

(Trans)cending Masculinity: Gender Performance of Female to Male Trans Fitness Influencers on Instagram

By

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Declaration

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I dedicate this paper to my Dad. My living, breathing superhero, always and forever.

Thank you for being the ultimate example for me.

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Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework	23
Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Findings	39
Chapter 5: Is He a Man of his Word? Linguistic Cues of Hegemonic Masculinity.....	59
<i>Is it true that hegemony maketh the #selfmademan?</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Mark his Words: Language and Identity</i>	<i>71</i>
Chapter 6: The Materiality of the body: Technologies of the Self and Self Expression	82
<i>The Site of the Scar: A Gendered Etching onto the Skin</i>	<i>82</i>
Chapter 7: Clear or Rose-tinted spectacles – Instagram as a Space for the Spectacle	109
<i>Here's to Looking at Me: Instagram as a Multi-faceted Mirror</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>Recognition as The Promise of Happiness</i>	<i>121</i>
Conclusion	136
Reference List	142

Chapter 1: Introduction

The public sphere has expanded in a way that has allowed for a more hypervisible approach to self-definition and self-representation. Instagram is just one example of an application that has created a platform for this kind of hypervisibility. Instagram is a photograph sharing application with a community of over 500 million users (Instagram, 2018). It dictates a heteronormative narrative and ideal and uses this to categorise and perceive bodies along a continuum of 'normality'. Many people who do not reiterate such norms utilise Instagram as their vehicle towards community creation or involvement, self-empowerment or awareness. The self-empowerment lies within the counter-discourse created by the hypervisibility of the bodies. The users utilise their own non-normative bodies to make a specific point towards discursive activism. There has been a rise in the occurrence of body-positivity selfies, in response to society's gendered expectations of the aesthetics of our bodies. Responding to the barrage of images dictating a narrow bodily ideal, the body-positivity movement has taken to social networking sites to create a space for the showcasing of bodies of all shapes and sizes (Sastre, 2014).

This study is based on the examination of a select number of Instagram users who identify as, or can be identified as, transgender (hereinafter referred to as 'trans') fitness influencers, and who perform a female-to-male trans fitness regime. An Instagram influencer can be understood as a public figure who is responsive to the needs and interests of a target audience, holding the power to shape the attitudes of that audience (Freberg et al., 2010; Khamis. Ang & Welling, 2016). LGBTQIA+ (an acronym for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans, queer, intersex and agender identities). This represents a spectrum of identities inclusive of the vast diversity of genders and sexualities of the human species (Poynter, 2016). Influencers are engaging in a social justice ecology, where they use their lifestyle narrative as a platform from which to personalise and promote causes pertaining to LGBTQIA+ politics and advocacy (Abidin, 2019).

The goal of these trans fitness influencers is to achieve a masculinised aesthetic. However, as the researcher, I wish to problematise the hegemonic or idealised masculine identity to which the influencers aspire. Such representations and promotions

of this particular identity are replete with issues that warrant further investigation within the broader field of trans scholarship. I aim to conduct this investigation using an analysis of the visual and written aspects of the relevant Instagram posts, and the audience reception of these posts.

i. Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the gender performance of female to male trans fitness influencers on Instagram. Through the exploration of hegemonic representations, discourses of gender embodiment and performance can be understood within the context of shifting cultural hierarchies, institutional arrangements and online technologies (Farber, 2017). The world of sport is largely considered a masculine domain, and the aesthetic of musculature is largely thought of as pertaining to a set of masculine attributes; accordingly, the performance behind these fitness profiles is often viewed as being in line with these assumptions. Through a discourse and visual analysis of Instagram uploads and comments, this study will explore the various ways in which masculinity is performed and consumed, and by what means.

Hegemony in males can be understood as a pattern of practice; in other words, it is not only a set of expectations or an identity, but it is also the behaviour and actions that afford men their dominance over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The hegemonic male is the marker by which all other masculinities are measured; it is the ideal which men try to achieve – but very few, if any, succeed (Billman, 2006). Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as ‘the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women’ (Connell, 2005).

Within the Instagram posts, these men appear to be partaking in a masculine ‘pattern of practice’ (i.e. weightlifting) as well as flaunting their musculature. This may be perceived, not only as a form of upholding the aesthetic expectations of masculinity, but

also as striving for the embodiment of ‘ideal’ masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, in order to understand the gendered complexities of an image, it is necessary to contextualise it within the users’ photographic and general self-representation techniques on Instagram as a whole (Raun & Keegan, 2017). While studies have been conducted in which the physical aesthetic ideals of trans men have been explored, the intention and effect of these forms of self-representation have not been delved into on a deep enough level. It is necessary to explore in what ways these representations uphold or transcend the rigid classification of the hegemonic male.

In the exploration of discourses of gender embodiment and performance, it is essential to consider the ‘visibility dilemma’ in which the trans fitness influencers find themselves. Here, photographs of transsexuality are ‘situated on a tension of revealing and concealing transsexuality’ (Prosser, 1998, p. 209). If the aim of reassignment is to ‘pass’ as male and erase visible markers of transsexuality, the subject finds himself in a point of contention as to how transsexuality can be represented through photography (Prosser, 1998). As he becomes more visible as man, he becomes more invisible as trans (Raun & Keegan, 2017). This becomes evident when the user posts a topless photograph in which he flaunts his well-built pectoral muscles. The visibility dilemma becomes highlighted here, as in drawing attention to his muscles (a historic symbol of masculinity) the absence of breasts (a symbol of femininity) becomes blatant. This is further disrupted by the sometimes-evident incision scar after the surgical process of breast removal, where the mark of incision can be seen as a symbol of ‘trans-ness’ and thus becomes a space of ambiguity.

The visibility dilemma raises questions about gendered aesthetics and what are considered to be natural visible characteristics for either gender. Muscles have historically been a chief symbol of masculine power and are used as a means of coding the ‘naturalness’ of difference between the genders (Bordo, 1993). Men are constantly inundated with expectations from society, and recommendations from the media, that the healthy and fit male body is defined by the image of musculature, muscle size, greater muscle density and less body fat (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). These physical elements have come to be a direct criterion for levels of masculinity. Scholars have

noted that the concern for physical fitness can be analysed as a means for ‘redeeming manhood, re-energising masculinity, and restoring force, dynamism and control to males in a culture full of doubts and contradictions about men’s futures’ (Griswold, 1998).

Conversely, muscular and athletic women are read as defiant of mainstream femininity (Farber, 2016). Parameters of femininity still contain significant size requirements (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). However, unlike size association referring to the increase in muscle mass for men, this refers to the decrease of fat storage for women. Historically, the most distinctive marker of maternal femininity is that of the hourglass figure, where the emphasis is on the reproductive organs – the hips and the breasts (Bordo, 1993). However, there has been a noticeable shift from the hourglass figure to a more elongated, slender form (Bordo, 1993). Expectations of the female aesthetic train women that their focus needs to be on decreasing the size of their hips and lower bodies (Farber, 2016).

These profiles challenge traditional gendered fitness aesthetics (Dockray, 2018). This becomes especially obvious where the intersections between female- and male-gendered aesthetics come into play. Hegemonic masculinity has always been thought to be a product of the male body (Connell, 2005). This is further emphasised through the very nature of physical fitness pages and the hypervisibility that it affords the body. Sports or fitness provides a continuous display of men’s bodies in motion where ‘elaborate and carefully monitored rules bring the bodies into stylised contests with one another’(Connell, 2005, p. 52). However, the constitution for masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained (Connell, 2005).

For the female to male trans fitness influencers, these dynamics become emphasised on different levels. In a study focused on strategic fitness habits of transgender males, when asked about their physical aspirations as trans men, interview respondents expressed that their goal was to build a more ‘masculine physique’, which was collectively described as broad shoulders, de-emphasised hips and thighs (fewer

‘curves’), visible muscle and lower body-fat percentage (Farber, 2016). There is a twofold challenge that is faced in not only sustaining bodily performance and form, which is associated with masculinity, but also simultaneously eliminating physical markers of the feminine form. For instance, many respondents expressed their aim of building a muscular chest (increasing markers of masculinity); however, they faced difficulty with regard to losing fat in the chest area (breasts as a marker of femininity). Therefore, they felt that they had to wear sports bras to diminish the appearance of their breasts during their workouts (Farber, 2016). In the struggle faced by trans men to pass as ‘male enough’, they are often compromised by upholding oppressive gender norms attached to ‘ideal’ and hegemonic masculinity (Raun & Keegan, 2017).

ii. Rationale

Due to the centrality of the media in modern society, audience agency and awareness have together increased over time. The development of technology has resulted in great expansions in the field of social media and social networking and has thus facilitated the rise of many overarching platforms which result in a unique globalisation of society. Users are given the ability to permeate the previous temporal and geographical boundaries of communication, encouraging dynamic expressions of representation and self-representation online.

This study is focused on female to male trans fitness influencers on Instagram who present themselves online through various performances of the body-in-transition. The deliberate visual presentation of the body is meant to create a sense of unity for the trans fitness community. By making these presentations, the influencers create an inclusivity for the transgender fitness industry, as well as a rethinking of the dichotomisation of both sex and gender, and of the expected aesthetics and performances that such a dichotomy promotes (Silverchanz, 2009).

To follow each influencer’s Instagram account is to be invited into each individual’s unique lived experience; and thus their stories come to life. This study makes space for the embodied affective processes in studying trans identities. Questions become more

pragmatic, focusing more on how the aesthetic is ‘defined, deployed, defended, subordinated, marked or manipulated’ and how this intersects with discourses of gender and value (Elias, Gill & Scharf, 2017, p.18). Insight into these identities takes a more affirmative turn, exploring life as ‘something other than a mystified false consciousness requiring the illumination of a specific theory’ (Colebrook, 2003, p.133). While studies have been conducted in which the physical and aesthetic aspirations of these influencers have been explored, the intention and effects of these forms of self-representation have had scant consideration in terms of the centrality of labour to the body, and of the unique identities of each individual’s life (Namaste, 2009). There tends to be little contextual information, and lived experience often tends to be neglected, where the trans individual is depicted as a ‘mere topological figure, a textual and rhetorical device’ (Hines, 2006, p.51).

Queer Theory has created a space for the questioning of sexuality and gender, both theoretically and as lived experiences (Halperin, 2003). With the use of Queer Theory in this study, ‘life’ is brought into the forefront; it encourages the consideration of ‘whose life matters?’ (Butler, 2004, p. 30). ‘To what extent does gender, coherent gender, secure a life as visible?’ (Butler, 2004, p. 30). Trans lives are constantly at risk and subject to extreme discrimination and isolation to the extent that violence against trans people is not considered violence. Often, this violence is ‘inflicted by the state that should be offering to protect the subject from such violence’ (Butler, 2004, p. 30). Butler argues that theory itself is transformative. While it may not be sufficient for social and political change, it can be a catalyst for awareness (Butler, 2004).

Through the visibility of these Instagram profiles, the trans body has the opportunity, not only to become visible, but to come to life. Instagram exposes the myriad ways in which norms can be occupied; whether they are exceeded and reworked, or whether they allow for the exposition of their realities (Butler, 2004). Instagram allows for this embodiment, the unique embodiment of each individual, to become visible. The diverse subjects which will form the sample of this research, together with the globalisation of Instagram, allow for the exploration of the ways in which more complex conceptualisations interface with cultural, racial, and socio-economic factors. This enables the understanding of the variations amongst people with different characteristics

in diverse circumstances (Swan & Anastas, 2009), and will allow the study to take a more intersecting approach. Moreover, owing to the constant updating within the platform, the research will allow for the understanding of trans identities situated in time. This is important, as the construction of sexual orientation and gender identities, and the developmental templates available to individuals, are constantly changing (Martin & D'Augelli, 2009).

iii. Research Questions

To what extent do female to male trans fitness Instagram influencers uphold or transcend the rigid classification of hegemonic masculinity through their endeavour to achieve a masculinised aesthetic?

Specific questions which guided my research:

- I. How are discourses of masculinity negotiated by trans fitness influencers in order to achieve a specific online identity?
- II. What visual elements are employed to construct a masculine identity?
- III. What linguistic strategies are employed to construct an identity of masculinity within the caption?
- IV. What linguistic strategies are being used by the audience within the comments to assist the trans fitness influencers in their aspiration towards a masculine identity?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Instagram influencers selected make strong commentaries on the materiality of the trans body within the socio-political context of Instagram. The literature discussed in this chapter will pave the way for the analysis and discussion that forms the essence of this study. This study shows a common interweaving and intersecting of discourses of gender and its presentations, with bodybuilding/fitness and Instagram as a platform for self-identification and recognition. It is important to contextualise such debates within academia in order to pave the way for further and future discussion.

Firstly, issues of gender performance will be discussed, allowing for a contextualisation for the reading of female bodies transitioning into male bodies. It is important to understand gender as a social construct in order to make sense of how performance may occur within (or against) its socio-political conventions. In the following sections, the literature will be outlined and discussed in order to question how such performances are elaborated into the context of hegemonic masculinity. Thereafter, self-representation will be discussed, in order to understand how gender performance extends into different realms of representation, and particularly representation on social media. Lastly, literature on Instagram influencers will be discussed in order to make inferences between self-representations online and their potential implications for influence on the greater community.

i. Gender and Performativity

The trans fitness influencers are striving towards a stereotypical, idealised version of masculinity. This objective can be facilitated by their performance on Instagram aligning with an ideal self; visually connecting themselves with established, legible and desirable categorisations of masculinity (Butkowski, 2019). While the influencers may have the choice and agency in their gendered performance, these particular performances are occurring within the heteronormative narrative of Instagram, and thus the social and cultural reception, categorisation and interpretation of such performances depend on the audience (Wight, 2011). It is important to elucidate how these

performances come to be and how the discourses in which they occur ultimately shape how they are received. This section will be built around Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity. Understanding gender as something one *does* rather than something one *is*, will allow for the understanding of fluid, 'defiant' and transitioning identities along normative understandings of the gender spectrum.

Being trans, the influencers have experienced an incongruence of anatomical and psychological sex and therefore the gendered performance which is expected of them. This results in a forced challenging of normative gender roles (Mbugua, 2011). Even while challenging these normative gender roles, the gender dichotomy will pertain in society as the boundaries of analysis are confined by discursively conditioned experience (Butler, 2008). This is always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse (Butler, 2008). 'To say that I "play" at being one is not to say that I am one "really", rather, how and when I play at being one, is the way that being gets established, instituted, circulated and confirmed' (Butler, 1993, p.310). Here, Butler encapsulates the co-dependent relationship between discourse and performance within. We are unable to separate our thoughts, utterings or actions from the discourse in which we find ourselves (Butler, 1993).

Gender can be understood as the discourse into which subjects are interpolated. 'Where there is an "I" who produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which proceeds, enables, and thus forms that "I"' (Butler, 1993, p.150). The concept of interpolation was constituted by the Marxist scholar Louis Althusser. He defines interpolation as an operation in which ideology (such as that of gender) functions in such a way that it transforms an individual into a subject (Althusser, 1971). Here, the individual can be understood as one that is produced by nature, and the subject as one that is produced by culture and its ideologies (Fiske, 1971). Ideological norms subjectify us and become naturalised in their practices; they constitute not only our sense of the world, but our sense of ourselves, our identity and our relation to one another (Fiske, 1998).

The heteronormative discourse of gender interpolates the body into a very specific way of being. As early as adolescence, as one develops both cognitively and socially, one is conditioned to understand that one's sexual categorisation will define the way that one ought to perform and behave. Gender norms are expected to be congruent with sex, and begin to manifest in behaviours, desires, gestures, talents, interests and stylisations (Boldt, 1996). Judith Butler (1998) deems gender norms as a specific stylisation of the body. We are conditioned to stylise our bodies in line with gendered expectations. Owing to the fact that we are socially conditioned into gender, it can be understood as a social construct (Butler, 1986). Since the body ultimately becomes a reflection of the social, it becomes a vehicle which is an active process of cultural and historical possibilities (Butler, 1986). Butler makes the analogy of comparing gender performativity to a theatrical act on stage; it is an act that is rehearsed and requires individual actors in order for it to be actualised (Butler, 1998). This implies that the body is both formed and exists in its entanglements with the social world and its discursive elements (Martin, 1994).

Gender performativity is one example as to how power acts as discourse (Butler, 1993). Discourse is socially constituted and socially conditioned. It constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of , and relationships between, people and groups of people (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). It is discourse that supports power relations, and as a result a subject is not 'free' to stand outside the norms or to negotiate them from a distance (Foucault, 1990; Butler, 1993). Power is the name that is attributed to a complex strategical situation in a particular society and comes from everywhere (Foucault, 1990). It can be understood as an aspect of interaction between human beings (Oliver, 2010). Many forms of power exist in society; some are more obvious – such as legal or economic systems – while some are more subtle, operating by means of strategies that are difficult to recognise (Oliver, 2010a; McHoul & Grace, 2015). The exercise and maintenance of power depends on an ideological framework which is acquired, confirmed or challenged through discourse (van Dijk, 2008).

Gender exists as discourse within this complex matrix of power, within which one is expected to perform in such a way that the norms by which one is constituted are reiterated and repeated with accordance to this strategical situation (Butler, 1993 Foucault, 1990). However, should one not follow these learnt conventions, and fail to do one's gender 'right', one is subject to punitive consequences (Butler, 1986). Institutional practices and informal practices (such as bullying) force us into our gendered space (Butler, 2012). Should one cross these rigid gender boundaries, discrimination, bigotry, and in extreme cases legal marginalisation may be the consequences. Feminists have argued that the theories of discourse and power with reference to gender create 'docile bodies', who lack the agency of power and resistance (McLaren, 1997). The framework does not merely describe the passive body, but rather the contingency of the cultural construction of gender (McLaren, 1997). As much as 'challenging' or contentious performances may have an effect on a discourse in some way, there will always be a preceding discourse which implicates how and why we perform (Butler, 1993). The ways in which the body has come to be seen as possessing certain inherent and natural attributes (such as race and gender) are intricately related to the social and political representations of persons. In other words, the discourse ultimately creates the person (Gilmore, 1994)

The way in which 'queer' is conceptualised in the world will always be dependent on the discourse in which it finds itself. Almost always, this discourse is one which is related to the idealisation of the heterosexual bond and the embodiment of very specific ideals of femininity and masculinity (Butler, 1993). Within queer theory, gender and sexualities are therefore arranged around defiant positions and deviations from the hegemonic 'norm' (Martin, 1994). Therefore, when one is making reference to queer or trans performance in particular, surfaces and appearances take priority over the interior (Martin, 1994).

These defiant positions and deviations prove that where there is power there is resistance. Power is always subject to a reversal, and freedom is a condition of the possibility of power's existence (McLaren, 1997). While power simultaneously polices and produces, it 'demands that we think beyond the conventional political logic of

resistance and domination' (Spargo, 1999, p.23). In fact, the very existence of power depends on resistance (Foucault, 1990). Foucault insists that power is not thought of in negative terms such as 'repression' or 'censorship', but that we rather consider that which power produces (McHoul & Grace, 2015). Alternatively, 'power produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault, 1977a, p.194). Though one is always inside power, while one can resist it, it will never cease to exist (Foucault, 1990). The discourse of gender supports a power which will continue to survive despite being challenged. Gender is categorised by means of positioning or aligning oneself to the positioning of the other within situated discourses. It is, therefore, a comparative category, where belonging to one entails the discourse of non-belonging to the other (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). The trans fitness influencers position themselves within the hegemonic discourse of Instagram, where their performances of sexual and gendered identities influence the potential for facilitating and circulating counter-discourses (Duguay, 2016).

ii. Hegemonic Masculinity and Trans Masculinity

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity has influenced thinking about men, gender and social hierarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is a gendered performance which represents the ideal form of masculinity. It is important to expand on this concept in order to contextualise the particular gendered performance of the transitioning male bodies in their struggle towards an 'ideal' masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity can be understood as the pattern of practice which allows for men's dominance over women to continue (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, not only does the hierarchy exist between the two genders, each gender has its own system of hierarchy as well. It exists not just through the subordination of femininity to hegemonic masculinity, but also through the subordination and marginalisation of other masculinities (Schippers, 2007). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the most honoured way of being a man. While only a minority of men, if any, can enact it, it is certainly considered the normative and ideal form of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt,

2005). The hegemonic male tends to produce an image that is white, middle class and heterosexual (Frank, 1987).

Traditional studies of masculinity tend to take the link between cis males (biological males that identify as male) and masculinity for granted (Gottzén & Straube, 2016). These studies seem intent on insisting that masculinity remains the property of male bodies (Halberstam, 2012). Connell focuses on the homosexual male within the model of hegemonic masculinity. She asserts that homosexual masculinities are at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men (Connell, 2005). In patriarchal ideology, gayness is ‘the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 2005, p.78). Hence gayness, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, is easily assimilated to femininity (Connell, 2005). Therefore, with regard to transsexual masculinity, one could assume that there are similar assimilations to femininity, based on a female to male trans individual’s biological sex and the conventions which accompany it, consistent with the ‘biology is destiny’ assumption. Jack Halberstam refers to ‘female masculinity’ (2012) in order to assert that masculinity can function independently of maleness or the male body. Halberstam explains that ‘Masculinity is what we make of it’, and while it does have important relations to cis maleness, it has equal importance to trans maleness (2012, p.154). It is important to recognise that often, trans subjects are not attempting to slide seamlessly into manhood, while other times trans males do wish to make distinct gender assignments; both spectrums of fluidity have specific implications for masculinity.

Connell affirms that gender, and therefore masculinity, is ‘a social practice which constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do and not social practice reduced to the body’ (Connell, 2005, p.71). Therefore, one could argue that while Connell’s theory refers to the cis male, there is an openness in the theory that sees masculinity as a set of norms and ideologies apart from the male body - thus allowing space for trans masculinity. (Gottzén & Straube, 2016). In other words, it may be possible that trans men who carry out social practices which are indicative of the hegemonic male may be higher up the gender hierarchy among men, although they are not heterosexual or cis.

Here, the body becomes essential to the construction of hegemonic masculinity, in which appearance and actions are fashioned to create ‘properly and situationally adorned and performed bodies’ (Messerschmidt, 2018, p.130). Connell (2005) asserts that true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from the body; to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. This can be evident in two ways. Firstly, by driving or directing action, such as by partaking in masculine social practices; or by setting limits to actions, such as avoiding partaking in social practices which are contradictory to heterosexual masculinity (Connell, 2005).

Therefore, to be ‘read’ as male, the individual must ensure that his presented self is situationally appropriated through his display and behaviour (Messerschmidt, 2018). Situating the body as an active vessel in the production and transmission of social structures, creates space in Connell’s theory for trans masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2018). One could argue, in line with Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, that with a ‘stylized repetition of acts’, the trans body can be coerced into the role of the hegemonic male (Butler, 1988). It is through this embodied social action that one can *do* hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2018).

iii. Online Self-representation

Instagram is a platform which depends on the self-representation of its users. The strategies of presentation used in constructing online identities are important in terms of understanding how an online gendered identity comes to be.

The ability to afford ‘ordinary people’ a platform for self-representation has allowed for an evolution in conventional understandings of human identity, representation and social relations (Thumim, 2009; Mallan, 2009). Social networking sites have institutionalised and mediatised the personalised display of socialising, and the personalised display of identity (Enli & Thumim, 2012). New spaces have been created which allow for virtual identities to be constructed, visually presented and narrated (Mallan, 2009). Within this creation of identity, or the representation of self, there must

be choices about what aspects of the self to present and how to present them (Enli & Thumim, 2012).

Self-representation refers to the conscious construction of a thing with which to represent oneself (Thumim, 2006). We are seeing the world of social media becoming increasingly focused on the visual, and thus self-representation is commonly presented through imagery. Photography introduces a new activity to perform and a new way for individuals to experience the world.

What a photograph shows us is how a particular thing can be seen, or could be made to look – at a specific moment, in a specific context, by a specific photographer employing specific tools. (Coleman, 1998 as cited in Schroeder, 2002, p. 45).

Due to the ubiquity of social media, images play an important role in how we shape our worlds (Tiidenberg, 2015). Photographs, especially within the context of online self-representation, have a profound and fundamental influence on conceptions of identity, in such a way that it has become impossible to disentangle the two concepts (Schroeder, 2002).

It is important to draw a distinction between self-representation and presentation of the self (Thumim, 2012). A self-representation is a consciously-constructed bounded text (Thumim, 2006, 2012). It refers to a sign that is constructed in some way, standing in the place of an object to which it refers (Rettberg, 2017). These semiotics, or systems of signs, provide a framework for understanding both the construction and decoding of meaning within an image (Schroeder, 2002). ‘To interpret a photograph is to acknowledge its representational power, both as artefact and as bearer of meaning’ (Schroeder, 2002, p. 52). Roland Barthes identifies two signifying practices present in all photographs – denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the photograph itself, in its literal form. Here, it is filled with signs/signifiers that are dealt with on a superficial level, independent of any context or subjective meaning; the viewer simply accepts it for what it is (Bouzida, 2014). Barthes asserts, however, that one will never

encounter a image in it's pure state, it will always be imbricated with symbolic connotations (Barthes, 1981, Oxman, 2010). To extrapolate the connotative meaning of an image, we begin to 'discover the interaction that occurs when the sign meets the meanings or emotions of the [viewer] and [his or her] values [and] culture' (Fiske,2002, p.86). These connotations will often be interpreted according to the way in which society, to a certain extent, thinks it is, or should be (Barthes, 1981). The connotative meaning, thus, usually reflects cultural and ideological codes (Schroeder, 2002). Since a representation is 'constructed', it can never truly 'mirror' reality, as we all have very different experiences and interpretations of reality (Rettberg, 2017). In making such constructions, self-representations could provoke fantasies of the real, or of what one's audience idealises the real to be (Gilmore, 1994). However, a presentation of the self can be likened to Judith Butler's theory of performativity. We perform the self all the time and this is neither a bounded nor necessarily a conscious process (Thumim, 2012).

Psychologist Erving Goffman's theory of *The Presentation of The Self in Everyday Life* is often applied to studies on online self-representation. Goffman uses the metaphor of theatre in order to promote an understanding of the presentation of the self. An individual is an actor who performs for his/her audience. The audience will observe a specific actor and monitor his/her performance (Hogan, 2010). The actor represents an idealised rather than an authentic version of him/herself in order to foster a desired impression, which is bounded by the audience (Hogan, 2010). Performance, in this sense, is socialised, as it is moulded and modified to fit into the understandings and expectations of the society (the audience) in which it is presented (Goffman, 1956). The actor's performance, however, varies depending on whether he/she is backstage or frontstage. When an individual performs frontstage before an audience, the performance generally functions in a fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance (Goffman, 1956). Here, the actor is conscious of his/her behaviour and that he/she is being observed by an audience, therefore one ought to perform following certain rules and conventions, or a script. (Bullingham & Vansconcelos, 2013). The individual tries to present an idealised version of themselves according to a specific role (Hogan, 2010). When the actor is backstage, he/she has space to openly construct the illusions and impressions which will be performed frontstage (Goffman, 1956). This is

‘where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course’ (Goffman, 1956, p.112). Here, an individual does much of the real work necessary to keep up appearances (Hogan, 2010).

It is crucial to conceptualise online self-representation as a mediated process, and thus apply this metaphor to the context of social networking. The mediated self may perform an idealised self, according to understandings and expectations of his/her followers (or audience).

In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art (Barthes, 1981, p. 13).

Backstage, when one is outside of the mediatised context, one can strategise how to foster this particular performance, which is in line with specific codes and conventions. Social media reflect society’s heteronormative expectations, and therefore one may feel the need to perform in line with such conventions when online.

The use of the term mediation indicates an ongoing construction of meaning (Thumim, 2006). Self-representations, even historically and outside of the realm of social media, are always social in nature. An example of this can be seen historically in artistic portraiture. Frida Kahlo, in *Self Portrait with Cropped Hair*, challenges traditional expectations of femininity by posing in (her lover) Diego’s suit, while attempting to appropriate his authority (Baddeley, 1991). We see these representations outside of their original context and this creates an ongoing ‘conversation’ between production (or producer), text and audience (Rettberg, 2017; Thumim, 2006). Once we understand the process of self-representation as a mediated one, we begin to see that the processes of production, circulation, and reception of the text will ‘always take place in specific and complex contexts and are processes where power can be exercised and negotiated’ (Enli & Thumim, 2012, p.100).

iv. Instagram Influencers: The Labour of Love

The audience of the trans influencer plays a critical role in the co-construction of the transitioning male's identity. In order to understand how the audience come to play this role, one needs to understand the power of the influencer. The following section will describe the concept of the Instagram influencer and how this title creates the potential for impact through differing strategies of self-representation and communication.

