

The Bookstagram Effect: Adolescents' Voluntary Literacy Engagement on Instagram

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**Abstract**

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This qualitative study is the first to explore bookstagram, a relatively new social media phenomenon whereby Instagram users dedicate their feed to showcasing books and reading-related activities. Specifically, this study explored adolescents' experiences of bookstagram to gain a better understanding of what motivates them towards voluntary literacy engagement. The bookstagram and reading experiences of 10 adolescent bookstagrammers were explored through semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. The interviews were coded according to types of pleasure experienced in adolescents' free-choice reading (Wilhelm, 2016), related themes derived from the data, and themes informed by the literature on social media. The findings reinforced Wilhelm's finding that pleasure is at the heart of adolescents' free-choice reading, and further showed that bookstagram enriched adolescents' experiences of social pleasure connected to reading. The findings also revealed that bookstagram enhanced participants' literacy practices, leading them to read more, branch out into different genres, read more attentively, and embrace their enjoyment of reading. Self-presentation on bookstagram was found in participants' references to identity and self-expression on social media, and was considered in terms of its influence on participants' experiences of and motivations to bookstagram. The topics of followerships and sponsorships also emerged, although neither acted as motivations to bookstagram. Overall, this study illustrated that bookstagram gave adolescent readers an opportunity to enhance their pleasure in free-choice reading by exposing them to a community of book lovers who are as excited about reading as they are. Implications include integrating bookstagram in literacy curricula to appeal to adolescents' reading interests.

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### The Bookstagram Effect: Adolescents' Voluntary Literacy Engagement on Instagram

There is something very interesting happening on Instagram. A substantial number of users have leveraged the social media platform to express and explore their interest in books. The phenomenon is called “bookstagram,” a term derived from a hashtag Instagram users originally created for posts that feature a book. Currently, there are over twenty million #bookstagram posts on Instagram, the majority of which have been posted by people who have dedicated their entire feeds to showcasing the books they read and love. Increasingly, the popular press is taking note of bookstagram, calling it “the community of book-loving users on Instagram” (Feneberger, 2017, para. 2) and the place where “Instagram’s bookworms congregate” (Ruiz, 2015, para. 5). An avid reader myself, I initially took to bookstagram as a way to display my personal library (@booksonmycouch). As my participation grew, I realized that bookstagram is sustained by an active and diverse community of readers, booksellers, and teachers. The Comments section of bookstagram feeds include conversations about plot lines, authors, and favourite books. Many bookstagrammers have started book clubs directly on Instagram, and some have even organized in-person meet-ups, the details of which are often shared on their feeds.

It is not surprising that there are people who are interested in books, nor that people in a digital age express this interest online. However, as a bookstagrammer with academic interests in youth literacy, I was struck by the fact that many bookstagram feeds are hosted by adolescents. As literacy research has shown, an essential quality of long lasting literacy behaviour is voluntary engagement (Guthrie, 1996; Guthrie, Alao, & Rinehart, 1997; Mahiri & Sablo, 1996). Thus, discovering that many bookstagrammers are adolescents made me feel as though I had stumbled upon the holy grail of literacy education. I became intrigued by how adolescents are

leveraging Instagram to pursue their literary interests, and curious as to what adolescent bookstagrammers might tell us about their own voluntary engagement with literacy.

Currently, there is very little empirical research on Instagram in relation to adolescent literacy or literary purposes. However, teachers and teacher educators have recommended Instagram as a prospective tool for students to engage in various literacy activities. Monsour (2015) suggests that Instagram has the potential to engage students in reading, writing, viewing, and visual literacy. Further, she proposes that integrating Instagram activity in writing assignments will help students develop their own writer's identity, establish a discourse community in the classroom, and expand their community by participating in the Instagram network. Similarly, Bell (2013) outlines ways educators can engage their students with Instagram in order to inspire students' creative writing. Nevertheless, there has not yet been any research on Instagram's influence on literacy engagement, and whether any potential influence extends beyond the platform itself. Furthermore, while a few studies have examined why adolescents use Instagram and the nature of their posts (boyd, 2014; Holmberg, Chaplin, Hillman, & Berg, 2016; Marwick, 2015), none have explored the bookstagram phenomenon specifically.

This study begins the exploration into bookstagram by focusing on two specific facets. Firstly, it explores bookstagram as it relates to adolescents' voluntary literacy engagement. Bookstagrammers dedicate their Instagram feed to showcasing books; thus, adolescent bookstagrammers are likely already actively engaged with literacy, perhaps even to a higher degree than their average peer, and are well-suited to contribute to our understanding of their voluntary literacy engagement. Secondly, this study examines bookstagram as a form of online self-presentation. Although my main interest is in adolescent literacy, an equally defining aspect

of bookstagram is that it takes place on Instagram, making it a form of social networking that could be informed by social and psychological motivations. Considering self-presentation on Instagram will further enhance the overall understanding of adolescents' motivations to bookstagram.

This study is founded on decades of research on the importance of literacy and the profound influence voluntary engagement has on establishing strong and long-lasting literacy behaviour. The literature review below focuses first on the value of literacy, free-choice reading, authentic motivations to read, and reading for pleasure. It then turns on recent research on self-presentation through Instagram. The research on self-presentation provides insight into how Instagram users engage in identity construction online, and provides a complementary framework for understanding the appeal of bookstagram to adolescents.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Literacy Engagement**

Literacy, in addition to being essential for academic achievement (McGeown, Duncan, Griffiths, & Stothard, 2014), has an influence on an individual's personal and social development. Philosophers Sen (2003) and Nussbaum (2006) maintain that literacy is a vital component in enhancing an individual's overall well-being, as well as his or her ability to be an active and responsible member of society. In their seminal analysis on the consequences of literacy, Goody and Watt (1963) delve into the cultural and social history of literacy across various societies. One emphasis in their analysis is on how writing encourages private thought and self-awareness insofar as it "enables the individual to objectify his own experience" (p. 339). Qualitative research with adolescents has also shown the positive influence literacy has on the development of personal goals and interests (Casey, 2008; Sweet & Guthrie, 1996).

As an educator and a leading theorist on critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1983) emphasized the power that both reading and writing have in widening one's gaze upon the world, and described reading as a type of interaction with the world that is both personal and political. Freire posited that literacy enhances one's ability to critically examine the world, and to interpret his or her own place within it. Similarly, and in relation to youth development, Guthrie (1996) argued that literacy engagement is the cornerstone of a child's shift towards self-direction as it helps a child recognize his or her preferences, and in turn, to nurture elements of his or her personality. This experience with self-direction is linked to self-actualization and is a vital component in the ability to make personal choices and critical judgments.

### **Adolescents' Voluntary Literacy Engagement**

Voluntary literacy engagement is driven by the intrinsic (or internal) motivations that compel a person to read or write on their own time. Guthrie (1996) described intrinsic motivations as those that lead to activity that is involved, curious, and social, and as a result, long-term. When rooted in intrinsic motivations, literacy engagement connects a student's cognitive ability with his or her personal interests, and facilitates a "broader pathway for personal growth and participation in society" (Guthrie, 1996, p. 436). Conversely, external motivations are fuelled by temporary goals, such as achieving high test scores or meeting academic expectations, ultimately leading towards unenthusiastic and short-term literacy engagement (Guthrie, 1996).

In their study on the out-of-school writing practices of high school students, Mahiri and Sablo (1996) illustrated how authentic motivations, such as creative expression, are key to voluntary literacy engagement. While the adolescents in their study were low-achievers in the classroom, they showed great skill in literacy activities that were motivated by their own goals.

One student, for example, developed a portfolio of poetry, drama, and short stories without any intention of sharing her work, but simply to have a private outlet to express herself. Mahiri and Sablo observed these voluntary literacy activities as undertakings that helped students cultivate a nexus of developmental and social benefits; particularly, identity construction, critical awareness, personal satisfaction, and partial retreat from difficult social or domestic situations. Similarly, Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (2008) found that adolescent students' voluntary literacy practices had a positive effect on their confidence, relationships, and sense of identity.

Furthermore, many studies have shown the benefits of non-academic literacy programs (826 National, 2016; Casey, 2008; Davidson & Koppenhaver, 1988; Jocson, 2006; Wiseman, 2011). Of note is 826 National, a non-profit literacy organization that offers free writing programs to youth between the ages of 6 and 18 years old. Part of 826's mission is to provide students "with opportunities to explore their creativity and improve their writing skills" (826 National, 2016, p. 6). With workshop themes such as "Products for Pirates," "Comic Strip Creation," "Superhero Shenanigans," "Make-Believe Science," and "Animal Dream Theatre," young students are given a chance to approach writing as a creative, interactive, and self-directed pursuit. In their latest annual report, 826 National measured several social and emotional as well as academic and professional benefits of their programs, including enhancing students' abilities to "foster creativity," "cultivate self-expression," "explore identity through storytelling," and "develop writing skills" (2016, p. 15).

Resnick (2000) suggested that a major obstacle in fostering voluntary and long-lasting literacy engagement in youth is the over-emphasis on useful and informational literacy in academic curricula and the mishandling of pleasurable literacy in classrooms. Useful literacy involves texts that are action-oriented, and is measured by a person's ability to engage with a text

to achieve a goal, such as filling out a job application, following a cooking recipe or assembly instructions, or using a search engine to find information. Informational literacy is reading with the sole purpose of understanding aspects of the world. Pleasurable literacy involves reading for enjoyment, and focuses on literacy as a cultural practice instead of a pragmatic skill. While Resnick conceded that reading for pleasure is increasingly becoming a priority in schools, she also asserted that the typical model of school literacy as a “canonic set of readings, standard questions, and expected answers” (p. 182) hinders the pleasure component and teaches students to think of reading as a task-based activity. Such a limited conceptualization of reading has been shown to not only discourage out-of-school literacy engagement, but also have a negative effect on adolescents’ self-efficacy (Pitcher et al., 2007). According to Resnick, until there is a major shift in how literacy is approached in the classroom, schools will continue to endorse the underlying notion that reading is not pleasurable in its own right.

Resnick’s theory is closely aligned with Freire’s (1983) pedagogical philosophy that teachers should encourage students to develop a more personal, and thus meaningful, relationship with reading and writing. Both Freire and Resnick, albeit separately, discredit any instructional approach that favours quantity over quality; rather than having students memorize texts or build a repertoire of academic knowledge, literacy programs should be designed around the vernacular and experiences of the students.

The devaluing of pleasure reading in schools and the tendency for reading research to overlook the importance of pleasure is precisely what motivated Wilhelm’s (2016) three-year qualitative study on the adolescent experience of free-choice reading. Wilhelm explored how adolescents experience texts by focusing on four aspects of reading: general reading practices, specific literary interests, favourite literary excerpts, and the connections between reading

interests and other interests. To grasp the types of pleasure within these forms of reading, Wilhelm adopted Dewey's model of educative interest. As described by Wilhelm, Dewey posits that there are four types of pleasure that motivate people to learn: play, work, intellectual, and social. Wilhelm mapped these types of pleasure onto the reading experiences of a sample of adolescents who self-identified as either passionate or highly-engaged readers.

Based on semi-structured interviews with these adolescent readers, Wilhelm found that in free-choice reading, adolescents experienced the four kinds of pleasure proposed by Dewey, as well as a fifth kind of pleasure Wilhelm labeled "inner work" (p. 31). Play pleasure was experienced when adolescent readers got "totally lost in a book" (p. 34). Intellectual pleasure involved the enjoyment of engaging with a text to figure something out. Social pleasure was experienced when readers connected with others and identified themselves through reading preferences. The pleasure of work was experienced when reading was done to improve writing, understand different perspectives, and inform ideas that would later be brought forth in debates or conversations. Lastly, the pleasure of inner work was illustrated through participants' descriptions of how reading helped them deal with personal issues, and learn about themselves and the type of person they want to be. Wilhelm concluded that free-choice reading provides distinct types of pleasure to readers. His study points to the importance of valuing adolescents' reading choices and preferences, as well as the need for educators and researchers "to make pleasure much more central to our practice" (p. 37-38) in order to help facilitate life-long reading behaviour.

The exploration of bookstagram in this study draws on Wilhelm's approach and framework. For Wilhelm, the only way to truly understand the dimensions of adolescents' free-choice reading was to "ask young people directly" (p. 33). His focus on capturing the



perspectives of adolescent readers, as well as the distinctive attention he pays to pleasure in reading, are perfectly aligned with the goals of this present study and will be helpful in understanding the relationship between bookstagram and voluntary literacy engagement.

### **Social Networking and Literacy**

There are a number of ways by which people have leveraged social networking to engage in literacy and literary activities. For example, Twitter users use the hashtag #140novel to participate in flash fiction writing within the confines of the platform's 140-character limit (even after Twitter increased the limit to 280 characters, users maintained the hashtag's 140 prefix). Several authors have even released new work on their Twitter feeds, rather than through print or e-reader, by serializing excerpts of their new novels one tweet at a time (Goldhill, 2015). Further, sites like Goodreads offer readers a platform to catalogue and review books they have read, receive book recommendations based on their personal catalogue, and interact with other users. Fiction writing communities have also formed on sites like Wattpad and Quotev, whereby users create profiles and post their original work for other members to read and comment on.

What distinguishes bookstagram from these types of social media literacy activities is that it takes place on a platform that is primarily a visual medium. Positioned as "the home for visual storytelling for everyone" (Instagram, 2018, para 2), Instagram is a mobile application designed for users to share photos and videos. One major appeal of the app is that it is equipped with easy-to-use image filters and mark-up tools that allow users to modify their photos to reach a desired effect. Thus, even the most amateur photographer can have a carefully curated and professional-grade feed of photography. Although many social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, now offer photo- and video-sharing features, none are as visually driven as Instagram.

### **Bookstagram as Self-presentation**

With over 800 million users worldwide (Instagram, 2018, para 1), Instagram is currently the fastest growing social media platform (Duggan, 2015), and with this growth has come research on Instagram's influence on users. Smith and Sanderson (2015) explore self-presentation on Instagram and assert that the internet has provided people with “the ability to engage in impression management virtually” (p. 344). Similarly, Marwick (2015) explored the appeal of Instagram, suggesting that it offers “average people” (p. 140) a status typically reserved for "celebrities." Through the lens of Senft's (2013) notion of microcelebrity, whereby users gain online popularity through strategic and carefully curated self-presentation, Marwick provides a textual and visual analysis of popular Instagram accounts. She explored how Instagram users present and maintain a persona through various techniques, such as posting selfies or other types of photos emulating a luxurious lifestyle, and thereby gain “Instafame.” Marwick further asserts that Instafame is the goal of many Instagram users: “gathering thousands, or even hundreds, of followers can be a motivating force” (p.137)

Given that bookstagram exists on a platform in which persona appears central to the content people post, self-presentation merited exploration in the present study. Bookstagram feeds contain a variety of posts, all of which can be considered a form of self-presentation, including selfies, ranging across feeds from none to plenty; “shelfies,” a clever play on the selfie neologism, referring to posts of one's personal bookshelves; and of course, photos of books, libraries, and bookstores.

