Negotiating Heteronormativity to Challenge Gender Inequality: What's Happening on Instagram?

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Abstract

Gender is performative and embodied. Heteronormative performances and embodiments (re)produce gender inequality in part by maintaining the cultural stigmatization of femaleness and femininity, and the hegemonic function of maleness and masculinity. Those who choose to transgress heteronormativity threaten its cultural legitimacy as the only 'natural', 'normal' and 'correct' way to do gender. In doing so, they also challenge broader processes of gender inequality. In this thesis – through a critical, feminist, and social constructionist lens – I present a visual narrative inquiry into the ways in which female bodybuilders, male bodybuilders, and transgender men perform gender through representations of their bodies on the social media website, Instagram. Female bodybuilders, through representations of their muscular bodies on Instagram, present narratives around female strength, independence, and empowerment that challenge feminine expectations around female weakness, passivity, and subservience. Male bodybuilders, by objectifying their bodies, by being emotionally expressive, and by being emotionally intimate with other men on Instagram, present inclusive masculinities that challenge hegemonic masculine expectations around dominance, stoicism, and rationality. Through their visibility and advocacy on Instagram, trans men present gendered narratives that challenge the heteronormative assumption that all men are born with stereotypically male bodies. These trans men also challenge male hegemony through relatively soft expressions of masculinity. However, I also reveal how the gender-transgressive narratives presented by these groups remain heavily constrained by heteronormative surveillance, through which others heavily police their bodies and encourage them to limit their transgressions through various heteronormative bodily conformities. I argue that these bodily conformities function in part to negotiate, or preserve, the transgressive identities of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram. Through

their exposure to heteronormative surveillance on Instagram, these individuals learn that, in order to have their transgressive identities recognized and validated by others, they must maintain some degree of heteronormative bodily intelligibility; otherwise, their transgressions are dismissed. This is counter to past assertions made by many gender scholars, who have claimed that the gender-conformities of these groups negate or outweigh their resistance. My conclusions take into account the relational and negotiated nature of gender; how our experiences of gender depend on, and manifest through, our interactions with others. Ultimately, I reveal contemporary ways in which cultural understandings of gender are diversifying through online social practices, while also revealing how bodily expectations in particular remain heavily involved in the (re)production of gender inequality. This thesis has important implications for the feminist quest towards eradicating dualistic understandings of gender and the power differentials that exist between the cultural categories of 'men' and 'women'; 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

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Introduction

Gender shapes our lives in many ways, but is most significant in its (re)production of inequality. Gender scholars are currently questioning how gender inequality manages to persist despite robust efforts (e.g., feminist movements) to combat it (Anderson, 2009; Ridgeway, 2011). One way in which gender inequality has been found to persist is through 'heteronormative' cultural assumptions about bodies (Bolin, 1992; Choi, 2000; Lorber, 1993; Messerschmidt, Messner, Connell, & Martin, 2018). Heteronormativity assumes that only two gender identities exist (man/woman), and that these gender identities reflect biological sex; that men have anatomically male bodies, and that women have anatomically female bodies (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Additionally, heteronormativity assumes that men are masculine while women are feminine (Bordo, 2004; Schippers, 2007). First and foremost, these heteronormative notions about bodies invalidate the inevitable diversity and ambiguity which exists with respect to people's gender identities and related bodily experiences. This includes those of androgynous (or non-binary, gender-neutral, or gender-queer) individuals who often do not identify or portray themselves as being exclusively male or female, or as predominantly feminine or masculine (Bem, 1974). In addition to over-simplifying people's gendered experiences, heteronormativity reinforces gender inequalities by, for instance, prescribing stigmatized and stigmatizing feminine expectations to women and their bodies (Okasala, 2018), while prescribing hegemonic masculine expectations to men and their bodies (Bordo, 2004; Oskala, 2018). Women's bodies are subjected to disciplinary practices of femininity which are aimed at controlling, regulating, and 'improving' their bodies (Coffey, 2013; Scott, 2011), and this reflects and reinforces the cultural assumption that women's bodies are relatively fragile, weak, and insufficient in their natural state. For example, women are much more likely than men to ornament their bodies with

jewelry, hairstyles, and makeup, and are much more likely to undergo cosmetic procedures and to diet and exercise in pursuit of bodily appearance ideals (Bartky, 1998; Oskala, 2018). Meanwhile, men's bodies are assumed to be relatively sufficient in their natural state, and are therefore much less subjected to stigmatized cultural standards of appearance (Scott, 2011). These heteronormative assumptions about gendered bodies function to secure patriarchal power in part by (re)producing the impression that 'men' and 'women' represent distinct categories and, furthermore, that men and their bodies are the 'naturally' superior standards against which women and their bodies are measured as opposite and deemed inferior (Bartky, 1998; Bordo, 2004; Koenig, 2003).

Theorizing Gender and the Body

Feminist research on gender and the body has been criticized for approaching heteronormativity as though it is a set of expectations which *pre-exist* bodies, and for approaching bodies as though they are *passive* objects to which these expectations are prescribed (Coffey, 2013; Giddens, 1991). Alternatively, critical feminist theories of embodiment have been put forth in an effort to conceptualize how people *actively (re)produce* heteronormativity through their bodily practices and (inter)actions (Butler, 1993a; 1993b; Coleman, 2005; Grogan et al., 2004; Gill et al., 2005). Moreover, critical and feminist gender scholars assert that heteronormativity manifests itself through people's active and successive embodiments and (inter)actions which are in-line with heteronormative ideals. Such an understanding takes into account the relational aspect of identity performance (Goffman, 1959); how our gendered identities, rather than being pre-determined, are performed according to how we react to, and engage with, each other (Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013). As Phillips (2009) claims,

"we become who we are in relation to others, as others become themselves in relation to us" (p. 304). In addition to acknowledging how people (re)produce heteronormativity through conformity, critical feminist approaches to gender acknowledge people's agency to challenge heteronormativity by refusing to embody and perform it (Coffey, 2013); "Interpretations of gender identity […] must leave room for the ways that individuals attempt to refashion, recreate, or reconstruct their gendered sense of self" (Wesely, 2001, p. 163).

Foucault (1977)'s conceptualization of power and surveillance is useful for further understanding the embodied and relational nature of gender performance and, furthermore, for understanding how heteronormative embodiments serve to uphold patriarchal power. Foucault argues that power is not enacted over bodies, but *through* bodies; "power reaches into the very grain of individuals and touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions, attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). Moreover, power can be understood as being wielded through surveillance and self-surveillance. People practice heteronormative surveillance by, for instance, criticizing others who do not conform to heteronormativity, and by accepting those who do. People internalize the heteronormative surveillance they experience by others and engage in *self*-surveillance by conforming to heteronormativity; people are motivated to conform to heteronormativity by a reasonable desire to gain acceptance and to avoid discrimination while engaging with others (Koenig, 2003; West & Zimmerman, 1987). It is through heteronormative (self-)surveillance that heteronormativity wields patriarchal power because it becomes "a compulsory performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence" (Butler, 1993b, p. 315). Foucault's work around power and surveillance is often cited in relation to cultural processes of domination. However, his contention that individuals have agency to

critique and resist processes of domination through self-surveillance is equally important. When people refuse to conform to heteronormativity, they challenge its existence and, in doing so, they challenge the processes of patriarchal power that heteronormativity functions to produce and maintain.

Heteronormative (Self-)surveillance on Social Media

Hollander (2013) notes that, while it is often acknowledged that people are held accountable to heteronormativity by others, "by whom, how, and with what consequences are rarely addressed" (p. 6). Social media have become heavily embedded in social life, often mediating much of people's every day social interactions. Social media are also highly visual in addition to highly interactive. For these reasons, social media offer unprecedented opportunities to examine how heteronormative surveillance influences the ways in which people construct gender through visual (and textual) representations of their bodies (Barry & Martin, 2016; Mitrou, Kandias, Stavrou, & Gritzalis, 2014; Smith, 2016; Tiidenberg & Gomez Cruz, 2015).

