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# THE PRIVATE DOMAIN OF A PUBLIC FIGURE

Displaying Home Among Interior Influencers in Sweden

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## List of words

**Account/profile** - Using Instagram one can register to the platform making an account/profile. All pictures one posts are visible on one's profile.

**Caption** - One can write something about the image before publishing it, called a caption. This is visible below the picture when published.

**Comment** - One can leave some words or emojis below an image to share one's thoughts.

**DM** - Short for Direct Message. A chat-function that allows people to communicate through messages that are only visible to the parties involved in the conversation.

**Feed** - Main page where all posts from profiles one follows are visible, among sponsored posts from businesses.

**Filter** - An editing layer that changes colour, exposure, contrasts, etc.

**Follow/unfollow** - Button on others profiles where one can click 'follow' if one wishes to have their posts in one's feed. One can click 'unfollow' if the profile is no longer of interest.

**Follower** - One becomes a follower of a profile when one clicks the 'follow' button. A profile's number of followers are visible on the top of their profile.

**Influencer/influencing** - An influencer is someone who has the ability to affect people's opinions. Is also considered a profession. Influencing is the practice of being an influencer.

**Instagram** - Picture-sharing application that is a part of what is known as social media.

**Interior influencer** - Influencer whose niche is the interior of their home. Also goes by home influencer, home design influencer, home decor influencer and furniture influencer.

**IRL** - abbreviation for In Real Life.

**Like** - One can react to a picture by clicking a 'Like' button (visually represented by the silhouette of a heart) or double-tap the image.

**Post** - The picture or film posted to Instagram.

**Sharing/posting** - The action of publishing a picture.

**Stories** - An Instagram function where one can publish film clips or pictures that are visible for one's followers (or visitors even if one has a private profile) for twenty-four hours. One can watch them several times, and one is also able to react and comment on these, however this interaction is only visible to the one publishing the story.

## **Abstract**

Intrigued by what happens when a person decides to share their private home on a public platform like Instagram, I wanted to study the phenomenon of the interior influencer's home in relation to the dichotomy of private/public. By performing interviews with four Swedish interior influencers I have looked into what home means to them, their reasons and motives for sharing their private spheres on public platforms, as well as how they perceive notions of private/public/personal connected to the home. The study understands the influencer's home as a complex phenomenon informed by its physical presence coexisting with the presentation of the home online. I have been working with the term emotional labour as a way of conceptualising the interior influencers' experiences, while Goffman's terms of front and back regions have contributed to my understanding of how these interior influencers live their lives. By producing knowledge about the relationship between the interior influencers and their homes, I wish to contribute to the general knowledge of the meaning of the home within a Swedish context.

**Keywords:** home, private/public/personal, influencer, Instagram, emotional labour, creative professions

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## 1. Introduction

*Imagine that you are in a living room that has an open floor plan so that you see both the kitchen and dining area. The walls are greige. The cupboards are painted sage green. Tasteful dining room furniture in oak is complemented with textured linen table cloths. There is no dust. No wrinkles on any cushions, blankets or curtains. Fresh flowers on every table. A scent of freshly baked cookies. A warmth coming from the many lit candles. Carefully selected coffee table books together with some decoration make a stilleben in the middle of the living room. There is not a single object in the room that contrasts the overall feeling of harmony and the heavenly peace that falls upon you.*

This is an example of an interior influencer's<sup>1</sup> home. After seeing countless pictures of such on social media, I became curious of what the perfect representation of home is and I wanted to explore further whether there is more to it than what first meets the eye.

Intrigued by what happens when a person decides to share<sup>2</sup> their private home on a public platform like Instagram<sup>3</sup> I wanted to study the phenomenon of interior influencers' homes in relation to the dichotomy of private/public. As their audience is big but consists of people whom they do not know in real life, they are sharing the privacy of their homes with a wide range of strangers and their homes become publicly known. Thus, the dichotomy between what is considered public and private is challenged, which is why I have looked into the reasons and motives for why Swedish interior influencers share their private spheres on public platforms, for everyone and anyone to see.

### 1.1 Purpose and research questions

With this study I aim to produce anthropological knowledge on what the homes of Swedish interior influencers mean to them. The study understands the influencer's<sup>4</sup> home as a complex phenomenon informed by its physical presence coexisting with the presentation of the home online. By interviewing interior influencers I intend to grasp the emic perceptions of their homes, looking into their motives for publishing photos and films to Instagram, thus sharing

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<sup>1</sup> See 'interior influencer' p. 2

<sup>2</sup> See 'sharing/posting' p. 2

<sup>3</sup> See 'instagram' p. 2

<sup>4</sup> See 'influencer/influencing' p. 2

their home with an audience. By producing knowledge about the relationship between the interior influencers and their homes, I wish to contribute to the general knowledge of the meaning of the home within a Swedish context. My research questions are the following:

- What does "the home" mean to Swedish interior influencers?
- What are the motives and incentives for sharing their home with the wider public, and what does this sharing mean to them?
- How do they perceive and enact notions of the private/public/personal connected to the home?

## 1.2 Background and relevance

We spend a lot of time in our homes, for instance, in 2020 Americans spent 62% of their waking time in their homes (Yau n.d.). Similarly, people also spend a lot of time on social media, as Instagram is being used daily by over 500 million people, ranking as the 4th most used social media platform worldwide (Iqbal 2022). Because we spend our everyday lives in our homes and on social media it is relevant to gain a better understanding of the two and how they interact.

In my research I will look specifically into the branch of influencers who focus their influencing<sup>5</sup> on home decor and interior. These influencers are referred to by different names, however, I have decided to make use of the term interior influencer in this thesis. The four people participating in my study all see themselves as, current or former, Swedish interior influencers. This specific group of people have all started an online account<sup>6</sup> on Instagram. They share pictures and sometimes even short videos from their homes to a broad audience of people. Although not all had the intention of becoming influencers, they most certainly were at some point in their Instagram-careers, with a range of 50,000—coming close to 200,000 followers<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See 'influencer/influencing' p. 2

<sup>6</sup> See 'account/profile' p. 2

<sup>7</sup> See 'follower' p. 2

Instagram is a picturesharing application. One can follow<sup>8</sup> different profiles<sup>9</sup>, whose posts<sup>10</sup> one finds interesting, beautiful, inspiring or entertaining in some way. People who have a large number of followers can be seen as influencers, especially if they are active, posting<sup>11</sup> several posts a day. They have usually created a niche for their Instagram account, for instance interior design. There are a lot of Instagram influencers all over the world, however, there is no easy way of knowing exactly how many there are, as there are so many different types of influencers; from artists like @arianagrande to sportsmen like @cristiano (Cristiano Ronaldo) to those who have become influencers through social media itself, like @lelepons.