The trans influencers have a very specific form of self-representation which affords them the title of influencer. To be an influencer, one must have the power to influence, and this comes with important strategies that need to be considered. Although on a globalised, largely normative platform, the influencers operate within a very niche space. Fitness accounts are a common phenomenon throughout Instagram. Here, influencers post diet and exercise tips, motivational posts and 'how to' tutorials. The trans influencers interweave the fitness/bodybuilding discourse into that of the trans discourse, where the equilibrium of Instagram's normative narrative becomes disrupted. This integration gives the influencer more titles and thus more responsibility to fulfil both roles of 'fitness' *and* 'trans' influencer. It is therefore important to recognise what it is that constitutes the title of influencer and what gives one the potential to influence. This section will discuss the concept of 'self-branding', and how this puts the ideal of authenticity in a precarious position; this ideal typically becomes part and parcel of the ability to influence.

Instagram is utilised as a platform for communication in a variety of ways. Trans visual representation on Instagram can be seen as an aspect of awareness or advocacy, or as a tool to mobilise and gain information about transitioning and trans identity (O'Riordan, 2005). In the instance of the Instagram influencer, Instagram also becomes the vehicle utilised to claim an identity (Raun, 2018). The influencer can be likened to the micro-celebrity, an 'identity linked almost exclusively to the internet and social media,

characterising a process by which people express, create and share their identities online' (Raun, 2018, p. 104). Micro-celebrities are public icons with large-scale audiences that operate within small, niche networks (Abidin, 2015). Being a micro-celebrity involves the creation of a persona; producing content for an audience and appealing to online fans by being authentic (Marwick, 2013). The audience expect an intimate relationship with the influencer, one that is transparent, open and authentic, and this relationship is maintained by direct communication and interaction from the influencer (Raun, 2018). It is these characteristics that distinguish the micro-celebrity from the traditional understanding of celebrity, or Hollywood star. A celebrity's popularity depends on an elevated status which requires a forced distance between him/herself and the audience; whereas a micro-celebrity's popularity depends on the connection with their audience (Senft, 2008).

While being authentic may seem simple, there is in fact a great deal of 'strategic intimacy' that is required in order to appeal to an anticipating audience (Marwick, 2015, p.333). This involves an affective labour. A micro-celebrity is expected to perform various types of labour and while they may be energy- and time-consuming, they are not necessarily economically profitable. This involves the signalling of connectedness, relatability, accessibility, presence and most importantly authenticity, which ultimately creates the foundation for intimacy. Intimacy is the core of the relationship between the creator and their audience (Raun, 2018). This intimacy is the basis for the audience's trust. Trust tends to be particularly important in marginalised communities, such as the trans community, where great significance and gravity is placed on finding a safe network or space and a community to be connected to and with which to be associated.

This labour of presenting an authentic self and creating a sense of intimacy between the influencer and his/her audience can be understood as both aspirational and affective labour. Aspirational labour can be defined as the compulsion to accumulate social or economic capital (Duguay, 2019). In the case of Instagram influencers, this is often seen as the struggle to gain popularity in the form of 'followers' and 'likes'. Affective labour, on the other hand, refers to the constant persona that is presented, which creates feelings of trust and intimacy between the audience and the influencer. While affective

labour lays the foundation for aspirational labour, one can argue that aspirational labour is constant, as influencers will continue to aim for infinite exponential attention and popularity.

In her interviews with social media content creators and producers (bloggers and influencers), Duffy (2016) found three main features of aspirational labour. The first feature is a performance of authenticity, which involves a celebration of ‘realness’ (Duguay, 2019). This translates to the ideal of transparency and the expectation of a certain kind of exhibitionism (Marwick, 2013). Authenticity is the display of the ‘hidden’ inner life. This often involves a certain kind of emotional vulnerability (Marwick, 2013). An emotional vulnerability becomes evident in the trans influencers’ online presentation. The influencers post many transition-type videos, about the difficulty of living as a trans individual, about gender and genital confirmation surgery and, in the case of the trans fitness influencers, about striving towards a masculinised aesthetic. This allows for education and enlightenment of other trans people, particularly trans men looking to achieve a certain degree of idealised masculinity. Here, there is a clear political purpose to counteract and challenge the pathologisation and discourse of trans details, through intimate personal revelations (Raun, 2018). Lauren Berlant said, on the effect of ‘intimate publics’,

Intimate publics flourish as a porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain experience of belongingness and provides a complex consolation, discipline and discussion about how to live as a [trans individual]. (2008, xiii).

Duffy’s second feature of aspirational labour involves an instrumental approach to affective relationship. This refers to the ways in which the influencer produces social networks and forms of community through his online presence (Duguay, 2019). This may involve being highly responsive and communicative with fans; responding to comments, and even offering guidance in response to some comments. Essentially, the premise of communication should encourage a responsiveness rather than a distraction from the community in which the influencer is operating (Abidin, 2015). An example of

this can be seen in an influencer referring to his/her audience as ‘followers’ rather than ‘fans’. The term ‘fan’ obscures the status elevation between the influencer and his audience, thus creating space for distancing and a decrease in the impression of intimacy (Abidin, 2016).

Lastly, aspirational labour involves creating a ‘self -brand’, the construction of an identity as a product to be consumed by others (Genz, 2015). This involves a form of labour with material and economic goals of self-promotion, profit and visibility, with the affective aim of self-reflexivity, creativity and authenticity (Genz, 2015). As such, this involves an explicit self-commodification. While this self-commodification can refer to the literal capitalisation of content, it can further refer to a specific way of performing in front of the camera and addressing the audience so as to attract attention and publicity, thus achieving social/cultural capitalisation (Raun, 2018).

Influencers are often affiliated with a certain product and are paid to publicise it on their platform. The ‘packer’, a phallic shaped object worn in a trans male’s underwear, is a common example in the transgender online network. Another common trend is the marketing of queer nightclubs by organising ‘meet-ups’ for the influencer’s followers. Interviews conducted by Raun showed that that trans influencers are generally reluctant to monetise their content, for fear of pushing the community away because of the impression that personal gain could be the influencer’s motivation. There is a common perception in the trans community that ‘by doing something good, you are not supposed to get paid for it’ (Raun, 2018, p.103). This puts the viewer’s authenticity in a compromised position, as the audience begins to wonder ‘is this the real him or is he just doing this for the money?’ While capitalising on self-branding is not as common in the trans community as in the mainstream community on Instagram, Gershon (2016) argues that authenticity can be branded and can, in fact, become the basis of the brand. One can commoditise their trans identity *while* building and contributing towards their community (Raun, 2018).

There is a great deal of affective labour at play on the part of the influencer. While specific approaches are used to attract attention and gain popularity, it cannot be

assumed that these strategies are only utilised for commercial gain. There is a great deal of contention in the trans influencer community about monetising their content in any way. Their *raison d'être* is to enlighten, inform and add value to their community. Although there is a proportion of posts which show sponsored or affiliated products, it is important to recognise that this should not necessarily compromise the influencer's authenticity. It is possible to gain economically while adding to and enriching the community.

The weight that is placed on authenticity, particularly within the trans influencer discourse, results in a great set of expectations of the influencer, not only as micro-celebrity but as role model and mentor. Audiences from marginalised communities seek for a belongingness, a consolation for their hardships and an enlightenment on pursuing their identities. This can only be achieved through intimacy and authenticity. Followers should feel as though they can not only relate to an influencer, but *trust* an influencer. It is this that allows the influencer the potential for change and, ultimately, influence.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I explore ideas of bodily modification (fitness, surgery and body building), gendered aesthetics and visibility in order to show ways in which trans bodies in transition complicate received meanings of gender. This disruption is complicated by the fact that the bodies being studied aspire towards heteronormative ideas of masculinity in ways that simultaneously refuse to challenge their trans identities.

Transgender studies, an extension of queer theory that accommodates for the particularities of trans identities, acts not only as a framework for the research, but as a basis on which the aforementioned ideas of bodily modification, gendered aesthetics and visibility can be conceptualised and expanded. I will first discuss transgender studies, as a means to situate further ideas that ultimately form the core lens for the analysis of this study. Thereafter, I will discuss my adaption of Michel Foucault's theory of technologies of the self, and how this relates to bodily modification and the technologies the trans body utilises in achieving its desired gendered self. Following this, I will discuss society's traditional aesthetic expectations of the body in the fitness/bodybuilding discourse, and how this has implications for transgendered bodily aesthetics, which will be discussed in the following chapter. This expands on society's expectations of how a gendered body ought to appear, and therefore the technologies utilised in achieving this ideal. This has implications for trans visibility, which will be discussed further. Lastly, I will discuss the site of the post bilateral mastectomy scar, and how this too becomes a highly political site where visibility is confronted.

i. From Queer Theory to Transgender Studies

Transgender studies provide a useful theoretical framework for this study as it allows for a lens that not only thinks beyond the binary but considers the unimaginable. Each influencer has a unique identity that ought to be considered with a lens that considers the various, unlimited ways in which the non-normative body can establish itself.

Rather than defining each identity, it considers how each identity disrupts, denaturalises and makes visible the normative and heteronormative expectations within everyday life.

While queer theory accommodates fluid identities that float across normative conceptions of gender and sexuality, theorists have argued that the trans identity gets lost under the overarching umbrella of LGBTQIA+. While trans lives do indeed fall under the umbrella of queer, it is important to consider the specific complexities and particularities of trans identities. Transgender studies confronts the limitations of queer theory in order to accommodate for the shifting and frequently complex trans identities in particular.

The word 'queer' is often used to describe a fluidity in identity, recognising identity as a historically contingent and socially constructed fiction (Giffney & O'Rourke, 2016). Lee Edelman (2004) emphasises the fluidity of queer identities in his statement 'queerness can never define an identity, it can only disturb one' (p.17). Queer theory does not dictate or suggest a particular mode of being but rather creates space for reflection and potentiality. Queer often functions as a synonym for the LGTQIA+ community, merging this multiplicity of complex identities under one false unifying umbrella (Giffney & O'Rourke, 2016).

Susan Stryker (2004), a revolutionary trans theorist, critiqued queer theory for its consideration of transsexuals as 'abject creatures' (p.213). Its focus was mainly on sexuality, for which it is considered to be an essentialist identity category, often ignoring intersectionality of gender with other crucial identity facets such as class, race and indeed, sexuality (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). This lack of emphasis upon particularity within queer theory has led to a homogenous theorisation of trans lives and identities (Hines, 2006). While queer theory remains a hospitable place for trans identities to reside, it is too often code for gay and lesbian and therefore, trans phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and identity as a primary means to differ from heteronormativity (Stryker, 2004).

In addressing these limitations of queer theory, transgender studies has taken place in its shadows, creating space for the confrontation of emerging problems in the critical study of gender and sexuality (Stryker, 2004). Transgender studies has opened up a field of gendered possibilities in its acknowledgement that gender identities are more frequent and complex than queer theory accommodates for (Miller, 2018). It considers gender as it is lived and experienced. It has more consideration of discourse and intertextuality as it is concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalises and makes visible the normative linkages between the biological and sexed body and the social roles each body is expected to occupy (Stryker, 2006).

Transgender studies involves an exercise in discourse analysis, taking the significance of words and the power of language into serious consideration (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). ‘The power of discourse to produce that which it names is essentially linked with the power of performativity’ (Butler, 1993, p. 17). Discourse is therefore an important consideration in considering the performativity of gendered identities in the field of possibilities which are encouraged within transgender studies.

ii. Technologising the Trans Self

Michel Foucault’s work on technologies of the self allows for the recognition and appreciation of the construction of the of the trans body, especially in the context of fitness and musculature. Foucault (1988, p. 18) defines technologies of the self as

the way individuals engage in psychic practices which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies or souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection and immortality.

Foucault (1998) asserts that it is this technology of self, along with technologies of power, which form the essence of an individual. Technologies of power determine the conduct or context in which an individual finds him/herself, resulting in the

objectivisation of that individual. In conjunction, these technologies produce effects which constitute the self (Foucault, 1988; Besley, 2005). It is important to consider the technologies which are used by the transitioning masculine body to strive towards an identity of masculinity.

Foucault emphasises in his work that although each individual is caught up in a network of historical power, one will always have the freedom to negotiate and resist it (Foucault, 1990). However, it is discourse that supports power relations and as a result, a subject is not 'free' to stand outside the norms or to negotiate them from a distance (Foucault, 1990; Butler, 1993). Through the various technologies that the individual uses, the body is marked (Grosz, 1994). In fact, even without these technologies, the naked body is constituted by technologies of power and thus marked by discourse. One can never understand a naked body as a 'natural' body as it will still be marked culturally, racially, sexually and possibly even in relation to class; just as it would be if it were clothed (Grosz, 1994). Therefore, one cannot understand the body to be a neutral site, as it will always be inscribed by the way in which it moves and behaves. The body shows the work or inscriptions which it has endured, whether it be intentionally or unintentionally (Wright, O'Flynn & Macdonald, 2006). Through such inscriptions, the body will thus be deemed or constituted as appropriate or inappropriate for its cultural requirements (Grosz, 1994).

With this in mind, Foucault's technologies of the self are often employed in studying sports and fitness and its effects on the body within a social context (Markula, 2003). The body can be understood as a site of disciplinary and normalising practices (Markula, 2003). Physical activity, such as bodybuilding, acts as a technology which disciplines the body, anchoring it into a web of normalising practices. However, it is how the body negotiates the technology of fitness which can be a determining factor of how the individual develops his/her subjectivity within a specific discourse (Markula, 2003). Gyming and muscularity may further constitute the body in a network of power, where an individual is merely objectified by discursive control and expectations, or it may provide a space for meaning-making, allowing for a certain degree of subjectivation, transformation, or of course personal enjoyment (Markula, 2003).

There is no escaping from the powerful context in which the idealised, ‘fit’ body appears in the everyday social realm; these images contextualise the way we read bodies (Pronger, 2002). Technologies such as weightlifting and bodybuilding work to normalise masculine bodies in line with these ideals. For the influencers, the involvement in such technologies, designed to discipline and shape the body, may result in the approximation of the visual ideal of masculinity represented in consumer culture (White & Gillet, 1994). This discourse valorises muscles as a symbol of hegemonic masculinity, a sign of dominance, control, authority, physical strength and power (White & Gillet, 1994). The influencer may reify these dominant constructions of masculinity through these technologies, or they may use their body as a tool for negotiating meanings of gender identity by marking it in a way that may not be consistent with the aesthetic expectations of the gender binary (Markula, 2003).

However, it is crucial that we recognise that individuals are not passive subjects of a particular discourse (Wright et al., 2006). Although they may be interpolated into a very specific discourse, they may take up these discourses in very different and complex ways (Wright et al., 2006). We ought to understand these technologies of the self as a more complex operation of how power works to connect the self to the social (Wright et al., 2006). Chapman (1997) equates technologies of the self to ‘practices of freedom’ in which people are given the liberty to make conscious choices about how to understand and relate to themselves. While aesthetic expectations of how the body should be constituted or inscribed may be viewed as an oppressive power, external to the individual’s self, one may take it up and use it in different ways in the development of their subjectivity (Markula, 2003).

Foucault posited two types of resistance to discourses of power; ‘reverse discourse’ and ‘discourse of freedom’ (Foucault, 1990). Reverse discourse refers to the continued support or maintenance of a discourse of power, while discourse of freedom refers to the creation of a self which resists or negotiates such a discourse (Guthrie & Castelnovo, 2001). Should the influencer make use of the technology of fitness as a means to maintain the representation of the ideal hegemonic body, he becomes a passive body, making use of a technology of power (reverse discourse). Should the

influencer make use of the technology of fitness in order to resist these ideals and negotiate these identities, he becomes a transformed body, making use of a technology of self (discourse of freedom).

It is important to consider the degree of 'naturalness' in such representations of gender identity (Wesley, 2001). In line with this concept of 'naturalness', an unnatural body refers to a body perceived as artificial, distorted, exaggerated or not legitimate; ultimately, a body which has been altered from the original (Wesley, 2001). 'The degree to which a body technology enables one to conform to social expectations of the gendered body dictates the degree to which the technologised body is socially perceived as natural' (Wesley, 2001, p. 63). The trans influencers make use of many body technologies such as surgery, hormones, gym equipment and Instagram filters. These body technologies become a way of marking the trans bodies as gendered while simultaneously passing it as natural (Wesley, 2001). In other words, these technologies are used as tools to create a gendered body which can be perceived as natural according to socio-cultural expectations of the male body. (Gillet & White, 1992).

iii. Traditional Gendered Fitness Expectations

The transitioning female to male body operates on a complex space of eradicating indicators of femininity, while striving towards achieving bodily characteristics that can be associated with the ideal representation of masculinity. In this section, I will discuss how each gender endures specific aesthetic expectations within the normative fitness discourse. It is useful to understand how these expectations come to be, and why certain characteristics will be placed at the forefront in the endeavour of achieving a specific gendered ideal.

As a result of society's gender binary, and the rigid classification of gendered aesthetics, the male body has often been understood and observed as the contrast of the female body. The masculine body has long been the norm against which female bodies are found lacking (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). The female is thus expected to 'make up' for

that lack by consuming certain products and services. However, over time, and with the increasing amount of scholarly attention being drawn to the complexity of hegemony, the male body too has found itself enduring intense scrutiny and objectification (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009).

Lean muscularity and physical strength have implications beyond the desire to appear attractive; they have come to be direct symbols of masculinity (Ian, 1995; Mussap, 2008). Extra emphasis has been placed on bodily display because it has become the means to negotiate and establish social status. Body image has become a means to reinforce or challenge relations of privilege or oppression (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Physical bulk, particularly muscle, implies strength, virility, and dominance; all of which are considered to be consistent with the heteronormative masculine gender role (Mussap, 2008). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the widest accepted criterion for muscularity is the absence of femininity. With the rise of women who have taken on and excelled in traditionally masculine roles in Western society, men are turning to muscularity as one of the few means to affirm and assert their masculinity (Mussap, 2008). Muscularity has continually operated as a means of coding the 'naturalness' of sexual difference (Bordo, 1993).

A pattern has therefore become evident, not only in health and fitness media but also within training and exercise rituals themselves, of the maintenance, exaggeration and even exaltation of conventional gender roles (Ian, 1995). The fundamental assumption that underlies men's fitness, is the expectation of gaining greater muscle density and muscle size, and decreasing body fat (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Bodybuilding and the gaining of muscle have come to be heroic in men, with the increase in physical size and power (Leppihalme, 2000). With the increase in muscle size, the already changing body becomes even more unrecognisable, thus exaggerating such gender norms (Ian, 1995).

In contrast, however, the aesthetic of the feminine body is expected to be controlled and contained (Farber, 2016; Bordo, 1993). Historically, typically 'feminine' desires were considered to be excessive and irrational, and were seen as threatening to erupt and challenge the patriarchal order. Therefore, the capacity for self-management is seen as a

process of taking direct control of such desires (Bordo, 1993). Aesthetic expectations of the female form dictate a slender, toned and elongated body (Bordo, 1993). A woman's main aim is the elimination of body fat. However, unlike with men, muscularity is not considered attractive or culturally accepted for female-bodied people (Richardson, 2008).

iv. (Trans) Gendered Bodily Aesthetics and the Invisibility Dilemma

Gender as a performative act is instituted through the stylisation of the body (Butler, 1988). Gender is a way of donning one's own body as a cultural sign (Davy, 2016). Therefore, in order to understand gender performance as a whole, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the aesthetic of the gendered body. This is critical in the exploration of how masculinity is visually constructed through the visual elements utilised by the transitioning body of the influencer (Raun & Keegan, 2017). Furthermore, it is important to recognise how this particular stylisation of the body may have implications for trans visibility.

Psychosexual theory claims that it is the sexual organs of a person which are the ultimate indicators of true sexual and gendered development (Davy & Steinbock, 2012). However, in Stone's *Transsexual Manifesto* (1993, p. 231), she asks 'Suppose that you could be a man [or woman], in every way, except for your genitals, would you be content?' Visibility has been naturalised as the ontological truth-claim of a subject; 'that which can be seen, is that which is true' (Robinson, 1994, p.721). However, in modern westernised society, the site of one's genitalia is considered private and hidden from visibility. Therefore, the question of how masculine and feminine aesthetics are attributed persists.

Although cultural attributions of male and female may vary across space and time, society is nevertheless conditioned to recognise that there is something essentially male and something essentially female (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). Every time we come across a person we make a gender attribution; that is, we determine whether they are male or female (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). The way that we decide is so naturalised that it is

not questioned, to the point that it almost seems trivial. However, gender attribution is far from an initial inspection process; it is the foundation of understanding other fundamental components such as gender roles and gender identities (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). In ongoing interactions, once the attribution has been made, it is not necessary to keep 'doing masculinity' or 'doing femininity'. It is not the particular gender that ought to be sustained but rather the 'naturalness' of that gender, the sense that the particular person has always been that gender (Stryker & Whittle, 2006).

For a trans individual, 'passing' means to live successfully in one's gender of choice, to be perceived as a 'natural' member of that gender (Stone, 1993). Those who are successful at passing are considered 'real transsexuals' within mainstream society, as they fall within the binary, which makes for simpler gender attributions (Roen, 2002). However, the act of passing as one's gender of choice means denying one's transgender identity and the very complex history which the transition process involves. Furthermore it is often viewed, among the trans population as well as among radical feminists, as falling prey to gender oppression (Roen, 2002). Radical feminists have argued that transsexuals and their surgery choices endorse the heteronormative hegemony (Davy, 2008). Moreover, doctors have been criticised for 'treating' transgender people, as this is viewed as adding to the social stratification of males and females by relying on hierarchical socially-constructed views about masculinity and femininity (Davy, 2008). However, these criticisms tend to be problematic, as they disregard the agency of the trans individual. The trans person may feel a sense of comfort and pride in themselves only once they are passing successfully as their desired sex. Furthermore, coming out as a trans person presents a risk of unemployment, a risk to one's personal safety, and possibly a risk to family relations, because of the widespread prejudice and transphobia that 'out' or non-passing people may face (Roen, 2002).

This contradiction leads to a visibility dilemma for a trans person. As a trans individual becomes more visible as male or female (i.e. becomes more successful at passing), he or she simultaneously becomes less visible as trans (Raun & Keegan, 2018). 'Out' trans individuals, or those who refuse to pass, or are less successful at passing, are more vulnerable to 'gender policing'; expressed judgments, ostracism and discrimination;

while trans individuals whose bodies are more congruent with hegemonic gendered expectations become less interesting to the public, as they simply comply with the status quo. However, the less interesting they become to the public, the less indicative their lives become of diverse gendered experience (Green, 2006). The person can become torn between the desire to 'blend in' and the desire to see the world become a more conscious and tolerant place for the trans community (Vivienne, 2011). 'Transsexual visibility is crucial to expanding general awareness of the great range of difference contained within social norms of gendered embodiment' (Green, 2006, p.499). In other words, an 'out' trans individual, through his/her visibility, is able to problematise social norms through his/her embodiment of non-normativity.

The site of the scar on the trans body becomes an important consideration in relation to this invisibility dilemma. In many of the Instagram posts of the trans influencers, scarring of the chest is visible following top surgery (a bilateral mastectomy, the removal of both breasts). Here, the scar becomes an ambiguous space, a discursive emblem (Hartman, 2004). It is important to recognise that behind every scar there is a narrative; it is a visible marker of a memory inscribed into the skin (Guidotto, 2005). 'Postsurgical scar tissue can function to inscribe a relation to the body, that was, prior to the surgery, characterised by extreme alienation or a "lack of lack"' (Cavanagh, 2018, p. 316). It becomes a link between the two spaces of 'then' and 'now', it delimits the void of where the other has been, but no longer is, or appears to be (Cavanagh, 2018). It becomes the merger between two identifications (Cavanagh, 2018). While the scar may be a reminder of the pain of integration, it may simultaneously be a symbol of freedom. One therefore ought to consider whether the scar can be considered the wound or the healing (Guidotto, 2005).

v. The Ambiguity of the Scar

The body and its surface is neither naturally pristine nor a blank canvas; rather, the inscriptions it holds exist within the context of forces which socially inscribe the body. These inscriptions produce meanings and make new discursive creations possible (Turner, 1999). It is therefore crucial to understand the notion of skin, because within the trans discourse of gender affirmation surgery, the skin exists in different yet equally

important discourses prior to and following the surgery. The inscriptions on the trans body strongly impact on the notion of trans visibility.

The scars that remain on the skin post top surgery leave an etching on the skin; this could signify a shedding of sorts, of an old and uncomfortable skin, for a new embodiment (Guidotto, 2005). Often, a trans individual would describe living as their gender of choice as the shredding or stepping out of a second or mismatched skin (Prosser, 1998). Leslie Feinberg (1998), transgender activist and author, speaks of wishing to shed her unhomely body, like a skin she wished to unzip. While our skin holds and contains us and keeps us discrete, it is our first mode of communication with the world, and it is therefore crucial to consider the skin surface as a bearer of meaning (Prosser, 1998; Ahmed & Stacey, 2001). While our skin may protect us from others, it simultaneously exposes us to them (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001). It is at the site of skin, the very surface of the body, where stigmatisation begins, because it allows for an ‘immediate visualisation of social difference’ (Prosser, 1998, p. 55).

Top surgery is a crucial aspect of the transitioning process for the influencers. Some influencers have shared their journey towards the attainment of a masculine and muscular chest, while others openly display their scars while posing topless in photographs. The scar becomes an extremely loaded site which holds great semiotic significance, especially within the gender discourse. Within any context, a scar becomes a discursive emblem (Hartman, 2004). Behind every scar, there is a narrative, a visible marker of a memory inscribed onto the skin (Guidotto, 2005). However, in the discourse of gender, the scars not only bear evidence of wounding, but also signify a new surface on which to form community and intimacy (Hammer, 2014). They initiate a dialogue which allows for the potential for healing (Guidotto, 2005).

Psychologist Didier Anzieu created the concept of ‘skin ego’; this refers to an ego containing physical content, based on its experience of the surface of the body (Anzieu & Segal, 2016). With this, the psyche can be understood as containing a direct correlation to the skin (Prosser, 1998). The skin is the locale for the physical experience of body image. Therefore damage to the skin, for instance scarring, cuts deeper than the

surface of the skin and can be further considered a flaw in one's skin ego (Prosser, 1998).

When the skin is considered as an entity correlated to the psyche, it manifests into a paradoxical site (Benthien, 2002). 'Can the skin be understood as a membrane which encloses the self or a barrier that conceals the self?' (Benthien, 2002, p. 17). This can be further contemplated with the question of whether the truth is hidden within, or if it reveals itself on the outermost layer of the skin (Benthien, 2002). Within the trans discourse, this consideration becomes heightened with the commonly used phrase 'living in the wrong skin'. In this sense, the skin becomes a barrier, a body prison. The desire for gender confirmation surgery can be understood as the destruction of this barrier, which manifests as a desire to find something primal and authentic that has been hidden within the fortress of the body (Benthien, 2002). This surgery allows for the release from the 'other' skin, stripping the body bare to what it should have been (Prosser, 1998). With this release, the skin becomes of utmost importance; it becomes the locale of gendered passing, as gender shifts from doing to being, from performance to flesh (Prosser, 1998).

It is through the marks that are etched into the skin, post-surgery, that this narrative comes to life. Dr Brownstein, a specialist in gender confirmation surgery, describes the scar as 'the inevitable consequence of healing following any surgical procedure' (Guidotto, 2005, p. 1). In Brownstein's conception, the scar is a representation of healing, rather than of a wound (Guidotto, 2005). It is with this dichotomy that the site of the scar becomes an ambiguous space, one which is loaded with semiotic meaning. The scar becomes a literal and metaphoric entrance point to explore intersubjectivity, its projection being two-fold; inwards affecting the wounded as well as outward affecting the onlooker (Rosenthal & Vanderbeke, 2015). This allows for the connection of human embodiment with social processes and the designation for a political identity (Turner, 1999). It allows for a space of interposition; a space is opened, allowing for a better recognition of various politicisations and the consideration of the various angles of discourse (Steele, 2013).

Historically, skin was not considered to be understood within the realm of cultural and historical understanding or investigations. However, with time, it has come to be known as the direct interface between a feeling subject and the world (Rosenthal & Vanderbeke, 2015). With this, it is important to recognise that skin is bound to cultural implications; it is never the same and will exist in different discourses and a constantly shifting light (Rosenthal & Vanderbeke, 2015; Benthien, 1999). Although the skin is situated at the periphery of the self, the human centre becomes visible from here (Benthien, 1999). It is the visual marker of identity (Rosenthal & Vanderbeke, 2015).