Social media have been shown to facilitate substantial gendered surveillance, particularly with respect to bodily appearance. For instance, surveillance on social media often encourages people to present idealized versions of their bodies in the photographs they post of themselves (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Hum, Chamberlin, Hambright, Portwood, & Bevan, 2011; Mitrou et al., 2014) because this makes it more likely that they will receive positive attention in the form of, for instance, 'likes' and positive comments (Marwick, 2015; Sheehan & Zervigon, 2015; Tiidenberg & Gomez Cruz, 2015). These methods of self-mediation have been shown to exacerbate social media users' desire to achieve bodily expectations of appearance (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014; Sorokowski et al., 2015). Additionally, women who use

social media have been found to be more likely to compare their own bodies to bodies on social media than to bodies presented in the mass media because they judge social media representations of bodies to be more realistic and thus comparable to their own bodies (Cohen & Blaszczynski, 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Shen & Bissell, 2013). However, given the highly self-mediated and idealized nature of social media images, this assumption is likely unfounded, and is likely to perpetuate body image concerns. The heavy surveillance which exists over bodies on social media is likely due in part to the lack of face-to-face communication on social media, which makes it more likely that people will openly judge each other's bodies and judge each other's bodies more harshly than in environments outside of social media (Mitrou, Kandias, Stavrou, & Gritzalis, 2014).

Despite the heavy surveillance being practiced over bodies on social media, social media have also been shown to provide a relatively diverse representation of gendered bodies in comparison to traditional forms of media (e.g., films, advertisements) (Andsager, 2014). This is largely because social media content is predominantly mediated by individuals, rather than by profit-driven corporations and institutions. Social media have blurred traditional boundaries between media production, distribution, and reception (Andsager, 2014; Gauntlett, 2011); now, everyday people can have some control over how bodies are being presented to the masses. People can present non-heteronormative bodies and identities on social media to mass audiences, which can potentially challenge idealized and heteronormative notions of gender and the body (Cohen et al., 2019).

The Gender-Transgressive Potential of Bodybuilding

Bodybuilding is a highly gender-encoded sport in which people pursue fat loss and muscle gain through rigorous diet and exercise routines with the goal of achieving a lean and muscular body (Choi, 2003). It has been argued that bodybuilding provocatively reveals the performative and embodied nature of gender and that it challenges the essentialist, dualistic, and oppositional categories of man/woman and masculinity/femininity (Rosdahl, 2014; Richardson, 2004; Sawicki, 1991). Muscularity has long been a naturalized symbol of male strength, power, and domination (Wamsley, 2007), and has long been important for maintaining visible differences between men and women (Choi, 2003; Holmlund, 1989). The excessive and active pursuit of muscularity which characterizes both male and female bodybuilding is argued to expose how masculinity is a *performed* aspect of maleness, rather than a *natural* aspect of maleness (Bolin, 1992). Furthermore, the extreme bodily objectification which characterizes bodybuilding practices, particularly during bodybuilding competitions where men and women showcase their muscularity, further exposes masculinity as something which is performed (Scott, 2011; Wesely, 2001).

Female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders tend to be avid users of social media, where they can showcase and discuss their bodies and related bodybuilding practices (Barry & Martin, 2016; Lupinetti, 2015). However, very little gender scholarship (e.g., Barry & Martin, 2016; Lupinetti, 2015) has explored bodybuilding practices on social media. Furthermore, we could not locate any research that has focused on the particular, complementary ways in which female and male bodybuilders (re)produce and/or challenge heteronormativity and patriarchal power, and how these processes are facilitated through (self-)surveillance. Further examination regarding how female and male bodybuilders perform masculinity and femininity on social media, and how

heteronormative (self-)surveillance is implicated in these performances, has the potential to be extremely revealing with respect to how contemporary bodily representations and practices (re)produce and/or challenge broader processes of gender inequality.

Unsurprisingly, bodybuilding has been dominated by men since its inception in the second half of the 20th century (Heywood, 1998; Scott, 2011). Interestingly, during the women's and gay movements of the 1980s, both female and male bodybuilding saw considerable spikes in popularity (St. Martin & Gavey, 1996). Gender scholars have argued that more women began bodybuilding during this period as a way to evoke feminist resistance (Choi, 2003; Dworkin, 2001; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996), and that more men began bodybuilding as a way to re-assert male hegemony in the face of increasing gender equality (Magallares, 2013; McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005; Swami & Voracek, 2013). Below, I discuss existing contentions in the literature regarding the transgressive potential of female bodybuilding and male bodybuilding.

The gender-transgressive potential of female bodybuilding.

Female bodybuilding has often been regarded within feminist literature as an important and meaningful arena within which dualistic and naturalized assumptions about men's and women's bodies may be challenged (Bolin, 1992; Daniels, 1992; Guthrie & Castelnuovo; Heywood, 1998; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996; Rosdahl, 2014; Schulze, 1997; Worthen & Baker, 2016). It has been argued that, by developing considerable muscularity, female bodybuilders challenge the notion that women are naturally fragile and weak and that men are naturally stronger and more dominant (Edwards, Molnar, & Tod, 2018; Rosdahl, 2014; Worthen & Baker, 2016). However, other feminist scholars have questioned the extent to which female bodybuilding is an act of feminist resistance (Bartky, 1998; Heywood, 1998), with most arguing

that it simultaneously represents both resistance and compliance (Bunsell, 2013; Scott, 2011; St Martin & Gavey 1996). Female bodybuilders are encouraged to limit the size of their muscular development through disciplinary practices of femininity (Bartky, 1998; Dworkin, 2001; Land, 2015). Female bodybuilders ornament and sexualize (e.g., objectify) their muscularity, which detracts from it and repositions their bodies as more stereotypically feminine (Gruber, 2007; Lowe, 1998; Obel, 2002). It has also been widely noted that, while competing male bodybuilders are generally judged according to who is the most muscular, the muscularity of female bodybuilders must be minimized to correspond with feminine beauty standards (Dworkin, 2001; Bordo, 2004; Choi, 2003). For instance, female bodybuilders may be penalized for being too muscular (Dworkin, 2001) and are judged according to their poise, clothing, makeup, and hairstyles (Bolin, 1992; Brace-Govan, 2004; Gruber, 2007; Land, 2015). Overall, there is a lack of consensus in the feminist literature regarding whether or not female bodybuilding should be understood as an act of feminist resistance.

The gender-transgressive potential of male bodybuilding.

Male bodybuilding has traditionally been viewed as a hegemonic masculine practice; male bodybuilders have been argued to pursue very large, muscular bodies as a way to evoke power and dominance over others (Klein, 1993; Swami & Voracek, 2013; Wamsley, 2007). Meanwhile, a number of gender scholars have proposed that dominant masculinities in general have become progressively less anti-feminine (e.g., hegemonic) and more inclusive since the 1980s (Anderson, 2009; McCormarck & Anderson, 2010). This seems to contradict the fact that male bodybuilding began to rise in popularity alongside the women's and gay movements (Klein, 1993). However, it has been argued that the spike in popularity of male bodybuilding

may be understood as a response to a cultural increase in men's self-objectification and appearance concern, which have long been stereotypically feminine orientations (Cafri & Thompson, 2004; Clements & Field, 2014; Ricciardelli, Clow & White, 2010; Featherstone, 2010; Kozlowski, 2010; Morrison et al., 2003). Because the male bodybuilder's body is judged exclusively on appearance rather than on functionality (e.g., strength), various gender scholars have argued that male bodybuilding is an inclusive masculine practice which challenges the traditional assumption that, relative to women, men are disembodied and rational (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Bjornestad, Kandal, & Anderssen, 2014; Richardson, 2004). Furthermore, it has been argued that, like female bodybuilders, the gender-subversions of male bodybuilders are compensated for; in particular, their self-objectification and appearance concern have been shown to be counteracted by the strength and power that their muscularity symbolizes (Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005; Hobza, Walker, Yakushko, & Peugh, 2007; Ricciardelli, Clow, & White, 2010). Evidently, similar to the gender literature on female bodybuilding, the gender literature on male bodybuilding lacks consensus regarding whether or not male bodybuilding is a gender-conforming practice, gender-transgressive practice, or both.

