0.411	-0.254	-0.573	-0.021	0.056
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

Profile C



	Image One	Image Two	Image Three	Image Four
Photo	Off-centre, portrait, uncropped	Portrait, from behind, off-centre	Portrait, off-centre, cropped, from behind	Mirror selfie, central
Setting	Interior, residence (house), contemporary architecture (western), carpet, art	Exterior, nature, river, nature, stones, plants, dog (on leash)	Interior, non-residence (restaurant), food (oysters), wine	Interior, non-residence (work), bathroom, contemporary architecture
Hair	Brown, ponytail	Brown, bun	Brown	Brown, ponytail
Shoes		Athletic (white, Brooks), socks (white)		
Bottoms	Pants (blue, jeans, fitted)	Pants (black, fitted)		Pants (blue, jeans, fitted)
Top	Shirt (black)	Jacket (puffer, black)	Singlet (black), exposed skin (arms)	Jacket (black, zipped)
Accessories		Sunglasses	Food (oysters), Drink (wine)	Phone (green case, unbranded), work ID
Body Language	Unaware of camera, unposed, indirect gaze, moving, working	Unaware of camera, indirect gaze, unposed, moving, throwing stone	Aware of camera, indirect gaze, posed, moving, eating	Aware of camera, indirect gaze, posed, peace sign



	Is an extrovert	Is imaginative	Is emotionally aware	Is highly organised	Is sensitive to stress
Strongly Agree (5)	14	7	16	8	4
Agree (4)	18	23	21	14	14
Neutral (3)	15	10	13	25	18
Disagree (2)	8	15	6	8	16
Strongly Disagree (1)	2	2	1	2	5
Total	57	57	57	57	57

Mode	2	4	4	4	4
Chi Squared Sig	0.025	<.001	<.001	0.313	0.003

Mean	2.54	3.39	3.56	3.7	3.65
T-Test Sig	0.007	0.004	0	0	0
Collective Perception	Not extroverted	Imaginative	Significantly Emotionally Aware	Significantly highly organised	Significantly sensitive to stress

Std. Deviation	1.226	0.978	1	1.034	0.876
Interquartile Range	1	1	1	2	1
Relative Sign Clarity	High	High	High	Low	High
Skewness	0.528	-0.381	-0.674	-0.265	-0.063
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Profile D

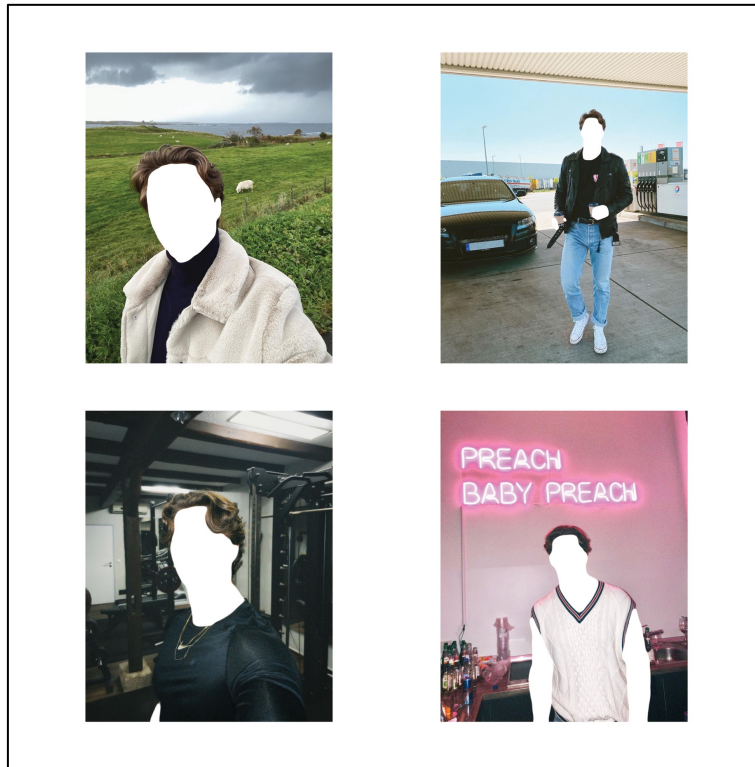
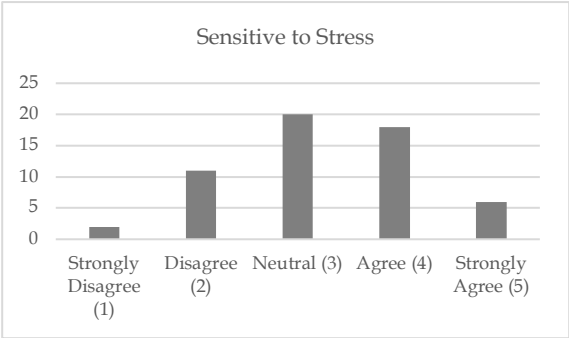
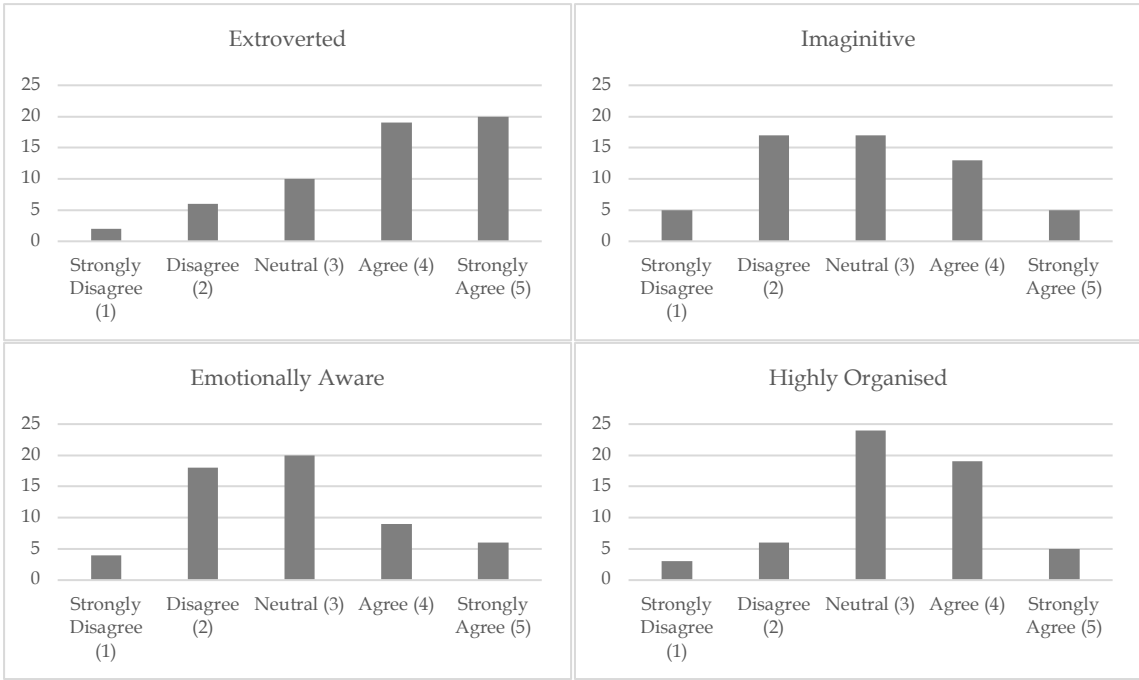


