

# Self-Disclosure tendencies in digital spaces: A qualitative study of secondary instagram account use among guidance and counseling students

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## Abstract

This research focuses on the self-disclosure of students from guidance and counseling studies who use a second Instagram account. Data Analysis Approach A thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data following the six-phase model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Participants were recruited using purposive sampling with explicit inclusion criteria: active Guidance and Counseling students who had owned a second Instagram account for at least 1 year prior to data collection and who frequently used the account to communicate thoughts, feelings, and daily life experiences. Seven participants met all criteria. Theoretically, this study is based on Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory and Butler's Performativity theory as an interpretative framework of the second account use situation regarding identity performance and self-presentation in a digital context. The analysis yielded five themes based on DeVito's (2011) categories of self-disclosure: Amount, Accuracy, Intention, Intimacy, and Valence. Results indicate that the second Instagram account serves as a negotiated Backstage space, where Guidance and Counseling students express identities that are context-dependent, emotionally oriented, and relationally selective, all of which have implications for developing empathic and reflexive counselor competencies. Counselor education implications and Guidance and Counseling service development are also discussed in the article.

**Keywords:** *self-disclosure, second Instagram account, social media, social media, guidance and counseling students, thematic analysis*



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## Introduction

Human communication is an important social act wherein we make meaning, maintain relationships and negotiate identity with others (Watzlawick et al., 1967). En la definición de lo político, Aristóteles (citado en Aristóteles 1998) decía que somos zoon politikon, es decir, seres que por naturaleza son políticos y sociales: existimos sólo en relación con otros a través de la

comunicación. This basic perspective has persisted over millennia of communicative evolution, including the age of digitally mediated social interaction.

Social media is one of the biggest innovations in how communication happens. By utilizing Web 2.0 architecture, the platform has established an interactive virtual space integrating social engagement, self-identity and content creation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Especially Instagram has become the most popular social media platform by millions of people worldwide. The platform is based on a user-account structure in which users exchange texts and images with the connected public online. This design includes a wider array of actions relevant to self-disclosure: posts (photos and videos uploaded for permanent access), Stories (they disappear after being live for 24 hours), short-form videos (Reels), direct messaging, and the Close Friends feature that allows restricting who sees your content, amongst others. The presence of these features lends contours to the context in which self-presentation and self-disclosure occur (Waterloo et al., 2018).

Social media usage in Indonesia have reached hydra-like of proportions. Central Statistics Agency (2023) released the fact that internet user have reached 78.19% of national population. In Indonesia, a social media trends study established that Instagram appears among the most used platforms every year with more than 80% of internet users aged from 16 to 64 years use it, just next to WhatsApp (Pandjaitan, 2024). According to (APJII, 2024), as of early 2024 there were around 139 million users of active social media accounts in Indonesia, making up roughly 49.9% of the population. At the beginning of 2024, there were roughly 100.9m Instagram users in Indonesia, representing 46% of the population aged over 13 years (DataReportal, Meta advertising statistics). Such statistics make Indonesia the most engaged nation on social media globally (World Population Review, 2023) which shows how integral digital platforms have become in the communicative and relational life of many Indonesians.

Along this continuum, self-disclosure emerged as a key construct both theoretically and in practice. According to Wheeler & Grotz (1977), self-disclosure is defined as the involving the intention of sharing personal information, feelings and thoughts with another person often to strengthen relational ties. In the same year, DeVito (2011) that defined of self-disclosure as a transaction between the disclosing person and recipient where the exchange was bidirectional and embedded in context. As stated by Floyd (2009), genuine self-disclosure includes the disclosure of information that the recipient does not already know about a person, thereby including an element of risk and trust in relational communication. According to West & Turner (2008), self-disclosure is at the heart of establishing interpersonal closeness as well as intimacy.