Having thousands of followers on Instagram and collaborations with international companies influencers have to interact with a significant amount of people on a daily basis. As Instagram is a platform where one not only shares pictures, but one is also capable of communicating with one another through comments<sup>12</sup>, reactions to stories<sup>13</sup> and chatting in DM:s (direct messaging, see p. 2), it is essential for people professionally engaged on Instagram that their followers create a buzz about new content. What this means is that they interact by liking and commenting on the post. By doing this it generates more traffic to the influencer's profile. However, it is also relevant for the influencers to respond to comments and DM's, as this affects their visibility.

While more and more people are joining in on this type of influencing work during the current digital age, it is of great societal relevance to study this phenomenon, since showcasing a home online has, in some ways, created the interior influencing profession. Even children have started to dream of becoming influencers, Instagrammers, Youtubers and Tiktokers in the future. Thus, it is time to discuss this contemporary wave of digitized social media professions in an academic context. Starting with interior influencers on Instagram.

As the research is based on four individuals' personal experiences this study is not sufficient as a general measure of neither influencers' nor Swedish opinion as an entirety. This research should be seen as a qualitative study with the intention of discussing the meaning of home from the perspective of the participating influencers, not all.

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<sup>8</sup> See 'follow/unfollow' p.2

<sup>9</sup> See 'account/profile' p. 2

<sup>10</sup> See 'post' p.2

<sup>11</sup> See 'sharing/posting' p. 2

<sup>12</sup> See 'comment' p. 2

<sup>13</sup> See 'stories' p. 2



### 1.3 Previous research

What is a home? Home is a complex concept that has several meanings to it, whether speaking with scholars in various disciplines or with those outside of academia, not least since the majority of people have a home of their own. Turning to anthropological literature, we find Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga (1999), for example, who offers a collection of textual contributions of family life in Europe in relation to space and place, where their own introductory chapter makes up an overview of the notion of home and its origins within the social sciences and anthropology in particular. The authors explain that they understand houses to be: "... encoded with complex symbolic meanings, expressing identity, status and the good life, which coupled with their practical dimensions, endow houses with the power to communicate, represent, influence, and teach" (1999, 9). Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga also mention that "[European house forms] often operate as unobtrusive, 'natural' and self-evident containers of human activity, and frequently appear to be taken for granted by their occupants" (1999, 9).

Daniel Miller, another anthropologist, has long studied the homes of people in relation to the field of material culture. Miller has contributed to anthropology by extensive ethnographic fieldwork in numerous people's homes, where his focus has been on what things or stuff mean to people and how they make each other in a matter of exchange. His work *Home Possessions* (2001) states that homes of societies formerly deemed appropriate for research tended to be public places, which he uses as an argument to explore what we now know as the private homes of industrial societies. Miller (2001) claims that there is no simple dichotomy of the private and the public, as one cannot equate the private with the personal. This insight has indeed inspired my research of what happens with the homes of influencers as they are, in new and modern ways, challenging the boundaries of what is considered to be private and public, respectively.

According to James and Kalisperis (1999), the home contains spaces which are seen as more or less public and private. These spaces transition gradually throughout the home, and could potentially be seen in the architecture or design of the home and its layout. A threshold is a physical boundary that is "dangerous" to cross (Rosselin 1999, 53). "Being the borderline between the private and the public space", the threshold is (according to Van Genep 1981, referred in Rosselin 1999, 54) a "liminal zone that separates and links two distinct territories"

and could also be seen as "a protective and neutralising zone to prevent or ease transition from the public to the private world" (Rosselin 1999, 55).

Studying Norwegian households, Marianne Gullestad has found that the Norwegians have a specific way of looking at their homes, as their culture is "home-centered" (1993a, 131), where they see the home in opposition to 'the outside world', in a dichotomy of private/public as well as inside/outside. She finds that what is considered to be private and public does not only "vary with place but also with time" (Gullestad 1993a, 135), which tells us that one cannot simply go on to think that what is public at one specific point in time will continue to stay public throughout the entirety of a day. Gullestad's discoveries of the "home-centered" culture in Norway is relevant due to its close proximity to my own study, which I have conducted in Sweden, the neighbouring country of Norway.

One can refer to the private sections of a home to "back stage" and the public domain "front stage", in the words of Goffman (1956). The 'front stage' is the place where a performance is given according to Goffman (1956, 66), and could be represented in what is displayed on Swedish interior influencers' Instagram profiles. The private home then, which we will see is withheld from Instagram later on, makes up the 'back stage', which Goffman describes as somewhere "the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (1956, 70).

As the participating interior influencers operate on Instagram as their online platform of choice, their homes transform into a digital (public) version, while still being analogue in the physical world. This connects my research to the study of virtual and online worlds, for example the virtual game *Second Life* studied by Tom Boellstorff (2008), where people create avatars that in some ways represent themselves. Boellstorff (2008) noted that his participants would separate their online avatar from their physical selves, however, in different ways. This resulted in a gap between virtual and actual worlds, which he argued "is foundational to culture in online worlds" (2008, 119), a concept that is relevant to my own study.

The emergence of interior influencing as a profession and a business relies on the commodification of the home and thus of the self, by influencers committing emotionally to create a personal brand for themselves (see Bridgen 2011). Oksala (2016, 284) states that "as

the marketization and commodification of everyday life expands”, affective labour has created businesses. Influencing could be seen as one of them. The vivid contact and communication between the influencer and their followers relate influencing to ‘emotional labour’. According to Oksala (2016, 284) ”workers are expected to mobilize emotional and social skills for professional goals, resulting in the blending of the private and the public.”

Duffy and Wissinger (2017) has studied social media personalities who seemingly have managed to find themselves in a situation where they possess a career-dream of getting paid to do what they love. The authors claim that these personalities ”circulate an interrelated series of mythologies about ‘work’ in the age of social media, invoking the ideals of fun, authenticity, and creative freedom” (Duffy and Wissinger 2017, 4653). They argue that such workers have intentionally concealed the reality of their work in the social media age, posing as a labour without needs for the work related burdens of normal jobs, painting a picture rife with optimism (2017).

