(Body) Positivity in Social Media
Mise-en-scène and Performing Digital Facticity

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Introduction

In a first step, this article takes up digitality as both a feature and a designation of the 21st century and sets it out as a framework before going into the postulate of singularity as a central moment of self-promotion in social networks, in general, and on Instagram as a social network mainly used by young people, in particular. In doing so, it will be shown which tendencies dominate self-promotions and how they may influence young people. Above all, mental health, and body image (keyword: body positivity) are often negatively influenced by staging a performed digital facticity. The article is intended as a call for a critical approach to and reflection on present-day phenomena and not as a call to abandon social networks. They are part of contemporary society with its culture of digitality and as such their strengths should be leveraged.

1. A New 21st Century Culture

Researchers from various disciplines, for example cultural studies (e.g., Stalder), didactics (e.g., Siemens), sociology (e.g., Reckwitz), have used diverse terms to describe the 21st century and its different designations: knowledge society, information society, and network society.[1] In the 21st century, classic roles are blurring and with them divisive structures. Anyone can be an author, reader, and publisher in the Social Web. As a viewer of a post on Instagram, we are readers; if we write a comment or give a 'like,' we interact and go from reader to author. If we write our own post, we are the author,

1 Cf. Stalder 2017: 30–34.

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if we share it, we are the publisher. Especially these last two roles cannot be clearly separated anymore. This means that the production of information is often increasing exponentially, and information is disseminated quickly within social networks and communities worldwide. The world is opening up or moving closer together, depending on the perspective. Editorial structures, as known from newspapers or magazines, are disappearing or gone. Information is frequently no longer checked for accuracy, relevance, and up-to-datedness before publication. Facts and opinions are mixed, as are facts and falsifications. A new culture is emerging. Those who take a closer look at the 21st century from the perspective of these current social phenomena and constellations identify a "culture of digitality,"[2] which Felix Stalder, a Swiss cultural and media scientist, fixes on several inherent parameters in his book of the same name.

1.1 A Culture of Digitality

Culture and cultural notions, according to Stalder, are negotiable and changeable depending on place and time. Culture is not a static phenomenon. It is, instead, "characterized by a juxtaposition, co-existence, and opposition of processes of dissolution and constitution."[3] In coexistence, this means that "self-determination and heteronomy [become] entangled up to a certain point where both poles constitute each other."[4] This raises the question of whether the "aesthetic projections – immateriality, perfection and virtuality – that continue to determine the image of the 'digital'" must, can or should be discarded, as currents towards post-digitality suggest. Stalder states that "the presence of digitality beyond digital media […] gives the culture of digitality its dominance."[5] As a result, society experiences a "diversification and liquefaction of cultural practices and social roles."[6] Individual realities of life become topics of public interest and social relevance: such as the decision for a certain way of eating (e.g., the increasing importance of clean eating, veganism, and superfoods), a specific body cult (e.g., the everydayness of tattoos and piercings, or numerous fitness initiatives), or the importance of one's own

2 Ibid. If not indicated otherwise, all translations are by E.H.

3 Ibid.: 17.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.: 19, 20.

6 Cf. ibid.: 48–49.

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well-being achievable e.g., through courses teaching yoga or mindfulness, or digital detox. Behavior that was once prevalent in subcultures becomes mainstream. Due to the possibilities of (digital) dissemination via social networks – such as Instagram for example – that are hardly limited in time and place, these behavioral attitudes are no longer a latent but a constitutive feature of social discourse.

According to Stalder, there are three forms of digitality: referentiality, communality and algorithmicity. The latter refers to machine-provided filtering strategies, to cope with the high informational load within the World Wide Web, whereas referentiality could be seen as an inter-approach: users create cultural artefacts that interrelate. These references can be obvious or latent, they can be recognizable to all or only to a specific group. Society is built of different groups and cultures, i.e., according to Stalder, "formations that produce self-referential worlds that modulate different dimensions of existence […]. Dynamics of network power operate in them, configuring voluntariness and coercion, autonomy, and heteronomy in new ways."[7] People decide whether to participate or not based on rational or emotional considerations. These considerations are reflected in both the choice and the quality of interaction and participation in the culture of digitality. It is therefore incumbent on individuals to "more or less bindingly determine how they relate to themselves, to each other and to the world, and to which frames of reference their actions should be oriented."[8] Emotion and rationale play just as significant a role in decision-making as a latent mentality of comparison.