As multisided construct, self-disclosure can be evaluated along the five analytical dimensions identified by DeVito (2011), which are: (1) Amount, i.e., quantity and frequency of information disclosed; (2) Valence, i.e., emotional nature of content disclosed—positive versus negative; (3) accuracy, i.e., the level of honesty/truthfulness; (4) Intention, i.e., underlying motivation for self-disclosing; and finally (5) Intimacy, that is to say personal relevance. These five dimensions constitute the theoretical framework underlying the analysis carried out in this paper.

Self-disclosure exists in a different context when talking about digital space. As discussed by Turkle (2011), through social media, individuals can wield unprecedented power over their self-narratives; they possess the ability to show a polished and curated version of themselves while selectively occluding fundamental, sensitive facets of their personal dimensions. In Luo & Hancock (2020), they show that online self-disclosure, when mismanaged, poses measurable threats to psychological health and social relations which means it is not just a communicative issue but also a psychosocial one. In a later meta-analysis conducted by Chu et al. According to (2023), positive and sincere online self-disclosure correlates with psychological well-being, whereas uncontrolled or contextually inappropriate disclosure produces harmful effects.

Which two theoretical frameworks are most relevant to the understanding of self-disclosure related to second Instagram accounts. First, Goffman's (1990) Dramaturgical Theory envisions that social interaction is a kind of performance before an audience where people manage impressions in particular domains which can be identified as the front stage and back stage. In

other words, for Instagram specifically, the primary account can be viewed as the front stage; a self-promotional and audience-oriented space in which to perform an edited self (Hogan 2010) while our secondary account acts as back stage, where the performance pressures of the primary account are relaxed and more authenticity is possible. Goffman theory relevance in social media platforms was also just recently proved by Jahangir et al. (2022) found that both real-name and anonymous online platform users adjust their self-presentation to be consistent with audience expectations and contextual norms in accordance with dramaturgical logic. This is not simply an analogy: Goffman articulates a vision of backstage dispositions as remaining purpose- and socially directed; this diagrammatic perspective is mirrored by the self-censoring, regulated behaviors reported by participants in this study even when describing their second order accounts.

The Performativity Theory of Butler (1990) represents a second complementary perspective, in which identity is not an immutable essence that preceded actions of performing but rather constructed through iterations of performative acts. Most importantly, identity is performed through the multiplicity of postings, responses and profile presentation across sites and account categories in social media (Cover, 2012; Dobson, 2015). This creates not a place of sincere self-exposure, as though the actual self just presents itself straightforwardly; but rather a different form of storytelling, where identity projects take on a different sort of meaning, facilitated by relationships with minimal relational insecurity and high control over context.

Academic attention is increasingly being given to the link between self-disclosure and privacy control on social media. Nissenbaum (2010) developed the notion of contextual integrity, which is about how people change what information they provide depending on the contextual norms of the audience and the platform. The second account may be seen as a structural mechanism whereby users enact contextual integrity. By compartmentalizing their social media persona, users preserve congruence between the kind of material they publish and the relational environment in which it is received. This is not only a privacy tactic, but a complex type of relational and communicative intelligence.

Internationally, multiple social media account usage has been reported across many cultural and national settings. Duffy & Chan (2019) have discussed second accounts and “finstas” in the UK and US as sites in which young people resist the demands of monitoring from public social media. Reduced identifiability on second accounts was shown to be associated with more real and emotionally honest self-disclosure (Zhao et al., 2022). In Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, Kurniawan & Hidayanto (2024) revealed that Generation Z users intentionally performed privacy calculations in their usage of the second accounts, weighing the need for authentic expression against the danger of social judgment.

The usage of second accounts in Indonesia has been observed even in domestic studies. Emeraldien et al. (2019) said that privacy and convenience were the main reasons. Hasibuan et al. (2023) mapped self-disclosure in second accounts into categories of open, concealed, dark and unknown. Kurnia (2023) studied the influence of personality, audience, subject, and media on the self-disclosure tendencies of second accounts. Budiani & Magistarina (2023) found the function of self-control in managing online self-disclosure among second account users. Finally, Haqqi & Ilmi (2023) revealed a substantial beneficial impact of second Instagram account usage on students' self-disclosure behavior, giving more empirical footing for the relational and communicative value of this platform's characteristics.

