

# **Is authenticity really as ‘real’ as we think?**

*A qualitative study on the degree of authenticity in influencers’ mental health posts on Instagram*

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## **Abstract**

Mental health is a widely discussed topic of our time, with one in every eight people worldwide suffering from mental illness. Due to inadequate help, long queues, high costs or the stigma attached to it, more people are seeking information about mental health on social media. This has created an online support system with both positive and negative effects, particularly among young people. Influencers participate in these mental health support groups, sharing information on Instagram. This puts influencers in a vulnerable position as they often share personal stories, but it can also be driven by commercial or entertainment motives to gain more followers and a larger reach. Therefore, this research addresses the question: *How authentic are Dutch influencers in their attempts to open up about mental health issues on Instagram?* Using purposive sampling and case studies, the research examined four specific influencers and 185 Instagram posts through qualitative thematic content analysis. First, it was examined what influencers post about mental health and why, which came together in an overarching main category *Opening up about mental health*. It was found that they mainly share personal experiences in order to create awareness. Subsequently, three main themes, or authenticity strategies, emerged: *Embracing the ordinary*, *Letting down the media mask* and *Confidential friendship connection with followers*. These themes indicate that influencers create a certain level of authenticity to enhance the credibility of their mental health messages. However, it's important to recognize that online authenticity is always a conscious choice, and the commercial nature of being an influencer must be considered. Despite appearing authentic, influencers always post content deliberately for greater reach, personal or social attention, and/or commercial purposes. This indicates that the motivation for sharing content about mental health has a dual significance. Nevertheless, these authenticity strategies enable influencers to sustain a reliable support system and offer accessible and affordable help, which is critically needed in the current global context.

**KEYWORDS:** *Authenticity, Mental health, Influencers, Social media entertainment, Instagram*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE.....	2
1.2. SOCIETAL RELEVANCE .....	2
1.3. CHAPTER OUTLINE .....	3
<b>2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. MENTAL HEALTH.....	5
2.1.1. <i>Mental health on social media</i> .....	6
2.1.2. <i>Therapeutic publics</i> .....	6
2.2. SOCIAL MEDIA ENTERTAINMENT.....	8
2.2.1. <i>Instagram as social media entertainment</i> .....	8
2.2.2. <i>The operation of social media influencers</i> .....	9
2.2.3. <i>Media credibility</i> .....	10
2.3. AUTHENTICITY .....	11
2.3.1. <i>Realness and the true self</i> .....	12
2.3.2. <i>The online constructed self</i> .....	13
2.3.3. <i>Performativity of online, mediated authenticity</i> .....	14
<b>3. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN .....	17
3.2. SAMPLING .....	18
3.2.1. <i>Context of the influencers</i> .....	19
3.2.1.1. Vivian Hoorn.....	19
3.2.1.2. Rianne Atiya-Meijer .....	20
3.2.1.3. Joann van de Herik .....	20
3.2.1.4. Vera Camilla.....	20
3.2.2. <i>Data collection</i> .....	21
3.3. OPERATIONALIZATION .....	22
3.3.1. <i>Inherent subjectivity aspect of authenticity</i> .....	24
3.4. DATA ANALYSIS .....	25
3.4.1. <i>Visual analysis</i> .....	25
3.4.2. <i>Three coding stages</i> .....	26
3.5. CREDIBILITY OF THE STUDY .....	27
<b>4. RESULTS.....</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1. INFLUENCERS OPENING UP ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH .....	29
4.1.1. <i>Embracing the ordinary</i> .....	30
4.1.1.1. Picturing the 'real' body as it is .....	31
4.1.1.2. Mocking the Insta perfect life.....	34
4.1.1.3. The frequency of body-positivity content .....	35
4.1.2. <i>Letting down the media mask</i> .....	36
4.1.2.1. The young self talking.....	38
4.1.2.2. Voicing negative feelings and insecurities .....	39
4.1.2.2.1. The power of honesty .....	40
4.1.3. <i>Confidential friendship connection with followers</i> .....	40
4.1.3.1. Discussing the impact of media on their followers .....	43
4.1.3.2. Power of gratitude and togetherness.....	44
<b>5. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>46</b>
5.1. WHAT IS ONLINE AUTHENTICITY ON INSTAGRAM? .....	46
5.2. WHAT AND WHY DO INFLUENCERS POST ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ON INSTAGRAM? .....	46
5.3. HOW DO INFLUENCERS MAKE USE OF THEIR AUTHENTICITY TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH? .....	47
5.3.1. <i>The first strategy</i> .....	48
5.3.2. <i>The second strategy</i> .....	49

5.3.3. <i>The third strategy</i> .....	49
<b>5.4. HOW AUTHENTIC ARE DUTCH INFLUENCERS IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO OPEN UP ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ON INSTAGRAM?</b> .....	50
5.4.1. <i>Raising and refuting authenticity doubts</i> .....	51
<b>5.5. ACADEMIC AND SOCIETAL RELEVANCE</b> .....	53
<b>5.6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH</b> .....	53
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>APPENDIX A:</b> CODING TABLE .....	63
<b>APPENDIX B:</b> HIERARCHY TABLE OF THE MAIN CODES AND SUBCODES.....	89
<b>APPENDIX C:</b> THEMATIC MAPS .....	92
<b>APPENDIX D:</b> IN-TEXT EXAMPLES.....	95

## 1. Introduction

Mental health is an incredibly important and widely discussed topic in today's society. Recently, there has been a significant increase in public discussions about mental health issues on social media platforms (Gowen, 2013, pp. 100-103; Moorhead et al., 2013, pp. 9-11). For example, #mentalhealth contains 55 million posts on Instagram. Social media is full of information, diagnostic tools, online discussion forums, mental health games, explanatory videos, memes, questionnaires and so on (Betton et al., 2015, p. 443; Fullagar et al., 2017, pp. 4-8; Naslund et al., 2016, pp. 114-117). Fullagar et al. (2017) examined that mental health issues are particularly prevalent in youth groups, as it is a time of significant psychological and physical changes and young people in this age group are more prone to feeling under pressure and experiencing anxiety and insecurities (pp. 1-3). This youth group specifically prefers to seek information and comfort on social media to combat their mental problems and listen to the advice of their peers, influencers, or inspirations (Jacobs et al., 2017, pp. 8-10; O'Reilly et al., 2018, pp. 658-660).

Influencers are increasingly participating in online support groups and are sharing their mental health experiences on social media (Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220). Their large reach on social media allows them to bring attention to difficult issues, fostering greater public understanding (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). However, a paradox arises here that is at the heart of this research. On the one hand, influencers are placing themselves in a very vulnerable and authentic position to share their stories and thereby put mental health on the map (Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220). On the other hand, these stories might also be shared for entertainment value, potentially amplifying their engagement (White & Hanley, 2023, pp. 3-4). Therefore, sharing mental health stories may be a marketing trick to generate more sympathy and simultaneously create greater reach. So, this duality raises critical questions about the authenticity of their story. Therefore, the research question is: **How authentic are Dutch influencers in their attempts to open up about mental health issues on Instagram?**

To answer the main question, the following sub-questions will be addressed:

- What is online authenticity on Instagram?
- What and why do influencers post about mental health issues on Instagram?
- How do influencers make use of their authenticity to talk about mental health?

### **1.1. Scientific relevance**

This research is at the interesting intersection of authenticity studies, mental health studies and social media studies and holds scientific relevance due to the scarcity of studies specifically addressing authentic mental health content on Instagram. Previous research has predominantly focused on various positive and negative effects social media has on mental health, which is a complex and rapidly growing field of research (Berryman et al., 2018, pp. 307-308; Naslund et al., 2016, pp. 114-118; Pantic, 2014, pp. 652-654). Furthermore, existing studies have primarily examined the impact of authentic content on subjective well-being (Bailey et al., 2020, pp. 2-3; Baker et al., 2017, pp. 235-236; Bunker et al., 2024, pp. 2-4), or have analyzed authenticity in the context of consumer attitudes and brand marketing within commercial spheres (Beverland, 2005, pp. 1003-1008; Lee & Eastin, 2021, pp. 822-825; Morhart et al., 2015, pp. 202-203). As illustrated above, there has been considerable exploration of mental health within the realm of social media and the effect of authentic content on social media. However, little attention has been paid to examining the authenticity and credibility of the content itself. Audrezet et al. (2020) explicitly state that studies so far have notably focused “on users' perceptions, and little work has centered on how producers (i.e., individuals or brands) manage their own authenticity” (p. 559). Thus, too little is still known about how social media creators deploy or use authenticity. This is noteworthy, given the frequent invocation of authenticity in online discourses, especially when it comes to sensitive topics (Slater, 2002, pp. 537-540). This research will try to partially fill this gap in the literature by revealing observable authenticity characteristics of mental health messages on social media. This may reveal much about how mental health issues are discussed by influencers on social media and may, therefore, contribute to the development of guidelines and standards that promote a healthier online ecosystem.

### **1.2. Societal relevance**

This research is socially relevant as the demand for reliable mental health information and help is ever increasing. According to the World Health Organization (2022a), hereafter abbreviated as WHO, the amount of people with mental disorders continues to rise and in 2019, already one out of eight people in the world was living with a mental disorder (para 2). In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people with depression or anxiety disorders increased dramatically by 28% and 26%, respectively, in just one year (WHO, 2022c,

p.1). It is distressing to see that limited people, who are dealing with disorders, have access to effective treatment due to long queues, expensive care and stigma or discrimination (Henderson et al., 2013, p. 777; Sartorius & Schulze, 2005, pp. xiii-xiv). Thus, there is a large gap between the supply and demand of mental health services, leading more and more people to seek help in other ways, for which social media is the most readily available choice (Moorhead et al., 2013, p. 2). For young people in particular, who are dealing a lot with mental problems these days, this is a quick and easy way to seek help (Fullagar et al., 2017, p. 3; O'Reilly et al., 2018, pp. 658-660). Influencers are increasingly taking on the role of experienced therapists on social media and since they often serve as role models, users are more likely to accept their information (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90; Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220). Given the substantial assumptions surrounding influencers, conducting comprehensive research into the authenticity and sincerity of the sensitive information they share is crucial. This makes it socially relevant to examine the ways influencers create authentic mental health content.

### **1.3. Chapter outline**

This research is systematically organized into several chapters that are outlined as follows. The second chapter presents the theoretical framework, explaining the key concepts essential for this study. At the end of this chapter, the first sub-question "what is online authenticity on Instagram?" will be answered, as this concept is the guiding principle of the entire research. The third chapter consists of the methodology, justifying the use of qualitative content analysis and focusing on the contextualization of the chosen case studies. In addition, it discusses in detail how the concept of authenticity is operationalized and the method of data analysis, which is thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Chapter four is dedicated to the presentation of the results, structured around the overarching category that answers the second sub-question: "What and why do influencers post about mental health issues on Instagram?" This chapter further presents the three main themes within this category, each revealing a different authenticity strategy. The fifth chapter provides a comprehensive conclusion and discussion. Here the findings of this study are briefly recapitulated, thereby answering the research question. Furthermore, it offers a reflection of the implications and broader perspectives on the topic, it highlights the study's

limitations and proposes directions for future research. Additionally, each chapter begins with a succinct overview of the specific topics that will be discussed in detail.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This chapter delineates the theoretical concepts that form the framework for understanding the social processes examined in this research (Boeije, 2010, p. 5). The explored concepts are 'mental health', 'social media entertainment', and 'authenticity'. First, the chapter explores mental health and its portrayal on social media, focusing on the concept of therapeutic publics to clarify the broad context of this research. Next, it delves into social media entertainment. After all, the research question for this study arises from the paradox inherent in the underlying entertainment value of social media. The chapter outlines the core characteristics of entertainment, its workings on social media platforms like Instagram, and how social media influencers contribute to media credibility. Social media entertainment serves as a counterpart to authenticity, shedding light on the contemporary online desire for authenticity. Finally, the chapter concludes with the core concept of authenticity. It examines authenticity by discussing concepts such as 'realness' and the 'true self', and explores the construction of the online self and mediated, online authenticity with its performative nature. This sets the stage to answer the first sub-question "What is online authenticity on Instagram?" This definition will guide the subsequent method and analysis.

### **2.1. Mental Health**

According to WHO (2022b), mental health is a state of mental well-being that causes how you think about yourself and how you cope with challenges in life (para 1). Therefore, a mental disorder is a disturbance in the individual's well-being. There are many different forms of mental health disorders, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia and anxiety or eating disorders (WHO, 2022a, para 3-10). In 2022, 970 million people worldwide had to live with a disorder, with anxiety and depressive disorders being the most common (WHO, 2022a, para 2). It is a positive sign that mental disorders are increasingly recognized as serious diseases requiring improved treatment, as they have a profound impact on individuals and are also becoming significant social and economic problems (Fullagar et al., 2017, p. 1). Unfortunately, there is still too little help available for people suffering from these issues due to several reasons, such as financial barriers and the stigma attached to them (Henderson et al., 2013, p. 777; Sartorius & Schulze, 2005, pp. xiii-xiv). Above all, there is still too little knowledge about certain disorders and therefore too

little effective care (WHO, 2022a, para 12). The knowledge a person has about mental health and the options for getting help for it is conceptualized with the term mental health literacy (Kelly et al., 2007, p. 26). Research indicates that mental health literacy is low among many young people, despite the fact that youth are particularly affected by mental health symptoms today (Fullagar et al., 2017, pp. 1-3). Furthermore, studies have shown that young people experiencing mental health issues often do not seek help themselves, and that help agencies are still not adequately attuned to the needs of youth (Fullagar et al., 2017, p. 3).

#### *2.1.1. Mental health on social media*

As a result of the lack of professional help, there has been an increased amount of sharing about mental health issues on social media, especially among young people (Moorhead et al., 2013, p. 6). Social media is changing the nature and speed of health care, because it is an accessible and inexpensive way to have discussions about mental health (Betton et al., 2015, p. 443). For example, there are several digital mental health practices that, according to Fullagar et al. (2017), provide better literacy such as “self-management apps for tracking mood, gamified therapies and youth focused social marketing to increase help-seeking” (p. 4). Social media can provide information in a way that younger users value, which is quick, easy and anonymous (O’Reilly et al., 2018, pp. 658-660). Therefore, help seekers, both young and old, are increasingly seeking for information on social media out of necessity, curiosity, or to find a support community, rather than seeking help from trained therapists (Jacobs et al., 2017, pp. 8-10). Thus, the internet has become a diagnostic tool, allowing users to look up symptoms online and seek diagnosis without seeing a therapist (Rahal et al., 2018, p. 165-166). However, this also brings disadvantages, such as the accuracy of the information being questioned since anyone can share information or the excess of information making people even more confused about their own mental state (Naslund, 2020, pp. 245-250). Nevertheless, mental health information on social media is mostly seen as positive trend that significantly increases mental health awareness.

#### *2.1.2. Therapeutic publics*

Mental health support on social media comes in various forms, such as factual information on websites, explainer videos, apps with games or trackers, but most interesting is the increasing trend of users sharing their own experiences of mental distress on social



media, thereby providing valuable information for others (Fullagar et al., 2017, pp. 8-10). Fullagar et al. (2017) say that "young people are actively positioned as producers of lay knowledge or 'lived experience' concerning their own distress, identification of mental health conditions and help-seeking practices" (p. 8). Thus, on social media, users are increasingly sharing their own personal problems and experiences to inform others. At the same time, these experiences are also shared to receive support from others, creating a social support system on social media (Andalibi et al., 2017, pp. 1485-1487). Such a social support system provides benefits such as social control over sticking to treatment, as well as encouragement, a sense of belonging and social contact throughout a day (Andalibi et al., 2017, pp. 1487-1488). However, the interactivity of social media also lurks dangers, such as unpleasant or aggressive comments from other users, or discrimination when users ask questions or share their story (Naslund., 2020, pp. 247-250). Fullagar et al. (2017) refer to users that share about their mental health in this digital world as 'therapeutic publics,' as users present a combination of personal experience and factual knowledge that are impossible to separate from each other and are very valuable (p. 9).

Next to 'ordinary' users, influencers are also increasingly taking on the role as experienced therapists on social media (Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220). They inform in the same way, only through their large influential reach and sometimes valuable collaborations with companies, they can exert a greater influence on users (Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220). Moreover, influencers often have a role model function, making users more likely to accept information from them which results in influencers becoming important opinion leaders influencing users' behavior (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). Especially since the younger generation is most affected with mental health issues, the social networking site Instagram is a useful platform for influencers to share information (Fullagar et al., 2017, pp. 2-4). However, what is important to note is that this also carries risks and ethical dangers. White and Hanley (2023) argue the importance of adhering to rules regarding competence, integrity, and confidentiality, which are often neglected due to the inherent qualities of social media entertainment (pp. 3-4). They emphasize that while social media has the potential to spread important mental health topics, it also carries significant risks (White & Hanley, 2023, p. 4).

## 2.2. Social Media Entertainment

Research on entertainment is highly complex with numerous interpretations and analyses about what entertainment actually is. In the broadest sense, it is often defined as “any market offering whose main purpose it to offer pleasure to consumers” (Hennig-Thurau & Houston, 2019, p. 41). Most researchers agree that the most important aspect of entertainment is enjoyment (Bosshart & Macconi, 1998, p. 5; Vorderer et al., 2004, pp. 388-390; Wolf, 1999, p. 31). It is this characteristic that makes people want to engage with entertainment repeatedly. Wolf (1999) says that we live in an Entertainment Age, as fun is prioritized in almost every experience (p. 4). Therefore, almost anything can be seen as entertainment and it is therefore “the driving wheel of the new world economy” (Wolf, 1999, p. 4). Vogel (2020) says that entertainment is more than only fun diversion, but it is “universally interesting and appealing because, ... it moves you emotionally” (p. xix). Vorderer (2001) defines entertainment as “an experience that helps media users to cope with their everyday life” (p. 258). Most of the studies still focus on traditional entertainment that do not occur in the context of social media (Stollfuß, 2020, p. 3). One important misunderstanding that needs to be clarified is that entertainment has been viewed as the opposite of information for too long (Vorderer, 2001, pp. 249-250). However, entertainment is actually a crucial aspect for successful information processing, since media users who are entertained are also more interested, making them better at processing information (Bosshart & Hellmüller, 2009, p. 6). Information and entertainment are thus often linked, conceptualized with the term “Infotainment”, which means that content and form combine elements of information and entertainment (Bosshart & Hellmüller, 2009, p. 6). In fact, Instagram can be quite entertaining as well as informative.

### 2.2.1. *Instagram as social media entertainment*

Social media is an Internet-based technology with the connection and interaction between individuals as the most important feature (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) describe it as follows “Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). According to Kaplan and Heanlein's (2010) social media classification, Instagram belongs to the category of social networking sites (p. 63). A social networking site, especially incredibly popular among

younger users, is a platform that connects users by sharing personal information (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010, p. 63). Instagram has grown incredibly since October 2010 due to its emphasis on posting everyday life in the form of photos and videos, becoming one of the new social currencies in the digital world (Hu et al., 2014, p. 595). Given the characteristics of a social media platform, Cunningham & Craig (2017) argue that social media entertainment is different from traditional media entertainment like television, because it is “constituted from intrinsically interactive audience centricity and appeals to authenticity and community in a commercialising space” (p. 72). Thus, interactivity and the community of users are the most important features of Instagram as social media entertainment. Moreover, Cunningham and Craig (2019) describe social media entertainment as “an emerging industry” of platforms, producers, fan communities and intermediaries that operate interdependently (p. 1).

Social media has long ceased to be simply a form of entertainment for the younger generation, according to Kaplan (2015), as it has a far-reaching impact on society as a whole (p. 197). One example of Instagram’s far-reaching social impact is the positive and negative effects it has on user’s well-being (Faelens et al., 2021, pp. 4-11; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019, pp. 485-488). For example, research shows us that, on the one hand, Instagram can increase self-confidence and decrease loneliness, but, on the other hand, the opposite has also been observed (Pittman & Reich, 2016, p. 157). Instagram's interconnectedness can provide a boost in social support, but it can also make users feel lonelier due to the social pressure to be perfect, which can lead them to feel inadequate (Pittman & Reich, 2016, p. 157). According to Fisher (2020), social media platforms, such as Instagram, reward continuously posting a positive and perfect self-image (pp. 93-95). The need to share perfect images often arises from the desire for social acceptance and validation on social media (Taylor, 2022, p. 6). Through this constant need for validation, the sharing of perfect images perpetuates itself, thus granting Instagram social control (Fisher, 2020, pp. 99-101). This results in an increasing desire for authenticity on social media platforms such as Instagram, which will be discussed later.

### *2.2.2. The operation of social media influencers*

Influencers on social media can have a significant impact on users' well-being. According to Koinig (2022), influencers are “individuals who are capable of informally influencing the attitudes or behaviors of their followers” (p. 4). On social media, influencers

create a symbolic identity through which they become “carriers of cultural meaning” (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 824). Thus, influencers are powerful role models that can provoke desired behavior and have the potential to make a difference in various areas. Social media influencers are widely used to convey messages and promote brands, as this has been proven to increase engagement and foster a more positive attitude toward the message or brand (Lou et al., 2019, pp. 176-180). This is called influencer marketing. Breves et al. (2019) also call it “branded entertainment” or “credible word-of-mouth”, since the interactive nature between follower and influencers on social media is so characteristic (p. 441). Lind and Wickström (2024) state that social media influencers build relationships with their followers by sharing intimate stories about their lives, such as failures and mental health issues, which makes them more like “friends” and, therefore, valuable partners in marketing campaigns (p. 219). Therefore, influencers are successful in conveying a message because they come across as credible and genuine (Breves et al., 2019, p. 447). Thus, the success of influencer marketing relies on authenticity.

### *2.2.3. Media credibility*

The technological capabilities and features of the Internet, and entertainment as a feature of the new economy, have logically led to concerns about the veracity of online information (Kiouisis, 2001, pp. 381-385). A lot of informational content on social media these days is delivered with an entertaining aspect, which makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish the truth. Therefore, it is important to look at the media credibility. Schweiger (2000) conceptualizes credibility as a subjective variable assigned to a communicator by receivers (p. 39). Therefore, he says, "one can only consider a medium as more or less credible - whether this is objectively right is impossible to verify" (p. 39). Source credibility in the economic sector, according to Simpson and Kahler (1981), is “... the trust, confidence, and faith the respondent has in the salesman” (p. 17). Media users cannot always know if the information given is correct, so they have to believe and trust the source. In the case of social media influencers, followers decide whether they find an influencer credible based on subjective feelings, which is easier if they ought the influencer to be authentic (Kapitan et al., 2022, pp. 342-344).

Several scholars over the years have researched the various factors that collectively cause a person to appear credible (Simpson & Kahler, 1981, pp. 20-24; Whitehead, 1968, pp.

59-63). Ohanian (1990) states that many marketing practices believe that the communicator's character strongly influences the credibility of a source (p. 39). To maximize the persuasiveness of a message, well-known spokespersons are often sought who are attractive, truthful and competent in the field on which they are stating something (Ohanian, 1990, p. 39). Indeed, often celebrities have a strong connection to the target audience and this is a reason why they are often used for marketing purposes (Ohanian, 1990, p. 39). Therefore, the credibility of celebrity endorsers is often measured using Ohanian's Source Credibility Scale (1990) which is a validated scale that consists of three dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise (pp. 43-48). Furthermore, Whitehead (1968), states in his famous and commonly used scale that source credibility can be measured by the four factors: trustworthiness, professionalism, dynamism and objectivity (p. 63). It is evident from all the factors that construct the concept of credibility that it is strongly related and intertwined with the concept of authenticity.

### **2.3. Authenticity**

According to the Cambridge dictionary, authenticity means the quality of being real or true. According to Goffman's (1959) social interaction network, as cited by Lee and Eastin (2021), authenticity is often understood as the degree to which a person is true to their own personality, despite external influences (p. 825). Authenticity is mostly seen as multidimensional and socially constructed concept by various scholars and comprises a dynamic process. For example, Sheldon et al. (2004) conceptualize authenticity as a trait of individuals who are honest with themselves and act in accordance with their internal state, both privately and publicly (p. 249). Wood et al. (2008) conceptualize authenticity as a process consisting of three stages; the inner experience of the self; the awareness of this inner experience and the expression of this inner experience (p. 386). Varga (2012) conceptualizes authenticity using two models: inner sense and productionism (p. 7). Inner sense can be explained as what feels true to oneself, a form of "introspective identification" in the internal world, whereas productionism is its opposite, defined by actions that shape one's identity in the external world or the artistic creation of oneself (Varga, 2012, p. 7). There are many different scales and subconcepts of authenticity, but most theories emphasize the connection between the internal and external dimensions. However, still few scholars explicitly define the term or agree on a generic meaning. After all, Beverland (2005)

argues what is considered authentic can also be determined as arbitrary since "images of authenticity involve projecting an image that is partly true and partly rhetorical" (p. 1008). Furthermore, authenticity is a socially constructed interpretation of what can be subjectively perceived versus the objective, inherent properties of an object (Beverland, 2006, p. 257). Various nuances of authenticity will now be discussed with emphasis on realness and constructing the true self that consists of performative actions online.

### *2.3.1. Realness and the true self*

A relatively large amount of research has been devoted to the notion of real, which is an important core concept within the concept of authenticity. Interestingly, realness and authenticity are often used for the same thought and are used interchangeably in casual speech. However, recent research by Hopwood et al. (2021) shows that realness is an important component of the multidimensional concept of authenticity (p. 3). They consider authenticity to be a dynamic process and "conceptualize realness as a more specific, core feature of that process that is revealed only in certain social conditions" (Hopwood et al., 2021, p. 1). Realness is important in research on authenticity because it reveals differences in individuals' behavior precisely when a situation occurs that pressures a person to be inauthentic (Hopwood et al., 2021, p. 1). Realness has been much discussed in classical theories of personalities. In general, being real is "behaving on the outside the way one feels on the inside, without regard for personal or social consequences" (Hopwood et al., 2021, p. 3). Thus, realness occurs when individuals act based on their internal feelings and do not let external factors affect them. It involves a connection between one's emotions and actions, which is a key characteristic of authenticity emphasized by many scholars. In addition to realness, research on authenticity often cites the concept of the true self. Schlegel et al. (2011) define the true self as "who a person really is, regardless of his or her outward behavior" (p. 745). Thus, this also demonstrates similarities with realness and authenticity, highlighting the connection between internal feelings and external behavior. What is important to mention within the research field of authenticity and the true self is that studies frequently show expressing one's true self has positive effects on people's well-being and predicts a healthier life (Bailey et al., 2009, p. 7; Schlegel et al., 2009, pp. 486-487; Wood et al., 2008, pp. 386-387). Being as authentic as possible and thus acting on your true self in

daily life can predict a more positive life. This makes it especially interesting to examine the authenticity of social media influencers who talk about mental health.

The words 'real' and 'true' are relative words, because it remains difficult to evaluate whether a person truly acts on his internal beliefs. Furthermore, Sheldon et al. (2004) say "confusion can arise ..., because it is not clear if by "self" they mean "my concept of myself and my conscious commitments" or "my underlying personality and needs"" (p. 270). With realness, the question always remains in relation to what something is seen as real. Henceforth, in this thesis, the words are in parentheses when talking about whether someone comes across as 'real' or someone 'really' acts according to internal beliefs and the 'true' self.

### *2.3.2. The online constructed self*

Within this research the focus is on the creation of online authenticity and online self-presentation. Authenticity coexists with technology in the online spheres even though the two concepts fundamentally clash (Taylor, 2022, pp. 1-4). Technology builds on things that are fake or simulated, whereas authenticity builds on things that are 'real' and natural. Therefore, Taylor (2022) asks the question: "In a world of simulacra, in particular reference to social media ... how can anything be authentic?" (p. 3). Social media are digital spaces where online personas are constructed by people, and the relationship between the 'real' self and the virtual persona is therefore complex. Marshall (2010) says "The public self is constantly worked upon and updated in its online form...." (p. 42). Social media give the freedom to users to constantly polish their self-presentation and portray the best self they want to be, whether it is 'real' or not. Sociologist David Riesman even says: "The more advanced the technology, on the whole, the more possible it is for a considerable number of human beings to imagine being somebody else" (as cited in Pittman & Reich, 2016, p. 155). After all, how can someone be authentic online if their identity is digitally constructed and can be modified in any desired form? For this reason, Wang and Skovira (2017) state that social media are a tool for creating an inauthentic self through escaping into imaginary worlds (p. 3017). However, Abidin (2018) argues that "... we need go beyond dichotomies that posit the online is "fake" and the offline more "authentic," given that all self-presentation in digital and physical spaces is curated and controlled" (p. 3). In the online world, it may be easier to portray a personality in a different way, but this can certainly be

the same in the physical world. As a result, Taylor (2022) argues that as a society we face the damaging effects of constantly wanting to be someone else and are therefore longing for authenticity (p. 6). So, how can someone appear authentic online, with the above contradictions in mind?

### *2.3.3. Performativity of online, mediated authenticity*

On social media, more influencers want to show that they are truly themselves and do not strive to appear as perfect as possible (Reade, 2021, p. 550). Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) define social media authenticity “as a post or photo that demonstrates some aspect of the celebrity’s true self” (p. 347). Influencers can manage this in different ways. Reade (2021) examined how influencers strive to appear ‘real’ by posting, for example, more unedited photos of their imperfect bodies, a concept she refers to as ‘photographic truth,’ or engaging in ‘practices of real talk’ on important topics like mental health (p. 550). Taylor (2022) argues that the authenticity of social media content can be measured based on metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and so on (p. 4). She suggests that higher engagement levels indicate more effective authenticity practices (Taylor, 2022, p. 4). Abidin (2018) argues that influencers “... must actively juxtapose this stripped-down version of themselves against the median and normative self-presentations of glamour....” (p. 3). In this way, authenticity can be measured by how frequently the back entrance to the influencers’ backstage world is opened, a concept Abidin (2018) refers to as ‘porous authenticity’ (p. 5). These measurements imply a productionist view of authenticity, as described by Varga (2012), because authentic presentation can be objectively evaluated using these kinds of measurements (p. 7).

The most prominent reason why influencers engage in these authentic practices is that they can create digital intimacy with followers, making them appear more credible (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016, pp. 349-350). Thus, these online practices allow influencers to build a loyal group of followers to whom they can credibly communicate important messages. However, paradoxically, this ‘real’ picture of the influencer is also consciously created (Van Driel & Dumitrica, 2021, pp. 79-81). It becomes evident within social media that authenticity is particularly used as conscious technological strategy for influencers to build relatability and intimate connections with users (Abidin, 2018, p. 3). In fact, Reade (2021) says that online authenticity “becomes a carefully calculated way to market oneself....” (p.



538). It is therefore striking that even this authenticity that users crave so much on social media, to feel that not everything is perfect, is also strategically constructed (Taylor, 2022, p. 6). Reade (2021) says that authenticity has a performative nature as it is "reflected in choices users make to appear 'real' to one another" (p. 537). Taylor (2022) also uses the term performativity for online authenticity, as authenticity on social media is temporary and depends on the technical choices a person makes (p. 19). After all, online authenticity can only be achieved temporarily and is artificial. Thus, since it is a strategy and is applied to content creation, online authenticity is best understood as a performative action rather than an inherent quality of someone (Taylor, 2022, pp. 10-14). Online authenticity thus becomes a technical construct in which the fake and the 'real' coexist, which makes it especially an ambiguous concept.