1.2 A Culture of the Attractive

In his works, the German sociologist and cultural scientist Andreas Reckwitz studies the role of emotionality in the modern age.[9] In a monograph of the same name, he describes the contemporary modern society[10] as a "society of singularities" and defines its culture as a "*culture of the authentic*, which is at the same time a *culture of the attractive*."[11] Singularity, authenticity, and attractiveness are three adjectives to qualify the society we nowadays live in.

7 Cf. ibid.: 13.

8 Stalder 2017: 16–17.

9 Reckwitz 2019a and b.

10 It should be noted that this is an analysis of the developed societies.

11 Reckwitz 2019a: 10.

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Reckwitz emphasizes that our society and its actions would follow the "*logic of the particular*."[12] According to the author, attractiveness, authenticity, and singularity are motives that influence our actions and subsequently our interactions. To give an example: Companies, but also educational institutions, have been looking for and pointing out their unique sales argument to promote their products and artefacts and to reach their (future) customers' and students' attention.

People are seeking and cultivating their own talents, "life [is] not simply lived, it is curated."[13] The late-modern subject is constantly performing their supposed and/or staged self, highlighting their unique natural and non-artificial selling points, in front of their audience. "Only when it appears authentic it is attractive."[14] Reckwitz, in his monograph, updates the concept of identity described in the 1960s by Erikson:

> *Identity in the modern sense* means a person's consciousness of being different from other people (*individuality*) as well as remaining essentially the same person, distinguished by certain characteristics, over time (*continuity*) and across different situations (*consistency*).[15]

Individuality in the late-modern age seems to be synonymous with singularity or the special. Individuals show off their individuality regarding their clothing styles, their dietary habits, or a specific body cult as well as their cultural preferences in the fields of music, art, or literature. To stay authentic, these cultivated and staged individual character traits must show both continuity and consistency. Mistakes and slips are discovered by the audience and socially 'punished.'[16]

This corresponds to Stalder's understanding of the culture of digitality, which makes diversity and otherness visible and is the result of a process that has led to a paradigm shift.[17] This paradigm shift is reflected in a revaluation of classical values. Whereas only a few years ago it was important not to stand out but to be conformist, today other values apply: "experimentation,

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12 Ibid.: 11. If not indicated otherwise, emphasis is in the original citation.

13 Ibid.: 9.

14 Ibid.

15 Erikson 1966: 107.

16 In this context, social punishment means, for example, not receiving attention through likes and comments or unfollowing.

17 Stalder 2017: 33.

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openness to new things, flexibility and change have now been established as positively occupied basic values."[18] For Reckwitz, however, the subject's self-determination[19] is no longer a decision independently taken, rather it is omitted in the "striving for uniqueness and exceptionality which to achieve has admittedly become not only a subjective desire but a paradoxical social expectation."[20] What used to be an individual choice is now a social obligation. What is classified as *singular* and *authentic* is not pre-determined but "*socially fabricated*."[21] The valuation and revaluation mechanisms are subject to their own, culturally determined and temporally fluid logics. They are neither static nor stable and least of all predictable. So, what is classified as *unique* and *singular* today may already belong to the mainstream tomorrow. According to Reckwitz, the individual is constantly under pressure, "the social logic of singularities represents for its participants a reality with considerable, even inexorable consequences."[22] Our society and its logics demand steady adaptations as singularities are "what the social revolves around."[23] The latent paradox between the singular and the social reality disappears at second glance: The valorization of one's particularity takes place through the other's judgement, according to Wolfgang Prinz who assumes the social construction of subjectivity:

> The mind is [...] open in two senses: on the one hand, in that it is created and shaped in and through the mirror of others and therefore designs itself according to the model of others. On the other hand, it is open and extremely receptive to all the knowledge it can acquire about the actions, thoughts, and knowledge of others.[24]

The individual may not define itself as an individual but by how others see it. Identity formation and identity development take place via the diversions of judgement by others. Hence, the identity construction is above all other-directed and not self-determined. One's own value is defined and attributed

18 Ibid.
19 Cf. Prinz 2016.
20 Reckwitz 2019a: 9.
21 Ibid.: 13.
22 Ibid.: 14.
23 Ibid.: 13.
24 Prinz 2016: 19.

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by others. An acting person measures their actions by the audience's reactions. Only if one's actions are noticed and even imitated by others, i.e., what Stalder[25] calls *referentiality*, value is attributed.[26] Authenticity, attractiveness, and singularity serve as assessment criteria. These observations and reflections lead to processes of comparison and a ductus of the comparative and ultimately the superlative in social interaction.