In order to better understand the ideas introduced above I will also place them within a broader societal context. Some researchers have argued that the former producer society has been replaced by the consumer society (see Bauman 1998). In the consumer society, consumption is no longer primarily driven by need, but rather by a more fundamental urge to constitute oneself as a subject through consumption. Citizens are always on the lookout for new temptations, new attractions and new baits, proving flexibility to be one of consumer society’s most crucial qualities (see Bauman 1998). Therefore, the market needs to be flexible in order to deliver goods and services living up to the tempo of the consumers, as it is the consumers who judge, criticize and choose what to consume (Bauman 1998). This context provides room for professions such as influencing, through ”trapping” a generation “in wealthier countries” in “the apparently burgeoning ‘creative industries’” (McGuigan 2014, 235). Influencing could be understood as such creative work, “condemned to freedom and lonely responsibility” in the same way as “the neoliberal self” (McGuigan 2014, 234). However, this freedom has made possible work no longer following the boundaries separating “vocation from avocation, job from hobby, work from recreation”, instead work has in some cases become a “gratifying experience”, way of “self-fulfillment”, and “meaning of life” (Bauman 1998, 34), at least among the privileged few—leaving the rest in awe, but also in the search for a similar chance. As we will see below, such transgressive work can

also have negative consequences, also for those who economically benefit from the professions.

#### 1.4 Theoretical framework

From the above discussion I have selected theories and concepts that are relevant to my own study. Firstly, Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zunigas (1999, 9) understanding of the house as able to "communicate", "represent" and "influence" is relevant to my research, as interior influencers actively use their homes as a *representation* of themselves and in order to *influence* and *communicate* with their Instagram followers. According to Goffman (1956) people sometimes express themselves in a particular way intentionally and consciously, but they also act in accordance with the tradition of their social group or status, where this expression is required. This insight on communication will help analyse how the participating Swedish interior influencers can present themselves through what "status and good life" (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999, 9) they are presenting by sharing their homes on social media and whether the home appears to have meanings that "transcend their physical boundaries" (Chambers and Low 1989, cited in James and Kalisperis 1999, 207). This also serves as a background for the ways I look at the home of the influencer as it seemingly is a complex phenomenon that might be viewed differently from person to person.

Secondly, despite spatial organisation having varied across history, the division between private and public areas tends to live on, and is today "(...) communicated and marketed through contemporary media. (...) [E]ven the internet [is] part of the global marketplace where people now shop for the latest houses, furnishings, and ideas and values regarding home and family life" (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999, 27). This is reflected by the rise of new professions such as interior influencing. Inspired by Gullestad (1993a; 1993b), James and Kalisperis (1999) and Miller (2001) who all acknowledge the dichotomy between private/public, I explore how notions of the private/public/personal are perceived and enacted connected to the home of Swedish interior influencers.

Goffman's concepts of the front and the back region of a performance (1956) is relevant to my study when applied to the private and the public notion of an influencer's home. The two

distinctions show that certain things in a house or a home are not supposed to be witnessed by just any person who is invited inside. According to the ideal, one should, due to this distinction incorporated in architecture and the design of houses (see James and Kalisperis 1999), be able to preserve some integrity and privacy even though one is having guests over, to name an example. The ways that this ideal, distinguishing the private from the public domains, is perceived and enacted by influencers working professionally with sharing their home is an aspect that I intend to analyse in this thesis.

The literature on home tends to include phrases such as "feeling at home" (Dudley 2011; Gullestad 1993a; 1993b), which, arguably, calls for an inclusion of emotion as an analytical term. As the home is generally associated with feelings of safety, belonging and happiness, to mention just a few emotions, it is relevant to investigate to what degree the influencers use these in their profession—presenting their homes on a public platform.

However, emotional connotations are not simply when one "feels at home", it is also in what ways a home creates meaningfulness and a sense of wholeness, as it implies a feeling of direction (Gullestad 1993a). This is of essential importance within my study because the interior influencers have chosen to spend so much time in and with their homes as their profession or hobby. They may feel that their home has some extraordinary meaning to it, as it has contributed to their direction in life in ways others do not normally experience. It also relates to my research question on what the home means to the Swedish interior influencers.

The term emotional labour (Hochschild 2012 [1983]; Oksala 2016) will figure as a way of understanding the influencers' engagement in handling the boundaries between their personal and professional lives, due to the public reality of social media intruding on the private nature of their home. In what follows, I will explore to what extent the practices of influencing could be considered as a form of emotional labour where influencers are concerned with selling their emotions to their followers; feelings that constitute "deep and integral to [their] individuality" (Hochschild 2012 [1983]). Hence, I will explore whether emotional labour is a relevant way of conceptualising how influencers engage in a merging dichotomy of private and public.

Duffy and Wissingers (2017) critical view on labourers of the social media age will contribute to the discussion enabling an additional perspective to the influencers' own experiences of their situations.

The practices of influencing as well as the influencers' motivations for sharing their home online must be understood in a neoliberal context of a consumer society (Bauman 1998; McGuigan 2014). The group of followers constitute the consumers of the society, and had it not been for their approval, support and feedback the influencers would not have had as great of a success with their profiles.

## 1.5 Methodology

The research took place in Sweden, with my home as the base for my own whereabouts. As the Swedish interior influencers use digital platforms performing their influencing professions or hobbies, I too, chose to engage digitally with my research participants. I enabled contact with potential research participants using both Instagram and Gmail, and once they had agreed to take part in my study we kept in touch on the same platform, setting up interviews and exchanging phone numbers. For two of the participants I used Zoom, a video conferencing tool, in order to conduct interviews. As for the other two, the interviews were conducted through phone calls.

Most of my material has been collected during the interviews. When deciding to go with interviews as a main method, I had to give my interview-questions and -strategy a lot of thought (see Garcia 2009 for a take on ethnographic approaches to the Internet). I made an interview guide that I used as a guideline for keeping the interviews connected with the aim of my study.

Using interviews as a qualitative method allowed for individuals to share their personal opinions and thoughts of why they are sharing their homes online. Instead of conducting formal interviews, I chose to engage in semi-structured interviews as a way of relieving the situation from my academic motive behind the study. I also wanted the participants to feel comfortable enough to share anecdotes from their lives, with stories that included emotions

connected to their home. Even though some of the participants had not thought about some of the specific questions I asked, they were keen to reflect on-the-spot and happy to share their thoughts. My strategy of letting the influencers speak somewhat freely, encouraging them to continue their narratives by giving them corroborating nods and "uh-huh's" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011) turned out to be fruitful as the influencers were willing to share anecdotes from their experiences.

With that said, doing interviews does not guarantee that the research is of good quality. It is known that people might not always do the things they say, which is why interviews are a method that should be complemented whenever doing scientific research. Interviews are, however, an integral part of doing anthropological research and is why I have engaged with interviews methodologically. In my case, doing interviews has built trust between me and my research participants (see Johnson and Rowlands 2014). During these conversations the participants have given me insight into their lives, thoughts and experiences which will be the ground pillars of this thesis.