This category of participants made perfect sense from a theoretical standpoint, so the focus on guidance and counseling students is clear. Because guidance and counseling students will assume a role as future professional counselors, they are in a unique position with respect to self-disclosure: their professional training centers on self-awareness, empathetic acumen, and ethical management of boundaries—all skills that have direct implications for how one manages self-disclosure in digital spaces. In counselor education research, self-awareness and congruence are foundational to therapeutic factor (Norcross & Lambert, 2019; Rogers, 1961) and how a counselor understands and regulates their own patterns of self-disclosure has direct implications for their ability to create

an environment conducive for safe disclosure with clients (Knox & Hill, 2003; Bevly & Prosek, 2024). Prihatiningsih & Simon (2024) had focused the documentation of Guidance and Counseling students in an Indonesian university and the relevance of self-disclosure practices in social media, linking the digital ones directly to professional identity formation among at least one student audience practice that clearly justifies this study as useful indeed professionally relevant. On the contrary, the study on the digital self-disclosure of Guidance and Counseling students in secondary accounts has not been studied well enough, which is relevant at both academic and practical levels.

This cohort was selected according to the idea of maximal variance sampling in purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All the chosen individuals were matched in terms of predicted phases of their professional growth allowing this research to talk about common developmental circumstances. This cohort-specific method was not intended to provide generalizable results, but to provide a contextualized knowledge of how Guidance and Counseling students—at different developmental phases in their careers expressed themselves via digital self-disclosure.

Several previous studies have examined related topics, but the relationship between professional identity development in Guidance and Counseling and digital self-disclosure practices in secondary accounts has not been specifically studied. This study attempts to cover this main research gap. Geographically, this study is not new in claiming to explore hitherto unmapped institutional sites, but it is new in its theoretically motivated focus on a particular group of participants who are professionals and whose relationship to self-disclosure has distinct consequences for their future practice.

The purpose of the present study is to describe and analyze the self-disclosure tendencies of Guidance and Counseling students in a second Instagram account by using qualitative thematic analysis through the five dimensions of self-disclosure of DeVito (2011) as the analytical framework and Goffman and Butler's (1990) theory as the interpretive lens. The results are likely to add to the knowledge of digital self-disclosure in this professionally important demographic, and to create practical implications for counselor education and the development of Guidance and Counseling services.

## **Method**

The research used a descriptive qualitative design and the analysis tool was theme analysis. Thematic analysis as created and refined by Braun and Clarke (2021) is a conceptually flexible approach that is well suited to detecting, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative datasets. Thematic analysis was chosen because of its capacity to provide a systematic and rigorous engagement with the experience narratives of the participants while being sensitive to the theoretical frameworks guiding the study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The research does not claim a case study design but employs theory-informed thematic analysis of interview and documentation data from seven persons with a specified characteristic profile. Therefore, the title of the publication has been modified to better represent this methodological approach.

Participants were recruited through use of purposive sampling methods. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), purposive sampling specifically, engages the intentional act of selecting participants that are information-rich; individuals who can provide an example of the phenomenon being studied from a related experiential context. There were four inclusion criteria to ensure that subjects would be relevant to the topic and comparable in some way: active, female Guidance and Counseling students (1) who are active users of a second Instagram account (2) for at least one year prior as regular users of this second account to share daily thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

These criteria were derived on solid theoretical and methodological grounds. The first criterion was selected because active Guidance and Counseling students are at similar levels of professional development allowing a focused analysis of their shared developmental context. We choose a same-gender sample to directly compare variables of interest, as theory indicates that women generally engage in more emotional self-disclosure than men (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Trepte

& Reinecke, 2013) and Indonesian-based studies suggested over-representation of females among second Instagram account holders (Kurniawan & Hidayanto, 2024). The third criterion was based on the concept that continuous usage for at least one year gives participants enough experience depth to be able to express patterns, motivations and reflections on their disclosure behavior, in line with data richness in purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We operationalized the fourth criterion with a short semi-structured pre-interview around usage of second accounts (encompassing examples starting from all four criteria, along with doses); thus these criteria do not rely on subjective self-reports only but structured screening conversations as preliminary inclusion (see below for details).