### **The Present Study**

Given the importance of voluntary literacy engagement in fostering growth in personal, social, and cognitive development, this study aims to provide a better understanding of what

motivates adolescents to bookstagram, and presumably, read. The four primary research questions are:

1. How do bookstagrammers describe their experiences of reading?
2. Why are adolescents choosing to bookstagram?
3. How does bookstagram influence adolescents' literacy practices? For example, does it encourage more reading, the exploration of literary genres, or personal writing?
4. How does online self-presentation factor into adolescents' motivations to bookstagram?

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

A qualitative approach was utilized to explore and learn about adolescents' experiences of bookstagram and literacy practices. Given the relatively recent emergence of bookstagram as a social media phenomenon and the scarcity of bookstagram-related research, a phenomenological approach was adopted as it is well suited "to discover and describe the meaning or essence of participants' lived experiences" (Hays & Singh, 2012) of a specific phenomenon. A phenomenological design includes the collection and analysis of "participants' specific statements and experiences" (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007, p. 252) in order to ensure the research reflects the ideas, feelings, and impressions of the population being studied. To this end, data was primarily collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to describe their experiences from their own perspectives. The key benefit of semi-structured interviews is that they allow for flexibility in a researcher's line of questioning. As described by Hays and Singh (2012), during a semi-structured interview "every interview question does not have to be asked, the sequence and pace of the interview questions can change, and additional questions can be included to create a unique interview catered to fully

describing the interviewee's experience" (p. 239). With the freedom to go off script, I was able to embrace and encourage participants' segues as they discussed their experiences and viewpoints, and to thereby obtain rich qualitative data. Data was also collected through a short questionnaire that focused on details of participants' usage of social media, and their leisure reading and writing habits. I anticipated that the questionnaire data would complement the interview data insofar as it would provide some added context to the interview responses.

### **Pilot Case Study**

The present study was informed by a pilot case study completed as part of a graduate level qualitative methods course in the MA Child Studies program. The case study focused on the experiences of a single participant called Angelica (pseudonym), a 19-year-old woman living in the Philippines who at the time had been bookstagramming for two years. It allowed me to refine my research questions, data collection instruments and procedures, and analyses. For example, the data helped guide the research questions and overall direction of the present study, particularly with respect to establishing a focus on pleasure and self-presentation. Angelica's responses to the interview questions revealed that she experienced different types of pleasure from reading, and bookstagram allowed her to not only express her reading interests, but also explore and discover new ones. Her responses also indicated that gaining and losing followers was a factor in how she presented herself online, and at times her genuine interest in books conflicted with the image of herself that she wanted to portray on Instagram. For Angelica, creating a secondary bookstagram feed was a solution that allowed her to broaden her online self-presentation while also satisfying her diverse reading interests and motivations. Further, in regards to data collection procedures, I initially asked Angelica to be interviewed by phone, but she requested that the interview be done over email. With English being her second language,

she felt a phone interview would leave her self-conscious of her speaking skills, and that her responses would be more expressive if she were able to write them out. Her request for an email interview guided how I designed the procedures for the present study in that all participants were given a choice of how they wanted to be interviewed (i.e., by phone, video chat, or email).

Overall, the findings of the pilot study were very encouraging, and indicated that a more extensive exploration would inform our understanding of how bookstagram is factoring into adolescents' literacy practices and perspectives.

### **Recruitment**

Criterion sampling was used whereby, to be included in the study, adolescents had to be between 13 and 17 years old and currently hosting a bookstagram account. To recruit participants, I first published a post on my own bookstagram account on September 2, 2017 (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BYixLFjj9lg>) in the hopes that fellow bookstagrammers might opt to participate or share the post with other bookstagrammers. While the recruitment post garnered much interest from bookstagrammers, none of those who contacted me met the participant age criterion. I subsequently posted another recruitment message in the form of a video on September 4, 2017 (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BYoOyo2D61h/>); however, this also failed to yield any participants. At this point, I implemented a new strategy (after obtaining Ethics approval); I conducted an active search on Instagram for bookstagrammers who indicated their age and an email address in their Instagram profile. To respect the privacy of prospective participants, I did not consider user information found elsewhere (e.g., in post captions or in a user's comments on other posts). Once prospective participants were identified, contact was made via the email address indicated on the user's Instagram profile rather than via direct message (DM). Although DM allows for quicker interaction, I did not use this feature to respect

privacy and to maximize the chance that adolescents would consider the email carefully before responding.

This second recruitment method was very successful. In total, I identified 90 prospective participants and emailed each of them an invitation to participate (Appendix A). The invitation outlined general details of the study, the tasks participants would be asked to complete, the age criterion to participate, the requirement for parental/guardian and participant consent, and contact information. Further, in an attempt to also recruit participants through snowball sampling, the invitation included a prompt to forward the email to other adolescent bookstagrammers who might be interested in participating, but this prompt did not yield any referred participants. Overall, ten adolescents agreed to participate in the study. All participants were sent parental/guardian information and consent forms (Appendix B) and participant information and consent forms (Appendix C) by email. The consent forms were signed and returned before any data collection began. The identities of participants and their parents or guardians were treated confidentially by assigning each person a pseudonym that was then used on all printed and digital records.

### **Participants**

Table 1 provides the participant demographic information. Of the 10 participants, eight were female and two were male. The participant age ranged from 14 to 17 years old, with one 14-year-old, two 15-year-olds, two 16-year-olds, and five 17-year-olds. The median participant age was 16.5 years old. Using social media as a recruitment tool allowed for a sample of participants from different parts of the world: two participants live in Canada, three in the United States, two in Italy, one in France, one in Venezuela, and one in Australia. Table 1 also indicates the number of Instagram followers each participant had on their bookstagram account at the time

of recruitment, ranging from 305 to 27,800 followers.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Location	Number of Instagram followers (at time of recruitment)
Vera	14	F	Italy	1,226
Heather	15	F	Canada	323
Simone	15	F	France	1,444
Claire	16	F	USA	725
Dominic	16	M	Italy	6,179
Alberto	17	M	Venezuela	2,104
Iris	17	F	Canada	305
Joan	17	F	USA	3,190
Leila	17	F	Australia	27,800
Maya	17	F	USA	15,200

### Instruments

**Interview questions.** The interview questions (Appendix D) were designed to explore the participants' feelings, experiences, and opinions in relation to bookstagram. At times, my line of questioning differed from the prepared questions in order to appeal to a participant's responses and disposition. The questions were in open-ended format, such as "Why did you start a bookstagram account?" and "How would you describe the interaction between bookstagrammers?" Some questions prompted participants to analyze and discuss the content of bookstagram posts. For example, Questions 13 and 14 prompted the participant to choose their favourite and least favourite posts from their own and others' bookstagram feeds, and to provide reasons for their choices. The motivation behind these tasks was to allow participants to discuss bookstagram in any terms they wished, and to allow them to elaborate on aspects of bookstagram that were important to their own experiences. Based on the pilot data, it was anticipated that these tasks would elicit thoughtful responses and reveal diverse interactions with bookstagram.

**Questionnaire items.** The questionnaire (Appendix E) consisted of 11 questions that focused on participants' usage of social networking sites, their thoughts on bookstagram, and their non-academic reading and writing habits.

### **Procedure**

Data collection was carried out only after receiving signed parental/guardian and participant consent forms. Participants were then asked to complete four tasks, presented next in chronological order.

Each participant engaged in an introductory conversation with me by Gmail chat (n = 7), phone (n = 2), or video chat (n = 1). The goal of the conversation was to review the consent form, go over the tasks the participant would be asked to complete, and ensure the participant understood their rights as a research participant. I also attempted to build rapport with the participant by engaging in casual chatting (e.g., about the grade they were in, how they were liking their school term so far, and what they had been reading lately). I closed each conversation by asking the participant to begin thinking about a favourite and least favourite bookstagram post that they had posted on their own bookstagram feed, as well as a favourite and least favourite bookstagram post that someone else had posted, in preparation for Questions 13 and 14 of the interview. Within a day of the introductory conversation, participants were sent the questionnaire by email. Once a participant returned the completed questionnaire to me by email, the participant and I scheduled a two-part interview by email (n = 7), phone (n = 1), or video chat (n = 2). The interview was split into two parts, each consisting of 10 questions and conducted on different days. If a participant chose to complete the interview by email, they were invited to have follow-up chat with me on Gmail chat. The follow-up chat allowed me to ask the participant to clarify or elaborate on any of their responses, and it also gave the participant a chance to ask or bring up



anything they wanted to talk about. Following the questionnaire and interviews, participants were sent a summary of their responses (Appendix F). Each participant was asked to review the summary, to revise any parts they wished to best reflect their experiences and perspectives, and to share any additional thoughts. All of the summaries were approved by participants, with only minor corrections of factual information (e.g., a participant clarified her extracurricular activities).

All interviews done by video chat and telephone were audio recorded using a digital audio recorder. All follow-up chats on Gmail chat were saved, transcribed, and added to each participant's interview transcript.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysed for this study consisted of transcribed interviews and tabulated questionnaire responses. Interviews conducted by email were compiled in a single Microsoft Word document per participant. Phone or video chat interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word. Questionnaire responses were aggregated and tabled using Microsoft Excel (Appendix G).

I pursued constant comparative analysis of the interview data throughout three stages of coding: in-vivo, axial, and selective. The in-vivo coding involved labeling direct quotes from participants, a process which is particularly useful for studies on youth experiences because it “enhances and deepens an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldviews” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106). In the second stage, the axial coding method was implemented by organizing the initial codes into succinct categories, thereby eliminating any redundancies. Lastly, during the third stage of selective coding, I adopted a hybrid approach of using a priori codes drawn from Wilhelm (2016) and developing new codes informed by the literature and the data. The a priori codes used were the five distinct types of pleasure as illustrated by Wilhelm: “immersive

pleasure of play, intellectual pleasure, social pleasure, the pleasure of functional work, and the pleasure of inner work” (2016, p. 30). The decision to apply these codes was based on the prevalence of pleasure in participants’ descriptions of reading and bookstagram, and the relevance of Wilhelm’s framework given that his study also focuses on adolescent reading. The analyses also took into account other types of pleasure articulated by participants. For example, the code of “leisure pleasure” was created to capture the participants’ sentiment that reading is enjoyable simply because it helps pass the time. Apart from pleasure, several new codes relating to reading practices and self-presentation were developed. The complete coding scheme can be found in Appendix H.

Additionally, I drew on the questionnaire responses to gain descriptive information about the participants and to allow for some triangulation with the interview data. For example, Question 5 of the questionnaire (Appendix G) directly refers to the topic of followers by asking “How important is it to you that you have a lot of followers on your bookstagram account?” I triangulated these responses with Questions 16 to 18 of the interview, which ask participants to describe if and how followership factors into what they post on their feed, and how they feel when they gain or followers. Both consistencies and inconsistencies between the questionnaire and interviews were noted.

### **Validity**

As described by Hays and Singh (2012), the validity of a study “is the truthfulness of your findings and conclusions based on maximum opportunity to hear participant voices in a particular context” (p. 192). The following measures were taken to establish validity.

**Researcher reflexivity.** Given my keen research interest in adolescent literacy and my own ongoing experience as a bookstagrammer, I maintained a dual role as outsider and insider,

respectively, throughout the entire study. In my outsider role as a researcher, I was mindful of the interviewee's responses and adjusted the pace and questions of the interview to achieve an optimal level of comfort for the interviewee. My insider role as an active bookstagrammer equipped me with knowledge that an outsider may not have had, particularly, a firsthand understanding of bookstagram experiences and of the functions of the app. This knowledge allowed me to better identify themes and topics as they were divulged in the interviewee's responses.

**Member checking.** Validity was also established through member checking, a process that involves "taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell, 2000, p. 127). As noted above (see Procedure), I achieved this through the individual participant response summaries after the interviews were conducted. These were written in the third person and relayed the bookstagram experiences as described by the participant. Each participant was asked to review their summary, and to revise or comment with any additional thoughts that they felt were missing.

**Disconfirming evidence.** A valuable measure in establishing validity in a qualitative study is disconfirming evidence or negative case analysis, whereby a researcher first establishes main themes or findings, and then goes back to the data to find examples that contradict or negate these findings (Creswell, 2000; Hays & Singh, 2012). The goal is to ensure that the researcher is not limiting or curtailing their own interpretations, and to ultimately minimize researcher bias (Hays & Singh, 2012). I implemented this technique after the third phase of coding. At this point, I had identified the main categories from the data, thus it was the opportune time for me to go back to the transcripts and summaries to find any instances that

disconfirmed my findings. If the data contradicted the identified categories or themes, I revisited the coding stage and integrated any new themes as needed. If the contradictions were not significant, I assessed the pertinence of including them in my analysis as outliers or examples of exceptional experiences.

## Findings

### Participant Profiles

Below are brief profiles of each participant based on their questionnaire and interview responses. An expanded description of each participant can be found in their response summary (Appendix F).

**Vera.** Vera is a 14-year-old girl who lives near Naples, Italy. Presently in high school, she really enjoys studying different languages, including Latin, English, Spanish, German, and her first language, Italian. Vera has been an avid reader since she was 9 years old, and currently spends approximately 4 to 5 hours a week reading in her free time. Her love for reading stems from the way it allows her to escape from reality. As she stated, “the most beautiful feeling in the world is when you open a book and you forget where you’re at.” Vera created her bookstagram account in August 2016.

**Heather.** Heather is a 15-year-old girl who lives in Toronto, Ontario. She is set to graduate high school in 2 years, at which point she hopes to move to the UK to study British History. For Heather, reading is a source of both enjoyment and escape, and she spends anywhere from 6 to 7 hours a week reading in her free time. She typically gravitates towards fiction, with a particular interest in fantasy and historical fiction, and has recently taken an interest in memoirs and essays. Heather created her first bookstagram account in 2016 but felt

her interactions decreased once the new Instagram algorithm<sup>1</sup> was introduced, so she decided to start a new bookstagram account in July 2017.