Focusing on the home, it would for obvious reasons have been useful to see the participants' homes with my own eyes, as observation would have made it possible for me to get a sensory experience of the influencers' homes. Unfortunately, I was unable to accomplish this, as the geographical distance between myself and the participants was substantial. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, my priorities were not to push for a physical visit, as the influencers do have an online platform which I could use as a way of getting a visual impression of how they display their homes. Therefore I decided to ask the participants whether they would like to do a video-tour of their homes with me. I was only able to do a single home tour with one of the participants, which has affected my perception of the homes, where I now stand with different knowledge and insight to this home in contrast to the others. However, it has contributed to more empirical material as it motivated the participant to talk freely about the rooms and objects within the home.

Instagram posts provided me with some visual experience of the other homes. I made a chart where I could add what the post consisted of, how many likes<sup>14</sup> and comments it had, what was being said by the followers, how the influencer responded, if at all, and how I reacted to the post myself, as a way of structuring my version of netnography. By using this method, I

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<sup>14</sup> See 'like' p. 2

was able to get some visual insight of the influencers' homes, which was my goal. Although it became a somewhat contrasting experience to the home-tour, as Instagram only provided me with the perspective that the influencer consciously serves their followers, and the home-tour was less 'filtered'<sup>15</sup>, to put it in social media terms.

## 1.6 Ethical considerations

While conducting my research online, I have considered the ethical dilemmas discussed in Townsend and Wallace's article (2016) on ethics concerned with social media research specifically. In the following, I will use pseudonyms when addressing the research participants as a way of preserving their anonymity. I have avoided presenting personal information that could potentially be used by third parties in ways I cannot control, and not included the participants' geographical location, exact number of Instagram followers or other information that could lead to their identities being revealed. As the participants for the most part did not include information about their families online, this has also been excluded in this thesis.

All interviews but one phone call were audio recorded and transcribed, and the files have been stored in a place where I have been the only one able to access them since it has been password-required. The files have also been named according to a system of codes, which I have not specified elsewhere but in my head, therefore I am the only one that knows which code belongs to the specific participant.

Quotations from the interviews have been translated from Swedish to English by the author. The citations have been sent to respective participants in order to get their approval upon use in this thesis.

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<sup>15</sup> See 'filter' p. 2



## 2. Ethnographic Discussion

The four women participating in my research were all in the midst of their lives, living in different parts of Sweden together with their families consisting of husbands or male partners and children. One of the women, let us call her Sara, had chosen to start an Instagram account as a way of connecting with other people sharing her interests in interior design. Another participant, Hanna, had come across Instagram as a way of marketing an event, and saw it as an opportunity to make an income from it, in addition to working part-time in her old job for some financial stability. Christina had similarly chosen to use Instagram as a place where she could market her true interest, getting her own company some additional online attention. Lastly, Ewa, had another platform at first and wanted to continue the same way, but then she moved and had to slightly rebrand herself which made her decide to start an Instagram account in addition to the other platform. Despite having similar interests in interior and thereby working with the same niche on Instagram, the influencers that I have discussed the meaning of home with differ from each other, as the above descriptions suggest. I view these four people's experiences as examples of a broad range of possible attitudes and perceptions on the notion of home as public/private/personal.

### 2.1 The meaning of home

When asked what home is, the research participants responded with different variations of prioritizing sensory aspects such as certain scents or visual expectations, emotional aspects such as a sense of security and social aspects concerning the whereabouts of their family members.

#### 2.1.1 *The social home*

For some the home is closely related to their family (see Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999; Gullestad 1993b; Miller 2001; 2008). Sara, for example, explained how she was not at home in her former apartment until she had gotten her firstborn child. Up until that point 'home' was with her own parents who lived in another country. Sara explained it this way:

”(...) what I found was that.. as long as you don't have your own family, it's easy to see.. that where your parents are, that's home... But then when you.. maybe meet your partner or even more so, when you have children, then it's really like, your home is where the children are, and where your own family is.”

Christina stated that ”the home is also the people you fill it with”, which implies that her sense of home has to do with social relations, it could include people other than her family as well (see Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999; Gullestad 1993b). For instance when several friends moved away from where Sara lived, she was afraid that it would affect her sense of home in that city. However, she and her husband managed to get acquainted with another family who did not have any relatives in the area and Sara expressed that this family had become their closest friends, ”acting like each other's family, we've celebrated birthdays and such together”. Ewa also said that what she saw as important in her home was that ”there's room for everyone in our home”.

All participants expressed the importance of their family members when talking about the most important things in their homes. Interestingly enough, none of their families were included on their Instagram accounts. Thus, by not including pictures of family members on Instagram and assigning them to the 'back region' (Goffman 1956) of the Instagram performance, the influencers have seemingly managed to draw a line between their professional and private lives. The influencers motivated this backstage assignment by claiming that their partners and children did not wish to be on their partner's and mother's Instagram. Hanna meant that as they had not chosen a public life for themselves there would be no reason to post pictures of them online. The interior influencers' accounts seemingly focus on home and interior instead of family and relationships. However, they do speak of having a family and sometimes they even share children's bedrooms for example.

### *2.1.2 The sensory home*

Christina said that 'home', in her opinion, is ”the smell of freshly baked buns or floors scoured with soap” which both are examples of how she recognises and experiences her home through olfaction. As scents can elicit memories from past events it is rather common that the sense of smell is interrelated with one's perception of something, such as Christina's

home for example. Although the scent of her home seemed a significant sensory aspect to her understanding of home, she admitted that she did not always have the time to bake or clean.

The research participants were divided in their way of perceiving how their home should appear when it comes to tidiness, which relates to their sensory expectations of what a home should look like. On the one hand, Hanna, Ewa and Christina were all focused on having clean and tidy homes, getting slightly frustrated at everything that did not sit in its place, which reminded me of clutter and dust being "matter out of place" (Douglas 2002, 44). Ewa said that "it's often very clean in our home, 'cause I feel better that way" and explained that "[i]f it's cluttered around me, I can't focus, I can't work with what I'm supposed to. Then I'll tidy it up until it looks good, it's the kind of atmosphere I like to attract". This statement emphasises the value of order and tidiness (Gullestad 1993b), and underlines its importance in relation to sharing the home with an online audience. Hanna disclosed that she is in fact unable to do the laundry and has made her husband take over that chore because of the impossibility of keeping the laundry room tidy. It was simply too much for her to handle.

Sara on the other hand insisted that in certain rooms a certain degree of disorder can be allowed, as long as she has some rooms in her home "free of chaos". She also said that she usually did not do much more than move a few things around before she started taking photos to post online. Her not being as hung up on the cleanliness of her home as the other participants, reminded me of a situation during my fieldwork. Even though she had agreed upon a home-tour and knew what time it would be conducted, the vacuum cleaner was still out, as she had not had the time to clean up the mess one of her pets had made knocking over a houseplant earlier that morning. Even some renovation-related clutter was able to make it into the frame as we were 'walking' (I was with her on Zoom) around her home. When I was observing the influencers' posts on Instagram, no such thing was spotted, as the pictures were all adjusted to be posted on Instagram, their front region (Goffman 1956).