	Image One	Image Two	Image Three	Image Four
Photo	Selfie, cropped	Portrait, uncropped, off-centre	Selfie, flash, cropped	Portrait, cropped, off-centre
Setting	Exterior, farmland, nature, ocean, grey sky, sheep	Exterior, urban, petrol station, black car, blue sky	Interior, non-residence (gym), weights, contemporary architecture	Interior, contemporary architecture, non-residence (bar), 'preach baby preach' pink neon sign, liquor
Hair	Brown, medium-length, wavy	Brown, medium-length, wavy	Brown, medium-length, wavy	Brown, medium-length, wavy
Shoes		Sneakers (white, Converse), socks (unseen)		
Bottoms		Pants (blue, jeans, fitted, cuffed)		
Top	Jacket (white, fur), shirt (black, turtleneck)	Jacket (black, leather), T-shirt (black)	T-shirt (athletic, black, Nike)	Vest (cable, knit, white), exposed skin (arms)
Accessories		Belt (black), coffees (in hand)	Jewellery (necklace, two, silver)	
Body Language	Aware of camera, taking photo, posed, direct gaze	Aware of camera, direct gaze, moving	Aware of camera, taking photo, direct gaze, posed	Aware of camera, standing, direct gaze, posed



	Is an extrovert	Is imaginative	Is emotionally aware	Is highly organised	Is sensitive to stress
Strongly Agree (5)	20	5	6	5	6
Agree (4)	19	13	9	19	18
Neutral (3)	10	17	20	24	20
Disagree (2)	6	17	18	6	11
Strongly Disagree (1)	2	5	4	3	2
Total	57	57	57	57	57

Mode	5	2 and 3	3	3	3
Chi Squared Sig	<.001	<.001	0.012	0.001	<.001

Mean	3.86	2.93	2.91	3.3	3.26
T-Test Sig	0	0.637	0.546	0.023	0.054
Collective Perception	Significantly extroverted	Average	Not emotionally aware	Highly organised	Sensitive to stress

Std. Deviation	1.125	1.116	1.09	0.963	1.009
Interquartile Range	2	2	2	1	1
Relative Sign Clarity	Low	Low	Low	High	High
Skewness	-0.806	0.143	0.351	-0.393	-0.127
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Profile E