Philosopher Jacques Derrida would conceptualise the scar as a type of text. As he explains, 'a text is no longer a finished corpus of writing, with content enclosed in a book or its margins but rather more complex, dividing and multiple strokes and lines' (Derrida, 2011, p. 81). Bennington expands on this, defining text as 'any system of marks, traces or referrals' (1989, p. 84). Derrida sought to dismantle a text, allowing for a re-inscription within a different order of textual signification, in order to open the door to a socially constructed relational other (Hendricks, 2016). The theory of deconstruction is derived from the theories of Derrida. Deconstruction involves the destabilisation of 'key ideas' of a text, the seeking out of what the text means and what it is intended to mean (Royle, 2003; Hendricks, 2016). It is the rearranging of the order of texts, thus showing the invisible connections and other layers of meaning (Frers, 2013)

For Derrida, every concept is essentially inscribed within a chain or system, within which it refers to another and other concepts (Spikes, 1992). For him, the presence of a text or sign exposes a gap for an essential inscription, since a presence always points to an absence (Frers, 2013). No element can function without reference to another element which is simply not present (Spikes, 1992). What may be materially absent still influences people's experience of the real world (Meyer, 2012). As Hetherington notes, 'social relations are formed not only around what is there, but sometimes, also around the presence of what is not' (2003, p. 159).

There is a simultaneous absence-presence of the bilateral mastectomy scar which helps to foster a political response with the potential for mobilisation (Steele, 2013). The scar stands as a replacement symbol for where the breasts once were. The presence of the scar across the chest represents the absence of the breast. The tissue that replaces the open wound, while part of the body, is replacement fibre, which demarcates the wound as a historical event of the past (Steele, 2013). 'The scar's presence is its absence – the space "speaks" to us as something that requires our attention; requires an understanding or story to account for the loss generated by the impact' (Steele, 2013, p.39). The presence of a scar across the chest of someone who identifies and represents himself as male, provokes a 'viewer' to trace the scar, to follow, locate or trail something that points to something that is incomplete, something that once was (Meyer, 2012). It is at this point, when the 'viewer' is confronted with the scar, that the relational materiality of breast to scar comes to life. 'All material entities are produced in relations, what defines and makes them is their relational materiality' (Meyer, 2012, p.103). The materiality of the scar comes to be defined 'within relations of various sorts, which can be at once material and social, emotional and political and which develop and change over time' (Hallam, 2010, p.468).

It is important to draw a distinction between the 'presence of absence' and the 'absence of presence', as although they do co-exist in the context of trans bilateral mastectomy scarring, the one proves to have more socio-political impact. The 'presence of absence' implies that it is not the thing that is experienced as absent that is present, but rather the absence itself (Frers, 2013). That is, it is not the absence of breasts itself that is being experienced, but rather the presence of the scar, indicating that the breasts are not where they once were. Contrarily, 'the absence of presence', refers to the absence of something or someone itself; when one orientates oneself to something that is not there, one experiences that that thing does not fill the space that one wants or expected it to fill (Frers, 2013). Simply put, this refers to the absence of the breast itself. However, this 'absence of presence' is less surprising to the viewer. It is not expected that a muscular male would have breasts, therefore the absence thereof is not surprising. Rather, it is the presence of the scar, suggesting this absence, which proves to be significant. It is at this

point where the site of the scar becomes a visible space, one which encourages the negotiation of gender.

Through acknowledging the site of absence, along with how this absence brings to life the subject which it re-presents, the bearer of the scar is brought into political subjectivity, where the body becomes ‘politically alive’ (Steele, 2013). Scars are open spaces; their absence or presence disturbs, stimulates, confuses and even enervates their surroundings (Steele, 2013). Absence has agency; through talk and text, thoughts and things, absences can have an important effect on the social world (Meyer, 2012). They push back and resist, they prompt us into action (Fowles, 2010). Absence is performative, as it is not only something that we engage with, but also something we do something with or to (Meyer, 2012). For some of the trans Instagram influencers, the site of the scar becomes an exposition through the act of freezing (photography) (Meyer, 2012). The key to exposition is publicity, creating a space for a more holistic understanding and response, that is both personal and social (Steele, 2013).

However, of course, with publicity comes heteronormativity. A large portion of the Instagram public tends to police the platform with heteronormative ideals and expectations. The concept of absence-presence is often brought into play when borderline situations and experiences are analysed, ‘when the uncanny growls in dark corners of regulated spaces’ (Frers, 2013, p.6). It is within these regulated spaces, with hegemonic ideals, that such absence-presence becomes highlighted. This is often responded to with the powerful tendency to ‘suture’ the scar with a hegemonic account (Steele, 2013). These sutures may be in the form of institutional practices, or informal practices such as cyberbullying, which attempt to force the bearer of the scar into a gendered space (Butler, 2012).

It is important to consider that often, the bearer of the scar may choose to remain ‘invisible’ (Steele, 2013). There are many trans men who carry scars, as a result of a double mastectomy, which will never be ‘publicly’ exposed or communally experienced, at least not in a highly socio-political setting (Steele, 2013). Often, it is these individuals who find themselves in a visibility dilemma. As a trans person

becomes more visible as their gender of choice, he or she simultaneously becomes less visible as trans (Raun & Keegan, 2018). Often, trans men, especially post gender affirmation surgery, wish to appeal to a mainstream, non-transgender public to acknowledge themselves as a legitimate part of the category 'men' (Raun & Keegan, 2018). They feel as if there is a need to have a highly stereotyped gender presentation in order to have their gender accurately read (Holtby, Klein, Cook & Travers, 2015).

The visibility of the scar becomes an important consideration in the visibility dilemma. While the trans influencer may be striving to attain a muscular and well-defined chest, the materiality of the scar allows an absence-presence to enter the space and potentially disrupt the representation. The visibility of the scar highlights the influencer's gendered experience, while the invisibility of the scar may allow for the influencer to hide his gendered experience; thus allowing for a representation which is more in line with hegemonic gendered expectations. However, it is of utmost importance to consider the agency of the trans influencer. When analysing such representations of the female to male trans influencers on Instagram, it is crucial that one does not strip the influencer of any resistant agency in the creation of their own images and how they choose to frame their bodies (Raun & Keegan, 2018).

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Findings

This was a qualitative study, as various interpretative and theoretical frameworks were used to shape it (Creswell, 2007). The study required a population of female to male trans fitness influencers on Instagram. The platform in which the study took place was, therefore, Instagram.

The participants of this study were chosen through purposive sampling. This refers to a deliberate choice of participants due to the qualities they possess. The objective is therefore, to concentrate on people with particular characteristics who will be better able to assist with the relevant research (Etikan et al., 2014). Since it is essentially impossible to study the entire population of female to male trans fitness influencers on Instagram, I used purposive sampling to find a subset of the entire population, whom I hoped would act as a representative for the wider community (Hoeber et al., 2017). These participants were chosen with the study purpose in mind, with the expectation that each participant would contribute rich information of value toward the study (Etikan et al., 2014)

The most important aspect of purposive sampling is to ensure that the method is reproducible. This meant that I had to have a systematic way of choosing the information (Tongco, 2007). I began by considering the important characteristics that were essential for each participant to possess. This being, a female to male trans identity who participates in bodybuilding that has sufficient postings for a thorough analysis. I therefore used the hashtag, #transbodybuilder and began my process from there. As a researcher using a purposive sampling method, I was interactive with the data, allowing for potential avenues to be pursued and considered to influence my decisions. It is important to take an active and informed role using this method (Hoeber et al., 2017).

Once I had found the three influencers, I believed that I had reached saturation. This means that I continued to expand my sample size until I believed that further data collection supplied no new or emergent themes (Thomson, 2011; Saunders et al., 2018).

I felt that the chosen participants would contribute rich information that would illuminate the question under study (van Rijnsoever, 2017). The phenomena that I determined to be essential characteristics, and ultimately led me to a point of saturation, were the participants' unique points in their transition process, this referred to the breast/chest area, discussion about phalloplasty, gender identification and so forth.

This led me to the three participants of the study, female to male trans fitness influencers, namely, @gdelarosa89, @jessediamondfitness and @phoenix_montoya. @gdelarosa89 resides in Canada, and considers himself a 'canna [cannabis] connoisseur', he has just over 2000 followers. At the time of this study, he has yet to have his bilateral mastectomy and made no mention of his genital area or any dysphoria around it. @jessediamondfitness, resides in Portland, Oregon, he is a USPA powerlifter and has over 40 000 followers. He has had a bilateral mastectomy and at the time of this study was very vocal about his upcoming journey towards his phalloplasty. Lastly, @phoenix_montoya, Mr Trans USA and Mr Worcester Pride winner, resides in Worcester, Massachusetts and has over 25 000 followers. He has had a bilateral mastectomy and is vocal about phalloplasty, although the audience is unsure whether he has had the surgery or not. I believed that these three profiles allowed for a broad spectrum of analysis regarding the transitioning journey and the important elements of the process. Instagram posts were analysed over a three-month period, from August to November 2018. All photographs, hashtags and comments for each influencer were 'screenshotted' and archived from least to most recent on my computer for analysis.

Instagram allowed for me to choose the participants from a globalised context. My main priority was to focus on the climate of activism, rather than issues of race and class particularly. There is great power in the fact that although the trans men are performing normativity, there are clear markers of dissonance that are unavoidable simply because they cannot be changed. The trans body forms the core of this research, and I therefore chose three influencers who are prominent in the globalised community, allowing for a larger and wider reach of activism.

This study used a social semiotics approach to visual analysis in studying the images. Social semiotics systematically aims to reveal conventions that are used or are present within a text in order to promote social change (Aiello, 2006). Whereas traditional visual analysis may have held more of an iconological aim, social semiotics goes beyond deconstructing texts and identifying codes. The fundamental aim is identifying how textual strategies are deployed to convey certain social meanings (Aiello, 2006).

In analysing images, especially with photography, it is important to understand the images as ‘social constructions of reality, rather than objective artefacts representing it’ (Iqani, 2012, p.52). In this way, the visual and ideological are co-dependent (Iqani, 2012). Images are never innocent, and texts are never made by accident. Images become naturalised by being associated with a given perceptual object. However, it is necessary to analyse an image’s perceptual qualities as they communicate cultural codes and carry culturally specific meaning (Aiello, 2006).

A critical visual analysis within social semiotics is an ‘interdisciplinary method for understanding and contextualising critical concerns, given the cultural centrality of vision’ (Schroeder, 2006, p.303). The interpretation begins with a description. Basic descriptive work of an image will focus on components such as form, subject matter, genre, medium, colour, light, and size. However, with photography, visual elements tend to require a deeper analysis. The elements that therefore need to be analysed include production quality, photographer’s vantage point, focus, depth of field and, in the context of Instagram, use of filters. All these components constitute the aesthetic, ideological and strategic choice of a text (Schroeder, 2006). The interpretation from descriptive detail allows for an analysis of visual strategies used within a text to produce meaning and achieve an ideological end (Aiello, 2006).

Furthermore, it is important to consider the photographs that were studied as multimodal images, because they will be studied in conjunction with the verbal and linguistic captions, comments, and hashtags. Therefore, the analysis took account of the visual and the verbal while they were simultaneously at work (Iqani, 2012). Textual elements and language which accompany a visual are almost always a rhetoric of

realism, and as such are political in nature, therefore requiring a holistic approach to analysis (Rose, 2007).

Critical discourse analysis sees language as social practice; therefore, a critical discourse analysis needs to be used in this study (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). 'Discourses as social practice implies a social relationship between a particular discursive event(s) and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure which frame it' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.258). Discourse analysis is therefore concerned with the texts and their 'production by, and reiteration of, particular institutions, their practices and their production of particular human subjects' (Rose, 2007, p. 172). A critical discourse analysis allowed for a contextual and holistic approach to analysing the Instagram posts in order to make greater inferences about their social, political or ideological meaning.

Limitations of Methodology

There are two main concerns with regards to my methodology that should be accounted for. Firstly, a purposive sampling technique is directed by the desire to enrich research and therefore is inherently bias. As a researcher, I exercised judgment on the suitability of the participants and the point of data saturation. It is important that such judgements were theory based and in line with the theoretical framework of this study (Rai & Thapa, 2015). However, my position of subjectivity may have inherently affected that. Moreover, the subjective nature of selection makes it difficult to account for the chosen participants and thus may impact arguments about the representativeness of the sample as well as the reproducibility of the selection method (Sharma, 2017).

Secondly, Instagram as a platform for analysis raises concerns with regards to the ever-changing nature of information which it produces. These issues of temporality suggest that information retrieved one day could be removed or edited the very next day. This became a fundamental issue where @gdelarosa89 had changed his Instagram handle to @high.campaign89. This had implications for the verification of data presented in this

study. Additionally, posts, comments and hashtags may have been removed since the time of the study.

Finally, the scope of the platform and the infinite and constant generation of information it provides, means that I may not have been able to account for every single comment on each photograph. As a researcher, this is unfortunately an element that I am unable to control but it is vital that this is accounted for as this study progresses.

i. Findings

The posts, captions and hashtags, as well as the comments of each trans influencer's Instagram account, were collected over a three-month period. Here, various themes were found to be prominent among the three influencers. These themes were determined through a thematic analysis of the analysed data. This is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns of themes within the data. These patterns are generated into themes which categorise the common threads that extend across all collected posts (Vaismoradi & Turunen, 2013). Finding these common themes allows for the expression of the communality of voices across participants (Anderson, 2007). This allows for a more accessible form of analysis where key features of a large data set can be summarised in a clear and organised report which highlights the similarities and differences between participants (Nowell et.al, 2017)

Although the results have been condensed and presented graphically in the stacked bar graphs below, each theme holds great significance with regard to the greater implications of this study. Please note, the explanations for the thematic choices and their subsequent elements will be expanded on in *description of findings* (p. 52).

Firstly, the findings were divided into: the photograph which was posted by the influencer himself; the comments and hashtags which accompanied the photograph; as well as the comments posted by followers or the general public below the photograph. These categories are clearly defined by the different bars within each cluster.

The various themes were then clustered into ‘gender attributes’, which make reference to the influencer’s gender identity, ‘physical attributes’ which are more focused on the aesthetics and materiality of the body, and lastly ‘mental/emotional health’, which refers to the internal state of being of the influencer. These categories are further divided into themes which make up the different colours of each bar.

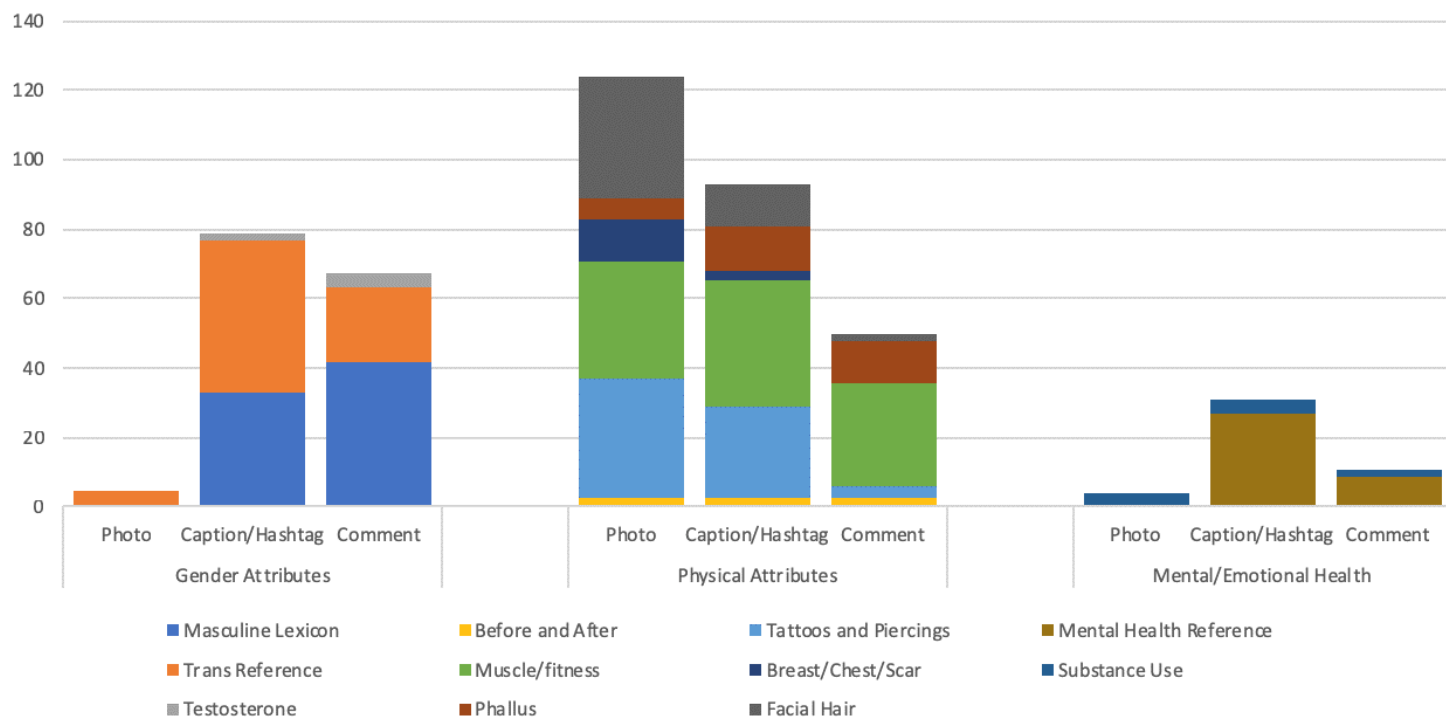
The themes which fall under ‘physical attributes’ are ‘before and after’, which makes reference to the influencer’s transition, ‘tattoos and piercings’ which are largely evident on the bodies on display, and ‘muscle and fitness’, owing to the influencers’ identities as bodybuilders. Following these are references to the breast/chest/scar area, whether this be in terms of the site of the breast, top-surgery, the post-surgical scar or the muscularity of the chest. Thereafter is ‘facial hair’, which proves to be a prominent theme, as this is one of the first masculine attributes to appear after starting testosterone treatment. Lastly, the site of the phallus or genital area ought to be considered, as sexual organs are normatively associated with a corresponding gender.

The ‘gender attributes’ category consists of three themes: ‘masculine lexicon’, which refers to language as a tool to achieve a masculine identity; ‘trans reference’, which makes reference to either the influencer or his audience’s trans identity; and lastly, ‘testosterone’ – testosterone is used to develop masculine characteristics in the transitioning body.

Finally, ‘mental/emotional health’ ought to be considered as a category because of the difficulties faced by the influencers in presenting a non-normative identity. This consists of two themes; mental and emotional health, and substance use. Mental and emotional health simply refer to emotional difficulties such as anxiety, depression and fear. Substance use refers to the use of drugs, usually marijuana, as a means to escape from the emotional turmoil.

The final graph is an accumulation of all the above data, across the three influencers, in order to determine general trends.

@jessediamondfitness Data Analysis



In the above graph, I looked at @jessediamondfitness’s Instagram profile. I went through the content that I had collected over the three-month period of analysis. I counted the number of photographs, captions and hashtags or comments which related to or consisted of the various categories that I had arranged into themes. This amounted to 203 captions or hashtags, 133 photographs and 128 comments.

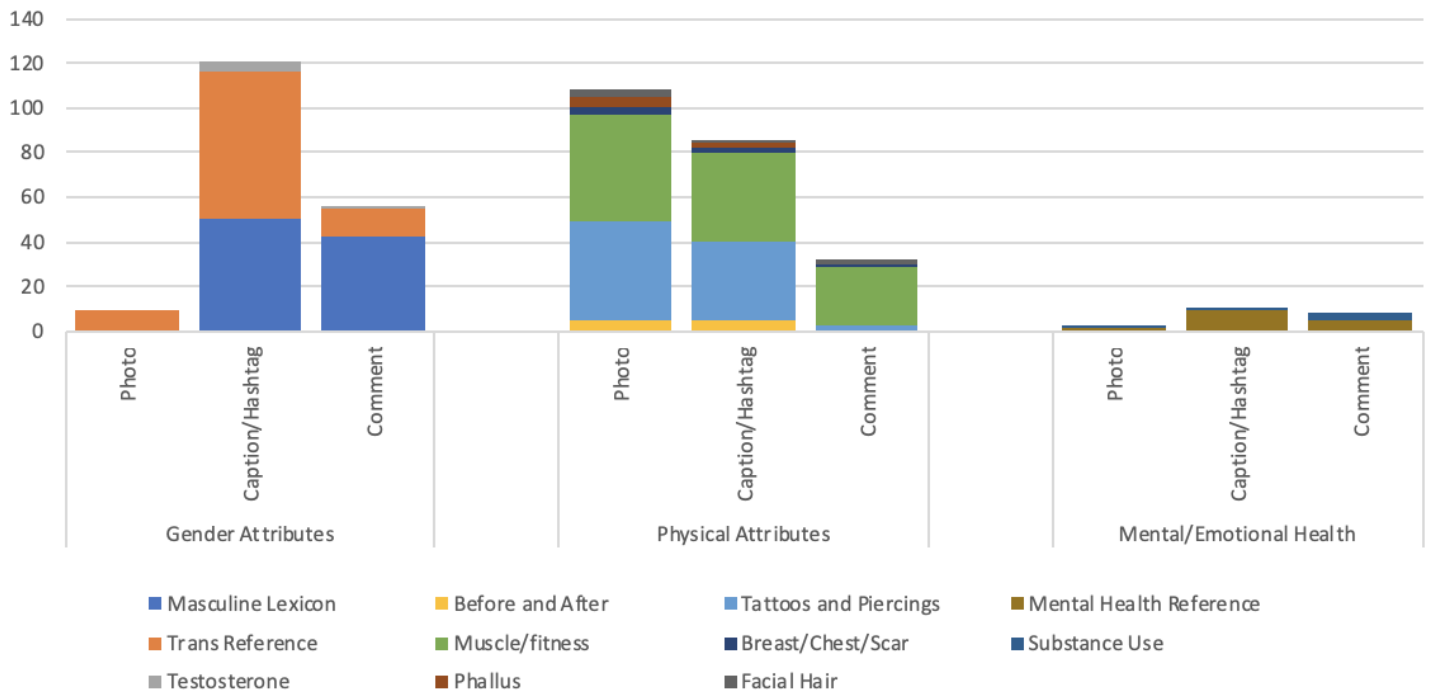
The largest category, physical attributes, revealed the highest amount of content related to its specific themes, with a total of 267 mentions or presentations. The greatest form of content was revealed in the influencer’s photographs posted, amounting to 124 presentations; where ‘facial hair’ amounted to 35, followed by ‘tattoos and piercings’ and ‘muscle/fitness’, each amounting to 34 representations. ‘Breast/chest/scar’ amounted to 12 representations, ‘phallus’ 6 and ‘before and after’ 3. Following the photographs, the influencer’s attached captions and hashtags proved to yield the greater form of content related to the themes in the physical attributes category, amounting to 93 mentions. Here, content related to the ‘muscle and fitness’ theme formed the majority of the caption and hashtag mentions at 36. This was followed by mentions of ‘tattoos and piercings’ at 26, ‘phallus’ at 13, ‘facial hair’ at 12 and ‘breast/chest/scar’

and 'before and after' at 3 each. The audience's comments produced the least content related to the themes, with a total of 50. Most comments tended to be related to the 'muscle and fitness' theme, at 30, which was then followed by 'phallus' at 12, 'tattoos and piercings' and 'before and after' both at 3, and lastly 'facial hair' at a total of 2.

The second category, yielding the most content related to its assigned themes, was gender attributes, which totalled at 151 mentions or presentations. Here the influencer's captions and hashtags revealed the most related content at 79 counts, followed by the audience's comments at 67, and lastly the influencer's photographs posted on Instagram, which totalled 5. Throughout the captions and hashtags, the most related content was revealed with mention of the influencer's trans identity, under 'trans reference', with a mention totalling 44, followed by the use of 'masculine lexicon' at 33 and 'testosterone' use at 2. Thereafter, the audience's comments mostly utilised a 'masculine lexicon', with total mentions of 42, followed by reference being made to the influencer's 'trans identity' at 21, followed by a small number of mentions regarding the use of 'testosterone', totalling 4. Lastly, 'photographs' yielded the least related content, where the only theme related to a trans identity was revealed 5 times.

Finally, the mental/emotional health category revealed the least related content with a total of 46 mentions or presentations. The most content relating to this category was revealed in the influencer's captions or hashtags at 31, followed by audience comments at 11, and lastly 4 visual representations through photographs. The main theme mentioned in captions and hashtags was 'mental health' at 37, followed by 'substance use' at 4. Then, the audience's comments revealed most mentions about mental health, at 9, which was followed by a small amount of reference to substance use at 2. Lastly, there were 4 photographs which portrayed themes of substance use.

@phoenix_montoya Data Analysis



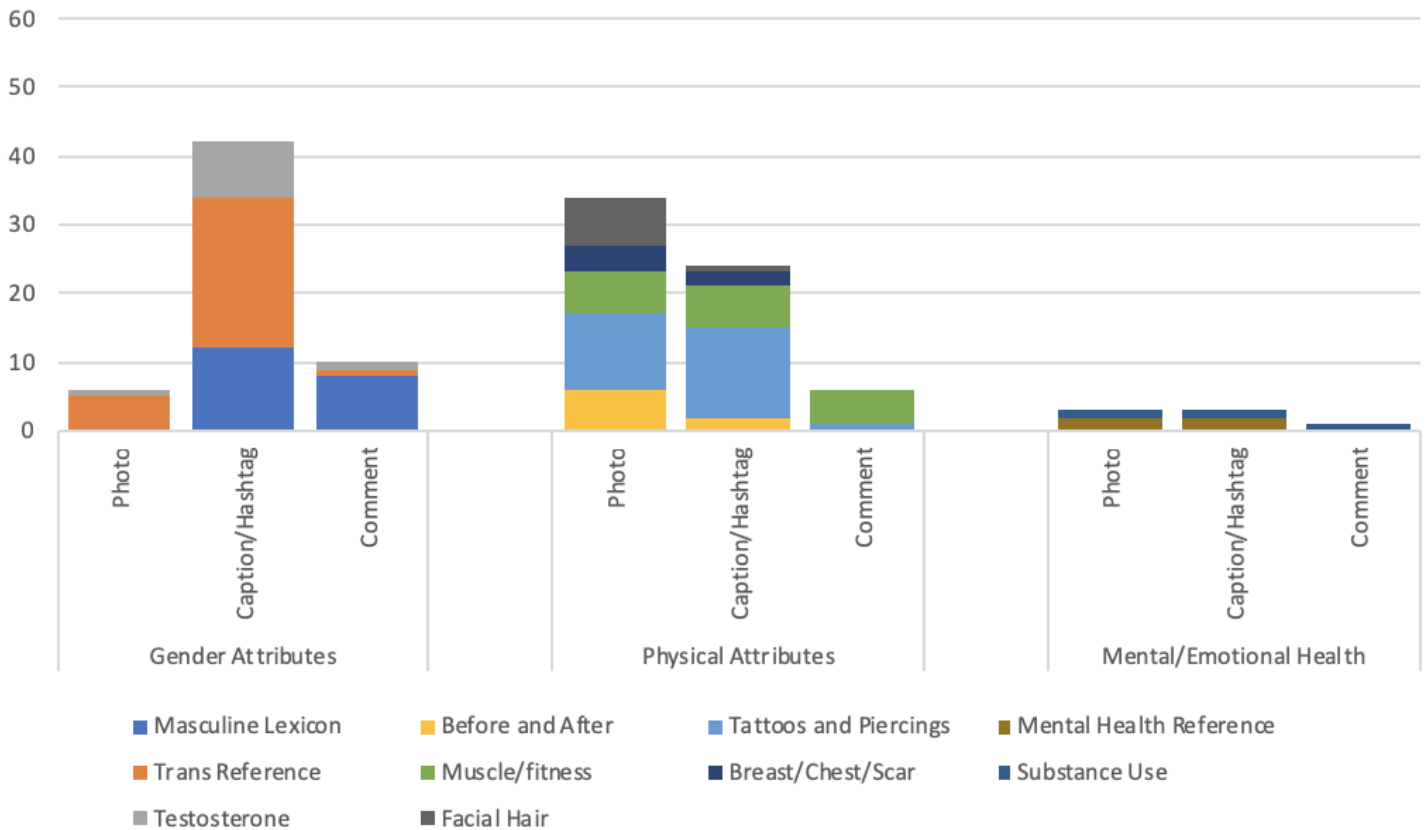
The above graph reflects the data related to the themes mentioned or revealed within the categories of gender attributes, physical attributes and mental and emotional health, from @phoenix_montoya's Instagram profile. The influencer's photographs, captions and hashtags and comments were analysed over a three-month period. I counted each time the various themes were revealed or mentioned and then tabulated their frequencies into their categories. This amounted to 218 captions and hashtags, 118 photographs and 96 comments.