In Ambjörnssons monograph *Tid att städa* (2018), she discusses cleaning and tidying as a gender encoded practice, where the norm is that women are the ones who should stay in to keep a clean home. This is discussed as a practice oppressive of women in Pink's ethnography *Home truths* (2004). However, Pink claims that women could potentially resist this oppression by "reinterpreting the material forms" of these buildings (2004, 88), meaning that homes could be transformed into non-oppressive spaces. Swedish interior influencers (in this

case female) can, in a way, be understood to have done this. By turning their homes into a business-like opportunity, they have created something for themselves that reaches beyond the four walls of their house transforming a potentially undermining position into something that gives them possibilities within the labour market.

### *2.1.3 The emotional home*

A dominant norm in many societies is that home is a place where one should feel safe and secure (see Gullestad 1993a; Magnarella 1974), not having to keep an eye out for possible dangers. Most of the research participants have stated that they feel at peace when they are in their homes. Additionally, all of the influencers have listed peace and quiet as a central part in their ability to relax in their homes. Hanna said that "[a] home is a space where you find peace, security and love" and added "when you have small children for instance, you might want the home to be a safe environment."

Discussing the importance of feeling safe and secure within one's home, Sara told me of her previous experience with some neighbours she had when she lived in an apartment.

"(...) we heard them..they fought in the nighttime, or partied at night. It made me feel very unsafe in my own home. (...) It's terrible that they could decide whether I thought of this [apartment] as a good home or not. (...) I started to feel so unsafe by not knowing what they'd do next, and I didn't know if he'd hit her, and I didn't know how to handle it. I was a bit afraid of him. So when you have a home like that, an apartment, you're very dependent on how the neighbours are (...) on how safe you feel and how much you can relax in your own home."

Ewa also mentioned security as an aspect central to how she felt about her home "it's probably what's the answer to the question 'what is a home', it's where you feel safe". Later on she concluded that "I have a home that makes me feel safe" which seemed important to her as she had told me of how she felt unsafe in her father's home when she was young, leading her to stay with her mother for the majority of the time.

These differences in how the Swedish interior influencers understand their homes indicate that "houses have meanings that transcend their physical boundaries" (Chambers and Low

1989, cited in James and Kalisperis 1999, 207), as their homes clearly are not simply a physical and material structure. For instance, we see that tending to their personal interests and making something creative out of their homes, the Swedish interior influencers have allowed themselves to engage with their creative sides. Sara has been encouraged to try things she would never have if it had not been for Instagram. She claims that if it had not been for Instagram, she would not have felt so brave making interior decisions in her home, and that her influencing and thus her home has increased her self-confidence, making her feel able to walk "[holding] [her] head high [*rak i ryggen*]".

Creating content for their social media platform in their homes provides the influencers with an opportunity to work with their hands and minds in a way that Hanna describes as having ensured her ability to "live out [her] dream" (see Bauman 1998). Through getting in touch with and being able to pursue her "artistic vein [*konstnärliga ådra*]", Hanna has been able to find a way of life that "doesn't feel like a job". Even though Duffy and Wissinger (2017) are critical of these kinds of statements where influencers "humble" their labour and efforts, arguing that they feed into the mythologies of creative work, it seems to be a clear indication in this case that Hanna is feeling happy and satisfied with her situation as an interior influencer, where she is able to be in her home where decorating and gardening are two of her main interests. She seems to experience the feeling of belonging (see Gullestad 1993a), as she can be in an environment that she loves and sees as her "place on earth".

Thus it may be relevant to see the home, not as a universal and homogeneous structure or concept, but rather as a complex phenomenon that is understood and embodied differently by different people. While keeping this in mind, we will now turn to the motives and incentives for the influencers to share their homes online.

## 2.2 Motives for sharing the home online

As home itself is individually understood, even the Swedish interior influencers' motives and incentives for sharing their homes on Instagram varies from person to person. Depending on the situation, background and interests of the influencers when they started their accounts, they would have several different arguments to motivate their choice of creating a profile on

Instagram. All four participants had been interested in home decor, furnishing and interior design in general since before they started their social media profiles. This initial interest in interior design could in itself be seen as a simple answer to the question on why they wanted to share pictures of their homes online. Yet, there were also far more multifaceted and nuanced reasons.

### *2.2.1 Sharing as a social activity*

Sara sees communication with her followers as an integral part of the reason why she initially wanted to have an Instagram. She said that having a dialogue with likeminded people is what makes Instagram meaningful, since communication is important to her. This dialogue is both essential to influencers from a professional perspective, and at the same time rewarding in a private matter, as Sara emphasised. It also makes a clear example on how emotional labour intertwines the private and the professional (Oksala 2016).

However, the influencers have also made a point of how much time they spend on this communication (see Duffy and Wissinger 2017). Christina put it like this:

”I really wish that I could receive a reasonable amount of reactions though, because it takes so long to respond to everything and it takes up so much of my time. And I feel that I have to take the time to respond, because if not Instagram punishes you.”

She referred to how one had to

”produce content, stories, respond to comments and DMs, or else one would be placed so far back that you might not come up in people’s feed<sup>16</sup>.”

The amount of time Christina puts into this communication seems to her like a necessary evil. This could be compared to the observation that a person’s social skills are crucial to the ”products” of emotional labour, in other words their “relationships and emotional responses” (Oksala 2016, 284). Influencers’ need to adapt to their followers’ wishes relates to the consumer society, where consumers are the one’s judging and criticizing, choosing what to consume (Bauman 1998). Thus, the influencers' careers are relying heavily upon their

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<sup>16</sup> See “List of words” p. 2

followers, as they "provide the crucial fan base necessary to keep the whole enterprise up and running" (Duffy and Wissinger 2017, 4663). Apart from the requirements of certain amounts of interaction with followers in exchange for visibility on the social media platform itself, the influencers have spoken about their relationship with other influencers, their colleagues so to speak. Some even call them friends.

According to Sara, "interior Instagram" is like a community where they support and encourage each other (see Archer 2019). In her experience, they are loving and caring for one another, and it is a very kind environment to be in. Her relationship with other interior influencers is one that seemingly has had as great of an impact on her private life as her professional, as she stated "[w]e have become.. each other's nearest.. friends, principally. We truly trust each other." Sara also said that she would not have wanted to continue with her Instagram if it had not been for the social aspects that it has provided. They keep in touch with each other on a daily basis through a chat-group, asking and giving advice on Instagram-matters. As Sara pointed out "it is great to have someone to talk to. It makes [influencing] more fun as well!", explaining that they also speak about people who do funny stuff.