Moreover, understanding the concept also involves understanding the users. After all, users need to believe that an influencer is 'real' on social media and therefore, users are often considered as co-creators of authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006, pp. 490-491). Furthermore, Kapitan et al. (2022) say that authenticity is an ongoing communicative process, established through mediations between influencers and their followers (pp. 342-344). Therefore, online authenticity is also conceptualized with the term mediated authenticity. Furthermore, Enli (2015) calls the connection between followers and the influencer the 'authenticity contract' because there are certain agreements that both parties must comply with for the content to be considered authentic (p. 131). If followers find something fake that is announced as 'real' by the influencer himself, a breach of contract has occurred that must be restored. Reade (2021) also calls it "an ongoing process of impression management, based on audience feedback...." (p. 537). These authenticity agreements between followers and influencers have become incredibly important in media, as distinguishing the 'real' from the fake must continuously occur on online platforms. This demonstrates the importance of measuring credibility and the similarities with perceiving someone as authentic. It all depends on whether the person comes across as 'real' and truthful and the trust the recipient has in this person (Whitehead, 1968, p. 63). Therefore, it can be argued that credibility has strong affinity with authenticity.

This allows for a theory-based answer to the first sub-question: "what is online authenticity on Instagram?" The main characteristics of Instagram as social media entertainment are its interactivity and the community of users created by sharing everyday

life. On Instagram, more influencers are striving to appear 'real' in response to the perceived artificiality and fakeness online. Online authenticity is a performative action, as influencers make conscious choices to appear 'real' and rely heavily on intimate interactions with their followers. Paradoxically, despite being 'real', online authenticity primarily serves as a strategic choice for influencers to construct a desired online persona. This multidimensional construct will be further analyzed in this research, particularly in the context of mental health content.

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter outlines the method used to answer the research question. First, it explains why qualitative content analysis, with the use of a case study, is the best way to conduct the research. Then, it discusses in detail how the sampling and data collection were conducted, with additional emphasis on contextualizing the chosen influencers. After this, the operationalization of the concept of authenticity is explained to demonstrate how the concept was made tangible for examining the influencers' Instagram posts, with particular attention to the inherent subjectivity aspect of authenticity. The chapter then describes how the data analysis was conducted through textual and visual thematic analysis. Finally, it discusses the credibility of this method.

#### **3.1. Research design**

The goal of this research is to investigate how authentic influencers 'really' are when they talk about mental health on Instagram. As mentioned in the scientific relevance of this research, too little research has been done on the authentic social media content itself (Audrezet et al., 2020, p. 559). Therefore, this research works towards a structured and the most objective method possible to investigate how the chosen Dutch influencers convey their mental health stories through words and images, use their authenticity for this purpose and how this authenticity can be examined.

This research was conducted using qualitative content analysis, enabling the deeper meaning of a social phenomenon to be explored (Boeije, 2010, pp. 6-8). According to Schreier (2012) qualitative content analysis is "a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data" (p. 171). Qualitative content analysis does not look at content as the main object of analysis, but uses the content as a "window into human experience" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 769). Thus, with this method, a researcher looks beyond the text. Mayring (2015) stresses the link between the content and the communicative contexts, as these contexts refer to the origin, effect, and purpose of the content's creation, which are necessary to examine the deeper layers of meaning (p. 369). After all, the influencers' posts are part of communicative contexts and by examining these, the underlying interpretations, assumptions and narratives of the creation of mental health content can be revealed (Mayring, 2015, p. 369). Therefore, qualitative content analysis considers the latent meaning of the content, which involves examining the combination of textual and visual elements that

convey both explicit and implicit interpretations of stories in various contexts (Mayring, 2015, p. 367). Puppis (2019) additionally emphasizes that the relationship between the text and the context is extremely important because it reveals the relationship to the circumstances of the production (p. 374). Therefore, the use of qualitative content analysis contributed to the realization of the aim of this study to investigate how authentic influencers are in communicating mental health messages. Mainly since authenticity is strongly related to the context of the 'real' self, content analysis is appropriate.

Furthermore, a case study was suitable for this research, because "the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 1). This explanatory research aims to investigate how authentic influencers are in their attempts to open up about mental health. To examine this, the influencers' posts were examined over an extended period of time as well as the context surrounding the influencers' operations. Therefore, the research question deals with "operational links needing to be traced over time", making a case-study an appropriate method for this purpose (Yin, 2009, p. 6).

### **3.2. Sampling**

This study focused specifically on the Instagram content of the following influencers: @VivianHoorn, @RianneMeijer, @JoannvdHerik and @VeraCamilla. These four female influencers, aged 25-35, were chosen based on purposive sampling because it allowed for the selection of suitable cases where the authenticity processes studied were most likely to occur (Silverman, 2011, p. 388). The reasons these well-known Dutch influencers were chosen is because of: their large reach of followers, their appeal to a young audience, their sincere way of talking about insecurities and mental health issues and their attempts to appear 'real'. Moreover, these four influencers are often recommended by well-known online magazines with a young audience, such as Vogue, Cosmopolitan, Grazia and Elle as most inspiring influencers who talk about mental health. With this large reach, they can have a significant impact on mental health awareness. Considering that youth are struggling the most with mental health issues today and also use social media the most to seek support from others (Fullagar et al., 2017, pp. 1-3), these influencers are an appropriate sample for this research. The social media platform Instagram was chosen because young adults are the largest group of users and Instagram is the forerunner in the influencer industry, according to Statista (Dixon, 2024, para. 1). Furthermore, the choice of four women was deliberate, as

including men would require analyzing gender effects, which is not the aim of this study. The focus on four individuals, and for example not mental health hashtags, considers the importance of context in understanding influencers' authenticity.

### *3.2.1. Context of the influencers*

To examine how authentic the content of the chosen influencers is, examining their context is key. After all, how these four female influencers 'really' come across in their Instagram posts is influenced by their personalities and the online environment in which they operate, which their followers can discover online (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 91). Hence, here is a brief explanation of who these four women are, what their personal missions are, what they generally say about mental health and what their online style is. This information was generated through what we know through their entire Instagram page on which they have shared their lives for the past several years. For the aim of this research, their pages have been followed for months in advance to ensure proper understanding of their way of posting everyday life.

#### *3.2.1.1. Vivian Hoorn*

Vivian Hoorn (@Vivianhoorn, 31) is an influencer with 616k Instagram followers, a model, photographer, creative entrepreneur and founder of the fashion brand VIVEH. VIVEH designs clothing based on Vivian's measurements, aiming to make every body feel comfortable in loose, elegant attire. Vivian's mission is to promote self-love, reflected in her Instagram bio "more self love my love". Vivian often shares pictures highlighting her body's natural imperfections. Despite years of social media activity, she first revealed her struggle with depression in fall 2022, sharing her emotional story with followers. She frequently discusses her past eating disorder from her modeling days, highlighting her previous unhappiness, self-image struggles and keeping her body at the socially desired weight. This may possibly be the reason why she deleted her pre-2020 posts. She often posts comparisons of her past and present: she may have looked socially desirable before, but she is much happier with her body now. Previously, Vivian ran a second Instagram account, @Jacqueline\_Timemachine, featuring imperfect photos, but since 2021, she shares these candid pictures on her main account.

#### 3.2.1.2. Rianne Atiya-Meijer

Rianne Atiya-Meijer (@Rianne.meijer, 31) is an influencer with 1.5 million Instagram followers. Her mission is to inspire and entertain her followers with an unpolished, humorous view of her life. Unlike many other influencers, she never paints a perfect image, but shares down-to-earth stories with a touch of humor. She is known for her 'Instagram vs real life' photos and quirky humor, she embraces imperfection, as reflected in her bio "professional butt squeezer since 1993". In 2018, Rianne shifted from posting perfect lingerie and bikini photos, which attracted a predominantly male audience, to sharing raw, relatable content, feeling the former was superficial and made her unhappy (RTL news, 2018, para. 6). She has struggled with stress and anxiety, especially after experiencing a miscarriage in 2022, which resulted in mental problems. She often says she could no longer trust her body and even small, normal tasks gave her anxiety attacks, which led to therapy. Additionally, she is an ambassador for Plan International, an organization fighting for equal opportunities and rights for girls worldwide.

#### 3.2.1.3. Joann van de Herik

Joann van de Herik (@Joannvdherik, 25) is an influencer with 373k Instagram followers, a model and author of her book "Joann's road to self-love". Both in her book and on Instagram, she tells her story of how she grew from an insecure girl to a confident plus-size model. With her Instagram posts, she tries to put the importance of looks and the current beauty ideal into perspective and wants to inspire people with her body-positivity content. She stands for self-love, which is why her Instagram bio includes the quote "the best thing you can ever be is yourself". She shares a lot of naked photos in particular. Previously, Joann tells she desperately wanted to fit into the perfect picture shared online, which caused her to hate herself and for a long time she struggled with depressed thoughts. She also developed an eating disorder as a result. Fortunately, a few years ago, she changed tack and threw herself into the idea that beauty is only a changeable concept.

#### 3.2.1.4. Vera Camilla

Vera Camilla (@Veracamilla, 32) is an influencer with 206k Instagram followers, Youtuber and entrepreneur. She gained fame as one of the first beauty bloggers and in 2017, she was among the first Dutch influencers to promote body-positivity on Instagram (Boer,

2023, para. 2). She shares unedited photos to show that every body is perfect in its own way. She struggled with a burnout not much later, which caused prolonged silence on her social channels. She also has an anxiety disorder and ongoing depression, including past suicidal thoughts leading to crisis hospitalization. As a result, she became an ambassador for World Suicide Prevention Day. She wants to discuss mental health issues on her Instagram by being open about therapy and medication. Her Instagram bio reads “makeup, mental health & living life plus sized”. She also hosts the podcast “Group therapy with Vera & Sophie”, tackling mental health taboos from personal experience, as she describes herself as still “mentally unhealthy”.

### *3.2.2. Data collection*

All the influencers’ posts from 2022 and 2023 regarding various mental health issues, including depression, low self-esteem, body insecurities and eating disorders, were examined for further research. This research focused on a wide range of mental health concerns and not just one type. In fact, the most common mental issues are depression and anxiety disorders according to WHO (2022, para 2). These mental health disorders are often used as umbrella terms for many different causes and symptoms (Carek et al., 2011, p. 16). Consequently, this research treated depression and anxiety as comprehensive categories, encompassing symptoms like low self-esteem and eating disorders, and examined all related posts broadly. For this, it was extra important to take into account the influencers' context, as many posts implicitly said a lot about their insecurities, ideals and negative mental feelings, while on a first quick glance, this was not so easily detectable. Posts that were, for example, only about fashion or travel, without any explicit or implicit link to mental conditions, were excluded. Only pictures, captions and comments from the influencers were selected for the corpus. Emoticons and hashtags were automatically included in the captions and were therefore textually studied as normal phrases, but they were not researched in detail. Approximately one-fourth of the captions were originally written in Dutch, while three-fourths were in English. In the results chapter, Dutch captions were literally translated into English, aiming to closely follow the original text. This is indicated in the running text by square brackets. Videos and stories were excluded, because considerable additional research on aspects such as montage or soundtrack would be needed. The Instagram content of the four influencers is publicly available and could be stored privately. The posts were saved to a

research folder using Instagram's save function and later documented offline in a numbered PDF. In total, 185 posts were included in the thematic content analysis; 50 from Vivian, 50 from Rianne, 46 from Joan, and 39 from Vera. The size of the data set fits this method and provided the required material to answer the research question.

### **3.3. Operationalization**

Operationalizing authenticity is difficult, because the concept is inherently subjective, relying on arbitrary processes and subjective beliefs about what is 'real' (Beverland, 2005, p. 1008; Beverland, 2006, p. 257). Several studies have used validated authenticity scales, such as the Integrated Self-Discrepancy Index (Hardin & Lakin, 2009), which measures how well the 'real' self matches the characteristics of the online persona (pp. 247-248). Another example is the scale from Wood et al. (2008), which emerged from person-centered psychology, that measures the degree of authenticity in an individual (p. 388). Kapitan et al. (2022) measure authenticity as a mediated relationship between the influencer and the consumers in the marketing field (pp. 344-347). These studies highlight that authenticity to this point is often measured subjectively, focusing on self-portrayal or consumer attitudes, rather than objective indicators. As a result, there is not one scale that is completely compatible for this study. For these reasons, this method worked towards one compatible scale that looks at the tangible visual and textual features of authenticity that a researcher can observe from the online social media content. This builds on the definition of online authenticity as described in the theoretical framework. Thus, this method adopts a productionist view of authenticity, as posited by Varga (2012), by objectively looking at how influencers present their authentic selves on social media (p. 7).

This study utilized the scale developed by Lee & Eastin (2021) to analyze the authenticity of social media influencers (pp. 825-831). This scale is based on five dimensions: sincerity, truthful endorsements, visibility, expertise and uniqueness. This study excludes two dimensions: uniqueness, which is too subjective for comparison among these four influencers, and truthful endorsements, which focus too much on the commercial aspect of influencer marketing and are not applicable when examining mental health posts. The remaining three dimensions are operationalized based on the framework established by Lee & Eastin (2021, pp. 825-831).



<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>Sincerity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seems kind and good hearted</li> <li>• Is sincere</li> <li>• Comes off as very genuine</li> <li>• Is down-to-earth</li> </ul>
<b>Visibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not only posts about the good in their life but also about hardships</li> <li>• Talks about real-life issues going on in their life</li> <li>• Talks about their flaws and is not ashamed for showing them to the public</li> <li>• Reveals a lot of their personal life to the public</li> </ul>
<b>Expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is skilled in their field</li> <li>• Is very knowledgeable in their field</li> <li>• Demonstrates a natural ability in their field</li> </ul>

*Table 1 - Operationalization of the authenticity dimensions*

These dimensions align with the conceptualization discussed in the theory chapter. Kowalczyk & Pounders (2016) are among those supporting the sincerity dimension, explaining how influencers create digital intimacy with their followers by being kind and genuine (pp. 349-350). Abidin (2018) primarily supports the visibility dimension, emphasizing that influencers should reveal their backstage world to appear authentic (pp. 3-5). Fullagar et al. (2017) mainly support the expertise dimension, showing how mixing personal experiences with facts increases credibility when discussing mental health (pp. 4-9).

To clarify these dimensions with tangible features, this study additionally used Reade's (2021) study, by finding two different "raw" tactics an influencer uses on Instagram to appear authentic (pp. 541-550). First, the posts were analyzed according to the 'photographic truth,' which means photos are unedited and show the body as it is. So, showing imperfections that are not removed just for the photo, such as blemishes, cellulite and stretch marks. Second, the research looked for the 'practices of real talk,' which means influencers share stories about difficult aspects of their lives, including insecurities and bad days. As explained in the theoretical framework, the credibility of influencer persona is very important and is strongly related to measuring authenticity. In fact, the ways in which

credibility is measured bear strong similarities to the ways in which authenticity is measured. This is why this study incorporates credibility in analyzing the content based on the above authenticity dimensions.

In conclusion, authenticity within an influencers' online content could be systematically examined using these dimensions, revealing the basic steps on which a particular 'real' and credible identity and message is strategically constructed. This scale was used as a theoretical guideline in coding the content. Therefore, this study was ultimately able to measure the authenticity of a post as objectively as possible through the eyes of the researcher.

### *3.3.1. Inherent subjectivity aspect of authenticity*

As described in the theoretical framework, authenticity is an ongoing communicative process between users and influencers, as users ultimately decide for themselves whether they consider an influencer 'real' or not (Kapitan et al., 2022, pp. 342-344). Authenticity is thus an assemblage of influencers' authentic qualities and strategies and the extent to which users perceive an influencer as authentic. Either of these two would give a one-sided and incomplete picture of authenticity. The consideration of authenticity is context specific, subjective and user dependent, causing that the concept is often vaguely operationalized (Beverland, 2006, p. 257). This could raise questions about the objectivity of this authenticity scale. However, among others, Lee and Eastin (2021) have shown the opposite, stating that authenticity is a multidimensional construct and should be considered as such (p. 835). They state "SMI authenticity is an amalgamation of subjective, objective, and observational cues ...." (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 835). Thus, on the one hand, the created scale encompasses the most observable indicators of authenticity through textual and visual features. On the other hand, it includes the user's (in this case, the researcher's) perception of whether they consider the influencer authentic or not. Thus, the scale combines objective and observable features to measure the influencers' authenticity, but it also addresses less observable, and more subjective, authentic characteristics such as the question "seems kind and good hearted". These characteristics are inherent in authenticity and could not be ignored. This subjective question could be systematically answered by considering context-specific factors and comparing them to the other influencers being studied. This is why this thesis described

the selection of cases in detail, emphasizing the context of the chosen individuals. However, it remains inherent to authenticity that the researcher's perception is included.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

The collected data was analyzed using visual and textual thematic content analysis. Boeije (2010) argues it is a suitable qualitative method to analyze aspects of social life and interpret it in an in-depth way (pp. 94-95). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is “seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (p. 78). It is a flexible method and allows to identify and analyze themes within the rich data. A theme says something about the data in relation to the research question and “represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The thematic content analysis focuses on both identifying and describing implicit and explicit ideas (Guest et al., 2011, pp. 9-10). The themes are constructed by aggregating the most relevant codes. Charmaz (2014) defines the purpose of coding as “coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us an analytic handle for making comparisons with other segments of data” (p. 4). A code is a collective name for specific matters found in the data and therefore, it classifies the data units. As the data was analyzed specifically on in theory embedded dimensions of authenticity, a theoretical thematic analysis was performed with the use of deductive codes and sensitizing concepts in particular (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 83-84).

Of importance is the fact that the essence of Instagram posts is the combination of a visual photo with textual captions. Thus, the meaning of a post is communicated not only through language, but also through visual language (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 30-31). Images can tell us something that text alone cannot, which is why the combination of textual and visual analysis is important. After all, the meaning lies in the conjunction of image *and* text. Therefore, content is coded both visually and textually. First, a short outline of how images are decomposed in order to be coded in the following steps.

#### **3.4.1. Visual analysis**

Machin and Mayr (2012) proposed a visual analysis toolkit based on the three aspects; attributes, settings and salience (pp. 49-56). For attributes, the focus in this research is specifically on what objects are in the image, for example, a body, bikini, camera, chair and so forth. The setting is the background of the image and shows the scenery in which the

attributes play a role, for example, a beach, bathroom, bedroom and so forth (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 52). Machin and Mayr (2012) describe salience as “certain features in compositions are made to stand out, to draw our attention to foreground certain meanings...” (p. 54). There are several methods to generate attention in an image such as, size, color, tone, focus, foregrounding and overlapping (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 54-56). Thus, this research coded the images according to the objects present, the specific setting features and the salience methods used.

### *3.4.2. Three coding stages*

Boeije (2010) distinguishes three coding stages within thematic analysis that were used in this research: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (pp. 95-118). The first step involved open coding of the Instagram images and captions. All posts were initially coded in short descriptions based on what is evident in the data itself. The captions were fragmented based on what is written, while the images were fragmented based on the attributes, setting, and salience, as described above. The second stage was the axial coding of the data. More abstract codes were built by linking the open codes with similar meaning together, exposing key patterns. The sensitizing codes, derived from the dimensions of authenticity, were applied here to ensure that all characteristics substantiated in theory were examined. After linking and reconstructing the codes, the third step was the selective coding. The most relevant codes were generated into the main themes and the sub themes of the data. Systematic coding tables (Appendices A and B) were created to organize the generated themes, the most important coding examples, subcodes and image features, providing insight into how selective coding was conducted (Boeije, 2010, p. 98). After the selective coding, the reviewing stage was important, as Braun and Clarke (2016) say “... at this level you consider the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set, but also whether your candidate thematic map ‘accurately’ reflects the meanings evident in the data set as a whole” (p. 91). The themes were checked again against the data and then finally defined with an overarching name that encompassed the essence of each theme. The hierarchy of the (sub)themes was illustrated using thematic maps (Appendix C), as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 89-90). Ultimately, the key themes served to explain the phenomenon’s behavior and could provide an answer to the research question (Boeije, 2010,

pp. 119-120). The most relevant examples described in the results section are organized in sequential order in Appendix D, using the same numbering as the PDF of the entire data set.

### **3.5. Credibility of the study**

The quality of the research was assessed in term of its credibility which means that the interpretation of the data must be reasonable and convincing (Silverman, 2011, pp. 351-360). Credibility is often mistaken for the truth, however, it is important to distinguish that credible research does not also make it *the truth*. Credibility refers to “...careful scholarship, commitment to rigorous argument, attending to the links between claims and evidence....” (Seale, 2004, as cited in Silverman, 2011, p. 359). Knowledge gained through research is always evolving and improving (Silverman, 2011, p. 359).

Thematic content analysis may be seen as a subjective way of analyzing data as it is in essence an interpretive approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue about thematic content analysis that “one of the criticisms ... is the perception that ‘anything goes’” (p. 95). However, this method provided a systematic way of analyzing the data using a codebook and is built upon a theoretical backbone with the use of sensitizing concepts that guided the research. The reliability was realized by making the research process as transparent as possible by extensively describing the data process (Silverman, 2011, p. 360). The validity was realized by doing an extensive check in the data analysis by double coding and constantly reviewing the themes (Silverman, 2011, p. 369).

This purposive case study research method might raise questions about the generalizability of the research as only four influencers were analyzed. However, Silverman (2011) argues not too much value should be put on generalization, because single cases are important for in-depth research (p. 387).

## 4. Results

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the following research question: *How authentic are Dutch influencers in their attempts to open up about mental health issues on Instagram?* Thematic content analysis has been conducted to investigate the use of authenticity in the Instagram posts regarding mental health of the four chosen influencers. Three main themes were identified during this analysis, which will help in answering the research question. The three themes are *Embracing the ordinary*, *Letting down the media mask* and *Confidential friendship connection with followers*. The first theme is mainly focused on the visual content of the data set, since it includes mainly visual aspects with which the normalcy of the body is depicted. The other two themes are more focused on the textual content of the data set, since it includes the practices of sincere talking. Despite this, both the visual and textual aspects are reflected in all themes, because the meaning lies in the conjunction of an Instagram photo and its caption. The overarching category under which these three themes are grouped is *Opening up about mental health*, illustrated in Figure 1. Here it is first discussed what mental health information is shared and for what purpose, which answers the second sub-question *What and why do influencers post about mental health issues on Instagram?* The three themes have partly emerged from the theoretical authenticity framework, as explained in the preceding chapters, and from theories about mental health on social media and entertainment studies. The most relevant results and examples are explained in detail below.

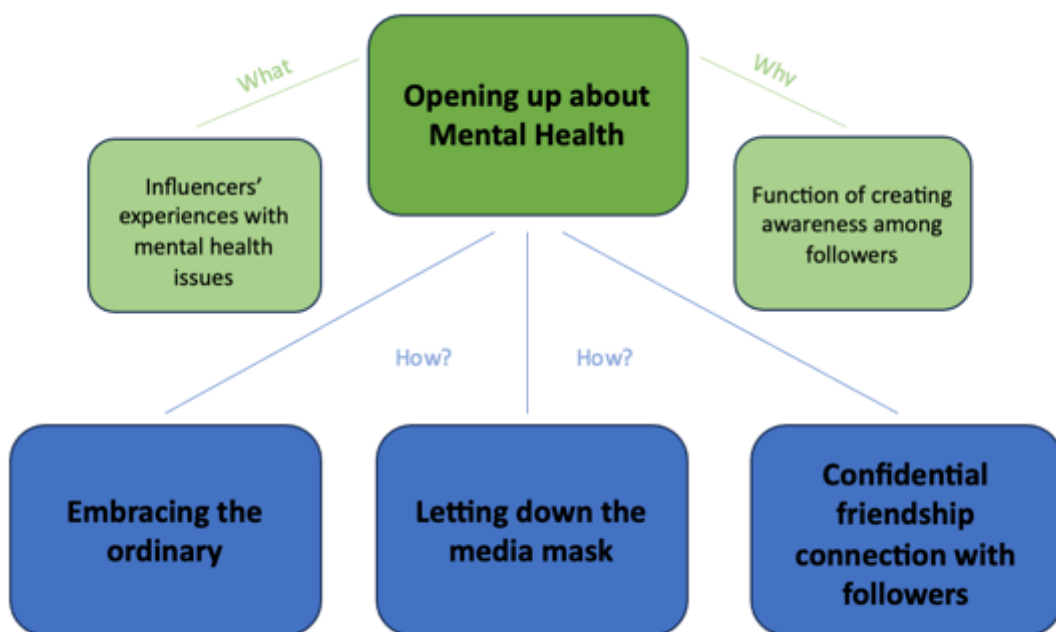


Figure 1 - Thematic map of the main category with the three themes

#### 4.1. Influencers opening up about mental health

First, it is important to outline *what* and *why* these four influencers post about mental health issues on Instagram. Only after this, it can be examined *how* they do this using authenticity. The context sections in the method chapter outlined what can be known of the influencers' Instagram activity over the years. Here is a description of what specifically appears in the selected data set. The thematic analysis revealed that influencers frequently discuss mental health by sharing personal experiences to inform followers. These stories often stem from their own struggles, allowing them to share effective coping strategies based on their experiences. The influencers can therefore be seen as 'therapeutic publics' as they combine their personal experience with factual knowledge and are producers of "lived experience" (Fullagar et al., 2017, pp. 8-9). The most occurring mental health disorders mentioned by the four influencers are: depression, anxiety disorders, mental breakdowns, panic attacks, loneliness, low self-esteem, severe body insecurities, the paralyzing effect of a poor mental state, burn out, experience with crisis services, therapy, use of medication, suicidal thoughts and trauma (Appendix A nr.2). Additionally, all four are open about the impact social media can have on their mental health. As the influencers share this information on social media, they increase mental health literacy among their followers in a quick and inexpensive way (Fullagar et al., 2017, p. 4). Users who scroll on Instagram and follow these influencers get information about heavy topics in an approachable way that they might otherwise not have explicitly looked up (Betton et al., 2015, p. 443). The influencers thus act as online experienced therapists on Instagram (Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220).

The mental health experiences shared by the influencers on Instagram implies multiple functions, as their posts reveal. First, it serves as an invitation to start the conversation and break the taboo. For example, Vera says "[I think it is very important to bring mental health out of the taboo sphere]" and "[any reason to get more attention to mental health I will grab]" (Appendices D4.24 & 4.1). Second, it emphasizes the need for more support from family, friends and social media, as Vera mentions, particularly regarding women's empowerment "[Together we are strong, because a voice can easily be ignored, but together we will sound ear-deafening]" (Appendix D4.5). Third, it is a call for more professional research and support for mental health issues. Joan posts, for instance, mention that her "advocacy will concentrate on raising awareness and support for survivors who are

dealing with trauma, abuse, or struggles with low self-esteem” (Appendix D3.31). Lastly, the influencers’ personal experiences help followers understand their own mental health conditions and the support they require. Vivian tells her followers “I’m still very scared to say this out loud, but that’s also why I need to speak up about it, because we have to talk about our mental health and not be ashamed” (Appendix D1.22). The awareness functions are addressed very explicitly, as Rianne often says “Let’s talk about it more”, or it is more implied in their stories. Nevertheless, it is clear that the main function is creating awareness among their followers. It appears from the popularity and high engagement of the posts that a support community is being created for followers to join, which hopefully lowers the barrier to seeking mental health help (Jacobs et al., 2017, pp. 8-10). Now that it is discussed what mental issues they are raising and why, it is possible to look at how they are using authentic strategies to raise these issues. This is reflected in all three themes and is the thread that guides the results.

#### *4.1.1. Embracing the ordinary*

The first theme reveals how all four influencers embrace their bodies as they are and want to put emphasis on the ordinary, as opposed to societal, beauty norms. The influencers embrace their ordinary body mainly with visual aspects by posting as many unedited photos as possible. According to Reade’s theory (2021), the ‘photographic truth’ is a way for influencers to appear authentic online (pp. 541-550). After all, according to her research, for followers, seeing unedited photos correlates with the feeling that someone comes across as ‘real’ and thus feels authentic. These photos explicitly show and highlight all the bodily flaws in multiple ways. At least, these are seen as flaws because they do not conform to the sociocultural standards of beauty of what most people think a body should look like (Calogero et al., 2007, p. 262). Most important is the fact that the unedited body and normalization of the human body is not just shown, but truly celebrated. The influencers are making a statement that the raw body is much prettier than pursuing perfection, a message often overlooked by social media. Vivian advocates the following “It’s time that we are all seen for our beautiful unique self” (Appendix D1.30). Joan emphasizes this by saying that her body is her sanctuary “i’m so thankful that my body loved me and nourished me, even when i didn’t love her back” and she aims to celebrate and appreciate her body, without feeling pressured to change a thing to achieve perfection (Appendix D3.19). Hence the name of the



theme *Embracing the ordinary*. This theme encompasses all flaws that depict the ‘real’ body, categorized into three factors, that would typically be removed based on societal norms, and two subthemes that are respectively about jokes that mock the perfect Insta life and an emphasis on body-positivity content, illustrated in Figure 2.

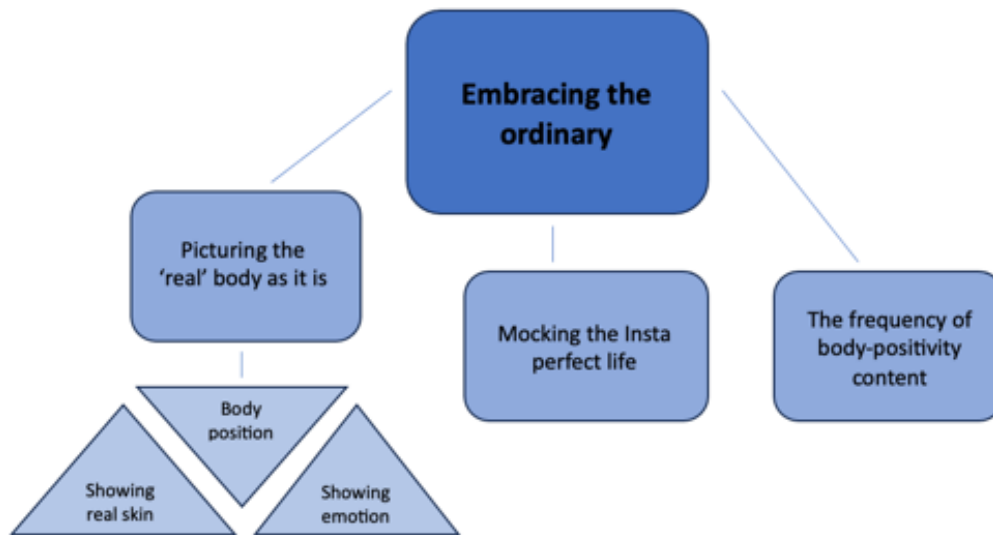


Figure 2 - Thematic map of 1<sup>st</sup> theme ‘Embracing the ordinary’

#### 4.1.1.1. Picturing the ‘real’ body as it is

An important factor with embracing the ordinary is daring to show the body as it ‘really’ is, without modifications or disguises. The following quote is an example that shows the emphasis on wanting to appear as normal as possible. Vera tells the following “[Not slim, standard handsome and not smooth. I am just like you. I’m your neighbor, your sister or cousin. I’m the one I wanted to see on the cover, but never saw]” (Appendix D4.20). She emphasizes being just like her followers. The influencers all post photos that do not conform to the predominant societal norms on social media. These societal beauty norms can best be explained as the cultural ideals of physical attractiveness, dictating how a person is expected to look like in order to be considered ‘pretty’ (Calogero et al., 2007, p. 262). The influencers want to counter these ideals by showing off their bodies on social media in all their normalcy with all its ‘flaws’, as Joan explains: “...and is it because WE don’t like those things or is it because society taught us to not like those things about ourselves?” (Appendix D3.22). This could be found in the data in several ways. Firstly, they show their skin as it ‘really’ is. Secondly, their bodies are not in perfect photo positions and lastly, they show ‘real’ emotion

in a photo. Of the total 185 posts, 89 show these bodily flaws, imperfections or emotions very explicitly.



