Girls at Indiana Tech and Their Excessive Instagram Usage

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Girls at Indiana Tech and Their Excessive Instagram Usage

If we look around and think for a bit, we might realize how many communities we are actually part of. Every living person is somehow part of a many different communities. I am part of multiple communities just at Indiana Tech. For example, I am an international student, I am a member of the hockey team, I am on the Dean's List, and I am also part of the college of business community. One thing these communities have in common is the fact that these are all real-life communities. Members of all these communities share similar explicit and implicit manifestations of culture. However, these real-life communities are not the only kind of communities we can be part of. With the up rise of technology, everyone either has a smart phone or a tablet and definitely use at least one, if not more, social media platforms. On these social media platforms, we are also part of multiple different communities. These communities are called virtual or online communities. The difference between real-life communities and these virtual communities is that all interactions and communications in the virtual community are made online.

A lot of times you are part of the same community in the real life as well as on the social media. For example, I am a student at Indiana Tech, and I am also a part of the community of students at Tech that is actively involved on Instagram. Being part of this online community gave me the option to observe this community and understand the behavior of its members on Instagram. During my observation, I was able to gather a lot of useful data. I realized that out of 728 people I follow, 158 go to Indiana Tech. Out of these 158 Indiana Tech people I follow, 87 people are guys and 71 are girls. My main focus of this paper is going to be aimed towards the 71 girls from Tech I follow. Due to my observations I figured out that girls are using Instagram

way more than guys. This girls' excessive usage of Instagram made me gather additional research to figure out why is it like that and what possible effects does it have on girls. After researching multiple articles, I was finally able to come up with a valid argument. <u>Indiana Tech girls should stop using Instagram so much, in order to protect their self-esteem and avoid mental health issues due to the comparison of the real world with the Instagram world</u>.

Not everyone reading this essay might be familiar with Instagram, so before I get into any discussion, it would be a great idea to explain what this social platform really is and what does it do. To start off, Instagram is basically a photo-sharing app that was launched in 2010 (Lee et al., 2015). Instagram follows the "image first, text second rule" (p. 552), which can be understood as the simple rule of thumb that "pictures speak louder than words" (p. 552). The major reason why Instagram is so popular with the younger generation is that Instagram is all in one package, that allows you to take photos, edit them, and upload them without having to use any other application. According to study conducted by Eunji Lee et al., "Instagram users may have different reasons for sharing their photographs – displaying important moments in their lives, expressing their self-concept, and displaying personal relationships by featuring the individual with important others" (p. 553). Instagram is a perfect social media platform to find and join many different communities. For example, if you like to work out and you like fitness, you can search for any fitness page, you can start following that page and connect with people who also follow and comment on that page. With that being said, you just became a member of an Instagram fitness community.

Instagram usage is not all about posting pictures however, there is many more reasons why people use it so much. As Lee et al. (2015) stated in their study, "Instagram users have five primary social and psychological motives: social interaction, archiving, self-expression,

escapism, and peeking" (p. 555). Even though, Instagram is mainly a photo-sharing app, people do not only use it to post pictures about themselves, but they also use it to interact with others via comments, likes, and direct messages. They also use it in order to escape from the real life and look at other people's profiles and try to compare themselves with others. This comparison can cause negative effect on people because not everything that is on Instagram appears to be like that in the real life.

With Instagram usage, there come many generally known stereotypes that girls are way more active on Instagram and post different pictures than guys. The majority of pictures on Instagram are pictures of people themselves, known as selfies. These generally known stereotypes led Nicol Döring et al. (2016) to conduct a study on how much gender-stereotypical selfies are. The results of this study concluded that female selfies often contain characteristics such as feminine touch, kissing pout (Duckface), lying posture and body display, while guys pictures are usually presentation of their muscles and display of their strength. This was really interesting to me because I was able to observe the same kinds of stereotypes within my Indiana Tech Instagram community. So, I went back to my observation log, and pulled up an observation that talks about the same issue:

> 5 out of 7 Tech guy's that posted a picture within my 24-hour observation period, posted pictures of them playing their sport or working out at the school gym, when 10 out of 13 Tech girls posted about their personal life and lifestyle.

This proves that these Instagram gender stereotypes are not really just stereotypes, but they are actually proven facts that are really happening within different communities on Instagram.

The photos that girls tend to post on Instagram are often pictures of them posing from different angles. These various angles make their bodies look way better than what they look like

in a real-life setting. The explicit manifestations of culture these photos represent on Instagram are directly reflected in the implicit manifestations girls have in real life. For example, the way that girls appear and interact on Instagram can affect their values such as self-esteem and self-confidence. These photos might also have a negative impact on other female users, because other girls tend to compare themselves to the unrealistic photos. These photos can also start a negative cycle where other females imitate the stereotypical photos. This will create a never-ending cycle of females imitating photos, unless the younger generation learns to post unique and truthful picture of themselves.

 As I mentioned before, girls tend to be way more active on Instagram then guys. They are not only posting pictures of themselves, but they are more often trying to compare themselves to other female Instagram users. The excessive amount of time girls spend on Instagram can directly impact their mental health. In the study composed by Mary Sherlock and Danielle L. Wagstaff (2019), the point that heavy Instagram usage can have many negative mental effects on females. In this study, they had a base group of females that answered a questionnaire about their mental health. A portion of those people were then showed 10 Instagram photos and asked to retake the survey. These people who viewed the 10 photos expressed answers that led the study conductors that viewing more pictures, which means being more active on Instagram, have direct impact on the mental health of young female Instagram users. This study was performed using girls from a university campus, which is the same type of girls as the girls from my Indiana Tech community.

 Since this study was based on university students, I was able to find another observation in my log that directly reflects on this issue within community. As I have stated in my observation log,

At 8 PM, during Instagram rush hour, I checked who from Indiana Tech is online and I realized that 37 girls were online or have been online within the last 30 minutes, compare to only 18 guys being online within the same period of time. This is quite a large number for the girl's active users, due to the fact that I only follow 71 girls from Tech compared to 87 guys from Tech.

This observation proves that even people form my Indiana Tech community are experiencing the same issue with girls' excessive Instagram usage. This excessive usage can have many negative impacts on the Indiana Tech girls such as depressive symptoms, self-esteem, anxiety, and low self-rated physical attractiveness (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). These negative mental effects result from the fact that the girls are exposing themselves towards more content, which results in more comparison towards other females and unrealistic sexualized images.

In conclusion, Instagram is a social media platform that lets people take, edit, and post pictures without using any other picture editing app. Due to this specific feature, it is really popular within the adolescent generation. It has been proven by multiple studies that girls are way more active on Instagram than guys. However, the excessive Instagram usage can have many negative effects on girl's mental health and could create a negative cycle. This also applies to my online discourse community and has been supported by my observations. I believe that girls from my Indiana Tech community need to spend less time on Instagram. I believe this because my observations and additional research have made me realized how bad of an impact Instagram can actually have on girls' mental health and their implicit values such as self-confidence and self-esteem.

References

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