The Gender-Transgressive Potential of Trans Maleness

Like bodybuilders, trans people's bodily practices have been shown to be highly-gender encoded; in fact, it has long been argued that trans people are the most provocative disrupters of heteronormativity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Trans people reveal the performative nature of gender and challenge essentialist and dualistic assumptions about gender first and foremost by identifying with the gender opposite to that which is heteronormatively assigned to their bodies. Also like bodybuilders, transgender people are avid users of social media (Harper, Bruce,

Serrano, & Jamil, 2009). In fact, social media have been proposed to play a pivotal role in the gender identity construction, management, and expression of trans people in part because they can readily engage and connect with many similar others, which is less common in environments outside of social media (Harper, Bruce, Serrano, & Jamil, 2009; Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2012). Additionally, because social media offer more diverse representations of gender and sexuality than the mass media, they enable trans people to feel validated (Bond, 2015; Andsager, 2014; Drushel, 2010; Fox & Ralston, 2016; Shaw, 1997). It has been proposed that LGBTQ+ persons find more acceptance, identity-affirmation, and support on social media than in environments outside of social media, which makes them more comfortable disclosing their non-heteronormative differences on these platforms (McKenna & Bargh, 1998; Wakeford, 2002). However, as of yet, research that focuses on how trans people construct gendered identities on social media, including through representations of their bodies, appears to be non-existent (McHale, Dotterer, & Kim, 2009). The interactive and image-based nature of Instagram makes it an ideal social media platform for examining how heteronormative surveillance influences trans people's gendered identity constructions.

Similar to the literature on bodybuilding, there are various contentions within the transgender literature around the transgressive potential of trans identities. Firstly, transgender scholars are largely conflicted over whether or not trans people are born in the 'wrong' bodies. Some have argued that the deep desire that most trans people have for a differently sexed body points to the biological derivation of gender; that the desire for a differently sexed body is, at least to some extent, a natural desire for trans people (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998). Other transgender scholars have challenged this assertion, arguing that there are far more "mistakes of society" than there are "mistakes of nature" (Devor, 1997, pp. 607 – 608);

that trans people feel compelled to physically transition because *heteronormativity* (not biology) has rendered the match between their bodies and gender identities unintelligible (Butler, 2013; Green, 2004). Accordingly, various scholars have asserted that trans people who choose not to undergo hormonal therapy and sex reassignment surgeries are more transgressive of gender norms than those who do (Bornstein, 1994; Feinberg, 1992; Wilchins, 1997). Furthermore, transgender scholars who do not believe that trans people were born in the wrong bodies argue that trans movements should embrace the political potential of trans bodies which do not conform to heteronormativity, rather than try to integrate them into dominant cultural understandings of gender by, for example, normalizing gender re-assignment surgeries (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Borstein, 1994; Feinverd, 1992; Wilchins, 1997). These scholars also point to the dangers of pathologizing trans identities; the assumption that trans people are born in the wrong bodies may (re)produce the cultural notion that trans people are abnormal and even mentally deficient (Rubin, 2003).

In ways that are similar to bodybuilders, trans people challenge the essentialist and dualistic notion that men (with stereotypically male bodies) are masculine while women (with stereotypically female bodies) are feminine. Halbertsam (1998) was among the first to de-link men and masculinity when she studied the masculinities enacted by butch lesbians, tom boys, and drag kings. She asserts that masculinities are most complex and transgressive when not connected to the male body. Like female bodybuilders, the 'butch lesbians', 'tom boys' and 'drag kings' discussed by Halberstam are transgressive in their re-gendering of the female body as masculine. By opposing the dualistic and essentialist assumption that only men can be masculine, female masculinity challenges heteronormativity and patriarchal power (Halberstam, 1998; Nguyen, 2008).

An important way in which trans men differ from female bodybuilders (and all women who enact masculinities) is in their self-identification as male and in their common desire to physically pass as male (Gardiner, 2013; Rubin, 2008). Accordingly, many transgender scholars believe that trans men's enactments of masculinity are irrelevant to feminist efforts; they assert that, because trans men's masculinities often accompany bodies which appear stereotypically male, they reinforce heteronormativity and patriarchal power (Aboim, 2016; Jeffreys, 2014; Koenig, 2003; West & Zimmerman, 1987). It has been shown that, as trans men begin to physically pass as stereotypically male, they suddenly find themselves experiencing male privilege (Aboim, 2016; Schilt, 2010). Male privilege is a symptom of patriarchy; due to men's more powerful positions in society – bolstered in part by their assumed natural superiority – men tend to be afforded more advantages and opportunities than women, such as higher paying jobs (Keith, 2017). For instance, trans men who physically pass as male are often treated as 'one of the guys' at work, and as such, have been found to receive more recognition and respect at their workplaces than they did as women (Schilt, 2010). Furthermore, it has been shown that, similar to how male bodybuilders compensate for their feminine practices, trans men who do not physically pass as male compensate for their female appearance by enacting hegemonic masculinities (Koenig, 2003). For these reasons, there is a substantial lack of critical feminist research that acknowledges and examines the gender-transgressive potential of trans maleness (Abelson, 2014; Aboim, 2016).

Various transgender scholars (Abelson, 2014; Schilt, 2010) have pointed to the transgressive potential of trans men, having demonstrated that trans men often enact masculinities much more consciously than cisgender men since they have had to construct their masculinities from the ground-up throughout their physical transitions from female to male. Due

to being consciously aware of their masculine identity constructions, trans men have been shown to be very critical of the hegemonic function of the stereotypical masculinities they perform/do not perform, and the male privilege that these masculinities serve to accomplish (Koenig, 2003). For example, trans men have been shown to be more likely to resist the hegemonic expectations of masculinity that they suddenly find themselves faced with upon physically passing as male (Green, 2004; Rubin, 2003). Additionally, it has been shown that, once trans men physically pass as male, they often revert back to the femininities that characterized their gender identities before they transitioned since they no longer feel the need to compensate for a female appearance (Rubin, 2008). Furthermore, trans men have been shown to enact overall much more inclusive forms of masculinity than cisgender men because they have had the opportunity to integrate femininities into their gender identities prior to transitioning, since they were not policed by the hegemonic masculine expectations which typically deter men from being feminine (Green, 2004; Devor, 1997; Rubin, 2003).

Clearly, more research on trans male identities is needed in order to understand their gender-transgressive potential. Given that social media are popular places for trans men to construct and make sense of their gender identities, and given the often highly interactive and visual nature of social media, they are ideal places for examining trans men's processes of physically transitioning to male, their enactments of masculinity and femininity, and how these are influenced by the heteronormative surveillance they experience by others.