*Figure 3 - Compilation of skin textures Joan, Vivian and Vera  
(Appendices D3.8 & D1.18 & D4.33)*

First of all, the influencers frequently display close-up shots revealing body hair, acne, cellulite, prominent stretch marks, dry skin and scars. These posts are often accompanied by a caption in which influencers show awareness of posting something that is not socially desirable. For example, Joan says “we still think we need to have smooth legs in order to be beautiful” with an accompanied, close-up photo of her cellulite or Vivian mentioning that she is trying to accept that she suffers from acne on her body and is revealing this in contrast to other flawless photos (Appendices D3.8 & D1.18). Vera says she has “[an unconventional skin]” which is unusual on social media, since we live in a world where “[pimples always have to be camouflaged or polished away]” (Appendix D4.25). Thus, these bodily flaws are often photoshopped and concealed in mainstream media to create the perfect picture. By showing them instead, an influencer comes across as more genuine (Reade, 2021, pp. 541-545). An interesting example is Vera, who initially thought her photoshoot pictures had been photoshopped, because her blemishes were no longer visible. She said “[... and I pity that I was not asked for approval beforehand. The stretch marks, marble skin, pimples; I would have loved to have seen them. Just to normalize it. I also gave that back as feedback]” (Appendix D4.26). This shows that she is honest about how photos are manipulated on social media and that she wants to prevent it. According to Lee and Eastin's (2021) authenticity factors, this comes across as sincere to followers, because these influencers are honest about their bodies and conscious about what they show on Instagram (pp. 825-826).

Second, all four influencers show their bodies in natural positions. They frequently post unflattering selfies, such as those showing double chins, not standing or sitting completely straight to reveal belly rolls, or Rianne's famous butt squeeze photos. What is striking with influencers is their strive for perfection, often adopting unnatural poses to appear slimmer and more toned, such as stretching legs and tightening their stomachs. In fact, these are the dominant physical-attractiveness factors commonly endorsed on social media within a specific cultural context (Piccoli, 2021, pp. 729-730). These influencers emphasize that a body doesn't always have to be 'perfect', according to social norms, in order to be shown on Instagram. Joan explains "It literally depends on how you're posing or what the lightning is like" and therefore these influencers show what the effect is when you don't intentionally do this (Appendix D3.8). They seem to show their bodies as if the photo was taken spontaneously and they don't want to hide these imperfect snapshots. According to the visibility dimension by Lee and Eastin (2021) this shows that these influencers are not ashamed to show their flaws to the public, making them more likely to be labeled as authentic by followers (p. 826).



*Figure 4 – Compilation of butt squeeze and body positions Rianne and Vivian (Appendices D2.7 & D1.42 & D1.25)*

Lastly, the influencers also share photos displaying genuine emotions, notably three influencers have posted photos where they can be seen crying. These crying selfies are all accompanied by a caption in which the influencer writes that the dark days are also part of life and emotions should not be concealed on social media. Another example of showing emotion unusually is capturing a drunken gaze. These are both vulnerable positions and show that they are not hiding behind an Instagram perfect photo. In fact, matters that might damage self-image are often disguised from the general public online and a "positivity-bias"

prevails in particular on social media (Waterloo et al., 2018, pp. 1814-1815). Vivian shows these matters in a selfie compilation, from a drunk and eating selfie to crying and grumpy selfie with bathing cap. She says "[we prefer to post only the selfies we look the most happy and radiant in. That is not always the reality; so here are 8 selfies each with a different mood]" (Appendix D1.25). She shows it, because it is all part of life, aiming to share her life as 'real' as possible. One of the most important success factors of an influencer is that followers must be able to identify with the online persona (Breves et al., 2019, p. 447). Thus, influencers or images that are too perfect, are often not likable enough. Emotions are an integral part of life, and showing them in all its glory makes the influencers more 'real'.



*Figure 5 - Compilation of crying selfies Rianne, Joan and Vivian  
(Appendices D2.26 & D3.34 & D1.25)*

#### 4.1.1.2. Mocking the Insta perfect life

An important subtheme involves the influencers sharing photos where they humorously critique the perfect life portrayed on Instagram. They post 'making of' photos, 'ugly' selfies, reality versus Instagram comparisons, filtered versus unfiltered comparisons and memes with text. Page (2019) explains an 'ugly' selfie or self-mockery imagery "as an alternative to the idealized norms of the 'perfect' appearance" (p. 6). This does not mean that the person is ugly, but the pictures are deliberately constructed to appear ugly. For example, Rianne writes "Nobody looks like those Instagram models, even the models themselves" and "Before and after hair & make-up at its finest today 😊" (Appendices D2.27 & D2.13). These types of posts with self-mockery should include clues to followers that it is not to be taken seriously (Page, 2019, p. 6). It is a playful way to bring up the perfection of



Instagram and demonstrate that the influencers are also ‘real’ compared to their modeling photos of their seemingly perfect lives they also post. Abidin (2018) argues that influencers must open the back door to their backstage world to give their followers a glimpse behind the scenes in order to come across as ‘real’, what is called ‘porous authenticity’ (p. 5). This is very explicitly done with the ‘versus’ and ‘making of’ content. The “stripped-down version of themselves” is deliberately juxtaposed against their normative and glamorous presentation, evoking a feeling of authenticity (Abidin, 2018, p. 3). These jokes about the perfect Insta life, provide an opportunity to lightheartedly address various issues, such as skin and body insecurities, by showing that everyone is different behind a seemingly perfect picture.



*Figure 6 - Compilation of comparisons photos Rianne (Appendices D2.27 & D2.13)*

#### 4.1.1.3. The frequency of body-positivity content

The last subtheme is the posting of body-positivity content by the influencers and explicitly labeling their photos to the body positivity movement with the use of their captions. The term, or derivatives of these such as, body confidence, body diversity, body acceptance, body comfortability and self love, can be found in a large amount of data of the influencers. Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) define body-positivity as “an all-encompassing love and respect for one’s body ... and acceptance of one’s body despite idealized societal messages” (p. 112). The body-positivity movement has spread across social networking sites the past years and Instagram caused the popularity of this movement to rise significantly as it is entirely focused on visuals (Cohen et al., 2019, pp. 1547-1549). Vera was the first Dutch influencer to use the term body-positivity on Instagram and this was, and is, still much needed (Boer, 2023, para. 2). Mainly, Vera, Joan and Vivian emphasize embracing body

acceptance by placing much emphasis on fat acceptance and diversity with various photos. Joan says "No matter your size, age, shape, skincolor, disability, scars etc etc. it doesn't matter whether you're fat, skinny, curvy, mid size, flat, big, tall, short, WHATEVER, you deserve love and respect" (Appendix D3.8). They often describe their own bodies as sexy, muse or goddess and emphasize that every body should be loved. The body-positivity movement that these influencers are pursuing paints a less predominant ideal image, but instead a more inclusive one that hopefully has a positive effect on body image (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 1549).



*Figure 7 - Compilation of body-positivity photos Vivian, Joan and Vera  
(Appendices D1.21 & D3.19 & D4.16)*

#### *4.1.2. Letting down the media mask*

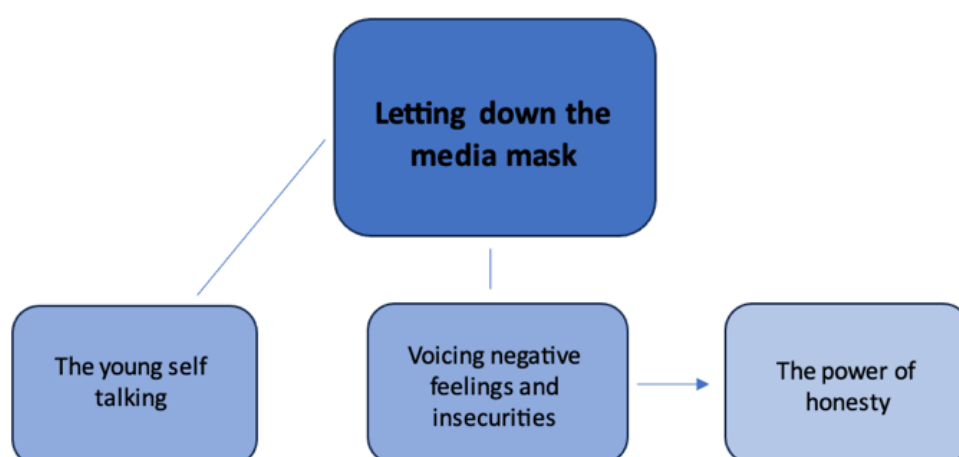
The second theme shows how all four influencers drop their media mask on Instagram and express their genuine feelings in personal stories. They don't hide behind a perfect or fake mask on Instagram. On the contrary, they share stories that they find stressful to share, such as their unattainable dreams or difficult days in their lives combined with mental health issues. Sharing seems like a way of coping for the influencers and they stress that it is okay to feel bad sometimes. For example, Rianne even says she doesn't know what to do with the feelings and therefore says "I need to write because I am so scared, It's just so damn scary" (Appendix D2.40). According to Reade's theory (2021), the 'practices of real talk' is a way for influencers to appear authentic online (pp. 541-550). After all, according to her research, for followers, reading sincere stories based on own experiences correlates with the feeling that someone comes across as 'real' and thus feels more authentic. Vera takes on

the role as experienced therapist on her Instagram and applies the practice of sincere talking with her informational post about antidepressants. She speaks from her own experience with depression and is honest about taking the medication for years. She even posts a photo with a medicine in her mouth.



*Figure 8 - Photo Vera with antidepressant in her mouth (Appendix D4.35)*

She explains that getting the medication, after she was hospitalized in crisis services, changed her life. Her function as an Instagram role model may make users more likely to accept the information and her advice (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). She also tries to normalize taking antidepressants by talking about how heart patients can't go without beta blockers either. This theme encompasses all practices of sincere talking with two subthemes that first, deal with experience stories from the past as young girls, and second, deal with voicing negative feelings and insecurities with the use of the power of honesty, illustrated in Figure 9.



*Figure 9 - Thematic map of the 2<sup>nd</sup> theme 'Letting down the media mask'*

#### 4.1.2.1. The young self talking

An interesting subtheme within dropping the media mask is the fact that influencers often revisit the past by looking at themselves as young girls in different ways. They communicate with their younger selves as adults, revisiting past experiences or projecting their past into the future for reflection. For example, Vera says “[She could never have imagined that 6-year-old Vera would have a lot to look forward to, and that's for the best]” with a comparison photo of her as a 6-year-old girl and her now in the same pose (Appendix D4.29).



*Figure 10 - Comparison photos of Vera and Vivian (Appendices D4.29 & D1.35)*

Furthermore, Vivian says “The things I wished my younger self would have known” (Appendix D1.35). The influencers go back in time for a moment and compare the unknowing of then with the experiences of now. The changeability of time and the fact that they are experts by experience is made clear. Vivian also makes visual comparisons between her as teenage model and now and says “15 years is the difference between these pictures” (Appendix D1.35). It is clear to see how thin she looked then because she wanted to conform to the beauty ideal and how she has renounced this ideal now for herself. Rianne does the same by saying “Ever since I was young, I’ve looked in the mirror and thought to myself little things that make my body ‘not finished yet’” (Appendix D2.36). In contrast, she now posts photos showing her being completely herself and claims to be less worried about her imperfect body. These comparisons to the past demonstrate the influencers’ growth and gained experience, creating more credible advice and qualifying them as experienced therapists through a combination of personal experience and factual knowledge (Fullagar et al., 2017, p. 4). Moreover, they also often talk about their dreams they had as young selves. Joan says “this is something i’ve been manifesting and dreaming of since i was a little girl”



and Vivian says "14y old would have never believed this" (Appendices D3.4 & D1.46). The fact that they share their childhood dreams that are now fulfilled, creates a sense of expertise (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 826).

#### 4.1.2.2. Voicing negative feelings and insecurities

The second subtheme shows how all four influencers discuss their negative feelings and insecurities, particularly fear, pain and destructive thoughts, letting their emotions speak for themselves. Examples are Vivian saying "This pain, I forgot the intensity of it" or Rianne saying "It is terrifying ... like something is wrong with me ... I need to feel this fear head on" (Appendices D1.43 & D2.40). Vera is open about her negative thoughts and says "[My self-image gets dented and I start thinking and talking negatively about myself]" (Appendix D4.39). The influencers say they were initially afraid to share these feelings, as Vivian says "Scared that my feelings weren't real and I was just dramatic" (Appendix D1.22). Clearly, they are now brave enough to share their negative feelings. Their courage establishes them as experts by experience, making them appear more 'real'.

Moreover, the women openly discuss receiving negative comments and how this affected their self-image. For example, Joan says "I was paying too much attention to what others might think of me. So, I tried to fit into an image that wasn't me" or Vivian who writes "...scared that people had an opinion about me" (Appendices D3.10 & D1.22). Naslund (2020) explains that the interactivity of social media lurks dangers and an example is unpleasant or aggressive comments from followers when a certain story is shared (pp. 247-250). This is almost inevitable in this digital and interactive world. However, these women do not let this stop them and still share their sensitive topics, even if they receive painful comments. Joan expresses her dissatisfaction with it by saying "the fact that people look at each other and feel the need to say negative comments about each other like that, is something i will never understand..." (Appendix D3.16). Most powerfully, the women share how these criticisms affects them, but they continue striving to make it discussable.

Furthermore, in addition to their feelings, the influencers also talk a lot about their bodily insecurities. They often say things like "[It can make me so insecure]" and "it made me feel very insecure and sad". It is noteworthy that in addition to talking about their insecurities, they also share them in their photos. For example, Vivian talks a lot about her skin insecurity and says "If I still have insecurities. The answer is yes. One of my biggest atm

is my skin ...." accompanied with a photo of her irritated skin (Appendix D1.18). Joan says "...so no one would see ANYTHING of my upper legs + butt. the parts i was most insecure about," but now she has the courage to expose herself on social media (Appendix D3.22). Rianne says "I never looked and felt: this is perfect just the way it is" and shares how she never dared to laugh with an open mouth. However, she now shares a photo of an openly smiling mouth along with this revelation (Appendix D2.43). Thus, the influencers post a "stripped-down" version of themselves with all their insecurities that is at odds with their exemplary and glamorous social media version, which is a strategy of evoking authenticity (Abidin, 2018, p. 5).

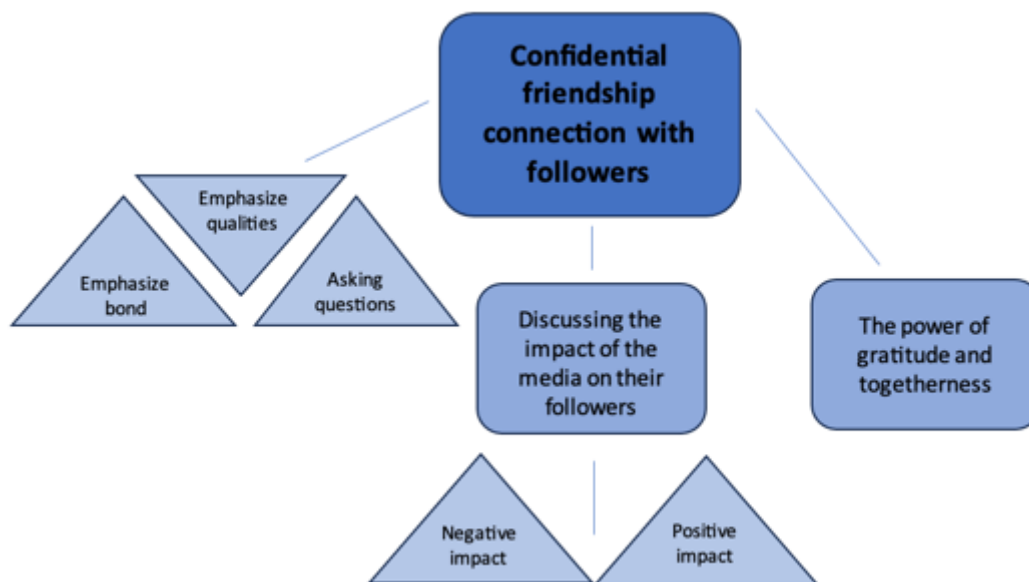
#### 4.1.2.2.1. The power of honesty

A notable aspect of this subtheme is that influencers often explicitly state their intention to be honest about their feelings. Vera says "[I am honest and open, maybe sometimes a little too honest and open. But I wouldn't have it any other way]" (Appendix D4.10). They often begin discussing sensitive topics by expressing a desire for greater openness on social media, starting with phrases like "I'm gonna be very honest....". Moreover, Vivian says candidly "it has been something that I haven't been really open about" and Vera says "[I'm open about that. I'm not ashamed and I want to tell everything about it]" (Appendices D1.22 & D4.24). As opposed to a desired version of themselves, they share parts of themselves that many people would rather keep secret because of social norms. When influencers repeatedly emphasize that they are honest and do not allow themselves to be changed by external influences, it is easier for followers to feel that they are their 'true' selves. This has a lot of similarities with theories about realness and the true self (Hopwood et al., 2021, p. 3; Schlegel et al., 2011, p. 745).

#### 4.1.3. Confidential friendship connection with followers

The third theme shows how all four influencers have created online friendships with their followers in the form of a confidential support system, where they can share different issues with each other. This is according to the theory of Jacobs et al. (2017), which shows 'support communities' are being created on social media because people want to open up about mental health, which can reduce the stigma (pp. 8-10). Above all, it is according to

Reade's theory (2021), because the 'practice of real talk' with followers is a strategy for influencers to come across as authentic online (pp. 541-550). In the influencers' posts, they often address their followers directly, updating them on their lives, creating conversations about mental health and discussing the impact of these stories on mental well-being. The influencers do this in several ways. First, they emphasize their friendship bond allowing them to give advice. Second, they often emphasize the qualities of their followers by saying they are proud of them. Third, they address their followers in the form of asking questions and sharing affirmations. This theme encompasses all these practices of creating a friendly support system and two subthemes that first, deal with the impact of the media on the mental health of their followers, both negative and positive, and second, deal with the power of gratitude and togetherness, illustrated in Figure 11.



*Figure 11 - Thematic map of 3<sup>rd</sup> theme 'Confidential friendship connection with followers'*

First of all, the influencers highlight the bond of friendship they have with their followers. Vera emphasizes that she often assumes her followers know more than they can, because she considers them as her friends. She says "[My pitfall is that I unconsciously assume that you know as much about me as I do]" (Appendix D4.24). This close friendship bond makes it easier for influencers to give credible advice. For example, Vivian says "A lot of you are going through this and asked me for advice" (Appendix D1.44). She offers her help after just sharing her painful breakup story and how much panic she got from this. Joan tries to normalize having feelings by telling her followers "but don't be afraid to go through these feelings, those feelings don't make you strange or weird, they make you human" (Appendix

D3.17). She emphasizes normalizing bad days and advises her followers to embrace their feelings rather than fear them. Because of her popularity and experience she can have a larger influence on her followers and add more believability to her advice (Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220).

Second, the influencers emphasize the qualities of their followers. They often tell them “I’m proud of you” and affirming they are doing their best, thereby addressing their followers directly. For example, Rianne says “YOU ARE ALREADY DOING PRETTY DAMN GREAT 🧘❤️❤️❤️❤️” (Appendix D2.2). Furthermore, Joan says “i am SO proud of you trying every day to make the best of it” and Vera says “[I believe that you can do it ❤️]” (Appendices D3.34 & D4.14). The influencers thus create a confident bond in which they step into the role of a friend, expressing their love to their followers by often explicitly saying “i love you 💕”. By sharing their experiences with their followers, as mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, influencers both receive support from their followers and create support for their followers, building a intimate support system (Andalibi et al., 2017, pp. 1485-1487; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016, pp. 349-350).



*Figure 12 - Caption Joan support community (Appendix D3.17)*

Third, the influencers frequently end their posts with questions to engage their followers in conversations. For example, Vivian asks the question “How do you feel lately my love?” and Vera often asks weekly questions on various topics, allowing followers to share their lives with her, such as the question “[What will you do outside your comfort zone this week?]” (Appendices D1.36 & D4.16). This creates a sense of belonging and social contact throughout the day (Andalibi et al., 2017, pp. 1487-1488). What the influencers also engage

in is sharing affirmations they use to encourage their followers to repeat them. Joan says “everything that’s meant for me will ALWAYS find me” (Appendix D3.39). Rianne also wants to remind her followers of their abilities and wants them to copy her by reading her caption: “I am woman I am fearless I am sexy I’m divine ❤️❤️❤️” (Appendix D2.9). This caption is accompanied by a number of selfies that, from a standard perspective, are anything but sexy. These reminders ensure that their followers gain confidence, feel heard and start or end a day on a hopeful note.

This friendship bond is made possible by the characteristics of Instagram as social media entertainment, namely the interactivity and the community of users that is created (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, p. 72). Cunningham & Craig (2017) argue that social media entertainment appeals to authenticity in a commercializing space because a sense of authenticity is necessary to create credibility within a community of followers (p. 72). In other words, in order to build friendships and engage followers who keep coming back, a level of digital intimacy must be built (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016, pp. 349-350). According to Ohanian's Source Credibility Scale (1990) this degree of credibility is measured using three elements: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise (pp. 43-48). Thus, as the popular influencers connect with their followers by sharing intimate and honest stories together of issues that they have experienced themselves, making them an experienced expert in that field, this makes them credible.

#### 4.1.3.1. Discussing the impact of media on their followers

A subtheme within this friendship connection theme is that the influencers initiate conversations with their followers about the impact of constant social media presence and being online 24/7 on mental health. They do not only talk about different mental issues, but they also reflect on how their stories and social media practices impact the mental health of their followers. They discuss both the negative impact, which may be more obvious in the light of mental health research, and the positive impact.

All four influencers talk about how seeing perfect pictures and distorted realities on Instagram negatively affect mental health. Joan shares the following with her followers: “Social media feels fake. We are constantly portraying a world where everyone is successful and happy, but that is so far away from the truth and it makes so many people feel like sh1t

every day” (Appendix D3.34). Vera emphasizes “[that striving for perfection makes people unhappy]” (Appendix D4.25). In particular, the influencers discuss the constant comparison culture that prevails on social media, by often saying “It’s easy to get lost in comparison on social media” (Appendix D3.9). This affects young women in particular who want to measure up to popular influencers, often resulting in low self-esteem and eating disorders (Piccoli et al., 2021, pp. 729-731). The constant comparison is deeply rooted in the use of Instagram, as it is built entirely on posting a perfect picture to promote yourself (Fisher, 2020, pp. 93-95). People are driven by constant validation, and getting likes and comments on a ‘perfect’ picture ensures that this keeps repeating itself (Taylor, 2022, p. 6). Joan counters this by saying “but 1 picture can’t define you. 1 picture can never capture your true beauty. We don’t need to fit into that “perfect” image society painted for us” (Appendix D3.21). The influencers show their followers that Instagram is not reality and say “All the “perfect” pictures you see on Instagram and compare yourself with: they’re not real” (Appendix D3.17). They do this by showing more ‘real’ images themselves (in all the preceding examples), but also by consciously exposing everything that is fake by saying “... social media is not the real world” (Appendix D3.9).

Oppositely, the influencers also demonstrate the positive impact of social media on their followers. Vera mentions that because of social media, there is “[... so much choice, an endless stream of information and inspiration]” (Appendix D4.27). Moreover, they emphasize that many people on social media seek recognition, and the fact that influencers can serve as inspirations to their followers, evoking positive behavior, is a beneficial effect. The influencers also highlight the positive effect of a support system created by social media. Rianne states: “The way social media connects us is so cool to me. The way we get to see people from all over the world be creative, be vulnerable, be funny. And the way we can support each other, share our stories and make others feel less alone” (Appendix D2.49). Social media has made it a lot more accessible to talk about mental health, and the fact that people now have easier access to information and can share their feelings with equivalents, is positive (Betton et al., 2015, p. 443; Jacobs et al., 2017, pp. 8-10).

#### 4.1.3.2. Power of gratitude and togetherness

Another notable subtheme within this friendship theme is that the influencers often express gratitude and emphasize togetherness. Rianne says “... and I want to thank you for

sticking around here laugh and cry with me from time to time haha. I see you ❤️❤️❤️”

(Appendix D2.49). Furthermore, Joan says “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA I DONT KNOW WHAT TO SAY I FEEL SO GRATEFUL!!!!!!” (Appendix D3.5). The influencers express gratitude to their followers and friends for their ongoing support, often literally saying “thanks”. This demonstrates that they value and appreciate this connection. It also gives a positive boost to the negatively loaded stories about their mental health. In fact, Reade's (2021) research revealed that followers do not like negativity on Instagram, even if it is ‘real’ (p. 549). These influencers appear to grasp this concept, perhaps subconsciously, as they refrain from dwelling on negativity. Instead, they uplift their followers by transforming negative thoughts into expressions of gratitude. Addressing their challenges and being grateful for the opportunity to entrust them to followers, comes across as sincere.

In addition to expressing gratitude, they also emphasize a sense of belonging and togetherness. The influencers frequently reassure their followers with “you are not alone” and they emphasize that they go through hard times together, often using inclusive language like “we”. Vivian says “you are not alone, honey. I feel you” (Appendix D1.22). Moreover, Joan says “EVERYONE STRUGGLES. everyone goes through shit and has bad days” and “We got this and we gotta remember that we’re NEVER alone. We always have each other ❤️👥” (Appendices D3.17 & D3.34). Furthermore, Vivian says “We are doing this together” and Vera says “[That I'm there, that we're there. To help, to listen and to talk]” (Appendices D1.44 & D4.36). In this way, followers can feel heard and have the feeling they are not alone during the process of healing. Thus, a supportive community is created where followers can seek help safely and potentially reduce the shame or stigma associated with mental health issues by realizing they are not alone (Jacobs et al., 2017, pp. 8-10).

## **5. Conclusion**

This study was designed to see how authentic Dutch influencers truly are when they open up about mental health issues on Instagram. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the large data set and three distinct themes were identified to address the main question. The conclusion revisits and answers the three sub-questions in the first three paragraphs. After this, the research question is answered in paragraph four. The conclusion is closed with a reflection, the possible study's limitations and directions for future research.

### **5.1. What is online authenticity on Instagram?**

The theoretical framework has already answered the first sub-question of what online authenticity on Instagram is, from a theoretical point of view. Although authenticity remains a dynamic construct, for which there is no one-sided definition, most scholars agree that it relates to the connection between the internal and the external state. Online authenticity is precisely about bridging the gap between these two states; how are internal beliefs, the 'true' self, shaped in the external, online world? In general, online authenticity on Instagram is a performative action, as influencers make certain conscious choices to appear 'real' online (Reade, 2021, pp. 537-538; Taylor, 2022, pp. 10-14). Whether an influencers' action is perceived as authentic depends heavily on the interaction with followers (Kapitan et al., 2022, pp. 342-344; Leigh et al., 2006, pp. 490-491). This is due to the key aspects of Instagram as social media entertainment, which are interactivity and a strong community of users (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, p. 72). Most importantly, online authenticity is primarily a strategic choice for an influencer to construct a desired online persona and establish intimate connections with their followers (Abidin, 2018, p. 3; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016, pp. 349-350; Van Driel & Dumitrica, 2021, pp. 79-81). The three themes identified in this research illustrate how influencers use their authenticity to discuss mental health, thereby concretely defining the concept online authenticity, as reflected in the third paragraph of this conclusion.

### **5.2. What and why do influencers post about mental health issues on Instagram?**

The analysis revealed that influencers openly share their personal mental health experiences on Instagram, allowing them to discuss effective coping strategies. Therefore, they act as online experienced therapists and hereby, can enhance mental health literacy



among followers (Fullagar et al., 2017, p. 4; Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220). By sharing their mental health stories, influencers aim to highlight the importance of open discussion about mental health and raise awareness. Their explicit and implicit messages combat stigma and foster an online support community which hopefully lowers the barrier for seeking help (Jacobs et al., 2017, pp. 8-10).

It is notable how influencers discuss mental health, often implicitly. Surprisingly, they rarely address severe mental health disorders *explicitly*. There are a few informative posts that deal with more clinical mental health problems, such as suicide, depression and anxiety disorders. However, most posts focus on milder mental health issues such as insecurities, the need to love yourself, a negative body image or dealing with mental breakdowns. These problems are linked to the pressures of conforming to an idealized online image and thus have to do with social media as the cause of mental problems. After all, the pressure of constantly wanting to conform to the perfect picture can negatively impact mental health, leading to low self-esteem, loneliness or eating and anxiety disorders (McCrory et al., 2022, p. 168; Naslund et al., 2020, pp. 245-246). However, despite their milder nature, these issues are significant. In the context of the few more intense posts, these milder posts can also gain more relevance and depth. Furthermore, their widespread discussion can lend greater visibility to the more severe mental health stories. Some posts in the data set mention mental health very implicitly, making the message unclear at first glance. The methods section explains why these posts were included, considering the influencers' context. Despite their subtlety, all posts were relevant to mental health, highlighting the influencers' efforts to raise awareness.

### **5.3. How do influencers make use of their authenticity to talk about mental health?**

The analysis revealed that three authenticity strategies were used by the influencers when talking about mental health. These are the three themes found by asking *how* influencers express themselves about mental health. All three of these themes can be linked most closely to one of Lee and Eastin's (2021) three defined authenticity dimensions: sincerity, visibility and expertise (pp. 825-831). Although they are not excludable and all dimensions are in a way applicable to the strategies, there is one dimension that most fits one strategy. These dimensions show in what ways online authenticity is used and evoked by influencers when they open up about mental health.

### 5.3.1. *The first strategy*

The first authenticity strategy is *Embracing the ordinary* and shows how influencers portray their bodies as normal as possible which evokes a feeling of authenticity. The subthemes and examples in the results section have shown the methods used by influencers to embrace their 'real' bodies by challenging current beauty ideals. In our culture, there is much emphasis on the importance of beauty, the eternal struggle to be thin, and the time and effort people put into perfecting their bodies (Calogero et al., 2007, pp. 262-269). By challenging these picture perfect and social norms in various ways, the influencers show that they are 'real' and do not participate in the constant drive for beauty. This strategy is most closely related to Lee and Eastin's visibility dimension. The influencers talk about their bodily flaws and actually show them, as an open back entrance to their backstage world (Abidin, 2018, p. 5). The result is that it reinforces the weight of their personal stories and makes their narratives more believable, which ensures that they appear more authentic (Lee & Eastin, 2021, pp. 825-826). Furthermore, the influencers are not afraid to show real emotion in photos. The most obvious example are the crying selfies. Waterloo (2018) examined the normative patterns of online social self-expression and it appears that posting negative emotions is less accepted than sharing positive emotions on Instagram (pp. 1821-1824). A major motive for using Instagram is gaining popularity and, therefore, it contains mostly visual self-promotion (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016, pp. 94-95). Content that might therefore portray the self in a negative light, and that could possibly hurt popularity, is less accepted. However, on the contrary, these influencers not only post about the good in their life, but also about the hardships, illustrated by ugly, crying or drunk selfies. This can be seen as a signature visibility dimension that makes an influencer seem more authentic (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 830). Moreover, the influencers humorously denounce the prevailing beauty ideal through memes, picture comparison and the use of obvious filters. Page (2019) argues that "these images are interpreted by journalists as a celebration of authenticity", because they are so deliberately in opposition to the perfect picture (p. 6). All these methods ensure that influencers' real-life flaws are shown and followers actually get a glimpse of their 'real' selves, making influencers appear authentic.

### 5.3.2. *The second strategy*

The second authenticity strategy is *Letting down the media mask* and shows how influencers drop their masks and share vulnerable experiences and emotions which evokes a feeling of authenticity. The two subthemes and the examples in the results section have shown how they talk about their own experiences as honestly as possible. This strategy is most closely related to Lee and Eastin's expertise dimension. The information about mental health stories might come across as much more credible, because the influencers are experienced, have overcome mental issues themselves and reveal a lot of their personal knowledge to their followers (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 826). A clear example is influencers addressing their younger selves. Their past experiences with mental issues have shaped the influencers in the past, allowing them to give credible and effortless advice. This is opposite to discussing unfamiliar topics. This combination of personal experience and factual knowledge qualifies them as experienced therapists (Fullagar et al., 2017, p. 4; Lind & Wickström, 2024, pp. 218-220). In addition, the power of honesty also draws followers into a sense of authenticity because the influencers literally appoint that they will open up about mental health in all honesty. By saying this so often and explicitly, it shows a natural ability in expressing their mental health struggles (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 830). All these methods ensure that the 'real' emotions of the influencers are revealed and followers can benefit from their lived knowledge, making influencers appear authentic.