1.3 A Culture of Comparison

If it remains for others to recognize and valorize one's singularity as such, this may lead to a change in behavior. The focus of one's own actions is being directed towards the evaluation by the other, thus, performance is shifted from the private sphere to the public sphere. The individual is a "social product"[27] and performs within a network formed by loose and strong nodes determined by an implicit or explicit challenge and pressure to compete with others. One not only tries to eat healthi*er* or be fitt*er* than the other but strives, longing for singularity, to eat the healthi*est* and be the fitt*est*. Consequently, everyone stages and fictionalizes their lives. The result is an illusionary *mise-en-scène* and a social paradox: Life is documented in its exceptionality and reduced to the positive moments: "The late modern culture of the subject is in a certain sense a *radically emotionalized culture*,"[28] which defines itself through "the production of positive emotions as the central meaning of life" and has become a "*positive culture of emotions*."[29] The joyful satisfaction of one's own needs and the experience of extraordinary moments become central contents of life. Life is celebrated with playful ease and harmony, whereby this celebration is to be seen in its double contingency. The performance is always based on the audience's (i.e., the others') expectations. It does not necessarily arise out of an intrinsic but rather extrinsic motivation: The yoga session to find one's center or the mindfulness seminar are transformed from a private into a public affair. The dichotomy of private and public blurs in the *mise-en-scène* of one's life

25 Stalder 2017.

26 Cf. Prinz 2016: 239.

27 Reckwitz 2019b: 206.

28 Ibid.: 205.

29 Ibid.

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and status. We are playing the "status game"[30] and it's our status and others paying attention to our status that define who we are.

Paradoxically, however, the put-on positivity and dominance of (positive) emotionality leads "as unintentionally as systematically and to an increased degree to *negative* emotions."[31] The continuous judgement and comparison with others result in "a phantasm that one's own real life – except perhaps in certain, prominent moments – hardly ever satisfies."[32] Reckwitz names "disappointment and frustration, excessive demands and envy, fear, despair and meaninglessness"[33] as possible reactions to a competitive culture of comparison, which can manifest themselves on two levels: Those reactions "either have a self-destructive effect inwardly and express themselves in the aforementioned psychosomatic clinical pictures or destructively outwardly, for example in the form of aggressive hate speech in the social media or even in acts of hatred such as the rampage."[34] The rationality of acting and thinking is often pushed back behind emotionality which is particularly evident in the self-promotion on social networks as a parallel reality.

2. Social Networks: The Main Social Space

Participation in the culture of digitality is determined by using social media and especially social networks, where the softening of the traditional dichotomy of private and public is just becoming clear, "as more and more actors with their own claims to meaning step out of the private-personal space" into the public sphere. Social networks have become their "main social space" of action.[35] Participation in social networks is selective; the selection criteria are fluid and can be adapted to the situation: rational and emotional factors (e.g., to form job-oriented as opposed to friendship-oriented networks) can come into play in decision-making. In some networks, the nodes can be looser or tighter. Social networks enable to exchange information, to establish and/or maintain, and to (re)construct one's identity and communication.[36]

30 Storr 2021.
31 Reckwitz 2019b: 205.
32 Ibid.: 205.
33 Ibid.: 206.
34 Ibid.
35 Stalder 2017: 38, 39.
36 Cf. Schmidt 2006.

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Ten years ago, Kaplan and Haenlein attempted to classify social media and define "theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure)" as "the two key elements of social media."[37] They state that the "higher the social presence, the greater the social influence that the communication partners have on each other's behavior."[38] Social presence is constitutive for the form and quality of the communicative relationship level. On the other side of their classification, they put self-representation, since people "in any type of social interaction [...] have the desire to control the impressions other people form of them."[39] The reasons for this controlling behavior vary; the authors cite the desire to be perceived and to convey an image that is in line with one's own personality or one's own desires.[40] In this context, Erving Goffman raises the question of the authenticity of self-promotion: "Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain."[41] When we interact with others, we try to obtain information about them. So, it is necessary that one discloses pieces of private information that form the image staged of oneself and thus also influence the relationship. In other words:

> [T]he conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information (e.g., thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes) that is consistent with the image one would like to give. Self-disclosure is a critical step in the development of close relationships (e.g., during dating) but can also occur between complete strangers; for example, when speaking about personal problems with the person seated next to you on an airplane.[42]

We try to convey a certain image of self, display our status[43] and therefore use personal information to put ourselves in the right frame.[44] In communication, interacting partners are "interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his

37 Kaplan/Haenlein 2010: 61.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.: 62.

40 Cf. Storr 2018.

41 Goffman 1956: 3.

42 Kaplan/Haenlein 2010: 62.

43 Cf. Storr 2021.

44 Cf. ibid. 2018.

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trustworthiness, etc."[45] While in the real world we draw a distinction between communication with known and unknown people and people tend to be reluctant to reveal too much information – depending, amongst others, on their character and prior experience – this boundary is blurring in social networks when privacy settings are more public than private.

If these considerations are related to the perfection and virtuality referred to by Stalder[46] as characteristics of the digital, and the striving for attractiveness and authenticity described by Reckwitz[47] in the context of the search for recognition and valuation of one's singularity, a paradoxical situation emerges: Self-representation in social networks

> has already become so self-evident and normal that anyone who is not active in this in-between space - which is about to become the main social space – i.e., who does not have a publicly viewable profile [...] or who does not position themselves as a producer of information and meaning and is so inconspicuous online that a search engine query for a name does not return any results, is now negatively conspicuous (or, much more rarely, gains status precisely through this absence.[48]

When everyone is on social networks and everyone posts the same thing, they don't stand out. The singularity, then, results from the absence or the conscious renunciation of self-presentation in the virtual world.

3. Comparative Identity Construction in Social Networks

The extension[49] of the real world to include the virtual element of social media leads to various identities and processes of identity constructions for those who move in both worlds. Divergent and convergent identities develop. "A social establishment is any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place."[50] The roles assumed

45 Goffman 1956: 1.
46 Stalder 2017: 19.
47 Cf. Reckwitz 2019a.
48 Stalder 2017: 39.
49 Cf. Seel 1998.
50 Goffman 1956: 152.

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or played in these social establishments are not necessarily the same, the images constructed are not bound to be congruent: "Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who co-operate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation."[51] This co-operation works if the establishment's boundaries are seen as stable and the different roles can be delineated from each other. "Performance disruptions [...] have consequences at three levels of abstraction: personality, interaction, and social structure."[52] Consequently, an identity construction must not only consider these three levels, which are climatically interdependent, but must learn to do so in both the real and the virtual world. The presentation of the self can differ, the communicative intentions can be different, the rules that apply in both worlds differ from each other.[53] The decision to construct one's own personality leads to consequences in (social) interactions and subsequently in social structures, which will be considered separately in the following sections.

3.1 Fictionalization of One's Own Personality

If one assumes with Goffman a "front" that people understand in interaction as an "expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance"[54] in order to impress the audience or to convey a certain, stylized, positivized, or staged image of oneself and of one's life, this image might correspond to one's own personality or – depending on the demands of the social establishment – might express a certain expectation. Consistency and authenticity, then, play a crucial role that can be described with Zapp as a "staging of reality."[55] The striving for credibility does not result in authenticity but, according to Knaller and Müller, "to stage authenticity effects." It is a matter of "creating a certain mixture between privacy and public, between intimacy and distance."[56] Which characteristics of one's personality are to be emphasized in the virtual reality of social networks is chosen – as mentioned above – for emotional or

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.: 156.
53 Cf. boyd 2014.
54 Goffman 1956: 22.
55 Zapp 2006: 316.
56 Knaller/Müller 2006: 7.

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rational reasons. This leads to a *mise-en-scène*, i.e., a fictionalization of oneself which can result in stylization or transfiguration. Fiction is not seen in contrast to truth but to reality.[57] This means that the self-promotion in social media must be seen as convergent or divergent to self-presentation in real life. This, though, does not imply that the person portrayed in real life is the true personality, as there is a "vertical multiplication of reality"[58] between reality and social media. The various realities refer to each other and, in their entirety, "make up the complex and self-structured reality of our society."[59] So, the virtual is to be seen as a space of "possible possibilities" that allows for a reconstruction of oneself.[60] The characteristics chosen are "not false real objects, but true virtual objects for which the question of real reality is entirely indifferent."[61] Just as literature can influence the formation of opinions and identity construction of its readers, images of the social networks as a parallel construction of reality also influence real life worlds.