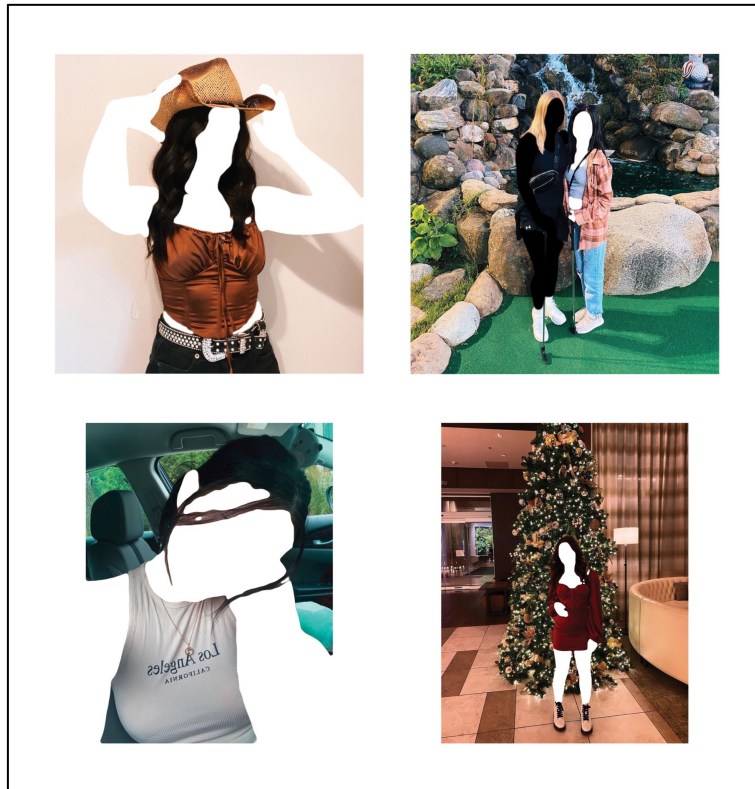
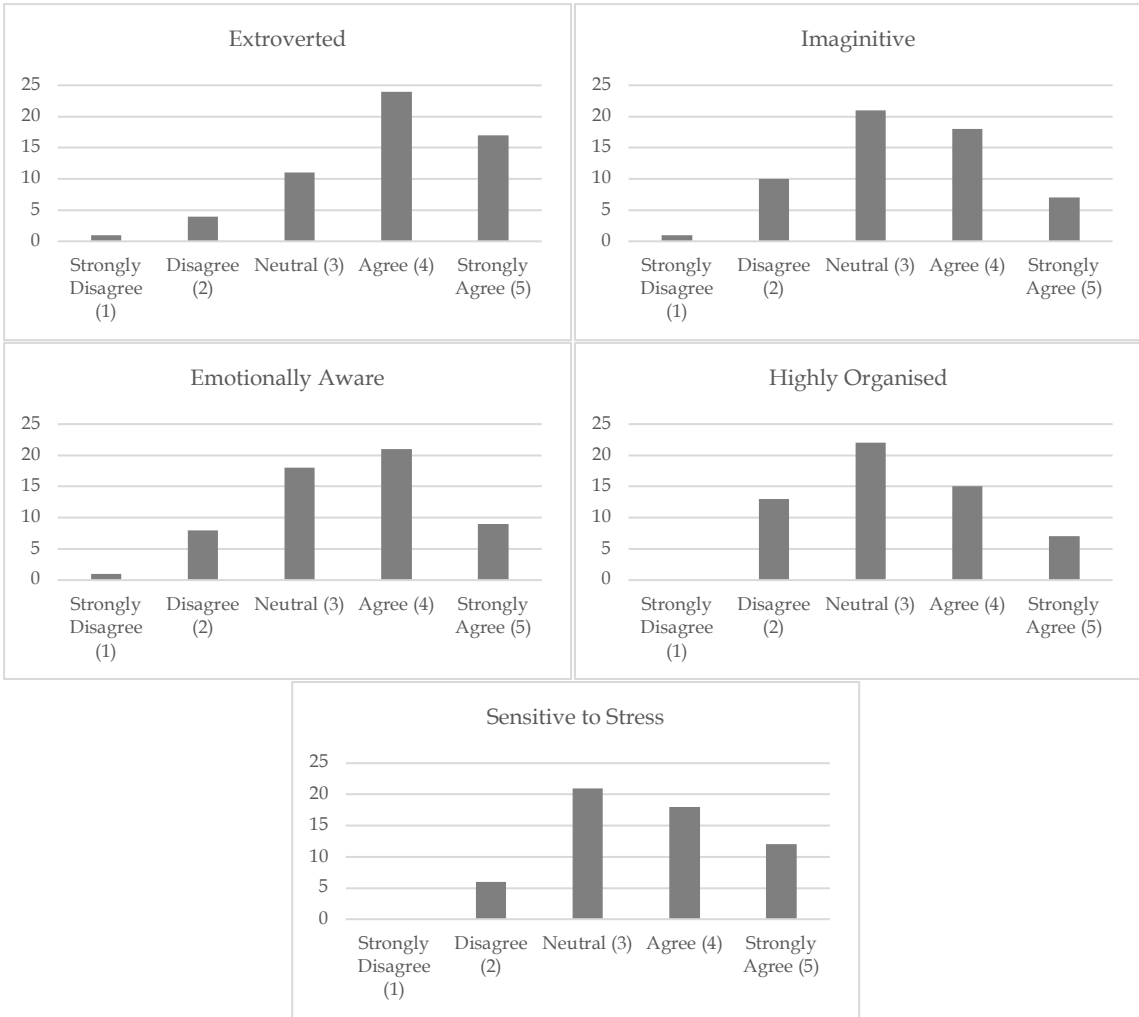


	Image One	Image Two	Image Three	Image Four
Photo	Portrait, cropped, central	Portrait, central, uncropped	Selfie, central, cropped	Portrait, central, uncropped
Setting	Interior, white wall	Exterior, urban, minigolf, people (one, friend), stones, waterfall	Interior, non-residence, car	Interior, Christmas tree, contemporary architecture, couch, non-residence
Hair	Brown, down, curled	Brown, down, straight	Brown, ponytail	Brown, curled, down
Shoes		Sneakers (white), socks (white)		Boots (Doc Martens, white), socks (unseen)
Bottoms	Pants (black, jeans)	Pants (blue, jeans, distressed, fitted)	Singlet (grey, graphic)	
Top	Singlet (brown), exposed skin (hips, arms)	Shirt (pink, plaid), singlet (grey, exposed skin (torso))		Dress (red), exposed skin (legs)
Accessories	Belt (black, studded), hat (brown, cowboy hat)	Bag (shoulder, black), golf club	Jewelry (necklace, gold)	
Body Language	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed



	Is an extrovert	Is imaginative	Is emotionally aware	Is highly organised	Is sensitive to stress
Strongly Agree (5)	17	7	9	7	12
Agree (4)	24	18	21	15	18
Neutral (3)	11	21	18	22	21
Disagree (2)	4	10	8	13	6
Strongly Disagree (1)	1	1	1	0	0
Total	57	57	57	57	57

Mode	4	3	4	3	3
Chi-Squared Sig	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.045	0.025

Mean	3.91	3.35	3.51	3.28	3.63
T-Test Sig	0	0.009	0	0.031	0
Collective Judgement	Significantly extroverted	Imaginative	Significantly emotionally aware	Highly Organised	Significantly sensitive to stress

Std. Deviation	0.969	0.973	0.984	0.959	0.938
Interquartile Range	2	1	1	1	1
Relative sign clarity	Low	High	High	High	High
Skewness	-0.796	-0.045	-0.258	0.28	0.007
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Profile F

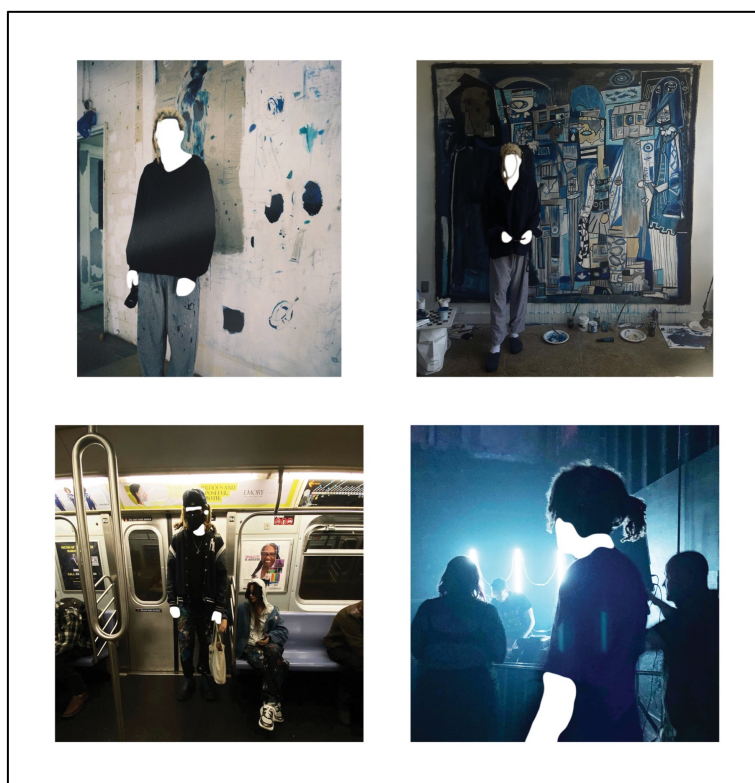
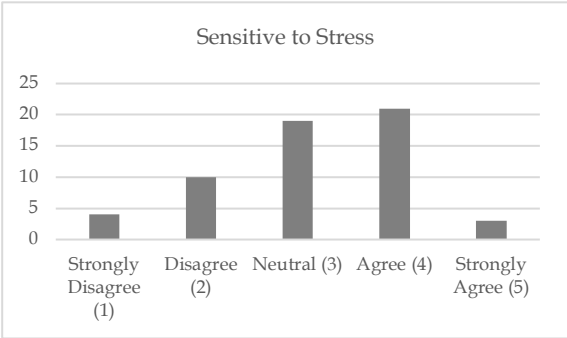
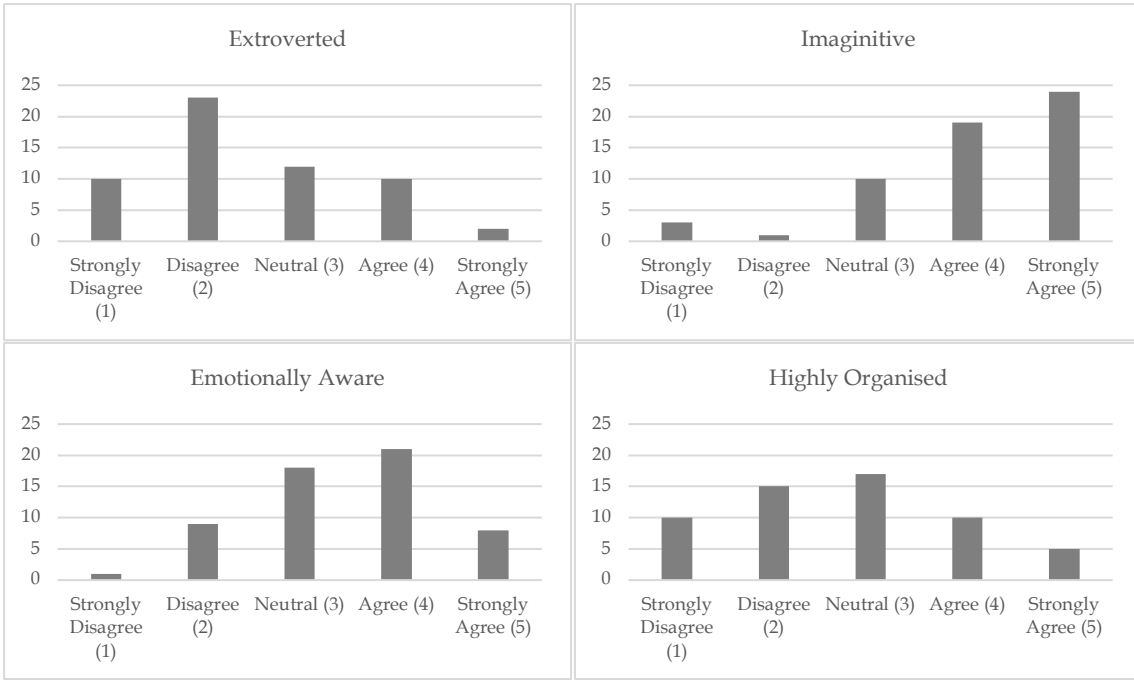