### 5.3.3. *The third strategy*

The third authenticity strategy is *Confidential friendship connection with followers* and shows how influencers have created friendships with their followers that provides a sincere support system which evokes a feeling of authenticity. The subthemes and examples in the results section have shown the methods used by influencers to create a genuine friendship bond. This strategy is most closely related to Lee and Eastin's sincerity dimension. As the influencers update their followers about their lives, engage in conversations, give advice and express their love and pride towards their followers, this makes the influencers appear kind and sincere, which creates digital intimacy (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016, pp. 349-350; Lee & Eastin, 2021, pp. 825-826). Furthermore, Lee and Eastin (2021) describe sincerity with the factor "is down to earth", and this is reflected in expressing gratitude, as influencers show that they are not elevated by their fame, but keep both feet on the ground

(p. 830). An important subtheme is that influencers use their friendship to educate their followers about the impact their social media can have on followers' mental health. Instagram is a highly visual social media platform and the inherent factors of such a platform have effect on the mental health of users, such as "longer-lasting feelings of jealousy, inferiority and pressure to be accepted," but Instagram has also been associated with anxiety and depression (McCrory et al., 2022, pp. 167-168). McCrory et al. (2022) stress that experiencing a distorted reality and illusions of perfect lives on Instagram has far-reaching consequences for users (pp. 168-170). Extensive research underscores the negative influence of social media on body image, with many young people comparing themselves unfavorably to idealized bodies seen online (Panjra, 2021, pp. 376-378). These social norms perpetuated on Instagram often lead individuals to feel dissatisfied with their own bodies, reinforcing a drive for thinness and contributing to anxiety and eating disorders (Panjra, 2021, p. 376; Piccoli, 2021, pp. 733-735). Since the influencers themselves share how miserable social media can sometimes make them feel, this advice about the negative impact of social media, comes across a lot more credible and sincere, making influencers appear authentic.

#### **5.4. How authentic are Dutch influencers in their attempts to open up about mental health issues on Instagram?**

The above three strategies can all be clearly linked to one of the dimensions by which authenticity has been operationalized in this study. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that influencers deploy authenticity by embracing the body in all its ordinality, letting down the media mask through talking openly about emotions and creating a sincere friendship bond with followers. Thus, with these strategies, influencers create a certain level of authenticity with which they can strengthen the credibility of their mental health message. These messages, which can have a positive impact on users by sharing reliable help and information, are much needed. Mackson et al. (2019) researched that Instagram can generally have a positive relationship with psychological well-being unless the content evokes an urge to compare (pp. 2160-2177). However, this has been avoided as far as possible by the influencers by showing the 'reality' and embracing both the good and the bad sides of life. In addition, Lindgren and Johansson (2023) recently studied that talking about mental health and responding to this type of content on Instagram can have a positive

effect on users, as it can reinforce a positive coping mechanism (pp. 275-283). Social media can be a positive place to raise mental health information and offer help, provided the information is handled carefully and the content is portrayed as authentically as possible. Thus, with these strategies to make the content authentic, influencers can have a positive impact on mental health content and on followers who may need this content.

#### *5.4.1. Raising and refuting authenticity doubts*

Now the real question of this research remains how authentic influencers then *truly* are or remain if some of the doubts that appear in the analysis will be highlighted. First, posting on social media remains a conscious strategy, with influencers diligently considering their content before sharing. The concept of online authenticity is, therefore, inherently defined as a calculated method of online self-presentation (Reade, 2021, pp. 537-538; Taylor, 2022, pp. 10-14). This study's findings, referred to as authenticity strategies, reflect this deliberate nature. Influencers have the ability to consciously edit and refine their photos or texts repeatedly until they achieve the desired effect, often making the final content appear unaltered. For instance, influencers typically avoid posting unflattering selfies on their main feed. In a carousel post containing multiple images, they strategically place the most aesthetically pleasing image first, followed by others (Appendix D1.13). Consequently, at first glance, their profile projects an idealized image. This practice underscores the notion that online authenticity is a carefully organized practice, aligning with the theoretical framework of online authenticity.

Second, a notable aspect within the analysis is that the influencers place a lot of emphasis on the sensuality of the body. They often describe their own bodies as sexy, muse or goddess or post a photo with the caption "spice it up". Moreover, many photos are professionally taken and are nude, in lingerie or bikini. Furthermore, there is a lot of emphasis on the breasts, the bottom and curves. They also use lightning, in the form of shading, to emphasize their bodies, often adopting sexy and provocative poses towards the camera (Appendix D3.25). Many of the influencers' photos seem to almost achieve a 'perfect' appearance again due to these factors, and since they serve as inspirations for many, followers emulate this perception (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). Paradoxically, then, the influencers create yet another ideal beauty image of what a woman should look like.

Third, it is noteworthy that the data set includes many collaborations with commercial brands even though it is about mental health. For example, the brand Hunkemöller with the #rockyourcurves advertisement or the brand Dove with the Self Esteem project return several times. The influencers post stories about their insecurities and selfie compilations about their 'real' emotions in collaboration with Dove's latest shower gel (Appendix D1.33). This does not necessarily make their posts less informative, but the post can drop in credibility about mental health, because it reveals that the story is shared for marketing and entertainment purposes and, in the end, ensures more money and attention for both the brand and the influencer. Through the eyes of the brand this can be seen as credible and successful marketing, as the popular influencers ensure that a positive connotation is given to their brand (Lou et al., 2019, pp. 176-180). Looking at it from another perspective, if you examine how a brand impacts an influencers' personal story, it can backfire. When a personal story is driven by commercial interests, it emphasizes that the message is being commodified, causing that it can seem less personal and therefore less 'real' (Abidin, 2018, pp. 2-4).

In conclusion, it is essential to recognize that online authenticity always involves a conscious choice, resulting in an inherent gap between one's internal and external states, which is central to the essence of authenticity (Hopwood et al., 2021, p. 3; Varga, 2012, p. 7; Wood et al., 2008, p. 386). Even though influencers can strategically use online authenticity to narrow this gap as much as possible. Furthermore, the commercial nature of social media influencers' profession must always be considered. This prompts the question of how 'real' online content can be and to what extent influencers can portray authenticity on Instagram. Specifically, this casts doubts on the underlying reasons influencers posts about mental health, which is the *why-question* from this research. The entertainment aspect of influencers and Instagram reveals potential double standards. Although Instagram influencers may appear 'real', they always post content deliberately for greater reach, personal or social attention and/or commercial purposes. Are these double standards inherently problematic? If influencers continue to prioritize the social cause, these double standards may not be detrimental. From this analysis, it appears that by deploying the three strategies, influencers can achieve a level of authenticity that allows them to credibly highlight important mental health issues. These authenticity tools enable influencers to

maintain a reliable support system for their followers and provide the accessible and affordable help that the world urgently needs right now.

### **5.5. Academic and societal relevance**

The findings of this research carry both academic and societal implications. They contribute to the academic discourse on authenticity, addressing a noted gap in understanding how social media creators employ authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020, p. 559). By identifying observable authenticity features on Instagram, this study filled part of this gap and provided insights into the strategies influencers use to convey credible messages about mental health. The theoretical exploration of online authenticity is complemented by the authenticity strategies found. Moreover, this research contributed to theoretical frameworks that analyze the complexities of online identity and authentic self-presentation (Slater, 2002, pp. 537-540; Taylor, 2022, pp. 1-4). Understanding these dynamics can establish standards that foster a healthier online ecosystem. Socially, the study's findings inform the development of guidelines promoting authenticity and reliability in online content. This addresses a growing societal need for trustworthy mental health information in an increasingly digital world (Fullagar et al., 2017, p. 3; Moorhead et al., 2013, p. 8; O'Reilly et al., 2018, pp. 658-660). In essence, this research enriched academic understanding of authenticity while revealing practical strategies that can support a more positive and informed online mental health community.

### **5.6. Limitations and further research**

It is important to note that this research, while significant and far-reaching, also has its limitations. First, only four influencers were studied. Although these were chosen very carefully using purposive sampling, it may limit the results of the study. However, Yin (2009) argues about case studies that "the operations of the study can be repeated with the same results" (p. 33). After all, many influencers operate in similar ways, so focusing on four influencers was appropriate for the aim of this particular research and serves as a starting point to understand how other influencers also discuss mental health. Furthermore, the study can be repeated on other social media. Second, the biggest obstacle was overcoming the subjectivity with which authenticity is so intertwined. This has been resolved and explained as clearly as possible in this study by treating authenticity as a multidimensional

concept, combining objective and observable characteristics with subjective and less observable characteristics in the authenticity scale (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 835). Moreover, visual and textual indicators of authenticity were clearly explored. However, dealing with the subjective belief remains inherent in measuring authenticity, so the influence of the researcher's personal perception, gender and age on the results is unavoidable and represents a potential limitation of the study.

For future research, it would be valuable to analyze whether the authenticity strategies identified in this study are applicable to other areas of social media beyond mental health content. For instance, examining if artists use similar strategies to engage their audiences on social media could provide insightful comparisons. In addition, it is relevant to look at newer social media channels, such as TikTok. Thus, discovering whether these strategies are also generic strategies is a nice pursuit for follow-up research. Moreover, investigating authenticity from the recipients' perspective would also enhance understanding. Conducting in-depth interviews and surveys with followers to see if they perceive mental health influencers as authentic would be a significant addition to authenticity research. Furthermore, examining videos on Instagram, which were excluded from this study, could address a growing area of interest given the rise of Reels and Stories. Finally, focusing on the examination of authentic content itself, rather than its effects, could help develop reliable and objective scales for analyzing online authenticity. This research could serve as a foundation for such studies, filling a notable gap in the current literature.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Coding table

Nr.	(Sub)Themes	Coding examples per influencer	Examples of subcodes and image features
1	<b>Opening up about Mental Health</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[My self love and mental health are the most important in life. It is time for an even stronger and healthier version of myself. The focus is on me]"</li> <li>- "[This figure hurts, knowing that a whole new generation is growing up with different platforms]"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I realized how many women I know experienced something like this as well"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[GGZ waiting lists are not getting any shorter]"</li> <li>- "[the depressed youngsters, after two years of pandemic, are far from helped]"</li> <li>- "[Because this subject deserves all attention]"</li> <li>- "[Mental health is just as important as physical health]"</li> <li>- "[We are 🌟mentally ill 🌟 or in other words, mentally unhealthy]"</li> <li>- "[And above all, keep talking and listening with and to each other]"</li> <li>- "[If I had grown up with social media ... I would have realized earlier what was going on with my mental health]"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mental health importance</li> <li>- Mental health figures</li> <li>- Protecting mental health</li> <li>- Social media impact on information sharing</li> </ul>
2	<b>Experiences with mental health issues</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "been struggling for years with depression."</li> <li>- "also I didn't understand my mental state, and I still don't"</li> <li>- "[A series focusing on depression and is very recognizable to me]"</li> <li>- "[I've seen really dark days]"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Depression</li> <li>- Low self-esteem</li> <li>- Panic attacks</li> <li>- Not understanding mental state</li> <li>- Own recognition of mental state</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[My mental health has always been put to the test]"</li> <li>- "I'm still in the process to love myself unconditionally"</li> <li>- "A feeling of panic started the moment I left the plane"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiencing dark days</li> </ul>
		<b>Rianne</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I had some thoughts about health anxiety 💖 This is something I struggle with, some days more than others."</li> <li>- "I find it hard to trust my body sometimes, to trust it to be healthy."</li> <li>- "The anxiety feels like it's weighing me down sometimes. And the anxiety itself is like living through fear of things that aren't even happening."</li> <li>- "Like a self-sabotage of happiness"</li> <li>- "This weekend I had a miscarriage after being pregnant for 6 weeks."</li> <li>- "honestly can't believe it has been a year since my first miscarriage"</li> <li>- "but freaking out and having absolutely no clue what I should be doing"</li> <li>- "and some minor mental breakdowns"</li> <li>- "My body is working for me 24/7 not against me"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (Health) Anxiety</li> <li>- Panic attacks</li> <li>- Mental breakdowns</li> <li>- Trauma after miscarriage</li> <li>- Having no body trust</li> <li>- Self-sabotaging</li> </ul>
		<b>Joan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I've lost myself this year"</li> <li>- "I was lonely"</li> <li>- "I have been struggling a little lately. I feel lonely. I feel sad. I feel lost"</li> <li>- "Life feels overwhelming"</li> <li>- "If your biggest achievement was just staying alive"</li> <li>- "'you don't have a nice body' is a comment I got."</li> <li>- "feeling lost, confused or just sad"</li> <li>- "the reason i missed a lot of fun things in my life"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low self-esteem</li> <li>- Loneliness</li> <li>- Severe body insecurities</li> <li>- Experiencing dark days</li> <li>- Feeling of just staying alive</li> </ul>
		<b>Vera</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Depression</li> <li>- Anxiety</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[I have been struggling with my mental health all my life. With generalized anxiety disorder, peaking disorder, burnout and depression]"</li> <li>- "[But I know very well about myself that I am depressed and that I have a parent who has been taking the same medication in a lower dosage for decades now. Depression - like anxiety disorders - runs in my family]"</li> <li>- "[In my signalization plan remind myself that fears are unreal]"</li> <li>- "[Depression and anxiety can be tremendously crippling]"</li> <li>- "[that I feel bad and lie in bed almost all day]"</li> <li>- "[Occasionally I find that challenging and find that I can move along just a little slower]"</li> <li>- "[Being open about my burnout was a relief]"</li> <li>- "[She talks very candidly about how she fell into a deep depression]"</li> <li>- "[my first plan that I made at the crisis service in 2020]"</li> <li>- "[Fortunately, I received tremendous help at crisis service Amsterdam Center at the time]"</li> <li>- "[because three years ago I experienced a violent low]"</li> <li>- "[other days I still feel like a barren branch, but with patience and few expectations, I manage to pull myself together to do something]"</li> <li>- "[When I came home from crisis services...]"</li> <li>- "[I am not feeling it for a while today and this week]"</li> <li>- "[The last few weeks I've been noticing it again. I am gloomy and get off to a bad start]"</li> <li>- "[And fleeing seems easy, but it is not. Once you have fled, finding your way back is something you cannot do alone. Even though you want to so badly]"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Burn out</li> <li>- Peaking disorder</li> <li>- Suicidal thoughts</li> <li>- Experiencing crisis services</li> <li>- Paralyzing effect of bad mental state</li> <li>- Hard to talk about mental health</li> <li>- Hard to keep up with life</li> </ul>
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		- "[But you can handle it, all the discomfort, all the sadness and shame]"	
3	<b>Creating awareness</b>	<b>Vivian</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "It's getting a lot better and I finally feel like i'm accepting this part of me"</li> <li>- "But that's also why I need to speak up about it. Because we have to talk about our mental health and not be ashamed"</li> <li>- "I will open up about it step by step"</li> <li>- "To hopefully help anyone who needs it"</li> <li>- "Sharing some of the things that really helped me during this journey"</li> <li>- "[Calming myself with some music and breathing exercises]"</li> <li>- "Hope it can help you as much as it did me"</li> <li>- "Let's continue the conversation"</li> <li>- "[Hearing 'it will be all right' is something I heard a lot but never believed]"</li> <li>- "[to raise awareness about this]"</li> <li>- "[protecting the mental health of young people]"</li> <li>- "[set up a nice self-esteem project so that hopefully together we can protect the new generation and ourselves from outside influences]"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (Self) Help</li> <li>- Therapy</li> <li>- Acceptance</li> <li>- Protect mental health</li> <li>- Speak up</li> </ul>
		<b>Rianne</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "So here's to the process 🙏"</li> <li>- "And all my anxiety went away and it lost all it's meaning. I have no idea how long this is gonna last hahah"</li> <li>- "and this is still a subject that isn't really talked about. Let's talk about it more."</li> <li>- "After talking to my family about it"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Process of healing</li> <li>- Talk about it</li> <li>- Speak up</li> </ul>
		<b>Joan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Maybe that's where the healings begins"</li> <li>- "but I learned so much from this experience and I have grown a lot as a human being"</li> <li>- "❤️ ALLOW YOURSELF TO CHANGE"</li> <li>- "Her advocacy will concentrate on raising awareness and support for survivors who are</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (Professional) Support</li> <li>- Process of healing</li> <li>- Lessons learned</li> </ul>

		dealing with trauma, abuse, or struggles with low self-esteem''	
		<b>Vera</b> - "[any reason to get more attention to mental health I will grab]" - "[Still a long way to go]" - "[My therapy never begins with the question 'how are you? ' or 'everything okay?' but 'how are you feeling today?']" - "[My depression is also teaching me now when I just want to cry and lie in bed for days on, it is actually tremendously good for me to do something]" - "[We wore out psychologists and psychiatrists and devoured therapies]" - "[I have been taking ad for two years next month]" - "[Together we are strong, because a voice can easily be ignored, but together we will sound ear-deafening]" - "[To get your life back, carry on and most of all just live it]" - "[Vera is committed to making vulnerable topics such as mental health, beauty, daring to speak out and self-acceptance discussable]" - "[I think it is very important to bring mental health out of the taboo sphere]" - "[And that's why I want to encourage you to have the conversation with your parents, child, friend or sibling]" - "[and want to urge you to keep talking ❤️ #IKHelpMee #WSPD]" - "[Today is World Suicide Prevention Day]" - "[That there are professionals who want to guide you]" - "[Topics that are sensitive, that can be hurtful or triggering]" - "[Should you also be taking antidepressants, I want to say to you that you are doing more than your best]"	- Professional help - Therapy - Self help - Use of medication - Giving depression advice - Getting life back - Prevention days - Mental health days - Not enough help - Gently address sensitive subjects - Breaking the taboo - Speak up

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[There the medication was prescribed]"</li> <li>- "[That a huge number of people take it, even though it is not talked about. There is a taboo on it, but you really don't have to "do without it]"</li> <li>- "[In conversation with a loved one, I heard him say that he couldn't handle talking for hours about the past and all that happened, during the mandatory intake at the clinic]"</li> <li>- "[Speaking about it is hard]"</li> <li>- "[He says he has to do it himself, I tell him that's right. But also that one cannot do it alone]"</li> <li>- "[I don't want to feel ashamed]"</li> </ul>	
4	<b>Embracing the ordinary</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Embracing the one you've already got"</li> <li>- "Life in selfies"</li> <li>- "It's time that we are all seen for our beautiful unique self"</li> <li>- "It's about time to be happy with who we are"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[I suddenly realized that beauty is just a concept and that beauty ideals have proven to be changeable over time]"</li> <li>- "ideals of beauty are constantly changing, but we shouldn't change our bodies with them"</li> <li>- "In this world it's hard to be authentic"</li> <li>- "💜 even though i've treated her poorly in the past, she's still here for me. i'm sorry for all the hurtful things i've said and done to my body. i'm so thankful that my body loved me and nourished me, even when i didn't love her back"</li> <li>- "She's my forever home and sanctuary"</li> <li>- "💜 she is unique! she is what makes me different from the other 7.8 billion people on this planet, YOU ARE SPECIAL!!! we are all special!"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (Mirror) Selfies</li> <li>- Beauty ideals</li> <li>- Love yourself</li> <li>- Be happy with your own body</li> <li>- Body is your sanctuary</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "i know it's a cliché to say, but we only have ONE body, why spend our entire lives at war with it?"</li> <li>- "and I decide that from now on, I will do my best to see the beauty in me just like I do in others"</li> <li>- "I appreciate the only body I have"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[You only have one body, one life to get the most out of]"</li> <li>- "[Love your body, and if that fails: accept that this shell is your home all your life and that you also deserve to enjoy all the experiences]"</li> </ul>	
4.1	Picturing the 'real' body	<p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "these pics were all taken within the same month and look how different my legs look in every picture"</li> <li>- "POV: you're more than just an image"</li> <li>- "for example: people tell me "don't show realness on social media, brands don't like that""</li> <li>- "and is it because WE don't like those things or is it because society taught us to not like those things about ourselves?"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[A photograph taken at a random moment, but one that continues to sway through your mind]"</li> <li>- "[A photograph is a snapshot. One second, then you're already in a different place]"</li> <li>- "[I felt like a lifesize fluorescent yellow marker, glow in the dark]"</li> <li>- "[Not slim, standard handsome and not smooth. I am just like you. I'm your neighbor, your sister or cousin. I'm the one I wanted to see on the cover, but never saw]"</li> <li>- "[Thick, thin, long, short, small, smooth, hairy, with scars, eczema, stretch marks, psoriasis, vitiligo or pimples. Thick bellies, flat bellies, bulging or muscular bellies. Soft</li> </ul>	<p><i>Specific images features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Naked body</li> <li>- No face, only body</li> <li>- Bikini or lingerie body</li> <li>- Emphasis on specific body parts</li> <li>- Bodily flaws</li> <li>- Normalizing the body</li> <li>- Denouncing social norms</li> <li>- All body types!</li> <li>- Just your 'average' woman</li> <li>- Impact of a photo</li> </ul>

		bellies or flabby bellies. Wobbly toes, lacquered or cut short. Bulging buttocks, flat buttocks, tight buttocks or dimpled buttocks. Sweaty armpits, badly applied sunscreen or burnt shoulders. Sometimes topless. Small breasts, large and uneven breasts. Light or dark nipples. Large nipples, flat nipples. Pimples or hairy nipples]”	
4.1.1	Showing real skin	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “My décolleté, shoulders, and back has been full with little bumps, irritation spots, rash and pimples.”</li> <li>- “Stretchmarks, pimples and body rolls = just a beautiful human body”</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “We first took a picture without any makeup and hairstyling”</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “look at the cellulite on my butt. There’s still a taboo around cellulite. We still think we need to have smooth legs in order to be beautiful, but it’s totally normal to have cellulite”</li> <li>- “here are pictures of my cellulite, my back rolls, my stretchmarks, my belly rolls, body hair, razor bumps, scars”</li> <li>- “cellulite is beautiful!! Scars are beautiful!! Stretchmarks are beautiful!!! Rolls are beautiful!!!”</li> <li>- “ celluLIT in the jungle 🌿🌿🌿”</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “[taking a while to get used to maybe, because we don’t see skin this way very often]”</li> <li>- “[not shaving your armpits or going to work without makeup for once]”</li> <li>- “[After all, I hadn’t shaved my armpits and I have all these ideas and rules about that anyway... Then I let go and put on the sleeveless dress]”</li> <li>- “[hence the makeup-less selfie]”</li> </ul>	<p><i>Specific image features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Close-up photos</li> <li>- Stretch marks</li> <li>- Acne</li> <li>- Skin texture; uneven skin, no make-up</li> <li>- Scars</li> <li>- Cellulite</li> <li>- Freckles</li> <li>- Skin irritation</li> <li>- Curves</li> <li>- Challenging the beauty ideal of a clear skin</li> <li>- Showing skin flaws and imperfections</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[On my face I have rosacea and on my whole body I have marble skin]"</li> <li>- "[I can't be a skinfluencer because I don't have flawless skin]"</li> <li>- "[I have "unconventional" skin. In a world where pimples always have to be camouflaged or brushed away]"</li> <li>- "[I have skin with redness, sensitivity, bumps and irritations]"</li> <li>- "[Ps: I never photoshop my pictures. These photos are photoshopped though and I pity that I was not asked for approval beforehand. The stretch marks, marble skin, pimples; I would have loved to have seen them. Just to normalize it. I also gave that back as feedback]"</li> </ul>	
4.1.2	<b>Body position</b>	<p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "the butt squeeze returns"</li> <li>- "Tried to leave without a buttsqueeze but couldn't 😂"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "It literally depends on how you're posing or what the lightning is like"</li> <li>- "BELLY ROLLS ARE HOT AF BYE 🤔"</li> </ul>	<p><i>Specific image features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curves/body rolls</li> <li>- Double chin</li> <li>- Emphasis on the buttocks</li> <li>- Butt squeeze</li> <li>- Emphasis on the belly area</li> <li>- Emphasis on the breasts</li> <li>- Impact of the pose and lightning of the photo</li> <li>- Normalizing the human body</li> </ul>
4.1.3	<b>Showing emotion</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I couldn't control my breath and tears"</li> <li>- "[so here are 8 selfies each with a different mood]"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I was crying most part of the morning"</li> <li>- "Feeling myself after 2 cocktails #drunkselfie"</li> </ul>	<p><i>Specific image features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crying face</li> <li>- Tears</li> <li>- Drunk gaze in a selfie</li> <li>- Eating selfies</li> </ul>

4.2	<b>Mocking Insta perfect life</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[What was I looking like, we laughed out loud. Sometimes you shouldn't take yourself too seriously either haha!]"</li> <li>- "The picture I put on my stories vs everything I send to my friends"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "During hairdresser vs after hairdresser 😊"</li> <li>- "Go take pics in the sun they said, it will be fun they said"</li> <li>- "Filter vs no filter, sun edition 😊"</li> <li>- "Before and after hair &amp; make-up at its finest today 😊"</li> <li>- "A little light and angle perspective for your monday evening"</li> <li>- "What people see vs what people don't see 🙄😊"</li> <li>- "to not take everything you see online too seriously ✨💖"</li> <li>- "this is a great example of photoshop 😊👍"</li> <li>- "And for everyone taking this too seriously. I'M JOKING"</li> <li>- "nobody looks like those Instagram models, even the models themselves"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "so here's me: a perfect picture vs the real me"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[Sometimes with a grain of salt though because I think it's important not to take everything so seriously]"</li> </ul>	<p><i>Specific image features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meme with text</li> <li>- Insta versus reality</li> <li>- Picture perspective</li> <li>- Effect of social media filter</li> <li>- Don't take yourself too seriously</li> <li>- Joking</li> <li>- Picture comparison</li> <li>- Using photoshop</li> </ul>
4.3	<b>Body-positivity content</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Self love is the best accessories"</li> <li>- "for me body confidence means that I'm spending less time obsessing over my body"</li> <li>- "For anyone who wants a little help towards self love"</li> <li>- "And to create more acceptance for the bigger sizes in general"</li> <li>- "Beauty is beyond size"</li> </ul>	<p><i>Specific image features:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasis on belly and curves</li> <li>- Sensual body posture</li> <li>- Shading</li> <li>- Sexy model face</li> <li>- Professional photographs</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Happy that i'm enjoying my body at it fullest these days"</li> <li>- "Im trying to accept"</li> <li>- "But I felt so confident wearing this"</li> <li>- "I am fearless, I am sexy, I am devine"</li> <li>- "be your own muse"</li> <li>- "[Did you know that 1 in 2 women is being bodyshamed?]"</li> <li>- "To achieve more diversity of models in the fashion industry"</li> <li>- "one ideal should not be at the expense of another"</li> <li>- "Let's fight together for more diversity in the fashion industry"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "with that beautiful body of yours 🥰💖"</li> <li>- "I'm so proud to be a plus size model in vogue. show the world that you can be proud of your body, no matter your size."</li> <li>- "we don't need to change our bodies my loves, there's nothing wrong with our bodies. there's something wrong with the way we look at our bodies. we need to change our mindset"</li> <li>- "No matter your size, age, shape, skincolor, disability, scars etc etc. it doesn't matter whether you're fat, skinny, curvy, mid size, flat, big, tall, short, WHATEVER, you deserve love and respect"</li> <li>- "this year i had to redefine what body positivity/confidence means to me "</li> <li>- "to help women of all sizes feel beautiful and comfortable in their own skin"</li> <li>- "so just stay true to yourself because your real beauty will shine from within, no matter your size, no matter the angle. 💖💖💖"</li> <li>- "Bc you're a GODDESS"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[because unfortunately there are still limits to what a fat woman's body can and may show on social media]"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bikini body</li> <li>- Model pose</li> <li>- Lingerie</li> <li>- Body rolls</li> <li>- Body size doesn't matter</li> <li>- Diversity in the media and fashion industry</li> <li>- Fat celebration</li> <li>- Body comfortability</li> <li>- Body confidence</li> <li>- Body acceptance</li> <li>- Sensuality of the body</li> <li>- Sexy</li> <li>- Divinity</li> <li>- Self love</li> <li>- Love yourself</li> <li>- Muse</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[Of all the people who attended. From black people, people of color, queer people and gay people]"</li> <li>- "[a celebration of fat people]"</li> <li>- "[What does it matter what you look like when you make memories?]"</li> <li>- "[Being allowed to be yourself unconditionally]"</li> <li>- "[Speaking of my body, you can call me curvy or plump, but I just call myself fat. Between the lines, I try to set a positive example as a fat person]"</li> <li>- "[Nobody cares what you look like, for you ten others. So hup, go enjoy yourself ❤️]"</li> </ul>	
5	Letting down the media mask	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[that I wouldn't be so likely to post on insta but want to share with you anyway]"</li> <li>- "The tears of sadness and fear started to flow into tears of joy"</li> <li>- "I'm still very scared to say this out loud"</li> <li>- "going through so many emotions lately"</li> <li>- "I'm feeling good these days but also tired and chaotic"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Lately I noticed I've been giving myself a hard time"</li> <li>- "[I post everything to comes to my mind]"</li> <li>- "Because keeping it in makes me more sad"</li> <li>- "You can't control things that are out of your control"</li> <li>- "I need to write because I am so scared, It's just so damn scary"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Your ability to feel is your strength"</li> <li>- "i have so much to say but i literally don't know how to fit it all in on caption lol!!"</li> <li>- "it's okay not to be okay sometimes &lt;3"</li> <li>- "just a few pictures of me going through the motions of life"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rollercoaster of emotions</li> <li>- Emotions out of control</li> <li>- Scary to share feelings</li> <li>- Dare to post</li> <li>- So much to say</li> <li>- Writing about emotions can help</li> <li>- Expressing dreams</li> </ul>

		<p>- "There's so much heartbreak and loss out there that sometimes caring about anything feels like a weakness"</p> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <p>- "[Last week I wrote this depressive poem... for writing, I don't always have the energy and fear of failure gets in the way]"</p> <p>- "[I always say that if you feel bad, that that feeling is just allowed to be there]"</p> <p>- "[But I don't share my dreams easily, because I actually find them ridiculous. Unattainable. Dreams that will forever remain dreams. This year, I decided to cautiously express my dreams anyway]"</p> <p>- "[your heart is pounding in your throat and you can't get your breathing under control]"</p> <p>- "[Yes, I still take 40 milligrams of Cita.lo.pr.am every morning. Today is my pillaversary! 🍬 3 years happy with my pram 🎉 I rarely talk about it anymore because I have been taking the same medication for years now. And I have no desire to reduce either.... Thank god for the medication...A heart patient is also not expected to "be able to do" without beta-blockers]"</p>	
5.1	The young self talking	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <p>- "when I was younger I already experienced it"</p> <p>- "15 years is the difference between these pictures"</p> <p>- "The things I wished my younger self would have known"</p> <p>- "14y old would have never believed this"</p> <p>- "the woman who planned her entire life is now living day by day"</p> <p>- "Trust that some of the best days of your life haven't even happened yet"</p> <p>- "I'm in love with my future, can't wait to meet her"</p> <p><b>Rianne</b></p>	<p>- Old photos as young girl</p> <p>- Comparison with younger self</p> <p>- Little girl's dream</p> <p>- Seemed impossible before</p> <p>- Reaction as young girl</p> <p>- Talking to younger or older self</p> <p>- Advice to young or old self</p> <p>- Future imagination</p> <p>- Growing up</p> <p>- Change</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I will absolutely show this to my grandkids one day"</li> <li>- "Ever since I was young I've looked in the mirror and thought to myself little things that make my body 'not finished yet'"</li> <li>- "Sending love to my scared self a couple of months ago ❤️"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "i think when i was younger my high expectations were never met compared to the movies"</li> <li>- "this is something i've been manifesting and dreaming of since i was a little girl."</li> <li>- "you will never be the same person you were a year ago, but not even a week ago: and that's okay."</li> <li>- "❤️ NEVER GIVE UP ON YOUR DREAMS"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[Someone asked me after the launch how I would have reacted as a teenage Vera if I told her where I am now...She had NEVER believed it, then. Never!]"</li> <li>- "[ 'Girl, prepare yourself. It's gonna be one hell of a ride'? 🤪]"</li> <li>- "[She could never have imagined that 6-year-old Vera would have a lot to look forward to, and that's for the best]"</li> <li>- "[13 years ago, and that I am now already 30]"</li> <li>- "[And omg: I HAVE BEEN BUSY FOR 14 YEARS 🙄]"</li> <li>- "[When I think about how bad I felt as a teenager, how intensely insecure I was. I found myself SO ugly. I thought my belly was huge, my skin way too red and pimply and omg: I have a double chin. It really makes me so sad now that I felt that way]"</li> <li>- "[What would you say to your younger self? ❤️]"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Body in progress</li> <li>- Teenage self</li> <li>- Teenager insecurities</li> <li>- Wanting to meet high expectations</li> </ul>
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5.2.1	<b>Voicing negative feelings</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "cause I was scared. Scared that people had an opinion about me. Scared that my feelings weren't real and I was just dramatic"</li> <li>- "Negative thoughts come way easier than positive ones"</li> <li>- "The last 15 years I lost myself and found myself back again"</li> <li>- "This pain, I forgot the intensity of it"</li> <li>- "[I had quite a down and stress moment]"</li> <li>- "[Remains difficult not to let these words hurt me]"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "And it's this fear that doesn't really serve me."</li> <li>- "Or almost like: I can't be that happy something must be wrong."</li> <li>- "It is terrifying, like something is wrong with me...I need to feel this fear head on"</li> <li>- "I can't think it away with positive thoughts. So much could go wrong"</li> <li>- "And there are no comfort words, no big life lessons, no positive"</li> <li>- "My biggest fear is living a life based on fear"</li> <li>- "That is continuous stress"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[I don't need to hate myself and I don't have to be thin]"</li> <li>- "I was paying too much attention to what others might think of me. So, I tried to fit into an image that wasn't me"</li> <li>- "💖 DO NOT LET OTHERS GET YOU DOWN."</li> <li>- "and believe me, the RIGHT people will accept you for who you are. and the ones who don't, well... f them!!!!"</li> <li>- "not all storms come to disrupt your life, some come to clear your path"</li> <li>- "Fighting the negativity and getting through the day"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dealing with negative thoughts</li> <li>- Negative self-talk</li> <li>- Self criticism</li> <li>- Feeling down and stressed</li> <li>- Dealing with negative comments</li> <li>- Criticism of followers</li> <li>- Pain intensity</li> <li>- Opinions of others</li> <li>- Fear/Feeling terrified</li> </ul>
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<b>5.2.2</b>	<b>Voicing insecurities</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I always been insecure about wearing sleeveless tops and skirts"</li> <li>- "me wearing skirts and even mini skirts was something I could never imagine"</li> <li>- "If I still have insecurities. The answer is yes. One of my biggest atm is my skin"</li> <li>- "[In my younger years I felt more 'ugly' than 'Vivian]"</li> <li>- "[It can make me so insecure]"</li> <li>- "[my perception of myself became less because I thought I looked 'prettier"]"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "It felt like I should be doing more .. but all I focus on is all the steps I'm not taking"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bodily insecurities</li> <li>- Feeling of not being good enough</li> <li>- Feeling ugly</li> <li>- Photo insecurities</li> <li>- Self hatred</li> <li>- Not comfortable in own body</li> </ul>



- "I never looked and felt: this is perfect just the way it is. Right now."

