

Using Instagram and Selfies to Explore Body Image in Gender Diverse Individuals

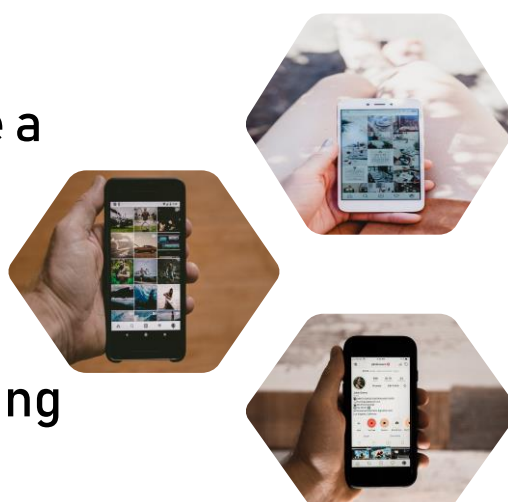
Introduction

This goal of this study was to explore the use of Instagram selfies posted by **gender variant individuals** (those who identify other than cisgender) in relation to body image, gender identity, and expression. To compensate for the lack of representation in mass forms of media, the gender variant community uses emerging media technologies, like social media, to explore and validate their identities. Digital self-portraiture (selfies) is a popular tool that individuals can use to express and expand the representation of diverse identities and bodies. **Instagram selfies** are identified as windows through which the expression of and dialogue surrounding diverse bodies can be observed. Public data was gathered from Instagram using self-identified cataloguing (hashtags) and coded for **body image themes**.

Representations of gender variance in mainstream media **conform to the established gender binary and perpetuate systemic oppression** in the real world and on screen (Solomon and Kurtz-Costes, 2018; Gerbner and Gross 1976)

Environments that **encourage gender exploration and affirm non-binary identities** can take the pressure off of individuals to conform to social standards and can potentially **foster more positive body image** (McGuire, Doty, Catalpa, and Ola, 2016)

Selfies have the potential to be a **self-therapeutic and awareness-raising practice** in relation to knowing, understanding, and experiencing the body (Tiidenberg and Gomez-Cruz, 2015)





Selfie Criteria:
The word selfie or #selfie in the user-generated text (caption or comment made by the original user), or a reflection that contains a visible phone/flash, or a partially visible outstretched arm (towards the camera).