**Simone.** Simone is a 15-year-old girl living in Paris, France who is presently in her first year of high school. Having already visited Tunisia, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, and Germany, her dream is to travel the world. As an avid reader, Simone currently spends anywhere from 6 to 7 hours a week reading in her free time. She loves reading because it lets her “mind dream of other worlds” and “understand this everyday life better.” Simone created her bookstagram account in April 2015.

**Claire.** Claire is a 16-year-old girl living in Tuscola, Illinois. She is currently a junior in high school and is on the cross-country, volleyball, basketball, track, and softball teams. With a wide range of interests, Claire’s dream job would be as a book cover designer because it would combine her love of reading and art. Claire spends approximately 2 to 3 hours a week reading in her free time. Part of Claire’s love for reading is rooted in being able to interpret a story more freely than she would be able to when watching a movie. She draws a parallel between books and movies in that they both relay stories, but she says, “reading is so different because you do put a little of your soul into it [...] you have to give to the book a little bit in order to get everything back.” Claire created her bookstagram account in April 2016.

**Dominic.** Dominic is a 16-year-old boy who lives in a small town in Sicily. Currently in high school, he plans on going to university to become a doctor. Dominic has been an avid reader from a very young age, and he now spends more than 7 hours a week reading in his free

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, a user’s Instagram feed would display posts in chronological order. In March 2016, Instagram announced that posts would be displayed based on a new algorithm that factors in things like timing and the relationship between the user and the accounts they follow (Instagram, 2016). This announcement and the subsequent roll-out of the new algorithm caused quite a stir among Instagrammers because it would affect the visibility of their posts on others’ feeds, and vice versa (Greenberg, 2016).

time. He has embraced reading as a form of escape, saying that, “I find things in books that I do not find in reality.” Dominic created his bookstagram account in August 2016.

**Alberto.** Alberto is a 17-year-old boy living in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. Having just graduated high school, he plans to go to university and hopes to major in Chemical Engineering. Alberto spends approximately 4 to 5 hours a week reading in his free time. His love for reading is primarily rooted in the way it allows him to “enter into new worlds and new lives” and experience life “through the eyes of the characters.” He also values reading because it helps him improve his vocabulary, learn useful and important information, and because it is an activity that is “never boring.” Alberto created his bookstagram account in April 2017.

**Iris.** Iris is a 17-year-old girl living in Cornwall, Ontario. Presently a senior in high school, she has already applied to the English program at a few different universities, and is thinking of enrolling in Teachers College after earning her B.A. She currently spends over 7 hours a week reading in her free time, and typically gravitates towards fantasy books. For Iris, reading is a major source of leisure and enjoyment, saying that, “[i]t’s a good thing to pass time, it gets me thinking and often helps me refocus when I need to.” Iris created her bookstagram account in August 2017.

**Joan.** Joan is a 17-year-old girl living in Chicago, Illinois. She is homeschooled and on track to finish high school next year, at which point she plans on enrolling in online college to study teaching or graphic design. Joan spends approximately 6 to 7 hours a week reading in her free time. She mostly gravitates towards fiction with a particular interest in fantasy, sci-fi and romance. For Joan, reading allows her to imagine and discover, saying that, “reading gives me the chance to read about something that doesn’t exist and takes you beyond your imagination.” Joan created her bookstagram account in August 2017.

**Leila.** Leila is a 17-year-old girl originally from Indonesia and now living in Perth, Western Australia. Having just graduated high school, she plans to go to university and hopes to major in Engineering. Leila spends approximately 2 to 3 hours a week reading in her free time. She reads mostly fiction, but also enjoys autobiographies and motivational books. Leila's love for reading stems from her genuine love for learning, and she feels motivated by the prospect of finishing a book: "I love the feeling of finishing a book. It feels somewhat rewarding and also relieving." Leila created her bookstagram account in December 2015.

**Maya.** Maya is a 17-year-old girl living in Vermont. As a senior in high school, she plans to go to university and hopes to major in Biochemistry and minor in English Literature. She spends over 7 hours a week reading in her free time. Maya experiences some social anxiety, and has come to embrace reading as a form of comfort and escape, saying that, "books have always been there for me; a way for me to be with people and go on adventures in the comfort of my own home." Maya created her bookstagram account in October 2015.

### **Adolescents' Experiences of Reading**

**Types of pleasure.** Regarding the first research question asking *How do bookstagrammers describe their experiences of reading*, participants expressed four types of pleasure when reading: immersive play pleasure, leisure pleasure, the pleasure of inner work, and social pleasure.

***Immersive play pleasure.*** As described in Wilhelm (2016), immersive play pleasure is "the pleasure you get from living through a story and getting totally lost in a book" (p. 34). Notions of immersive play pleasure mostly arose in participants' direct responses to the interview question, "Why do you enjoy reading?" Many of the participants described how reading allows them to escape reality and enter other worlds. Vera alluded to immersive play

through her reflection on how books allow her to mentally and emotionally embark on a fictional journey:

I love reading because, in books, I find other worlds. I think that the most beautiful feeling in the world is when you open a book and you forget where you're at [...] You're in the book's world, with all the characters and their adventure. I understood I loved books when I started realizing how I felt while reading. I really do care about characters and their emotions, I cry when someone dies, I laugh at jokes, I keep my breath when something dangerous or scary happens [...]

Similarly, Simone said that “[w]ith fantasy stories, I can let my mind dream of other worlds,” and Alberto explained that “[r]eading allows me to enter into new worlds and new lives because I can enter these worlds and see them through the eyes of the characters.” Heather also alluded to immersive play when she says “when I’m reading, I’m living someone else’s life, which I always enjoy.”

*Leisure pleasure.* Participants also described reading as something to do to pass the time. For example, Alberto explained that part of the reason why he enjoys reading is that, simply put, “[r]eading is something to do.” Similarly, Iris said that reading “gives me something to think about when I’m bored.” Further, in Heather’s description, she seemed baffled that anyone could not find reading fun:

I think it’s always been such a big part of me and what I do, that I never understand when people say they only read when they have to for school, cause I’m like ‘then what do you do for fun?’

These descriptions of reading as pure leisure reflect participants’ experiences of pleasure as being within the act of reading itself.

*The pleasure of inner work.* Wilhelm’s concept of inner work involves readers using reading to “address deeply personal issues” (p. 35) and “help them become the kind of people they wanted to become” (p. 36). Seven participants in my study described reading as a way to



escape reality, and while that escape was at times described in terms of immersive play pleasure, the participants also alluded to escaping into a book as a way to deal with personal issues or emotions. As Dominic described:

[W]hen I'm sad I always read to try to get into another world, try to be a character, try to think like a character, try to be like a character, that really helps me to get out of myself and be in the book. So, it really helps me.

As mentioned earlier, Maya experiences social anxiety, and has found great comfort in reading:

I have quite bad anxiety, especially social anxiety and sometimes it's hard for me to interact with other people, even people who are my friends. It's a bit hard to explain, but when I'm in one of those moods books have always been there for me; a way for me to be with people and go on adventures in the comfort of my own home.

Similarly, Iris also turns to reading to help her through negative feelings or circumstances:

“[reading is] an escape when I don't feel comfortable or content with my situation. [...] it gets me thinking and often helps me refocus when I need to.”

***Social pleasure.*** Wilhelm defines social pleasure as “the pleasure of using reading to connect to others” and “to name and identify [one]self” (p. 35). In relation to reading, aspects of social pleasure mostly appeared in participants' descriptions of reading-related conversations they have offline. Specifically, participants described their enjoyment of being able to discuss books with other people, including their family, friends, teachers, librarians, and school guidance counsellors. For Alberto, having friends who share a mutual interest in reading is enjoyable because of the book recommendations they give each other: “[I]t's cool, because they know what kind of books you like to read, so this gives them a chance to recommend books that they think you'll like. And this is reciprocal.” Likewise, Heather is also able to discuss books with people in her life:

My parents are both pretty big readers, so I can always talk to them. I have friends who are into books. And occasionally my teacher, well, my French and English teachers are

both really good, and they notice what I read, and we'll talk about it.

In addition to being able to discuss books with others, participants also expressed enthusiasm for the kinds of conversations they have, illustrating that having someone to discuss books with is great, but even better is when people also share the same reading interests and level of excitement. For Leila, social pleasure arises amongst friends who are also avid readers: "I have a couple of friends who are huge booknerds like I am, and they are amazing to talk books with. It's fun, loud and sometimes it gets really deep." It is clear that Leila is happy to self-identify as a "booknerd" and to be able to share this identity with friends. This shared excitement for what they are reading is the gateway to their "fun, loud," and "deep" discussions.

Similarly, Vera enjoys being able to bond with others over books, which is illustrated in her description of her relationship with her older cousin:

When we see each other, we always talk about books, even because she recommends me lots of books—I literally have a list that she made to me—and she wants to know if I like them! It's very nice and funny, even because we make jokes about characters or authors that only we understand!

While participants expressed social pleasure in describing their reading experiences, some described limitations in their social interactions around reading. For example, both Maya and Simone expressed that they have people in their lives who they can discuss books with, but perhaps not as many or to the degree they would like. Maya said,

I have my school librarian, who chats with me and gives me recommendations. Whenever I go to the library we chat about the books we're reading. We just recently discussed our thoughts on *Turtles All the Way Down* by John Green. My family aren't big readers, and I do have one friend who I chat with sometimes, but not that often.

Similarly, Simone also described her ability to discuss books with an adult at school, but her interactions with peers are not as frequent:

I often talk to my English teacher about my bookstagram account, or my readings. [...] I have a friend who likes to read, but not as much as I do. [...] I have a second friend I used to be really close to last year, especially because we liked to read the same books, I was always borrowing hers and she mines, although we're not in the same class this year, and, having different schedules, we don't see each other as often as we used to.

There were many factors that influenced participants' experiences of social pleasure in relation to reading, including having people in their lives to discuss books with, the types of relationships they had with those people (i.e., parents, teachers, friends, etc.), common interests, frequency of discussions, and the depth of discussions.

**Reader isolation.** Although many of the participants experienced social pleasure through interactions with the people around them, several mentioned a lack of social opportunity in their reading lives, which was subsequently coded as "reader isolation." Reader isolation is the feeling of not having anyone to discuss books with, or feeling as though there are very few or no people in one's life who read as much or read the same type of books. At some point during the interviews, seven of the 10 participants expressed reader isolation and several alluded to it being one of the reasons why they began to bookstagram. For Dominic, this came out when he described his struggles as a native Italian who prefers to read in English:

[B]eing Italian and reading in English I don't find that much people that read the same books as I do, or even have heard of the books that I read [...] Also, me and my sister are the only readers in the family, but she only reads in Italian, and whenever I go to ask her about recommendations, like book recommendations, she's always like "you should read this," and it's in Italian, and I'm like, I don't know if I should read this because you know, Italian books do not attract me at all, I don't know why.

Dominic has people in his life who enjoy reading, perhaps even as much as he does, but he experienced reader isolation by way of not having anyone in his life who reads English books. Not being able to discuss or get recommendations of English books was one of the major reasons why Dominic began his bookstagram account.

The notion of reader isolation also emerged in several participants' claims that there weren't people in their lives who enjoyed reading or who read as much as they did. When asked why she started her bookstagram account, Leila replied, "I didn't have very many friends who read, so I thought Instagram would be the perfect platform to discuss books!" The potential of Instagram as a way to escape reader isolation is also illustrated in Vera's response to the same question:

Since I was a child, I've always loved reading. It was my personal way to escape from reality and lose myself in new worlds. Unfortunately, I had no one who loved books as much as I did, so I hadn't someone to talk about books with, except for my cousin. And then I found this amazing world: bookstagram.

Claire also suggested her experiences of reader isolation when she described how her interactions on bookstagram are different than those she has offline:

I go to a pretty small high school so there aren't a lot of people like me who just love to read because that's just not a very common thing, and so being able to share an interest with so many different people online is just really awesome.

Even those who were able to engage in thoughtful and fun interactions offline still felt there were limitations to their social reach.

### **Adolescents' Motivations to Bookstagram**

**Types of pleasure.** Regarding the second research question asking *Why are adolescents choosing to bookstagram*, participants' descriptions of their bookstagram experiences mainly alluded to social pleasure and the pleasure of work.

**Social pleasure.** The social pleasure experienced through bookstagram was distinct from that experienced through reading in that it was multi-layered. In addition to being able to discuss books with others, the participants described other sources of social pleasure, including the ability to build friendships, join online book clubs, and even solidify their identity as a reader. Three of the main themes present in participants' descriptions of their bookstagram interactions

were community, friendship, and self-identification.

*Community.* During the interviews, seven participants directly referred to bookstagram as a “community,” and used qualities like “warm,” “welcoming,” “safe,” and “supportive” to describe it. Dominic’s recollection of his very first bookstagram post demonstrates the sense of community that he discovered:

[T]he first experience of when I started bookstagram that I noticed was how warm the community was because I was welcomed in a very good way. The first day I posted, I presented myself like, ‘Hi, I’m [Dominic], this is my first bookstagram post,’ and the next day I got tagged by a lot of people saying, ‘Say hi to him! He’s new here!’

Maya also reflected on her earlier bookstagramming days, saying that, “everyone in the community was extremely welcoming and nice. I unfortunately do not know many people in my life who like reading, so it was nice to be surrounded by other book lovers.”

When asked to describe how bookstagram is different than other platforms she uses, Simone mentioned the element of safety and togetherness that she finds on bookstagram as opposed to other social media:

Unlike Twitter or Facebook, I feel like Bookstagram is a safe place. Of course, it’s not really safe, truly there’s nowhere on the Internet where you can actually be ‘safe.’ Although the bookstagram community is so welcoming, supportive, filled with talented people, that you hardly feel alone there.

The community aspect of bookstagram was not necessarily what motivated adolescents to start bookstagramming; but rather, it was an unexpected pleasure point. For example, Leila recalled that she “didn’t even know the community was even called Bookstagram until a little later.”

The sense of community also surfaced in participants’ descriptions of how bookstagram encouraged them to partake in group activities, such as reading clubs and, in some instances, offline meet-ups. Vera described how she was able to join a reading club with fellow bookstagrammers who are all her age:

I started to talk with a girl on bookstagram, and then she asked me ‘What about a reading club?’ I always wanted to be a part of a reading club, but I was so busy with school! [...] For now, we are four member, we all are about 14 years old and have a bookstagram! I'm so happy that I accepted!

Vera also mentioned that she “found a girl who lives near my town” and that the two plan to meet up in person. Many other participants also spoke about how their bookstagram interactions have or will be extended offline. For example, Dominic mentioned that he plans to travel to Germany to meet a friend he met on bookstagram. He described how their friendship has evolved over time, saying that “we saw that we had a lot of common interests, and talked all night until we exchanged our numbers, and we started sending stuff. And yeah, we talk every day.”