- "Where always this moment is never quite right, not good enough"

- "You might remember how I never smile with my teeth on pictures"

**Joan**

- "it made me feel very insecure and sad"

- "you always have this fear of not being good enough"

- "just didn't feel comfortable in my own body anymore"

- "and immediately feel the need to change something about themselves"

- "i know people hear these comments in their own lives, get so insecure"

- "and we immediately start feeling insecure about the way we look"

- "i used to HATE my legs...I've always had big legs. I hated it"

- "so no one would see ANYTHING of my upper legs + butt. the parts i was most insecure about"

- "I was so insecure about the cellulite on my legs because i knew nobody my age that had cellulite. i always thought i had "grandma legs"

- "Every insecurity included. Those things tell a story"

**Vera**

- "[Which leaves you asking yourself, "So is this what I really look like?" and never wanting to appear in a photo again]"

- "[Self-hatred is not motivating; it makes one insecure]"

- "[but on days when I am not comfortable in my skin, feel like a sausage roll, doubt everything, wish I could exist without a 'shell']"

- "[even though I get insecure from all the award shows and no nominations, missed

		<p>opportunities and no management helping me out]”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “[Such a photo can cause you to collapse from now on when a camera is pointed at you]”</li> <li>- “[I never belonged anywhere and was always left out. That made me extremely insecure]”</li> </ul>	
5.2.3	<b>The power of honesty</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I have to be honest”</li> <li>- “I will open about it step by step to hopefully help anyone who needs it”</li> <li>- “and it has been something that I haven’t been really open about”</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “to be very honest, when I first saw this picture...”</li> <li>- “I’m gonna be very honest...”</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “[I am honest and open, maybe sometimes a little too honest and open. But I wouldn’t have it any other way]”</li> <li>- “[And honestly? That really breaks my heart]”</li> <li>- “[I’m open about that. I’m not ashamed and I want to tell everything about it]”</li> <li>- “[I like to share my opinion and I am honest]”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being as open as possible</li> <li>- Staying true to sharing your own thoughts</li> <li>- Opinion sharing</li> </ul>
6	<b>Confidential friendship connection with followers</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Can’t wait to show you”</li> <li>- “Be your best friend and supporter”</li> <li>- “hi loves, I created a little love letter for you”</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “but just thought I’d update you guys”</li> <li>- “I didn’t want to wait sharing this ”</li> <li>- “Excited to be sharing this journey with you all! 🧡👩🏻”</li> <li>- “For the ones who have followed me for a long time”</li> <li>- “I wanted to send a big hug to everyone dealing with miscarriages”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support system</li> <li>- Talking to followers</li> <li>- Updating followers</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "And couldn't wait to share it with you"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I can't wait to share it all with you"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[This message is for you]"</li> </ul>	
6.1.1	<b>Emphasize bond and give advice</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "A lot of you are going through this and asked me for advice"</li> <li>- "But all tips are welcome to make my skin more calm and less irritated"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Big hugs ❤️❤️"</li> <li>- "Please be as sexy as you want to be haha ❤️"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "remember that next time someone tries to get you down. don't EVER let those mean comments get to you"</li> <li>- "I'm here to tell you, and show you, that you don't need to be perfect at all"</li> <li>- "but don't be afraid to go through these feelings, those feelings don't make you strange or weird, they make you human"</li> <li>- "You are an amazing &amp; emotional person who feels feelings. This can be annoying sometimes but it's also your secret power. Keep being human"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[My pitfall is that I unconsciously assume that you know as much about me as I do]"</li> <li>- "[I can recommend that to everyone]"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Followers = friends</li> <li>- Asking/giving advice</li> <li>- Feeling of safety</li> </ul>
6.1.2	<b>Emphasize qualities</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "You are unique and amazing"</li> <li>- "You've already come so far and overcome so many challenges"</li> <li>- "I might have been a bumpy ride at times, but you did it"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "YOU ARE ALREADY DOING PRETTY DAMN GREAT 🙌❤️❤️❤️❤️"</li> <li>- "You sexy human you"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You are doing great!</li> <li>- You are unique</li> <li>- Love for followers</li> <li>- I am proud of you</li> </ul>

		<p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "you deserve it. ❤️ happy EVERY day!"</li> <li>- "and I just wanted you to know that WHATEVER you did this year, i'm proud of you 🙏💕"</li> <li>- "and if you're reading this, and can relate to this, i just wanted to say that i am proud of you too. you made it. and 2023 is gonna be a beautiful year, for all of us. 💕"</li> <li>- "I'm proud of the progress you're making not matter how small"</li> <li>- "i am so proud of all the people reading this, wanting to grow and learn how to love themselves. it's so hard and it's a whole journey but YOU GOT THIS!!!"</li> <li>- "and if i can do this, you can definitely do this too"</li> <li>- "but if you are reading this and you are willing to take on that journey, i am so proud of you...i love you. 💕"</li> <li>- "keep spreading your light and love. i'm so proud of you"</li> <li>- "i am SO proud of you trying every day to make the best of it"</li> <li>- "I am SO proud of the person you are, but also the person you are becoming"</li> <li>- "you're doing great, you deserve a star ✨💕💕"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <p>"[I believe that you can do it ❤️]"</p>	
6.1.3	Asking questions and affirmations	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Repeat after me I'm perfect just the way I am. 😊"</li> <li>- "How do you feel lately my love?"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Affirmation: I am woman I am fearless I am sexy I'm divine ❤️❤️❤️"</li> <li>- "So here's a little reminder for everyone (including myself 😊)"</li> <li>- "Friendly reminder"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Questions for followers</li> <li>- Question from followers</li> <li>- Reminder for followers</li> <li>- Inspirational quotes</li> <li>- Affirmations</li> </ul>

		<p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Repeat after me: I don't want what doesn't want me"</li> <li>- "Everything that's meant for me will ALWAYS find me"</li> <li>- "everything i desire, desires me more"</li> <li>- "Today's affirmation: your best self is not your smallest self 🧡☁️"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[What will you do outside your comfort zone this week?]"</li> <li>- "[What makes you see life through rose-colored glasses?]"</li> <li>- "[but I am especially curious since when you have been following me?]"</li> </ul>	
6.2	Discussing media impact	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "My phone is with me 24/7 what means I'm online and ON."</li> <li>- "without being connected with everything else, I found a deeper connection with myself"</li> <li>- "I realized what I need in life and that is less screen time, more me time"</li> <li>- "[I grew up without Instagram, without social media.... And that was already very tough. Growing up in this day and age is even tougher]"</li> <li>- "[and to inspire to make social media safer]"</li> <li>- "[proven that social media has a major impact on the mental health of 8 in 10 young people]"</li> <li>- "[new guidelines to ensure safer social media]"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "'Endlessly scrolling through short meaningless videos, staring at your phone 24/7'"</li> <li>- "Kind of brainwashed by watching too many 'that girl' tiktoks I guess 😂"</li> <li>- "start to think twice about your digital footprint 😂"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social media brainwashed</li> <li>- Always online 24/7</li> <li>- Social media impact on youth</li> <li>- Growing up with social media</li> <li>- Safety of social media</li> <li>- Doubting digital footprint</li> <li>- One-sided view</li> <li>- Impact of advertising</li> <li>- Causes wrong expectations</li> </ul>

		<p>- "the internet strikes again hahah 😂"</p> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <p>- "and everyone is announcing their biggest wins"</p> <p>- "ALSO movies, tv shows &amp; social media show us such a wrong image what this day is supposed to look like."</p> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <p>- "[Fake it until you make it ❌ If anything doesn't suit me, that's it]"</p> <p>- "[How do you perceive the influence of social media, on yourself and young people?]"</p> <p>- "[yet these advertisements touch me. The timing of those ads is the drop in the bucket]"</p>	
6.2.2	<b>Negative media impact</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <p>- "and not strive for the "perfect image" cause we are already perfect in our own way"</p> <p>- "[But this makes us all engaging in a platform where sometimes our reality should always be a perfect pose. But life, real reality is so much more than that. And so much more important. And I have to keep saying this to myself as well]"</p> <p>- "[We all post a stylized version of ourselves on social media]"</p> <p>- "[More than eight in 10 children in Europe are exposed to toxic beauty content on social media. As a result, this negatively affects mental health]"</p> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <p>- "Most say social media is a bad place to spend your time and sure a lot of that is true"</p> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <p>- "social media feels fake. we are constantly portraying a world where everyone is successful and happy, but that is so far away from the truth and it makes so many people feel like sh1t everyday"</p> <p>- "[She emphasizes over and over again in words and selfies that striving for perfect looks does not make one happy]"</p>	<p>- Social media is not reality</p> <p>- Feels fake</p> <p>- Only depicting the picture perfect</p> <p>- Striving to be perfect</p> <p>- Comparison culture on social media</p> <p>- Causing disorders</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "but 1 picture can't define you. 1 picture can never capture your true beauty. We don't need to fit into that "perfect" image society painted for us"</li> <li>- "It's easy to get lost in comparison on social media, but social media is not the real world"</li> <li>- "All the "perfect" pictures you see on Instagram and compare yourself with: they're not real"</li> <li>- "you're more than just the perfect pictures you see everywhere"</li> <li>- "next time you feel bad and everyone seems to have the perfect life except for you, know that it's not real. it's just filtered"</li> <li>- "perfection is not realistic. life isn't perfect. the world isn't perfect. even things or people we consider perfect aren't perfect. so why do we expect perfection from ourselves?"</li> <li>- "But please don't compare yourself and your progress to others"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[It is not a lie, but it is certainly not the full truth either]"</li> <li>- "[That striving for perfection is making people unhappy]"</li> <li>- "[and causes eating problems and trying to meet unachievable (and unreal) beauty standards]"</li> <li>- "[An image of girls trying to measure up to popular influencers]"</li> </ul>	
<b>6.2.3</b>	<b>Positive media impact</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I'm here to hopefully inspire people and make a change"</li> <li>- "Hopefully we can inspire you with the interview to love yourself a little more, cause you deserve it"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I love the content we made over the years 😂"</li> <li>- "I want to shed some light on the good stuff. The way social media connects us is so cool to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Able to be an inspiration</li> <li>- Social media support</li> <li>- Connection between many people</li> <li>- Searching for recognition</li> <li>- Endless stream of information and inspiration</li> </ul>

		<p>me. The way we get to see people from all over the world. Be creative, be vulnerable, be funny. And the way we can support each other, share our stories and make others feel less alone. That is so valuable.”</p> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “i can’t wait to inspire more people together to love and accept themselves”</li> <li>- “i hope young girls and women will look at this campaign and recognize themselves in it”</li> <li>- “I hope when you’re reading this and can recognize yourself in my story, it will make you feel seen and heard”</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “[By now I know that recognition is precisely something we are all looking for]”</li> <li>- “[there is so much choice, an endless stream of information and inspiration]”</li> <li>- “[I want to be the example that I missed when I was young]”</li> <li>- “[If I had grown up with social media, instead of the limited images visible in magazines and on TV ... Then I would have quickly discovered body positivity]”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Valuable information about sensitive topics</li> </ul>
6.3.1	<b>The power of gratitude</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “thankful for my friends who are supporting me, sleeping next to me cause the morning and nights are the most intense”</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Big hug for everyone who was a part of this beautiful week and to all of you for the congratulations and love ❤️❤️”</li> <li>- “Overwhelmed with your love, thank you ❤️”</li> <li>- “And I want to thank you for sticking around here, laugh and cry with me from time to time haha. I see you ❤️❤️❤️”</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I’m forever grateful.”</li> <li>- “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA I DONT KNOW WHAT TO SAY I FEEL SO GRATEFUL!!!!!!”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thanking friends and followers</li> <li>- Practicing gratitude</li> <li>- Expressing happiness</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "thank you thank you thank you for everyone involved!"</li> <li>- "i am forever grateful for you 🥰"</li> <li>- "❤️ BE GRATEFUL FOR THE LITTLE THINGS"</li> <li>- "but it's so important to practice gratitude for what you have NOW. no matter how small, I am grateful for everything surrounding and inside me"</li> <li>- "I'm grateful for making it this far"</li> <li>- "but every chance i get to be grateful for your presence in my life i take 😊😊"</li> <li>- "and I will wait in excitement and gratitude"</li> </ul> <p><b>Vera</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[that exactly 1 year ago today you gave me the space and my confidence in myself (back) ✨]"</li> </ul>	
6.3.2	<b>The power of togetherness</b>	<p><b>Vivian</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "[But here I am to say to you. It will be all right. Really]"</li> <li>- "Let's make it a good story, together"</li> <li>- "but let me remind you that we are in this together"</li> <li>- "We are doing this together so for all of you please give each other advice in the comments"</li> <li>- "You are not alone honey, I feel you"</li> </ul> <p><b>Rianne</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "you're not alone either, although you probably already know that ❤️❤️"</li> <li>- "I feel you, we made it ❤️❤️❤️"</li> <li>- "You are so not alone! ❤️"</li> <li>- "It was really nice to know I'm not alone"</li> </ul> <p><b>Joan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "and i know that we will make this world a better and kinder place together 🧡"</li> <li>- "together we will make this world a better place with more acceptance and love towards others"</li> <li>- "EVERYONE STRUGGLES. everyone goes through shit and has bad days"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You are not alone</li> <li>- Talking in 'we'-form</li> </ul>

- "...and i know that we will both completely and utterly love ourselves. i'm manifesting that for all of us. we got this..."

- "You are not alone. Everyone struggles with something"

- "We got this and we gotta remember that we're NEVER alone. we always have each other. ❤️👥"

**Vera**

- "[That I'm there, that we're there. To help, to listen and to talk]"

## Appendix B: Hierarchy table of the main codes and subcodes

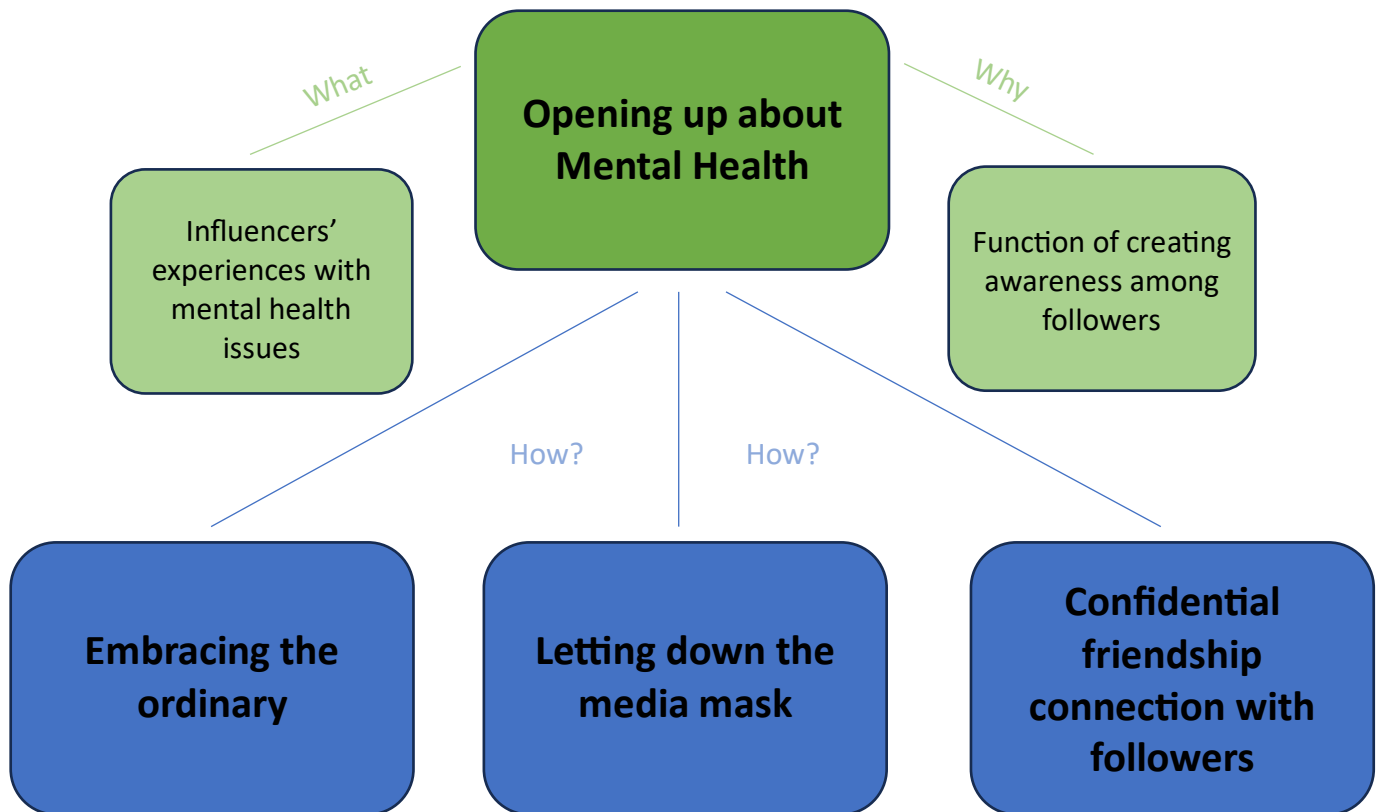
Main category	What, Why and How (Three main themes)	Sub themes	Subthemes 2nd layer	Subcodes	Subcodes 2nd layer	Subcodes 2nd layer2	Subcodes 2nd layer3	Subcodes 2nd layer4	Subcodes 2nd layers5	
1. Opening up about mental health	What? 2. Influencer's experiences with mental health issues	2.1 Mental health complaints		2.1.1 Depression	2.1.1.1 Not feeling happy for weeks	2.1.1.2 Missing out on all the fun things in life	2.1.1.3 Social withdrawal			
				2.1.2 Low self-esteem	2.1.2.1 Social insecurities	2.1.2.2 Dealing with break-up	2.1.2.3 Feeling unwanted or unworthy			
				2.1.3 Panic attacks	2.1.3.1 Can't breath	2.1.3.2 Life feels overwhelming	2.1.3.3 Feeling stressed			
				2.1.4 (Health) Anxiety	2.1.4.1 Built-up fear	2.1.4.2 Uneasiness	2.1.4.3 Living with constant fear in your head			
				2.1.5 Mental breakdowns	2.1.5.1 Crying being overwhelmed	2.1.5.2 Completely freaking out				
				2.1.6 Trauma after miscarriage	2.1.6.1 Scared for pregnancy	2.1.6.2 Having scaring dreams reliving miscarriage				
				2.1.7 Loneliness	2.1.7.1 Being alone too often	2.1.7.2 Feeling empty				
				2.1.8 Burn out	2.1.8.1 Fear of failure	2.1.8.2 Overworking	2.1.8.3 Overachieving			
				2.1.9 Peaking disorder	2.1.9.1 Overthinking everything	2.1.9.2 Pessimistic mindset				
				2.1.10 Suicidal thoughts	2.1.10.1 No other way out					
				2.1.11 Experiencing crisis services	2.1.11.1 Being hospitalized	2.1.11.2 Can't do it alone anymore				
				2.1.12 Severe body insecurities	2.1.12.1 Eating disorder	2.1.12.2 Feeling fat	2.1.12.3 Feeling ugly	2.1.12.4 Bodyshame		
		2.2 Mental health emotions		2.2.1 Not understanding mental state	2.2.1.1 Feeling lost	2.2.1.2 Hard to talk about mental health				
				2.2.2 Own recognition of mental state	2.2.2.1 Recognizing triggers	2.2.2.2 Accepting bad days	2.2.2.3 Feeling bad is ok			
				2.2.3 Experiencing dark days	2.2.3.1 Not feeling ok					
				2.2.4 Having no body trust	2.2.4.1 Struggle with 'normal' health	2.2.4.2 Fear of dying				
				2.2.5 Self-sabotaging	2.2.5.1 Negative thinking spiral	2.2.5.2 Body tricks you				
				2.2.6 Paralyzing effect of bad mental state	2.2.6.1 Lying in bed all day	2.2.6.2 Feeling numb	2.2.6.3 Difficult to function	2.2.6.4 Feeling of just staying alive	2.2.6.5 Hard to keep up with life	
	Why? 3. Creating awareness among followers	3.1 Mental health help			3.1.1 Professional help	3.1.1.1 Therapy	3.1.1.2 Psychologist	3.1.1.3 Support		
					3.1.2 Self help	3.1.2.1 Self care	3.1.2.2 Breathing exercises	3.1.2.3 Music therapy		
					3.1.3 Use of Medication	3.1.3.1 Antidepressiva	3.1.3.2 Prescription of medication			
					3.1.4 Social media advice	3.1.4.1 Depression advice	3.1.4.2 Self-esteem advice	3.1.4.3 Dealing with insecurities advice		
					3.1.5 Process of healing	3.1.5.1 Lessons learned	3.1.5.2 Getting life back	3.1.5.3 Acceptance	3.1.5.4 Feeling hopeful	
					3.2 Mental health information	3.2.1 Mental health importance	3.2.1.1 Collaboration posts with health institutes	3.2.1.2 Getting attention	3.2.1.3 Prevention days	3.2.1.4 Sharing information on world Mental Health day
		3.2.2 Mental Health figures				3.2.2.1 Sharing mental health research	3.2.2.2 Too many depressed youths	3.2.2.3 Not enough help in the Netherlands		
		3.2.3 Protecting mental health of followers				3.2.3.1 Gently address sensitive subjects	3.2.3.2 Social media impact on information sharing			
		3.2.5 Breaking the taboo				3.2.5.1 No shame	3.2.5.2 Normalising talking about mental health	3.2.5.3 Talk about it	3.2.5.4 Urging followers to keep talking	3.2.5.5 Speak up

	How? 4. Embracing the ordinary	4.1 Picturing the 'real' body	4.1.1 Showing real skin	4.1.1.1 Challenging the beauty ideal of a clear skin	4.1.1.1.1 Showing skin flaws and imperfections	4.1.1.1.2 Not wearing make-up for photo's	4.1.1.1.3 Change the mindset		
				4.1.1.2 Close up photo's of skin	4.1.1.2.1 Bodily flaws: Stretchmarks, acne, uneven skin texture, scars, cellulite, skin irritation, body hair				
			4.1.2 Body position	4.1.2.1 Normalizing the human body	4.1.2.1.1 The naked body	4.1.2.1.2 Emphasis on specific body parts	4.1.2.1.3 Denouncing social norms	4.1.2.1.4 All body types!	4.1.2.1.5 Just your 'average' woman
				4.1.2.2 The impact of photo positioning	4.1.2.2.1 Capturing the moment	4.1.2.2.2 Shading from sun or lights	4.1.2.2.3 Butt squeeze		
				4.1.2.3 Selfies	4.1.2.3.1 Double chin				
				4.1.2.4 Body curves	4.1.2.4.1 Body rolls	4.1.2.4.2 Love handles			
			4.1.3 Showing emotion	4.1.3.1 Crying selfie	4.1.3.1.1 Seeing real tears				
				4.1.3.2 Not so charming selfies	4.1.3.2.1 Drunk selfie	4.1.3.2.2 Eating selfie			
		4.2 Mocking the Insta perfect life		4.2.1 Don't take yourself too seriously	4.2.1.1 Joking	4.2.1.2 Deliberately not depicting a picture perfect			
				4.2.2 Memes	4.2.2.1 Photo with funny caption				
				4.2.3 Picture comparison	4.2.3.1 Insta vs Reality photo's	4.2.3.2 Before vs After photo's	4.2.3.3 Two sides of a photo	4.2.3.4 Picture perspectives	
				4.2.4 Using photoshop	4.2.4.1 AI face generating	4.2.4.2 Experiencing with funny social media filters	4.2.4.3 Experimenting with fake	4.2.4.4 Stock modelling	
		4.3 Body-positivity content		4.3.1 Body size doesn't matter	4.3.1.1 Fashion for everyone	4.3.1.2 Diversity in fashion industry	4.3.1.3 Plus size models	4.3.1.4 Wear what you want	4.3.1.5 Fat celebration
				4.3.2 Body comfortability	4.3.2.1 Body confidence	4.3.2.2 Body acceptance			
				4.3.3 Sensuality of the body	4.3.3.1 Sexiness	4.3.3.2 Model poses	4.3.3.3 Wearing lingerie or bikini	4.3.3.4 Divinity	4.3.3.5 Emphasis on buttocks and breasts
				4.3.4 Self love	4.3.4.1 Love yourself	4.3.4.2 Be happy with your own body	4.3.4.3 Be your own muse	4.3.4.4 Body is your sanctuary	
	How? 5. Letting down the media mask	5.1 The young self talking		5.1.1 Photo as young girl	5.1.1.1 Comparisons photo's young and old self				
				5.1.2 Little girl's dream	5.1.2.1 Seemed impossible before	5.1.2.2 Young me would have never believed me	5.1.2.3 Reaction as young girl		
				5.1.3 Talking to younger or older self	5.1.3.1 Put into perspective	5.1.3.2 Sharing past experiences	5.1.3.3 Advice to young or old self		
				5.1.4 Future imagination	5.1.4.1 New chances in the future	5.1.4.2 Goals and mission			
				5.1.5 Growing up	5.1.5.1 Gained knowledge	5.1.5.2 Change	5.1.5.3 Body in progress		
				5.1.6 Teenage self	5.1.6.1 Teenager insecurities	5.1.6.2 Wanting to meet high expectations			
		5.2 Voicing negative feelings and insecurities	5.2.1 Negative feelings	5.2.1.1 Dealing with negative thoughts	5.2.1.1.1 Negative self-talk	5.2.1.1.2 Self-criticism	5.2.1.1.3 Feeling down and stressed	5.2.1.1.4 Being extra hard on yourself	
				5.2.1.2 Dealing with negative comments on social media	5.2.1.2.1 Criticism of followers	5.2.1.2.2 Opinions of others	5.2.1.2.3 Doubt	5.2.1.2.4 Words matter	5.2.1.2.5 Comments influence your mood
				5.2.1.3 Rollercoaster of emotions	5.2.1.3.1 Pain intensity	5.2.1.3.2 Out of control	5.2.1.3.3 Feeling overwhelmed	5.2.1.3.4 Heartbreak and loss	
				5.2.1.4 Scary to share feelings	5.2.1.4.1 Dare to post	5.2.1.4.2 So much to say	5.2.1.4.3 Feeling terrified	5.2.1.4.4 Writing about emotions can help	5.2.1.4.5 Being vulnerable
			5.2.2 Insecurities	5.2.2.1 Bodily insecurities	5.2.2.1.1 Doubting the beauty of your own body	5.2.2.1.2 Sharing biggest insecurities	5.2.2.1.3 Dare to post insecurities	5.2.2.1.4 Feeling of not being good enough	
				5.2.2.2 Photo insecurities	5.2.2.2.1 Feeling ugly on photo's	5.2.2.2.2 Judging yourself online			
				5.2.2.3 Self-hatred	5.2.2.3.1 Not comfortable in own body	5.2.2.3.2 Body is never good enough			
			5.2.3 The power of honesty	5.2.3.1 Being as open as possible	5.2.3.1.1 Vulnerability	5.2.3.1.2 Was not open before			
				5.2.3.2 Staying true to sharing your own thoughts	5.2.3.2.1 Opinion sharing				