Gender-Transgression and (Self-)surveillance on Instagram

It is important to further explore how heteronormativity is (re)produced through surveillance on social media. However, it is equally important to acknowledge people's active

and embodied engagement with this surveillance and their ability to challenge heteronormativity by choosing to present gender-transgressive bodies and practices. In fact, it was once the hope of a number of feminist scholars (e.g., Koskela, 2006; Plant, 2000; Turkle, 1995) that the advent of online environments, particularly social media websites, would enable people to challenge oppressive and overly simplistic gendered ideals through diverse self-representations. At the time of this research, however, very few studies have examined gender defiance on social media, although this is not to say that such instances are necessarily rare. In one study (Murray, 2015), women on social media were found to deliberately protest the objectified, passive, and sexualized ways in which women's bodies have traditionally been culturally constructed through mass media by presenting their bodies in ways (e.g., certain poses, facial expressions) that evoke strength, defiance, and empowerment (Murray, 2015). More research is needed to identify and examine gender-subversive embodiments and performances on social media and how these might challenge heteronormativity and broader processes of gender inequality.

Instagram is a principally image-based social media website where users share photographs, other images, and up to one-minute-long videos on their profiles. These photographs, images, and videos can contain captions as well as comments published by other Instagram users. Instagram users 'follow' each other in order to have each other's posts appear on their newsfeeds. Most of the visual content on Instagram are photographs; as such, there are countless photographs of bodies. Exposure to photographs of bodies on Instagram is also regular and frequent; Instagram is accessed almost exclusively through mobile phones, and one third of Instagram users use the site multiple times a day (Manikonda, Hu, & Kambhampati, 2014). Additionally, unlike other social media websites, most Instagram profiles are publicly accessible rather than restricted to select friends, family members, and acquaintances. As such, an

Instagram user's audience can spread far and wide. For these reasons, Instagram offers a particularly compelling social media website for examining how female and male bodybuilders and trans men transgress heteronormativity, including through representations of their bodies, and the potential impact of these transgressions. Instagram is also a compelling site for examining how heteronormative (self-)surveillance operates over, and how it influences, the bodily representations and related gendered practices of female and male bodybuilders and trans men. However, at the time this research was being planned, Instagram had rarely been addressed in literature on body-related issues (Fox & Rooney, 2015). Furthermore, very little research (e.g., Lupinetti, 2015) had focused on the gender making practices of bodybuilders on Instagram, and it appears that virtually no such research had focused on trans men.

Visual Research on Instagram

Psychologists have begun to take interest in examining social media as sites for visual research into psychological phenomena, including self-expression, identity construction, and relationships and interaction (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014). However, there is a need to further develop methodologies for visual research on social media. Most social media research has focused on consumer behaviour and public opinion in the interests of corporations and government entities; as such, research on social media tends to employ quantitative and 'big data' approaches to understanding textual information such as, for instance, the number of 'likes' on a Facebook advertisement and tweets about a political event. There is currently a need to merge visual and text-based research methods in order to fully capitalize on social media's rich data and what they can tell us about contemporary psychological practices manifesting online (Highfield & Leaver, 2015; Laestadius, 2017).

To date, psychologists interested in examining the visual appear to have rarely used Instagram as a site for research. This can be partly attributed to the overwhelming amount of images on Instagram, which makes it a seemingly unrealistic or daunting place to conduct qualitative and visual 'small data' research, and a more suitable place for quantitative big data research focused on text (Hand, 2017). While big data quantitative research is useful for understanding general practices among Instagram users, as represented by textual information, qualitative small data approaches to Instagram research would be useful for examining specific psychological practices among Instagram users and their relationships to the visual. Because Instagram is characteristically visual in addition to highly interactive, it is a particularly useful social media site for understanding the visually mediated ways in which people are currently representing and expressing themselves and communicating with others online (Highfield & Leaver, 2015; Kaufer, 2015; Jang et al., 2015).

For visual researchers, analyzing posts on Instagram needs to involve more than just an analysis of the text and visual form of images, but also an analysis of what posts implicitly represent and accomplish (Hand, 2017). For instance, psychologists researching on Instagram need to bear in mind that Instagram posts are highly curated and self-mediated, and as such, tend to be highly idealized and not necessarily reflective of people's experiences outside of Instagram (Marwick, 2015). It is therefore important for Instagram researchers to inform their analyses by considering the intentional and often idealized ways in which Instagram users produce and display images. This includes how people actively (re)produce (or challenge) cultural ideals through the images they post on Instagram, how they describe them, how they react to images and their descriptions on Instagram, and how they interact with other Instagram users. The polysemic nature of images contributes to the complexity involved in discerning the meanings of

Instagram posts (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Edwards & Hart, 2004); images are highly subjective and have multiple and complex meanings. Psychologists researching on Instagram must move beyond analyzing text and the literal form of images on Instagram to consider what posts implicitly represent and accomplish. This would involve considering how Instagram posts indicate how people desire to be seen by others, how posts affect the people who view them, and how posts correspond with broader cultural processes; this includes, for instance, the cultural processes of inequality which rely on the (re)production of cultural ideals, which are often represented in Instagram posts (Marwick, 2015). In order to break down the self-mediated and polysemic nature of images on Instagram, visual psychological researchers should refer to the text which contextualizes images on Instagram, including captions (which often contain hashtags), comments, and numbers of 'likes' and followers (Highfield & Leaver, 2015; Laestadius, 2017).

Instagram users often use captions to describe the images they post, and often use the hashtags in their captions to classify the images they post (Highfield & Leaver, 2015; Laestadius, 2017). Therefore, captions and hashtags can provide important information regarding users' thoughts, feelings, and motivations behind the images they post. While this information may not always be explicitly stated, researchers can certainly use captions and hashtags to help deduce this information.

Additionally, visual researchers can refer to the comments, likes, and followings associated with Instagram posts in order to understand how and to what extent they affect people. This information is often important because, for instance, Instagram users often learn to idealize their content because they are motivated by the positive attention they receive on idealized posts; people are more likely to like and leave flattering comments on idealized posts and are more

likely to follow the poster's profile (Marwick, 2015). As such, Instagram users who attract the most likes, followers, and comments tend to appear conventionally attractive, rich, and tend to post traditional status symbols like nice houses, luxury cars, and fit bodies (Marwick, 2015). In fact, Hand (2019) suggests that it is often the amount of times an image is circulated on social media (e.g., followed, liked, commented on) which ascribes power to the image, rather than its actual composition. Examining the ways in which people contextualize images on Instagram is also important for understanding potential ways in which everyday people, as newfound producers of mass (social) media, actively subvert dominant cultural images on Instagram in addition to (re)producing them. For example, Cohen et al. (2019) examined the 'body positive' movement on Instagram, which is generated through the mass posting of diverse bodies of all shapes, sizes, colours, features, and abilities. People post these images with popular hashtags such as #bodypositive and #bopo with the goal of spreading body positivity among people on Instagram. Exposure to this body positive content on Instagram was shown to improve people's moods and to encourage them to appreciate, and to be more satisfied with, their bodies.

The research presented throughout this thesis involves a combination of visual and textual analyses of the Instagram content represented by female and male bodybuilders and trans men. My analyses are informed with the knowledge that the Instagram images posted by female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram are contextualized through textual information such as captions, hashtags, and comments, which are extremely important to refer to in order to adequately discern the meanings of images on Instagram. My analyses are also informed with the knowledge that Instagram content is highly self-mediated and curated, and therefore, that the content posted by the female and male bodybuilders and trans men in my studies are not necessarily reflective of their everyday lives outside of Instagram. I suspected that

these individuals would idealize the content that they post on Instagram in ways that are in-line with various heteronormative cultural ideals. I was also aware that they would transgress various heteronormative cultural ideals through representations of their gender-subversive bodily practices. I was primarily interested in how female and male bodybuilders and trans men negotiate heteronormativity and construct gender identities through the visual content that they post on Instagram.

Visual narrative inquiry.