All 4 criteria were met by 7 participants who completed the study. In thematic analysis, statistical power does not dictate the adequacy of participants but rather saturation, the point at which no new meaningful codes occur from additional data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Data saturation was determined iteratively during the analysis process; specifically, after having coded the transcript of the fifth interview, no significantly new codes appeared in the transcripts of the sixth or seventh interviews indicating that thematic saturation had been reached for this phenomenon within our sample. Similar to recommendations from the thematic-analysis literature, this is because small samples with rich, depth data, are well suited for the thematic analysis methodological approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and content documentation of secondary accounts, two complementary qualitative data. Using a protocol based on DeVito's (2011) five dimensions of self-disclosure, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant. The duration of interviews varied between 45 and 75 minutes, all audio-recorded with consent from the participants. Qualitative interview guidelines, including the use of open-ended questions designed to prompt stories based on experiences rather than binary yes/no responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Documentation consisted in a systematic recording of content published on the participants' Instagram accounts during the three months before the interviews took place. The collection of content was based on a systematic analysis protocol that covered: a) all feed posts in this timeframe (photos, carousels, and videos); b) 10 randomly selected archived Stories per participant when available; and c) pinned posts or Highlight content. Effects in Text Captions (Proportional Analysis): Proportion of negative affective tone, thematic area and contextual elements; Effects in nature of visual content (Photo, Reels) on affective tone, subject matter and context. This generated a multimodal dataset alongside the interview data that was complementary and triangulated. All documents were collected with clear written consent.

Previous to data gathering, they were given a complete participant information sheet then clearly described the reason for the study, that participation was voluntary (not obligatory), how privacy and confidentiality will be treated, their right to withdraw at any time without penalty body of work in which their personal data are stored and used. Prior to interview commencement, a signed written consent was collected from each participant.

The analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis procedure of Braun & Clarke (2021), as follows: (1) familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and documentation notes; (2) generation of initial codes, both inductively attending to participants' own meaning-making and deductively drawing on DeVito's (2011) dimensional framework and Goffman's and Butler's (1990) theoretical lenses; (3) construction of candidate themes by grouping related codes into meaningful clusters; (4) reviewing and refining themes against the full dataset to ensure coherence and representativeness; (5) defining and naming themes with conceptual precision; and (6) producing the written analysis integrating thematic findings with theoretical interpretation.

Following the clear methodological direction of Braun & Clarke (2021) the thematic significance in this research is not established by the frequency of the codes related to the themes, but by the conceptual importance and the analytical richness of each topic. Instead of a frequency

table the results section provides a thematic map (Figure 1) showing the related structure of themes and codes that make up the themes. Data on code frequency are included in the additional analysis file and are only mentioned when they show substantial variance among individuals.

Data were analyzed with the use of ATLAS.ti 9, a software program that aided in organizing, coding, and displaying the analytical process. It is crucial to establish what exactly is ATLAS.ti: a data management and organizing tool that allowed systematic categorization and the building of theme networks, but the analytical and interpretative work was done by the researchers. ATLAS.ti did not generate the analysis, but helped the researchers to handle and visualize it (Frieze, 2019).

The research validity was determined based on four criteria suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985): (1) Credibility was established through member-checking, whereby participants reviewed draft summaries of themes related to their data and confirmed or refined the researchers' interpretations, (2) Transferability was supported through a rich description of the research context, participant characteristics, and analytical procedures so that readers could assess the applicability of the findings in similar contexts, (3) Dependability was maintained through a detailed audit trail documenting all coding decisions, theme revisions, and analytical choices, and (4) Confirmability was promoted through systematic, reflexive journaling throughout the research process, where researchers examined their own assumptions and positioned their interpretations accordingly.