Gender attributes proved to be the category which revealed or mentioned its related themes most frequently, at a total of 187. The influencer's captions and hashtags proved to reveal the most content relating to this category at 121, followed by the audience's comments at 56, and lastly the influencer's comments and hashtags attached to his photograph at 10. Within his caption and hashtags attached to his photograph, he makes the most reference to his trans identity, tabulated under 'trans reference' at 66 counts; he then utilises 'masculine lexicon' with mentions totalling 55, which is followed by little reference of 'testosterone' use, at just 1. Thereafter, the audience's comments mostly utilise a 'masculine identity' at a total of 42, which is followed by reference to their own or the influencer's 'trans identity' at 13. Only the influencer's trans identity is revealed in his photographs, with the frequency of 10.

Following gender attributes, the second category, physical attributes, yielded the greater frequency of mentions or content related to its assigned themes, with a frequency of 187. Physical attributes were revealed or presented mostly in the influencer's photographs, with a total of 108. Then, in his captions or hashtags attached to the photograph, at 86, and lastly, in the audience's comments at 32. In @phoenix_montoya's photographs, he most frequently presented himself in line with the themes of fitness or musculature, at a frequency amounting to 48; he then revealed themes of 'tattoos and piercings' at 44, followed by 'before and after' at 5 photographs. Exposure of his phallic area, his facial hair and lastly his chest area all amount to a total of 3 photographs each. His captions and hashtags attached to his photographs almost show a reflection of the frequency of themes revealed in his photographs. The most mentions make reference to fitness and musculature at 40, which is followed by 'tattoos and piercings' at 35, then his 'before and after' transition at 5 mentions, and his phallic area also at 5 mentions. However, within his captions and hashtags, unlike in his photographic representations, he makes equal mention of his chest area and his facial hair, at 3. Lastly, the audience's comments make the most reference to the influencer's fitness or musculature, at a total of 26 mentions; this is followed by the mention of his tattoos and piercings at 3, his facial hair at 2 and his chest area at 1.

Finally, with the least mentions, is the mental and emotional health category at a total of 21. The influencer makes most reference to his mental and emotional health in his captions and hashtags, at 11, while his mental and emotional health is the most frequently mentioned at a total of 10 times, followed by substance use just 1 time. Thereafter, his audience make the most reference to this category, at a total of 8. Again, mental health was mentioned the most, at a total of 5, followed by substance use at 3. The influencer's photographs show the least reference to these themes; here, substance use is represented equally with mental health, each totalling 1 mention.

@gdelarosa89 Data Analysis



Lastly, the above graph reflects @gdelarosa89’s data. The category which revealed the most presentations or mentions to its themes was physical attributes, with a frequency of 64. Thereafter was gender attributes with a total of 58 and lastly mental and emotional health at 7. Over the three-month period, 62 captions and hashtags, 50 photographs and 17 comments which matched the themes corresponding to the categories were analysed.

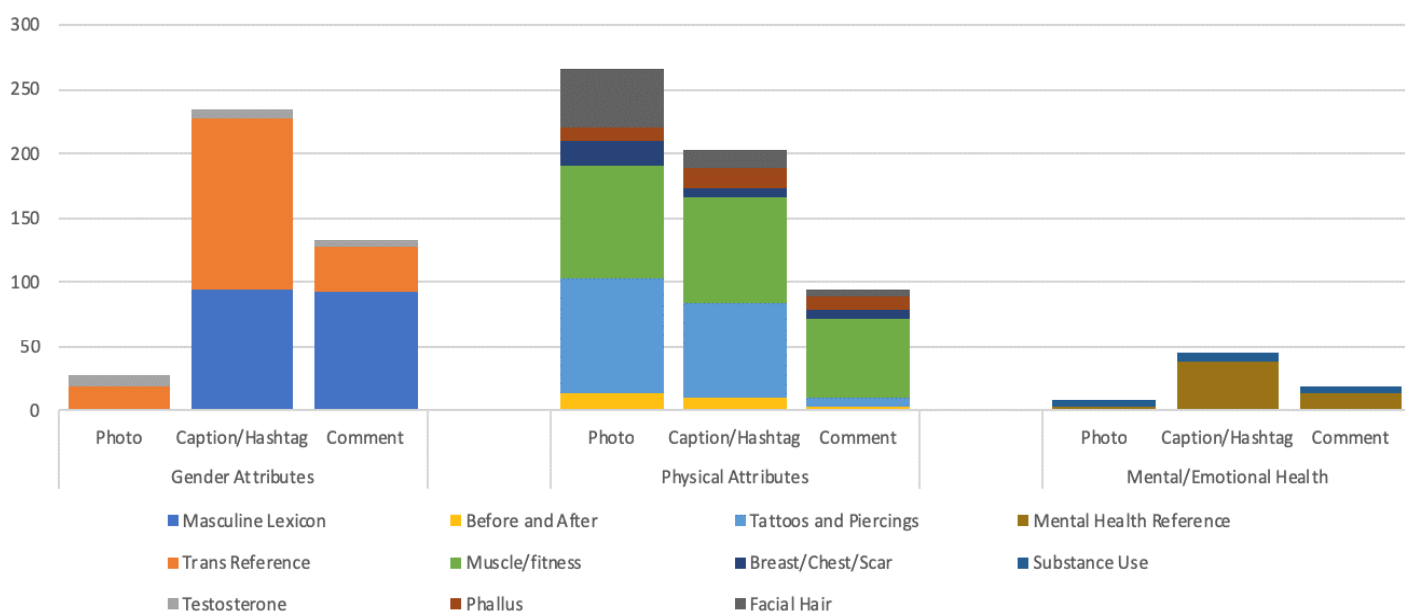
The physical attributes category proved to have the most presentations and mentions at a frequency of 64. These were mostly revealed through photographs, which had a total frequency of 34. Here, the most revealed theme was the influencer’s tattoos and piercings, at 11, followed by his facial hair at 7, and his before and after transition pictures and presentations of muscle and fitness, both at 6. Lastly, he exposed his chest in photographs a total of 4 times. Thereafter, captions proved to yield the greatest number of mentions at 24. The majority of captions mentioned his tattoos and piercings, at 13, followed by his muscles and fitness at 6. He mentions his before and after transition as well as his chest a total of 2 times each. His facial hair is mentioned once.

The audience's comments only totalled 6, with 5 mentions referring to the influencer's muscles or fitness and one referring to his piercings or tattoos.

The gender attributes category yielded a total of 58 mentions or presentations of its corresponding themes. It was the captions and hashtags attached to the influencer's photograph that had the highest frequency, with a total of 35. Here, 22 mentions referred to trans identity, 12 mentions utilised a masculine lexicon and 1 mentioned testosterone use. Thereafter, photographs yielded a total of 13 presentations of the themes, with 5 presentations of trans identity, and testosterone use 8 times. Lastly, the total of 10 comments broke down to masculine lexicon 8 times, and trans identity and testosterone use once each.

Finally, the mental health category totalled 7 mentions or presentations. Both photographs and captions totalled 3 mentions or presentations. The photographs presented themes of mental health twice and substance use once. The captions reflect the same trend, where mental health totalled 2 mentions and substance use one mention. Lastly, there was only one comment which referred to substance use.

Data Analysis of Influencers Combined (General Trends)



Finally, the above graph incorporates data from all three influencers in order to make inferences on general trends of female to male trans fitness influencers. In total, 323 photographs, 483 captions and hashtags and 241 comments were analysed according to the three categories of gender attributes, physical attributes and mental/emotional health.

The largest category was physical attributes, which consisted of 266 photographs, 203 captions and hashtags and 88 comments, totalling to 557. Photographs presented the most content in relation to the themes of ‘before and after’, ‘tattoos and piercings’, ‘muscle/fitness’, ‘breast/chest/scar’, ‘phallus’ and ‘facial hair’. Within the photographs posted by the influencers, the most common theme presented was ‘muscle and fitness’, which totalled to 88; this was followed by presentations of tattoos and piercings at 84 and ‘facial hair’ at 45, with before and after transitioning photographs, and photographs presenting the chest area, amounting to 19 each. Lastly, representations of the phallic area totalled 11. Following the photographs were the captions and hashtags. Here, the majority of mentions refer to ‘muscle and fitness’, at 82, followed by tattoos and piercings at 63 and before and after at 21. Mentions of the phallic area and facial hair total 15 each. Lastly, the chest area is mentioned the least in captions and hashtags at 7. Comments proved to yield the lowest numbers in the physical attributes category. The theme most mentioned in the audience’s comments was muscle and fitness at 61, which then drops significantly in terms of facial hair and tattoos and piercings which total 6

each, before and after at 4 and lastly the breast area which was mentioned only once in the comments.

Following physical attributes is the gender attributes category, which consisted of 48 photographs, 235 captions and 133 comments which either relate to or visually present aspects of the corresponding themes. It was within the influencer's captions and hashtags attached to his photograph that there was the most representation of the themes of 'masculine lexicon', 'trans identity' and 'testosterone'. The captions which made mention of these themes totalled 235. Mentions of trans identity and the utilisation of masculine lexicon total 20 each. There were 8 mentions of testosterone use in the captions and hashtags of the influencers. Thereafter, there were 133 comments that made mention of the themes attributed to the gender attributes category. The most frequent reference was to masculine lexicon at 92, followed by trans identity at 35 and testosterone use at 6. Lastly, the photographs had the fewest representations in line with the assigned themes. Masculine lexicon and trans identity were presented 20 times each. Lastly, testosterone use was visually represented in the photographs 8 times.

Finally, the category with the least mentions was mental/emotional health. Captions and hashtags made the most mention of the themes at 45, while 39 mentions were assigned to mental health and 6 to substance use. It was then comments with 20 mentions in relation to the theme, 14 mentions of mental health and 6 of substance use. Lastly, photographic representations related to the themes totalled 9. Visual representation of substance use totalled 6 and mental health 3.

ii. Description of Findings

Gender Attributes

The first category is gender attributes; this refers to strategies used by the influencer or his audience to construct a particular gendered identity. This consisted of three categories; masculine lexicon, reference to trans identities and lastly testosterone use.

Masculine Lexicon refers to the choice of language that we make, which can have important implications for the way that we construct our own identity and co-construct the identity of those with whom we are in dialogue. The practice of naming, signifying and valorising linguistic practice holds great significance. These linguistic phenomena are invested with meaning and values through their production and reproduction (Milani & Johnson, 2010). Individuals do gender in different ways by creatively deploying different linguistic means, which allow them to orientate themselves towards a more masculinised or feminised self (Milani, 2010) When gender is understood in a fluid way, such as in the trans context, words which are socially associated with either sex or gender have to be carefully considered and monitored. These words, which hold great gendered weight, were analysed in this study in order to obtain an inference of how various language was used to categorise (or avoid categories) within the gender binary. Overall, this category makes up the majority of the ‘comments’ bar, and while it makes up a fair percentage of the ‘caption/hashtag’ bar, it is not the greatest category. For @jessediamondfitness, masculine lexicon tends to be attributed more to the comments on his posts than within his own captions and hashtags. For @gdelarosa89 and phoenix_montoya, on the other hand, masculine lexicon tends to be attributed slightly more within their own captions and hashtags than from the comments of their followers or other Instagram users. For all three influencers, the comment bar consists of majority ‘masculine lexicon’, among the other two themes within the gender attributes cluster.

Trans reference is considered as any mention or representation of trans identity by the influencer or his audience. As argued by Raun and Keegan, as a trans individual becomes more visible as male/female, he or she simultaneously becomes less visible as trans (2018). It is important to consider the influencer’s trans identity and how various linguistic strategies and visual elements are used to construct this identity. Furthermore, it is important that the responses to posts by the general public are investigated in the same regard. As the literature has made apparent, gender ought to be understood as a fluid concept, and the point at which an individual identifies himself within this spectrum has implications for the greater study of gender performance and hegemony. For all three influencers, the ‘trans reference’ theme makes up the majority of the ‘caption/hashtag’ bar, while the comment bar tends to have a small percentage

referencing this theme. The photograph itself has low percentages in this category, as none of the influencers visually referred to their trans status, other than with symbolic references such as the trans or LGBTQI+ flags appearing within the photograph. Despite this, this category makes up the majority of the 'photo' bar within the cluster. All three influencers seemingly make equal reference to the category within their photographs and captions/hashtags. @gdelarosa89 and @phoenix_montoya do not have much commentary referring to the category, while @jessediamondfitness has a substantial amount.

Lastly, there is testosterone, which is used in hormone replacement therapy in transitioning males to suppress female secondary characteristics and to masculinise transgender men (Unger, 2016). Testosterone allows for the redistribution of fat to a more masculine pattern, increased muscle mass and upper body strength, deepening of the voice and hair growth on the face and torso (Dahl et al., 2006). Acknowledging and crediting the hormone for these masculine characteristics has implications for their gendered and transgendered identities. For all three influencers, this category is the least referred to within the trans identity cluster. @gdelarosa89 makes the most reference to his testosterone use, within his captions and hashtags, of all the three influencers. The testosterone category make up the minority of the comment bar for all three. However, the most reference to testosterone use is represented through their photographs, rather than the other mediums.

Physical attributes

The physical attributes category refers to the materiality of the influencer's body, the aesthetic characteristics that are elements of his identity construction. This was divided into six themes: 'before and after'; 'muscle and fitness'; 'phallus'; 'facial hair'; 'tattoos and piercings'; and lastly the site of the 'breast/chest/scar'.

The 'before and after' theme allows for the acknowledgment of trans identity and transitioning bodies. The influencers are often keen to acknowledge how far they have come in their transformation of materialising their gender identity of choice. The

influencers tend to put a side by side comparison of their 'then' and 'now'. With this comparison, they often acknowledge their journey in achieving their current state of being and its hardships. However, it tends to be a positive exhibition of their accomplishment, a case of 'look at me and how far I have come.' @gdelarosa89 posts the most photographs showing his transformation and journey as a transgendered male. There is slightly less reference in the captions/hashtags than there is in the photographs overall. Comments don't make much reference to the before and after, except for @jessediamondfitness. However, overall, this category is one of the smallest contributions to the 'comment' bar.

Thereafter, the theme of muscle and fitness proves important owing to the fact that the influencers identify themselves as bodybuilders. This has important implications for the materiality of the body, and the way that the individuals have the control to shape particular body parts. There is a strong sense of agency in having the ability to build and target certain areas of the body to allow for a certain desired aesthetic result. Followers on the influencers' accounts often tend to be not only highly complementary about the individuals' muscular build and definition, but also inspired, and they regularly seek advice and tips. This category makes up a large percentage of the physical attributes cluster. For all three influencers, the comment bar consists of this theme predominantly. For @phoenix_montoya, this category makes up the largest percentage of the physical attributes cluster. Overall, for all three influencers, the percentages within the muscle and fitness category are mostly equal between the photograph bar and the caption and hashtag bar.

Next is the site of the phallus, which refers to the genital area of the transitioning male. This is a very interesting theme in the study, as it is not something that is visible in any of the posts. However, society has made the inference that it is the phallus that determines manhood. It is found that some of the influencers make no reference to this at all, such as @gdelarosa89. @Jessediamondfitness is very open about his journey towards the phalloplasty surgery, and this theme is therefore very prominent in the 'caption/hashtag' bar. While Instagram's policies would never allow for @Jessediamondfitness or @Phoenix_montoya to show their sexual organs, analysis of

their photographs shows a subtle hinting or directing of the gaze to the area.

@gdelarosa89 makes no reference to this and therefore the category is not present within his graph. @jessediamondfitness was the most vocal about his journey towards phalloplasty. @phoenix_montoya does make reference to it; however, it is one of the smallest categories within the cluster of his graph.

Facial hair, as opposed to the category of the phallus, is a hypervisible feature on any male body. The clothed body can cover any other reference to masculinity, but facial hair is always visible (if groomed to be so). All three influencers have groomed their facial hair to be a prominent feature. While it may not always be referenced overtly, the darkness of the hair against the individual's skin always creates a focal point of sorts for the viewer. Despite this hypervisibility, this feature isn't a dominant trend within the physical attributes category in general. @Jessediamondfitness has a moustache, and has groomed his facial hair in such a way that the gaze seems to be directed to it predominantly. This contributes to a large percentage of the 'photo' category within this cluster. He does overtly mention it within his hashtags and captions, but it is not a substantial contribution to the 'caption/hashtag' bar. This feature is the largest percentage of @gdelarosa89's 'photo' bar, while his hashtags and comments make little reference to it. There is no reference to his facial hair by any commenters. Lastly, @phoenix_montoya makes very little reference to this feature. His facial hair is perhaps fairer in colour than the other two influencers, and while it is still groomed to be visible, he does not seem to make this a focal point on his body. He makes some reference to this feature within his captions and hashtags and there is some commentary on it.

Tattoos and piercings are certainly widespread among both genders within popular culture. However, it could not be overlooked as a category within this study. The influencers make great reference to this category, and it therefore ought to be analysed. While piercings do contribute to this category, tattoos are certainly predominant. Owing to the fact that the individuals are bodybuilders and therefore their bodies are often on display, we are able to see the body art that is scattered across their bodies. This is the second largest category in the physical attributes cluster, following 'muscle/fitness'. It is referenced mostly in the 'photo' bar, since it is a feature which is made visible to the

viewer along with the exposure of the influencer's body. However, it is clear that the individual overtly makes reference to this category, as it makes up the second largest proportion of the 'caption/hashtags' bar. For @gdelarosa89, this category makes up the majority of the physical attributes cluster; while for @phoenix_montoya and @jessediamondfitness it is only slightly behind the 'muscle/fitness' category in both the 'photo' and 'caption/hashtags' bars. However, not much commentary is made on this feature, across all three influencers.

Finally, the site of the breast/chest/scar. This forms an important contribution towards the ultimate research question, although it may not always be overtly mentioned by the influencers. Among the three influencers, their double mastectomies (or journeys towards them) and the subsequent scars post-operation were referred to and exhibited in different ways. This makes up the smallest percentage of the 'caption/hashtag' bar within the physical attributes cluster, for all three influencers. For the 'photo' and 'comments' bar, this category is one of the smallest, following the 'phallus' and 'before and after' categories. @jessediamondfitness and @gdelarosa89 make the most reference to this area within their photographs, while for @phoenix_montoya, this is one of the smallest categories. @gdelarosa89 had no commentary on this category whilst for @jessediamondfitness and @phoenix_montoya there was a small percentage of commentary.

Mental Health

Mental Health refers to the emotional and psychological well-being of the influencer. It is important that one considers these aspects as well as the physical, in understanding that the subjects are active beings with emotions and feelings. Among the influencers, there is reference to anxiety and depression as well as their emotional journeys throughout transition. 'Mental Health Reference' is difficult to depict visually, although some influencers do, and it therefore does not comprise a great deal of the 'photo' bar. The 'caption/hashtag' bar seems to be where the highest level of reference to mental health occurs. Among all three influencers, @Jessediamondfitness makes the most reference to mental and emotional health in his captions and hashtags, followed by the

commentary. @Phoenix_montoya makes reference in his captions, followed by subsequent commentary. @gdelarosa89 posts pictures which exhibit his mental state, these being accompanied by captions or hashtags. However, he has no commentary.

Substance use proves to be a method or activity that is used in order to improve or escape from the transition-related mood disorders. All three influencers are very open about their marijuana use, although it is one of the smallest categories within the whole graph. @Jessediamondfitness makes the most reference to marijuana use within his photographs and captions/hashtags. @gdelarosa and @phoenix_montoya make reference, seemingly, as often as each other. The commentary on substance use is roughly equal across all three influencers.

Conclusion

The data as presented in the bar graphs above allowed for the visualisation of the trends amongst the various themes and their subsequent categories. It is difficult to make conclusive assumptions and the research should rather be guided by the patterns observed. For instance, while on average, the general trends represented 'physical attributes' as the theme with the highest frequency, in reality, this varies amongst the Instagrammers (@gdelarosa89 and @phoenix_montoya have higher frequencies within the 'gender attributes' category).

It is therefore the patterns observed that shaped and informed the discussion to follow. Chapter 5 considers linguistic cues as an implication on identity (gender attributes). Chapter 6 discusses the materiality of the body (physical attributes) and how this impacts on identity. Lastly, chapter 7 explores the physicality of Instagram itself and how this lends itself to issues of identity and mental health.

Chapter 5: Is He a Man of his Word? Linguistic Cues of Hegemonic Masculinity

Is it true that hegemony maketh the #selfmademan?

In this chapter, I discuss the symbolic ways in which the influencers cite hegemonic masculinity as ideal. I explore the tools used, such as hashtags, captions with specific words, and comments that remind the reader of this ideal. I will be discussing various posts in which the influencers made use of the #selfmademan hashtag. This concept holds great implications in the discourse of gender performativity. The ideology of the self-made man promotes a version of masculinity which aspires to be seen as natural and as a universal fact. The concept of the self-made man downplays the importance of social definition (such as sex, class and gender) and rather equates masculine growth with an escape from these boundaries of origin (Catano, 1990).

This inherently raises questions around this concept of maleness and self-making. What does it mean to count as a man? (Rubin, 2003) Within the trans discourse, particularly within this study, the body is used as an expression of manhood (Rubin, 2003). To a trans person, their core sense of self is an internal identity, regardless of the physical; however, one's transition allows for this core identity to become visible and recognisable to the public. It is important to consider to what extent such transitions occur.

Catano asserts that there are two basic needs and fears which are present in the self-made man. Firstly, the desire for growth. This arguably holds the most positive appeal to the concept of the self-made man. This refers to the democratic ideal of the free pursuit of personal and social growth (Catano, 2001). Anyone is free to pursue their personal development as vigorously as they wish, so long as this desire for self-growth addresses the power of institutional determination. Secondly, one feels the need to form an acceptable, social, masculine identity with the understanding that a failure to do so results in an emasculation or feminisation of the subject (Catano, 1990).

In the context of this study, the influencers create an innuendo with the use of the #selfmademan hashtag. This could more metaphorically refer to a desire for personal growth, a growth that is independent of their trans identity. However, this could also be understood in a more literal sense – the need to form an acceptable, social and masculine identity. The influencers have used this hashtag on posts in different ways, which are analysed in order to make inferences within the context of gender performativity; and more specifically, hegemonic performativity.

@Jessediamondfitness



Figure 1

*“Growing up trans, a lot of us simply just wish to feel normal one day. All I wanted was good people in my life who accepted me as a man. I never thought I'd have a whole community of wonderful folks supporting me along my journey into manhood or a partner who could help me see the beauty within myself. I don't feel normal because thanks to my friends, the trans community and @rosalynnemontoya I feel extraordinary
💖🏳️‍🌈”*

The multimodality of this text allows for a more complex reading of the representation of the self-made man. On a surface level, the viewer sees the influencer embracing another trans woman, who can be assumed to be a romantic partner. With this, one may assume that the #selfmademan hashtag is referring to the desire for personal growth in the pursuit of love. However, with a deeper analysis one can recognise various representations which both confirm and deny the self-made man ideology, thus allowing for a shift from a metaphorical interpretation to a more literal interpretation.

The hegemonic male represents the most honoured way of being a man; consequently, this entails the inherent dominance of men over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). While @jessediamondfitness does aesthetically display some characteristics of the hegemonic male, for instance, being a white male in a *seemingly* heterosexual relationship (i.e. male and female, albeit trans), the dynamics within this photograph allow this concept to be challenged. The influencer is noticeably shorter than his girlfriend, and stands slightly behind her whilst he embraces her. This allows for a visualisation of a different dynamic between man and woman and thus challenges the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, this caption is wholeheartedly making reference to his own trans identity and the trans community, which eradicates the hegemonic characteristic of heterosexuality.

This post does address the self-made man ideology in that the viewer witnesses the influencer's pursuit of happiness, of 'just wish[ing] to feel normal one day and want[ing] good people in his life who would accept [him] has a man'. However, it is evident that there is not much emphasis on a need to form an acceptable, social masculine identity. Rather, one could interpret this hashtag in its most literal sense. The influencer's pursuit of transitioning, and enabling his core identity as a man (albeit a trans man) to be recognised by the public and society, is being fulfilled.

However, @jessediamondfitness's self-representation among the myriad photographs analysed with the #selfmademan hashtag attached, shows how contradictions arise when making inferences regarding hegemonic performativity.



Figure 2

“Right now, I’m not in “peak condition”. I’m not super shredded or strong and I’ve never been tall. I may not meet everyone’s standards for conventional masculine beauty, but I’m proud of all my hard work and love this body of mine. Learning how to stop fighting with my body and just start loving it.”

Society associates the traditional masculine body with broad shoulders and a narrow waist, which lends a V-shape appearance to the torso. In surveys conducted by Biller and Liebman, the muscular body is identified as the most masculine of any body type. It is associated with such physical attributes as strength, tenacity, competence, sexual potency, independence, dominance, self-confidence and aggressiveness (Biller & Liebman, 1971). This body type is often associated with the highest degree of masculinity and the most honoured way of being a man (Wagner, 2017). On a surface level, the influencer exudes such qualities. He takes a selfie of his whole body with the use of a mirror. His stance allows for a widening of the chest, giving the appearance of a

broad chest. The flexing of his right arm allows for the contraction of the muscles along his upper arm and trapezius, thus resulting in a bulging appearance. The tattoos just above his pelvic area allow for an emphasis on the V-shape, which leads the eye along his well-defined torso. He fits the criteria of the ideal masculine body in every way – ‘muscular, V-shaped, fit, athletic and chiselled’ (Wagner, 2017, p. 1).

However, with deeper multimodal analysis of the text, one begins to learn of the multiple ways in which this notion of the ideal masculine body is challenged. The accompaniment of the text and hashtags beneath the photograph give the first layer in hinting at such contradictions. The influencer states that he is not ‘super shredded, or strong and that [he has] never been tall’. With this, he eradicates many of the characteristics which are associated with the ideal masculine body. Moreover, he uses hashtags such as #transguy and #transisbeautiful, allowing for a deeper disassociation from the heteronormative masculine body. These linguistic suggestions allow the viewer to turn to the photograph and assess the physical and aesthetic attributes with a different lens. For instance, the broadening of the chest; while the influencer does have a ‘superhero’ physique and stance of sorts, he further illuminates the scars which remain following his bilateral mastectomy. Furthermore, the full body shot – with his underwear cut below the groin, allowing for visibility of his muscular upper leg – results in the accentuation of the genital area. This leads the viewer to question the influencer’s genital-gender congruency. The image may evoke a number of questions about the appearance and size of what is hidden.

Trans men are typically thought of and depicted as deficient, castrated, and having “not enough” genitals, assumed to lack a genital status reserved for cisgender men alone and can therefore never really be real men. Even if surgery has been pursued, trans men’s genitals are typically demonised as monstrous, insensate or mutilated. (Raun & Keegan, 2018, p. 91).

This proves interesting, as @jessediamondfitness is very transparent about his journey towards phalloplasty. He often speaks of his surgeon and updates his followers after

appointments with him. Therefore, we know that the accentuation of the genital area may not be towards ‘something’ but rather ‘nothing’ (Raun & Keegan, 2018, p. 91). Heteronormatively, we recognise and attribute a person as either male or female based on physical cues (Rubin, 2003). Within heteronormative society, it is primarily the site of the penis which is attributed to masculinity and manhood. The influencer understands the importance of physical cues (made clear with his reference to ‘conventional masculine beauty’) but is comfortable to include his genital area within the photographic frame regardless.

Unlike the photograph of @jessediamondfitness and his girlfriend, in figure 1, this photograph requires a slightly deeper analysis, as he challenges traditional associations of the self-made man ideology on a less overt scale. On a surface level, the influencer seems to fulfil the ideology in its most traditional sense, in representing an ‘acceptable’ masculine identity through the flaunting of characteristics associated with the ideal masculine body. However, this is challenged with the conjunction of characteristics associated with a trans male body. One could therefore interpret the #selfmademan hashtag according to its democratic ideals, the desire for personal growth towards ‘being proud of his body and loving it’.

The multimodal analysis of the two photographs above allow for a dynamic understanding of the #selfmademan. @Jessediamondfitness negotiates with, and challenges, the ideology in many different ways, through his performativity and the use of his body. It is evident within both photographs that the influencer is pursuing his own personal growth as a trans man, whether that be through self-acceptance and love or being recognised within the gender binary. What proves interesting here, however, is that although he mentions ‘being accepted as a man’, he allows for a self-representation outside of conventional and hegemonic understandings of masculinity. One could argue that to some extent he has created his own definition of masculinity, through his expressions of ideal masculinity, in many ways, while still allowing many of his markers of dissonance to appear at the forefront of his representations. His core identity reflects one of a man and he wishes to be recognised as that, but he is satisfied that that should be under his own terms. He is comfortable to challenge the gender binary and be

viewed slightly outside its definitions. With this, he negotiates the assumptions around masculinity and creates his own definition through trans-masculinity.