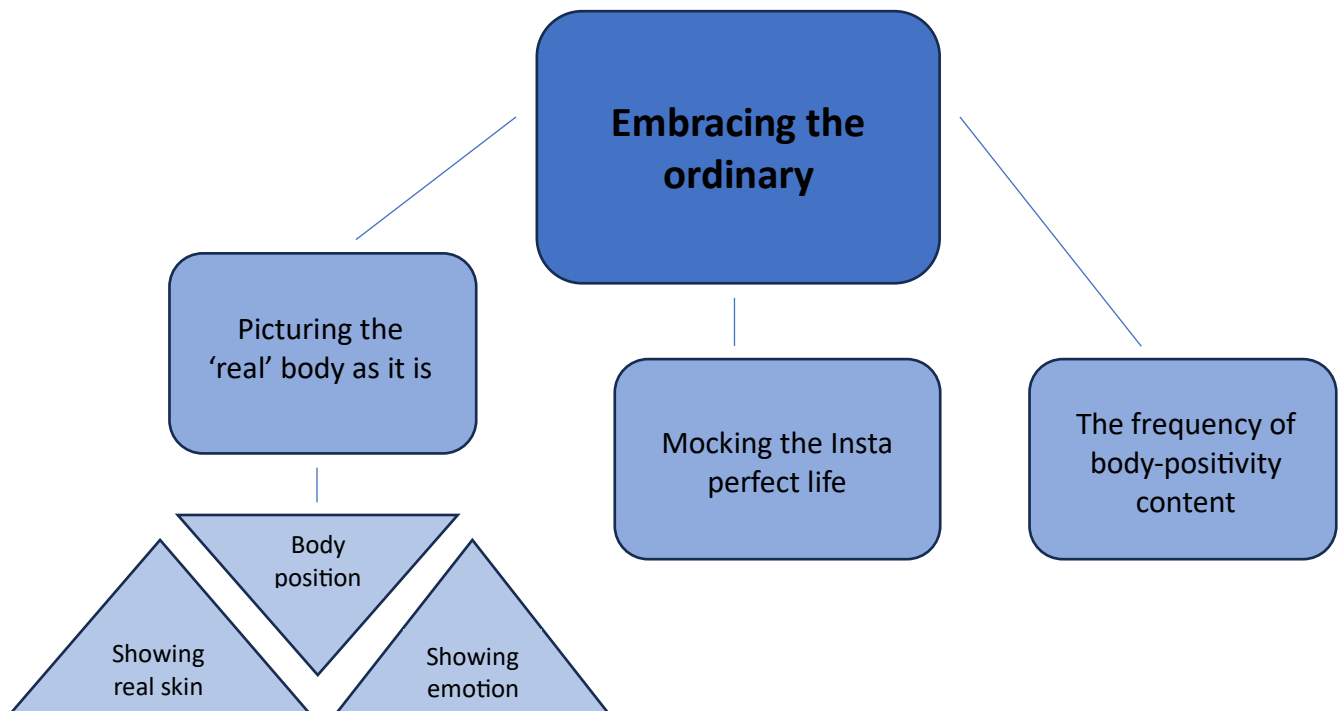
	How? 6. Confidential friendship connection with followers	6.1 Follower friendship	6.1.1 Emphasize bond and give advice	6.1.1.1 Followers = friends	6.1.1.1.1 Talking to followers	6.1.1.1.2 Updating followers	6.1.1.1.3 Sharing personal life with followers		
				6.1.1.2 Support system	6.1.1.2.1 Asking/giving advice	6.1.1.2.2 Feeling of safety	6.1.1.2.3 Seeking recognition from favorite influencer		
			6.1.2 Emphasize qualities	6.1.2.1 Saying followers are doing great	6.1.2.1.1 You are unique				
				6.1.2.2 Love for followers	6.1.2.2.1 I love you	6.1.2.2.2 Love letter			
				6.1.2.3 Expressing being proud	6.1.2.3.1 I am proud of you				
			6.1.3 Asking questions and affirmations	6.1.3.1 Questions for and from followers	6.1.3.1.1 Discussing the day together				
				6.1.3.2 Reminders	6.1.3.2.1 Don't forget				
				6.1.3.3 Inspirational quotes	6.1.3.3.1 Repeat after me	6.1.3.3.2 Today's affirmation	6.1.3.3.3 Manifesting		
		6.2 Discussing media impact on their followers	6.2.2 Negative media impact	6.2.2.1 Social media is not reality	6.2.2.1.1 Feels fake	6.2.2.1.2 Only depicting the picture perfect	6.2.2.1.3 Striving to be perfect	6.2.2.1.4 Only stylized version of ourselves	6.2.2.1.5 Unreachable examples
				6.2.2.2 Comparison culture on social media	6.2.2.2.1 Insecurities through comparison	6.2.2.2.2 Causing disorders like eating problems	6.2.2.2.3 Social media criticism	6.2.2.2.4 Chasing yourself because of social media	
				6.2.2.3 Social media brainwashed	6.2.2.3.1 Always online 24/7	6.2.2.3.2 Causes one-sided view of the world	6.2.2.3.3 Endlessly scrolling		
				6.2.2.4 Impact of social media on youth	6.2.2.4.1 Growing up with social media	6.2.2.4.2 Later doubting digital footprint	6.2.2.4.3 Discussing safety of social media for youth		
				6.2.2.5 Toxic or only commercial content	6.2.2.5.1 Causes wrong expectations	6.2.2.5.2 Impact of advertising	6.2.2.5.3 Difficult to filter the truth		
			6.2.3 Positive media impact	6.2.3.1 Able to be an inspiration	6.2.3.1.1 Influencers have great reach and can cause positive impact	6.2.3.1.2 setting an example			
				6.2.3.2 Social media support	6.2.3.2.1 Connection between many people	6.2.3.2.2 Searching for recognition	6.2.3.2.3 Digital friends are also valuable		
				6.2.3.3 Endless stream of information available	6.2.3.3.1 Valuable information about sensitive topics				
				6.2.3.4 Way of expressing yourself	6.2.3.4.1 Escape from reality				
		6.3 The power of gratitude and togetherness	6.3.1 Gratitude	6.3.1.1 Thanking followers	6.3.1.1.1 A big hug for you	6.3.1.1.2 Appreciation			
				6.3.1.2 Practicing gratitude	6.3.1.2.1 Be grateful for the little things	6.3.1.2.2 Expressing happiness			
			6.3.2 Togetherness	6.3.2.1 You are not alone	6.3.2.1.1 Sense of belonging				
				6.3.2.2 Talking in 'we'-form	6.3.2.2.1 We get through this together				

## Appendix C: Thematic maps

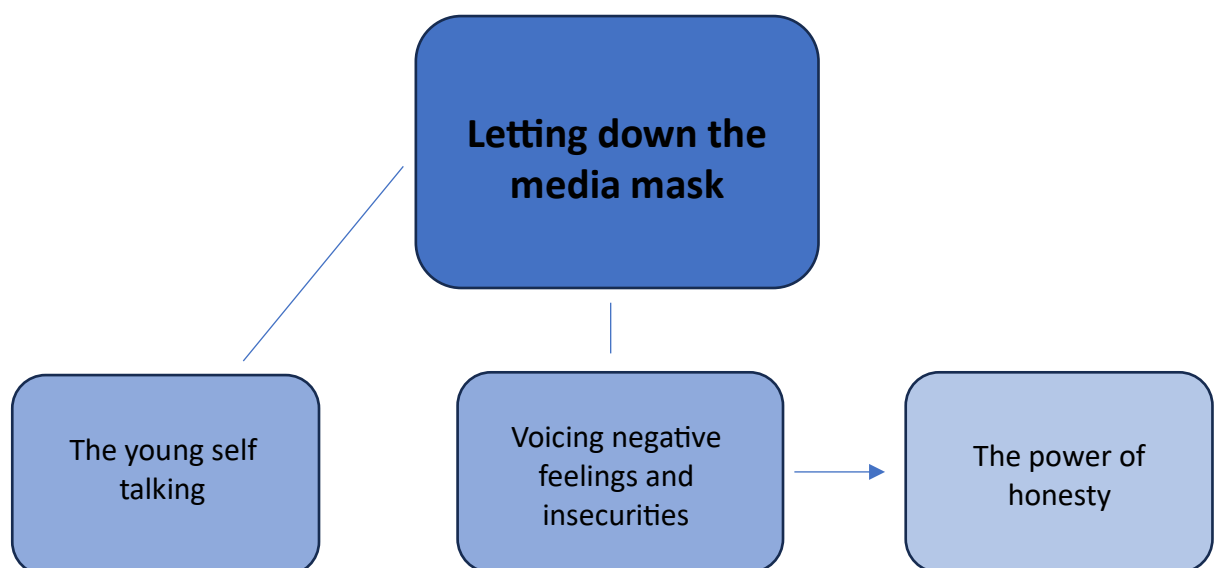
### Appendix C1: Main category with the three themes



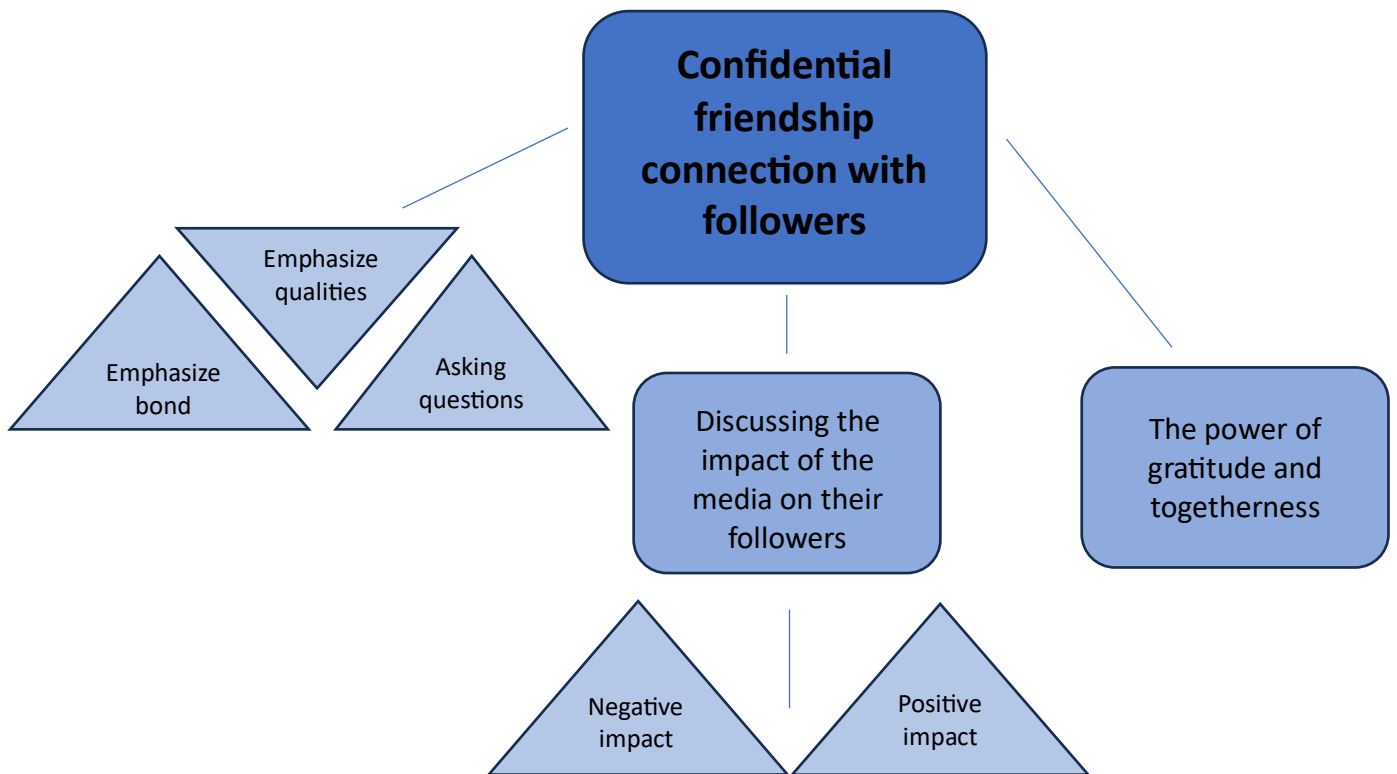
*Appendix C1.1: First theme with subthemes*



*Appendix C1.2: Second theme with subthemes*



*Appendix C1.3: Third theme with subthemes*





## Appendix D: In-text examples

*Note: The examples are listed in the same chronological order as they first appear in the results and conclusion chapter and have the same numbering as in the complete PDF data set.*

### D4.24



 veracamilla • Volgen ...

 veracamilla Recentelijk kreeg ik de vraag of ik wat meer over mezelf kan vertellen, van iemand die me pas net volgt. Mijn valkuil is dat ik er onbewust vanuit ga dat jij net zoveel over mij weet als ikzelf. I know, dat kan helemaal niet.

So, let me (re)introduce myself. Mijn naam is Vera, mijn verjaardag is op 6 februari en ik ben geboren in '92. Mijn sterrenbeeld is een Waterman en hoewel ik niet spiritueel ben, vind ik horoscopen lezen en over sterrenbeelden leren stiekem heel leuk.

Ik ben geboren in Arnhem, heb bijna tien jaar in Amsterdam gewoond, maar kocht hier vorig jaar een huis en ben nu weer thuis in mijn geboortestad. Ik woon samen met Jeffrey, hij is alweer 9 jaar mijn partner 💜

Ik draag standaard foundation kleur 00, maar dat ik zo wit ben vind ik helemaal geen probleem. Op mijn gezicht heb ik rosacea en op mijn hele lichaam heb ik marmerhuid. Over mijn lichaam gesproken: je kan me curvy of volslank noemen, maar ik noem mezelf gewoon dik. Tussen de regels door probeer ik een positief voorbeeld te geven als dik persoon.

Ik worstel al mijn hele leven met mijn mentale gezondheid. Met een gegeneraliseerde angststoornis, piekerstoornis, burn-out en depressie. Daar ben ik open over. Ik vind het heel belangrijk mentale gezondheid uit de taboesfeer te halen. Ik schaam me niet, wil er alles over vertellen en je mag me alles vragen.

In maart 2009 begon ik met een beautyblog, waar ik vanaf ongeveer 2012 een goed salaris uit kan halen. Bloggen doe ik niet meer, maar ik verdien nog steeds met veel plezier mijn geld met YouTube, Instagram en TikTok. En omg: IK BEN ALWEER 14 JAAR BEZIG 🥳

Ik houd van winkelen van mooie make-upproducten en designer items shoppen. Ik deel graag mijn mening en ben eerlijk. Soms wel met een korreltje zout want ik vind het belangrijk niet alles zo serieus te nemen.

Dat was het denk ik wel, laat het me weten als ik iets ben vergeten, maar ik ben vooral heel benieuwd sinds wanneer jij me volgt?

Bewerkt · 59 w.

## D4.1



 **veracamilla** • Volgen

 **veracamilla** Je angsten zijn irreëel. Ook al voelt dat nu niet zo, bonst je hart in je keel en krijg je je ademhaling niet onder controle. Je lichaam houdt je voor de gek. Echt waar.

Blue Monday bestaat misschien niet, maar elke reden om meer aandacht voor mentale gezondheid te krijgen grijp ik aan. De wachtlijsten bij de GGZ worden er niet korter op en de depressieve jongeren zijn na twee jaar pandemie, nog lang niet geholpen.

Waarom deze foto van mij in bad? Omdat ik in mijn signaleringsplan mezelf er niet alleen aan herinner dat mijn angsten irreëel zijn, in bad gaan benoem ik als een van de dingen die ik kan doen om te ontspannen. Net als wandelen en een aflevering van The Office kijken. Er wordt vaak lacherig gedaan over self care in deze vorm, maar zelfzorg kan alles zijn. Van vroeg naar bed gaan en je telefoon uitzetten voordat je gaat slapen, tot lekker uitgebreid opmaken en badderen voordat Blue Monday begint.

Hoe je zelf een signaleringsplan kunt maken en hoe mijn eerste plan die ik in 2020 bij de crisisdienst maakte eruit ziet, laat ik in de video via het linkje in mijn bio zien.

#bluemonday #mentalhealth

Bewerkt · 120 w.

17 januari 2022

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen

## D4.5



 **veracamilla** • Volgen  
International Women's Day

 **veracamilla** Feminist. Ik ben het, elke dag. Ik ben er trots op en vandaag nog een beetje meer. Sommigen zullen mij niet feminist genoeg vinden, en anderen teveel. Maar ik doe wat ik wil, en ik doe dat als vrouw. Want vrouwen worden nog steeds niet gelijk behandeld, ook in Nederland niet.

Samen staan we sterk, want één stem kan makkelijk genegeerd worden, maar samen zullen we oorverdovend klinken.

Daarom hierbij een aantal fantastische Nederlandse vrouwen verzameld, die mij eindeloos inspireren en waarvan ik je aanraad om ze heel snel te gaan volgen 📢


- ⚡ @jvandb de OG feminist die mijn ogen opende en die me motiveert om te blijven leren
- ⚡ @joy.delima schrijft voor de Volkskrant prachtige eerlijke en kwetsbare columns over s3ks en plaatst ze door op instagram
- ⚡ @susanpotiek is de allerleukste radio dj van FunX en is niet bang om fatshaming te benoemen
- ⚡ @michelleamo\_ maakt heerlijke kleurrijke en vrolijke content
- ⚡ @marketingvrouw verdient een award voor alles wat ze je leert over racisme, autisme en (uiteraard) marketing
- ⚡ @jenniefromtheblog woont in een boshuisje wat ze zelf financierde en opknap(t)e en is wars van onze

8 maart 2022

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen



### D3.31



We proudly announce  
**JOANN VAN DEN HERIK**  
as Free a Girl's new ambassador.

Joann, an internationally recognized influencer, is dedicated to using her platform to inspire women to embrace self-love and empowerment.

Her advocacy will concentrate on raising awareness and support for survivors who are dealing with trauma, abuse, or struggles with low self-esteem.

**FREE A GIRL**

freeagirlusa en joannvdherik

freeagirlusa @joannvdherik, an internationally recognized influencer, is dedicated to using her platform to inspire women to embrace self-love and empowerment.

Her advocacy will concentrate on raising awareness and support for survivors who are dealing with trauma, abuse, or struggles with low self-esteem.

#freeagirl

37 w. Vertaling weergeven


Voor jou ▾

joannvdherik 37 w. 5 vind-ik-leuks Reageren

1.630 vind-ik-leuks  
18 augustus 2023

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen

### D1.22



vivianhoorn • Volgen

vivianhoorn this picture means a lot to me. truly smiling and enjoying life. not something that is very usual for me. been struggling for years with depression and it has been something I haven't been really open about. cause I was scared, scared that people had an opinion about me, scared that my feelings weren't real and I was just dramatic. and also I didn't understand my mental state, and I still don't. over the years I heard a lot things like 'why are you feeling this way you living the perfect life'. and that was something I asked myself aswell. I wished I could wake up every day happy, fresh and full of energy but that's not the case. it's getting a lot better and I finally feel like I'm accepting this part of me. I'm still very scared to say this out loud. but that's also why I need to speak up about it. cause we have to talk about our mental health and not be ashamed! I will open up about it step by step to hopefully help anyone who needs it. cause you are not alone honey. I feel you - I had this post planned for already a week ago. not knowing that today is mental health day and it's 10/10. some things aren't a coincidence. a new chapter is starting and today is the day. - thank you @lottaliinalove for capturing this moment

81 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou ▾

nevy88 Sending you so much love, I have been following you for a while. I've inspired by you as a different

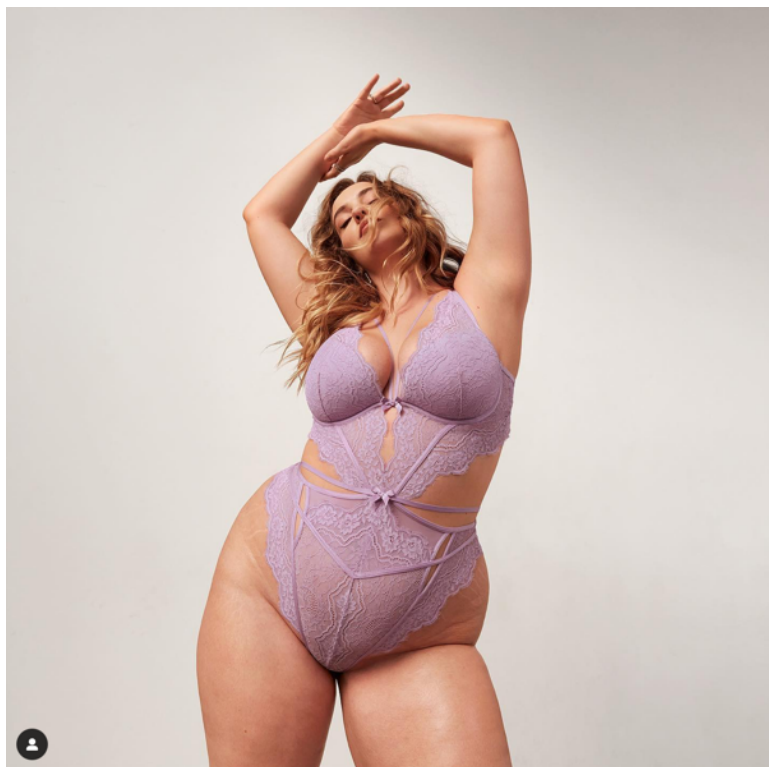
40.871 vind-ik-leuks  
10 oktober 2022

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen

D1.30



D3.19



vivianhoorn • Volgen  
London, United Kingdom



vivianhoorn Thank you @thetimes for this beautiful cover story! Beauty is beyond size. Our bodies should not be a trend. This is where we and the fashion industry need to shine a light on. One ideal should not be at the expense of another. It's time that we are all seen for our beautiful unique self.

Portrait @dankennedyphoto  
Writer @\_harrywalker1  
Styling @pruewhitestylist  
Hair @liamcurranhair  
Make-up @shelleyblaze

Bewerkt · 68 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou



sarahmen.des  
36 w. Reageren



nevermindpepin  
51 w. Reageren



nadi\_anson



63.496 vind-ik-leuks  
7 januari 2023



Een opmerking toevoegen...

Plaatsen



joannvdherik



joannvdherik 6 reasons i've decided to start loving my body:

- ♥ she's my forever home and sanctuary. as long as i'm here, she's here with me. even if i have nobody, she's always there. so i deserve that love i keep giving to everyone else.
- ♥ she helps me to do the things that i love. wanna go on walk? i can go on a walk. wanna watch a movie? i can watch a movie. wanna have deep conversations about life? can do that as well. bc of her, i can do anything i want!
- ♥ even though i've treated her poorly in the past, she's still here for me. i'm sorry for all the hurtful things i've said and done to my body. i'm so thankful that my body loved me and nourished me, even when i didn't love her back.
- ♥ we get to work together to achieve our dreams. there's so many things i wanna do, see, achieve, and without my beautiful body i could never even dream of doing these things.
- ♥ she is unique! she is what makes me different from the other 7.8 billion people on this planet, YOU ARE SPECIAL!!! we are all special!
- ♥ she does everything in her power to keep me alive. she works every day to make sure i'm here, i wake up and get to live this amazing journey called life.

i know that loving your body and yourself is a journey, it takes a while and is definitely not something that happens overnight. but if you are reading this and you are willing to take on that journey, i am so proud of you. and i know that we will both completely and utterly love ourselves. i'm manifesting that for all of us. we got this. i love you.

58 w. Vertaling weergeven





veracamilla • Volgen

...



veracamilla • Wie zie je op de cover als je aan het magazine Cosmopolitan denkt? Een hollywoodster waarschijnlijk. Een perfecte vrouw, knap, slank, glad. Onbereikbaar. Haar haren wapperen en ze lacht breeduit. Iemand om naar op te kijken, maar waarschijnlijk niet iemand waarin jij je herkent.

Ik ben een dromer, een dagdromer en een 'echte' dromer. Doelen stel ik misschien niet zo snel, maar van dromen heb ik er genoeg. Daarin durf ik above and beyond te gaan. Maar mijn dromen delen doe ik niet zo snel, omdat ik ze eigenlijk belachelijk vind. Onbereikbaar. Dromen die voor altijd dromen zullen blijven.

Dit jaar besloot ik toch voorzichtig mijn dromen uit te spreken. Naar mensen dichtbij, mensen die ik vertrouw en die vaak net een stapje verder durven te gaan. Ze vechten voor waar ze in geloven of waar ze van (je raadt het al) dromen. Zo besprak ik voorzichtig met een van mijn beste vriendinnen @curlbellaa dat ik op de cover van Cosmopolitan wilde komen te staan.

Juist omdat het onbereikbaar leek, omdat ik geen hollywoodster ben. Niet slank, standaard knap en niet glad. Ik ben net zoals jij. Ik ben je buurvrouw, je zus of nicht. Ik ben degene die ik op de cover wilde zien, maar nooit zag.

Deze maand is het zo ver, met dank aan @kayjosephine voor het vertrouwen en in een prachtige jurk van het Nederlandse @houseoflovaeij, gestyled door @valeriantantu. Haar en make-up gedaan door @jimmystam\_ @lots.looks, fotografie door @heingijsbers.

Deze maand sta ik op de cover van de Nederlandse Cosmopolitan. Met een groot interview over mentale gezondheid (met dank aan @awuraabena voor het gesprek en voor het perfecte vertalen van mijn woorden naar papier). Nu overal te koop!

73 w.

## D3.22



joannvdherik Los Angeles

...



joannvdherik i used to HATE my legs, so wearing shorts is always a big moment for me. a milestone in my selflove journey.

i've always had big legs. i hated it. i was so insecure about the cellulite on my legs because i knew nobody my age that had cellulite. i always thought i had "grandma legs". one time during gym class, we were obligated to wear shorts and a guy from my class said to me: "wow when you sit down your legs get even bigger, they look like islands" that was obviously for me a confirmation to never wear shorts again. and there was one thing that was even worse than shorts: bikinis. that was the only time i would wear shorts. over my bikini so no one would see ANYTHING of my upper legs + butt. the parts i was most insecure about. the reason i missed a lot of fun things in my life. it's something that really stuck with me for a while, because it's only since last year that i really started wearing denim shorts again.

i hope when you're reading this and can recognize yourself in my story, it will make you feel seen and heard. because if you're feeling insecure about a certain body part: you're not alone. everyone struggles with something. but what we got to realize is that those things are not important. they might feel really big for you in this moment, and that is completely valid, but try looking at the bigger picture. do you really wanna miss out going to the beach because you don't like the way your legs look? do you really want to feel uncomfortable in a bikini because you don't like your belly? and is it because WE don't like those things or is it because society taught us to not like those things about ourselves?

i think we are all so beautiful in our own way, the cellulite, the scars, the rolls, the stretchmarks, every insecurity included. those things tell a story. and all those things combined, is part of who you are, but there's also SO much more to you. you are kind, you are funny, you are smart, you are loving. and rather than focusing on our insecurities, let's focus on the things we love about ourselves and finally start LIVING. if i can do it, so can you. i believe in you. WEAR THOSE SHORTSSSSS!!!

55 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou



17 april 2023

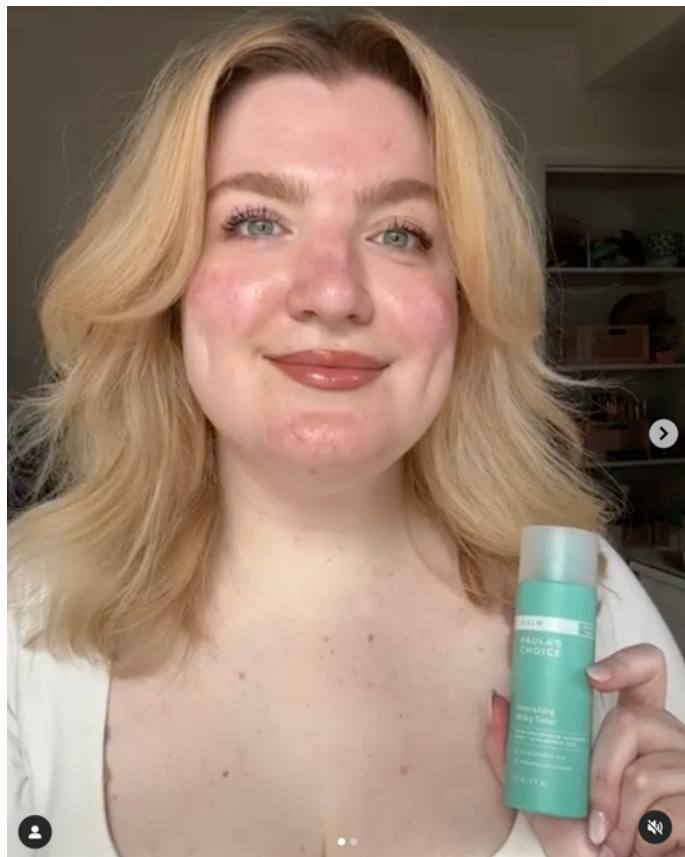


Een opmerking toevoegen...

Plaatsen



## D4.25



**veracamilla** • Volgen

**veracamilla** Ik kan geen skinfluencer zijn, want ik heb geen gave huid. Geen voorbeeld, want ik ben niet perfect. Dat is wat ik altijd dacht, wat ik vond en wat ik mezelf voorhield. Inmiddels weet ik dat herkenning juist iets is waar we allemaal naar opzoek zijn, dat streven naar perfectie ongelukkig maakt, en dat als ik dat wil, ook ik skinfluencer kan zijn.

Ik heb een 'onconventionele' huid in een wereld waarin pukkels altijd gecamoufleerd of weggepoetst moeten worden. Online krijg ik al veertien jaar de vraag wat er met mijn huid aan de hand is, en het advies dat ik geen make-up zou moeten gebruiken en veel geld zou moeten uitgeven aan behandelingen die maar tijdelijk werken.

Ik heb een huid met roodheden, gevoeligheid, bultjes en irritaties. Ik leer nog bijna elke dag, met elke blik die ik op de spiegel werp en met elk product dat ik wel of niet gebruik.

Door het maken van foto's en video's van mijn huid, het proberen van nieuwe producten en leren wat voor mij normaal is, weet ik eindelijk dat mijn huid ook echt normaal is. Ik heb geen last van de rosacea, niet meer last dan ieder ander mens met een 'normale' huid.

6 april 2023

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen

## D4.26



**veracamilla** • Volgen  
studio3000amsterdam

**veracamilla** Daar zijn ze dan: de beelden van onze eerste fotoshoot samen na dik 9 jaar verkering. We zijn er zo blij mee en willen de tweede foto uitvergroot in de slaapkamer gaan hangen.

Ps: ik fotoshop mijn foto's nooit. Deze foto's zijn wel gefotoshopt, en ik vind het jammer dat me niet om goedkeuring is gevraagd van te voren. De striae, marmershuid, pukkeltjes; ik had ze heel graag gewoon gezien. Juist om het te normaliseren. Dat heb ik ook als feedback teruggekoppeld. Daarop kreeg ik reactie dat alleen de belichting zou zijn aangepast en wordt retoucheren ontkend.

Fotografie @Dorian.Jurne  
Styling @chariseabigail  
MUAH @sisleyagenois\_ @mifasstudio  
Bewerkt · 56 w.