	Image One	Image Two	Image Three	Image Four
Photo	Portrait, cropped, off-centre	Portrait, uncropped, off-centre	Portrait, central, uncropped	From behind, portrait, cropped
Setting	Interior, paint, non-residence (workshop), contemporary architecture	Interior, non-residence (workshop), abstract painting	Interior, non-residence (train carriage), people (three, unassociated), advertising	Dark, interior, non-residence (music venue), people (three, unassociated), contemporary architecture
Hair	Dread-locks, blonde, medium-length	Dread-locks, blonde, medium-length	Dread-locks, blonde, medium-length	Dread-locks, medium-length
Shoes		Slippers (black), socks (white)	Boots (black), socks (unseen)	
Bottoms	Pants (dark, dirty, baggy)	Pants (dark, dirty, baggy)	Pants (dark, distressed, fitted)	
Top	Jumper (black)	Jumper (black)	T-shirt (black), jacket (black, white details, New York Yankees)	
Accessories	Camera	Paints, brushes	Bag (white, tote), Jewelry (silver, necklace), sunglasses, hat (cap, backwards, black)	
Body Language	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed	Aware of camera, direct gaze, posed	Aware of camera, posed, indirect gaze	Unaware of camera, unposed, indirect gaze



	Is an extrovert	Is imaginative	Is emotionally aware	Is highly organised	Is sensitive to stress
Strongly Agree (5)	2	24	8	5	3
Agree (4)	10	19	21	10	21
Neutral (3)	12	10	18	17	19
Disagree (2)	23	1	9	15	10
Strongly Disagree (1)	10	3	1	10	4
Total	57	57	57	57	57

Mode	2	5	4	3	4
Chi-Squared Sig	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.098	<.001

Mean	2.49	4.05	3.46	2.74	3.16
T-Test Sig	0.001	0	0.001	0.104	0.245
Collective Perception	Not extroverted	Significantly imaginative	Emotionally aware	Average	Average

Std. Deviation	1.088	1.076	0.983	1.203	1.014
Interquartile range	1	1.5	1	2	1.5
Relative Sign Clarity	High	High	High	Low	High
Skewness	0.455	-1.266	-0.224	0.213	-0.435
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

3. The Signs and Symbols of Personality

Is Extroverted

Profiles B,D and E were identified as significantly extroverted; a total of 12 photos.

Sign	Count	Percentage of Total Photos (12)
Photo		
central	5	42%
cropped	8	67%
off-centre	3	25%
uncropped	3	25%
Portrait		
Portrait	6	50%
Selfie	5	42%
Setting		
blue sky	2	17%
contemporary architecture	3	25%
grey sky	2	17%
nature	3	25%
non-residence	2	17%
people	3	25%
urban	3	25%
waterfall	2	17%
Exterior	6	50%
Interior	6	50%
sign	2	17%
Hair		
curled	2	17%
down	3	25%
dreadlocks	4	33%
long	4	33%
medium-length	4	33%
wavy	4	33%
Brown	12	100%
Shoes		
socks (unseen)	4	33%
white	2	17%
Boots	2	17%
Sneakers	2	17%
Bottoms		
fitted	2	17%
jeans	3	25%
Brown	2	17%
Pants	2	17%
Shorts	2	17%
Top		
exposed skin	4	33%
black	4	33%
exposed skin	2	17%
Jacket	2	17%
Shirt	2	17%
white	2	17%
Accessories		
black	2	17%

Belt	2	17%
black	2	17%
Jewellery	2	17%
necklace	3	25%
Body Language		
direct gaze	10	83%
holding camera	2	17%
indirect gaze	2	17%
moving	2	17%
posed	10	83%
taking photo	2	17%
Aware of camera	12	100%

Is Imaginative

Profile F was the only identified as significantly imaginative; a total of 4 photos.

Sign	Count	Percentage of Total Photos (4)
Photo		
cropped	2	50%
off-centre	2	50%
uncropped	2	50%
Portrait	3	75%
Setting		
contemporary architecture	2	50%
non-residence	4	100%
Interior	3	75%
Hair		
blonde	3	75%
medium-length	4	100%
Dread-locks	4	100%
Shoes		
black	2	50%
Pants		
baggy	2	50%
dirty	2	50%
dark	3	75%
Pants	2	50%
Top		
black	4	100%
Jumper	2	50%
Body Language		
direct gaze	2	50%
indirect gaze	2	50%
posed	3	75%
Aware of camera	3	75%

Emotional Awareness

Profiles B, C and E were identified as significantly emotionally aware; a total of 12 photos.