3.2 Recognition-Induced Interaction

When Reckwitz describes our culture as a "thoroughly psychologized culture that incessantly animates individuals to self-reflection and self-transformation,"[62] the behavior in social networks is reminiscent of Bakhtin's carnivalesque counter-world and allows a breakout from the real world. Thus, somebody living as an outsider in the real world can achieve the recognition and attention in the virtual world that they lack in the real world. Exploiting technical possibilities or effective self-presentation strategies, the individual flees into social networks as if into a parallel counter-world in which they can present themselves in a different way. Performing digital facticity, they can be what they wish to be. By staging and stylizing the self, however, they create an ideal display for their followers. The latter, as a result, play the status game,[63] enter a competitive game in the culture of comparison, and probably recognize their averageness and inadequacy in the real world because they cannot achieve this ideal.

57 Cf. Esposito 1998.

58 Esposito 2007: 68.

59 Ibid.

60 Esposito 1998: 269.

61 Ibid.: 279.

62 Reckwitz 2019b: 204.

63 Cf. Storr 2021.

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The recognition of singularity is measured via reactions, i.e., the number of followers and likes one receives for a contribution; accordingly, recognition manifests "in the form of positive, negative or no feedback."[64] What counts is the quantity of reactions and not the quality,[65] lack of reactions equals lack of recognition and social death: "It is a sign that communication has broken down, and if this state persists, it results in the dissolution of one's own communicatively-constituted social existence."[66] Interaction loses its reciprocity, "fascination"[67] as the currency of valuation ceases to exist, self-promotion is not perceived or valuated (anymore). This might result in new forms of one-sided interaction and expressions of "a perceived discrepancy between expectation and reality": Stalking as an expression of morbid attention, cyber-bullying as a negative play with singularity, and ghosting as a withdrawal of attention may be mentioned as examples.[68]

4. Instagram as a Platform for Young People to Express Themselves

4.1 The Use of Instagram

The annual Youth Internet Media Study (JIM Study) published by the *Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest* (mpfs) provides information about media use among German young people between the ages of twelve and 19. On average, young people spend 241 minutes online every day.[69] Looking at apps that are mainly used, i.e., on a daily basis or several times a week, a clear picture emerges: WhatsApp is used by 92 percent (93% girls | 91% boys), Instagram (in second place) by 58 percent (63% girls | 54% boys), TikTok (in third place) by 46% of the respondents (52% girls | 39% boys). The older the respondents get, the more important the image-dominated realities on Instagram become. To illustrate the development: 15% of the 12-13-year-olds surveyed use Instagram, and among the 14-15-year-olds the number of users doubles

64 Stalder 2017: 137.
65 Cf. Reckwitz 2019b: 226.
66 Cf. ibid.: 139.
67 Cf. ibid.: 218.
68 Cf. ibid.: 221.
69 Cf. mpfs 2021: 32.

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to 30%. A further jump occurs among 16-17-year-olds: Here it is 50%, a rate that remains stable among 18-19-year-olds.[70] When we take a closer look at Instagram, its use has changed in the last years. In 2018, young individuals answered that "participating in the everyday life of people from one's personal environment documented by photos and videos" was the main motive.[71] Active, personal posting was not in the foreground in 2018: "Only just over one in ten say they frequently post photos or videos themselves."[72] In 2018, Instagram was used more receptively, e.g., by liking others' posts, and semi-receptively by commenting on others' posts. This has changed in 2019, as young people state that they publish an average of three to five posts per week.[73] On average, in 2019, young people have 299 followers (girls: 319, boys: 278), with the number increasing with age. According to their answers, 40 percent of the respondents have made their account public and thus visible to everyone.[74] The boundaries between privacy and the public sphere are blurred; the content can be consumed and commented on or liked by everyone, not just the accepted followers. In 2021, the respondents state that they contribute actively to Instagram (43%), use it to stay up to date regarding fashion trends for example (35%) and to get to know new people (31%).[75] Given their frequent use, it is not surprising that a large number of young people are regularly confronted with negative content such as hate speech. Thus, 58 percent state that they have been confronted with hate messages in the last month and 47 percent with offensive content.[76]

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70 WhatsApp is relatively stable at all age levels (77% | 71% | 83% | 81%). (Cf. ibid.: 35) The increase between 14-15-year-olds and 16-17-year-olds should be scrutinized more closely. This lack is probably due to a change in the privacy regulations, which some time ago led to many young people switching to alternative messenger services, for example Signal or Telegram.