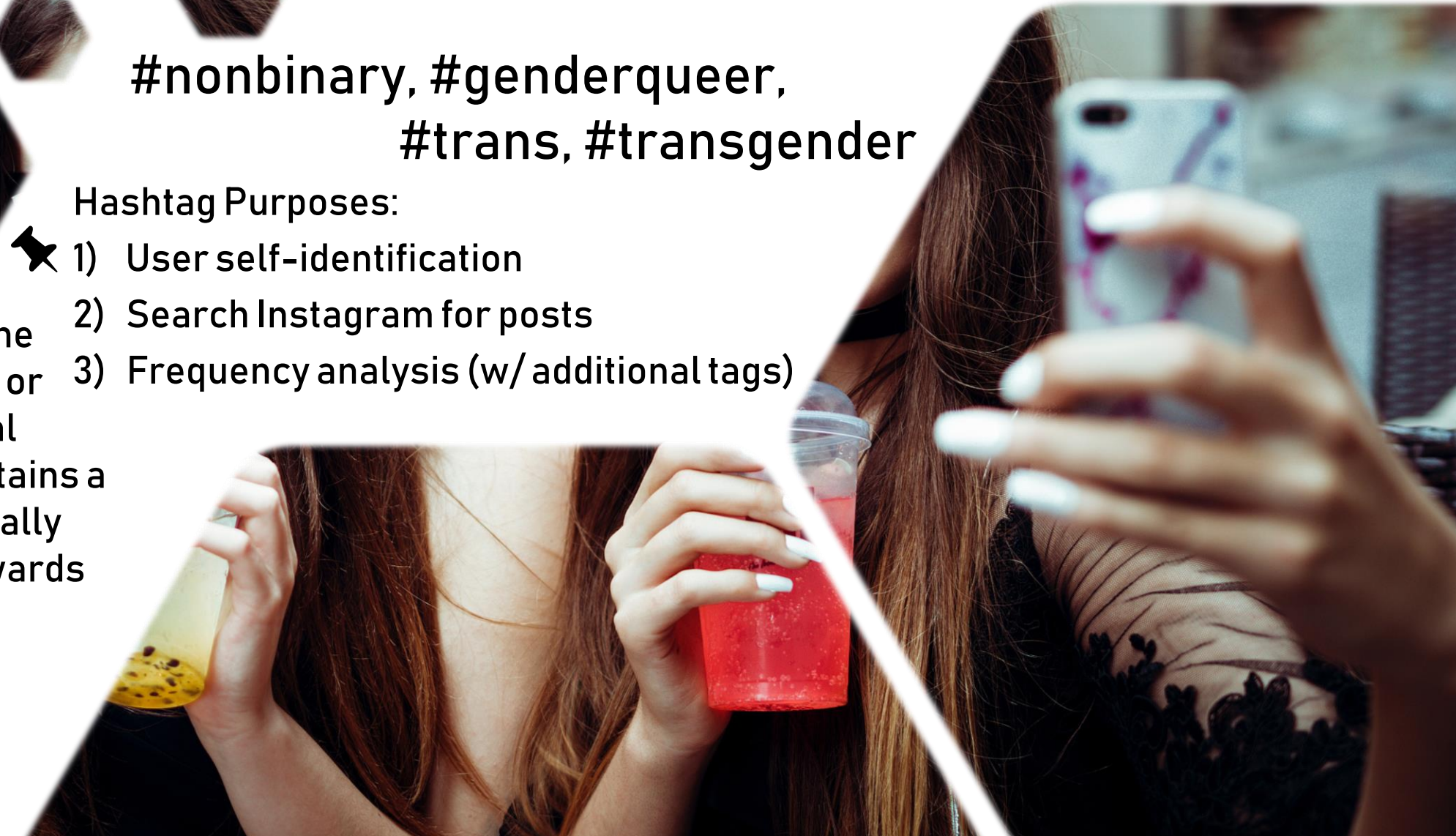
Methods

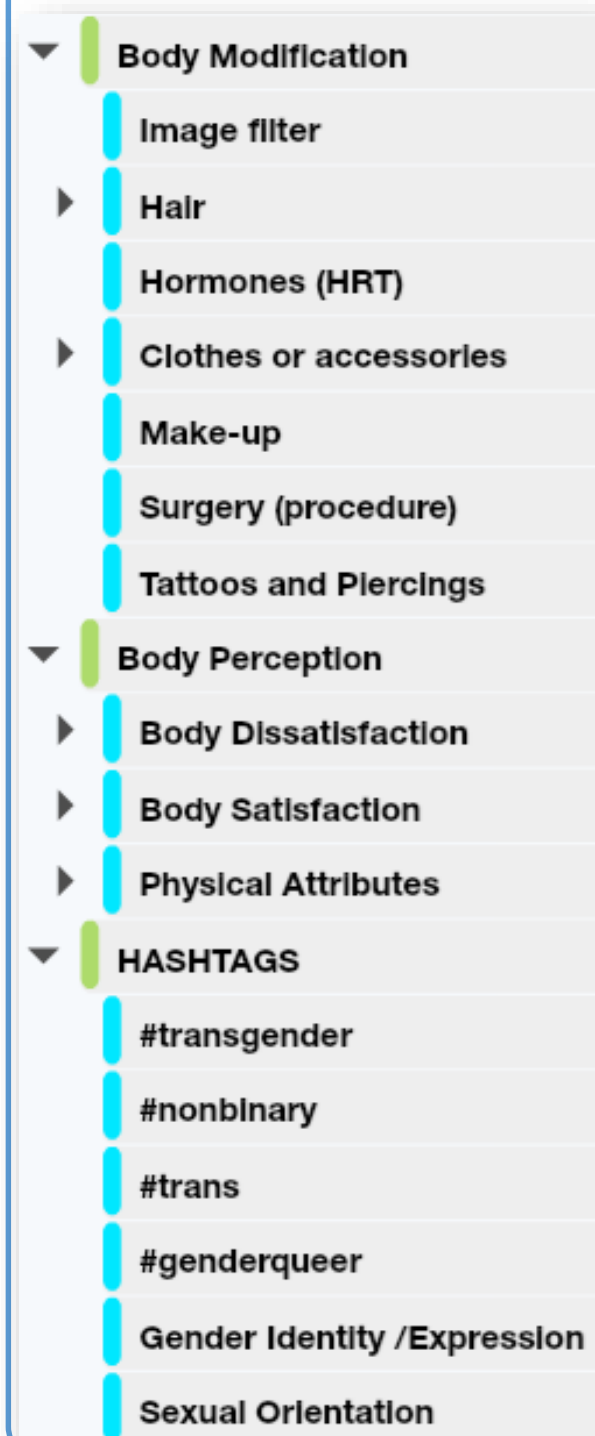
Adapted four hashtags from 2015 US Trans Survey which found that "more than one-third (35%) of respondents indicated that their gender identity was best described as non binary or genderqueer" (James et al., 2016, p.45)