Sign	Count	Percentage of Total Photos (12)
Photo		
central	6	50%
cropped	6	50%
off-centre	3	25%
portrait	2	17%
uncropped	3	25%
Portrait	6	50%
Selfie	3	25%
from behind	2	17%
Setting		
contemporary architecture	3	25%
non-residence	3	25%
people	3	25%
Interior	7	58%
Exterior	5	42%
nature	4	33%
plants	2	17%
waterfall	2	17%
urban	2	17%
stones	2	17%
Hair		
curled	2	17%
down	3	25%
dreadlocks	4	33%
long	4	33%
ponytail	3	25%
Brown	12	100%
Shoes		
socks (unseen)	3	25%
socks (white)	2	17%
white	2	17%
Boots	2	17%
Bottoms		
fitted	4	33%
jeans	4	33%
black	2	17%
blue	3	25%
Brown	2	17%
Pants	5	42%
Shorts	2	17%
Top		
exposed skin	3	25%
black	4	33%
exposed skin	2	17%
Jacket	2	17%
Shirt	2	17%
Singlet	2	17%
Accessories		

black	2	17%
necklace	2	17%
Body Language		
direct gaze	6	50%
holding camera	2	17%
indirect gaze	6	50%
moving	4	33%
posed	9	75%
unposed	3	25%
Aware of camera	10	83%
Unaware of camera	2	17%

Highly organised

Profile C was the only profile identified as significantly highly organised; a total of 4 photos.

Sign	Count	Percentage of Total Photos (4)
Photo		
off-centre	2	50%
Portrait	2	50%
from behind	2	50%
Hair		
ponytail	2	50%
Brown	4	100%
Bottoms		
fitted	3	75%
jeans	2	50%
blue	2	50%
Pants	3	75%
Top		
black	3	75%
Jacket	2	50%
Body Language		
indirect gaze	4	100%
posed	2	50%
unposed	2	50%
Aware of camera	2	50%
Unaware of camera	2	50%
moving	3	75%

Sensitive to stress

Profiles C and E were identified as significantly sensitive to stress; a total of 8 photos.

Sign	Count	Percentage of Total Photos (8)
Photo		
central	5	63%

cropped	3	38%
off-centre	2	25%
uncropped	3	38%
Portrait	5	63%
from behind	2	25%
Setting		
contemporary architecture	3	38%
non-residence	3	38%
Interior	6	75%
Exterior	2	25%
nature	2	25%
stones	2	25%
Hair		
curled	2	25%
down	3	38%
ponytail	3	38%
Brown	8	100%
Shoes		0%
socks (white)	2	25%
white	2	25%
Bottoms		
fitted	4	50%
jeans	4	50%
black	2	25%
blue	3	38%
Pants	5	63%
Top		
exposed skin	4	50%
black	3	38%
Jacket	2	25%
Accessories		
necklace	2	25%
Body Language		
direct gaze	4	50%
indirect gaze	4	50%
posed	6	75%
unposed	2	25%
Aware of camera	6	75%
Unaware of camera	2	25%
moving	3	38%

DISCUSSION

Findings illustrate the theoretical offerings of this research's background research and its novel exploration of identity and its processes within postmodern uncertainty. They describe specific processes and outcomes but as Serpe and Stryker (2011) suggest is the case for sociological research of this nature, greater understanding can be gained.

Having said that, it's important to recognise the scope of this project, and findings ultimately offer a limited and simplified view in comparison to what a following project with greater scope and learning could offer.

Specific Illustrations

Within the data this research produced, specific and individual cases can be illustrated. Specific signs of identity are highlighted, and their interpretation presented. Statistically not only are the perception of self and identity defined via the subjective perspectives – the subjective realities – of individual responders, but objectivity of a shared reality is defined too.

Illustration of Postmodernity's Consequences for Identity

Importantly, findings paint a picture of how, much like the unproductive strategies employed in the face of general uncertainty, self-uncertainty places a premium on meaning that can serve identity formation processes despite its quality; any answer is better than no answer when we must do something.

In the same way that group identification offers anaesthetic amongst general uncertain, it serves as an even stronger panacea under conditions of self-uncertainty, (Hogg, 2007) recognising its subjective importance. "Self-uncertainty places a premium on identity-defining belief systems that are distinctive, unambiguous, all-encompassing, explanatory, and behaviourally prescriptive" Hogg (2014) says.

I would posit that it is these group systems, those that seem useful under general uncertainty and ultimately offer moral and social clarity we crave, inform identity beyond social identity salience; with self lacking clarity, they impose beyond social identity and saturate personal identity even when disconnected from the group. Instagram has proved an appropriate testing ground for such processes, with postmodernity's characteristic individualism a defining feature. The digital space imitates public heterogeneity; there are not shared profiles, social identity is not salient, but rather profiles are individual, and online visual identity is too.

These findings also represent what I would describe as the 'solidification of personal identity.' As described, identity is flexible, with a shifting hierarchy of salience unique to each social scenario. In the past this flexibility was far more possible than today. By making identity universally viewable, and permanent in respect time, both you, and everyone who can see your profile, have a set definition of your identity. It is hard to escape your own and other's conceptions of you when there is permanent 'evidence' of who you are. You self-categorise and others categorise you in a specific way, informing looking-glass processes that only serve to reinforce identity. I would suggest this universality and permanence pigeonholes us, a rigidity of identity that reduces our social resilience and creative capacity.

Beyond the scope of this research, while Hogg (2014) observes self-uncertainty in relation to 'extremist groups', it should come as little surprise that without obvious social structures to look to, we gravitate to groups - facilitated by digital environments - that offer defining beliefs characterised by distinct prototypes (Choi & Hogg, 2020); Donald Trump, Greta Thunberg, Alex Jones, Andrew Tate, Kim Kardashian.