Although Christina also has positive things to say about her fellow interior influencers, she does not see them the same way Sara does. Christina gratefully stated "this has given me the opportunity to get to know influencers that I wouldn't have met otherwise, that is if it weren't for Instagram". However affectionate this might sound in certain contexts, one could say that she speaks of the other influencers in a more business related fashion as she refers to them as her 'colleagues'. She explained that they communicate with each other through "private groups where [they] share [their] lives, and [she] appreciate[s] it, that [they] can exchange experiences and brainstorm ideas with each other", which seems similar to the ways in which Sara communicates with her friends. Christina relating to her fellow interior influencers as her colleagues might (in contrast to Sara relating to them as her friends) be a way for Christina to draw a line between her private and professional life, whereas Sara allows them to stay blurred (Oksala 2016).

However, it is important to keep in mind that not all of the participants have intended to have influencing as a career. Although some are on social media for fun and mainly use it as a hobby, there is nevertheless a certain pressure to keep up with the highest level of

accomplishment you have previously achieved, even though it is very tough to always strive for an even better outcome than the previous (see Duffy and Wissinger 2017). By being one single person behind an Instagram account one is personally (and professionally) held accountable for what happens with one's account. Sara said "you're controlled by the number of likes, whether you like it or not", even though she also said that she was actively trying to follow her heart more than the number of likes, it was difficult because she could notice what her followers thought and thus, she was affected by them as they constitute the consumers on Instagram, deciding how the interior influencers' future on social media looks like (Bauman 1998).

All participants have explained how they seek and get confirmation from their Instagram followers. Likes provide a quantitative measurement of both success and failure (see Ross 2019), and can be translated into confirmation. Ewa meant that it is very rewarding receiving confirmation, simply because it "feels so good". Although, it could ultimately become an "addiction", Ewa said, where one "craves confirmation" in a way that affects one's mental health in an unfortunate fashion. She also had this idea that "the need for confirmation is a drive that is toxic no matter what your values are, or what you want to achieve with it". This speaks to where she stands on her relationship with the need for confirmation and what engaging in emotional labour has cost her. This could be seen as a way her engaging with emotional labour has had negative effects on her, both professionally and privately (see Duffy and Wissinger 2017). It also relates to the power possessed by the consumers (see Bauman 1998), here being the followers. However, Ewa came to a point where she realized that she needed to seek this confirmation elsewhere, and so she initiated going outside more often in order to get away from the Internet and social media for a while.

### *2.2.2 Sharing as an economic income*

There is great potential to earn a lot of money within the influencing profession. Although, it is a common preconception that literally every influencer is invested in their online practices solely because of the financial benefits the profession allegedly holds. All of the participants have been positive to discuss the potential economic motives to an influencing career, although numbers have not been disclosed.



Hanna expressed her gratitude as she has been "able to live off [Instagram]", only keeping her previous full-time job as a secondary income in order to gain some financial stability in times where there are not so many collaborations being done. She sees influencing as her way of "living [the] dream", enjoying a sense of "freedom but not without responsibility of course"—in line with a 'neoliberal self' (see McGuigan 2014). In a critical sense, this could be a way that influencers "gloss over a less-prodigious reality" (Duffy and Wissinger 2017, 4657), however it is not necessarily untruthful, as Hanna might be sincere expressing her situation.

Christina also makes money on her Instagram account, however, she uses it as a way of intentionally marketing her own company. Here is what she answered on my question of how much time she spends working:

"(...) well, I work like.. almost all my waking time, when I am at home. I mean, when I'm in the house. So.. almost everything but the laundry is, and the food, is basically work related.. in some way, I guess. And even if it is unpaid hours when you're doing Instagram.. At the same time I shouldn't forget that it is a marketing channel for my work, so it goes hand in hand. I can't really.. well, about marketing oneself, I mean, it's what you do! At the same time it's the products I make that are my true livelihood, and I need to get them out there."

It is clear that Christina's intention with creating her Instagram was to market her other business. However, since her account grew and she became an influencer, she has not had the same need to produce as many products as she would have had it not been for the additional income from Instagram. This puts her in a dilemma of doing what she wanted in the first place; making her products—or continuing to benefit economically through Instagram. As it seems, Christina's passion for her business pushes her in the direction of not relying too heavily on Instagram for anything other than marketing. Even though she acknowledges the need to stay online and be active on social media, she said "if I want to have a day off, I take a day off. Without a guilty conscience, actually." With this statement it becomes clear that she is her own boss, capable of making decisions for her own good, in addition to being attentive to what is best for her business, which ultimately relies on her mental and physical health.

Christina's heavy workload does, nevertheless, imply that she is engaged in entrepreneurial labour (see Duffy and Wissinger 2017)—as she relies on herself in order to make money, both on her Instagram and with her company. At the same time she is an emotional labourer, having to balance the feelings of her private and professional self. One can say that both Christina and Hanna have been directed by both their home and Instagram in their lives, making their practices of sharing their homes online meaningful in the way that it has given them a sense of direction in life (Gullestad 1993a), affecting them both privately and professionally.

In contrast to the others, Sara was in fact unable to do collaborations and make money on influencing due to her other job as it would have been conflicting with the required ethical considerations there. This makes Sara's motivations for taking time to be active on Instagram entirely non-economic, which ultimately disputes old fashioned and ignorant criticism arguing that every influencer has an economic incentive that fuels their drive to expose their private and personal lives on social media (see Archer 2019).

### *2.2.3 Sharing as a challenging activity*

One might wonder how the online exposure of one's life affects the people doing it, and there is no simple answer to it as everyone is probably affected differently. Ewa was the first to admit that she had not always been happy with how influencing affected her private life. Besides it making her become even more of a perfectionist, her influencing career took up way too much time from her ordinary life. As she was also working with another profession she felt that "every weekend was consumed by [influencing]". Having to continuously update her Instagram, it was all that she thought of. Just as she had posted one image, she was off planning the next. In every chore, during every meal, from the corner of her sofa, thoughts were spinning—making her spend a lot of labour for the purpose of influencing. She put it like this "I was living more in a digital world, than in the real world, and that's terrible". This phrase points to her experience of prioritizing her public presentation of her life more than living it together with the people she cares for the most. Ultimately, she had created what she called "a monster". In contrast to other people in the business, Ewa was able to detect and criticize the pattern of rationalizing conditions of overwork (see Duffy and Wissinger 2017).

Besides being a beast that would turn out to be difficult to restrain, Ewa also thought of how much responsibility her Instagram had to account for. As her number of followers grew, she suddenly felt slightly overwhelmed by the size of it, as she had not understood that it could come to this. She sees the responsibility as a direct "consequence of being able to reach out to so many" people. In her mind, the responsibility that she felt was "what social media does with people's well-being". This is what she said:

"I mean, I post pictures to social media that show off some kind of perfection. But it isn't true, obviously! It doesn't always look like that in my home. And I don't want people to feel bad because of it.."