## Findings

The participants in this research were seven Guidance and Counseling students who were active users of secondary Instagram accounts for one to three years. Thematic analysis of interview data and secondary account material revealed five themes aligned with DeVito's (2011) aspects of self-disclosure. The thematic network map, which depicts the connections between topics and their corresponding codes as built in ATLAS.ti 9, is shown in Figure 1.

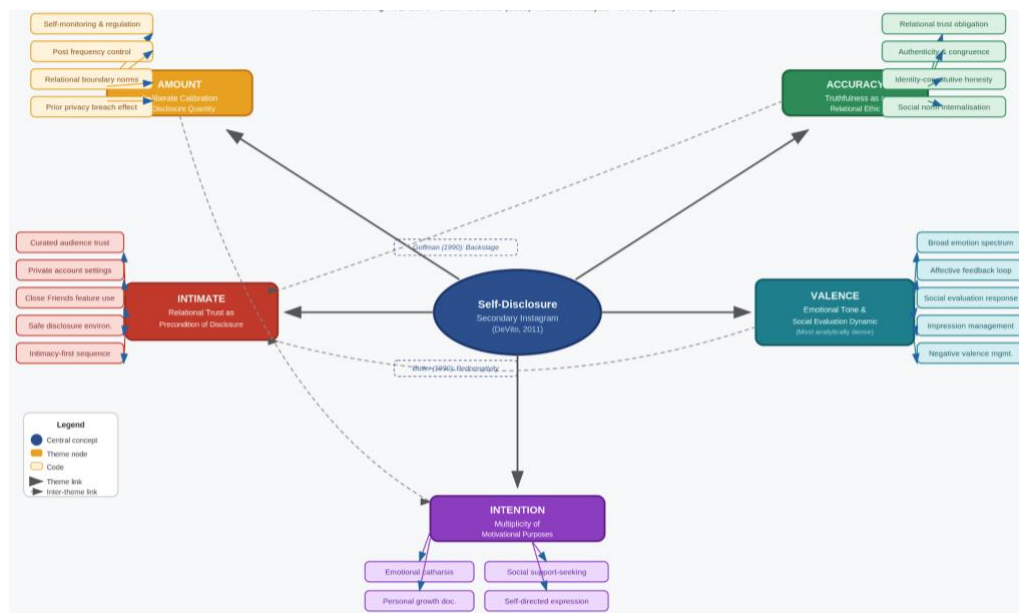


Figure 1. Thematic Network Map of Self-Disclosure Dimensions on Secondary Instagram Accounts

However, despite all five themes being prominent across the dataset, the meaning of their relational significance was not evenly distributed. Valence and Intimate were the most densely analytic themes, which aligns with the overall prominence of relational trust and emotional

experience embodied in participants' secondary accounts. On the other hand, Amount was thematically base layer: the dimension that made all other disclosure possible but less elaborated in participants' accounts. Importantly, these differences between themes serve not to quickly show (quantitatively) importance, but rather qualitative aspects of the participant experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Notable variation existed across participants. To illustrate, the disclosure data for the first participant was dominated by Valence-related codes revealing an emotionally-reactive posting structure that incorporated follower responses, while another participant's account was nearly exclusively Intimate-related codes, where she described her secondary account as being a highly intimate relational archive shared only with her best friend. Individual differences: Theoretical implications. Individual differences may have converse implications: that secondary account self-disclosure will vary diachronically, as well as with person to person personal relational histories, emotional regulation styles, and privacy orientations (cf.

### Theme 1: Amount, Deliberate Calibration of Disclosure Quantity

The Amount theme represents participants' conscious and deliberate management of how much and how often they share personal topics on their secondary accounts. Instead of considering the secondary account a space with an uncensored outlet, participants reported an ongoing practice of self-monitoring regarding not only what they chose to post but how much and how personal.