Simone also has offline interactions with bookstagrammers. She described one bookstagrammer in particular as one of her “closest friends.” In addition to their interactions on bookstagram, they also share “a 200 Snapchat streak” and sometimes chat via “video call.” Simone hopes to travel to Switzerland to meet this friend in person, saying that, “I'm so looking forward to the day we'll meet irl<sup>2</sup>! [...] I'm taking driving lessons and my mom told me we would maybe go to Switzerland when I get my license!” In the meantime, Simone also interacts and meets up with fellow bookstagrammers who live near her:

I saw on a bookstagrammer's story that she was asking every Parisian bookstagrammer if they'd be up for a meeting. I answered I'd like to be in, and we created a WhatsApp group with all the Parisian bookstagrammers who agreed. We chose to meet at a café, we were almost 20 and chatted for a long time. Ever since we've been using this group chat, added a lot of new people from all around France, and plan to go to some signings, movies, or book fairs together.

The aspect of meeting bookstagrammers “in real life” is appealing to some of the participants,

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<sup>2</sup> irl is an abbreviation for “in real life.”

and several carry out their interactions with bookstagrammers on different platforms, including SnapChat, WhatsApp, video chat, and phone calls.

*Friendships.* The topic of friendship came up in almost all of the participant interviews. For the most part, the participants were generally excited about making new friends on bookstagram, and about how easy it is to do so. Vera described her experience with much enthusiasm:

One of the things that I love the most is how bookstagrammers can easily become friends! Once you have a bookstagram, you must talk with someone (usually you can tag them into pictures) and it's done: you two start talking for some days. Days become weeks, and weeks become months and so it goes. It's so nice to get to know a person who loves the same things that you do!

While a common interest in books is what brings bookstagrammers together, sometimes bookstagrammers bond over other topics. Claire spoke about a friendship that transpired when her and another bookstagrammer discovered that she and the bookstagrammer's sister share the same name.

Yeah, we're like sisters on there, we always call each other sisters, we're like 'thanks, sister!' and stuff like that [...] And I thought that was kind of cool to be able to have that little inside joke with someone that I've never really met.

Further, Heather described how her friendship with a group of fellow bookstagrammers deepened when they discovered their mutual disdain for the newly integrated Instagram algorithm<sup>3</sup>:

So many of my discussions and my online friendships have been formed over the two of us ranting about the algorithm. We even, like me and 10 other bookstagrammers, are in an Algorithm Survivors Group Chat.

Books are definitely what bring bookstagrammers together; however, it is clear that this common

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1 above.

interest eventually sprouts out and ties individuals together in different ways.

*Self-identification.* As described by Wilhelm (2016), part of the social pleasure of reading is “using reading to name and identify yourself” (p. 35). The participants addressed this type of self-identification in various ways. For example, Alberto said his enjoyment of bookstagram is partially due to being “part of the fandom [...] And you can meet people of that fandom if they say something in the comments like: OMG I LOVED THAT BOOK TOO and it's really cool.” This notion of fandom is also seen when Joan says “whenever i read a book i always update my booknerd friends and we fangirl over books.” Associating with fellow “booknerds” is an important part of Joan’s bookstagram experiences, as is the ability to “fangirl.”

Participants also indicated qualities that they both identify with and characterize other bookstagrammers as having. Maya’s description of why she thinks bookstagrammers enjoy bookstagramming touches on these points of self-identification:

Everyone’s different, but it can be semi-safe to assume a lot of bibliophiles are introverted and sometimes it can be hard to talk to people or approach them in real life. Bookstagram is a way to make friends from around the world, while sharing with them something you know the entire community has in common: books!

Whether or not it is in fact “semi-safe to assume” that bookstagrammers are “introverted” is debatable but beside the point that Maya’s own perception of herself and of other book lovers is what contributes to her overall bookstagram experience. Much earlier in the interview Maya stated that she is “an introvert who is extremely awkward,” which perhaps explains her similar characterization of bookstagrammers in general.

Leila’s description of her favourite bookstagram post from her own feed (Figure 1) reveals how she uses bookstagram to characterize herself as a particular kind of reader:

The caption refers to a controversial topic in bookstagram, and that is annotating books. This photo is my favorite because not only am I encouraging people to destroy this norm, but the fact that several people reached out to me personally and even tagged me in some



of their posts, thanking me for making them annotate their books feels so rewarding and heartwarming!

Leila referred to several different elements of identity. For one, she enjoyed claiming that she is someone who annotates books, thereby distinguishing herself as a particular kind of reader. She is also the type of bookstagrammer who acknowledges controversy—albeit controversy that likely only resides within the community—and as someone who not only pushes against “norms” but also encourages others to do so as well. She was also enthused by the positive response she received from other bookstagrammers, further enhancing her experiences of social pleasure on bookstagram.



Figure 1. Leila’s favourite bookstagram post from her feed, chosen because it reflects her identity as a reader.

*The pleasure of work.* Wilhelm (2016) illustrated that adolescents experience the pleasure of work through “immediate and personally compelling goals that involved writing, talking, understanding others and their perspectives, and using reading to think and act in new ways” (p. 34). Similarly, adolescent bookstagrammers alluded to their experiences of the pleasure of work through their discovery of new aspects about themselves and their interests. One very notable part of the exchange with Dominic was when, while discussing what he

thought about teachers incorporating bookstagram in the classroom, he referred to an Italian expression he translated as “it opens your brain’s doors”<sup>4</sup>:

[B]ookstagram is a very huge and warm community and really really makes you a good person. (*chuckles*) Well, I don’t want to say you’re a bad person before starting it, but I want to say is that it makes you wider in a mental way. Like it makes you think more, it gives you more challenges. It’s mostly like a mental thing, like it opens, so, what we say in Italy is it opens your brain’s doors, so a lot of doors in your brain stay closed until you do something. And bookstagram has opened a lot of my brain’s doors.

In essence, Dominic’s enjoyment of bookstagram appears partly due to the pleasure of work he experiences insofar as it has exposed him to new things and ideas, and has helped him think in different ways.

Further, Vera described how bookstagram has had an incidental influence on her vocabulary: “with bookstagram I find new books, and for each book I learn new words and found the writing habits of the author!” Similarly, as an avid writer, Simone has participated in out-of-school writing competitions for many years, and is now enjoying the encouragement she receives from fellow bookstagrammers: “I like to share my writing progress on my Instagram stories, because this community is so supportive, and talking about my writing habits with my followers is so great.” Additionally, Simone’s reading habits have changed as she now makes note of her reading progress and judgments: “I keep record of my monthly readings, and rate every book I’ve read in case I would reread it later, or even just so I know if I liked it; that’s something I didn’t do before.” Be it by expanding vocabulary or keeping a track record of personal writing and reading, bookstagram acted as a resource for these participants’ personal goals.

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<sup>4</sup> Dominic later emailed me the written form of the Italian expression, specifying that it is in the Sicilian dialect: “*quannu fai ddra cosa, chissa cosa, tu rapi u cervello.*”

### **The Influence of Bookstagram on Literacy Practices**

The third research question in this study asks *How does bookstagram influence adolescents' literacy practices*. According to the questionnaire (Appendix G, Questions 8 & 9), participants spent more time reading than writing in their free time. For example, eight participants reported reading 4 hours or more per week, while only three participants spent that much time writing. In response to the interview questions regarding how their reading and writing practices changed since starting their bookstagram account, participants relayed more of a change in their reading practices. They described four different ways their reading practices had changed; namely, they found themselves reading more, branching out into different genres, reading more attentively, and embracing their enjoyment of reading more than they ever had.

**Reading more.** When asked what their relationship with books and reading was before starting their bookstagram account, and how that relationship has changed, four of the participants directly expressed an increase in how much they read. In Maya's response, she credited this increase to a surge of book recommendations from fellow avid readers:

My love for literature has definitely grown, and I definitely read a lot more than I used to before starting bookstagram. I also buy a lot more books than I usually do thanks to bookstagramming. I think it's because I am surrounded by book lovers every day and so have a ton of recommendations.

Vera also linked her exposure to books on bookstagram as being a factor in her increased reading:

I love books as much as I did before. The only thing that changed was that I usually went to the bookshop without knowing what I was going to buy [...] Instead, now, I always go to the bookshop with a very long list of books that I saw on bookstagram!

When speaking about their increased reading behaviour, participants also mentioned their increased ability to discuss books. Simone said that's she has always read, "but definitely not as much as when I had started bookstagramming. Neither did I cherish my books, nor got to talk

about my readings with other people.” Similarly, Iris said, “I’ve always loved reading, though I feel since I’ve started this account I’ve been more motivated to read and to share my thoughts on books.” The exposure to more books coupled with the opportunity to discuss books with a wider range of people seems to have had an influence on the amount and frequency bookstagrammers read.

**Branching out.** In addition to reading more, participants also found that their literary interests have expanded. Joan said, “I’ve been opened up to more genres and other readers’ favorites, and I find that amazing.” Likewise, Heather reflected on how bookstagram has led her to discover some new favourites, saying “I have books on my shelf right now that I really love that I probably would have no idea about them because they’d probably be in a section that I don’t typically look in at the bookstore.” Dominic also spoke about his shift into new literary genres, and how bookstagrammers piqued his curiosity for fantasy books:

My reading tastes have changed, like, before I always used to read only a specific genre which was contemporary, but with bookstagram I saw a lot of people talking about a lot of fantasy books, and I honestly wanted to know what they were talking about.

Maya also noted her increased interest in fantasy books, saying “I’m more into fantasy now, contemporary romances aren’t really for me anymore. I am also trying to branch out from the young adult genre.”

There was one instance of bookstagram having the reverse effect on adolescents’ propensity to branch out into different literary genres. As Iris explained,

I sometimes feel more eerie about exactly what I am reading. I’m more aware of the negative representation of some authors and at times when a larger group is against an author you previously enjoyed you feel less willing to read those books.

This notion of “negative representation” was surprising, especially in relation to how it could have an influence on bookstagrammer’s reading preferences. The impact of negative

representation, or “controversial” books, is examined in greater depth in the section on self-expression below.

**Reading attentively.** Two participants expressed how bookstagram encouraged them to pay closer attention to what they were reading. For Simone, the rise in attentiveness was partially motivated by prospective discussions with bookstagrammers: “I pay way more attention to the stories I read so I can talk about every detail later with those of my followers who’ve read it.”

For Claire, her reading has become more “in depth” leading her to develop a more critical eye:

I do judge [books] more in depth instead of just saying 'oh that was a fun story.' I do have more of an opinion on books and I know what I like and I know what I don't. [...] I also appreciate the writing more than I did.

Be it for social purposes, like preparedness for potential discussions, or the more personal aspect of identifying and understanding one’s taste better, reading attentively surfaced as a delightful outcome of bookstagramming.

**Embracing reading.** Participants conveyed the different ways they have embraced reading since starting their bookstagram account. For some participants, there was a change in their feelings towards reading and being a reader. As Dominic explained, “I always had this great feeling with books, since I was a kid. And bookstagram made this feeling become even more deeper and even more attached to me.” Heather relayed a very similar sentiment, saying “I like the fact that I like reading, and embrace that a bit more.” For Vera, bookstagram has allowed her to further appreciate herself as a reader. Having faced some criticism from friends and relatives regarding her avid reading, Vera now pays no mind to naysayers:

I’ve met some people who didn’t want to read because they thought it was a “nerd thing” [...] [But] being a nerd doesn’t mean that you’re not cool or things like that!! Bookstagram is a little portion of our own world, it’s a beautiful thing, not something to be ashamed of.

For Simone, her enhanced embrace of reading materialized in the physical care and display of her books:

I have come to take care more for my books. I have bought shelves two years ago because since I started bookstagramming I haven't stopped discovering and buying new books, so I needed a place to store them. I like it when my bookshelves look nice on Instagram pictures, so I also buy candles, fairy lights, miniatures, posters, and other decoration items I would never have thought of picking up before joining bookstagram.

There was one instance of bookstagram bringing on a negative feeling towards reading. Particularly, Leila described how, since starting her bookstagram account, she began feeling a pressure to read that she had never felt before:

Sometimes reading books can be a chore or even stressful. I always feel like there is no reason to post if I have nothing book-related to talk about, so I tend to find myself force reading. I still love books the same way, I just hate that it has a negative side to it too.

Nonetheless, despite this drawback, Leila also mentioned that integrating bookstagram in the classroom could appeal to non-avid readers: "Normally people hate anything to do with books, but bookstagramming is an ideal way of making books look fun and beautiful!" Even though she experienced "force reading" at times, Leila still acknowledged the potential for bookstagram to shift others' conceptualization of reading.

### **Self-presentation on Bookstagram**

The final research question asked *How does online self-presentation factor into adolescent motivations to bookstagram*. The theme of self-presentation was reflected in participants' references to identity, self-expression, bookstagram followership, and sponsorships.

**Identity.** The topic of identity was not prominent in the data, as reflected in a low frequency of comments by the participants. However, when the topic did arise, the participants' reflections were quite interesting. Specifically, the questionnaire revealed that nine participants have another Instagram account that is separate from their bookstagram account (Appendix G,

Question 4). Further, three of the participants expressed disdain for the idea of incorporating bookstagram in the classroom because it would conflict with their desire to keep bookstagram separate from their “real life.” During the interviews, Iris and Heather elaborated on the distinction between their bookstagram identity and their personal identity. As Iris described, bookstagram, more than her other social media accounts, is particularly different. By keeping her bookstagram and personal account separate, she can post and talk about books freely:

“[Bookstagram is] away from the fear of being judged for liking typically nerdy things I guess. Kinda like a Hannah Montana moment where you can have a different identity online.”

Similarly, Heather also referred to how she uses bookstagram to portray herself differently than she does on other social media:

I have another account on Instagram that’s sort of my personal account, and I think with bookstagram, well, with a lot of social media, image is a really big thing, and I think with bookstagram I’m a lot more conscious of my image than I am with other things. [...] I put up a different image of myself that is, not necessarily false, but just a different version than I would on my other Instagram or my Snapchat.

The notion of bookstagram as being used to foster “a different identity” or portray “a different version” of oneself suggests that bookstagramming may be partially motivated by the ability to be selective in what one withholds, divulges, or exaggerates about themselves.