Weighed down by feeling responsible for other people's mental health in addition to her own, there is no doubt that Ewa is battling a severe dilemma. A useful way of analysing Ewa's dilemma is through the concept of emotional labour. Hochschild (2012 [1983]) explains that when workers who engage in emotional labour "promote a product or a company" they "transform their show of personality into a symbol of the company, a clue to the nature of its product". For instance, they have to post pictures to Instagram daily, and they are required to set aside possible private emotions in order to represent their company, as they "represent the decision-makers (...) in how, emotionally speaking, [the influencer] seem" (Hochschild 2012 [1983]). If we relate this to the situation of the influencers, their 'company' is their own Instagram account. We see that they are torn between personal feelings and the way they should display themselves on Instagram, such as Ewa exemplified above. Committing emotionally to one's profession is something that is not exclusive for certain industries, however, it is something that practitioners on social media can easily relate to. As emotions are connected to the self it is difficult to distinguish professional emotions from private or personal ones. Therefore we see that emotional labour contributes to the transgression of boundaries between personal and professional life (Duffy and Wissinger 2017; Hochschild 2012 [1983]; Oksala 2016).

Having the kind of responsibility mentioned above led some of the influencers to feel a certain level of anxiety when it comes to their social media performance. Sara explained that "the level of achievement anxiety [*prestationsångest*] increases in relation to a rise in the number of followers". In periods where she could not find the motivation to take pictures Sara, nevertheless, experienced that she felt pressured to make content in order to satisfy her

followers. This is another example of how the consumers have power over the influencers (see Bauman 1998), potentially being able to affect their decisions and practices. It also relates to the realities of doing emotional labour, as Sara refers to her having to post pictures that display feelings that she does not possess herself at that point in time (Hochschild 2012 [1983]).

### 2.3 Perceiving and performing public/private

The majority of the research participants did not initially feel that there was any difference between what I called the virtual and physical versions of their homes during the interviews. When asking Ewa this question, she thought about it for a second, before she concluded with a "[n]o, I wouldn't say that". Sara reflected upon it after giving a primary statement of "not really". Christina quickly responded with a firm "[n]o, not at all", while Hanna had a different view on the matter from the beginning, when she said "[y]es, to a certain degree".

The three influencers who did not feel that there was a difference between their private and public homes made clear that they all sought to be authentic and genuine towards their followers (see for instance Duffy and Wissinger 2017; Oksala 2016; Ross 2019), thus representing their homes publicly as they saw them privately. This is an example of how they are crossing boundaries between their private and professional selves, and it calls upon them to engage in emotional labour, once again (see Bridgen 2011; Hochschild 2012 [1983]; Oksala 2016). Although their wish to share their genuine and authentic homes might be true from their emic point of view, they have already stated that home to them is (amongst other things) where their families are. Therefore it is somewhat contradictory that none of the influencers include their families in pictures they post to Instagram, even though they claim to be showing their true homes, just as they would be perceived were they to be experienced in their physical, private spheres. Instead of arguing that these influencers are not showing the genuine homes they claim to share, it is Goffman (1956) who serves a theoretical framework which can help understand the situation.

By regarding the private and public versions of the influencer's home as two different regions, there is a possibility to begin unwrapping the way these two can coexist and be entangled, emerging from the same physical structure at the same time as they are different

from each other. What is shared on Instagram, serving as a public version of the influencer's home can in Goffman's terms be equated with what he calls the 'front region' (1956). The public home on Instagram could therefore be understood as a place which gives a presentation of the influencer and their home. The influencers are in total control as they have the ability to decide whether to show or hide things from Instagram depending on what they see fit. Whatever they choose to include makes it to the front region for the public to see. The things they exclude stay in the 'back region' (Goffman 1956) which in this case is their private home. As we saw earlier, the back region includes both clutter and family members. This way Swedish interior influencers preserve some privacy, despite sharing pictures from their private homes. Having a back region (Goffman 1956) makes it possible for influencers to draw a line between their private and professional selves.

As noted above, Boellstorff (2008) observed the existence of a gap between virtual and actual worlds, allowing participants in the online game that he studied to have two different identities simultaneously. In a similar way, interior influencers are able to live in and through two versions of their home, one physical version which they share with their families and one online, digital version which they could use as an extending representation of themselves.

Turning to Hanna's understanding of the two versions of her home, she shows an informed insight to the way publicly presenting her home affects her private home. The duality of her home is visible to her in her way of preparing for a new Instagram post as she admitted that "on social media, there is this picture that I wish to display [*förmedla*]. There is complete chaos around me, I can tell you that!" She told me of how she tends to start on a project but then sees something else that also needs to be done or she may have to wait for the perfect lighting in order to take a photo. All of a sudden she has several ongoing projects, making her home cluttered and her husband wondering where he should eat his lunch. However, she made it clear that it is a part of her process, constantly tuning into her feelings, letting them lead her way in what to do next, how to do it and when to be happy with the outcome.

Wanting to maintain a "feelgood-account", Hanna did not hide the fact that there are certain things she does not include on her social media posts:

”if I have a bad day, depending on what it is, I don’t show that. I don’t talk about disease or (...) what goes on around me, because I think that it doesn’t.. well I don’t think there’s a reason to let everybody know of it on social media.”

Her way of deliberately not sharing certain things on her Instagram makes Goffman’s terms of front and back regions (1956) relevant and accurate, as not all things are suitable for sharing with an online audience. Here, as well as in the example above, she exemplifies how she is indeed engaged in emotional labour, as she adapts her Instagram content, not simply to her personal feelings, but to the emotions that she has in a sense, promised her followers (see Duffy and Wissinger 2017; Hochschild 2012 [1983]; Oksala 2016). This way, she is putting her own feelings aside, in order to accommodate the feeling that her followers want to receive—and the feelings she wants them to have when visiting her profile.

As mentioned above, the other participants had to reflect somewhat on the matter of difference between the two versions of home before they could come to see that they do not in fact share everything, including the clutter. Sara shared her reflection on the matter:

”(...) if someone else saw it from their perspective, if they were to come here, they might think that it differs from what they had thought. I cannot know for sure. Because—it’s really difficult for me to answer, really, but-but as I’ve said.. Well, I don’t arrange that much before I take pictures, and things don’t have to be in the right place and.. things don’t have to be wrinkle-free and things like that. So, for the most part, what’s in the photos does look like that, even here—IRL<sup>17</sup> in my home. However, I can choose not to show certain spaces. So that’s the part my followers don’t get. Even though I’m not like.. lying in any way, they aren’t—they don’t see the whole picture. That’s just how it is.”