@Gdelarosa89



Figure 3

“Focused now more than ever before to get my shit done. No more games. No more waiting. No more patience for those who don’t know where they’re going. I got me. I got my goals. They come first now”

Throughout the three-month analysis period, @gdelarosa89 uses the #selfmademan hashtag only once. It is therefore difficult to make holistic inferences about his associations and identification with the ideology. However, based on this photograph in isolation, the viewer is exposed to the more conventional understandings of the concept, when confronted with the influencer’s representations.

In figure 3, the influencer appears to have taken a selfie which is framed within a medium personal distance frame. With this, the viewer of figure 3 feels as though there is strong sensory potential, as though the subject can be grasped at any given moment. This creates a sense of intimacy between the viewer and the subject. The influencer is pensive, looking away from the lens of the camera, there is no direct gaze toward the viewer, and thus the subject becomes the object of the gaze, the object for inspection. He does, however, have a great deal of his body covered by clothing or his cap. His tattoos and facial hair are visible and become a focal point as they are situated in the centre of the frame.

Based on a visual analysis alone, the viewer is confronted with a determined individual. One is not aware of any feelings or emotions that are being projected. It seems as though the subject is focused on something that is beyond the viewer's grasp and imagination, as it is hidden from our sight. Owing to this photograph being taken by the subject himself, the viewer is aware that he turns his head away from the camera lens intentionally. He made the decision to be the object of the gaze, and he is content in this positioning. Typically, the gaze is dictated by the order of sexual imbalance – the act of looking being separated between the active male and the passive female (Mulvey, 1999). However, the male has the power to reject this objectification, rather taking on an active, narrative role; 'making things happen' (Mulvey, 1999, p. 838). Rather than, like the passive female, being the object of the erotic male gaze, the male holds the power of the active protagonist, exhibiting a satisfying sense of omnipotence (Mulvey, 1999).

The accompanying text beneath the photograph confirms this visual tone. The influencer expresses a determination in achieving his goals by means of individualism. These sentiments are congruent with societal perceptions of success in finance, capitalism and the service industry in general. The financial services industry is often understood as a 'boys' club' of sorts, where dominant models of masculine behaviour are most prominent (Griffin, 2012, p. 12). In this industry, a culture exists in which certain types of behaviour are created and rewarded, such as competitiveness and

individualism (Griffin, 2012). Hegemonic masculinity has come to be a symbol intimately connected to conventional ideas about economic success (Griffin, 2012).

The individualistic business rhetoric does in many ways speak to the self-made man ideology. The influencer speaks of a desire for personal growth and the attainment of his goals. He expresses an individualistic attitude in pursuing this personal development. The intertextuality of the photograph and accompanying text represent a determination and ambition to attain his career goals in a manner congruent with dominant models of masculine behaviour in the financial services industry. However, one cannot assume that this is merely in line with a need to form an acceptable masculine identity. The viewer is aware that this is in reference to his career, as he has the hashtag #carpenterlife, a conventionally masculine profession. However, the influencer may be expressing the need to persevere despite the adversity experienced as a trans male. He credits his trans identity within his hashtags, with the use of #ftm, #transman and #transtrades. One could deduce that the influencer considers himself a #selfmademan in terms of his free pursuit of personal, social and economic growth despite adversity or discrimination due to his trans identity. Although he may represent characteristics of the hegemonic male, or the characteristics of the self-made man, in a variety of ways, the credit to his trans identity allows for this rhetoric to be viewed outside of rigid heterosexual margins.

@Phoenix_Montoya

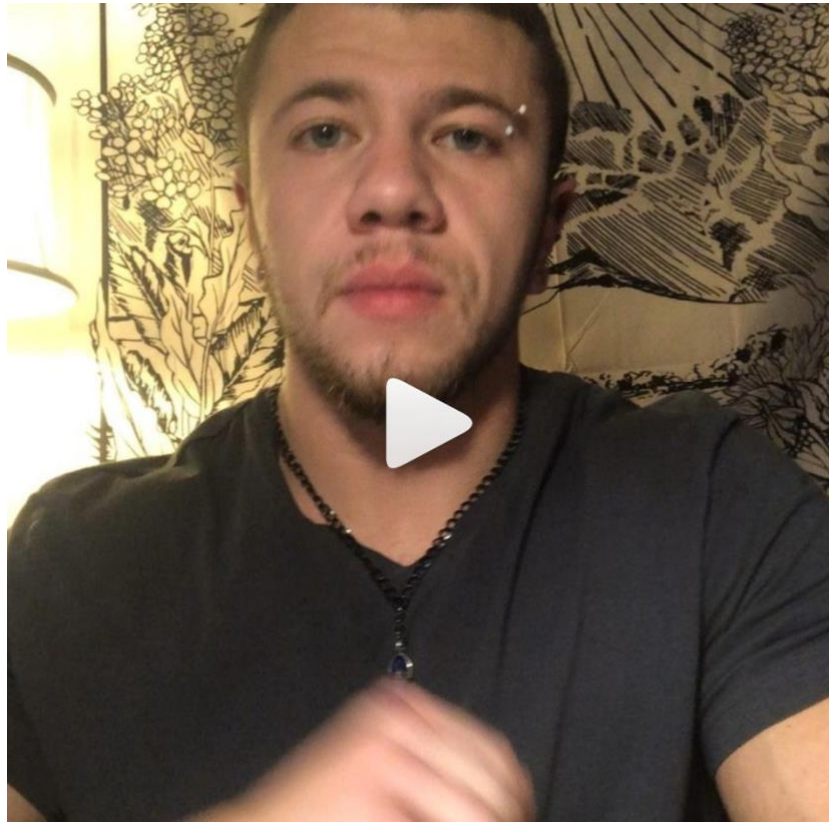


Figure 4

“NEW YOUTUBE VIDEO UP! The link to the full video is in my story, but you can also copy and paste it from here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UckVMGfKToXYYUkI318c0s2A>”

In this video the influencer tells his followers a story. He starts with, ‘hey guys. I wanted to make a quick impromptu video, because I had a really crappy day and I wanted to show that everything I post on Instagram isn’t just positivity and happiness, you know, that’s what you see, but that’s not the reality of life.’ He then goes on to explain how he was scouted by a makeup company, and during his interview with the marketing director he was told that he wasn’t famous enough and therefore would not be accepted for the job.

This video was filmed within a close personal distance, in which the influencer holds an intimate engagement with the viewer. Based on his socio-cultural context as a trans male and social media influencer, one might expect that the video would be speaking about the adversity or discrimination that is experienced as a transitioning body. Rather, he tells his followers about the ‘hardship’ of being turned down for a job because he wasn’t famous enough. This is an obstacle that any figure in the public sphere, regardless of gender identity, could experience within his/her career. His trans identity is not mentioned within this video and he therefore frames himself as a public figure, separate from his gender identity.

Alongside the #selfmademan hashtag, there is #setbacks, #trialanderror, #dontgiveup and #keepdreaming. Based on these hashtags, in conjunction with the video, the influencer is relaying a message about the setbacks one experiences throughout the journey towards success. He aims to be a relatable and inspirational figure in this regard, emphasising that this happens to all people, public figures included, and it is important to persevere, despite any obstructions or adversity. The desire to be just another person facing a hard day, in many ways speaks to the idea of erasure; erasure in the sense of not dwelling on his gender but on his humanity. He appeals to a wider and more generalised audience, both within and outside of the LGBTQI+ community.

When analysing the video in conjunction with the hashtags, the self-made man ideology can be interpreted in contradicting ways. The influencer expresses an obvious desire for personal and social growth. In this context, he bases such growth on fame and recognition. However, this recognition is expressed outside of his identity as a trans man. On the other hand, this does not mean that he disregards this identity entirely; he does hashtag #transmen, #ftm and #transgender. Therefore, in many ways, one can interpret this post as the pursuit of self-growth and actualisation despite one’s gender identity or sexuality.

Furthermore, he is transparent about the company being a makeup company. Based on this alone, his gender fluidity becomes increasingly obvious to the viewer. Although he speaks of success and failure very much in line with the self-made man rhetoric, the line

of masculinity becomes blurred in this regard; a heteronormative and hegemonic male is not expected to take part in the feminine act of makeup application.

The ideology of the self-made man is obvious as it is clear that the influencer is pursuing personal and social growth and is determined to do so despite any adversity he may experience. However, the *man* in self-made man is challenged and redefined. Although the influencer does not mention his trans identity directly within the video, he does not disregard it entirely, as it is featured in multiple hashtags. Furthermore, he is very transparent about the company being a makeup company, which thus allows for a further diversion from heteronormative masculinity. One can therefore interpret this ideology as the pursuit of social and personal growth outside of one's gender orientation. A trans male is entitled to the same successes and aspirations as a cis male. Success does not have to be equated to a universal or natural understanding of masculinity (Catano, 1990).

In conclusion, the #selfmademan ideology can be understood in a dynamic and somewhat revolutionary way within the context of this study. While the ideology does emphasise the pursuit towards personal growth and success despite adversity, this is shown to be a quality that one should hold despite gender identity or orientation. Being a heteronormative male, a gender fluid male or a non-binary male should have no influence on one's perseverance towards self-actualisation.

These analyses express a need to form an acceptable, sound, masculine identity (Catano, 1990). The need to form a recognisable masculine identity is undoubtedly clear across all three influencers. There is a transparency regarding their desires for their core identities as men to be recognisable and visible to the public. This is sometimes expressed in overt ways, such as @jessediamondfitness stating that he wished one day to be accepted as a man. However, often it is less overt. The #selfmademan hashtag is used here in such a way that the emphasis on 'male' falls away. The influencers show that they have personal ideals and aspirations as trans men, yet often these aspirations are independent of their gender identities. This means that the idea of masculinity is

negotiated. Each influencer creates their own definition of masculinity and the pursuit of growth follows freely.

Mark his Words: Language and Identity

This section will illustrate how linguistic strategies can bring vital insight into the way cultural norms and practices are negotiated, resisted, valorised or otherwise orientated to (Coates, 2015). I will therefore explore how various choices of words in captions, hashtags and comments are used as tools for the construction of a particular gendered identity. Furthermore, since I am using a multimodal analysis, it is important to consider how the captions, hashtags and comments relate to the image, and how this further establishes a gendered identity. Because online self-representation is an extremely conscious and strategic form of expression, as a researcher it is important to consider this within the study. Often a 'slip of the tongue' and unguarded speech can allow a listener a different perspective and insight of linguistic analysis. However, Instagram affords a platform of conscious and intentional strategies of self-expression.

Given that language is an instrument for the assignment of the phenomena of human experience to conceptual categories, it is clearly not simply a mirror that reflects reality. Rather it functions to impose structure on our perceptions of the world. Language is...highly selective. (Lee, 1992, p. 8).

While gender as a performative act has been sufficiently explored, through the literature review of this study, performativity was discussed only in a physical sense; performing as the repetition of acts (Butler, 1988). It is crucial to consider performativity as a linguistic strategy, in addition to stances, social acts and social activities (Ochs, 1992). Louis Althusser speaks of interpolation, a concept where ideology (such as that of gender and gendered expectations) transforms an individual into a subject (1971). Language is the primary vehicle for such interpolation. With regard to gender, its identities are constructed and constituted by language. Language is an act that brings into being that which it names (Salih, 2007). The example of the doctor pronouncing

‘it’s a boy!’ after a baby is born is often used to explain the concept of interpolation within the gendered context. With this, the wriggling body is interpolated into a pigeonhole of ‘he’, and consequently a set of rules about how this body should think, look and behave will follow (Milani, 2015).

Within the socio-cultural context in which the Instagram posts exist, a researcher can gain great analytical value by approaching identity as a relational and socio-cultural phenomenon that circulates in local discourse, rather than being a stable and static artifice (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). A socio-cultural linguistic analysis allows for the study of language as it intersects with culture and society (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010).

Various posts were selected, and with the use of a socio-cultural linguistic analysis, inferences were made on how various identities are constructed through language and how these identities relate to varied gendered constructs.

@Jessediamondfitness



Figure 5

“Random facts about me:

- 1) I'm roughly 5'1-5'2 and I actually like being a short dude. I save hella money on food and shoes because my body requires less calories than other male bodybuilders and I wear kids sized shoes.*
- 2) My dead name was Amanda. That's right; I was a man, duh! 🤪*
- 3) Right now @beefdog69xxl and I are texting about how amazing @iiswhoisis is. We love you, Kesha!”*

This post uses language in such a way that both a masculine identity and a trans identity are inherent. The influencer allows for a complex representation of gendered identity. He proves that there are different dimensions of relationality with regards to identity within the binary of sameness and difference. There is no mutual exclusivity, and identities are often overlapping and complementary relations (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). Although this is a socio-cultural linguistic analysis, due to this being a multimodal study, it is important that the accompanying photograph is considered in conjunction to the text. Firstly, the camera angle plays a role in the representation of the subject. A low angle shot, which is taken looking up on the subject, makes the subject appear

imposing, awesome and superior (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). This angle leads the eye along the musculature of the influencer's legs, straight to the groin area, in which the eyes are drawn to the penis; the ultimate symbol of manhood. Furthermore, he lifts the bottom of his vest in order to ensure that this area is visible to the viewer. He then lifts his chin, creating a sense of machoism and further allowing for the visibility of his facial hair.

On first glance of the photograph alone, the viewer may believe that the influencer is representing a hyper-masculine identity. He places the camera and positions his body in such a way as to create a strong, awesome figure with all the visible characteristics that are traditionally associated with masculinity. However, the accompanying text shows that this gendered identity exists on more of a continuum. He refers to himself as a 'dude' – a colloquial term which suggests the 'everyday man', yet in conjunction refers to his height. This contradicts the heteronormative expectations of the hegemonic male, a strong, tall, all-encompassing figure. He proceeds to explain how this affects him as a *male* bodybuilder, again using a gendered voice. Although he is ultimately describing life at a height considered short for most cis men, he makes reference to his gendered identity twice.

He goes on to refer to his dead name, the name he was assigned at birth, that he was identified as before his transitioning. In a study conducted on non-binary trans speakers, examining how they construct and navigate around a non-binary trans identity, every individual recounted a narrative in which they had been dead-named (referred to by their birth name, rather than their changed name). This was considered to be one of the greatest emotional triggers (Gratton, 2016). @Jessediamondfitness is extremely transparent, not only about his trans identity but about his life prior to his transition. He jokes that his typically feminine name, Amanda, makes the obvious suggestion that he was a man, and he insinuates that even at that point in his life, prior to his transition, he identified as a man.

The influencer represents a fluid identity, where, although the binary is somewhat acknowledged, he disregards his placement within it. He neither appropriates nor

distinguishes as a cis male. Although he foregrounds the similarities between himself and a cis male, he openly foregrounds the differences as well. In doing so, he creates a fluid and dynamic identity in which both a masculine identity and a trans-identity are equally celebrated.

@gdelarosa89



Figure 6

“It’s been a LONG week. This boy right here needs good food, rest, relaxation and peace. Hope ya’ll are being good! Happy weekend!”

The influencer makes a direct reference to his gendered identity – ‘this *boy* right here’. With a casual caption, where colloquial and terse language is used, there is a definite assertion of gendered identity. The accompanying photograph, along with the content of the caption, has no need for a gendered voice, yet the influencer consciously and strategically inserted this wording.

It is useful here to understand identity as a relational phenomenon, in that identities are never autonomous and independent; they always require social meaning in relation to other social positions or actors. Therefore, identity can be understood as revolving around a single axis of sameness and difference (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). This can be equated to the gender binary which revolves around a single axis of male and female, where sameness must associate with one category and thus difference automatically will be associated with the other. In other words, heteronormative society states that should one be likened to a male, this in turn dictates the direct differentiation from ‘female’ or femininity.

Bucholtz and Hall (2010) use the terms *adequation* and *distinction* to describe the complementary identities of sameness and difference. Adequation emphasises that in order for individuals to be perceived as alike, they need not be identical, but simply sufficiently similar within interactional situations. Here, differences are downplayed, and similarities are foregrounded. In contrast, distinction focuses on differentiation. Differentiation is understood within socio-cultural linguistic analysis as being the more emphasised of the two complementary identities. This is mainly because differentiation is a largely visible process, and because language proves to be an especially potent resource for producing it in different ways. This results in the ‘suppression of similarities which might undermine the construction of difference’ (Bucholtz & Hall 2010, p. 24). Here, @gdelarosa89 uses distinction to interpolate himself within the gender binary. Through language, he ‘brings into being what is named’, in that he names himself as a ‘boy’, thus constituting himself clearly within the binary (Butler, 1993). In doing so, he suppresses any similarities, thus stating that his identification as ‘boy’ implies the direct opposite, his disassociation from ‘girl’.

However, it is imperative that this socio-cultural linguistic analysis adheres to a multimodal approach, and with this considers all elements of this post. In doing so, the hashtags attached to the photograph ought to be considered within the linguistic analysis. Here, the influencer uses hashtags such as #ftm, #trans, #transgender and #thisiswhattranslookslike. With the consideration of these hashtags, one can recognise that the influencer does not identify within the binary of sameness and difference, male

and female. Rather, he acknowledges the overlapping, complementary qualities of these relations, and that the two identities are not mutually exclusive (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). While he acknowledges the binary in his clear gendered distinction within his caption, his hashtags prove that his self-identification allows for a more fluid, gendered adequation. In other words, this allows for the acknowledgement that he need not be identical to a cis male, but is sufficiently similar. In doing so, masculine traits, language, behaviour and appearances are utilised and foregrounded.



Figure 7

“In LOVE with my coat! I look like a ‘dad’ hahah!” [typo appears in original source]

Here, @gdelarosa89 states that he looks like a ‘dad’. Owing to the fact that he has placed the word in inverted commas, it becomes clear that he is using this term within a colloquial context. Within the literal sense, the dad is understood as the patriarch. The dominant male figure that runs the household and is expected to provide care and protection. This is a traditionally male gendered role and thus refers to the highest form of masculinity in which that man is held in a position of power, authority, judgement

and discipline (Weinkauff, 2011). Within the context of this study, this term appeared a multitude of times, generally in a complimentary form. Since none of the influencers are literal ‘daddies’ as they do not father any children, one can assume that this refers to an ideal representation of masculinity.

@gdelarosa89 has taken a full body selfie of himself in a coat which is in accordance with the standards of current, modern, male fashion. His caption states that he loves it and that it makes him look like a ‘dad’. With this, the influencer is insinuating that this coat allows him to personify this ideal representation of masculinity. This post can be likened to the previous post (figure 6) in that, initially, it seems that the influencer is identifying within the gender binary, by making distinctions. However, with a further consideration of the hashtags within the multimodal analysis, one recognises that he may equate himself a masculine identity while simultaneously making reference to his trans identity. He therefore allows for a masculine identity to occur in a more fluid space, where the borders are less defined. In other words, he can still wear fashionable men’s clothing and exude masculinity in its most idealised form, albeit as a trans man.

@phoenix_montoya



Figure 8

“Idk if anyone watched my story this weekend, but if you did, then you saw that I ate like absolute garbage the entire weekend lol. And I drank a lot. This is the result. I legitimately gained 5lbs. Mostly water and bloating. But still. I should have at least kept up with my work outs, but I didn’t. The drinking didn’t help with that 😞 today will be my first day back at the gym after a whopping 4 days off. Not a lot, but a lot for me! I never take more than 2 days off in a row at the most. Just goes to show that no one is perfect, especially not me. I’m just a guy doing my best and trying to inspire others along the way. Back to the grind today 🙌🙌”

The influencer posts side-by-side photos of his torso before and after 4 days off from working out at the gym, and 4 days away from disciplined, healthy eating. He is showing that after just 4 days, he has developed a ‘food baby’, a small bump on his stomach from overeating, like the bump of a pregnant woman. In the first photograph, he is posing and flexing his muscles, showing a well-defined and lean torso. In the second photograph, he is not flexing his muscles in the same way. While his stomach does bulge out slightly, his torso is still well defined. He pulls an animated sad face to express his dissatisfaction.

The caption below explains how he got to this point in his physical appearance. Although it is not a great change, it has happened over a short period of time. He explains that he would never usually stray from his routine for as long as 4 days, his usual maximum being 2 days. He concludes by stating that ‘[he] is just a guy, doing [his] best trying to inspire people along the way.’ In doing so, he is acknowledging the censorship process that one goes through when self-representing on social media. Especially as a fitness influencer, one is expected to be lean and in great shape at all times.

A socio-cultural linguistic analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the influencer’s identity. He identifies as a health-conscious fitness influencer, and is aware of the publicity attached to that. He knows that he holds a position of influence and therefore wishes to be transparent with his followers, showing that even *he* diverts from his fitness and health regimen from time to time, and the results will show. ‘No one is perfect, especially not me.’ He is acknowledging the degree of censorship amongst public figures and in doing so, represents himself as the exception. He concludes with a subtly gendered voice, ‘I’m just a *guy* doing my best.’ This caption did not necessarily require a clear gendered voice behind it, yet he concludes with this, as a subtle reminder of where his identity can be located within the binary.

This subtle, yet clear gendered voice is complemented by the photograph above. A man with a well-defined muscular torso. His chest is broad, yet flat. Bicep muscles bulge as he lifts his arm to expose hair covering his armpits. Facial hair neatly groomed, in both the before and after photograph. Not only does the influencer possess many characteristics associated with masculinity, he possesses many characteristics which are in fact congruent with aesthetic expectations of the ideal man. Therefore, the caption complementing this photograph need not be questioned.

However, after a number of hashtags such as #gains, #weightloss, #mensfitness, the influencer begins to acknowledge his trans identity. He uses hashtags such as #transgender, #ftm and #transfitness. This acknowledgment is downplayed as it

mentioned on a less overt scale. However, it is still mentioned. Therefore, one can assume that perhaps the influencer wishes to be identified as a man, or a man of fitness, before a trans man. However, once his trans identity is acknowledged, this becomes an adequation of masculinity. He downplays his differences from a cis man by hardly acknowledging his trans identity, while foregrounding similarities, through his aesthetics within the photograph and his choice of words within the caption. One could conclude that while he is aware of the fact that – although he need not be, nor appear to be, identical to a heteronormative male, he can be recognised as one and therefore, he can identify as one to an extent.

In summary, this socio-linguistic analysis sought to explore the way language was utilised and to what extent this can be used to make inferences about identity. It is important that identity ought to be understood as a relational phenomenon. This proves to be true especially within traditional, hegemonic understandings of gender identity. These exist on a binary, male and female, and a belonging to one means a non-belonging to the other. The gendered binary held true in many ways within this linguistic analysis. The influencers all identified or referred to themselves as men, with wording such as ‘guy’, ‘daddy’, ‘dude’ and so on. Furthermore, all complementing photographs posted above the captions confirmed these identities, in many ways, through masculine features and characteristics being highlighted and foregrounded.

However, all three influencers acknowledge their trans identity to some extent. Some are more overt at doing so than others. It can therefore be concluded, that based on linguistic strategies used by all three influencers, the identities of these trans men can be understood as the adequation of masculinity. In acknowledging their trans identities, these influencers acknowledge that they are not identical to cis males. However, through linguistic strategies and the complementary photographs, similarities are highlighted in various ways. It is crucial to mention that owing to gender identity being a free-flowing, non-boundaried space, this adequation can still exist on a continuum, where their overlapping and complementary relations are always evolving through ongoing negotiation.

Chapter 6: The Materiality of the body: Technologies of the Self and Self

Expression

The transition process towards gendered affirmation is often described as the act of making one's internal, gendered self recognisable to the outside world. Therefore, this process can be understood as a highly physical one, in which the materiality of the body becomes instrumental in achieving the congruency between an internal gendered self and an external gendered identification. As a researcher, it is therefore crucial to consider the materiality of the body, and how it is used, transformed and expressed in a multitude of ways so as to impart meaning. The influencers prove to be extremely interesting in this regard, as their bodies are in a constantly shifting state. Initially, they may have undergone various transformations in order to change their bodies, such as double mastectomies or hormone replacement therapy. However, bodybuilding allows these influencers to remain in a constant state of transformation; rather than a doctor or professional controlling the outcome, the individuals themselves are in charge of the result. It is crucial that both transformations, at the hands of the other as well as at the hands of the individual, are considered. The following chapter will focus on the materiality of the body and how various practices or 'technologies of self' are negotiated and used in order to etch meaning onto the body.

The Site of the Scar: A Gendered Etching onto the Skin

The presence of the breast on the trans male body is often a source of great dysmorphia. The breasts are a strong symbol of femininity. Even on a clothed body, they are constantly visible, as they protrude from the chest. The negotiation of the breast on the trans male body becomes heavily loaded with gendered implications. While some trans men have no dysmorphia with the body part at all, others bind their chest with a strapping in an effort to flatten the area. Many choose to remove their breasts completely with a double mastectomy; this is known as top surgery within the trans discourse. Here, the absence of the breast will be replaced with the presence of a scar. A continuum can therefore be recognised, in which the negotiation with the site of the breast exists in different extremes; from breast, to concealed breast, to scar.

Among the three influencers in this study, only @gdelarosa89 has not had top surgery. While he binds his chest in photographs, uses emojis to cover his breasts, or photoshops them out completely, he states that he soon will no longer need to use these methods of concealment, suggesting that he is aiming towards a double mastectomy as well. While @jessediamondfitness and @phoenix_montoya have had top surgery, they negotiate the post-operative scar in different ways. @jessediamondfitness is transparent about his scar, often lifting his arms, allowing for a hyper-exposure of the area and including it within his hashtags; while @phoenix_montoya has tattooed a red eagle across his chest and torso – it is curved in such a way that his scar is blended into the wings of the eagle. Therefore, a continuum of breast to scar exists across the three influencers as well; from concealed breast, to scar, to concealed scar. Therefore, the various combinations of absence and presence of both breast and scar need to be discussed in each individual case, as the materiality of each body allows for a unique gendered implication.

@gdelarosa89



Figure 9

“Super proud of myself keeping up with my gym time and my eating habits. The left is me a couple days ago. The right was me about two months ago, when I first started to cut and lean out. I’d like to thank @mariahdelarosa for helping me out with my diet and holding me accountable every time we ate out together hahaha! More like making me feel guilty for picking up those fries...”

The above photograph is a transformation post, in which the influencer shows his progress with diet and exercise over a two-month period. He places the photographs side by side in order for the viewer to make an easy comparison. The right photograph is the ‘before’ photograph. The influencer stands in front of the mirror and takes a selfie in the reflection. The photograph is framed in such a way that the viewer confronts the influencer from a social distance, from the waist up. He clenches his fist to flex his biceps, and tilts his head upwards, which creates a sense of machoism. His chest area is covered with two emojis, in which the cartoon is holding its hands to its face, with a wide mouth as if in a state of shock. The current photo, on the left, is also framed at a social distance. The viewer does not appear to be flexing any muscles; his pose seems to

be more natural and relaxed. However, his head is still slightly lifted upwards, but to a lesser extent. His chest is covered with a skin-coloured strapping.

The influencer makes no reference to his chest area. This post is focused on how he has 'lean[ed] out' over the two-month period, due to regular visits to the gym and strict eating habits. Although there is a clear comparison in his body mass, the concealment of his chest area has also transformed. His chest is covered in both photographs. One might consider that this could be in compliance with Instagram's strict regulations and censorship, rather than because it is a site of dysmorphia for the individual. However, the choice of emoji used to cover the chest in the 'before' photograph implies the influencer feels dissatisfied by what lies beneath the face. The expression of shock suggests that something that is not expected to exist is present. In other words, a breast is not expected to exist on a male body.

While the individual's chest is still concealed in the current photograph, the way in which this has been done, as well as the individual's stance, suggests a more comfortable disposition. The viewer stands with his chest out, allowing for this area to protrude further. His bound breasts are covered in a skin-coloured strapping, making the area less of a feature in the photograph, in comparison to the bright yellow emojis in the photograph alongside. The influencer expresses in his caption that he is proud of himself and his progress, and his body language reflects this. However, the exposure (or concealment) of his chest area is also a reflection of these feelings of pride. In the first photograph, the chest area is being concealed in an almost comic manner, while the current photograph makes less of a feature of the area. Although the chest area is still concealed, the way that it is concealed has changed, which may reflect a change in feelings towards it.

Jacques Derrida's absence-presence theory proves to be very interesting in this scenario. There is a simultaneous absence and presence at play. In the 'before' photograph, the absence of the breast is replaced by the presence of the shocked emoji. However, in the current photograph, there is no entire absence of the breast. While the absence of the breast may be replaced by the presence of the nude strapping, that absence is never fully

concealed. The contour of the breast is still evident and it protrudes from the chest. Even so, as mentioned, the influencer stands with his chest out, allowing his chest to protrude further. Based on this comparison, it could be deduced that it is not the chest area itself, which he has no control over, that causes dysmorphia, but rather that the ability to control other aspects of his body, such as the building and definition of muscle, that allow for feelings of self-pride and confidence. With this, there seems to be less of an attempt to employ hyper-masculine mannerisms or traits, like the clenched fist and tilted head.