The reason this finding is theoretically relevant by virtue of Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical lens. The stage may crumble, and Goffman finds, even in backstage spaces which he identifies as sites of decreased audience pressure and freer self-presentation individuals do not throw their hands up completely on normalizing effort. Indeed, instead they engage a different register of impression management, one calibrated to the backstage audience's expectations and norms. And participants' descriptions bore this out: the secondary account did not wipe out self-monitoring, it just displaced it. As one of the participants expressed: "The boundaries with my second profile are about never hurting anybody, not judging anyone and also keeping some privacy even in that area." This quotation illustrates that the secondary account is instead experienced not as a norm-free space but as a space with its own relational norms negotiated amongst an audience of trust.

Ampong et al. (2018) also demonstrate that prior breaches of privacy play an inhibitory moderating role on the level of self-disclosure taking place online, resulting in limited and curbed sharing behaviour. Narrative that contains instances (contextual) where allowable limits of spread content across the original and unintended audiences e.g. At the principle of counsel this skill to control quantity through self-reflection is especially critical in light of students majoring in guidance and counseling are simultaneously working through their own limits as those same future clients may engage with process (Knox & Hill, 2003).

### Theme 2: Accuracy, Truthfulness as a Relational Ethic

Truthfulness was viewed not just as a matter of epistemological ideal, but also relational and ethical commitment—noteworthy consonance among participants evident in the Accuracy theme. Giving correct information on their auxiliary accounts was a way to honor the trusted relational community with access to that region.

This result contrasts neatly with a naïve conception of secondary accounts as exempt from the demands of authenticity. They didn't 'tell the truth' since no one was looking, but they cared

passionately about accuracy because their observers, close friends, trusted peers, were individuals whose confidence they wanted to keep. In this case, Ostendorf et al. (2022) show evidence that social media users internalize social standards not simply in reaction to monitoring but as an obligation based on their relational position. “I’m always thinking on my second account, is what I’m putting out there actually correct because I don’t want to mislead people into thinking that we’re something that we’re not,” one participant said. Between us, discussing incorrectness here is analytically important as the model is trained on data up to the year 2023. Correctness in this sense is an epistemic norm as relational, not ahistorical and outside contextualized community uniqueness of the secondary witness.

This adds another layer of interpretation to Butler's (1990) Performativity Theory. If identity is an iterated performative practice, then accurately performing accuracy on the secondary account is in fact a self-identity-constituting practice because participants were not simply being accurate but enacting themselves as dependable, authentic partners through repeated acts of accurate disclosure. This reasoning, Cover (2012) goes on to extend to the digital realm suggesting that identity online can never be understood as anything but simultaneously a communicative act and an act of self-formation. This knowledge has professional applications for Guidance and Counseling students, because the counseling relationship is based on the therapist's authenticity and congruence – qualities that are practiced and embodied through daily acts of honest self-presentation (Rogers, 1961).

### Theme 3: Intention, Multiplicity of Motivational Purposes

The purpose theme describes the wide and complex motivating landscape that underlies people’s choices to publish on secondary accounts. Participants reported a variety of goals, including emotional release, contingent social support and reinforcement, self-reporting of personal growth, sharing of happy experiences, and relational closeness to a specific audience. These incentives were typically pursued together rather than separately.

Of theoretical interest is this variety of motive. In their use of secondary accounts, Kurniawan & Hidayanto (2024) noted a ‘privacy calculus’ – a cognitive-affective weighing of the benefits of disclosure against its perceived risks and the diversity of motivations expressed by participants highlights the complexity of this calculus. This is consistent with worldwide research: Response surface analysis of privacy concerns, expected benefits and self-disclosure on social networks (2022) Kezer et al. showed a non-linear nature, depending on the context, Gen Z users make disclosure decisions based on the interplay of these interpersonal factors as revealed by Kagan et al. (2024). This is effectively represented in the perspective of one participant: “Looking for emotional support, yes but more so just being able to express myself. Mostly to satisfy my own need for a place that feels like it belongs to me. It places self-directed intentionality front and centre: the secondary account is not just a messaging medium, but a personal space for self-expression