**Self-expression.** Bookstagram acted as both an outlet for and inhibitor of self-expression. For some, bookstagram induced a sense of ease, allowing people to feel, as Alberto described, “very comfortable to give [their] opinions about [books] without fear. That’s one of the reasons I am a bookstagrammer. It's easier to express my opinion of something.” Similarly, Simone stated that on bookstagram, “[y]ou can talk more openly, express your opinion more freely.” Further, Vera claimed that interacting online enhances her self-expression on bookstagram:

I feel more comfortable on my bookstagram where no one knows me in person and I have a lot more of fun! I can do lives [live video on Instagram] and saying what I want to,

without thinking too much about the words that I use or how I am saying it or who will read that. On my bookstagram I just write it!

However, self-expression did not come easy to all participants, and in some cases was stifled by the desire to be conscientious of others' feelings and perceptions. For example, Leila stated that she is cautious about the way she expresses herself on bookstagram: "Bookstagram is full of positivity and encouraging people but there is also a handful that can get sensitive and sometimes even mean, so I tend to be more careful with the things I say online." Heather also brought up this notion of cautiousness when describing how she holds back her sarcastic personality when she's interacting on bookstagram, and online in general:

I am a very sarcastic person, so I can be a lot more honest with [my friends], which doesn't always translate over the internet as well, because you're never sure 'oh, are they being sarcastic or are they actually a horrible person?' So, I'm a lot tamer on bookstagram. [...] I'm always scared that people think I'm aggressive, I'm not, or I don't think I am. [...] I hold back a lot when I'm online. A lot of times I want to say something and I'm like, "don't say it," [...] but I would totally say it if I knew that person offline.

There was also mention of withholding self-expression in order to avoid conflict. Based on the participant interviews, criticism or "drama" within the bookstagram community typically arises around "controversial" or "problematic" books, and is propelled by bookstagrammers who criticize others' book choices. Dominic provided a great description of what "problematic" entails: "Basically, when they say problematic, they mean something that [the author is] doing that's bad for any diverse community. Like the LGBTQ community, or even people of colour, or discrimination in general. Yeah, problematic is synonymous with discrimination." Several participants spoke about how it can be difficult to express their ideas about problematic books because of the potential conflict that can arise. As Iris explained, she experienced this firsthand:

It's hard sometimes to express all the books that you like. Especially when they may be labelled 'problematic' for some issue you didn't see beforehand? It's hard to explain but I've had people use books I liked against me to prove a point so that isn't fun.



Further, while Maya didn't experience conflict firsthand, she had witnessed it on other bookstagram accounts and it made her feel very uncomfortable, so much so that she refrains from posting any problematic books on her own feed in an attempt to ward off any undue conflict. This is exemplified in the post Maya chose as her least favourite post from someone else's feed (Figure 2). The basis of her choice is neither the bookstagrammer who posted it nor the caption. Rather, she chose the post as her least favourite because the post features a book that caused conflict within the bookstagram community. As she explained:

There was this really uncomfortable time on bookstagram when this book released that caused a ton of arguing and conflict. Like in real life, I tend to stay away from drama, but it was hard to ignore. Any post with this book just makes me super anxious. I do own it though I have not read it, but I have refused to post anything about it because I don't want to hurt anyone's feeling and it is just not worth the drama in my opinion. There is nothing wrong with the photo, or really the caption, I just cannot deal with seeing this book anymore without feeling strong anxiety.



*Figure 2.* Maya's least favourite bookstagram post from someone else's feed, chosen because of controversy surrounding the book depicted in the post.

Despite her anxiety towards conflict, Maya emphasized that even problematic books should not be off limits: "I am a firm believer of people reading whatever they want and no to censorship [...] you can like a book and still see the problems of it." In line with Maya's stance,

Heather also stated that readers can embrace a book or an author despite their flaws:

[C]ontroversy is a really big thing [on bookstagram]. Especially now because if an author or someone does one little thing that [bookstagrammers] find controversial they'll be like 'don't read this they're horrible.' And it's just like no, that doesn't make [the author] a bad person. And you can still read their books even if they've done or said something that wasn't so, you know...

Bookstagram seemed to enhance self-expression insofar as the online aspect of the platform provided participants with added freedom to express their opinions. However, self-expression was at times restrained by the fear of potential conflict amongst bookstagrammers.

**Followership.** On the questionnaire, participants were asked to rank the importance of having a lot of followers on their bookstagram account on a 4 point-scale, ranging from extremely important to not important. Most of the participants chose important (n = 4) or somewhat important (n = 5), whereas extremely important (n = 0) and not important (n = 1) were barely chosen. The topic of followership was revisited during the interviews when participants were asked how they feel when they lose or gain followers, and how gaining followers factors into what they post. Overall, most of the participants said they feel good when they gain followers, saying that it feels “awesome,” “amazing,” “nice,” and that “it’s a bit of validation.”

Further, losing followers was not a sore point for any of the participants. When asked how they feel when they lose followers, they relayed a level of indifference, saying things like “I don’t take it too seriously,” “I wouldn’t even notice,” and “it’s not something I keep up with anymore.” Even when comparing the responses of the participants with the least and most followers, the sentiment is much the same. Iris, whose bookstagram account has 305 followers, said, “I’m not too worried about stuff like that. I mean [losing followers is] frustrating [...] but there’s not much getting around it.” Similarly, Leila, whose bookstagram account has 27,800 followers, said, “I don’t keep track with the number of followers I get per post. [...] Most of the

time I'm not aware that I lose followers, so I don't feel bad about it."

Participants conveyed an understanding that a followership is made up of individuals who enjoy their bookstagram posts. As Dominic described,

[G]aining followers makes you feel happy because you see that people actually like your content and follow you, so it motivates you to post even more [...] But as you go on, time passes and you actually realize that it's not that important. If people follow you that means they like your content, and if they don't follow you that means that they didn't like it. And you're okay with it, you're going to get used to it.

Participants' motivation to publish a bookstagram post seemed to have less to do with gaining followers, and more to do with what they are interested in and want to share with others. As Claire explained, "I just kind of post what I think looks good and hoping that other people agree with my sense of inspiration." And while Maya conceded that posts of certain books will fare better, she does not let that sway her decision of what to post: "Of course, some posts with 'popular' books do better than others, but that does not change what I post."

**Sponsorships.** Of the 10 participants, three spoke about how their bookstagram account led to collaborations with publishing houses, authors, and even some non-book-related companies. Specifically, Vera, Leila, and Maya each brought up their experiences with sponsorships, which for them amounted to receiving books or products in exchange for a review or a post on their bookstagram account. For Vera, she has collaborated with nine authors who have contacted her to review their books. Leila and Maya have dealt directly with publishing houses that send them advance reader copies of books. Apart from publishers, Leila has also been contacted by sock companies—in line with a growing trend in the literary community to pair socks and reading (for example, major book retailers are marketing cozy "reading socks" and some clothing companies offer a line of "book socks" with literary excerpts or bookish slogans printed on them). Maya has also received sponsorship offers that do not involve books,

but said, “I don't often accept them since I am a book account and it feels weird.”

For the most part, the participants' sponsorship experiences have been quite enjoyable, and participants said they are “honoured,” “grateful,” and “very thankful” to be a part of them. However, a negative side to sponsorships was revealed when both Leila and Maya expressed some trepidation towards integrating sponsored posts into their bookstagram feed. As Leila explained,

[T]ruth be told, I'm not actually a big fan of sponsorships. This is because I often feel pressured to post what I think is 'unfitting' to my account theme. Also I know for a fact that these sponsorships happen because they feel as if I am the right candidate for their marketing strategies but, honestly? [...] [O]ften I turn to my sister and friends to ask them if they would enjoy the products themselves, that way it would mean something to me posting these products on my social media. But otherwise, I try to stay away from them unless they are beneficial to someone.

Similarly, Maya is also wary of sponsorships, and described how and why she avoids publishing too many sponsored posts:

[F]or any sponsored posts I like to try and space them out, I don't like making my account into such a giant advertisement if I can help it. Of course, I try to be as transparent as possible, and most of the sponsored posts are about books anyway so it isn't that disingenuous, I just still feel weird about it.

Further, Maya's experience with sponsorships also led to her feeling “guilty and anxious.” She elaborated on this when she describing her least favourite post on her feed (Figure 3):

I've always felt extremely uncomfortable with sponsored photos. It makes me feel super guilty and anxious whenever I post them and that's why I usually try to make the posts something I'm proud of in the hopes that other people like it more than my normal photos. But I remember the day I took this photo, I was super stressed because the post needed to come out that day and I hadn't taken it yet, and I just really was not proud of the final product. I tried to edit it to make it better, but in the end I ended up posting it without really liking it. It ruined my mood for a while and it had me questioning my bookstagram account. I lost motivation for the longest time.



*Figure 3.* Maya's least favourite bookstagram post from her feed, chosen to reflect the negative effect of sponsored posts.

Based on the experiences of these three participants, sponsorships are indeed an enjoyable aspect of bookstagram. Nonetheless, with the added perks of receiving free books and products comes a wariness of over-saturating one's feed with marketed content. To avoid this participants take additional measures to ensure that their bookstagram is first and foremost a feed about books that they actually enjoy.

### Discussion

The principal aim of this study was to provide a better understanding of adolescents' voluntary literacy engagement. Bookstagram, a social media phenomenon rooted in users' interest in books, served as a gateway into the adolescent reading experience. The participants were all forthcoming, engaged, and perceptive, and had a lot to say about their experiences as readers, their motivations to bookstagram, their self-identification as readers, and what reading means to them.

### The Importance of Pleasure

The data were partially analyzed with reference to the experiences of pleasure in free-

choice reading and in bookstagramming. Overall, this study reinforced Wilhelm's (2016) findings that pleasure is at the heart of adolescents' voluntary literacy engagement. Further, participants experienced different types of pleasure during free-choice reading and bookstagramming. Participants expressed the pleasure of immersing themselves in books (immersive play pleasure), passing the time reading (leisure pleasure), and turning to reading to deal with personal issues (inner work pleasure) only in reference to reading. In contrast, reading to achieve a practical end (pleasure of work) was only articulated in reference to bookstagramming. The most salient type of pleasure, and the only type to appear in the data in reference to both reading and bookstagramming, was that of social pleasure. However, social pleasure manifested quite differently in the two activities.

In their offline reading lives, participants felt social pleasure when they were able to share their reading experiences with other people through discussions, book recommendations, and even inside jokes. However, participants also described a lack of reading-related interaction, which brought about feelings of isolation. Without anyone to bond over books with, some participants felt a type of deprivation, leading them to turn to the internet in search of reader connection. Even those participants who experienced social pleasure offline said that their socializing was enhanced on bookstagram due to their exposure to and interaction with more fervent readers. This finding exemplifies the importance of social pleasure in adolescents' free-choice reading experiences. While often a solitary act, reading is enhanced by interactions that occur off the page, outside of the book, and in the real world.

The social pleasure participants experienced on bookstagram compensated for any lack of social pleasure they might have felt offline. Although participants discussed books with others offline, bookstagram augmented their social pleasure by providing community, new friendships,

and the ability to distinguish themselves as a particular kind of reader, reinforcing Wilhelm's (2016) finding that adolescents experience "the pleasure of using reading to connect to others and [...] to name and identify [one]self" (p. 35). What participants found on bookstagram was more than just photos of books and a digital library in infinite scroll; they found instant camaraderie with fellow book lovers, a sense of community, and a way to gather amongst enthusiasts to explore books.

Interestingly, intellectual pleasure (i.e., the enjoyment of engaging with a text to figure something out), was virtually non-existent in participants' interview responses pertaining to both reading and bookstagramming. This finding contrasts with Wilhelm (2016), who reported that adolescents experienced intellectual pleasure in free-choice reading. The discrepancy between my results and Wilhelm's might be due to the differences in our research designs and interview questions. Specifically, Wilhelm investigated a larger sample over a longer period of time, and asked participants to compare free-choice and in-school reading. This line of questioning may have prompted more attention to intellectual pleasure, which Wilhelm identifies as being the only type of pleasure that is fostered in schools. Alternatively, the lack of intellectual pleasure in the present data could suggest that the participants turned to free-choice reading and bookstagram for creative or personal reasons rather than intellectual pursuits.

### **Bookstagram as a Literacy Enhancer**

The participants expressed several reasons why they began a bookstagram account, including wanting to join a fandom, increase their reading-related interactions with other readers, expand their literary repertoire, and share their passion for books with others. Even as adolescents who already have a deep love for reading, all of the participants still craved something more, still felt a degree of want. Bookstagram complemented their reading

experiences and provided them the opportunity to both cultivate whatever aspects they felt were missing in their reading lives, and to discover new realms of their reading interests. Participants specifically described reading more, branching out into different genres, reading more attentively, and embracing reading. These findings are in line with Guthrie's (1996) assertion that intrinsic motivations are key in adolescents' voluntary literacy engagement. As enthusiastic readers who were already equipped with their own curiosities and interests, the participants' motivations to bookstagram perpetuated their literacy engagement.

In contrast with reading, there were very few instances when participants described changes in their writing since starting bookstagram. This might be because a study on bookstagram would be more likely to attract a sample of avid readers than one of writers. The questionnaire responses lend some support to this explanation as participants reported spending less time writing than reading in their spare time. Future studies using larger samples could potentially produce different findings. Further, adding a sampling criterion that appeals to recruiting bookstagrammers who also have blogs might elicit more writing-related data, and in turn enhance our understanding of the relationship between bookstagram and writing.

### **Bookstagram and Self-presentation**

Self-presentation was explored in this study to consider its influence on participants' experiences of and motivations to bookstagram. Participants revealed that bookstagram allowed them to explore the type of person they want to be, and to expose and express sides of themselves they would otherwise be unable to. At times participants even expressed the enjoyment of being able to adopt a separate identity on bookstagram, illustrating the advantages of anonymity that social media can provide.

The data did not contain any evidence that participants utilized bookstagram in pursuit of



Instafame. As seen in Marwick (2015), Instafame is a form of microcelebrity whereby Instagram users leverage the platform to emulate a specific lifestyle in order to garner celebrity-like status through high follower counts and follower adoration. Yet, in this study Instafame did not seem to factor into participants' bookstagramming activity. This might be because reading is not typically an act that leads to celebrity, and while there are many famous authors, they rarely, if ever, hold the same celebrity status as pop stars, models, or actors. Additionally, Marwick's content analysis focused on the activity of Instagram users with hundreds of thousands to millions of followers, whereas the participants in this study had at most 27,800 followers, which is not a small number to be sure, but still a far reach from the ranks of "famous" accounts. Celebrity, or the prospect of it, is probably not in the cards for bookstagrammers. What did emerge, however, was a close cousin of Instafame: sponsorships.