Figure 10

“Now please excuse the poor photoshop job I did to my chest area still not that confident in exposing it all... this is my progress so far on my diet. It’s been tough but it’s working!!!”

This post is a series of photographs side by side, to show a comparison of progress from the ‘keto diet’. Similar to the post above, the influencer has arranged the photographs side by side in order to allow for an easier comparison, thus highlighting the transformation. The first three photographs are selfies taken in the reflection of a mirror,

framed at a social distance, while the last photograph allows for a longer shot, framed at a public distance; it appears to have been taken by someone else, or from a tripod. The influencer is topless in every photograph and has photoshopped his chest so that the detail is blurred. Although it is clear that this area has been edited, it is also clear that the attempt was to make the area appear flat.

@gdelarosa89 admits that he has photoshopped the chest area and states he has done so as he is not yet confident enough to expose it on Instagram. He posted this series of photographs to show his weight-loss progress on the 'keto' diet. While each photograph shows a progressive decrease in body mass and a leaner torso, the concealment of the chest area remains the same. It appears as if the influencer has used an 'eraser' tool in a photo-editing application to remove an aspect of the chest area from the photograph. He merely refers to his 'chest area' and does not expand on what exactly it is that has been covered.

If one conducts a socio-cultural linguistic analysis on the caption below this photograph, the layers of dysmorphia around the chest area become more and more exposed. Firstly, the influencer overtly states that he has used photoshop because he is not confident to expose himself without it. However, the choice of words, 'chest area', suggests a complete disassociation from the breast. At the time of writing, the influencer has yet to have top surgery, which therefore indicates the presence of breasts; but this is never overtly expressed as he does not acknowledge their presence.

While the influencer does not acknowledge the presence of the breasts, and attempts to conceal their presence, he cannot conceal the presence that this absence exposes. The absence of the breast is replaced by the presence of an obvious edit, in which an erasure tool seems to have been used. With this, the presence of a dysmorphia is exposed.

While the influencer is confident to expose his progress and transformation on his torso area, his chest area remains the same as before. He is unable personally to reduce this area, as he has done with his stomach. This lack of control highlights the absence/presence theory. As much as an individual may attempt to conceal something, the presence of its absence will always remain.

@jessediamondfitness



Figure 11

“ TW/CW: Suicide. I almost didn’t survive this year. Losing my support system, my home, and most of my belongings sent me into a state of severe depression. Everything felt hopeless and I’ll be honest with you; there were a few times where I tried to end my life. When I had lost all other will to go on, the one thing that kept me breathing was knowing that I did have a different kind of family who still supported me; the Trans Family and our allies. Y’all have been encouraging me for years and I knew I had to keep going because there was still work I needed to do for our family. Even though I was struggling, y’all helped me see that I do still have a purpose. I wanted to say thank you to everyone for saving my life and for helping me find happiness. It feels so good to be smiling again. I promise you that I’m devoted to doing what I can to give back to our community. Y’all inspire me.”

The above post shows the topless influencer holding his arms out in an almost victorious stance. This allows for a broadening of the chest and the hyper-exposure of the post-operative scars following his top surgery. He grins widely and, through the

visuals of this post alone, sets a positive tone. However, the accompanying text causes the viewer to consider the visuals of the image in a different light. He begins by warning his followers that the caption may be a trigger warning, because it discusses the topic of suicide. He goes on to state the hardships that he has endured, presumably throughout his transition journey, that sent him into a state of depression and ultimately towards suicidal attempts. He explains that it is his trans family and trans supporters who gave him hope and purpose. It was those who believed in him, and his potential for further impact for the trans community, that saved his life.

The intertextuality of the seemingly positive visual with the corresponding text, allows for a deeper interpretation of this post; an interpretation which in fact is centred around the site of the scar. Behind every scar, there is a narrative, a visible marker of a memory inscribed onto the skin (Guidotto, 2005). The influencer broadens his chest in the photograph, allowing for the hypervisibility of the physical scars across his chest. Through his prose, he expands on the materiality of the scar, and allows for the unfurling of the narrative behind it. In doing so, the absence/presence of the scar is negotiated in a highly meaningful and impactful way.

The presence of a scar across the chest of a muscular male provokes a viewer to trace the scar, to follow, locate or trail something that it points to, something that is incomplete, something that once was (Meyer, 2012). The presence of the scar is the representation of the absence of the breast. This leads the viewer to trace what this presence symbolises. For many trans males who have the top surgery scar etched onto the skin, this presence represents the journey of transition into one's new gendered skin. However, @jessediamondfitness adds to this presence through his accompanying caption. He allows for a more penetrating presence. Through his transparency regarding the narrative of the scar, the individual becomes vulnerable. Vulnerable through the opening of an emotional wound, vulnerable to a lack of control and vulnerable to the abuse which may be the result of being perceived as weak.

Hegemonic masculinity idealises power and strength while subordinating groups who come to hold characteristics of 'weakness' and vulnerability (Jordan, 1990). Therefore,

our culture tends to deny the experience of vulnerability in the definition of courage. Here, the influencer challenges such definitions of courage and strength. Through his victorious stance, wide grin and ambition for impact, he proves that with the presence of vulnerability comes the presence of courage. Through his transparency, the influencer proves that courage is the capacity to act meaningfully and with integrity in the face of acknowledged vulnerability (Jordan, 1990). Although this expression of vulnerability may defy hegemonic expectations of strength, the influencer is aware that this vulnerability holds greater impact. There is no true 'absence' within this post. Through his transparency, the influencer brings all the viewer's unknowns into the present, with the knowledge that there is no real courage where vulnerability and fear are denied (Jordan, 1990).

@phoenix_montoya



Figure 12

"The Bulk vs The Shred! These photos are almost exactly 6 months apart. I remember after that photo shoot on the left, I was like, 'yep, time to lose some weight 😁' This is why I love bodybuilding. I love having the knowledge and the drive to sculpt my body the way I want. If I can do it, YOU can do it. DM me to get started!"

The above post shows two photographs, side by side. The influencer states that these were taken 6 months apart; he is therefore showing his transformation over this time by inviting a comparison between the two photographs. In the first photograph, @Phoenix_Montoya wears high-cut underwear which contours the genital area. He is topless and stands with his elbows above his head, allowing for the broadening and hyper-exposure of his chest. The second photograph is a full body selfie taken in the reflection of the mirror. The influencer flexes his biceps on both arms, which again allows for the hypervisibility of the torso and chest area. His chest area is covered in tattoos. Across his torso is a red eagle; its wings ride up towards his chest area and are curved beneath the pectoral muscle. The red lines of the tattoo allow for the contouring

of the pectoral muscle and the simultaneous covering of the scars following the bilateral mastectomy surgery.

The caption below the picture is revolved around the concept of bodybuilding. The influencer shows the progress that has been made with regard to losing weight and gaining muscle. He expands; 'that's why I love bodybuilding. I love having the knowledge and the drive to sculpt my body the way I want.' In doing so, he is affirming the power that bodybuilding has given him. He credits himself for his appearance, owing to the fact that he is able to sculpt his body according to his own specifications.

The body, in both photographs, is very much in line with heteronormative standards of the masculine form. The fundamental assumption that underlies men's fitness is the expectation to gain greater muscle density and muscle size and decrease body fat (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). The influencer discusses both the increase of muscle size and density ('bulk') and the decrease of body fat ('shred'). As a result, he fits the criteria of the ideal masculine body in every way; 'muscular, V-shaped, fit, athletic and chiselled' (Wagner, 2017).

The influencer makes no reference to bodybuilding as a technology or vehicle towards gendered embodiment or masculinisation. The photograph and the caption are neutral, and occur within a fitness discourse rather than within a gendered discourse. As a result, the viewer is unlikely to examine either the visual or the text through a trans-gendered lens. The fact that the influencer has consciously situated himself in one discourse rather than another has important implications for the analysis of this post with regards to the materiality of the body.

The very materiality of the influencer's body has gained him the 'ideal masculine body'. Through bodybuilding, he has been able to target certain areas with the aim of emphasising certain muscles throughout the body. In this way, he has sculpted himself towards gendered embodiment. The choice of tattoo across his torso and chest is another technology that has been utilised to sculpt his muscular, hyper-masculine physique. The red wings of the eagle cover any remnants of the top surgery scar. With

this, the presence of absence is hidden. With the attempt to hide the scar, the evidence that breasts once existed has been hidden. As a result, the absence/presence of breast to scar gains a multi-dimensional complexity. While the double mastectomy scar represents the removal of the breast, a strong symbol of femininity, the tattoo replaces the presence of the scar. This indicates a further detachment or disassociation from femininity, and the further striving towards heteronormative masculinity.

Moreover, owing to the fact that the placement of the tattoo holds such significance, it is necessary that the choice of tattoo itself is considered. In world art, the eagle is the symbol of bravery, visual acuity and strength. Its majestic appearance, the mysterious inaccessibility of nesting sites, and the seemingly impossible heights to which it flies all add to the all-encompassing power of the eagle (Werness, 2006). Scars, a typical remnant of injury or pain, are entangled with the wing of an eagle, the vehicle with which the eagle reaches great heights. This juxtaposition holds great symbolism for the site of the scar on the trans body. While the scar may be a reminder of the pain of integration, it may simultaneously be a symbol of freedom and strength. The association of the eagle transforms the site of the scar from wound to healing.

In conclusion, the above analysis attempted to analyse how the materiality of each body holds different meaning. Each body exists in a difference space; through a space of having been transformed to a space of continuous, indefinite transformation. Each transformation leaves an etching of sorts on the body, a narrative which holds greater, deeper, implications. The negotiation of the breast on the trans male body is an example of such an impact. While @gdelarosa89 has yet to remove his breasts, he is in a continuous state of negotiation and renegotiation. For @jessediamondfitness and @phoenix_montoya it is the site of the scar, rather than the site of the breast, which is in negotiation. @Jessediamondfitness flaunts his scar. While situating himself in a vulnerable space, this is ultimately his foundation for courage and strength. @Phoenix_montoya hides his scars completely, as he incorporates them into the wings of the eagle tattooed across his chest. Although this results in a further disassociation from the breast, and therefore femininity, it allows for a redefinition in the understanding of scarring; the transformation of scar from wound to healing.

It is clear that all three influencers exist along a continuum with regard to how they negotiate with the breast. While all three influencers show a dysmorphia towards the breast, through their attempts to cover the area or remove it completely, it is through the negotiation of the chest area that greater implications lie. While each individual walks their own gendered journey, each individual exists in a different space of negotiation. And each space holds its own absences and presences. This proves the very fluidity of gender performance itself. Each individual is constantly in a free-flowing space where negotiation and renegotiation become inevitable.

Bodybuilding: 'bulking' towards a masculinised self

The following chapter considers the trans influencers' identities as bodybuilders. In the context of this study, bodybuilding becomes a technology that seeks to approximate the ideal of substantial masculinity (Butler, 1999). The trans influencers are all bodybuilders who are in a constant state of bodily negotiation and transformation. Through the very act of bodybuilding, they are afforded a sense of control and power in the achieving of their gendered selves. Through diet, the influencers are able to decrease certain body parts, while weightlifting allows them to increase other body parts. This is often translated into the endeavour for the idealised masculine physique; 'muscular, V-shaped, fit, athletic and chiselled' (Wagner, 2017). It is therefore important to consider the very act of bodybuilding, and further, the materiality that it affords the body, in order to make inferences about this activity as an endeavour towards a specific ideal.

The body is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body. (Bordo, 1997, p. 165).

Our bodies are in a constant state of negotiation. It is through the ways that an individual organises time, space and the movements of daily life that a body becomes trained, shaped and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood,

desire, masculinity and femininity (Bordo, 1997). Michel Foucault refers to the practices, which situate the body in a constant state of negotiation, as technologies of the self.

Practices that permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18).

Through the practices that permit an individual to create an identity, he/she is made subject within the relations of power (Markula, 2004). Although an individual is always situated within a discourse of power, like that of gender, it is important to recognise that where power exists, there is the potential for resistance (Pringle & Markula, 2006). This is a great point of contention, because any act of resistance may be turned against its subject and incorporated against his/her own will within a broader strategy of subjection (Krips, 1990). Even though a subject may be renegotiating the discourse in which he or she exists, the risk of renormalisation is constantly there (Lilja, 2008). This conflict becomes particularly apparent in the trans discourse. While living as the gender opposite to one's sex proves the very fluidity of gender and thus the liberation from its binary, the enactment of either masculinity or femininity may be an acknowledgement and reiteration of the norms it produces. As such, the reverse discourse (trans) becomes parasitic on the dominant discourse it contests (heteronormativity) (Butler, 1995).

This specific stylisation of the body can be likened to Foucault's analogy of self-care as art. 'Art is something that is specialised or that is done by experts, who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?' (Foucault, cited in Tirkkonen, 2018, p. 75). Self-stylisation is a complex and difficult process, like the creation of art. One's relationship to oneself is a creative activity, a constant process of invention. If we think of our lives as works of art, we regain the ability to think creatively and challenge the limitations of the discourse of power in which we are situated (Markula, 2004).

The female to male trans bodybuilder is situated in an interestingly complex negotiation of power. Does he resist the discourse of power, through striving towards the ideal, masculine form, despite being born a female? This would prove that he has the power to liberate himself from the gender binary, situating himself in what Foucault termed a discourse of freedom, in the creation of a self which resists or negotiates the discourse in which he/she is situated (Guthrie & Castelnovo, 2001). Or does he situate himself within a reverse discourse, in which the practice of bodybuilding allows for a continued support and maintenance of hegemonic and idealised masculinity in the striving towards the physique of the ideal male? (Guthrie & Castelnovo, 2001).

Through a critical interrogation of the ways that subjectivity is situated and negotiated within various and interwoven discourses, inferences can be made as to the degree of transgression the act of bodybuilding holds. This is achieved through a multimodal analysis of the photographs posted by the influencer with the accompanying text of the caption and hashtags below.

@gdelarosa89



Figure 13

“Back progression: the top picture is around this time last year. I wasn’t consistent with my workouts, I wasn’t where I wanted to be mentally and was very kept to myself. No one could reach me. Fast forward a year later, the bottom picture was taken last night. Not only am I more consistent in my workouts, I am where I want to be mentally. Now, I’m not saying every day is all fuckin sunshine and rainbows. No ma’am! I’m saying I’m learning to take the good with the bad. It takes time and practice, but with one step at a time, you will be where you want to be.”

The above post shows the influencer’s transformation in the musculature and definition of his back. The top photograph is the ‘before’ photograph, which he states in the caption had been taken a year prior. He places his hands behind his head, and his elbows splay at the sides. This allows for a broadening of the back area. In the current photograph, the influencer clenches his fists and flexes his biceps. This too allows for the broadening of the back, as well as the further definition of the muscles along his shoulders and biceps. In both photographs, the influencer’s face is not visible to the

viewer. As a result, he becomes subject to the onlooker's gaze. The purpose of the photograph, and the way that the individual has positioned himself therein, invites a scrutiny of what is on display. He further places the photographs side by side to allow for an easy comparison between the two. The very being of the individual seems to be lacking in the photograph, as the viewer is confronted only with his back.

The accompanying caption, however, contradicts this 'lack'. The influencer brings his personal self to the forefront. He states that along with the physical progression that is evident in both photographs, there has been a simultaneous internal progression in which the materiality of the body and his control thereof has become a site of healing. The ability to control a specific muscle group, and have the power that results in its growth, has allowed for personal growth. The influencer opens up; 'Not only am I more consistent with my workouts, I am where I want to be'. With this statement, the influencer is exposing the co-dependence between the materiality of his body and his inner being.

While there is no direct mention of gender in the caption, the transgender discourse is invited through his hashtags #ftm and #transfitness. Here, the influencer has woven the trans discourse into the fitness/bodybuilding discourse. Sociologist Norman Fairclough (1992) states that the intersection [or weaving] of different discourses simultaneously enables the continuity of the past and makes possible its transformation. With the intersection of the trans discourse, the viewer is invited to analyse the text with a gendered lens. This has important implications in understanding and measuring the extent to which power has and can be negotiated. Hegemonic relations and ideals limit the possibilities of how the influencer represents himself and how these representations can be interpreted (Lilja, 2008).

One could argue that as the influencer's muscles expand and begin to reveal characteristics of masculinity, his gendered self begins to line up, which results in an increase in mental wellbeing. Here, the act of bodybuilding becomes transgressive towards achieving an alternative mode of engendering. It has afforded the influencer the ability to achieve masculine characteristics which ultimately translate into the achieving

of a gendered self – the congruence between an inner gendered identity and an outer, recognisable, gendered identity. As a result, the influencer expresses that he is beginning to feel whole; he is where he wants to be mentally.

Furthermore, as the individual introduces the topic of mental health, the discourse of power is forced into a deeper state of negotiation. The heteronormative, ‘ideal’ man is expected to hide all traces of weakness. This weakness refers to physical strength as well as emotional and mental strength. The influencer is transparent about emotional hardships that he has experienced. While his musculature progression has resulted in a mental and emotional progression, he proves that the control that bodybuilding has afforded him over his body has granted him the power of healing. As such, he creates a discourse of freedom, in which he negotiates the characteristics of hegemonic and heteronormative masculinity in the creation of a resilient self.



Figure 14

“Some days are harder than others. Today, I was very inside my head, nothing felt right. So I took my man-child ass to the gym, and worked it out. Felt better after, not 100% but def put my mood in a better place.”

This post shows a pensive influencer, looking away from the camera, with his hands covering his mouth. His right hand holds the camera and takes the selfie, in which he purposely situates himself as subject of the onlooker's gaze. There is a sombre tone that exudes from this photograph, through the black and white filter that has been used. The caption reflects this tone. The influencer opens up; 'Some days are harder than others. Today I was very inside my head, nothing felt right.'

The intertextuality of the photograph and caption prove that the narrative of this post is that of mental health and emotional hardships. However, there is great significance in the mention of gym within this context. While the previous post (*figure 13*) was situated mainly within the fitness or bodybuilding discourse, and the mental health discourse was woven within it, this post is the opposite. This post is situated primarily within the mental health discourse, with the fitness discourse interwoven within. The influencer states that because of the difficult emotions he was experiencing, he forced himself to visit the gym and this resulted in an improvement in his mood. While exercise does have great benefits, because of the release of endorphins, the further interweaving of the gendered discourse allows for deeper implications. The influencer invites the viewer into a gendered analysis through his hashtags; #ftm, #transisbeautiful and most significantly, #dysphoria.

The mention of dysphoria indicates an inner turmoil, a feeling of discomfort in his own skin. He states that working out improves these feelings. This mirrors the sentiment of the previous post in many ways; the materiality of the body is congruent to the inner self. While this post does not directly refer to bodybuilding, inferences can be made based on the post above. One can assume that his visits to the gym are all similar; he focuses on increasing his muscle mass, broadening his upper body and defining the muscles of his torso. In doing so, every visit to the gym becomes a further step in his attainment of the ideal masculine form.

The influencer expresses that working out is an escape for him, a means to 'get out of his head'. Bodybuilding acts as a technology in which the influencer is granted

‘freedom to invent self’ (Lloyd, 1996, p. 252). Through the self-awareness that bodybuilding and visits to the gym afford him, he is able to create new types of experiences that can lead to transgressive practices (Markula, 2004). Although power is acknowledged, it is transcended. Transgressive acts are most impactful when they prove to impinge critically upon social consciousness by utilising existing practices in subversive ways so as to provoke a new manifestation (Lloyd, 1996). Although the act of bodybuilding may be a technology of self which is the vehicle towards the attainment of a masculinised physique, he utilises this activity as a vehicle for the creation of self, a whole self, in which the body becomes a site of healing and freedom.

@Jessediamondfitness



Figure 15

November 2014 vs October 2018

“In the picture on the left, I had been on HRT for 2.5 months and weighed 109lbs. The beginning of my transition was a little scary. I didn’t really know any other trans folks and didn’t know what to expect my future to look like. Four years and 25lbs later, this body of mine is starting to feel like home and I can honestly say that I’m excited for my future. This is your journey; follow your heart, stay true to yourself, and fight for your happiness.”

The above post shows two photographs of the influencer. This is a transformation post in which two photographs are shown side by side to allow for an easy comparison of the physical progress that has been made over a period of time. The influencer states in his caption that these photographs were taken about four years apart. In the photograph on the left, the ‘before’ photograph, the influencer takes a full-body selfie in the reflection of a mirror. The background shows weightlifting equipment and therefore suggests that he had just completed, or was about to begin, a workout. He is wearing athletic apparel.

His legs and torso are covered, while his tattooed biceps are visible. He pulls his tongue with a self-deprecating grimace. In the current photograph, the tone has changed drastically. He now has much more of his body visible and on display. He stands in his underwear and poses for the camera. He stands with his chest out, in a confident stance. His expression is serious yet contemplative.

The accompanying caption discusses the journey between the two photographs. The influencer admits that it was not an easy one and that he was fearful because he was unsure of what the future held for him as a trans man. Ultimately, he is using these two photographs as a representation of his transition journey. He explains that achieving his current physical appearance has involved hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and weight gain. There is a congruency between his physical appearance and his consciousness as he reveals ‘four years and 25 lbs later, this body is finally starting to feel like home and I can honestly say that I’m excited for my future.’

The influencer immediately situates himself in the trans discourse, in the mention of his transition process and HRT. He is transparent about the technologies of self that he has utilised in achieving his current state of being. In doing so, he has made a clear interweaving of two discourses, primarily the trans discourse with the less overt fitness and musculature discourse. As a result, he invites the viewer to read his post with a gendered lens. The influencer’s progress is not only evident physically through his stance, choice of clothing, body language and facial expression, but he admits that these transformations have allowed for an emotional and mental development as well. The statement ‘my body finally feels like home’ insinuates comfort and familiarity. However, the phenomenon of home goes beyond the experience of being orientated within a familiar order; it also means to be identified with the place in which we dwell. There is an integrity, a connectedness, between dweller and dwelling (Dovey, 1985). A connectedness finally exists between the influencer and the materiality of his body, thus enforcing the significance of the congruency between his core gendered identity and his physical, recognisable being.

The precept of the ‘care of the self’ [soud de SOI] was, for the Greeks, one of the main principles of cities, one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life. For us now, this notion is rather obscure and faded. When one is asked "What is the most important moral principle in ancient philosophy?" the immediate answer is not ‘Take care of oneself’ but the Delphic principle, *gnothi seauton* (‘Know yourself’). (Foucault, 2012, p. 226).

According to Foucault, the goal of care for the self in Ancient Greece was to make one’s life into an object for a sort of knowledge that can only be achieved by a training of oneself by oneself (Markula, 2004). However, in modern times, various discourses and institutions have taken this autonomy away from individuals. Foucault therefore asserts the need for disengaging the current self from the domination of these institutions to allow for a true knowledge of self (Markula, 2004). Care of the self can be likened to bodybuilding. Through the stylisation of his body, the influencer has gained the truest knowledge of self, in which his body has come to be his home. This is largely owing to the challenging of the constraints of the gender binary.

The influencer has not entirely disengaged from the domination of hegemonic masculinity, because in many ways he has still reiterated its norms. However, he has challenged these norms, thus creating a problematisation. His transparency negates the heteronormativity which hegemonic masculinity enforces. Foucault asserts that ‘it is not behaviours or ideas, nor societies or their “ideologies” but the problematisations which being offers itself to be’, that form the greatest impact (Foucault cited in Lloyd, 1996, p. 258). The most radical instantiations of practice of the self are those that have this impact; those that provoke a critical, querying reaction (Lloyd, 1996).

Owing to the influencer’s transparency, he has allowed for the interweaving of discourses, which creates a problematisation of the standards of hegemonic masculinity and its ideals. In doing so, he has challenged the discourse in which he is situated and transgressed towards a discourse of freedom in which the potential for the creation of new types of subjectivity has emerged (Lilja, 2008).

@Phoenix_Montoya



phoenix_montoya • Following ...

phoenix_montoya Declined cable flies on the Pec Deck. Chest day is my absolutely favorite day. I love the pump, and the way my chest feels afterwards. And chest being a huge source of dysphoria for a lot of trans men, it's nice to be able to sculpt it the way I want. For these, keep a slight bend in your elbow, but don't use your biceps. Really focus on bringing your pecs in together, and squeeze at the very end. DM me to inquire about my 8 week customized workout plans! 💪💪

#workoutwednesday #wow #workoutoftheday #wod #chestday #pecdeck #cableflies #decline #pecs #transmen #transdysphoria #transfitness

8,671 views
OCTOBER 10, 2018

Add a comment... Post

Figure 16

“Declined cable flies on the Pec Deck. Chest day is my absolute favourite day. I love the pump, and the way my chest feels afterward. And the chest being a huge source of dysphoria for a lot of trans men, it’s nice to be able to sculpt it the way I want. For these, keep a slight bend in your elbow, but don’t use your biceps. Really focus on bringing your pecs in together, and squeeze at the very end. DM me to inquire about my 8 week customised workout plans!”

The above photograph is a still taken from a video in which the influencer is performing ‘declined cable flies’. He places the videoing device on the ground while he performs the exercise, often looking down into the camera. He is wearing a grey vest which shows the muscular and vascular definition along his shoulders and arms. This exercise is focused on building the pectoral muscle around the chest region. In the caption

below, the influencer states that he devotes a specific workout day to focus on his chest – ‘chest day’. He explains that it is his favourite day because of the feeling after ‘pumping’ his chest. The chest area is a major source of dysphoria for him and therefore having the control to sculpt and stylise this region through various exercises proves to be extremely rewarding. He concludes by providing tips for his followers on how to perform this exercise correctly, with the correct form.

While the influencer does not overtly mention his trans identity within the caption, he still invites the interweaving of the trans discourse through the mention of dysphoria of the chest. Having the ability to ‘sculpt [his] chest the way [he] want[s]’ proves to be extremely significant, and thus goes beyond the physical outcome of merely building muscle. Chest workouts surpass representational forms, which emphasise the body’s external appearance. Rather, this proves to be an experiential discipline, which focuses on the aesthetic quality of its inner experience. These exercises make the quality of the experience of working out more satisfyingly rich, while making the influencer’s awareness of the somatic experience more acute and perceptive (Schusterman, 2000). In other words, he is aware of the richness and significance chest exercises have with regard to his battle with dysphoria.

Furthermore, there is much to be said regarding the influencer providing a ‘how-to’ for his followers. Being an influencer in the trans community, many trans men look up to him and are inspired by his progress in his journey of transition. He provides valuable tips and advice for his trans followers, who may also have dysphoria with the chest region. In doing so, he is exercising an ethical self-practice in which the performance of these exercises not only holds purpose for the individual but for his followers as well.

Foucault (1997d, p. 317) asserts that ‘the growth of capabilities of modern humankind should be disentangled from the dominant power regime’. Moreover, the surveillance and scrutinising of this dominance is most transgressive in a collective setting (Taylor & Vintges, 2004). The influencer takes to an extremely public platform, in which he appeals to a large collective, and provides a ‘how-to’ for his followers. In doing so, he is not only testing the limits of heteronormativity and hegemony, which assume that it is

only biologically-born males who are able to perform such exercises; he is providing a step-by-step demonstration of how these changes are possible.

One cannot ignore the fact that such exercises are performed in a pursuit of the idealised, hegemonic, masculine physique. Thus, a reiteration and repetition of the norms that this discourse produces is constantly a risk. However, it is important to view such performances with a critical and querying lens (Lloyd, 1996). There is great significance and experiential value for the influencer, in the performance of chest exercises, as they afford him a sense of control in sculpting his chest area, a region which is a major source of dysphoria. Further, he creates a deeper significance and value through the scrutinising and surveillance of the dominant power regime, on the large collective scale, through the platform of Instagram. He is sending out a message, albeit a subtle one, to his community of trans followers; that one is and can be capable of resisting the simple submission to heteronormativity (Thompson, Pleck & Ferrera, 1992). Furthermore, he offers guidance in achieving this enlightenment of performing and enacting one's gender of choice.

In conclusion, the practice of bodybuilding has proven to be rather complex in terms of understanding how it allows for the creation of different subjectivities within various discourses. While being trans allows for a challenging of the gender binary, the pursuit of the masculine norms which it produces is still a risk. Bodybuilding is a practice which is utilised to achieve many characteristics of the ideal hegemonic male; hence the risk of reiterating the norms of hegemonic masculinity.