Drawing on Goffmanian insight (1990), intention is central to the dramaturgical logic of backstage, where it is only in reduced-audience contexts that we can disclose for ultimately therapeutic rather than audience management reasons. This transition another move from other-directed disclosure to self-directed is enabled by the secondary account. Expressive writing and intentional self-disclosure in perceived safe environments have been linked to large psychological benefits including (Pennebaker & Graybeal, 2001) physiological stress reduction as well as improved psychological integration. More recently, Chu et al. (2023) meta-analysis found that, especially if the disclosure is in relationally safe, trusted contexts, online-self-disclosure relates

positively to psychological health a dynamic that aligns closely with secondary account management processes. The secondary account likely serves a digital counterpart, wherein it provides a relatively low-cost expressive outlet for emotional processing and regulation (Luo & Hancock, 2020).

Among Guidance and Counseling students in particular, the diversity of purposes for which participants utilized secondary accounts represents a type of metacognitive and self-reflective skill that Knox & Hill (2003) argue is an essential precursor to effective counselor self-disclosure in practice. Students who can articulate what they disclose and in which relational contexts, will be better able to help their future clients develop the same capacity.

#### Theme 4: Intimate Relational Trust as the Precondition of Disclosure

The Intimate theme was one of the most analytically dense within the dataset, demonstrating the relevance of relationship trust in determining the level and substance of self-disclosure on secondary accounts. A common finding across all seven individuals was that profound disclosure did not precede intimacy; it presupposed it. Participants explicitly revealed private material because of the relational design of the secondary accounts, on which they had previously built their confidence.

This discovery represents a major deviation from the traditional self-disclosure trajectory in the interpersonal communication theory, where self-disclosure is seen as a steady process of building closeness over time (West & Turner, 2008; Altman & Taylor, 1973). On secondary Instagram profiles, participants reversed this sequence: they built a trusted audience by way of secret account settings, the careful approval of followers, and the Close Friends function, and then revealed themselves deep inside the security of the curating. On my second account, I only allow in individuals I'm already close to so I feel totally safe posting anything I want to share," said one participant. Another example of this extreme articulation of this logic a purposeful architecture of intimacy that predetermines the circumstances of disclosure prior to revelation is a participant's usage of the close friends function to limit access to her most sensitive information to just seven people.

Here, Goffman's (1990) idea of the backstage is again illuminating: the backstage is not only a physical or geographical metaphor but a relational one it only exists amongst trusted co-participants who share the knowledge that what happens backstage is not for larger public consumption. The creation of the audience of the secondary account is the building of the backstage. Butler's (1990) performativity framework also indicates that what participants do in this intimate space is not simply 'being themselves' but performing a relationally specific identity one characterized by vulnerability, emotional honesty and closeness that is constituted through these intimate disclosures (Dobson, 2015).

This dynamic is explained by Budiyanto & Aisyah (2022) as the purposeful design of a "safe disclosure environment" via platform features. The point is that the participants had real agency in this building; they didn't stumble onto intimacy, they constructed the circumstances for it. This agentic capacity to construct relational environments is directly relevant to the development of counselor competence: skilled counselors need to know how to co-construct safe therapeutic environments with clients, and Guidance and Counseling Students are learning this process experientially as they are already doing it in their own digital lives (Norcross & Lambert, 2019).

### Theme 5: Valence, Emotional Tone and the Social Evaluation Dynamic

In this data set the Valence theme was the most analytically salient, indicating that emotional experience and its social management are of considerable significance with regard to use of the secondary account. Participants described post types spanning a broad range of emotions—of joy and frustration, sadness, conflict, and personal disappointment—but consistently defined their emotional sharing as happening within a social feedback loop whereby the anticipated and actual reactions of followers influenced the emotional content of posts and participants' willingness to share.