According to participants' descriptions, bookstagram sponsorships run on a barter system through which publishers or authors provide a free copy of a book in exchange for a promotional post on a bookstagrammer's feed. Sponsorships seem to be an appealing feature of bookstagramming, but not one that necessarily drove participants' bookstagram activity. Although they provide added perks, sponsorships bring with them a risk of making a bookstagram feed seem, as Maya put it, "disingenuous." Of the three participants who acquired sponsorships, two spoke about the precautions they take to avoid over-saturating their feeds with sponsored content. Based on the data, participants did not seem to be negotiating their self-presentation to lure in sponsorships. In fact, quite the opposite was true: participants showed more interest in maintaining genuine interactions with followers, illustrating that social connection with peers outweighed any prospective material gain or increase in sponsorships.

The importance of interaction was further exemplified in participants' positions towards

their follower counts. Although participants had a wide range of followers, the overall consensus was that followership only mattered in terms of interaction and enjoyment, further illustrating that adolescent readers find pleasure in “connecting with other readers” (Wilhelm, 2016, p. 35). The bookstagrammers I interviewed wanted their followers to enjoy, talk about, engage with, and be inspired by their content. Online popularity was not on the participants’ radars, and did not seem to factor into their motivations to bookstagram.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

As the first to explore bookstagram, this study was subject to several limitations. First, given the nature of the sample (i.e., self-selected), the findings may be representative of a particular kind of bookstagrammer. For instance, the sample was comprised of enthusiastic readers, which is not necessarily a quality of all bookstagrammers. Nonetheless, the study offers a preliminary understanding of adolescents’ experiences of bookstagram and literacy engagement. Future studies could consider using a larger sample in order to capture a broader, and potentially different, set of experiences. Further, although the participants in this study represent a culturally diverse sample, there was less diversity in their gender and age, with 80 percent of being female and 50 percent being 17-year-olds. Research aiming to gain perspective on adolescents’ experiences could try to achieve greater balance in terms of gender and age.

Secondly, data was collected predominantly through individual semi-structured interviews, which, although vital in capturing participants’ experiences from their own perspectives, nonetheless limit the scope of the conversation to those topics that arise between the interviewer and interviewee. Future studies could consider also engaging participants in a group discussion, during which they would be able to agree or disagree with each other on ideas brought forward, as well as potentially bring up new topics that were not discussed during the

individual interviews. A discussion forum could be carried out online using a platform such as Google Hangouts or FocusGroupIt. Issues of privacy would need to be carefully considered, and given that participants would likely reside in different parts of the world, scheduling would need to be well organized in order to include as many participants in the discussion at the same time.

Thirdly, a deeper exploration of bookstagram as a visual medium could add depth to the overall findings. Although beyond the scope of this study, aesthetics and photography did emerge in participants' responses about their bookstagram experiences. For example, when participants were asked to choose their favourite and least favourite bookstagram posts (Figures 1-3 are examples of such choices), the majority of their choices were based on aesthetic features (i.e., the lighting in a photo, the way a book was positioned, the use of props, etc.). These data suggest that the visual appeal of the platform and the opportunity to share their photography are important aspects of adolescents' bookstagram experiences. Future studies could explore bookstagram as a form of multimodal literacy, paying special attention to how photography enhances literacy in ways that a text-only reading experience cannot.

Lastly, research using either an experimental or qualitative design could investigate the impact of integrating bookstagram into the literacy curricula for students with varied levels of voluntary literacy engagement.

### **Implications for Practice**

This exploration of bookstagram revealed that adolescents are very much aware of their reading interests and are actively pursuing these interests on bookstagram. However, this is not to say that bookstagram is a pre-packaged solution for enhancing voluntary literacy engagement. The common characteristic of the participants is that they were already engaged readers equipped with their own intrinsic motivations, allowing bookstagram to serve whatever purpose

they each needed it to. Bookstagram did not instill intrinsic motivations; but rather, it satisfied them. What I can confidently suggest is that bookstagram is a prospective tool that can help accentuate the appeal of reading. Indeed, many of the participants were open, some even enthusiastic, to the idea of incorporating bookstagram into the classroom. However, some participants rejected this idea on account of it potentially impeding their own goals and intentions. Educators would need to recognize this contention and design curriculum in such a way that bookstagram be used as a tool to tap into students' interests, and not as a reiteration of strictly academic pursuits. Pleasure would be essential in leveraging bookstagram to help students discover and gratify their own motivations, and discovery of such pleasures will surface when educators, in the words of Wilhelm (2016), "ask young people directly" (p. 33).

Reader isolation was a surprising finding in the present study, and very telling of the importance of social pleasure in reading. As indicated, the participants' experiences of reader isolation suggest that a lack of social connection can impede adolescents' voluntary literacy engagement. Bookstagram can address this, but so can other strategies. For example, allowing students to contribute to the reading curriculum may decrease or prevent experiences of reader isolation insofar as students will bring forth material they like to read and have the opportunity to discuss these books with peers.

The ultimate goal is for educators to discover ways to engage youth with voluntary and long-lasting literacy practices. This can be done with or without bookstagram, but not without pleasure. The findings of this study could give educators a better understanding of the role and types of pleasure in reading, and in using social media, like bookstagram, to communicate about books. Educators could, in turn, leverage this knowledge to design curricula that nurture adolescents' motivations towards literacy. At its very best, bookstagram might help educators

convert uninterested readers into curious ones, and expand our understanding of reading as a source of social interaction, friendship, and community.

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## Appendix A

## Template of Email Invitation Sent to Prospective Participants

Hello [Participant's Name (if known) or Instagram handle]!

My name is Rima and I am a graduate student at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. I am contacting you today because I noticed you host a bookstagram account, and was wondering if you would be interested in participating in a research study that I'm doing on teenagers' experiences of bookstagram.

To give you an idea of what participation in the study involves, here are two of the main things that participants will be asked to do:

1. Fill out a short questionnaire
2. Be interviewed by me (by phone, Skype, or email) to answer questions about your experiences of bookstagram, reading, and writing.

In order to participate, you must be between the ages of 13 and 17 years old.

If you're interested in participating or if you have any questions, please email me back and let me know.

If and when you do decide to participate, I will send you an information and consent form with the details of the study for you to review with your parent or guardian.

Also, please feel free to forward this email to any fellow teenage bookstagrammers who you think would be interested in participating.

Thank you so much for your time!

Sincerely,  
Rima Hammoudi (@booksonmycouch)  
Graduate Student, Department of Education, Concordia University

**Note:** In order to reassure you that this invitation is not spam, below is the contact information of Concordia University's Office of Research, which you can contact at any time to inquire about the validity of this study:

Concordia University Office of Research  
514-848-2424 ext. 4395  
office.of.research@concordia.ca

## Appendix B

## Parental or Guardian Information and Consent Form

**PARENTAL OR GUARDIAN INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM**

**Study Title:** The Bookstagram Effect: Exploring How Instagram Influences Adolescents' Voluntary Literacy Engagement

**Researcher:** Rima Hammoudi

**Researcher's Contact Information:**

BookstagramStudy@gmail.com

514-625-2823

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Diane Pesco

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:**

Diane.Pesco@concordia.ca

514-848-2424 ex. 7338

**Source of funding for the study:** None

Your child is being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you give permission for your child to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

**A. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research is to explore and understand why teenagers create and maintain a bookstagram account, and how bookstagram influences the development of reading and writing skills or habits.

**B. PROCEDURES**

If your child participates in the study, he or she will be asked to:

1. *Have an introductory conversation with the researcher* (by video chat, phone, or email, whichever method your child prefers. If the conversation is had over video chat or phone, the researcher will request your child's permission to audio record the conversation).

The goal of the conversation will be for your child and the researcher to talk casually and get to know each other a bit before your child completes the questionnaire and interviews (described below). The researcher will also take this time to review the following:

- the tasks involved in participating in this study
- your child's rights as a participant
- any questions your child may have.

Estimated time: 10-20 minutes

2. *Complete a questionnaire*, which will be sent to your child by email from the researcher. The questionnaire consists of 11 questions on:

- the usage of social networking sites
- certain aspects of bookstagram
- reading and writing habits

Estimated time: 10-20 minutes

3. *Participate in a 2-part interview* with the researcher (by video chat, phone, or email, whichever method your child prefers. If the interviews are done over video chat or phone, the researcher will request your child's permission to audio record the conversation). Each part of the interview consists of 10 questions that will ask your child to describe different aspects of his or her bookstagram experiences, and reading and writing experiences.

Estimated time: 1 hour per interview, for a total of 2 hours

4. *Review a summary* of his or her questionnaire and interview responses. By reviewing the summary, your child will be able to:

- verify if the researcher interpreted your child's responses accurately
- revise or add anything to the summary

The researcher will send the summary to your child by email within 4 weeks of the final interview. Your child will be asked to return the reviewed summary to researcher by email within 2 weeks of receiving it.

Estimated time: 1 hour

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 3.5-4 hours.

### **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

Your child might face certain risk(s) by participating in this research. These risk(s) include:

- Feeling uncomfortable being interviewed

Potential benefits include:

- having the opportunity to discuss his or her experiences of bookstagram

- having the opportunity to discuss his or her reading and writing practices

This research is not intended to benefit your child personally.

#### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will gather the following information as part of this research:

- Your child's age
- Your child's bookstagram activity status (i.e., how long they have hosted a bookstagram account, the number of posts on their account, the number of followers on their account)
- Your child's questionnaire responses
- Your child's interview responses
- Your child's summary revisions and comments, if any

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research (the researcher, the faculty supervisor, and possibly a research assistant). We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information your child provides will be identified by a code and not by his or her name. Only the researcher will have a separate list that links the code to your child's first and last names.

We will protect the information by keeping your consent form and your child's assent form in a locked filing cabinet located in a secure office in the University. All of the data from your child's interview and questionnaire responses will be saved in encrypted files on the researcher's password-protected computer.

We intend to publish the results of the research, but it will not be possible to identify your child in the published results because he or she will be referred to through a code or a false first name (a pseudonym). If we decide to include any photos from your child's bookstagram post(s), their Instagram handle will be concealed and any face(s) will be blurred. If you prefer that we do not include images of your child's bookstagram post(s) in a report or presentation, please check off "No" at the end of this form.

We will destroy the information 5 years after the end of the study.

#### **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

Your child does not have to participate in this research. It is purely his or her decision. If your child does participate, he or she can stop at any time. Your child can also ask that the information they provided not be used, and their choice will be respected.

To stop your child's participation in the study, you or your child can notify the researcher or the faculty supervisor by email or telephone (listed on Page 1).

If your child decides that they do not want us to use their information in the research study, you or your child must contact the researcher or the faculty supervisor before December 30, 2017.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping at any time, or asking us not to use your information.

### **G. PARENT OR GUARDIAN'S DECLARATION**

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree for my child to participate in this research under the conditions described.

I allow for the image(s) of 1 or 2 of my child's bookstagram post(s) to be used in a written report or presentation of this study.

- Yes
- No

PARTICIPANT NAME (please print):

PARENT OR GUARDIAN NAME (please print):

PARENT OR GUARDIAN EMAIL ADDRESS AND/OR PHONE NUMBER:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## Participant Information and Consent Form

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND ASSENT FORM**

**Study Title:** The Bookstagram Effect: Exploring How Instagram Influences Adolescents' Voluntary Literacy Engagement

**Researcher:** Rima Hammoudi

**Researcher's Contact Information:**

BookstagramStudy@gmail.com

514-625-2823

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Diane Pesco

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:**

Diane.Pesco@concordia.ca

514-848-2424 ex. 7338

**Source of funding for the study:** None

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

**A. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research is to explore and understand why teenagers create and maintain a bookstagram account, and how bookstagram influences the development of reading and writing skills or habits.

**B. PROCEDURES**

If you participate in the study, you will be asked to:

1. *Have an introductory conversation with the researcher* (by video chat, phone, or email, whichever method you prefer. If you choose video or phone, the researcher will request your permission to audio record the interview).

The goal of the conversation will be for you and the researcher to talk casually before you complete the questionnaire and interviews. The researcher will also take this time to review the following:

- the tasks involved in participating in this study
- your rights as a participant
- any questions you may have.

Estimated time: 10-20 minutes

2. *Complete a questionnaire*, which will be sent to you by email from the researcher. The questionnaire consists of 11 questions on:
  - the usage of social networking sites
  - certain aspects of bookstagram
  - reading and writing habits

Estimated time: 10-20 minutes

3. *Participate in a 2-part interview* with the researcher by video, phone, or email (whichever method you prefer. If you choose video or phone, the researcher will request your permission to audio record the interview). Each part of the interview consists of 10 questions that will ask you to describe different aspects of your bookstagram experiences, and your reading and writing experiences.

Estimated time: 1 hour per interview, for a total of 2 hours

4. *Review a summary* of your questionnaire and interview responses. By reviewing the summary, you will be able to:
  - verify if the researcher interpreted your responses accurately
  - revise or add anything to the summary

The researcher will send the summary to you by email within 4 weeks of the final interview. You will be asked to return the reviewed summary to researcher by email within 2 weeks of receiving it.

Estimated time: 1 hour

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 3.5-4 hours.

### **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

You might face certain risk(s) by participating in this research. These risk(s) include:

- Feeling uncomfortable being interviewed

Potential benefits include:

- having the opportunity to discuss your experiences of bookstagram.



- having the opportunity to discuss your personal reading and writing practices

This research is not intended to benefit you personally.

#### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will gather the following information as part of this research:

- Your age
- Your bookstagram activity status (i.e., how long you have hosted a bookstagram account, the number of posts, the number of followers)
- Your questionnaire responses
- Your interview responses
- Your summary revisions and comments, if any

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research (the researcher, the faculty supervisor, and possibly a research assistant). We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information you provide will be identified by a code and not by your name. Only the researcher will have a separate list that links the code to your first and last names.

We will protect the information by keeping your parent or guardian's consent form and your assent form in a locked in a secure office in the University. All of the data from your interview and questionnaire responses will be saved in encrypted files on the researcher's password-protected computer.

We plan to publish the results of the research, but it will not be possible to identify you because you will be referred to through a code or a false first name (a pseudonym). If we decide to include any photos from your bookstagram post(s), your Instagram handle will be concealed and any face(s) will be blurred. If you prefer that we do not include images of your bookstagram post(s) in a report or presentation, please check off "No" at the end of this form.

We will destroy the information 5 years after the end of the study.

#### **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information they provided not be used, and your choice will be respected.

To stop your participation in the study, you or your parent or guardian can notify the researcher or the faculty supervisor by email or telephone (listed on Page I).

If you decide that you don't want us to use your information in the research study, you or your parent or guardian must contact the researcher or the faculty supervisor before December 30, 2017.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping at any time, or asking us not to use your information.