Voor jou

**okergeelfan** Ik vind bewerken ook vreselijk. 48 w. Reageren

**szt123** Ontzettend mooi!!! Zou ik ook wel eens willen met mijn man! ❤️❤️❤️

13 april 2023

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen



## D3.8



joannvdherik • Volgen  
New York City, N.Y.

joannvdherik to be very honest, when i first saw this picture, i thought to myself: look at the cellulite on my butt. it made me feel very insecure and sad. and that's exactly why i'm posting this now. there's still a taboo around cellulite. we still think we need to have smooth legs in order to be beautiful. there's still 10000 "solutions" on the internet on how to get rid of cellulite. but it's totally normal to have cellulite. it doesn't make you less beautiful, it doesn't make you unhealthy. it literally depends on how you're posing or what the lighting is like. these pics were all taken within the same month and look how different my legs look in every picture. i even have pics from the same day as these where it looks like i have no cellulite at all! we don't need to change our bodies my loves, there's nothing wrong with our bodies. there's something wrong with the way we look at our bodies. we need to change our mindset and realize that we are ALL beautiful just the way we are. no matter your size, age, shape, skin color, disability, scars etc etc. it doesn't matter whether you're fat, skinny, curvy, mid size, flat, big, tall, short, WHATEVER: you deserve love and respect. from others, but especially yourself ❤️

Bewerkt · 95 w. Vertaling weergeven

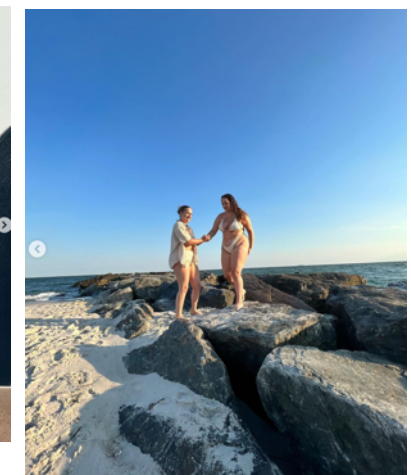
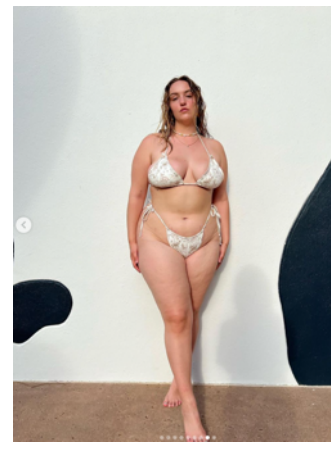
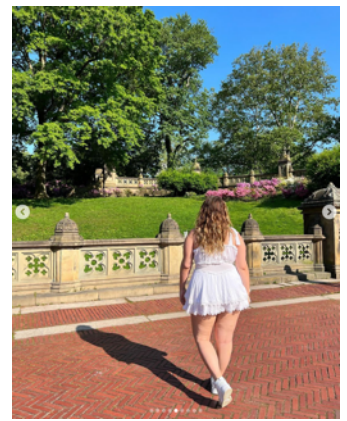
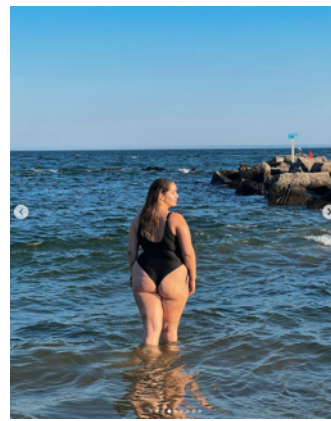
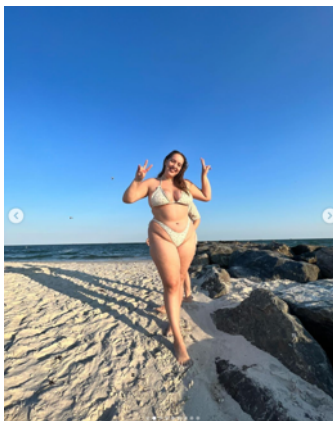
Voor jou



8 juli 2022

Een opmerking toevoegen...

Plaatsen





D1.18



**vivianhoorn** • Volgen  
Ibiza, Spain

vivianhoorn in the q&a I posted on my stories I got one question a lot. 'If I still have insecurities.' the answer is yes. one of my biggest atm is my skin. when it comes to my face my skin is glowy and I'm happy. but my décolleté, shoulders and back has been full with little bumps, irritation spots, rash and pimples. when I was younger I already experienced it and it was less for a longer time because of my birth control. since I quit birth control it comes back with periods. sometimes it's because of skincare products, sometimes food, sometimes stress. on the picture it is less than it looks these days. I'm trying to accept cause I know it doesn't make me a less worthy person. but all tips are welcome to make my skin more calm and less irritated.

Bewerkt · 86 w. · Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou

virgi\_cog Try to avoid sugar, lactose and gluten for 2-3 weeks.  
71 w. · Reageren · Vertaling weergeven

ollieshor It's s just age acne, which I was diagnosed too. Not many people have it and it comes up cause of food or periods time..

28.806 vind-ik-leuks  
7 september 2022

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen

D4.33



**veracamilla** • Volgen

veracamilla Ik voel het even niet vandaag en deze week. Ik raap mezelf bij elkaar, kleed me aan, maak me op en herinner mezelf aan dat ik nog steeds die meid ben. Misschien niet 24/7, of in andermans optiek. Maar ik ben haar wel degelijk. En jij ook. Weet dat. Ze komt vanzelf weer boven drijven.

Bewerkt · 45 w.

Voor jou

ameliabodeliana Ik voel me dus al de hele maand zo

11 w. · Reageren

ilses\_fotos Herkenbaar! Fijn dat je het bespreekbaar maakt!

21 w. · Reageren

dilaralovesdonuts

45 w. · 1 vind-ik-leuk · Reageren


laidbackvloglife Herkenbaar, ik probeer vooral daar de rust te pakken die ik pakken kan. En soms denk ik; maar wat heb ik nou eigenlijk gedaan vandaag? En dan denk ik, maakt niet uit.. ik heb naar mn eigen behoeften geluisterd, dat is ook oké. Maar ik weekend


27 juni 2023

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen


## D2.7





 **rienne.meijer** • Volgen


 **rienne.meijer** The butt squeeze returns  
114 w. Vertaling weergeven


Voor jou ▾


 **bebrad7** You are my favourite  
86 w. Reageren Vertaling weergeven

 **pkaatee76** 🤔🤔🤔❤️  
100 w. Reageren

 **cherriesprofile\_** 🤔  
101 w. Reageren


 **iree.se** 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔 brutal  
107 w. Reageren

 **maliksbaker23** 🤔  
107 w. Reageren

 **lilyemilyhero** 🔥🔥

❤️ 💬 🗑️

**157.057 vind-ik-leuks**  
22 februari 2022

 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)





## D1.42



**vivianhoorn** • Volgen  
Ibiza, Spain

...



vivianhoorn same woman, different angle. we plaatsen allemaal een gestileerde versie van onszelf op social media. ander licht, even anders staan, zomers filtertje, haartjes en pose! niks mis mee, en ik hou van aesthetics met mijn liefde voor styling en fotografie en mooie plaatjes maken. maar hierdoor zitten we met z'n allen op een platform waarin onze realiteit soms altijd een perfecte pose moet zijn. maar het leven, de echte realiteit is zooveel meer dan dat. en zoveel belangrijker. en ook dit moet ik steeds tegen mijzelf blijven zeggen. onderzoek van @Dove heeft bewezen dat social media een grote invloed op de mental health van 8 op de 10 jongeren heeft. deze cijfers doen pijn, wetende dat er een hele nieuwe generatie opgroeit met verschillende soorten platformen. daar heeft @Dove een mooi self esteem project voor opgezet zodat we hopelijk met elkaar de nieuwe generatie en onszelf kunnen beschermen voor invloeden van buitenaf. want oh wat ben jij toch leuk! en wat is het leven toch heerlijk. #DoveSelfEsteemProject #DovePartner

47 w.

Voor jou



**somestylingsgewoon** heel mooi en vrouwelijk

35 w. Reageren



**45.531 vind-ik-leuks**

5 juni 2023



Een opmerking toevoegen...

Plaatsen





## D1.25



vivianhoorn • Volgen

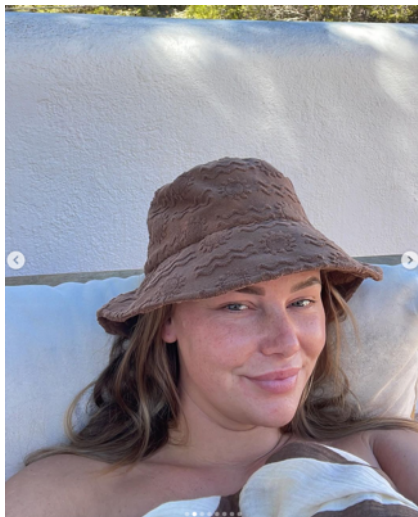


vivianhoorn We maken allemaal weleens selfies en posten het liefst enkel de selfies waar we het meest happy en stralend op staan. Dat is niet altijd de realiteit; dus hierbij 8 selfies met ieder een andere mood die ik niet zo snel zou posten op insta maar toch met jullie wil delen. @Dove heeft mij gevraagd om van de afgelopen maanden een Dove Diary bij te houden met mijn selfies en het verhaal erachter...

1. Ik had een flink down en stress momentje dus heb ik mijzelf rustig gemaakt met wat muziek en ademhalingsoefeningen.
2. Lekker op het balkon op Ibiza stuurde ik dit naar een vriendinnetje.
3. Ik was op trip voor werk en moest een badmuts op in het zwembad. Wat zag ik eruit we hebben dubbel gelegen. Soms moet je jezelf ook niet te serieus nemen haha!
4. In between content shooten een selfie.
5. Een foto om te kijken hoe mijn huid eraan toe is. Ik heb de laatste tijd veel last van plekjes en puistjes. Dit is door stress en hormonen. Maar het kan mij zo onzeker maken!
6. De serie 'A million little things' aan het kijken en het is elke aflevering weer huilen. Een serie waarin depressie centraal staat en is erg herkenbaar voor mij.
7. On my way naar een dinner en ik wilde even een knappe selfie maken. Ik voelde mij heel goed maar toen ik de foto maakte werd mijn gevoel over mijzelf minder omdat ik dacht dat ik er 'mooier' uit zag. Nu zie ik de foto en denk ik wooweee lekkerding!
8. A healthy gut is a healthy mind dus elke dag neem ik verse celery juice. Geen feestje want is niet mijn favoriete smaak. Maar ik ben trots op mijzelf als ik het heb gedronken en het werkt goed voor mijn gemoedstoestand en huid!

Waarom zijn we toch zo hard naar onszelf. gelukkig heeft @dove een self esteem project waarbij ze een gratis kit aanbieden waarmee je je confidence een boost kan geven. Check mijn stories voor de link. #dovepartner

77 w.



## D2.26



 rianne.meijer

 rianne.meijer This weekend I had a miscarriage after being pregnant for 6 weeks. I found out I was pregnant pretty early on and wauw I was so happy. I loved every minute of it and couldn't wait to share it with you. But this time it wasn't meant to be. I didn't want to wait sharing this because keeping it in makes me more sad. And after talking to my family about it I realised how many women I know experienced something like this as well. It was really nice to know I'm not alone and if you are reading this and have been through it, you're not alone either, although you probably already know that ❤️❤️ Big hugs ❤️❤️

86 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou ▾

 carolinarivera.7 🥺🥺🥺  
21 w. Reageren

 anne3er ❤️❤️❤️  
60 w. Reageren

 kwidmore ❤️  
60 w. Reageren

317.348 vind-ik-leuks  
12 september 2022

 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)



### D3.34



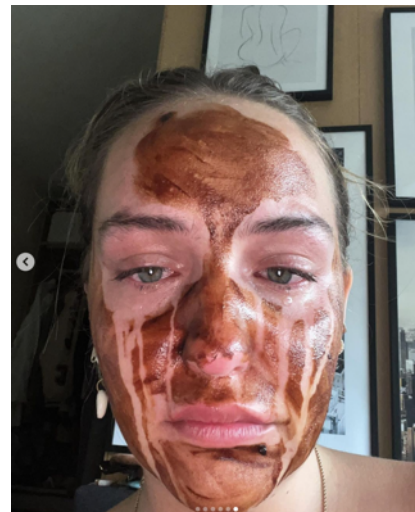
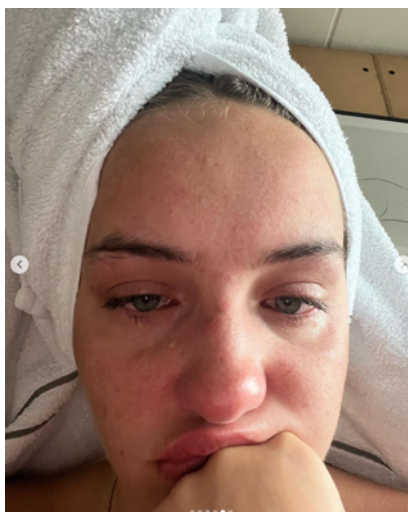
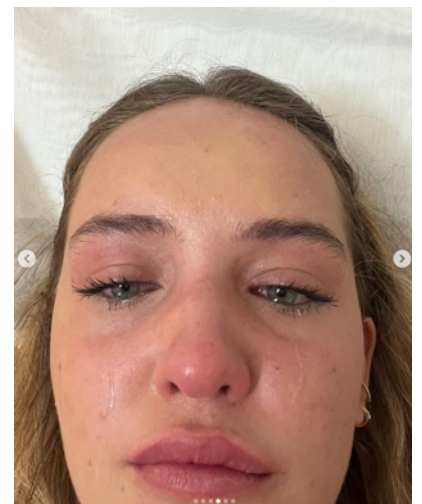
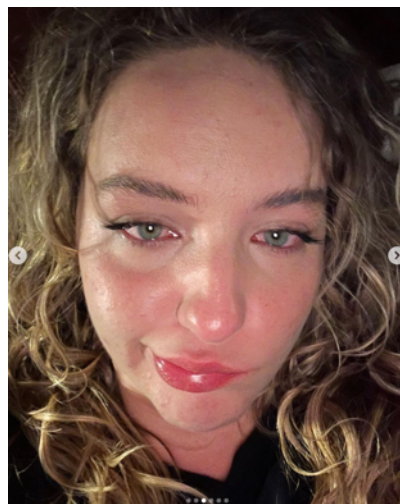
joannvdherik

...



joannvdherik i'm gonna be really honest: i was crying most part of the morning. i have been struggling a little lately. i feel lonely. i feel sad. i feel lost. i feel like i want to spread love and positivity and make this world a more beautiful place, but at the same time i don't know where to begin. life feels overwhelming. social media feels fake. we are constantly portraying a world where everyone is successful and happy, but that is so far away from the truth and it makes so many people feel like sh1t everyday. it makes us all feel like we can't be ourselves, like we have to change something about ourselves in order to fit in. for example: people tell me "don't show realness on social media, brands don't like that" "don't post too much of your relationship, you'll lose followers" "don't do too much body positivity, you'll scare off brands" but is that really what matters most? i want to help people. i want to inspire. i want to show people that being yourself is enough to become successful and happy. i want to make sure people feel confident within themselves, including myself. and it's so hard sometimes to do that and at the same time try not to care about society's expectations of you. i'm sorry if you're struggling, i'm sorry if you're feeling insecure, i'm sorry if you're comparing yourself to all these people on social media that seem to have this "perfect life". i want you to know that you are more than enough exactly the way you are. i am SO proud of you trying every day to make the best of it, fighting the negativity and getting through the day. i am SO proud of the person you are, but also the person you are becoming. there's no need to change or compare, just focus on your personal journey of love and growth. we got this and we gotta remember that we're NEVER alone. we always have each other. ❤️👥

33 w. Vertaling weergeven



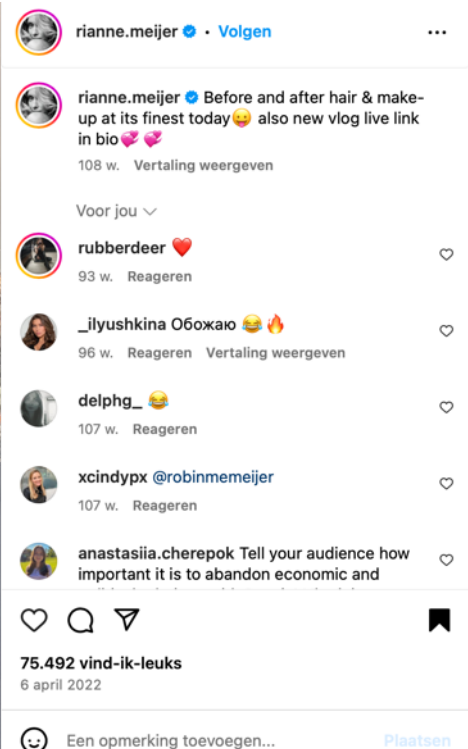


## D2.27

Friendly reminder that nobody looks like those Instagram models, even the models themselves



## D2.13



## D1.21



**vivianhoorn** • Volgen  
Ibiza, Spain

**vivianhoorn** for me body confidence means that I'm spending less time obsessing over my body and spending this time and energy in more special things in life.

82 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou

**mamana.maxa** Piece of art

57 w. Reageren Vertaling weergeven

**gschwindmelanie** Respekt beautiful Lady

57 w. Reageren

**cptmom**

69 w. Reageren

**dank.ink** Perfection

70 w. Reageren

**mustafa.37911**

71 w. Reageren

**livia. h. coffarelli** How much Beauty is possible 2121

34.197 vind-ik-leuks  
8 oktober 2022

Een opmerking toevoegen...

Plaatsen

## D4.16



**veracamilla** • Volgen

**veracamilla** Doe niets waar jij je niet comfortabel bij voelt, dat is wat ik altijd zeg. Voor mij is een gevoel van veiligheid enorm belangrijk. Maar zo nu en dan een stapje buiten je comfort zone doen, wil ik ook aanmoedigen. Dat kan namelijk een enorme boost geven in je zelfvertrouwen. Ookal voelt het eerst totaál niet goed en is het doodeng, relativeer het en zet die stap. Wat kan er fout gaan? En, is dat nou zo erg?

Of het nou een badpak dragen is naar het strand, een keer niet je oksels scheren, je leidinggevende om loonsverhoging vragen, of zonder make-up naar je werk gaan: het maakt niet uit.

Het gaat erom dat het iets is wat je stiekem heel graag wilt proberen, anderen bewondert die het wel doen, maar denkt dat je het zelf niet kunt, het je niet staat, mensen je zullen veroordelen, of je het simpelweg niet waard ben. Daarom zeg ik nu: ga ervoor!

Het hoeft niet gelijk een sprong te zijn, een stapje is voldoende. Desnoods dip je alleen nog voorzichtig je tenen erin. Oefenen is altijd een goed idee. In en om het huis, met of bij mensen die je vertrouwt. Een jurkje over je badpak dragen, of lange mouwen over je

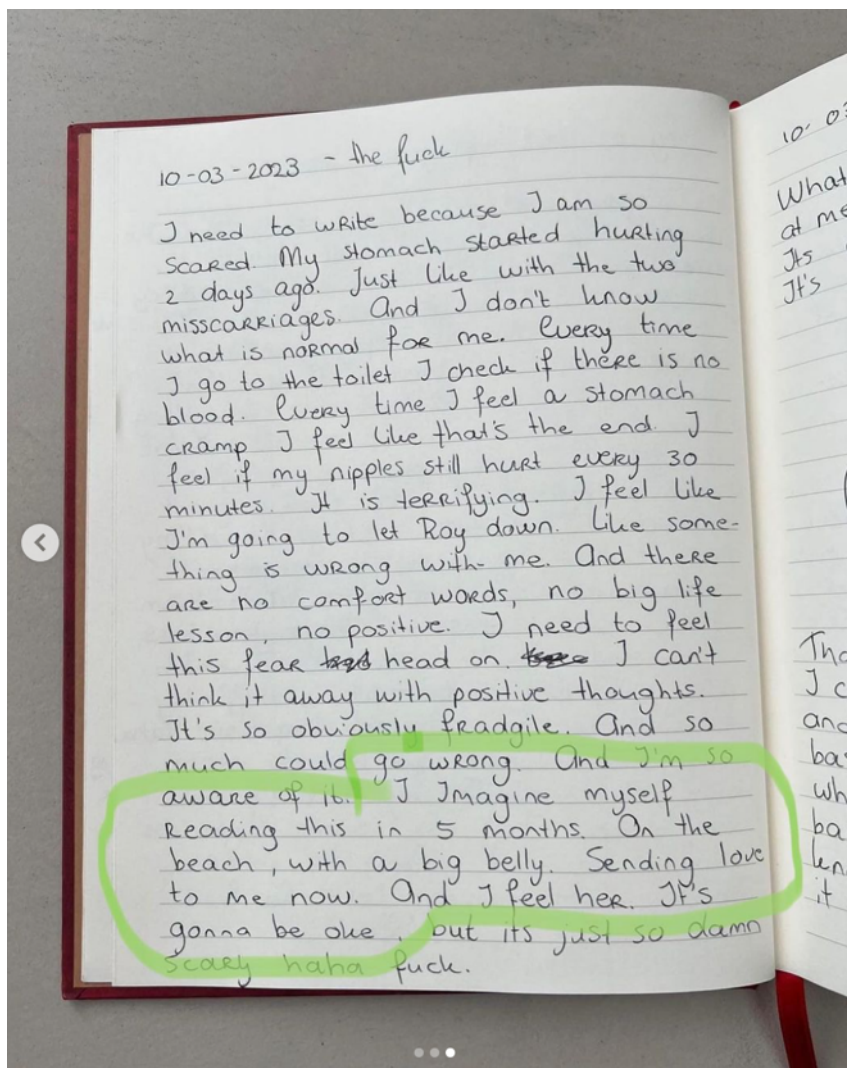
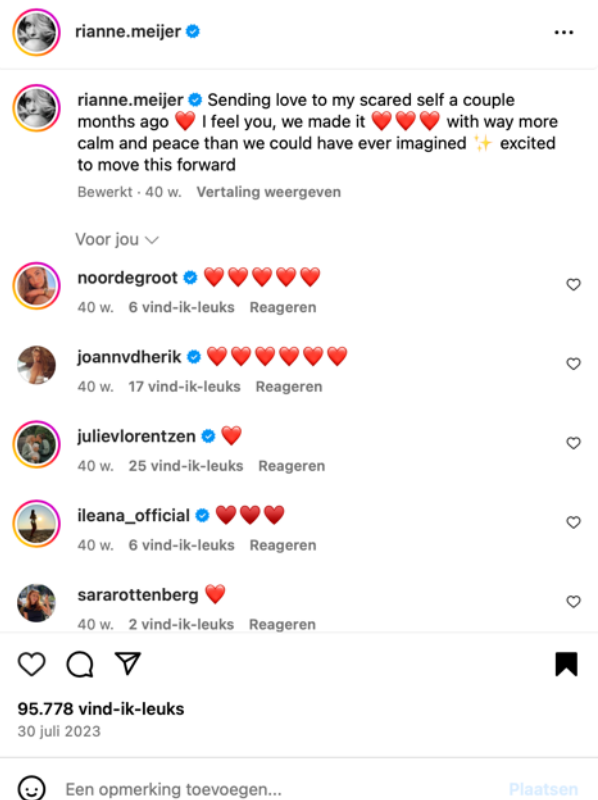
Voor mij was deze bikini een tikkeltje buiten mijn comfort zone. Ik voelde me een lifesize fluorgele marker, glow in the dark. Ik droeg hem daarom eerst op vakantie bij ons huisje, voordat ik hem ook naar het strand aan trok.

Wat ga jij deze week buiten je comfort zone doen?

Bewerkt · 88 w.



## D2.40



## D4.35



veracamilla • Volgen

...



veracamilla • Slik je eigenlijk nog antidepressiva? Die vraag werd me recent gesteld. Ja, ik neem nog steeds elke ochtend 40 milligram Cita.lo.pr.am. Vandaag is mijn pillaversary! 🎉 3 jaar gelukkig met mijn prammetje 🥰

Ik praat er nog zelden over omdat ik inmiddels al jaren dezelfde medicatie slik. En ik heb ook geen behoefte om af te bouwen. Blijkbaar is dat best bijzonder, misschien zelfs controversieel. Maar ik weet heel goed van mezelf dat ik depressief ben en dat ik een ouder heb die dezelfde medicatie in een lagere dosering inmiddels tientallen jaren slikt. Depressie zit - net als angststoornissen - in mijn familie.

De laatste weken merk ik het weer. Ik ben somber en kom slecht op gang. Thank god voor de medicatie, want drie jaar geleden ervaarde ik een heftig dieptepunt. Ik ben toen bij crisisdienst Amsterdam Centrum gelukkig enorm goed geholpen. Daar werd de medicatie voorgeschreven.

Mocht je ook antidepressiva slikken, wil ik je op het hart drukken dat je meer dan je best doet. Dat enorm veel mensen het slikken, ook al wordt er niet over gepraat. Er rust een taboe op, maar je hoeft het echt niet 'zonder te kunnen'. Mentale gezondheid is net zo belangrijk als lichamelijke gezondheid. Van een hartpatiënt wordt ook niet verwacht zonder betablokkers 'te kunnen'. Ben je gek, dat is hartstikke gevaarlijk.

Cheers 🍷 🥰

39 w.



## D4.29



**veracamilla** • Volgen

veracamilla • 6 vs 31 jaar. Wat zou ik tegen mijn jongere zelf zeggen? 'Meid, bereid je voor. It's gonna be one hell of a ride' \*\*\* Niet heel bemoedigend denk ik, maar het is wel de waarheid. Dat de 6-jarige Vera nog heel wat te wachten staat had ze nooit kunnen bedenken, en dat is maar goed ook.

Als ik met social media was opgegroeid, in plaats van met het beperkte beeld dat er in magazines en op TV zichtbaar was, had ik als onzekere puber mezelf niet uitgehongerd en 's zomers alleen maar in lange broeken gelopen. Dan had ik bodypositivity al gauw ontdekt en had ik eerder door wat er met mijn mentale gezondheid aan de hand was.

Vanuit mijn bubbel wil ik dat heel graag geloven. Met de kennis van nu, wil ik heel graag dat dat de waarheid is.

Maar helaas wordt er uit onderzoek van @dove toch een heel ander beeld geschetst. Een beeld van meisjes die zich proberen te meten aan populaire influencers. Door hun eigen foto's te bewerken (27% tot 43%), minder te eten (19% tot 32%), of een procedure te ondergaan om hun uiterlijk aan te passen (30%) hierbij gaat het om bijvoorbeeld wimperextentions, gezichtshaar harsen en tanden bleken.

En uit datzelfde onderzoek blijkt ook dat zeven op de tien meisjes zouden (73%) graag met hun ouders erover willen praten.

Dat geeft me hoop. En daarom wil ik je aanmoedigen om het gesprek aan te gaan met je ouders, kind, vriend(in) of sibling. Al begin je maar met een simpele vraag over het bewerken van foto's, of vraag je wie diens favoriete influencer is.

Met mij is het helemaal goed gekomen en dat hoop ik voor jou ook. Wat zou jij tegen je jongere zelf zeggen?

♥

#DoveSelfEsteemProject advertentie

Bewerkt - 50 w.



## D1.35



**vivianhoorn** • Volgen

vivianhoorn • 15 years is the difference between these pictures. same woman, same heart, same intentions. only life has changed all the time in between into a rollercoaster of emotions. the last 15 years I lost myself and found myself back again. I see now that I needed to learn these lessons to be the person I am today and to make a change. I created a little list with things I learned over the past years. the things I wished my younger self would have known. go to VIVEH.com and subscribe to receive this personal letter from me to you.

Bewerkt - 63 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou ▾

lovemaika3 @happy\_miri  
52 w. Reageren

pina\_santos70 Estas muito bem o importante e se manter saudável o peso não é o problema. Ainda bem que tem pessoas co@o vocês beijinhos  
54 w. Reageren Vertaling weergeven



borangazyeva 🔥🔥🔥🔥



57.591 vind-ik-leuks  
15 februari 2023


😊 Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen

## D2.36








**rianne.meijer**  





 **rianne.meijer**  You know what I found out this pregnancy. My body has always been 'in progress' in my eyes. Ever since I was young I've looked in the mirror and thought to myself little things that make my body: 'not finished yet' if that makes sense. Like a project that's not done yet. First it was: oh yeah cute but wait till I get boobs. Then it was oh yeah cute but would be cuter if I gained a little bit of weight. And then I got older and it shifted to: yeah cute but let's get those arms a little more toned. Let's get that butt a little more tight. And now I'm pregnant and I catch myself thinking: nice but would be cuter if my bump was a little bigger. And then I figured: I always live in the future with my own body. I'm never here. I never looked and felt: this is perfect just the way it is. Right now. I was always looking at it with a thought of how it could be.

So that is what I've been changing now. I've been extremely kind to myself. I've been stopping and looking and thinking: perfect. Absolutely perfect just like this. And that has been liberating 


Bewerkt · 46 w. · Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou 

 **panagiotiskorsianos** So beautiful   



   









**168.417 vind-ik-leuks**  
19 juni 2023

 Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen


## D3.4












**joannvdherik**  · **Volgen**   
Amsterdam




 **joannvdherik**  a DREAM come true: I'M IN VOGUE NL !!!!   
 this is something i've been manifesting and dreaming of since i was a little girl. i'm so proud to be a plus size model in the vogue and show the world that you can be proud of your body, no matter your size. big thank you to [@yeliz\\_cicek](#) [@nlvogue](#) and the whole team for this amazing opportunity, i'm forever grateful and i can't wait to inspire more people together to love and accept themselves. here's to more (self) love for everyone    expect me spamming you guys the coming week with pics of this shoot 





Bewerkt · 90 w. · Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou 


 **nostalgiaetroboy** Very nice um cover of vogue   
26 w. · Reageren · Vertaling weergeven

 **bhattdinkar782** Nice figar shap        
69 w. · Reageren

 **baunstudio\_** We sent you a dm    
69 w. · Reageren · Vertaling weergeven

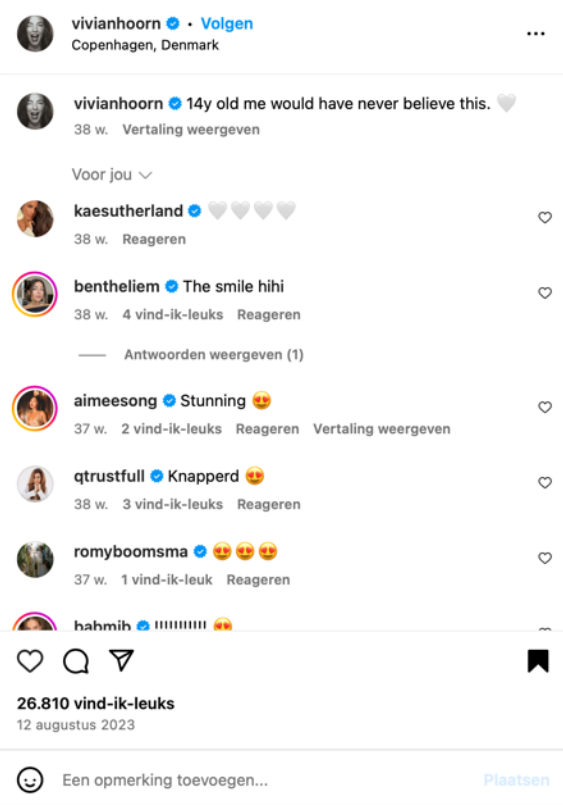
   

18 april 2022

 Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen

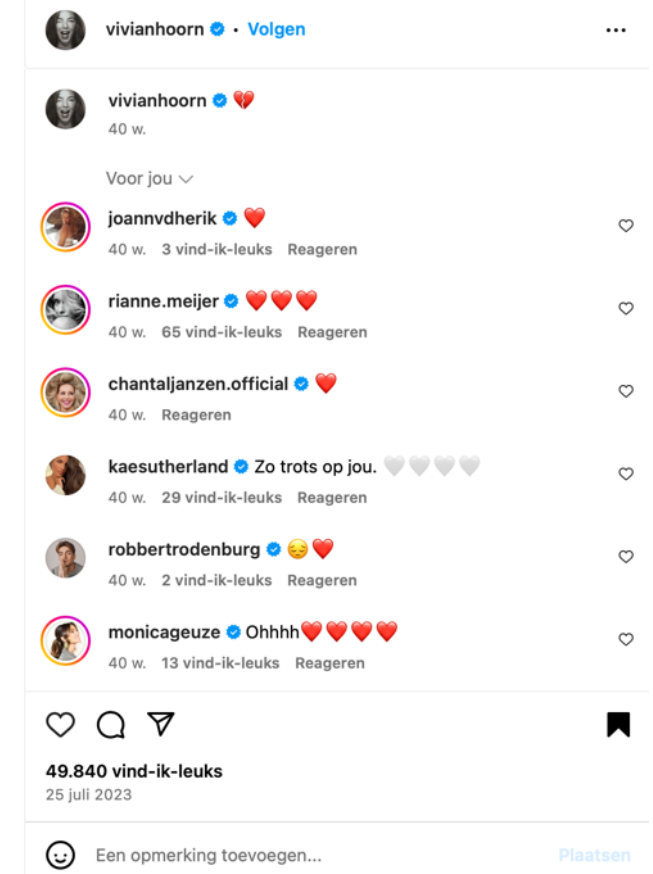


## D1.46



## D1.43

after loving years we decided to go our separate ways. for all of you out there dealing with a break up. we are in this together. this pain, I forgot the intensity of it. been through so many emotions lately. and even though it's for the better, it hurts.. the moment I landed back in amsterdam I knew a new life started. a feeling of panic started the moment I left the plane. I couldn't control my breath and tears. but I knew instantly that this will be the first chapter of my new book. my new life. so I pushed back my shoulders, straightened my spine, chin up and a fierce face. I listened to my favorite song and just walked into my new life. the tears of sadness and fear started to flow into tears of joy. I felt proud cause I handled this moment so well, I knew over the years I grew into a strong woman. and I smiled cause I realized I can do this. on my own. these are just the very first pages of a new book. and it will be a beautiful one.