In this thesis, I employed visual narrative inquiry, which is a visual research methodology that has been used in psychological research to examine a variety of aspects of human experience, including feelings, thoughts, motivations, and the construction of self and identity (Bach, 2007). Visual narrative inquiry is a branch of narrative inquiry, which follows the notion that people experience, understand, and present their lives through stories (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). In research, a *visual* narrative is a story containing made or found images (Reisman, 2008); a visual narrative may be constructed with a series of images created by the researcher(s) or research participant(s), or the researcher(s) or participant(s) may locate images that already exist in order to identify, make sense of, and present a particular narrative (Caine, 2010; Mattern et al., 2015; Reisman, 2008; Sairanen & Kumpulainen, 2014).

Importantly, people's narratives are shaped by the sociocultural narratives that govern their experiences (Clandinin, 2006). Visual narrative inquiry within psychology should involve considering how the images we see throughout our daily lives, and the cultural meanings attached to them, govern our narratives. As previously discussed, gendered images of bodies permeate our culture, with the majority of these images invalidating the inevitable diversity of

bodies in that they set strict and unrealistic standards for what ideal and 'normal' bodies are supposed to look like for men and women. For these reasons, visual narrative inquiry is a useful methodology for examining how female and male bodybuilders and trans men construct gendered narratives through visual representations of themselves and their bodies on Instagram, and for conceptualizing how these gendered narratives are constrained and influenced by heteronormative cultural narratives.

Conceptualizing the Present Thesis

As I document throughout this thesis, resistance against heteronormativity is challenging and complex, but possible. Such resistance is realized through the gender-transgressive embodiments and performances of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram. I aim to address the complex and (inter)active ways in which female and male bodybuilders and trans men negotiate heteronormative understandings of gender through self-mediated, visual, and gendered narratives regarding their bodies and related practices on Instagram. In particular, I aim to reveal how these negotiations correspond with the surveillance enacted by other people on Instagram who react to the gender-transgressive embodiments and practices of female and male bodybuilders and trans men. I address potential ways in which heteronormative surveillance serves to/does not serve to discourage the gendered non-conformity of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram and how it repositions/does not reposition their bodies as more heteronormative. I also address how these gender-subversive groups take control of their gendered narratives on Instagram and engage with the surveillance they experience on Instagram by choosing to conform to, resist, and/or openly critique it. To conduct my research, I take a critical, feminist, and social constructionist approach to visual narrative inquiry, and employ

Foucault's (1977)'s conceptualization of power and surveillance. I acknowledge gender as a social construction which is embodied and performed. I also acknowledge how essentialist, dualistic, and oppositional expectations of maleness versus femaleness, and femininity versus masculinity, are (re)produced through (inter)actions in ways that reinforce patriarchal power. I conceptualize the gendered embodiments and performances presented by the female and male bodybuilders and trans men as visual narratives that tell a story about the particular ways in which they negotiate heteronormative cultural narratives, which are appropriated through surveillance on Instagram. I recognize female and male bodybuilders and trans men as active agents in their negotiations of gender, and give credit to their ability to challenge heteronormativity and the patriarchal power it serves to reinforce.

I acknowledge that what is seen on Instagram is not necessarily reflective of the everyday lives of the female and male bodybuilders and trans men I observed, and frame my analyses and findings accordingly. However, I also take the position that performances and embodiments on social media are uniquely useful to research on gender because they become, in a sense, more deliberate than in environments outside of social media. I argue that, because female and male bodybuilders and trans men can more actively manage and control how their gendered bodies and practices are represented in photographs, captions, and comments on Instagram, their deliberate efforts to conform to and/or to resist cultural ideals become relatively obvious. Following this logic, I treat Instagram as a 'magnifying glass' for identifying the gendered ways in which female and male bodybuilders and trans men desire to be viewed by others. Moreover, I aim to examine their deliberate efforts to negotiate gendered ideals, by observing the specific ways in which they actively choose to mediate and showcase their gendered bodies and practices in their Instagram posts. Below, I further discuss various gaps which exist in the current gender

scholarship on female bodybuilders, male bodybuilders, and trans men, and how I aim to address these limitations through my research on Instagram.

Bodybuilders on Instagram.

In line with traditional theorizing about gender in general, theorizing about bodybuilding has uncritically focused on whether or not the bodies of bodybuilders either possess or lack masculinity or femininity, or both (Wesely, 2001). The overall literature on both female and male bodybuilding points to much more complexity with respect to how female and male bodybuilders actively (re)produce and resist heteronormativity through self-mediated, gendered embodiments and performances (Choi, 2003; Rosdahl, 2014; Swami & Voracek, 2013; Wesely, 2001). Additionally, there is a need to further examine how the gender identity constructions of bodybuilders correspond with broader gendered discourses and patriarchal power (Choi, 2003; Wesely, 2001; Scott, 2011; Rosdahl, 2014).

Female bodybuilders on Instagram.

What is primarily lacking in the literature on female bodybuilding is a focus on how discourses of femininity are actively embodied and negotiated by female bodybuilders and how these discourses function to denaturalize muscular female bodies in the first place. Indeed, it has been noted that competing theories about female bodybuilding treat femininity as a somewhat incidental by-product of the debate by focusing on whether or not muscular women either lack (and thus challenge) heteronormative femininity, or possess (and thus reinforce) heteronormative femininity, or both (Obel, 1996; Rosdahl, 2014; Wesely, 2001). Such an approach has been criticized for continuing to "secure rather than loosen the boundaries surrounding the meanings

of the body and gender" and for ignoring the potential for female bodybuilders to actively or even consciously resist the expectations imposed on them (Rosdahl, 2014, p. 37). Again, there is very little research on female bodybuilders on social media, particularly research on how heteronormative (self-)surveillance influences the ways in which female bodybuilders represent their bodies and gendered practices on social media. Women who use social media have been found to constantly monitor and critique other people's bodies according to feminine ideals of appearance (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012), which may be understood as a form of heteronormative surveillance. Additionally, women who use social media have been found to constantly monitor and critique their own bodies, and to constantly compare their own bodies to other ideal feminine bodies on social media (Ahadzadeh, Sharif, & Ong, 2017), which may be understood as forms of heteronormative self-surveillance. These bodily surveillance practices lead women who use social media to become dissatisfied with their bodies (de Vries, Peter, de Graaf, & Nikken, 2016; Meier & Gray, 2014). By acknowledging how female bodybuilders negotiate heteronormative (self-)surveillance on Instagram, and how this influences their gendered self-representations on Instagram, I am well-equipped to conceptualize how female bodybuilders actively engage with broader discourses of femininity.

Most studies on female bodybuilding focus on competition settings (Bolin, 1992; Bordo, 2004; Dworkin, 2001; Land, 2015; Rosdahl, 2014; Wesely, 2001). While reviewing the literature, I was left wondering if the feminist quality of female bodybuilders' muscularity might be more successfully emphasized on Instagram where it is not being directly or institutionally regulated by the heteronormative (self-)surveillance of female bodybuilding competitions. It has been shown that female bodybuilders are strongly opposed to being sexualized and to limiting their muscularity, although they experience pressure from family and friends to avoid becoming

too muscular (Choi, 2003). Female bodybuilders have also been shown to appreciate the 'feminine' aspects of their bodybuilding competition criteria (e.g., muscular limitation, jewelry, high heels) because they can feel 'sexy' in addition to strong and muscular (Rosdahl, 2014). My research will extend upon such findings by examining how female bodybuilders actively manage (self-)surveillance in their everyday experiences on Instagram where they are not subjected to the institutionalized and relatively more direct sexism and misogyny of bodybuilding competitions. Moreover, while Instagram is certainly not completely reflective of everyday life, I take the position that the everyday heteronormative (self-)surveillance which occurs over the gendered bodies and practices of female bodybuilders can be more accurately observed on Instagram in comparison to bodybuilding competitions. How people react to female bodybuilders on Instagram, and how female bodybuilders engage with these reactions and in turn represent themselves on Instagram, can be argued to be more in line with how these people have actually internalized broader heteronormative discourses and how they (re)produce and/or resist them throughout their everyday lives.