## **G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION**

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

I allow for the image(s) of 1 or 2 of my bookstagram post(s) to be used in a written report or presentation of this study.

Yes

No

**PARTICIPANT NAME** (please print):

**SIGNATURE:**

**DATE:**

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page I. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## Appendix D

## Interview Questions

1. Why did you start a bookstagram account?
2. What was your relationship with books and reading before you started bookstagramming?
3. Has this relationship with books or reading changed since you started bookstagramming? If so, how?
4. Have your writing habits changed since starting a bookstagram account? If so, how?
5. In the questionnaire you filled out earlier, you were asked to list the social media platforms that you use. Can you describe how bookstagram is different from the other platforms you use?
6. Can you tell me about any positive experiences you've had while bookstagramming?
7. Can you tell me about any negative experiences you've had while bookstagramming?
8. Are there people in your life, such as family, friends, or teachers, who you can talk to about books with?
  - a. If yes: Can you describe these experiences?
  - b. If no: Why do you think that is?
9. How is bookstagram different than the interactions you have offline?
10. How would you describe the interaction between bookstagrammers?
11. Why do you enjoy reading?
12. What do you think about teachers incorporating bookstagramming in high school classrooms? Why would you or wouldn't you enjoy bookstagramming for school projects?
13. Take some time to browse through your own bookstagram feed and choose:
  - a. One of your favourite posts from your account.
    - Link to post:
    - Describe why you chose this post:

- b. One of your least favourite posts from your account.
    - Link to post:
    - Describe why you chose this post:
14. Take some time to browse through someone else's bookstagram feed and choose:
  - a. One of your favourite posts from someone else's bookstagram feed
    - Link to post:
    - Describe why you chose this post:
  - b. One of your least favourite posts from someone else's bookstagram feed (your least favourite post does not have to be from the same feed that you chose your favourite post from)
    - Link to post:
    - Describe why you chose this post:
15. How do you decide what to post on your bookstagram feed?
16. Does gaining followers ever factor in to what you post?
17. How do you feel when you gain followers?
18. How do you feel when you lose followers?
19. Why do you think bookstagrammers enjoy bookstagramming?
20. Lastly, I'm going to turn it over to you to add anything else you would like to express. It can be about any of the bookstagram topics we've discussed or covered in the interviews, or it can be about anything else that's on your mind.

## Appendix E

## Questionnaire Items

**1. In a typical day, which of the following social networking websites do you use most often? (Select all that apply).**

- Bebo
- Facebook
- Google+
- Instagram
- MySpace
- Reddit
- Snapchat
- Tagged
- Tumblr
- Twitter
- Vine
- Other(s) (please specify):

**2. If you could use only one social networking site, which one of the following would you use?**

- Bebo
- Facebook
- Google+
- Instagram
- MySpace
- Reddit
- Snapchat
- Tagged
- Tumblr
- Twitter
- Vine
- Other (please specify):

**3. In a typical day, how many hours do you spend browsing or posting on social networking sites?**

- 0-1 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 4-5 hours
- 6-7 hours
- More than 7 hours

4. **Do you have another Instagram account that is separate from your bookstagram account?**
- Yes
  - No
5. **How important is it to you that you have a lot of followers on your bookstagram account?**
- Extremely important
  - Important
  - Somewhat important
  - Not important
6. **Of all the books you have posted on your bookstagram account, how many have you read?**
- |                            |                           |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 100% | <input type="radio"/> 90% | <input type="radio"/> 80%  | <input type="radio"/> 70% |
| <input type="radio"/> 60%  | <input type="radio"/> 50% | <input type="radio"/> 40%  | <input type="radio"/> 30% |
| <input type="radio"/> 20%  | <input type="radio"/> 10% | <input type="radio"/> None |                           |
7. **Of all the books you have read since you started your bookstagram account, how many have you posted on bookstagram?**
- |                            |                           |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 100% | <input type="radio"/> 90% | <input type="radio"/> 80%  | <input type="radio"/> 70% |
| <input type="radio"/> 60%  | <input type="radio"/> 50% | <input type="radio"/> 40%  | <input type="radio"/> 30% |
| <input type="radio"/> 20%  | <input type="radio"/> 10% | <input type="radio"/> None |                           |
8. **In a typical week, how many hours do you spend reading in your free time? (Do not include reading done at school or for school assignments).**
- 0 hours
  - 1 hour
  - 2-3 hours
  - 4-5 hours
  - 6-7 hours
  - More than 7 hours
9. **In a typical week, how many hours do you spend writing in your free time? (Do not include writing done at school or for school assignments).**
- 0 hours
  - 1 hour
  - 2-3 hours
  - 4-5 hours
  - 6-7 hours
  - More than 7 hours

**10. Are you currently or have you ever participated in a book club that meets in person?**

- Yes
- No

**11. Are you currently or have you ever participated in an online book club?**

- Yes
- No

## Appendix F

## Participant Response Summaries

**Note:** Participants were sent summaries that included their real names. Below are those same summaries, but with the use of pseudonyms.

**Vera**

Vera is a 14-year-old girl living in Italy. Presently in high school, she really enjoys studying different languages, including Latin, English, Spanish, German, and of course, Italian.

Vera has been an avid reader since she was 9 years old, and currently spends approximately 4 to 5 hours a week reading in her free time. Her love for reading stems from the way it allows her to escape from reality, saying that “the most beautiful feeling in the world is when you open a book and you forget where you’re at.”

Vera has a few people in her life who she can talk to about books, such as her best friend and her mother, but the person in her life who most shares the same love for books as she does is her cousin. When they’re together, Vera and her cousin always talk about books, swap recommendations, and even share some inside jokes about characters in and authors of books they’re reading. Unfortunately, Vera does experience some criticism regarding her reading. For example, some of her relatives equate her reading and blogging with not having an active social life, and other people in her life describe reading as a nerdy activity. Luckily, Vera isn’t bothered by these sorts of comments or attitudes, saying that “[r]eading is part of my life. I don’t care what other people think.” Further, Vera’s parents encourage her to read, and her mother even reads every single one of her blog posts, leaving Vera to describe her mother as her number one fan.

When Vera first started her bookstagram account almost 2 years ago, it was a way for her to share her love for books and to be able to discuss books with others. Since then, bookstagram has become a place where she is able to meet and interact with people, make new friends, swap book recommendations, and discover a lot of different books. Over the years, her bookstagram account has also led to partnerships with new authors and a publishing house, where she is sent free books in exchange for a book review post on her feed. Bookstagram has also led her to join her very first reading club, which includes 3 other bookstagrammers who are also 14 years old.

Currently, Vera’s bookstagram account has over 1,200 followers. She does think that having a lot of followers is important. When she notices that her follower count is increasing, she tries to strengthen her bookstagram activity by posting good quality photos, being active on her feed, posting stories, and even doing live interactions. In regards to losing followers, she is aware that this sort of thing can happen, but doesn’t take it too seriously.

Overall, Vera’s bookstagram experiences have been very positive, and she has fortunately not had any negative experiences. In fact, bookstagram has become a place where Vera can feel relaxed about expressing herself, saying that “I feel more comfortable on my bookstagram where no one knows me in person, and I have a lot more of fun!”



**Heather**

Heather is a 15-year-old girl who lives in Toronto, Ontario. She is set to graduate high school in 2 years, at which point she hopes to move to the UK to study British History.

For Heather, reading is a source of both enjoyment and escape, and she spends anywhere from 6 to 7 hours a week reading in her free time. She typically gravitates towards fiction, with a particular interest in fantasy and historical fiction, and has recently taken an interest in reading memoirs and essays. Heather has many people in her life who she can talk to about books, including her parents, some friends, and her English and French teachers.

About 2 years ago, after noticing a lot of Instagram accounts that were both book-themed and aesthetically-driven, Heather decided to start a bookstagram account of her own. For her, it was a great way to combine her love for books and reading with her growing interest in photography. Since then, her reading interests have broadened, and she says bookstagram has led her to “like the fact that I like reading, and embrace that a bit more.” Heather describes bookstagram as “a really good opportunity to share ideas” and “a great way to discover new books.” She has also met a lot of people through bookstagram, many from around the world. Further, over the years Heather has pursued her creative writing more seriously, and she says bookstagram has opened new avenues for her to share and get feedback on her writing.

Overall, Heather’s bookstagram experiences have been very positive. However, she does admit that she portrays a “tamer” version of herself on bookstagram. Compared to the interactions she has on other social media platforms or offline with her family or friends, Heather feels that her interactions on bookstagram are much less sarcastic than they typically would be, mostly because sarcasm, she says, “doesn’t always translate over the internet.” In order to avoid the risk of coming off too aggressive or unintentionally hurting someone’s feelings, Heather sticks to a more straight-forward exchange with fellow bookstagrammers.

Currently, Heather’s current bookstagram account has over 300 followers. She thinks having a lot of followers is somewhat important, but gaining followers doesn’t factor into what she posts on her feed. In fact, Heather’s initial bookstagram account had over 2000 followers, but she created a new one because she felt the new Instagram algorithm was compromising the potential for interactions on her feed. By restarting, she lost all her followers, but her interactions have since improved, which to her makes for a much more satisfying bookstagram experience.

It is clear that bookstagram is not the cause of Heather’s enthusiasm for reading and writing, but rather, a platform where she can openly express this enthusiasm with countless other people.

## Simone

Simone is a 15-year-old girl living in Paris, and who is presently in her first year of high school. Having already visited Tunisia, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, and Germany, her dream is to travel the world.

As an avid reader, Simone currently spends anywhere from 6 to 7 hours a week reading in her free time. She loves reading because it lets her “mind dream of other worlds” and explore different perspectives. Simone also has a growing interest in creative writing, and has participated in the NaNoWriMo writing challenge for a few consecutive years.

When Simone first started her bookstagram account almost 2 years ago, it was a way for her to share her passion for reading. Since then, she says she hasn’t “stopped discovering and buying new books.” She is also reading a lot more, and says that she pays more attention to the stories she reads so that she can discuss the details with her bookstagram followers. Although Simone has a few friends and an English teacher who she can discuss books with, she says that bookstagram has increased her opportunity to “talk about my readings with other people.” She has met many people on bookstagram and has formed what she describes as “everlasting friendships.” Some of these friendships have extended onto different social media platforms, as well as offline in group meet-ups at cafes.

Currently, Simone’s bookstagram account has over 1,500 followers. She thinks having a lot of followers is somewhat important, and says that gaining followers makes her happy “because it means more people are enjoying my work.” She also says that the more followers her account has, the more careful she becomes in what she posts because she wants to avoid the risk of offending anyone. Further, she actually feels relieved when she loses followers because she wouldn’t want anyone to “feel forced” to follow her account.

Apart from having to endure some book spoilers here and there, Simone’s bookstagram experiences have been very positive. Bookstagram has given her the opportunity to explore her interests as a reader, share her passions, and develop relationships. She also feels that on bookstagram “[y]ou can talk more openly, express your opinion more freely.” Further, Simone describes bookstagram as a safer place than Twitter or Facebook, and also says that “the bookstagram community is so welcoming, supportive, filled with talented people, that you hardly feel alone.”

**Claire**

Claire is a 16-year-old girl living in Tuscola, Illinois. She is currently a junior in high school and is on the cross country, volleyball, basketball, track, and softball teams. With a wide range of interests, Claire's dream job would be as a book cover designer because it would combine her love of reading and art.

Claire is an enthusiastic reader, and spends approximately 2 to 3 hours a week reading in her spare time. Compared to junior high, her reading curriculum in high school is less rigorous, which has actually allowed her to begin exploring different kinds of books in her free time. Part of Claire's love for reading is rooted in being able to interpret a story more freely than she would be able to when watching a movie. She draws a parallel between books and movies in that they both relay stories, but she says "reading is so different because you do put a little of your soul into it [...] you have to give to the book a little bit in order to get everything back."

There are a few people in Claire's life who she can discuss books with, including a few girl friends who really like to read, but who she says aren't as outgoing with their reading as she is. Her mother, a former fourth-grade school teacher, is also a big reader. Although her and her mother don't necessarily have the same taste in books, they often swap recommendations, and her mother is very supportive of her blog, bookstagram account, and overall reading activities.

About a year and a half ago, Claire had accumulated many books and wanted to begin reviewing them, and so she started a book review blog. At the same time, she also started a bookstagram account as a way to promote her new blog posts and increase her blog's readership. Since then, bookstagram has proven to be a very positive experience for her, and has helped her form stronger and more critical opinions on books, develop relationships with authors, and improve her photo-taking and editing skills.

Currently, Claire's bookstagram account has over 750 followers. While she thinks that having a lot of followers is somewhat important, but she is more focused on posting photos and content that she actually enjoys in the hopes that others will too. For Claire, her bookstagram following is a reflection of that on her blog, and her ultimate goal is to form "a blog following to reckon with."

Although she has not experienced any negative experiences on bookstagram, she does admit that, due to time restraints, her bookstagram interactions aren't as involved or in-depth as she would like them to be. Nonetheless, she has formed a few really strong connections with some people, and she says that one aspect of bookstagram that she particularly enjoys is "being able to share an interest with so many different people."

**Dominic**

Dominic is a 16-year-old boy who lives in a small town in Sicily. Currently in high school, he plans on going to university and becoming a doctor.

Dominic has been an avid reader from a very young age, and he now spends more than 7 hours a week reading in his spare time. He has embraced reading as a form of escape, saying that “I always read to try to get into another world, try to be a character, try to think like a character, try to be like a character. That really helps me to get out of myself and be in the book.”

There are a few people in Dominic’s life who he can discuss books with, including his English teacher and his older sister. However, for the most part he feels a disconnect with the people around him because they are more interested in reading books in Italian whereas he is more interested in reading English books. This is one of the main reasons why he started his bookstagram account over a year ago. At first he had his personal account where he would browse Instagram for book-related posts, but as he became more immersed with bookstagram interactions, he decided to start a bookstagram account of his own. Since then, he has made friends from all around the world who he can discuss books with, and describes bookstagram as “a very huge and warm community.” Further, his reading choices have expanded into different genres and he has discovered a lot of different authors. Bookstagram has also given him the inspiration and encouragement to write more, so much so that he is currently working on a novel! He says bookstagram “makes you think more, it gives you more challenges” and, drawing on an Italian saying, he says it “opens your brain’s doors.”

Currently, Dominic’s bookstagram account has over 6,000 followers. He thinks that having a lot of followers is important because it motivates him to post more on his feed. However, if he doesn’t gain new followers or if he loses some followers, he doesn’t let it upset him too much. His main focus is on posting what he likes rather than his follower count, saying that, “if people follow you that means they like your content, and if they don’t follow you that means that they didn’t like it. And you’re okay with it, you’re going to get used to it.”