## D4.39



veracamilla • Volgen

...



veracamilla • Nog maar een paar nachtjes tot het nieuwe jaar, goede voornemens en afslanken dieetreclames overal waar ik kijk. Elk jaar krijgt mijn zelfvertrouwen in januari een klap. Ik ben blij met mezelf, ik weet dat ik het goed doe, weet dat diëten op de lange termijn niet (voor mij en voor 90% van de bevolking) werkt en tóch raken die reclames me. Mijn zelfbeeld krijgt een deuk en ik ga negatief over mezelf denken en praten. Zelfhaat is niet motiverend, het maakt onzeker. Zeker na de feestdagen, na oliebolletjes en kerststol. De timing van die advertenties is de druppel die de emmer doet overlopen.

De influencers die het nieuwe jaar starten met een dieet ('het is een levensstijl') kan ik muten en ontvolgen, maar wat dan met alle online advertenties over afslankmiddelen op de websites en apps van Google? Die kan je beperken!!! Ik ben daar pas net achter, maar wát fijn dat die mogelijkheid er is. Je hebt met Google's Mijn Advertentiecentrum controle over de advertenties die je te zien krijgt.

Je kan niet alleen online advertenties over diëten beperken, maar ook over kansspelen en alcohol! En nog een hele andere belangrijke: ouderschap! Onderwerpen die gevoelig liggen, die kwetsend of triggerend kunnen zijn, kan je beperken. Halleluja. Wat een uitvinding. Wat een opluchting.

Ga naar [myadcenter.google.com](https://myadcenter.google.com) > in het menu klik je op > Advertenties aanpassen > in beeld krijg je drie keuzes > klik op gevoelig > zet uit wat je uit wil zetten.

En denk hierbij ook aan je zusje, nichtje, of dochter. Pas de instellingen in Google aan. En blijf vooral praten en luisteren met en naar elkaar.

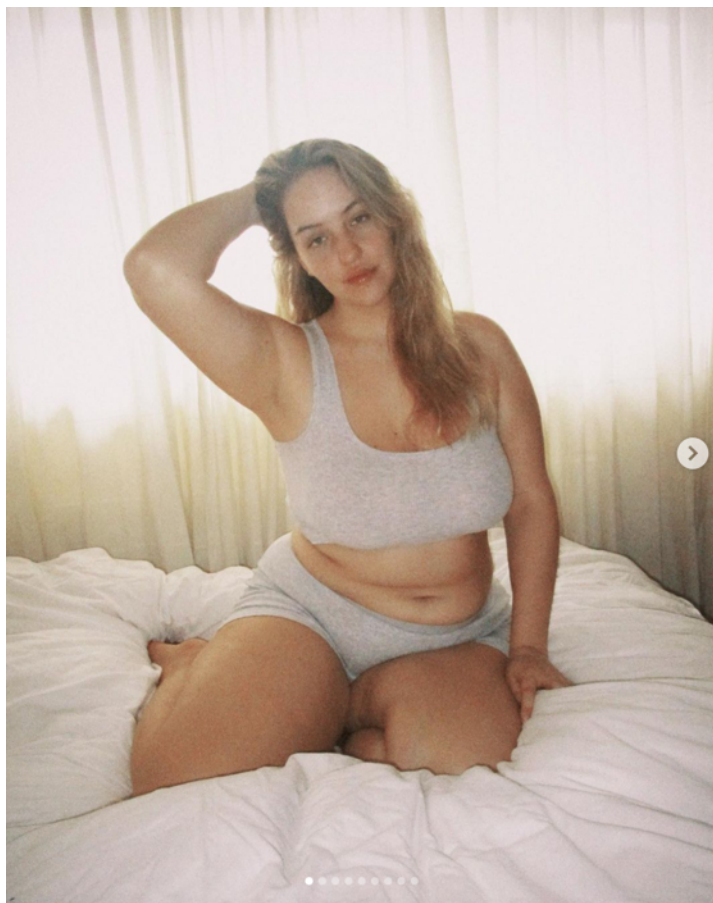
Ik wens je een heel fijn nieuwjaar zonder schuldgevoel en stress. 1 januari is ook maar 'gewoon' een nieuwe dag ❤️ you got this 🍀

#google advertentie

19 w.



### D3.10



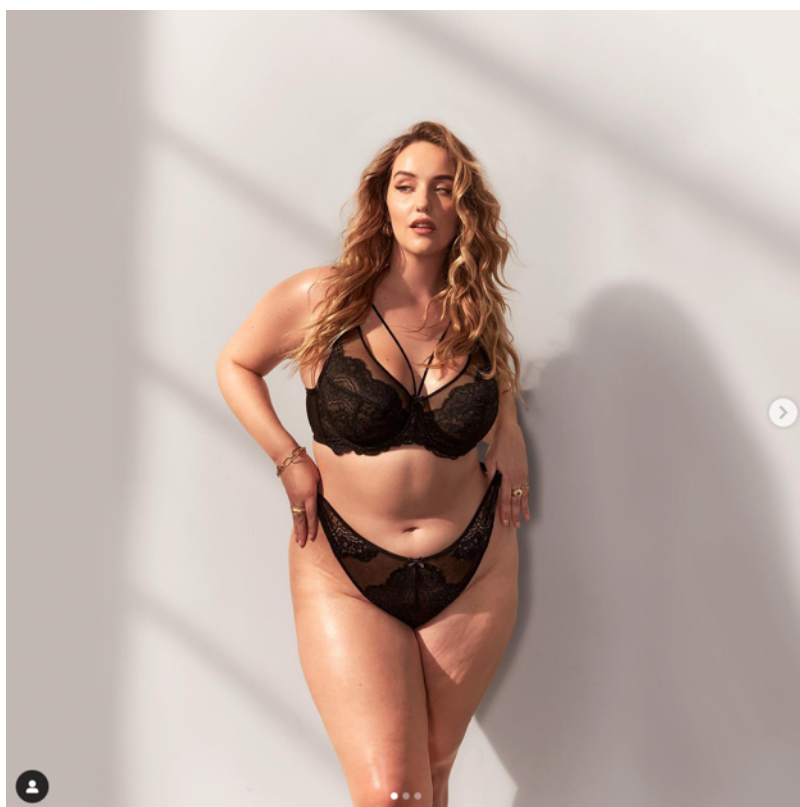
joannvdherik • Volgen

joannvdherik LESSONS IVE LEARNED IN 2022..  
 ❤️ DO NOT LET OTHERS GET YOU DOWN. i've lost myself this year. i was paying too much attention to what others might think of me, so i tried to fit in to an image that wasn't me. in this world it's hard to be authentic, you always have this fear of not being good enough, but at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what other people think. it's YOUR life, so do what makes YOU happy.  
 ❤️ LISTEN TO YOUR BODY. this year i had to redefine what body positivity/confidence means to me. bc of birth control, i gained a lot of weight, got severe acne and just didn't feel comfortable in my own body anymore. so i completely quit birth control and started listening to what my body NEEDS, instead of what i thought i wanted. and when you listen to what your body needs, that's where you'll find true confidence..  
 ❤️ DON'T BE SCARED TO TAKE THE LEAP. i moved to nyc this year and it didn't turn out as expected. i didn't have a lot of work there, i was lonely, living there was super expensive and to top it all off: my apartment had a giant leak last week and a lot of my stuff is ruined.. and because of these things, i decided i'm gonna move back to the Netherlands. but i am still so grateful i took the leap. it might've not been the year i was expecting it to be, but i have learned so much from this experience and i have grown a lot as a human being. so whatever you're scared to do, just do it.

31 december 2022

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen

### D3.16



joannvdherik en hunkemoller


joannvdherik "you don't have a nice body" is a comment I got on one of my latest posts. honestly, comments like that don't hurt me anymore. but i know it hurts a lot of other people. i know people hear these comments in their own lives, get so insecure and immediately feel the need to change something about themselves. the fact that people look at each other and feel the need to say negative comments about each other like that, is something i will never understand. because of comments like these, people feel like their appearances are the most important thing about them. obviously it's not. the first thing i remember about you won't be your abs or your belly rolls, won't be your acne or clear skin, your stretchmarks or your cellulite, your fat or your muscle. it will be your energy, your love, your light. you are made of the same elements lionesses are made from. remember that next time someone tries to get you down. don't EVER let those mean comments get to you. there's nothing wrong with being fat. there's nothing wrong with being skinny. stop asking others for their opinions. let go of the things and people that won't matter in two years from now. YOU've got to look at yourself in the mirror and say "you know what, I deserve so much more". because you do. you are made of the sea and stars, and one day you will fully and completely love yourself. ❤️❤️❤️ @hunkemoller #HKMCurvaceous #rockyourcurves #HUNKEMOLLER



14 maart 2023

Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen


## D2.43





**rianne.meijer** 


 **rianne.meijer**  For the ones who have followed me for a long time; you might remember how I never smile with my teeth on pictures. So when I saw these pictures I was very very proud 😊 So here's an official teeth smile appreciation post 💖 thank you [@ciobanoo\\_](#)

31 w. Vertaling weergeven


Voor jou 

 **vivianhoorn**  Mooi vriendinnetje 🔥


31 w. 16 vind-ik-leuks Reageren

 **joannatsaousidou** You look stunning and your smile is amazing!

31 w. 2 vind-ik-leuks Reageren Vertaling weergeven


 **elaisaya** Cutiepieee

31 w. 1 vind-ik-leuk Reageren

 **caciamatias7** Whyyyy?? You're smile is adorable ❤️.

31 w. 10 vind-ik-leuks Reageren Vertaling weergeven

111.554 vind-ik-leuks  
27 september 2023

 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)

## D4.10



**veracamilla**  • [Volgen](#)

 **veracamilla**  Fake it until you make it ❌ Als er iets niet bij me past is dat het wel. Ik ben eerlijk en open, misschien soms iets té eerlijk en open. Maar ik zou het niet anders willen.

De neusring is (helaas) wel fake, maar ik vind het leuk om er mee te experimenteren. Net zoals met mijn haar, of het nou gaat over kleuren, knippen of stylen.

De haarclips zijn van [@invisibobble](#), het zijn de nieuwe 'BARRETTES'. Ze zijn lichtgewicht, laten geen lelijke knik achter en beschadigen je haar niet. Je schuift ze er eenvoudig in en klikt ze vast.

Ik vind ze super cute en de neutrale tinten passen ook helemaal bij me 📷

[#invisibobble](#) [#invisibobbleBARRETTE](#) AD

96 w.

Voor jou 

 **denaamisels** I must say, staat je wel héél leuk zo'n neusring

90 w. 1 vind-ik-leuk Reageren

 **verenabiscava** Oké maar wat heb ie op ie lippen 🤔

5 juli 2022

 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)



## D1.44



vivianhoorn • Volgen  
Amsterdam



vivianhoorn how to deal with a break up and be single? i don't know. the woman who planned her entire life is now living day by day. one day i feel on top of the world, next day my bed is my best friend. a lot of you are going through this and asked me for advice. we are doing this together so for all of you please give each other advice in the comments. let's share more love.

my days are filled with Billie Eilish for the crying sessions and Lizzo for more empowerment. working out more to clear my head and feel stronger. I never went to concerts but my friends are taking me everywhere and it's giving me power and excitement for everything that is coming. thankful for my friends who are supporting me, sleeping next to me cause the morning and nights are the most intense. but I also choose to have more time for myself, meditation and thankful for the universe for everything it is teaching me. going to therapy. and a moment to watch myself in the mirror, right in the eyes, feel, and tell myself I can do this. that everything happens for a reason. no rain. no flowers.

one thing is very clear for me. I'm in this with me. there is no one out there who can hold my hand constantly. at the end of the day you have to be in the best relationship with yourself. and that is something I'm still working on.

40 w. Vertaling weergeven



44.950 vind-ik-leuks  
29 juli 2023



Een opmerking toevoegen...

Plaatsen

## D4.14



veracamilla • Volgen  
Zákynthos, Zakynthos, Greece



veracamilla Wat als je nou eens niet denkt aan hoe je eruit ziet, maar enkel denkt aan de ervaring? Denkt aan het doel en niet aan de middelen? Aan afkoelen, ontspannen en genieten.

Wat maakt het uit hoe je eruit ziet, wanneer je herinneringen maakt? Wat kan het je schelen wat andere mensen van je denken, wanneer jij plezier hebt?

Gun jezelf de ervaringen. Het is niet relevant in wat voor lichaam jij dat doet. In welke conditie je bent, en welk bikini of badpak je aantrekt. Het enige wat er toe doet is met wie je bent. Met vrienden, familie, je partner of kinderen. Geniet van de zomer en van je vakantie.

Onthoud: het gaat om het doel, niet om de middelen.

Ik geloof dat je het kunt ❤️

92 w.

Voor jou ▾



butterflies.by\_minouk Je staat er prachtig én krachtig op!



86 w. 1 vind-ik-leuk Reageren



6.025 vind-ik-leuks  
3 augustus 2022



Een opmerking toevoegen...

Plaatsen



## D3.17



**joannvdherik**

joannvdherik it's okay not to be okay sometimes <3 just a few pictures of me going through the motions of life. don't be so hard on yourself for feeling lost, confused or just sad. it's not weird to feel like that sometimes. you might feel alone in these moments, but everyone has these days. all the "perfect" pictures you see on instagram and compare yourself with: they're not real. EVERYONE STRUGGLES. everyone goes through shit and has bad days. next time you feel bad and everyone seems to have the perfect life except for you, know that it's not real. it's just filtered. we are all on a journey to grow and learn things. every win, every loss, every mistake, every heartbreak. every human goes through it, gets lost only to find themselves again. so be patient, we'll figure it out and everything will make perfect sense. but don't be afraid to go through these feelings, those feelings don't make you strange or weird, they make you human. and that's the most beautiful thing you can be.

59 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou

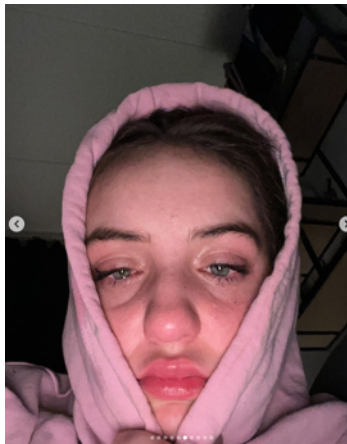
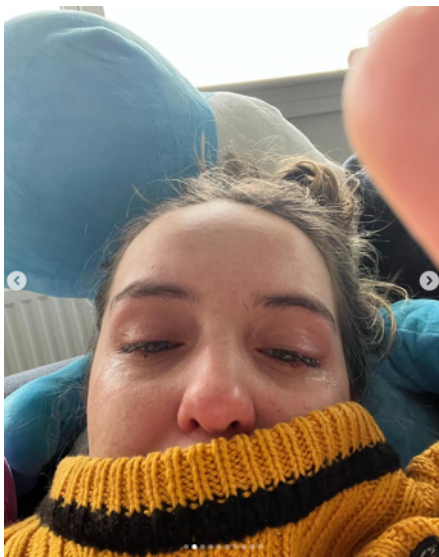
**entre.preneurs2022** Sorry bb

30 w. Reageren Vertaling weergeven

**ethanaelteshome8** Be happy be blacked

19 maart 2023


Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen






## D2.2




 rianne.meijer • Volgen ...

 rianne.meijer Hi! Lately I noticed I've been giving myself a hard time if I didn't do every step of the 'perfect' morning routine. I could be taking all my vitamins every morning but only focus on the fact that I didn't meditate. Or I could be making the best oatmeal breakfast but only focus on the fact that I didn't journal yet. Eventhough I felt pretty good it felt like I should be doing more. Until I realized like wow, I actually feel great, I'm improving and creating habits that make me feel better but all I focus on is all the steps I'm not taking. Kind of brainwashed by watching too many 'that girl' tiktoks I guess 😊 So here's a little reminder for everyone (including myself 😊) who feels like they should be adding a thousand steps to their routine in order to feel their best: YOU ARE ALREADY DOING PRETTY DAMN GREAT 💪❤️❤️❤️❤️

119 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou ▾

 spontaangenieten @danakessels 61 w. 1 vind-ik-leuk Reageren

 roehina\_design 🥰🥰 113 w. Reageren


♡ 💬 🚩


**47.046 vind-ik-leuks**  
18 januari 2022

😊 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)


## D1.36





 vivianhoorn • Volgen ...


 vivianhoorn all over the place but luckily very centered. ❤️ how do you feel lately my love?  
Bewerkt · 54 w. Vertaling weergeven


Voor jou ▾


 lizza.san 🥰 38 w. Reageren

 madushaf 🍷🍷🍷 50 w. 1 vind-ik-leuk Reageren

 tonyamazzeo This dress 💙💙💙 54 w. Reageren Vertaling weergeven

 theblondeventure This dress was made for you babe ❤️ 54 w. Reageren Vertaling weergeven

 andreas\_koronakis xx 54 w. Reageren

 nansuits 💕💕 54 w. Reageren

♡ 💬 🚩

19 april 2023

😊 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)

## D3.39



joannvdherik  New Moon

joannvdherik  everything i desire, desires me more. everything i am searching for is making its way to me. everything that's meant for me will ALWAYS find me. and i will wait in excitement and gratitude. thank you so much universe and my angels. happy new moon 🌙💕☁️

29 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou ▾

jerrelbaumann 😊😊

29 w. 1 vind-ik-leuk Reageren

noor.mutsaers Parel 😊

29 w. 1 vind-ik-leuk Reageren

wiardi.koopmeiners ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

29 w. 1 vind-ik-leuk Reageren

holistiknl 😊

29 w. 2 vind-ik-leuks Reageren

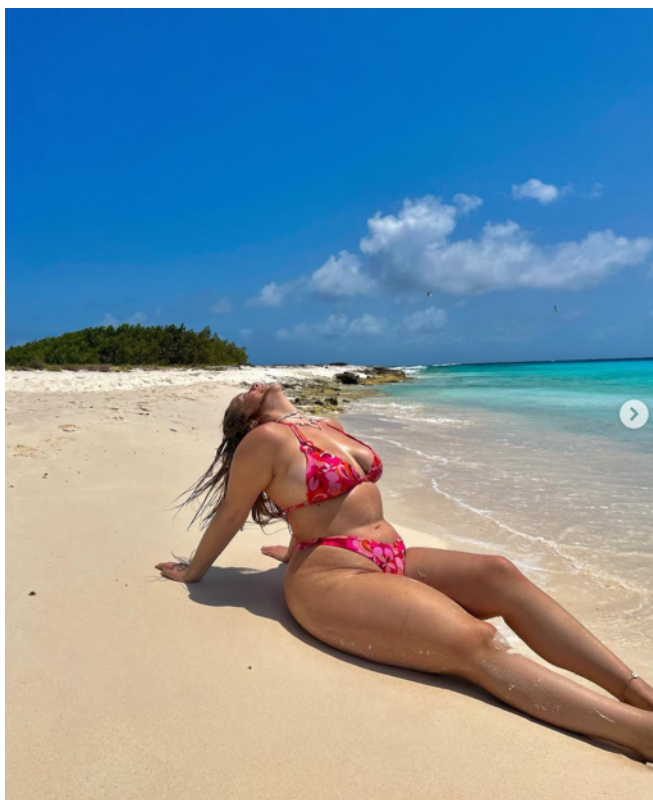
havenlakevillage 💚💚

14 oktober 2023


Een opmerking toevoegen...

Plaatsen

## D3.21



joannvdherik  Klein Curacao - Little Curacao

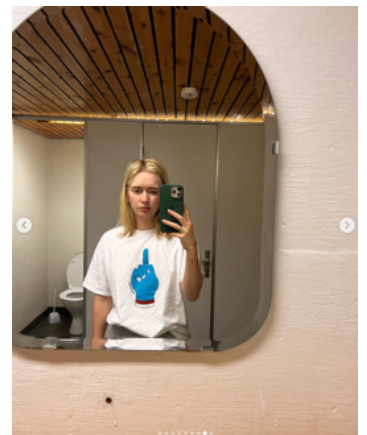
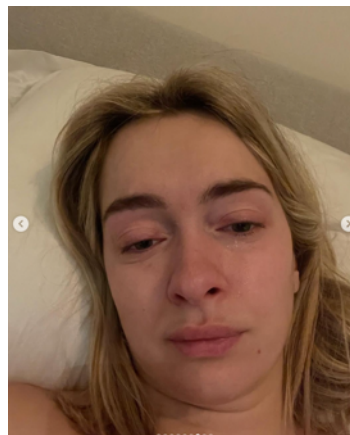
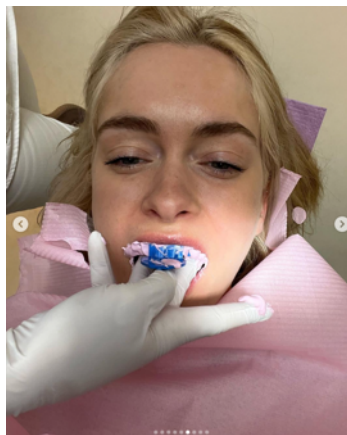
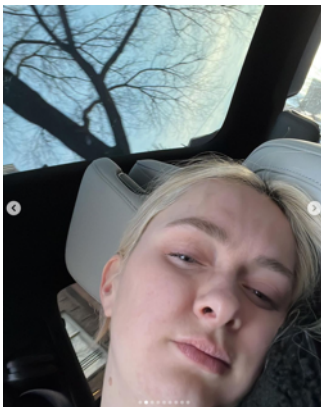
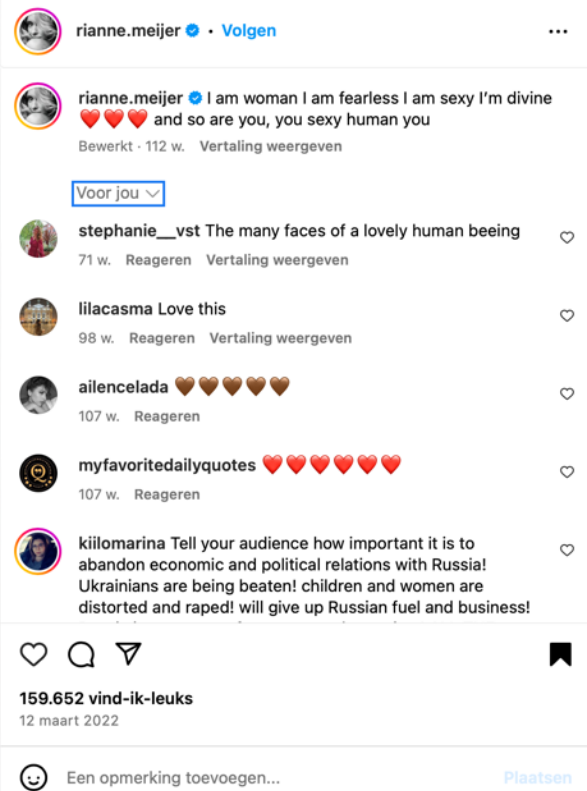
joannvdherik  same body, different angles 💕 this is a reminder that you are beautiful in EVERY way. every angle, every lighting, every pose, every outfit. sometimes we see pictures of ourselves in an angle we don't like or in "bad" lighting and we immediately start feeling insecure about the way we look. but 1 picture can't define you. 1 picture can never capture your true beauty. we don't need to fit into that "perfect" image society painted for us. ideals of beauty are constantly changing, but we shouldn't change our bodies with them. beauty is not a one size fits all. so just stay true to yourself because your real beauty will shine from within, no matter your size, no matter the angle. 💕💕💕 keep spreading your light and love. i'm so proud of you.

55 w. Vertaling weergeven



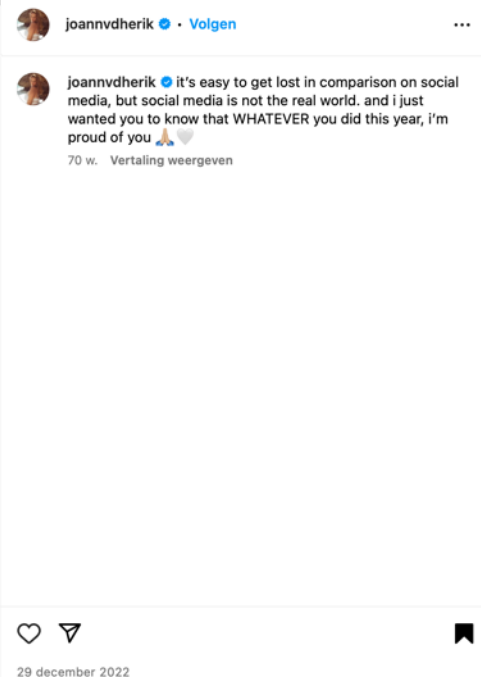


## D2.9



### D3.9

I know we are in the yearly recap phase on social media and everyone is announcing their biggest wins, but please don't compare yourself and your progress to others. If your biggest achievement was just staying alive, then that's the biggest win of all.





### D4.27














## D2.49













**rianne.meijer**  



 **rianne.meijer**  Most say social media is a bad place to spend your time. 'Endlessly scrolling through short meaningless videos' 'staring at your phone 24/7'. And sure a lot of that is true but I'm in the Christmas spirit and want to shed some light on the good stuff. The way social media connects us is so cool to me. The way we get to see people from all over the world be creative, be vulnerable, be funny. And the way we can support each other, share our stories and make others feel less alone. That is so valuable! And I want to thank you for sticking around here and laugh and cry with me from time to time haha. I see you    MERRY CHRISTMAS you beautiful people   





19 w. Vertaling weergeven

Voor jou 


 **vivianhoorn**       
19 w. 3 vind-ik-leuks Reageren

 **chantaljanzen.official**     
19 w. 3 vind-ik-leuks Reageren

 **the\_blonde\_freckle** Beautifully said. Merry Christmas! Your feed also shows "real" and humorous stuff, that is what I 




   







**117.453 vind-ik-leuks**  
24 december 2023

 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)


## D3.5













**joannvdherik**     
Amsterdam

















 **joannvdherik**  AAAAAAAAAAAAAA I DONT KNOW WHAT TO SAY I FEEL SO GRATEFUL!!!!!! THIS FEELS LIKE A DREAM! thank you thank you thank you for everyone involved! i can't wait for my booklaunch and for you all to finally read my book this week !!!!    

Bewerkt · 106 w. Vertaling weergeven







Voor jou 

 **vipin\_vipinkanojiya** Congratulations         





14 w. Reageren

 **stacieabuhler** CONGRATS!!!! This is so kick ass!! You a bad bitch!!               





106 w. Reageren Vertaling weergeven

 **whoisthatblonde**  You go girl!!    


106 w. Reageren Vertaling weergeven

 **diana.yuss** Gefeliciteerd   

106 w. Reageren

19 april 2022

 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)

**suicide raakt ons allemaal**



wereld suicide preventie week

samenmindersuicide.nl  
#ikhelpmee




veracamilla • Volgen

...



veracamilla In gesprek met een dierbare hoorde ik hem zeggen dat hij het niet aan kon om uren te praten over vroeger en over alles wat er gebeurd is, tijdens de verplichte intake bij de kliniek. Daarom besloot hij tot mijn verdriet de intake en de behandeling te laten schieten.

Ik vroeg hem wat dat betekent, dat hij het niet aan kon. Ik zei dat het ongemakkelijk zou zijn, heel moeilijk en heel kut. 'Dat hoort erbij, je moet daar doorheen'. Maar je kan het aan, al het ongemak, al het verdriet en de schaamte.

Hij is er nog niet klaar voor. We praten zonder dat hij me aankijkt en ik hoop dat hij begrijpt dat ik er altijd voor hem zal zijn. Ondertussen ben ik bang dat het niet genoeg zal zijn.

Hij zegt dat hij het zelf moet doen, ik zeg hem dat dat klopt. Maar ook dat je het niet alleen kan doen. Dat er professionals zijn die je willen begeleiden. Dat ik er ben, dat wij er zijn. Om te helpen, te luisteren en te praten.

Praten is moeilijk. En vluchten lijkt makkelijk, maar is het niet. Eenmaal gevlucht is de weg terug vinden iets wat je niet meer alleen kunt doen. Ook al wil je zo graag.

Vandaag is het Wereld Suicide Preventie Dag en wil ik je op het hart drukken om te blijven praten ❤️ #IkHelpMee #WSPD

35 w.



## D1.33



**vivianhoorn** • Volgen

**vivianhoorn** • LOVE the skin you are in. ❤️ happy that I'm enjoying my body at its fullest these days. I really don't care what anyone thinks of my body cause I'm so proud of the woman I became. for everyone who wants a little help towards self love please check the Dove Self Esteem Project in my stories.

2. buiten douchen is toch een van de fijnste dingen ooit. Met de verzorgende @Dove Rose Oil Shower Mousse is het alsof je een toetje opsmeert. geef je lichaam de liefde die het verdient.
3. elke dag een potje yathzee.
4. als ik op vakantie ben draag ik bijna geen make-up.
5. de shower mousse van @dove heeft een verzachtende werking op de huid.
6. checking in bij dit all pink prinsessen hotel, wat een feest!
7. I like my view haha.

#ad

Bewerkt • 64 w.

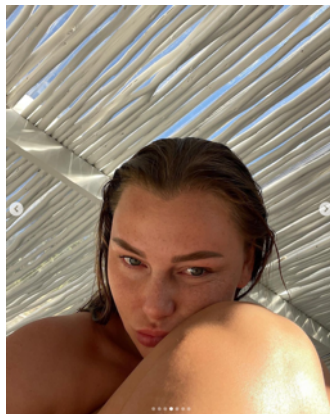
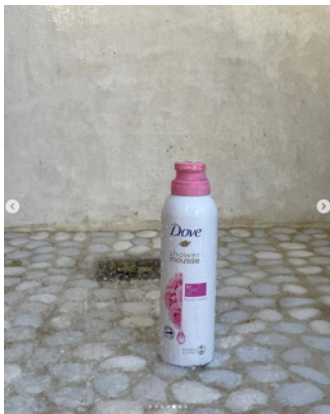
Voor jou ▾

**my\_lidia** 🥰🥰🥰  
44 w. Reageren

**pauyarte** ❤️




43.494 vind-ik-leuks  
9 februari 2023




Een opmerking toevoegen... Plaatsen










D3.25







 **joannvdherik**  

 **joannvdherik**  this is your weekly reminder that your body is a masterpiece   
51 w. [Vertaling weergeven](#)




Voor jou 

 **gold\_investor105** Stomach     




29 w. [Reageren](#) [Vertaling weergeven](#)

 **tenoriocavalcantiadilson**   




29 w. [Reageren](#)

 **andfri6**  







30 w. [Reageren](#)





 **senorita\_a019** Those curves  

30 w. [Reageren](#) [Vertaling weergeven](#)


 **viperjes**  

30 w. [Reageren](#)

 **ebriosdoasfalto**     

10 mei 2023

 Een opmerking toevoegen... [Plaatsen](#)





## D1.13