#nonbinary, #genderqueer, #trans, #transgender

Hashtag Purposes:

- 1) User self-identification
- 2) Search Instagram for posts
- 3) Frequency analysis (w/ additional tags)





500 Instagram posts/selfies were collected (125 from each hashtag)
A preliminary content analysis was conducted on the first 25 posts from each to develop a **body image codebook**

Descriptive codes (with yes or no responses) were developed to represent the following overarching themes related to the gender variant experience with body image

TGFinal Data Set.docx
TG Original 123 Non-edited photos.. just natural light. Everyone has flaws, we may see them and give ourselves a hard time.. but it's those flaws others learn to love about us. Stay strong everyone #positive #positivity #positivevibes#peachhair #splithair #splitdyedhair#twocolorhair #transgender #transboy#loveyourself #noediting #naturallight#sunlight #noneditedphoto #loveyourflaws

User-generated text (caption, hashtags, and graphic text) was collected and analyzed in Dedoose

- Hair
- Self-acceptance
- #transgender
- Gender Identity /Exp...

This excerpt was coded for themes under **Body Modification, Body Perception (Satisfaction), and additional hashtags (respectively)**

Results

- ✦ **Body Modification** was the most present (95%) overarching thematic category with **Clothes or accessories (20%)** and **Hair (19%)** appearing the most frequently
- ✦ The child code that appeared most was **Self-acceptance (36%)** and fell under **Body Satisfaction (55%)**, which appeared most in the Body Perception category
- ✦ **84%** of posts collected contained hashtags with **gender identity or expression language** other than the four hashtags used for data collection

Discussion

Instagram posts analyzed in this research showed a tendency for individuals to express the feeling of self-acceptance, especially in relation to body modification tools/behaviors and social acceptance. Results posit that body modification is a better predictor of self-acceptance than a sense of unity (or disjunction) between gender identity and body image. This is an important finding because it suggests that not all gender variant individuals experience dysphoria or a desire to align with a particular gender. Future research must not assume that the experience of gender exploration (like transitioning) places individuals at odds with their physical characteristics, but rather potentially facilitates more opportunities for self-acceptance in gender ambiguity.

References

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Tiidenberg, K., & Gómez Cruz, E. (2015). Selfies, image and the re-making of the body. *Body & Society*, 21(4), 77-102. 10.1177/1357034X15592465

Solomon, H., & Kurtz-Costes, B. (2018). Media's influence on perceptions of trans women. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 15(1), 34-47. doi:10.1007/s13178-017-0280-2