However, it is important to analyse the purpose and outcome that bodybuilding affords the influencers in concluding that it is a technology of self which ultimately allows for the materiality of the body to become a site of healing and freedom. All three influencers express that there is a clear correlation between their inner gendered core and their outer, physical, gendered identity. Furthermore, the influencers allow for a problematisation and a critical querying of the gendered discourse in which they are situated, through the interweaving of the trans and mental health discourse into the fitness and bodybuilding discourse. In doing so, they have provoked a critical and

querying reaction which allows for a potential disengagement from heteronormativity. Moreover, there is much to be said about this impinging on social consciousness, on the large and collective scale of Instagram. This allows for the transgressive act of body stylisation to transcend its personal experiential value, and establish a potential for the creation of new types of subjective experiences, which allow for further healing, and liberation from the gender binary.

Chapter 7: Clear or Rose-tinted spectacles – Instagram as a Space for the Spectacle

The following chapter will critically analyse the presentations of self that each influencer posts, and the implications these hold regarding the negotiation of the primarily heteronormative standards which the Instagram platform propagates. The contextual implications will be considered with regard to the identity construction and self-revelation of each influencer individually, as well as to the greater community with which he is associated, particularly in terms of the trans discourse.

Social media and social networking have become an all-pervasive global space in which the ‘ordinary’ person is afforded the opportunity to participate in a limitless socio-cultural environment (Cannon et al, 2018). There are strong implications for the omnipresence that such platforms hold, and thus it is perceived that online communication can cross over, and has crossed over, to offline outcomes in real life, often perpetuating constructive change (Mehra, Merkel & Bishop, 2004).

It is therefore crucial to engage in a critical analysis of Instagram and the contextual implications that the social media platform holds for the influencers, as well as the discourse in which they operate. The application is used as the vehicle for self-representation for the female to male trans fitness influencers throughout different stages of their transitions. Owing to the application revolving primarily around visuals and aesthetics, it is not only important to engage with the images themselves, but the implications of the images in the context in which they exist.

There is great significance in exploring the body in the heteronormative culture of Instagram, where voyeurism and sexualized looking is permitted and encouraged. This hypervisibility is what constitutes the body in space. Bodies are known, understood and experienced through images (Tiidenberg, 2015). The feed of photographs that formulates each user’s unique profile becomes a multi-faceted mirror of sorts, in which the influencer is lifted out of life and existence, and into representation. The tangible ‘being’ of an image translates into ‘being’ someone; an authentic, legitimate being

(Roen, 2002). 'Images such as these appear as a stabilising force of identity formation and cultural legibility, offering a structuring device for the proliferation of specific ideas as to what it means to be a trans man in contemporary Western culture' (Mowlabocus, 2010).

Owing to the hypervisibility of social networking, it is plausible that an application such as Instagram is utilised as a platform for the showcasing of the self. Studies have found that such platforms are used in order to build one's own self-concept in the form of social comparison and self-evaluation (Shin et al., 2017). These studies are largely based on socio-cultural theory, which contends that identity construction is a social process involving more than just oneself. Cognitive development takes place in a social arena and an individual's experiences cannot be separated from the context of that arena (Lucero, 2017).

The selfies or photographs a user posts of him/herself can be considered as objects that initiate the transmission of human feelings in the form of relationship and gesture; and they thus hold important implications for the potential for conversation. Self-presentational images have the potential to address and challenge various discourses and thus form counter publics, gathering people around alternative and opposing discourses (Duguay, 2016). As such, these platforms allow for the visibility of non-normative identities in public discourse, thus giving rise to queer publics that open possibilities for new understandings (Duguay, 2016).

Here's to Looking at Me: Instagram as a Multi-faceted Mirror

For each influencer, their Instagram profile mainly consists of a stream of photographs of themselves, their unique self-representations. Studies of the visual and aesthetic presentation of self on social media have often drawn comparisons between an individual's unique profile and a personal mirror. The stream of photographs acts as a multi-faceted mirror; enabling self-creation and self-labelling while also establishing interaction and connection with like-minded people, which can encourage and support one's self-recognised identity (Raun, 2012). This is particularly pertinent with the trans

influencers, who have presented evolving selves over the journey of their transition. The act of looking that Instagram encourages consists of various gazes which help the influencer to control, objectify, define and mirror identities to themselves (Martin & Spence, 2003). Just as the mirror image is part of the way in which one learns to conceive oneself, and allows the subject to move from disidentification to full identification, the selfie or photograph posted on these platforms becomes an act of self-revelation in which the digital eye is turned inwards (Schwarz, 2010). The reflexive image directs attention to the conditions and context of one's own presence, activity and efficacy. Identity formation does not take place solely inside, but through visibility and the interaction with others; which is ultimately the premise on which an application such as Instagram exists.

The presentation of self on such platforms becomes an interactional experience in which the responses to the photographs – such as liking, commenting and sharing – equate to a social reinforcing of the ways in which bodies are looked at and experienced (Tiidenberg & Cruz, 2015). Instagram, as a platform, largely propagates normative cultural standards, in which it mirrors the contemporary visual economy that remains profoundly ageist, (dis)ablist and heteronormative (Tiidenberg & Cruz, 2015). Self-presentation that addresses and challenges such discourses of power allows for the gathering of counter publics which allow for the formation of new visual discourses, teaching participants of this new visual economy and its new ways of seeing (Tiidenberg & Cruz, 2015). It is important to analyse the meaning of the photograph post and the meaning of the context (Instagram) as mutually constituting, and how this holds implications for self-revelation and identity formation (Banks, 2007).

@gdelarosa89

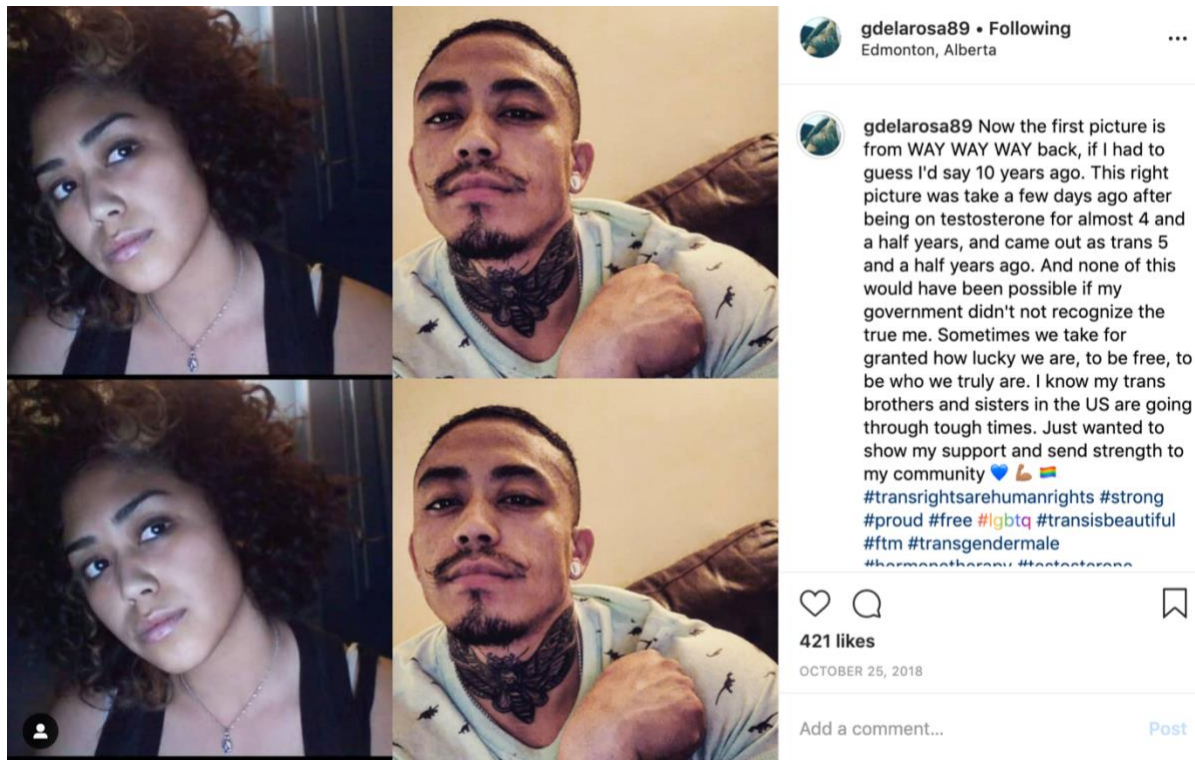


Figure 17

“Now this first picture is from WAY WAY WAY back, if I had to guess I’d say 10 years ago. The right picture was taken a few days ago after being on testosterone for almost 4 and a half years, and come out as trans 5 and a half years ago. And none of this would have been possible if my government didn’t recognize the true me. Sometimes we take for granted how lucky we truly are. I know my trans brothers and sisters in the US are going through tough times. Just wanted to show my support and send strength to my community.”

This is a ‘before and after’ post in which the influencer posts photographs of himself side by side, from before his transition, to his current position within the transition process. The photographs are situated side by side to allow for a comparison throughout his transition. What is prominent is that the two photographs appear to be direct mirror images of each other. Both are positioned similarly, with the head tilted slightly to the side. Both appear to be in control of the gaze, looking seductively into the camera. However, it is undeniable that both representations conform to heteronormative

representations of femininity and masculinity, respectively. It is therefore important to understand that although each isolated image does not negotiate the hegemony, with the analysis of the photographs side by side in the context of Instagram, a more nuanced and significant narrative becomes possible.

Instagram can be compared to a personalised visual archive in which photographs are presented in a chronological order. For the female to male trans fitness influencers, Instagram acts as an archive to keep track of bodily changes. In this case, a side-by-side comparison assists and encourages a recreation of the desirable (or idealised) male-image that must constantly be evaluated (Raun, 2012). It is on this basis that each personal profile becomes a multi-faceted mirror (Raun, 2012). Instagram is a public mirror in which the influencer is aware that others are watching, thus internalising and synthesising powerful gazes (Raun, 2012; Walker, 2005). Thus, one tends re-enact the discursive gazes of Instagram.

Instagram, as a platform, produces and reproduces the conventional expectations which heteronormativity dictates, especially with regard to how the female and male bodies should appear within the rigid confines of the gender dichotomy. While each of the above photographs, in isolation, may conform to these expectations, the side-by-side narrative may force this representation into being labelled as 'other', as this highlights the fluidity, crossing and bending of the dichotomy (Rettberg, 2005). Those who are labelled as 'other', in the view of those with power, or within the heteronormative discourse of Instagram, may wish to engage in work on identity as a tool for becoming an active subject in their own dissonant histories (Walker, 2005, p. 407).

As the influencer searches for a sense of his own identity, the photographs tend to act as a mirror on which he can project aspects of himself (Sabbadini, 2011). Identity formation is closely connected to visibility and interaction with others. What tends to be most determinative is not necessarily how one would like to see oneself, but rather how we are seen by the cultural (heteronormative and powerful) gaze (Raun, 2012). As a result, it is evident within both photographs that the cultural gaze has been consumed,

and performativity reflects this. However, the photographs, side by side, challenge this gaze, creating an entirely new counter-narrative.

Archiving photographs throughout the transition process on Instagram allows the platform to serve as a series of mirror stages. Often the mirror is referred to in trans discourse and literature as a symbol of great anxiety, as one's reflection is simply the projection of a disidentification. There is a split between the body image (projected self) and the image of the body (the reflected self). Instagram assists in an un-distortion and the bringing back of the body and the body image into gendered alignment (Raun, 2012).

The emphasis on the split between self before and self after (or during) transition is highlighted here. Although each isolated image can be read as the consumption and re-enactment of heteronormativity, the pictures positioned side by side allow for the possibility of objectifying oneself, in order to see a separate part of oneself. These photographs, understood as chronologically intended, act as a mini narrative, an account or testament of the journey of transition. There is never a fixed story, or a closure to the narrative, as the influencer continues to make sense of his identity as male. Lastly, these 'before and after' posts are markers of triumph. They allow the influencer to acknowledge and come to terms with the negativity that existed and exists within both selves, and how these perceptions may have evolved and improved throughout his transition (Walker, 2005)

@Jessediamondfitness



Figure 18

“Why did I make my Instagram page nearly 6 years ago? To keep track of my fitness progress.

*Why do I keep my page now? So I can stay in contact with all of you lovely folks 🤔
A lot has changed in the past several years since I started this page. I started my transition into manhood, I gained roughly 50lbs of muscle mass, I competed in an assortment of different sports (rugby, long distance running, powerlifting, bodybuilding), and I've made so many wonderful friends.*

*Who would've thought that @instagram would help change my life for the better?
Thanks #instafamily and #transfamily for being a part of my journey these past few years. .*

If you live in the PNW and want to watch me compete in bodybuilding, I'm currently training to compete at the NPC Emerald Cup this spring 🏆🏆”

In the above post, the influencer lifts his vest to expose his muscular abdomen. His face suggests exertion, as if he may be contracting his muscles to emphasise their presence. He is in the gym; the exercise machines behind him are visible. He uses his mobile phone to take a picture of himself in his reflection in the mirror. His caption states that he has used Instagram as a tool to keep account of himself, in achieving his goals and making progress in fitness and bodybuilding. He equates these accomplishments as the components that constitute his transition into manhood.

‘Why do I keep my page now? So I can stay in touch with all you lovely folks.’ This insinuates that the need for Instagram as a technology for accountability is no longer needed; he is where he wants to be in terms of his fitness and muscular aesthetic. However, he largely credits Instagram as a platform that has ‘changed [his] life for the better’. It has allowed him to enter into a discourse that has supported and continues to support him throughout his transition journey, and further, in his competitive bodybuilding.

There is an interesting dualism between the literal selfie in the mirror and the analogy of Instagram as a mirror. Often, one’s confrontation with a mirror image is a private experience; the act of looking at and scrutinising one’s reflection is typically done within a private space. Here, the influencer allows for his self and his reflection to become a subject. Instagram becomes a subjective-objective world (Sabbadini, 2011). It opens possibilities for the objectification of the self, to see separate parts of oneself which can then be integrated into overall subjectivity, allowing the visibility of the self, both subjectively and objectively, to become an important aspect in the influencer’s identity and transition into manhood (Walker, 2005, p. 408; Crossley, 2015, p. 548). ‘We live in an extremely visual society. Vision, rather than a privileged form of knowing, becomes itself, an object of knowing (Crossley, 2015, p. 548).

The influencer admits that Instagram as a public mirror, and the internal and external gazes which it affords, has become an archive, not only to keep track of bodily changes, but to stay accountable, so as to stay motivated to keep on track with his fitness regime (Raun, 2012). He is aware that others are watching him; this is what motivates him

further. This creates an objective self-awareness, in which self-evaluation becomes largely based on the cultural gaze. This causes one to view oneself as one believes others do (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011). It creates a dynamic of ‘cultural sociability’ in which viewers are invited to make conspicuous, communicative or gestural responses (Senft & Baym, 2015). The synthesis and internalisation of the gazes often results in a pro-social behaviour (Gonzales et al, 2011). In other words, the influencer will subtly govern his behaviours to meet society’s expectations of an acceptable identity (O’Donnell, 2018). The discourse of Instagram has created a norm in which an acceptable identity equates to heteronormativity. Thus, ‘manhood’ equates to the heteronormative, and indeed hegemonic, performances of masculinity. ‘A body affects other bodies and is affected by other bodies’ (Deleuze, 1992, p.652).

Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of becoming can be likened to this documented (gendered and fitness) transition. Becoming is a process of desire (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Becomings can be likened to transformations, (in this instance, both literally and figuratively), of ‘constantly processual, constantly transforming narratives’ (Coleman, 2008, p. 12). A kind of order or apparent progression can be established for the becoming in which we find ourselves (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These becoming bodies can never be separable from their relations with the world (Deleuze, 1992). Bodies are processes which become through their relations, and whose entities are therefore constituted through these relations (Fraser, 2003).

The theory of becoming has strong implications for the use of Instagram as an archive for the transitioning body. The influencer has utilised a largely heteronormative application, and although his performativity may be in line with this narrative, his caption and hashtags (such as #transgender and #transisbeautiful) blur the lines, creating the potential for a counter discourse. However, through acknowledging Instagram for his growth and transition into ‘manhood’, he acknowledges the effects of the public mirror, and thus, its consequential cultural gaze. This suggests that his transition cannot be separated from Instagram and the heteronormative narrative that it encourages.

@Phoenix_Montoya



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21

“Hopefully I can get a better video soon. But here’s my runway walk for @marcomarcounderwear ! Words cannot describe how amazing these past few days have been. I am beyond thankful for this incredible opportunity, and to have met such beautiful people along the way. This is definitely going to be a weekend I will never forget. Thank you to everyone who helped put this show together, and to Marco himself for representing the trans community in such an empowering way. And thank you to all my supporters and followers from the bottom of my heart. I never could have done this without all of you! ❤️” Video Credit: @ravenjadeking 🙏

The above stills are from a video of the influencer walking down the runway at New York Fashion Week. It is clear that the video was taken from afar as it appears to be of rather poor quality. He gives credit to his girlfriend @ravenjadeking for taking the video; the influencer therefore knows he was filmed by an amateur videographer. Marco Marco is an underwear brand. The influencer walks the runway, wearing the brand's tight briefs, whilst the rest of his body is on display. His stance, and the way he protrudes his chest, exudes a sexualised confidence. As he approaches the end of the runway, he seductively looks down towards his groin, encouraging the onlooker's sexualised gaze. 'I wanted to create a space to celebrate trans bodies. This was an opportunity for their presence to be undeniable, and reinforce that trans is beautiful' (Marco Morante, designer of Marco Marco Underwear).

Thinking of the influencer as a spectacle is layered with many complexities based on the various discourses (both online and offline) in which he is situated. In the video that has been uploaded onto Instagram, the viewer sees a snippet of footage in which he walks the runway of New York Fashion Week. The Marco Marco runway show for New York Fashion Week consisted of an all-transgender line-up; the designer, Marco Morante, has long catered for the LGBTQI+ community and wished to express this within his fashion show (<https://attitude.co.uk/article/underwear-brand-marco-marco-features-all-trans-models-at-new-york-fashion-week/19056/>). This gives the viewer insight into the influencer as a fashion or runway model, which shifts the gaze from online into reality. We can transfer the analytical lens into one of fashion, modelling and even glamour, which is associated with this discourse.

Heteronormatively, a model walks the runway and his/her image communicates silently; he/she becomes a visual authority, transmitting norms without verbal communication, norms which embody ideals of social perfection. In doing so, they are expected to perform to an assigned standard of bodily norms, which constitute a collective understanding of beauty (Soley-Beltran, 2006). However, owing to the fashion discourse being challenged by selecting only transgender models to walk the runway, the model has more agency in projecting him/herself. He exposes himself wholeheartedly to the consuming, desiring and envying gaze; however, he does so with

the knowledge that this defies the traditional and heteronormative norms which usually define fashion (Soley-Beltran, 2006).

This Marco Marco fashion show has allowed the models' bodies to become a prime ethnographic site providing insight into how gender materialises, or can be negotiated onto different bodies. These processes have strong implications for both femininity and masculinity, and the dismantling thereof (Entwistle & Mears, 2013). This has encouraged an onlook of contradictory gazes; the model as a star of the spotlight as well as an object of surveillance.

Although Marco Marco has provided and indeed celebrated a platform for an all-inclusive fashion line, and models who emphasise this, one cannot deny that the influencer remains as a non-heteronormative body, under close speculation within the fashion discourse that is still largely heterosexual and determined by the patriarchy. Furthermore, one cannot disregard that although all selected models are trans, there still seems to be a clear reinforcement of the gender binary, where femininity and masculinity are hypervisible (even if gently challenged, in the instance of men wearing makeup).

The influencer then further exposes himself to the gazes of an entirely different discourse. He has shifted his role from spectacle in reality to spectacle online. He subjects himself to scrutiny on two levels. His caption reads 'Thank you...to Marco himself, for representing the trans community in such an empowering way.' This insinuates that his experience as a model was a powerful one for him; one which evoked confidence. Perhaps this is the reason behind further exposing the footage – to allow such feelings to linger.

However, it is crucial to recognise how the two circumstances, along with their subsequent representations and gazes, differ. Within the video itself, a safe queer set of circumstances has been created, allowing the influencer to feel pride as a male model. Instagram, however, dictates hegemony and heteronormativity; regardless, the influencer still felt he wanted to continue his representation – as spectacle, perhaps –

with the hope of further negotiating the heteronormative standard that Instagram dictates.

In conclusion, this section has considered each representation in terms of the possible individual rationales for each influencer's postings. Each influencer is undoubtedly a spectacle in his own right, utilising Instagram for different purposes. This discussion has explored the chronological uploading of videos onto Instagram as an archive. This personal archive acts as a public mirror, in which the influencer is able to separate part of himself in the creation of various narratives – of growth, transition, triumph or self-awareness within the trans discourse – despite these narratives occurring within the heteronormative parameters of Instagram. It is crucial to understand how this positioning of the self is responded to, and what reflections the public mirror of Instagram projects. The following segment will focus on the audience and the implications they hold as the online spectators of such performances.

Recognition as The Promise of Happiness

Instagram stages a scene of phantasy in which a cluster of promises is embedded (Berlant, 2011). It is important to consider what it is that makes Instagram phantasmic and how this encourages users to return to the scene time and time again. Thus far, the individual female to male trans influencer has been discussed; the one-sided personal implications have been considered with regard to the individual presentations of self, aesthetically and verbally. However, it is crucial to consider the audience. The influencer is undoubtedly aware that the performance or presentation of self within the platform transcends the self. There is a clear awareness that Instagram acts not only as a mirror for each representation, but moreover as a looking glass through which one billion users have potential access (Instagram, 2019). 'Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes. I constitute myself in a process of posing. I instantaneously make another body for myself' (Barthes, 1981, p. 10).

Barthes discusses the unconscious or impulsive change of bodily integrity that takes place as soon as one recognises the presence of the lens. This, of course, is mostly the case with Instagram. Most of the photographs posted have been taken by the influencers

themselves, and if not, every photograph that is posted is scrutinised with the knowledge that it will be transmitted onto a globalised and publicised platform. This change of bodily integrity, the need to ‘pose’, unfolds from the realisation that ‘this image – my image – will be generated. Will I be born from an antipathetic individual or from a “good sort”?’ (Barthes, 1981, p. 11).

It is with this thought or realisation, that one’s image will be generated, that the premise of phantasy and promise exists. Instagram becomes a scene that enables one to expect that *this* time, a nearness to *this* thing, will help an individual or a world to become different in just the right way. A person may find him/herself bound to a situation of profound threat that is at the same time profoundly confirming (Berlant, 2011). While there is threat and vulnerability to the generation of these presentations of self, there also exists the promise of recognition and inclusion. For the trans influencers, the platform becomes a vehicle that promises inclusion into a normative or even hegemonic existence. Our epistemological self-existence is all bound up with literacy in normativity and this relation constitutes the ‘common sense measure of trust in the world’s ongoingness and our competence at being human’ (Berlant, 2011).

While Instagram’s reflection of normative and ideal narratives may often nudge and discipline the imaginary mind about what the good life is and how ‘proper’ people act, the trans influencers negotiate, challenge and resist this narrative by addressing the normative discourse and counteracting or confirming on its misconceptions (Berlant, 2011; Duguay, 2016). For the influencers, the platform becomes an opportunity with which they can pull the world in and push it away according to their own terms and sense of pacing (Berlant, 2011). In other words, we see the trans males negotiate with the discourse of normativity, where performance is not limited to gender normativity, yet sometimes it does occur within its confines.

Enlightenment is the moment when humanity is going to put its own reason to use without subjecting oneself to any authority to determine what can be known, what must be done and what may be hoped
(Foucault in Rabinow, 1984:38).

In many ways, Instagram is a platform for enlightenment; it gives the influencers the chance to become conscious of the discontinuity of time and its mutual discourses and break from its tradition (Rabinow,1984). Many theorists consider this emancipation from arbitrary authority and the unthinking of custom to be an act of modernity or ‘being’ modern (Mah, 2004). ‘Modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of liberty that simultaneously respects the reality and violates it’ (Rabinow,1984). This modernity does not liberate man from his own being, but rather compels him to face the task of producing himself (Rabinow,1984).

The following chapter aims to explore this process of modernisation and how it is received within the normative and idealised discourse of Instagram. One has to consider why the influencers return to the scene time and time again. What pleasure does it afford them? How does the recipient of each representation recognise or misrecognise these performances, and how does this affect the influencers’ repetitions of relations, the build-up and the pressure over time that triggers their contribution to the application (and the manner in which they contribute) as a kind of habit that seems intuitive? (Berlant, 2011).

@gdelarosa89

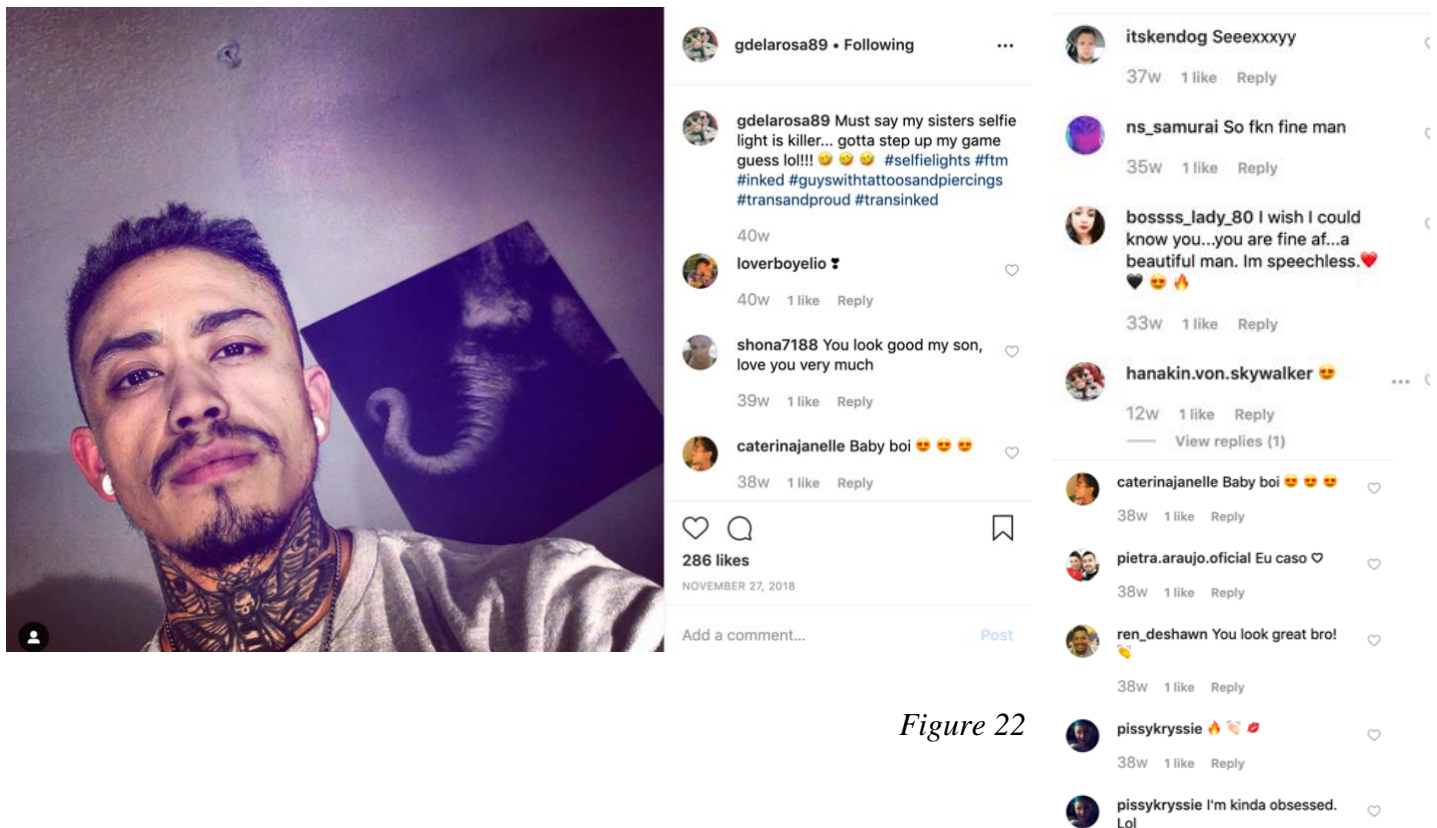


Figure 22

“Must say my sisters selfie light is killer... gotta step up my game guess lol!!!”

🤔🤔🤔 #selfielights #ftm #inked #guyswithtattoosandpiercings #transandproud #transinked

The influencer takes a selfie, which he admits in his caption was taken with his sister’s selfie light. He looks directly at the lens with a stern yet confident gaze, making the viewer feel as if he is in total control. He lifts his chin slightly, exposing the tattoo that covers his neck. This positioning of the head gives an impression of confidence and machoism. The caption below does not invite any particular gendered discourse. The hashtags, however, seem to be dynamic in this regard. He largely acknowledges his trans identity with hashtags such as #ftm and #transandproud; he also invites a more masculine and potentially heteronormative audience through #guyswithtattoosandpiercings. While it is impossible to record how this particular

audience were led to this particular post, one can assume that a large percentage were led to it through the various hashtags.