Male bodybuilders on Instagram.

The research on male bodybuilders, and on masculinities in general, has tended to over-simplify these men's gender identity constructions in part because gender scholars have over-relied on Connell (1987)'s Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (Anderson, 2009; Pompper, 2010; Wesely, 2001). According to this theory, all men strive to distance themselves from passive, weak, and subservient femininity to some degree, and do so by, for instance, enacting stoicism, aggression, and dominance. Critical gender scholarship on masculinities have been introduced and have taken a relatively more diverse and 'plural' approach to masculinities. For instance,

scholars have noted that men employ hybrid masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Messner, 2007), and that contemporary hybrid masculinities often involve the aforementioned feminized or 'inclusive' masculinities which are becoming increasingly normalized (Anderson, 2009). Moreover, due in large part to the women's and gay movements of the 1980s, there has been an overall decrease in the stigmatization of male femininity over recent decades (Anderson, 2009). Consequently, men have been found to abandon anti-feminine, hegemonic masculinities in favour of softer, more inclusive forms of masculinity (Arxer, 2011). It has been shown that men today feel much more comfortable engaging publicly in stereotypically feminine practices, such as emotional expressiveness, than they have in the past, because they are less likely to fear being labeled effeminate or gay (Adams, 2011; Anderson & McCormack, 2015).

Because male bodybuilders are often assumed to primarily evoke male hegemony by presenting bodies which are large and muscular, it appears that research on male bodybuilding has not yet adequately acknowledged the complex and plural ways in which male bodybuilders enact a plurality of masculinities (Klein, 1993; Swami & Voracek, 2013; Wamsley, 2007). Very little is known about potential ways in which male bodybuilders enact other inclusive masculinities besides the self-objectification and appearance concern which characterize their bodybuilding practices. It has been shown that men who consistently engage in a stereotypically feminine practice develop more positive perceptions about other stereotypically feminine practices, which increases the likelihood that they will engage in them (Marsh & Musson, 2008). Additionally, very little is known about other potential forms of hegemonic masculinities which male bodybuilders seek to evoke in addition to the power, strength, and dominance symbolized by their muscular bodies. It has been suggested that men who seek lean and muscular bodies are motivated to do so by a desire to symbolically demonstrate their ability to work hard and to

achieve hegemonic masculine financial power and success (McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005). In my research on male bodybuilders on Instagram, I take into consideration a wide range of masculine practices in order to capture the dynamic, multi-faceted, and hybridized ways in which male bodybuilders come to embody and enact gender on Instagram.

While hegemonic masculinity has been heavily theorized in terms of its links to patriarchal power, Anderson (2015) notes that inclusive masculinity has yet to be sufficiently theorized in terms of its relationship to patriarchy. As such, there has been very little speculation regarding whether or not inclusive masculinities challenge, or do not challenge, patriarchal power, and in what ways. Men in general have been shown to feel pressure to compensate for their inclusive masculine practices through hegemonic masculine conformity, which obscures and counteracts the progressive potential of their inclusive masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Hall, Gough, & Seymour-Smith, 2013; Messner, 1993; 2007; McCormack & Anderson, 2010). For instance, men who want to achieve a lean and muscular body have been found to avoid talking about the aesthetic nature of this goal and to emphasize how lean and muscular bodies increase their chances of being promoted at work since they demonstrate their capacity for self-discipline (Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005; Gough, Hall, & Seymour-Smith; Pompper, 2010). Such talk serves to reposition men as less embodied and objectified and more disembodied and rational (Gill et al., 2005; Seidler, 1994; Watson, 2000). However, very little is known about the particular ways in which male bodybuilders negotiate their gender-transgressions by compensating for them (Anderson, 2005; de Visser, Smith, & McDonnell, 2009; Gough, 2007), and the particular ways in which these negotiations re-stabilize broader processes of gender inequality (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). In my research on male bodybuilders on Instagram, I aim to identify potential ways in which male bodybuilders counteract their

inclusive masculinities through hegemonic masculinities on Instagram, and theorize ways in which the inclusive masculinities of male bodybuilders on Instagram challenge/do not challenge patriarchy.

While feminist literature has extensively examined how hegemonic masculinities negatively impact women's well-being (e.g., violence against women by men), there is an overall lack of insight into how hegemonic masculinities negatively affect men (Connell, 1987). For instance, men have been found to avoid seeking help for their emotional issues because of fear that they will be labeled effeminate; this has been argued to contribute to the fact that men are more likely than women to commit suicide (Mahalik & Rochlen, 2006). In my research, I acknowledge how men can also be negatively affected by hegemonic expectations of masculinity, particularly in that these expectations limit the range of practices that men can engage in without stigmatization (Bartlett, Vasey, & Bukowski, 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

While studies have shown that men's bodies are increasingly being objectified and subjected to unattainable appearance expectations, the assumption that (self-)objectification and appearance concern is a predominantly feminine preoccupation has prevented sufficient critical theorizing about men's body-related issues (Bell & McNaughton, 2007). It has been shown that men are struggling with issues of self-objectification and with unrealistic masculine bodily expectations (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Ricciardelli, Clow, & White, 2010). For instance, the abundance of media images which idealize lean and muscular male bodies has been linked to depression symptoms among men (Agliata & Tantleduff-Dunn, 2004; Arbour & Ginis, 2006). Relatedly, the overwhelming majority of research on social media and their links to body-related issues appears to focus on women (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Meier &

Gray, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). The limited research on men who use social media has shown that men are increasingly using social media to construct masculine identities, including through representations of their bodies (Barry & Martin, 2016). Men who engage in higher levels of self-objectification have been found to spend more time on social media and to be more likely to edit the photographs they post of themselves on social media so that they more closely align with masculine appearance ideals (Fox & Rooney, 2015; Penny, 2013). Additionally, men who use social media for self-presentation have been found to be compelled to think critically about the appearance of their bodies (Hum et al., 2011), to compare their appearance to narrow masculine expectations presented in the mass media, and to compare their bodies to the idealized bodies of other men on social media (Barry & Martin, 2016). It has also been argued that such tendencies lead men to become dissatisfied with their bodies (Ahadzadeh, Sharif, & Ong, 2017). Through my examination of the heteronormative (self-)surveillance experienced by male bodybuilders on Instagram, I aim to contribute to the lack of research on the negative ways in which hegemonic masculinities constrain men's gendered practices, and aim to contribute to the lack of research on men's body-related issues.

Trans men on Instagram.

Once again, the lack of theorizing regarding the transgressive potential of trans men can be attributed to a tendency to over-simplify gender identity constructions (Aboim, 2016; Prosser, 1998). The overall scholarship on trans identities is relatively new and underdeveloped, having only gained traction in the 1990s. Various transgender scholars have pointed out that critical scholarship on masculinities needs to focus more on *how* masculinities are accomplished and performed in addition to *by whom* (Peetoom, 2009; Prosser, 1998). As Aboim (2016), argues, ,

"Rather than asking who does masculinity, the trigger question should be about how it is done" (p. 230). Moreover, there is a need for more scholarly acknowledgement regarding the gender-transgressive potential of trans men. Regardless of the fact that trans men often desire to 'pass' as male, their processes of *becoming* male and masculine are uniquely complex, and further insight into such processes would be valuable for critical theorizing about masculinities and about gender in general (Abelson, 2014; Aboim, 2016; Prosser, 1998; Schilt, 2010; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In my research, I acknowledge the gender-transgressive potential of trans maleness. Through an examination of trans men's unique processes of becoming male and masculine, as represented on Instagram, I aim to contribute to critical theorizing regarding how gendered power differentials are (re)produced through heteronormative assumptions about biological sex and gender identity.