Signs and Symbols of Identity Amidst Postmodern Uncertainty

Findings also demonstrate the proliferation of signs and symbols that similarly serve our needs under conditions of general uncertainty; I would posit the same can be said for those relevant to identity and self-uncertainty. In a time where interactionist and categorisation processes empower us to

simplify social complexity, it should be assumed that the same abilities allow us to self-categorise. We adopt the signs and symbols of groups as we attempt to steep ourselves in meaning, contributing to the simplification of the social space, not only to the benefit of others, but truly for the benefit of ourselves.

Fashion choices undoubtedly dominate the signs and symbols of identity as is clear in the research, where much like more general signs and symbols, technology and financial freedom amongst late-capitalism have propelled brands and the “sign power” (Baudrillard, 2016) they carry.

It is also important to recognise the social hyper-reality that Instagram has come to be. A simulation in its own right as a digital space, evolving “sign power” has seen photographs – and the signs and symbols that compose them – replace ‘real’ social appearance and interaction. Alongside such a transition, ‘real’ experience find their power less and less in reality, but find power more so in their online representation; a quality that would horrify Baudrillard.

CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

Future Research and Limitations

This research, in its unique methodology and viewpoint offers foundation for further research that continues to focus on digital interaction, but also any research that seeks to understand subjective realities and construct objectivity amongst them.

Future research specifically into personality, the semiotics of identity and the online environment has the capacity to focus on already clear and yet to be defined problems within an increasingly important and lawless context. Specifically, in such a visual medium, in which we lust for signs and symbols to simplify a complex world, research has the opportunity to understand the ways in which we are taking on meaning via the pattern recognition of

interactionist processes; information that increasingly seems to be damaging for the self and problematic for society.

Limited by the scope in respect to resources including time, this research's primary methodology serves as a great pilot study from which to learn; but it should be treated as such. Future research should adopt transdisciplinarity in its full capacity, including first person perspectives across cognitive sciences including neuroscience, psychology, sociology, anthropology and more; contemporary research's explanatory capacity has been worryingly limited by monodisciplinary and individual approaches to knowledge. These phenomenon and processes do not exist in a vacuum but are highly complex and should be treated as such. I would again emphasise an explorative approach to such complex spaces and highlight the offerings emerging tools of analysis in the online space and statistically, including artificial intelligence bring to the academic table.

Importance

This research set out to understand the state of the world and the way we interact. In the face of insurmountable challenges, we must work together, lest we come to regret it. Far from offering all the answers, this research simply contributes to what should be an increasingly important focus of academia.

If there is any takeaway from this research let it be this; everyone is simply seeking safety in remarkably uncertain times. Everyone is afraid whether they realise it or not, we are all just doing our best. We are who we are because of our social groups, and we rarely get to choose them; more often than not we are simply forced to accept them when they are handed to us at birth or presented to us in a time of need. It would be ignorant to think that any of us actually have any power over who we are.

Empathy and love are the only way.

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<https://libkey.io/libraries/239/openurl?genre=article&au=Dorst%2C+Kees&aulast=Dorst&issn=&isbn=&title=Mixing+Practices+to+Create+Transdisciplinary+Innovation%3A+A+Design-Based+Approach&jtitle=Technology+Innovation+Management+Review&pubname=Technology+Innovation+Management+Review&bttitle=&atitle=Mixing+Practices+to+Create+Transdisciplinary+Innovation%3A+A+Design-Based+Approach&volume=8&issue=8&spage=60&date=2018&doi=&sid=ProQuest>
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APPENDIX

Survey: What is your Perception?

As a thank you for contributing to this research at its conclusion you have the option to enter your details for chance to win a one of three \$50 gift vouchers. There is also a brief explanation of this research if you wanted to know more about what you are contributing to.

PLEASE NOTE: This survey is completely anonymous, No data gathered will be identifiable. This should take you approximately 5 minutes.

This research is concerned with how we construct and perceive identity. Some questions may seem difficult to answer, but any answer you give, no matter how certain you are, is useful.

The first section of this survey is concerned with who you are. The following 6 sections each feature several images from a public Instagram profile that have been de-identified, along with questions about your perception of the individual.

*Required

Who are you?

1. How do you identify? *

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

5. If you have completed, or are completing, a university degree, in what area did you study?

Mark only one oval.

- Arts and Humanities
- Business and Law
- Design, Architecture and Planning
- Education and Social Work
- Engineering and Computer Science
- Health
- Science
- Social Science
- Other: _____

6. In what city or town do you live? *

7. What are your current living arrangements? *

Mark only one oval.

- Living Alone
- Living with Partner
- Living with Partner and Children
- Living with Roommates
- Living with Parents and Family
- Other: _____

Profile 1

What is your perception of this person based on their public Instagram profile?

2. How old are you? *

Mark only one oval.

- Under 18
- 18-19
- 20-21
- 22-23
- 24-25
- 26-27
- 28-29
- 30-35
- Above 35

3. Are you an Instagram user? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed? *

Mark only one oval.