71 mpfs 2018: 40.

72 Ibid.

73 Cf. mpfs 2019: 32.

74 Cf. ibid.

75 Cf. mpfs 2021: 40.

76 Cf. ibid.: 62.

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4.2 Dominance of the Visual

In the parallel reality of social networks, a competitive comparability, and a dominance of the visual[77] come to bear, limiting the ambiguity of the written word by defining the relationship between *signifiant* and *signifié*. Instagrammers construct a positively idealized image of themselves in their posts through mechanisms of fictionalization and *mise-en-scène*. They supposedly correspond to the desire of media consumers "for an unvarnished reality" and enable "comparisons to one's own every day and unvarnished existence."[78] Instagrammers perform digital facticity. The focus is on self-portrayal, self-promotion and conforming to specific socially prescribed or self-created ideals of beauty, as Gerdenitsch shows in an empirical study using a quantitative image content analysis of different Instagrammers.[79] Preferred posted content is self-portraying images that are not a reflection of reality, but stylized realities. The focus is on superficial, visually clearly conveyable, and subsequently also perceptible content: The focus is on the self and one's own experiences stylized and hyped into the (staged and supposed) singularity.

Presenting healthy eating habits,[80] celebrating personal fitness[81] and living out an exclusive clothing style construct the image of a perfect world, which for many followers becomes an unattainable goal. Instagrammers frequently appear relaxed, happy, and enjoying themselves. When followers begin to compare their own lives to the lives of (always happy, beautiful, fit and healthy) influencers, they are constantly introduced to, they often feel inadequate and failed. Consuming the images has negative or toxic effects on their own body perception, as Tiggermann and Zaccardo, Fardouly et al. as well as Jackson and Luchner show.[82] The exaggerated thinness of the self-promoters, for example, carries into a lean cult.[83] The desire to emulate Instagrammers leads to a competition of superlatives instead of comparatives. A tendency particularly problematic within the phase of identity construction that takes place during puberty: it is not about being thinner than one is – one wants to

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77 Cf. Reckwitz 2019b: 225–226.

78 Zapp 2006: 318.

79 Gerdenitsch 2019.

80 Cf. Sachin/Paul 2018.

81 Cf. Baker/Walsh 2018; Tiggermann/Zaccardo 2018.

82 Tiggermann/Zaccardo 2018; Fardouly et al. 2018; Jackson/Luchner 2018.

83 Cf. Ging/Garvey 2018; Parz 2017.

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be the thinnest. The construction of one's own identity takes place following and trying to reach unattainable ideals that reveal their own inadequacy to the young people rather than allowing them to perceive or emphasize their own strengths. The call for one's own body positivity, as first undertaken specifically for children by Meschke and Crenshaw, is thereby only one consequence of the self-portrayal and self-promotion machinery.[84]

4.3 The Blurring of Reality and Fiction

To achieve the highest possible recognition and valuation of one's images, hashtags are used as keywords that allow an unfiltered dissemination of contributions. Contributions – depending on the kind of privacy setting – are searchable and viewable for a target group beyond close friends. On the interactional level, images on topics such as #healthy or #fitspiration but also on #anorexia can be found without editorial review and according to complex algorithms. The competitive game is started and filled with images whose context or origin is not and cannot be verified. As contributions in different media show, Instagrammers too often are not only willing to risk their lives for the best photo but also to use posing strategies and image editing strategies or (softening) filters that blur the line between reality and fiction. Performing digital facticity means to play with reality and fiction.[85] Even though the images convey the impression of being snapshots, in many cases they are highly staged representations. As models they build up a high pressure to recreate such contributions (think of Stalder's referentiality), which in a competitive culture of comparison must be better, more beautiful, more coherent, because nowadays one is "never satisfied with the way of life once found but always seeks the challenge of the new."[86] An addictive behavior develops; the adrenaline only works when the comparative is possible. The rational moment takes a back seat to emotionalization. Even if one knows to be putting oneself in a dangerous situation for a photo, for example by making maximum use of the space on a cliff or searching for the best angle, one may accept the risk out of considerations of the desire for singularity. Life is no longer lived in the here and now, the moment is not necessarily enjoyed but documented as best

84 Meschke/Crenshaw 2020.

85 Cf. Storr 2018 and Stalder 2017: 141.

86 Reckwitz 2019b: 229.

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as possible for posterity – or followers – against the backdrop of a dominantly visual culture and the demand "Pic or it didn't happen."[87]