I also aim to shed some light onto current debates regarding whether or not trans men are born in the 'wrong' bodies through an examination of how heteronormative (self-)surveillance operates over their bodies and gendered identities on Instagram to influence their experiences with transitioning from female to male. Rather than arguing 'for' or 'against' the notion that trans men are born in the wrong bodies, my aim is to point to the profound power of heteronormativity, particularly as it applies to biological sex and gender identity, to determine our gendered realities. Additionally, I aim to clarify contentions in the transgender literature regarding the extent to which trans men conform to, or resist, hegemonic masculinities, and how their expressions of masculinity correspond with the heteronormative surveillance they experience on Instagram.

I chose to focus on trans men in part because I wanted to address ways in which patriarchal power is sustained through heteronormative notions around the male body itself, in

addition to how patriarchal power is sustained by the heteronormative notions of masculinity which are assigned to that male body. Moreover, unlike female bodybuilders, trans men move from marginalized to privileged locations in society when they physically transition from female to male. Trans men automatically receive male privilege upon being physically recognizable as male (despite being biologically female) (Aboim, 2016; Schilt, 2010). While women (e.g., female bodybuilders) may enact masculinities, they do not enjoy the privileges which are provided to men when enacting masculinities. This points to the 'automatic' (albeit socially constructed) nature of male privilege; how men (regardless of biology) receive male privilege simply by virtue of being (perceived as) biologically male. My research on the gender making practices of female and male bodybuilders on Instagram addresses various ways in which heteronormative (self-)surveillance on Instagram regulates and/or challenges heteronormative expectations around *masculinity* and *femininity*. My research on the gender making practices of trans men on Instagram expands upon these analyses by including an examination of the ways in which heteronormative (self-)surveillance regulates and challenges heteronormative notions around *biological sex* and *gender identity*.

In this thesis, I present a comprehensive examination of various ways in which dualistic and essentialist heteronormative notions around biological sex, gender expression, and gender identity operate in tandem to categorize people and reinforce gendered power differentials. Importantly, I emphasize that female and male bodybuilders and trans men do not simply subvert and/or enact contemporary expectations of gender and the body; rather, they actively *negotiate* gender diversity in progressive, albeit limited, ways. I move away from the tendencies of gender scholars to over-simplify gender identity constructions, which has often led them to overlook the transgressive potential of female and male bodybuilders and trans men. I maintain that the

resistance practised by these individuals remains meaningful despite the gendered surveillance which confronts and limits it. Ultimately, I establish how our cultural understandings of gender and the body are shifting, particularly in that they are becoming less strict and dualistic and more fluid and diverse. I argue that this shift is essential for eradicating gendered power differentials.

In addition to the current introduction, this thesis consists of a methods section, three research articles with transition sections, and lastly, a discussion of the conclusions drawn across the three research articles. The first research article presented in this thesis is entitled, *Female bodybuilders on Instagram: Negotiating an empowered femininity*. In this article, I examine the gendered self-representations of female bodybuilders on Instagram, whose muscularity and related bodybuilding practices challenge feminine cultural assumptions around women as fragile, weak, and subservient. I also examine ways in which this resistance is limited by heteronormative (self-)surveillance on Instagram, which encourages female bodybuilders to feminize their bodies by, for instance, ornamenting and sexualizing their bodies. The second article presented in this thesis is entitled, *Male bodybuilders on Instagram: Negotiating hegemonic and inclusive masculinity*. In this article, I shift to a focus on male bodybuilders on Instagram, whose bodies and bodybuilding practices reinforce hegemonic masculine cultural assumptions around men as strong, powerful, and dominant. I also examine ways in which these men conform to current hegemonic expectations around socioeconomic success on Instagram. Additionally, I demonstrate how bodybuilders transgress expectations of masculinity on Instagram by being emotionally expressive and emotionally intimate with other men. Throughout these discussions, I consider how heteronormative (self-)surveillance corresponds with these men's simultaneous conformity and nonconformity to hegemonic masculinities. The third article presented in this thesis is entitled, *Trans men on Instagram: Negotiating validation through*

masculine male bodies. This article involves an examination of trans men on Instagram, who challenge the cultural assumption that male identities can only accompany (biologically) male bodies through visibility and advocacy. I consider how this resistance is limited by heteronormative (self-)surveillance, which encourages these men to transition their bodies from female to male and to masculinize their appearance. However, I also examine how trans men resist hegemonic expectations of masculinity by integrating femininities into their male identities.

Methods

In this section, I begin with a general discussion of the data collection and analytic processes I employed in my visual narrative inquiry into the gendered self-representations of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram. In doing so, I focus on how I addressed various methodological challenges associated with collecting and analyzing visual data on social media, particularly on Instagram. The specific research questions, data collection processes, and analytic steps employed for each study are discussed later within each of the research articles contained in this thesis. Next, I talk about the ethical components of my research, with references to the ambiguity that exists with respect to ethical practices for social media research. This includes a discussion of how ethical challenges around privacy, consent, and reflexivity were implicated in my observation of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram.

Data Collection

To begin my visual narrative inquiry, I collected a total of 150 Instagram profiles; 50 profiles belonging to female bodybuilders, 50 profiles belonging to male bodybuilders, and 50 profiles belonging to trans men. Posts were collected by taking screenshots of them and the overall data consisted of the photographs and other images, as well as the captions and comments, contained in the posts I collected. Screenshots of posts were categorized according to the analytic themes discussed later in this section.

To locate my data, I began with a search of the general hashtag, #bodybuilding, which is popularly used by female and male bodybuilders, as well as the hashtag, #trans, which is popularly used by trans men. Conducting hashtag searches is an extremely useful strategy for

researchers who must narrow down the overwhelming amount of potential data that exists on Instagram and to track down content posted by specific communities or subpopulations (Hand, 2017; Highfield & Leaver, 2015). On Twitter, people use hashtags to integrate themselves into a particular conversation (Bruns & Burgess, 2011); however, on Instagram, people use hashtags to integrate themselves into a particular community (Laestadius, 2017) in part because hashtags ensure that their posts can be located by other members of that community (Oh et al., 2016; Postill & Pink, 2012). After searching general hashtags related to bodybuilding and transgender, there was still an overwhelming number of posts to select from, many of which belonged to bodybuilders and trans men who did not post frequently about their bodies and related practices. I wanted to select male and female bodybuilders and trans men who were active members of their respective communities on Instagram; ones who regularly posted photographs, particularly photographs of their bodies, and who regularly described their bodies and related gendered practices in the captions of their posts. I noted that such bodybuilders and trans men tended to use more specific hashtags related to their respective communities. Therefore, in order to narrow down my potential data even further, and in order to ensure that I selected female and male bodybuilders and trans men who were active and well-integrated into their respective communities on Instagram, I searched more specific hashtags, including '#girlswholift' for female bodybuilders, '#beastmode' for male bodybuilders, and '#transisbeautiful' for trans men.

I also narrowed my selection of female and male bodybuilders and trans men by choosing those whose profiles had large followings. Popular profiles have more exposure and therefore more surveillance in the form of comments. As of 2014, almost 60% of Instagram posts did not contain comments, and posts with comments had an average of only 2.55 comments, although extremely popular profiles can have comments that reach into the tens of thousands (Manikonda,

Hu, & Kambhampati, 2014). Observing a large amount of comments was important since I was interested in examining the surveillance experienced by female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram, which would take place in the comments sections of their posts. I also wanted to understand how the gender-subversive representations of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram might positively affect the people who view and openly react to them in comments.

The individuals whose Instagram posts I collected had a wide range of demographic characteristics, including age, race, culture, and socioeconomic status; however, I did not contact the individuals whose Instagram practices I observed for information about these demographics, so they were not recorded or controlled for. I discuss this limitation in the conclusion section of this thesis. The only demographic variable that guided my selection of profiles was gender. I selected female bodybuilders who appeared to be cisgender and who appeared to identify as female, and male bodybuilders who appeared to be cisgender and who appeared to identify as male. I also selected trans men who clearly stated that they were transgender and who clearly stated that they identify as male and/or that they use male pronouns.