- High School
- Currently Studying an Undergraduate Degree
- Undergraduate Degree
- Currently Studying a Graduate Degree
- Graduate Degree
- Trade/TAFE Certification
- Other: _____

Profile



8. This person is an extrovert. Rather than being introverted, they thoroughly enjoy a dress-up party and will go to lengths to make sure they have a good costume. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

9. This person is imaginative. While they can and do deal with real challenges in front of them, they enjoy discussing hypotheticals and the possibilities of the future. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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5

Strongly Agree

10. This person is emotionally aware. Rather than doing things efficiently by themselves, they are good at understanding and supporting others. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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5

Strongly Agree

11. This person is highly organised. Instead of being flexible in their day-to-day, they much prefer to have a plan for their week, are always on time and like others to do the same. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

12. This person is sensitive to stress. While others might be self-assured and comfortable under pressure, they prefer to be in control of a situation to feel comfortable, seeking perfection and preparation. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

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5

Strongly Agree

13. Describe this person with one or two words. *

Profile
2

What is your perception of this person based on their public Instagram profile?

Profile



14. This person is an extrovert. Rather than being introverted, they thoroughly enjoy a dress-up party and will go to lengths to make sure they have a good costume. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

15. This person is imaginative. While they can and do deal with real challenges in front of them, they enjoy discussing hypotheticals and the possibilities of the future. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

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5

Strongly Agree

16. This person is emotionally aware. Rather than doing things efficiently by themselves, they are good at understanding and supporting others. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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3

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5

Strongly Agree

17. This person is highly organised. Instead of being flexible in their day-to-day, they much prefer to have a plan for their week, are always on time and like others to do the same. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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5

Strongly Agree

18. This person is sensitive to stress. While others might be self-assured and comfortable under pressure, they prefer to be in control of a situation to feel comfortable, seeking perfection and preparation. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

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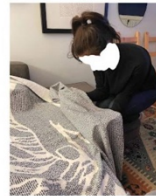
Strongly Agree

19. Describe this person with one or two words. *

Profile
3

What is your perception of this person based on their public Instagram profile?

Profile



20. This person is an extrovert. Rather than being introverted, they thoroughly enjoy a dress-up party and will go to lengths to make sure they have a good costume. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

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4

5

Strongly Agree

21. This person is imaginative. While they can and do deal with real challenges in front of them, they enjoy discussing hypotheticals and the possibilities of the future. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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5

Strongly Agree

22. This person is emotionally aware. Rather than doing things efficiently by themselves, they are good at understanding and supporting others. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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5

Strongly Agree

23. This person is highly organised. Instead of being flexible in their day-to-day, they much prefer to have a plan for their week, are always on time and like others to do the same. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

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5

Strongly Agree

24. This person is sensitive to stress. While others might be self-assured and comfortable under pressure, they prefer to be in control of a situation to feel comfortable, seeking perfection and preparation. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

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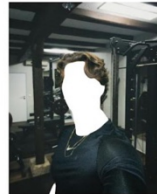
Strongly Agree

25. Describe this person with one or two words. *

Profile
4

What is your perception of this person based on their public Instagram profile?

Profile



26. This person is an extrovert. Rather than being introverted, they thoroughly enjoy a dress-up party and will go to lengths to make sure they have a good costume. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

27. This person is imaginative. While they can and do deal with real challenges in front of them, they enjoy discussing hypotheticals and the possibilities of the future. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

28. This person is emotionally aware. Rather than doing things efficiently by themselves, they are good at understanding and supporting others. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

29. This person is highly organised. Instead of being flexible in their day-to-day, they much prefer to have a plan for their week, are always on time and like others to do the same. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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3

4

5

Strongly Agree

30. This person is sensitive to stress. While others might be self-assured and comfortable under pressure, they prefer to be in control of a situation to feel comfortable, seeking perfection and preparation. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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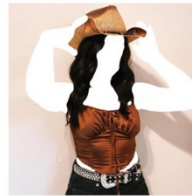
Strongly Agree

31. Describe this person with one or two words. *

Profile
5

What is your perception of this person based on their public Instagram profile?

Profile



32. This person is an extrovert. Rather than being introverted, they thoroughly enjoy a dress-up party and will go to lengths to make sure they have a good costume. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

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4

5

Strongly Agree

33. This person is imaginative. While they can and do deal with real challenges in front of them, they enjoy discussing hypotheticals and the possibilities of the future. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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5

Strongly Agree

34. This person is emotionally aware. Rather than doing things efficiently by themselves, they are good at understanding and supporting others. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

35. This person is highly organised. Instead of being flexible in their day-to-day, they much prefer to have a plan for their week, are always on time and like others to do the same. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

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5

Strongly Agree

36. This person is sensitive to stress. While others might be self-assured and comfortable under pressure, they prefer to be in control of a situation to feel comfortable, seeking perfection and preparation. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

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4

5

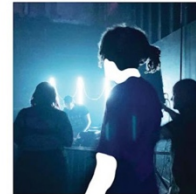
Strongly Agree

37. Describe this person with one or two words. *

Profile
6

What is your perception of this person based on their public Instagram profile?

Profile



38. This person is an extrovert. Rather than being introverted, they thoroughly enjoy a dress-up party and will go to lengths to make sure they have a good costume. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

39. This person is imaginative. While they can and do deal with real challenges in front of them, they enjoy discussing hypotheticals and the possibilities of the future. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

40. This person is emotionally aware. Rather than doing things efficiently *
by themselves, they are good at understanding and supporting
others.

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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5

Strongly Agree

41. This person is highly organised. Instead of being flexible in their day- *
to-day, they much prefer to have a plan for their week, are always on
time and like others to do the same.

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

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5

Strongly Agree

42. This person is sensitive to stress. While others might be self-assured *
and comfortable under pressure, they prefer to be in control of a
situation to feel comfortable, seeking perfection and preparation.

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Agree

43. Describe this person with one or two words. *

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