5. Body Positivity, Dropouts, and Whistle-blowers

The fixation on the ego and self-promotion, the continuous comparison with others, the latent double contingency of one's own decisions on how to (inter)act appear at first glance to contradict sociability. There are nevertheless some initiatives that try to soften the pressure to perform, the striving for recognition, the "popularity contest" and the constant competitive thinking.[88] They do live in these parallel realities too but want to uncover their mechanisms and strategies. They reveal:

- The intention to share: Is a contribution shared to motivate others to do the same (e.g., baking banana bread, clean eating, veganism) and make the best of a situation or is it self-promotion for promotion's sake? Does one show one's commitment in a voluntary institution or in initiatives like #FridaysForFuture out of conviction to show solidarity, or for reasons of double contingency, because followers expect such behavior, and one wants to receive additional recognition? These questions cannot be answered without empirical surveys; the question of intention often remains unanswered.
- Instagram is not real: The journalist and model Danae Mercer (https://www.instagram.com/danaemercer), amongst others, promotes self-love and body positivity on Instagram. In her contributions, she shows how different body postures are when you are taking pictures, how important it is to tense the muscles, to choose the right angle and, in the process, she also shows that cellulite is just as normal as small 'spare tires' on the belly. She breaks through the positivity of the perfect world on Instagram by talking openly about her miscarriage and her (mental) health problems. In this way, she tries – above all – to convince women to love their own bodies despite or even because of their uniqueness.
- Cross-media reception: To reach different target groups, the influences that Instagram, the beautiful ideal world, the staging of positivity wield

87 Cf. ibid.: 235.

88 Cf. ibid.: 216 and Stalder 2017: 141.

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are taken up together with their negative consequences and addressed in different media. Meschke and Creshaw address children with their appeal for a lived body positivity,[89] while articles in popular magazines such as Time Magazine, for example, are aimed at a broad audience and refer to the toxic effects of social media on mental health.[90] Numerous TED Talks[91] have addressed the issue from different perspectives, many of them following Katherine Ormerod's ideas as published in her book *Why Social Media Is Ruining Your Life*.[92] These different multimodal publications often pursue the renunciation of social media as a goal but the critical handling and questioning of these media should play a more important role than radical renunciation (in the sense of Dieter Baacke's media literacy mode).[93] Parents as role models and schools as critical friends are called upon to teach strategies for critical and reflective use.

Mise-en-scène and the performing of digital facticity are everyday phenomena in social networks. If they are not critically questioned, the staged images are perceived as factual realities and subconsciously serve as role models and unachievable targets. The consequences of these images and their messages having a negative impact on mental health have now been sufficiently empirically proven. Education and awareness raising is needed to maintain body positivity, a healthy body image and a healthy attitude in general. Even more so for children and young people whose identity and self-image are still in formation.

6. Conclusion

The described focus on singularity and its recognition and the striving for attention pursued and sought by today's subjects lead to a loss of self-determination and freedom of action. Against the backdrop of a double contingency, people may act in an externally determined way, constantly comparing themselves with others and perceiving the staged self-promotion of the other as an

89 Meschke/Creshaw 2020.

90 Cf. MacMillan 2017.

91 To name three examples Ormerod 2019; Parnell 2017; Thomas 2017.

92 Ormerod 2020.

93 Baacke 1996.

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ideal and a common standard. Living out one's own positive, almost perfect world generates a feeling of inadequacy. Users of social networks, especially Instagrammers, are willing to go to great lengths to receive recognition in the form of likes or comments. Identity construction here takes place in a competitive way through comparison. Outward appearances obviously dominate. Especially for those young people who still are in search of their own identity and immersed in a social system based on contest, performance, and competition, this constellation might be stressful, as they are not yet solidified in their personal choices. The goal of education and training would therefore be to set a good example for the young people and to break out of the comparison ductus.

The considerations of this paper focus on Instagram but can also be applied to other visually dominated networks, such as YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat. Further research is needed on the topic of self-promotion and its consequences which can serve as a basis for further education and training, also for parents and teachers. Children are often left alone with social networks.[94] They need the support of critically thinking and acting adults to be aware of the strategies of performed (digital) facticity, staging and self-presentation as such and not to adopt them unreflectively in their actions and everyday life.

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94 Cf. boyd 2014.

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