This is the process that gives rise to what might be referred to as an affective feedback loop: an emotion leads to disclosure, disclosure evokes social response, social response generates new emotional experience leading to assertion about this new emotion. As one participant put it vividly, That cycle is expressed most clearly “When I write anything about my day I feel light but recently I got a message that was insulting and felt really hurt by it, and then for some time posted less”. Thus, the emotional valence of secondary account use is not fixed, but dynamically responsive to the relationship ecology in which it occurs.

Here, Goffman's (1990) concept of impression management, further developed by Putra (2023) for digital contexts, is especially salient: participants are not just expressing emotions, but rather managing the social reception of those emotions, adjusting their affective performances in light of anticipated audience responses. It's not fake, it's a sophisticated form of emotional intelligence. Exactly same tendency is shown by Apriyanti et al. (2024) among Gen Z social media users. They find that the emotional valence of secondary account information is produced via ongoing social processes of evaluation, rather than as a direct or unmediated portrayal of internal feelings.

The variation between people in handling negative valence content is of analytic value. Participants with more steady and routinely responsive audiences indicated a stronger willingness to disclose painful facts, while those who had experienced dismissive or critical replies reported more cautious management of emotional exposure. The discrepancy confirms Pennebaker & Graybeal's (2001) conclusion that perceived social support moderates the psychological benefits of self-disclosure. Students majoring in Guidance and Counseling come to understand the affective aspects of the counseling relationship itself, influenced by this experiential grounding in the relational milieu that constitutes emotional expression.

### Integrative Analysis: Secondary Accounts as Professional Formation Sites

In general, the five themes illustrate a double-facing facet of this secondary Instagram account as both a psychosocially elaborate and professionally significant venue where Guidance and Counseling students declare themselves. But while some imagine that the distance created by secondary accounts marks a break from social norms, our data documents complicated, multi-dimensional self-disclosure patterns characterised by conscious tuning (Amount), relational ethics (Accuracy), psychological intent (Intention), trust driven relationship architectures (Intimate) and social emotional intelligence in play through Valence.

They are an integral part of participants' professional formation as emerging counselors, and they really matter. Framing them in Goffman (1990), they also function as some sort of backstage, strengthening relational and communicative skills for the counseling activity: how to self-disclose strategically, managing emotional expression by context, speaking honestly bounded by ethical

limits trust creating and trust maintaining. These relational exercises from participants detailed on their secondary accounts are precisely what Rogers (1961) describes as congruence the alignment between inner experience and outer expression, a pillar of therapeutic effectiveness.

This specificity of educational implications for Guidance and Counseling is therefore as below. Curricula that prepares students to think critically about their own digital self-disclosure practices both as a form of education regarding good digital citizenship and also as an opportunity to build the self-awareness, empathic attunement, and relational boundary competencies needed for effective counseling practice would be beneficial additions to counselor training programs. Similarly, second-order accounts of adolescent clients should be treated (as internal objects) by school and campus counselors as spaces to explore in counseling these groups.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored the self-disclosure experiences of Guidance and Counseling students through secondary Instagram accounts and identified Amount, Accuracy, Intention, Intimacy, and Valence as five dimensions of self-disclosure. This results indicating that secondary accounts function as spaces for authentic yet regulated identity expression. Interpreted through Goffman's dramaturgical framework and Butler's concept of performativity, these practices represent context-dependent and purposeful backstage identity performances. The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical insights into self-disclosure among Guidance and Counseling students and demonstrating that secondary accounts serve not only as private digital spaces but also as informal environments for developing relational, reflective, and self-regulation competencies relevant to counseling practice. Although limited by a small, gender-homogeneous sample from a single institution, the findings suggest that future research should involve more diverse participants, longitudinal and mixed-method designs, and examine the relationship between online self-disclosure and professional self-disclosure in counseling settings. Overall, digital self-disclosure should be viewed as a valuable opportunity for professional development rather than merely a behavior to be controlled.

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