Dominic thinks that one negative aspect of bookstagram is the confrontations that can occur between bookstagrammers regarding “problematic” books, whereby bookstagrammers criticize each other based on their reading choices. Nonetheless, he feels this sort of conflict does not happen very often, and that bookstagrammers are generally “so welcoming in an amazing way.”

Overall, Dominic’s bookstagram experiences have been very positive and have led him to develop new friendships, widen his reading repertoire, engage in more creative writing, and even improve his photo-taking skills.

**Alberto**

Alberto is a 17-year-old boy living in Barquisimeto Venezuela. Having just graduated high school, he plans to go to university and hopes to major in Chemical Engineering.

Alberto spends approximately 4 to 5 hours a week reading in his free time. His love for reading is primarily rooted in the way it allows him to “enter into new worlds and new lives,” and experience life from the perspectives of different characters. He also values reading because it helps him improve his vocabulary, learn useful and important information, and also because it is an activity he can do in his free time that never gets boring. He has some friends who also enjoy reading and who he can discuss books with, which is especially great because they often swap book recommendations based on each other’s interests.

At first, Alberto only had his personal Instagram account. As he began posting book-related posts on his account, he discovered bookstagram by way of other people who were sharing pictures of books, discussing their opinions, and engaging in things like booktags and shout-outs, which he thinks are really fun. After a while, he decided to start a second Instagram account dedicated to bookstagram only. Since then, Alberto has enjoyed meeting and interacting with people from all over the world. Although he also uses Facebook and Twitter regularly, he feels much more comfortable sharing his thoughts on bookstagram compared to other social media platforms. “That's one of the reasons I am a bookstagrammer. It's easier to express my opinion,” he says.

Overall, Alberto’s bookstagram experiences have been very positive. However, one of the negative aspects he experiences is the amount of time bookstagramming takes, which he’s managed to handle better by taking a lot of photos in one day, and posting them later on.

Currently, Alberto’s bookstagram account has over 2,000 followers. While gaining followers doesn’t really factor into his decision on what he posts on his feed, he does think that having a lot of followers is important, saying that new followers means that “people enjoy my feed [...] and that makes me feel great.”

**Iris**

Iris is a 17-year-old girl living in Cornwall, Ontario. Presently a senior in high school, she has already applied to the English program at a few different universities, and is thinking of enrolling in Teachers College after earning her B.A.

Reading for Iris is a source of both enjoyment and escape. She currently reads in her free time for over 7 hours per week, and typically gravitates towards fantasy books. She has a few people in her life who she can talk to about books, including a few friends, her older cousin, and her literature teacher. However, for the most part she feels as though the people in her offline life don't really read as much as or in the same way that she does.

About 9 months ago, after noticing that a few of her online friends were bookstagramming, Iris decided to start a bookstagram account of her own. Since then, she says her relationship with reading has become stronger, and that bookstagram has become "a fun place to find new books to read and make friends who have read the same books as you have." Further, compared to other social media platforms that she uses, Iris feels that on bookstagram she does not experience "the fear of being judged for liking typically nerdy things," and she also feels less awkward interacting on bookstagram than she sometimes does in real life.

Currently, Iris's bookstagram account has over 300 followers. She does think that having a lot of followers is important, but says gaining followers doesn't factor into what she posts on her feed. Instead, her posts are based on what she herself enjoys reading in the hopes that other people will enjoy it too. In regards to losing followers, she does find it frustrating when people follow her and then unfollow the next day, but losing followers is not something she really worries about.

Overall, Iris's bookstagram experiences have been very positive, but she does think there are some negative aspects about bookstagram. For example, she feels that there are times when she is hesitant to express her enjoyment of a book that other bookstagrammers deem as "problematic." Further, she feels that bookstagram accounts with smaller follower counts can be excluded from those with larger ones. Nonetheless, despite these aspects Iris still really enjoys bookstagram, describing it as "a fun place for me to talk about books where I don't have the opportunity to in my real life."

Participant note: Initially started bookstagram account in April, but restarted in August to have a fresh start.

**Joan**

Joan is a 17-year-old girl living in Chicago. She is homeschooled and on track to finish high school next year, at which point she plans on enrolling in online college to study teaching or graphic design.

Joan spends approximately 6 to 7 hours a week reading in her spare time. She mostly gravitates towards fiction with a particular interest in fantasy, sci-fi, and romance. She has some friends who she can discuss books with and who she updates on her latest reads so they can “fangirl about books” together.

When Joan first started her bookstagram account a little over 4 months ago, it was a way for her to combine her love for reading and photography. Since then, she feels bookstagram has helped broaden her reading interests, saying that she’s “opened up to more genres and other readers’ favorites.” Joan also feels that she “didn’t have a community to talk about [books]” before bookstagram, and now she’s able to interact with people all the time. She’s also developed friendships with other bookstagrammers, who she engages with through shout-outs, book photo challenges, and group chats.

Currently, Joan’s bookstagram account has over 3,100 followers. She thinks that having a lot of followers is important, but says gaining new followers never factors in to what she posts on her feed.

Overall, Joan’s bookstagram experiences have been very positive, saying that “it gives us a chance to show and talk about the books we love.”

**Leila**

Leila is a 17-year-old girl originally from Indonesia and now living in Australia with her parents and sister. Having just graduated high school, she plans to go to university and hopes to major in Engineering.

Leila spends approximately 2 to 3 hours a week reading in her spare time, and her love for reading stems from her genuine love for learning. The reading Leila does in her free time is mostly fiction, but it also includes autobiographies and motivational books. Her family members are also big readers, and although they tend to enjoy different genres, they all share the same love for reading. Leila also has a few friends who she can discuss books with. Regarding the reading Leila does for school, she finds that the assigned books address some interesting topics, but feels that often times the subjects explored in the classroom are repeated year after year, which she thinks can get pretty dull.

When Leila first started her bookstagram account over 2 years ago, she wasn't aware that bookstagram even existed. What began as a way for her to share her love for books and discuss books with others quickly led to her discovery of an entire community of book lovers on Instagram. Since then, bookstagram has become a place where she is able to interact with others, swap book recommendations, discover a lot of different books, and even become more creative with her photo-taking. Over the years, her bookstagram account has also lead to partnerships with publishers that send her free books in exchange for a book review post on her feed, as well as some sock brands that send her free product in exchange for a post on her feed. While these sponsorships are enjoyable, Leila also finds they can get overwhelming and sometimes a little insincere, which is why she tries to keep them to a minimum.

Overall, Leila's bookstagram experiences have been very positive. However, one of the negative aspects Leila experiences as a bookstagrammer is the pressure to post something on her feed, which ultimately results in what she calls "force reading," whereby she pushes herself to get through a book in order to publish a post on it. Further, there are times when she is a bit guarded when interacting with other bookstagrammers on account of other peoples' sensitivities. In fact, she says her interactions offline with her friends tend to be more truthful than those she has on bookstagram because with her friends she can express how she feels without worrying that she will offend anyone.

Currently, Leila's bookstagram account has over 27,800 followers. She does admit that gaining followers used to be a huge part of her bookstagram experience. However, her perspectives on gaining and losing followers has changed, and she credits this shift to her own evolution as a person. From the time she started her bookstagram to the present day, Leila says she has become less shy, less introverted, and more aware of the importance of communication. "I think bookstagramming can be a competition to a lot of people," she says, "[b]ut I feel like gaining followers and likes are nothing compared to interacting with real people."



**Maya**

Maya is a 17-year-old girl living in Vermont. As a senior in high school, she plans to go to university and hopes to major in Biochemistry and minor in English Literature.

As an avid reader, Maya spends over 7 hours a week reading in her free time. Maya has embraced reading as a form of escape, saying that reading is “a way for me to be with people and go on adventures in the comfort of my own home.” There a few people in her life who she can talk with about books, including her school librarian and one of her friends, but for the most part she feels as though that aren’t many people in her offline life who enjoy reading or read as much as she does.

When Maya first started her book-themed account over 2 years ago, it wasn’t her intention to be a bookstagrammer per se. What began as a way for her follow some book fandom accounts she was interested in quickly led to her discovery of an entire community of book lovers on Instagram. Since then, bookstagram has become an avenue for her to interact with others, make new friends, swap book recommendations, discover a lot of different books, and “be surrounded by book lovers everyday.”

Over the years, her bookstagram account has also lead to collaborations with publishers whereby the publisher will send a free advance copy of a book in exchange for a book review post on her feed. While these types of sponsorships are enjoyable, Maya also feels a bit uncomfortable participating in them because she finds they can be interpreted as disingenuous, even if she is reviewing books that she genuinely enjoys. As a way to resolve her conflicting feelings on sponsorships, she spaces out her sponsored posts so that her feed is nice and balanced.

Currently, Maya’s bookstagram account has over 15,000 followers. She doesn’t think that having a lot of followers is important, but says she is happy when she gains new followers because “it feels so awesome to know that people like the photos I post and are willing to take the time out of their day to chat books with me.” Further, she doesn’t keep track of the number of people who unfollow her account, and losing followers isn’t really something she pays much attention to.

Overall, Maya’s bookstagram experiences have been very positive. However, one negative aspect of bookstagram that she’s noticed is the confrontation that can occur between bookstagrammers regarding controversial books. Although she has not experienced this sort of conflict firsthand, it does make her uncomfortable to see that people are criticising each other based on their reading choices rather than just discussing their different opinions. Apart from this, Maya feels bookstagrammers are generally kind, supportive, and welcoming. Although bookstagram can be a little time consuming, she says “[i]t is the best feeling in the world when someone tells me they read and loved a book because of me. I could never give it up.”

Appendix G

Questionnaire Responses

**1. In a typical day, which of the following social networking websites do you use most often? (Select all that apply).**

P \ R	Bebo	Facebook	Google+	Instagram	MySpace	Reddit	Snapchat	Tagged	Tumblr	Twitter	Vine	Other(s)
Alberto		x		x						x		
Claire				x						x		
Dominic				x								
Heather				x			x					
Iris		x		x			x		x			
Joan				x			x					
Leila				x								
Maya				x								YouTube; Goodreads
Simone				x			x					Pinterest
Vera		x		x						x		
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

**2. If you could use only one social networking site, which one of the following would you use?**

P \ R	Bebo	Facebook	Google+	Instagram	MySpace	Reddit	Snapchat	Tagged	Tumblr	Twitter	Vine	Other
Alberto				x								
Claire				x								
Dominic				x								
Heather				x								
Iris				x								
Joan				x								
Leila				x								
Maya				x								
Simone				x								
Vera				x								
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**3. In a typical day, how many hours do you spend browsing or posting on social networking sites?**

P \ R	0-1 hours	2-3 hours	4-5 hours	6-7 hours	>7 hours
Alberto					x
Claire	x				
Dominic					x
Heather	x				
Iris			x		
Joan		x			
Leila		x			
Maya			x		
Simone			x		
Vera		x			
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>



**7. Of all the books you have read since you started your bookstagram account, how many have you posted on bookstagram?**

P \ R	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%	40%	30%	20%	10%	None
Alberto		x									
Claire		x									
Dominic				x							
Heather								x			
Iris	x										
Joan	x										
Leila					x						
Maya		x									
Simone				x							
Vera		x									
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**8. In a typical week, how many hours do you spend reading in your free time? (Do not include reading done at school or for school assignments).**

P \ R	0	1 hour	2-3 hours	4-5 hours	6-7 hours	>7 hours
Alberto				x		
Claire			x			
Dominic						x
Heather					x	
Iris						x
Joan					x	
Leila			x			
Maya						x
Simone					x	
Vera				x		
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

**9. In a typical week, how many hours do you spend writing in your free time? (Do not include writing done at school or for school assignments).**

P \ R	0	1 hour	2-3 hours	4-5 hours	6-7 hours	>7 hours
Alberto	x					
Claire		x				
Dominic			x			
Heather					x	
Iris			x			
Joan	x					
Leila			x			
Maya			x			
Simone				x		
Vera				x		
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

10. Are you currently or have you ever participated in a book club that meets in person?

<b>P</b> \ <b>R</b>	Yes	No
Alberto		x
Claire	x	
Dominic		x
Heather		x
Iris		x
Joan		x
Leila		x
Maya		x
Simone	x	
Vera		x
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>

10. Are you currently or have you ever participated in an online book club?

<b>P</b> \ <b>R</b>	Yes	No
Alberto	x	
Claire	x	
Dominic	x	
Heather	x	
Iris	x	
Joan		x
Leila	x	
Maya	x	
Simone	x	
Vera	x	
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>

## Appendix H

## Data Analysis Coding Scheme

<b>Category</b>	<b>Broad theme</b>	<b>Definition of broad theme</b>	<b>Source (if applicable)</b>
PLEASURE	Immersive Play	Get “totally lost in a book”	Used a priori from Wilhelm (2016)
	Leisure	Enjoyment of reading to pass the time	
	Intellectual	Enjoyment of engaging with a text to figure something out	Used a priori from Wilhelm (2016)
	Social	Connecting with others and identifying oneself through reading preferences, favourite books, etc.	Used a priori from Wilhelm (2016)
	Work	Reading to improve their writing, understand different perspectives, and inform ideas they would later bring forth in debates or conversations	Used a priori from Wilhelm (2016)
	Inner work	Dealing with personal issues, and learning about oneself and the type of person one wants to be	Used a priori from Wilhelm (2016)
	Reader isolation	Feeling of not having anyone to discuss books with, or feeling as though there are very few or no people in one’s life who read as much or read the same types of books	
LITERACY PRACTICES	Reading more	Bookstagramming has encouraged more reading	
	Branching out	Bookstagramming has encouraged broader	

		reading (different genres, authors, etc.)	
	Reading attentively	Bookstagramming has encouraged more attentive reading	
	Embracing reading	Bookstagramming has encouraged an increased appreciation for reading	
SELF- PRESENTATION	Instafame	Pursuit of "celebrity" status on Instagram	Marwick (2015)
	Identity	Different version of self; separate from "real life"	
	Self-expression	Freer to express ideas and feelings about books and reading	
		Safer to express ideas	
	Sponsorships	Collaborations with publishers, authors, or companies, usually amounting to free books or products in exchange for a promotional post.	
Followership	Sentiments about gaining and losing followers, and how this affects what one posts on one's feed		
PHOTOGRAPHY	Creativity	Bookstagramming has encouraged increased creativity in photos posted	
	Skills	Bookstagramming has encouraged increased interest in photo-taking skills	
	Aesthetic	Enjoyment of photo composition and layout, curation of feed	