Here, Sara tries to show how she is not that into displaying a flawless version of her home, as that would not sit well with her way of influencing. She is all about transparency and being sincere with her followers, not pretending to be someone she is not. Towards the end of the quotation above, Sara is coming to an insight of her followers not being able to see the entirety that makes up her private home, because she is capable of deliberately not showing

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<sup>17</sup> See ‘IRL’ p. 2

everything publicly and makes use of the back region instead (Goffman 1956). This ultimately proposes once again that there is in fact a complexity to an influencer's home.

### 2.3.1 *Getting personal*

Challenging the duality of an understanding of the home as private/public, the Swedish interior influencers have talked about something that could be understood as a middle ground between the public front region and the private back region of their home. Even though the influencers seem to be excluding private aspects of their home such as certain rooms and family members from the public online sphere, they are still considering themselves able to be *personal* on their Instagram accounts.

Sara thinks that by being personal she could share some things with her followers, but without disclosing every detail. For instance, she could share her wallpapers, which had high sentiment to her personally but did not give away private information about herself nor her family. She could also share items handcrafted by her father, without disclosing any information about him. She did mention that if she had gotten negative feedback on something, she would withdraw somewhat, closing herself off and becoming more private because she felt too exposed and vulnerable, reminding us of her emotional commitment (Bridgen 2011; Oksala 2016).

Similarly, Hanna explained that even though she considers her home to be a private matter, she shares material things with the public because it is, in her opinion, the people inside the home who are the 'private' within a private home. Leaving those out, she can share the home without sharing 'the private home'. For instance, the garden arrangements she shares, is something very personal in her home, but it does not intrude on the family's privacy.

Friends of Christina had expressed to her how they saw so much of her personal self in the caption<sup>18</sup> below her Instagram posts. Christina explained that "I really try my best (...) because I think it's difficult to act like someone you're not." This implies that she is emotionally committed to her profession as an influencer (see Hochschild 2012 [1983]; Oksala 2016), affecting both her private and professional self.

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<sup>18</sup> See "List of words" p. 2

*The personal home* can thus be understood as both visual impressions of atmospheres, decisions concerning the furnishings, decor, colours and patterns, all made by the individuals of that particular home, and selected phrases, emojis and words in the caption of an Instagram post. Once again, we are reminded of the complexity of the home.

In contrast to the others, Ewa thought that being personal on her Instagram only led her to lose followers. She said "I've created a certain style of how I post photos, and if I don't stick to that, people react by unfollowing<sup>19</sup> me", which contradicts the possibility of having the middle ground of a personal home between the private and public. Ewa explained that she could understand this reaction from the followers because, as she herself is a follower of other Instagram accounts, she would have similar reactions as she is more interested in the interior design than e.g. selfies and baby-photos.

### 2.3.2 *Emotional labour*

It is clear that Swedish interior influencers are in constant need of managing boundaries when sharing their private homes on a public platform. They have made a point of the need for privacy, even though they expose a big part of themselves online (meaning that they have made their home into a hobby or job that takes up a lot of their time, in addition to it being a great personal interest to them), which means that they have to find and maintain a balance between private and public life. This also includes finding a balance between family and influencing, which is made clear by the fact that influencing goes on inside their homes, at the same time as it hosts its inhabitants. As we have seen, they also need to handle the boundaries between followers and themselves, having to set aside someone's wishes in order to live up to the others'. This leads to them having to uphold some boundaries between their well-being and the responsibility they have when being sources of inspiration for a magnitude of people.

A big part of emotional labour is precisely dealing with such boundaries. Emotional labour can maintain boundaries, but it may just as well help decide on when to transgress them, or when to blur them (see Hochschild 2012 [1983]; Oksala 2016). Thus, interior influencers who engage in emotional labour should be able to negotiate, challenge and change the boundaries that are connected to the practices of sharing their homes on Instagram.

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<sup>19</sup> See 'follow/unfollow' p. 2



### 3. Conclusion

As my curiosity was triggered by the thought of a private home being posted onto a public social media platform, I initially wondered whether this duality affected the home and the influencer's perception of it. The meaning of the home, as well as perceptions of private and public, both turned out to be focused around experiences of navigating and handling various boundaries.

Interior influencers have made their homes into their life-work, by making them an essential part of their daily lives both privately and professionally. It is therefore reasonable to assume that influencers who share their homes publicly are not the typical occupant that 'takes their home for granted' (see 1.3). However, influencers' homes are understood and embodied differently by different people, as we have seen due to their perceptions of home as something emotional, sensory and social. Thus, the home can be understood, not as a universal and homogeneous structure or concept, but rather as a complex phenomenon that both crosses and maintains boundaries. It becomes clear that the participating influencers are able to experience different versions of their home simultaneously.

The participating Swedish interior influencers shared their homes online for different reasons. For instance it created a possibility for an additional income to their household and it was also a way of networking in a social manner, however it was time consuming and they were held responsible and accountable for their practices which in certain cases would lead to anxious influencers that would ultimately be affected both privately and professionally. While influencing as a profession does not have limited working hours, a restricted area or relations, this 'freedom' can be challenging to navigate in everyday life, even though it simultaneously provides opportunities by being a business with potentially significant economic outcome.

Given the fluid and often boundary-less context of living in a neoliberal consumer society, interior influencers found themselves spending a lot of labour (time, energy, emotional investment) in upholding but also traversing boundaries. Their engagement with emotional labour requires a performance by the influencer that combines the private and professional self. Thus, Swedish interior influencers acknowledge that there are indeed private, public and personal notions to a home and the practice of sharing it online. This calls for them to manage these boundaries in ways that affect them both privately, personally and professionally.

Perhaps the inclusion of a third category, the personal home, could be seen as an indicator of how it is difficult to draw boundaries in this context, in the same way as emotional labour points to the boundary managing reality of notions of private and public in professions such as influencing. Thus we can see that this study has contributed with some knowledge of what the home means to Swedish interior influencers, and how they need to manage boundaries in and of their home. However, I would like to encourage researchers to discuss homes online further, in order to bring about perspectives beyond the influencers' to the discourse. For instance, the perspective of both the families and the followers of the influencer could contribute to additional insights on how they perceive the influencers' online home and how they are affected by it.

Instead of looking at private/public, digital/physical and online/offline like binary oppositions existing simultaneously, we can be inspired by a Second Life-gamer who sees the virtual, online world as equally real as the actual, offline world (see Draxtor 2018). Even though these worlds are somewhat different from each other, physically, they are merging within our lives and existence. This suggests that binary dichotomies such as the ones discussed here are able to be created, challenged, negotiated and transformed.

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