The influencer does not situate himself within a definitive discourse. He moves transversally across spaces and subjectivities, projecting and sensing atmospheres to which he has to catch up and respond. He does not categorise himself, often just leaning wonderingly towards the next potentiality (Berlant, 2011). Instagram, and his contribution thereto, opens up spaces for these potentialities. While these potentialities base the premise of phantasy, and one can only assume what this exact phantasy may entail, it is based on a fulfilment of a particular desire. The audience have to be fulfilling this particular desire for the influencer to return to this site time and time again. The audience provide a certain recognition in which phantasy hovers.

The comments on the above photograph all seem to be a testament to social validation through various forms of recognition. The majority of the comments seem to be recognising the influencer's masculinity, and further, his masculine identity. Each comment uses the masculine lexicon, with words such as 'son', 'boi' and 'bro'; these words recognise the influencer as male and may assist in his identity-formation as male. Other comments focus on his aesthetics, with comments such as 'sexy', 'you look great' and 'so fkn fine'. These comments, regardless of how they are situated in discourse, may allow for higher perceptions of self-worth. However, it is important to consider in what discourse these perceptions of beauty may be situated. Would such comments exist on a photograph which does not express the idealised and normative conventions of beauty? Perhaps this beauty is exclusive to a particular kind of male, and this is the recognition the influencer thrives on.

It is impossible to know for certain what form of recognition the influencer seeks through his contribution to the platform. However, the audience recognise through the physical and aesthetic, as this is the premise of a visual application such as Instagram. For the influencer, the platform and its audience allow for a liberation from the time and space of his sociability (Berlant, 2011). *His* story and the context from which he captures this self-representation become irrelevant once he is converted into a still

image. While his ambitious pursuit of an understanding of the aesthetic ambit may simply be pushing his ongoing narrative into something that has not found its genre or categorisation within the gender discourse, these alternative means and scenes of self-production do not necessarily equal the cultivation of either identity (Berlant, 2011). He acts on the potentialities of the space and seeks a recognition from its audience. His constant contribution to the platform suggests that the space is a scene of phantasy, a scene where his wishes and desires continue to be fulfilled.



Figure 23

“Today defeated me.” #insidemyhead #anxiety #ftm #mentalhealthawareness

In many ways, this post shows a direct contrast to the previous one. Here, the influencer looks away from the camera, becoming the object of the viewer’s gaze. This suggests a vulnerability or even submission to control. He looks down at the camera as if in a sombre, contemplative state. His caption confirms this tone. ‘Today defeated me’, he writes. The hashtags attached mostly refer to mental and emotional health. He does,

however, include #ftm, which hints that his emotional state may be indicative of the current climate for trans individuals and the hardships they have to endure.

As discussed in previous chapters, there is great significance to the concept of emotional and mental health in the gender discourse. The hegemonic or ideal male is expected to be emotionally in control and lacking in vulnerability. Any expression of emotional weakness is associated with powerlessness and a lack of control in the expression of emotions (Emslie, Ridge, Ziebland & Hunt, 2005, p. 2246). Within hegemonic discourse, masculinity is perceived as being the direct opposite to femininity. Men must suppress their pain, both physical and emotional, and exercise control over both (Bennett, 2007). Expressing emotion is linked to femininity, and thus a man may perceive emotional weakness as an intolerable condition, as it makes him feel like a woman (Emslie et al., 2005). This is an interesting tension, within the masculine trans discourse, especially; and there is a tug from either side of the gender binary. The need to be perceived and recognised as male may be directly correlated with the complete lack of femininity.

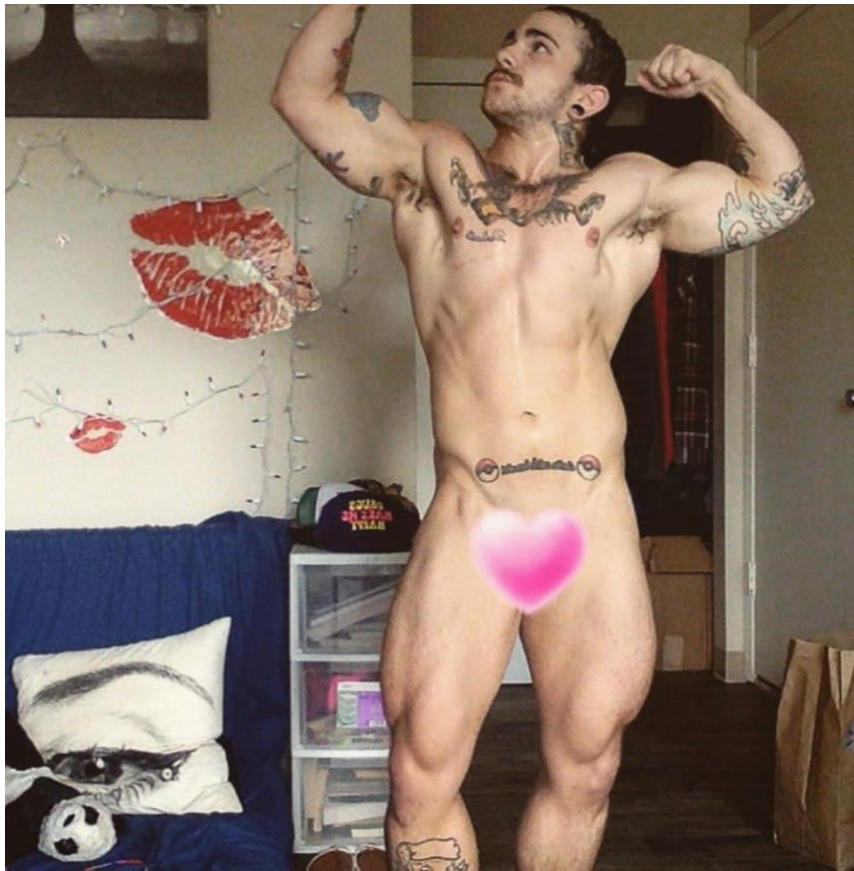
However, the influencer is transparent about his journey and the emotions that are experienced throughout. Here, the present may represent the point of transition and the hope of the dawning of a new world (Rabinow, 1984). This does not entail an annulling of reality but the difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise for freedom. Here, 'extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects the reality and simultaneously violates it' (Rabinow, 1984). While he acknowledges his trans identity and its subsequent difficulties, he is essentially acknowledging the problematic gender binary. He is aware that, heteronormatively, he will never exist within the binary. He does however seek to be liberated from its confines.

Perhaps the influencer shared this post only for transparency, for his followers who look up to him as a trans influencer; however, with the understanding of Instagram as a phantasmic site to which he is bound, that is one of vulnerability while at the same time profoundly confirming (Berlant, 2011). This seeking of recognition and consolation can

be understood as the ‘need for sympathetic others’, those who have had the same experiences or share the same stigma, who recognise that he is still human and ‘essentially’ normal despite appearance and his own self-doubt (Andalibi, 2017). Phantasy hovers over the influencer between 3 moments of time, throughout which his ideation evolves. His intentions are linked to his current impressions, a provoking moment which has aroused his major wish for recognition. This harks back to a memory in the past, most likely a previous posting, in which this wish was fulfilled; and now it relates to the future which represents the fulfilment of that wish (Green, 2009).

The influencer posts this picture in search of his own kind of recognition. An example of a comment has been posted above. The user posts words of encouragement and recognition for the impact that the influencer has had on so many lives. She also affirms his aesthetic; ‘your body is a freaking muscley temple.’ Does she believe that recognising his masculine aesthetic will affirm his identity and thus improve his mental and emotional state? She acknowledges his affliction, yet confirms his masculinity. This could be argued as an unintentional reaffirmation of the gender binary and the normative bodies which it idealises. A masculine man need not express emotion should he have a masculine aesthetic. While this may have been the recognition the influencer was hoping for, this proves problematic in the trans discourse, which attempts to remove the boundaries within the binary.

@jessediamondfitness















-  joelewin86 Ur gorgeous like x 
62w Reply
-  haus_of_antonyo OmG! beautiful male shape 🙌🌍 
61w Reply
-  griggboyce 🔥❤️😍 
44w Reply
-  lanstromkendall Oh yes that's a ... 
good picture
-  tsj7993 Damn, just so fucking hot
62w 1 like Reply
-  ebenloaeza Good Shape 😍👍👊
62w 1 like Reply
-  gabrieladimasyzbek I'd love to share my time with a boyfriend like you. Keep strong, I wish you the best in this new step.
62w 1 like Reply
-  markus.klaus.weber Wow geil ...
Hammer bitte mal Herz 💕 weg weg 😊😁

Figure 24

“Due to my medical issues, I've had to focus most of my work hours to freelance training and other odd jobs. I'm more than likely starting the process of bottom surgery (phalloplasty) within the next year or several months, so I'm trying to earn steady income that I won't necessarily lose while I'm in post op recovery. Instead of asking for donations, I'm offering exclusive content that can only be found at onlyfans.com/jessediamond. If you wanna learn everything about me, how I workout, how I eat, how I coach others, how I combat anxiety and depression or if you wanna see me stripping, naked, in the shower, or 'enjoying myself', it's all on there. New content daily. I'll be posting fitness/nutrition/self-care tips along with NSFW/nudity posts every single day, have over 100 detailed video and picture posts right now. And I'll be taking requests, so whatever you wanna see on there feel free to post a comment or DM me a request. Thank you so much to any and every one who decides to check out and subscribe to my site.”

The influencer stands exposed in front of the camera; he is completely in the nude. While this is an extremely vulnerable position for most, his body language and body positioning proves otherwise. He flexes his biceps in a heroic stance and looks up at his right fist, representing a grandiose figure. Tattoos are scattered across his nude body but are clustered mainly around his very upper body. The broadening of his chest makes the scars from his bilateral mastectomy hypervisible. His genital area is covered with a heart emoji. This post is an interesting intersection of discourse. The influencer is open about his trans identity, not only through his hashtags, but also, as he mentions, he is in the beginning stages of his phalloplasty surgery. Here, he admits that he does not have a penis and as he is aspiring toward this surgery; one can assume that the genital area is a site of dysphoria. However, this does not interrupt the sexualised tone of the post. He covers his genital area with a heart, a symbol of love and acceptance. Further into his caption, he invites users to view his website where he exposes and pleasures himself sexually.

The overlapping of the trans discourse with the sexualised tone becomes very significant regarding the study of the audience and their role as ‘recognisers’ within the influencer’s scene of phantasy. His genital area is the focal point of the photograph; the bright pink heart contrasts against his flesh, drawing the eye towards it. On a quick glance of the post, and without an intertextual understanding, (the reading of the caption in conjunction) one might assume that this heart covers the penis. However, on further reading, the viewer realises that there is no penis and the heart, in fact, covers a presence of absence.

Sex is heteronormatively a constitutive theme of manhood, where real sex is associated with the penis (Ratele et al, 2011). In this context, however, the influencer exudes sexuality, regardless of the penis obviously not being present. This can be regarded as the refusal to constitute the phallus as a signifier of sex. ‘It is true that the phallus, often confused with the limp little prick, is not much more than a signified of jouissance that sexual discourse transforms into a signifier’ (Lacan in Gherovici, 2011, p. 15).

The penis has come to be read as a symbol of sexual pleasure or ecstasy only because sexual discourse has framed it as such. The penis is a biological organ and sexual attribution is not necessarily based on organ attribution (Gherovici, 2011). Although the heart may cover a site of lack, this 'designification' of the penis creates a fantasised position beyond lack and desire (Gherovici, 2011).

The comments are a reflection of this. Sexuality is not a matter of seeing but rather of sensing, taking place outside the realm of the visible (Salamon & Corbett, 2011). Essentially, with the knowledge that this otherwise masculine man does not have a penis, he can still be regarded as not only sexual but also a man. Here, the comments reiterate that masculinity is in fact gestural rather than anatomical and the purpose of the body's materiality (or its lack) is to transmit this inchoate but expressive gesture. Sexuality is not located in the genitals, or even in a particular erotogenic zone, but rather it is situated in one's intentionality towards the other and toward the world (Salamon & Corbett, 2011). Comments range from complimenting the influencer's masculine shape to envisioning him as a boyfriend. There is a definite recognition of his masculinity and sexuality through the reception of the audience.

This recognition brings a comfort and pleasure of recognition exclusively, but is in no way intending to be confused with a particular known. The influencer is open about his gender identity and has created an alternative means of sexualised self-production, without cultivating a particular identity (Berlant, 2011). In other words, he is not trying to cultivate a sexualised masculine identity, but rather negotiate how masculine sexuality is perceived and accepted. The audience have created this scene of phantasy by recognising him as a sexualised male, an object of desire, despite any presence of lack.

@Phoenix_Montoya

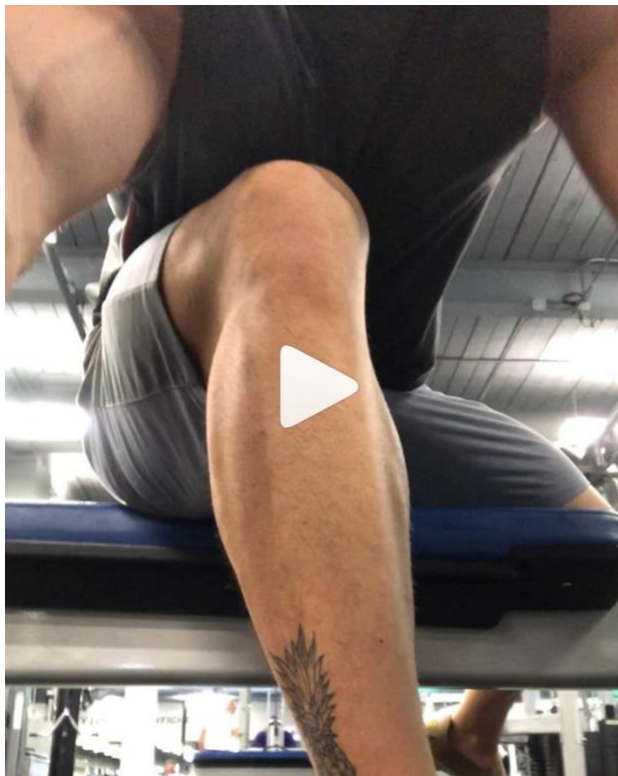



Figure 25

“Not the best angle, but just me getting in some low rows for back day. For this, keep your chest up and head forward. Let your shoulders roll forward, and pull straight back towards your stomach, keeping your back straight up. Feel the contraction right in the middle of your back, and squeeze. Slow, controlled movements. 🏋️”

#workoutwednesday #wow #workoutoftheday #wod #workoutmotivation #motivate #inspire #fit #instafit #fitness #mensfitness #lowrow #backday #cablerows #happyhumpday #ftm #transgender #ftmfitness #bodybuilder #classicphysique #gymaddict #strengthtraining #testosterone #muscle #pineapple #tattoo #guyswithtattoos #guyswholift #selfmade #progressnotperfection


The above post is a still image from a video which the influencer filmed in the gym. He places his mobile phone or filming device on the ground while he performs the exercise. The viewer is looking up at the influencer; this angle orientates the viewer’s gaze to

 **shirungazar** Love this post, pure motivation! 🙌


51w 1 like Reply
— View replies (1)

 **devongale12** Beast 🙌 🙌

51w 1 like Reply

 **queertastes** Oh my god!! The close up of that bicep at the start!!!

51w 1 like Reply
— View replies (1)

 **caballerodseth45** Veins for days 🙌 🙌 nice work!!

 **icecihot** 😏 😏 😏 😏


51w 1 like Reply

 **jacobaffhauser** Way to be bro ❤️

51w 1 like Reply

 **suicidalbarbi** so handsome!

51w 1 like Reply
— View replies (2)

 **vain_soul** Your arms 😏 😏 😏

51w 1 like Reply

look up, giving the perception of strength and vigour. He occasionally looks into the camera whilst performing the exercise. The focal point of the video is the influencer's biceps, as he moves his arms back and forth in a rowing position. His face does not show that he is struggling but rather that he is absorbed in the intensity of the movement. His caption explains the movements performed in the video and how one can achieve the same muscle tension and growth oneself. His caption highlights his identity as a fitness influencer, in that he demonstrates and explains to his viewers a 'how-to' exercise; be like me and ultimately, be as muscular as I am.

Historically, the act of bodybuilding (and muscle enlargement) was considered to be an act of remasculinisation (Messner, 2007). Following the loss of the Vietnam War, American men felt the need to challenge their confusion and humiliation by reaffirming themselves as decisive, strong and courageous; theorists have coined this cultural moment as the 'remasculinisation of America'. The muscular male body became the symbolic expression of remasculinisation, where the firm, bulging body became the ultimate spectacle and locus of masculine regeneration (Messner, 2007). The visibility of the male body and the spotlighting of muscles was considered a natural signifier of masculine power (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). This symbolism relies heavily on the display and control of the masculine body, where the muscles, especially the biceps and pectoral region, function as the synecdoche (Kac-Vergne, 2012).

While the influencer is not portraying an act of remasculinisation, he is portraying an act in which his body becomes a site of aesthetic re-creation, which in many ways can be likened a masculine regeneration of his masculine psyche expressed through visibility of his body. The influencer has mentioned in previous posts how bodybuilding has given him the power of control over his body, where he is able to sculpt areas of dysphoria. Here, he is not only expressing this display and control of the masculine body, but also providing instructions for how others can do the same.

In so doing, the influencer is recognised as an icon for bodybuilding and a mentor for many of his trans followers. This recognition becomes a site of phantasy, in which his masculine body becomes not only a spectacle but also an example and inspiration;

perhaps a site for many others to project their own fantasies. While some comments reify and concretise the influencer's body as a site of inspiration, with comments that read 'Love this post, pure motivation!', most comments recognise the masculine and muscular body as a sexualised one. Drooling and in-love emoticons and comments on specific body parts act as points of sexualised recognition. However, it is clear that the sexualised recognition lies exclusively within a masculine recognition which is reinforced through the visibility of the male body.

It is important to recognise that the influencer does not exclude the trans discourse from the masculine and bodybuilding discourse. Therefore, through his display of hypermasculinity, he simultaneously invites an inclusive masculinity; the emergence of an archetype of masculinity that undermines many principles of hegemonic masculinity (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). Here, he opens up a contemporary meaning of masculinity, one which allows trans individuals access to bodybuilding, historically a practice which reinforced and justified hegemonic masculinity (Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Kac-Vergne, 2012).

Through this post, the influencer has gained recognition through his muscular male body as well as his sexualised male body. While this brings the satisfaction of being recognised, the influencer does not allow this to become confused with being *known* as a heteronormative or hegemonic male. Through the discourse of inclusive masculinity, he produces scenes of masculinity and even ideal masculinity without pursuing or materialising the identity wholeheartedly.

In conclusion, the above analyses have explored how Instagram acts as a scene of fantasy and a vehicle that delivers a promise of happiness. Happiness holds its place as the object of desire, an object that all human beings are inclined toward (Ahmed, 2010). Happiness represents a certain kind of life, a life that has certain things and does certain things, and it is almost impossible to separate the good life from a heterosexual life (Ahmed, 2010). Happiness scripts, how to look happy and how to act happy, are powerful scripts which act as straightening devices. They speak a certain truth; deviation from the lines of the script can result in a certain unhappiness (Ahmed, 2010).

While the influencers are openly queer in many ways, they still tend to show an adherence to this happiness script. While they cannot (and do not attempt to) cultivate new heteronormative identities, they keep returning to the site of fantasy, for the pleasure recognition offers. The comments explored show the innate and almost automatic response to reaffirm this concept of happiness. They often reaffirm the influencer's masculine features, recognising him as a masculine and sexualised body. It might just be that queers are rewarded with happiness in return for approximate signs of straightness (Ahmed, 2010). However, it is clear that they are not fighting to be the protagonist of the normative script of happiness, but are rather negotiating their identities and subjectivities around it. 'The subjects of precarity are not fighting, but are caught up in a circuit of adjustment and gestural transformation in order to stay in proximity to the aspirations that are attached to the normative good life' (Berlant, 2011, p. 249).

Conclusion

Purpose of research

In my thesis, I aimed to explore how various representations and expressions of gender, and in particular masculinity, are negotiated within the heteronormative and idealistic discourse of Instagram. Through the exploration of the performances and presentations of the bodies of female to male trans fitness influencers, I was able to discover whether the mediated self-representations of these influencers reaffirmed or transcended the discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Overview of Results

Chapters 3 and 4 were both focused on linguistic forms of discourse analysis. They explored how various linguistic strategies have the power to frame an individual within a certain discourse.

In Chapter 3, I began to analyse posts, by the three influencers, that had the #selfmademan hashtag attached. Normatively, the self-made man ideology promotes a particular version of masculinity that aspires to be seen as natural and universal fact. This chapter explored how the various representations could express this ideology, regardless of its often hegemonic perceptions.

The chapter showed that for the influencers, representation of the ideology referred to a self-actualisation, and personal growth. They were not pursuing the heteronormative understandings of the ideology, but rather a personal growth towards their identities as men, albeit openly trans men. This desire for personal growth developed into a desire for a social growth, and the hope that their visibility could inspire their community and create new definitions for trans bodies.

Chapter 4 showed how language is a conscious and highly selective form of expression. It is utilised by all as an important instrument for human expression and experience.

This chapter explored language as an extension of performativity, and how the various words we choose (just as the various performances we show) can interpolate us into various discourses and thus create various identities within those discourses.

A socio-linguistic analysis gave me insight into how various identities can be constructed through language, and how this has implications for a gendered identity. The gendered binary proved to hold within the analysis, referring to man and boy without the trans prefix. However, the influencers did acknowledge their trans identities through their hashtags. This shows that based on the linguistic strategies used, their identities can be understood as an adequation of masculinity. Through acknowledging their trans identities, the influencers acknowledge that they are not identical to the cis male. However, through their linguistic strategies, that operated mostly within the binary, similarities to the cis male are highlighted in various ways.

Chapter 6, named *The Materiality of the Body: Technologies of Self and Self Expression*, focused on the site of the scar of the trans male body. The scar is the remnant of the breasts which were once attached to the chest. This is often a great source of dysmorphia, as the breast is a powerful symbol of femininity.

Each influencer is located in a different space regarding their negotiation with the breast. This negotiation exists in a continuum, from the concealed breast (chest binding), to the scar (hypervisibility of the scar), to the concealed scar (covering the contours of the chest with a red tattoo which blends into the lines of the scars). Each negotiation is heavily loaded with gendered implications. The variety of representations of the chest/site of the scar proves that each body exists in a different space. Each influencer is in a different phase of negotiation with the site of the breast. Each unique representation highlights the individuality of each influencer and the unique gendered journey he walks.

The section named *Bodybuilding: Bulking Towards a Masculinised Self* detailed the ways in which bodybuilding acts as a technology of the self.

Practices that permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

The act of bodybuilding allows the body to enter a space of constant negotiation and control in achieving a desired self. This is often associated with the pursuit of the attainment of the ideal, muscular, masculine form. I aimed to explore how their representations of the bodybuilding self hold the risk of reiterating the norms and ideals of the masculine body through the continuous support and maintenance of the practices that support these ideals. Conversely, partaking in this act could be considered a pursuit of freedom and liberation, in resisting and negotiating the discourse that states that the ideal masculine form is reserved only for cis and heteronormative males.

Each body analysed does hold (and further, strives towards) the characteristics of the ideal masculine form – broad shoulders, defined muscles that particularly bulge in the bicep and pectoral regions, and a slim, v-shaped torso. While the influencers expressed openly that the act of bodybuilding was an important aspect of the pursuit of their masculinised self, they placed greater emphasis on how the control and negotiation of the body is used as a vehicle for achieving freedom and facilitating healing. Through the interweaving of the trans and mental health discourses, the influencers accelerate a critical and querying potential for the disengagement of the practice from hegemonic masculinity and a move into a practice of liberation.

Clear or Rose-tinted Spectacles: Instagram – a Space for the Spectacle explores the implications of self-representation within the context of Instagram. I aimed to understand how the showcasing of the self within the normative and largely idealistic platform of Instagram had important gendered implications.

Here's to Looking at Me: Instagram as a Multi-faceted Mirror came to show how the streams of photographs of the self on each unique Instagram profile can be compared to

a personal mirror. Just like a mirror, the archive of self-representations allows the eye to be turned inward, teaching one how to conceive of oneself and move from disidentification to identification. It is important to consider how the presentation of the self within the normative context of Instagram holds great implications for each influencer's identity-formation and self-revelation.

With the exploration of the selected posts, it is clear to see that each influencer is a spectacle in his own right. The personal archive that acts as a public mirror allows the influencer to separate part of himself in documenting various narratives of growth, transition, triumph and self-awareness within his own trans discourse, despite the fact that these representations occur within the heteronormative context of Instagram.

The final section, *Recognition as The Promise of Happiness*, aimed to explore the possible reasons that the influencers return to the Instagram site time and time again. Undoubtedly, the influencer is aware that his presentation and performance extends beyond the self, allowing for Instagram to act not only as a personal mirror, but as a looking glass through which a potential one billion viewers have access.

The audience, therefore, play an important role in the performative repetitions the influencer displays for them. They provide a certain kind of pleasure. With this, Instagram becomes a vehicle which carries the promise of happiness in the form of recognition. Every human being gains great pleasure in recognition. The audience grant this for the influencer through not only recognising but reiterating his identity as masculine and sexual. He does not fight for recognition in normativity, but rather despite it. Instagram becomes a scene of fantasy in which he is recognised as a desirable man, despite his existence outside normativity.

Discussion and overview

A wider analysis of the study proved the extensive scope of gender roles and expressions. The way one chooses to express his or her gender is ultimately an extremely personal process. It is only the binary which gives a script of how one ought

to behave, perform and express oneself. For any person who situates him/herself fluidly along the binary, even crossing it from time to time, there is no obvious assumption that can be made about any unique identity.

The influencers showed how gender and identity are in fact impenetrable and complex. There were instances within my analysis where I was so sure I could identify each influencer as 'this' or 'that'. Yet ultimately, I think this was the greatest and most valuable insight that I gained over time; not everyone has a box that they wish to fit neatly within, and even those who live in a 'boxed' society where it is impulsive to categorise each person we are confronted with, it is important to recognise that perhaps that box hasn't been named or identified by the person him/herself.

It was at this realisation that Instagram as the context of this study became the perfect metaphor. Instagram is the unapologetic reflection of heteronormativity, promoting and dictating a certain idealised body type. Here, the influencers, without compunction, created identities outside the general narrative of the platform they used. While they did adequate characteristics, and the aesthetic, of the ideal hegemonic male, they challenged and negotiated the ideal further. It became clear that across the three influencers, no one was hoping for a solidification within the binary, but rather a recognition in spite of it. Each one was simply on their own gendered journey, aiming for their own definition of idealism; however, with the transformation of the ideal man into the ideal trans man.

Limitations of Study

As this study was limited to three influencers, it is not a true reflection of female to male bodybuilders as a whole. This is especially true considering the method of purposive sampling that was used in this study. Researcher bias may have unconsciously affected the profiles chosen in order to further enrich this study and this may have implications for further reproducibility of this research. Furthermore, it is limited to a class of trans males that have access to the gym, and smartphones which can take photographs and upload to database applications. Future studies would benefit by exploring trans bodies that do not have such privileges. How do these bodies negotiate

gender identities? How do they seek recognition? What performances do they engage in, if any, to reiterate a various identity?

When regarding access to social media and database applications, it is vital to consider the issue of temporality. As a researcher, I have controlled as many aspects of the study as I can and was able to capture content as situated in time. However, the autonomy that such sites afford its users and the subsequent constant generation and regeneration of content means that posts may have been deleted and comments and hashtags may have been added, edited or removed since the time of this study.

Importantly, as the researcher – a white, cisgender, heterosexual female – my lens may differ from bodies that exist within different spaces. While I attempted to use a neutral lens within the framework of transgender studies, I cannot doubt that my assumptions would have differed from a trans researcher who had a more involved understanding of the discourse.

Implications of Study

I hope that this study has enforced the importance of gender expressions, especially within heteronormative discourses. I hope that this encourages education about and awareness of the gender binary, and the importance of challenging it. It is important that we recognise a complex, wider array of identities; some that may have been studied, others not.

Above all, to recognise that all human beings simply wish for happiness and recognition. It is important to conceptualise each individual attempt at recognition with an open mind and heart, separate from all heteronormative judgement. Ultimately, we should all aspire to reach the fantasy, that the self-consuming negotiation we all partake in every moment can fall, where the need for identification becomes a fleeting memory.

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