The limitation brought on by my lack of reference to other demographic variables such as age, race, and socioeconomic status was cushioned by Instagram's generally young and demographically diverse population. Instagram users are mostly teenagers and young adults (Duggan, 2015), with an estimated 90% of Instagram users being under the age of 35 (Smith, 2014). This made data collection relatively easy since I was interested in observing bodybuilders and trans men who were relatively young; most of the profiles I selected appeared to belong to young adults in their 20s or early 30s, with the exception of one teenager (a trans man whose identity was anonymized). In comparison to other social media platforms such as Twitter,

Instagram is racially diverse with more black and Hispanic users (Duggan, 2015). Most of the female and male bodybuilders and trans men I selected appeared to be white, although a considerable amount of other users I selected appeared to be black, Hispanic, or Asian. Instagram users also tend to be relatively economically and educationally diverse, with Instagram users being more likely than Twitter users to make less than 50 thousand dollars a year and to not hold college degrees (Duggan, 2015). However, any set of Instagram data is not directly representative of its broader geographic (or cultural) area (boyd & Crawford, 2012). As Laestadius (2017) suggests, while research using Instagram can be extremely valuable for understanding the practices, identities, and self-disclosed experiences shared among subpopulations on Instagram, it is less valuable for making broadly generalizable conclusions about wider populations outside of Instagram. This knowledge was important for informing my analyses and how I framed my findings. It should be clear that the practices that I observed among the female and male bodybuilders and trans men in my studies point to their tendencies as subpopulations which are formed and exist on Instagram, and that they do not necessarily reflect the practices of their respective populations beyond Instagram.

Analysis

I took a social constructionist, feminist, and critical approach to my visual narrative inquiry into the gendered practices presented by female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram. I took the position that gender is a socially constructed performance; that female and male bodybuilders and trans men construct and perform gender identities through what they post on Instagram. I sought to identify similarities and patterns regarding the self-representations practiced by the members of each group, and conceptualized these similarities and patterns as

being part of an overall gendered narrative that describes the tendencies within each group regarding how they construct gender identities on Instagram. Through my critical and feminist approach, I sought to critique how these gendered narratives correspond with cultural processes of power; how expectations of femininity and masculinity, maleness and femaleness, and the unequal power relations that they uphold, are (re)produced and challenged through the gendered narratives presented by female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram.

In addition to employing a social constructionist, critical, and feminist approach, I utilized Foucault's theorization of power and surveillance in my visual narrative inquiry into female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram. This helped me to conceptualize how the gendered narratives presented by female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram are influenced by other people who openly criticize and compliment their bodies and related practices in the comments sections of their post. In line with Foucault's views, I took the position that other people's reactions (e.g., compliments, criticisms) to female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram represent forms of heteronormative surveillance which serve to regulate the gendered narratives presented by these groups, and does so in accordance with dominant cultural narratives around gender and the body. Moreover, I took the position that female and male bodybuilders and trans men internalize the surveillance they experience by others and that they engage in self-surveillance by either conforming to or resisting it.

Following data collection, I conducted a preliminary analysis of each data set, focusing on the heteronormative (self-)surveillance experienced by the female bodybuilders, male bodybuilders, and trans men I observed. Posts were categorized according to the following analytic themes: firstly, I analyzed the extent to which the female and male bodybuilders and trans men I selected conform to dominant masculine and/or feminine standards. To do this, I

observed the extent to which their bodies appear conventionally feminine or masculine in the photographs they post of themselves. I also examined the captions of their Instagram posts to identify instances in which they discussed their bodies and related practices, and the traditionally feminine and/or masculine nature of these discussions. For instance, given past findings on bodybuilding, I aimed to uncover the extent to which female bodybuilders aim to minimize their muscularity through conformity to feminine bodily expectations. In the case of the trans men I observed, I also analyzed the extent to which their bodies appear (e.g., 'pass' as) stereotypically male, which would point to the extent to which they conform to heteronormative expectations around biological sex and gender identity. Finally, I observed the comments sections contained in the posts of the female and male bodybuilders and trans men in my studies to analyze how other people on Instagram react to their gendered narratives. I identified the particular ways in which people criticize and compliment the bodies and bodily practices presented by the female and male bodybuilders and trans men I observed, and how these reactions align and do not align with heteronormative expectations of the body.

Following my preliminary analyses, I selected 15 profiles from the 50 profiles originally selected for each group for in-depth analyses. My criteria for selecting these profiles was that the users post very frequently (daily or almost daily), and that they frequently (daily or almost daily) display their bodies and discuss their related gendered practices in their posts. I observed each profile selected in its entirety. I began by analyzing the data with a closer and more comprehensive reading of the analytic themes discussed above. Furthermore, for my in-depth analyses, I was particularly focused on conceptualizing the various ways in which other people's reactions to the bodies and bodily practices of female and male bodybuilders and trans men in my studies enable and constrain the gendered narratives that they present on their Instagram

profiles. Moreover, through my feminist, social constructionist, and Foucauldian approach, I wanted to conceptualize how cultural processes of power operate through the gendered interactions experienced by the female and male bodybuilders and trans men I observed. I considered the extent to which, and particular ways in which, the gendered displays of the female and male bodybuilders and trans men align or do not align with the heteronormative surveillance they experience on Instagram, as well as the surveillance that they discuss experiencing off Instagram. I analyzed the extent to which other people's compliments and criticisms are in line with how the female and male bodybuilders and trans men display their gendered bodies and practices on Instagram. Moreover, I wanted to uncover the ways in which these individuals display nonconformity despite possible criticism or because other people appreciate their nonconformity, and/or the ways in which they display conformity in order to avoid possible criticism and receive admiration. For instance, in relation to the aforementioned example concerning female bodybuilders, I analyzed potential ways in which other Instagram users criticize female bodybuilders who do not feminize their muscularity. I then analyzed potential ways in which the female bodybuilders feminize/do not feminize their muscularity in response to this surveillance. Lastly, I analyzed the extent to which the female and male bodybuilders and trans men demonstrate a conscious awareness of the surveillance they experience, and potential ways in which they openly resist or conform to this surveillance. I identified instances on Instagram in which female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders and trans men critique, or do not critique, other people's reactions to their gendered bodies and practices, as experienced both on and off Instagram, and how they respond to these reactions by, for instance, openly choosing to resist or conform to them. Through these analyses, my overall aim was to develop an understanding of contemporary ways in which heteronormativity and related gender inequalities

are being challenged and reinforced through the gendered narratives presented by female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram, and how these processes are enabled and constrained by other people who react to gendered narratives on Instagram.

Due to the self-mediated nature of Instagram content, it was extremely important for me to inform my analyses with the knowledge that people represent themselves very deliberately and intentionally on Instagram (Marwick, 2015). Rather than interpreting Instagram posts as though they are windows into an objective reality, I kept in mind that they are heavily mediated and potentially idealized; that the gendered representations of female and male bodybuilders and trans men are very deliberate on Instagram. Rather than treating the self-mediated and heavily curated nature of Instagram content as a limitation, I treated it as an advantage. I analyzed my data according to the notion that the Instagram posts of female and male bodybuilders and trans men represent magnified versions of how they desire to be viewed by others; that their desire to conform to, and to resist, heteronormativity becomes relatively more obvious because their self-representations are more deliberate and intentional on Instagram. Secondly, it was extremely important for me to move beyond traditional approaches to media research, which treat media as top-down and profit-driven in their power and influence (French, 2014). I considered how other people might be affected by their exposure to the gender-subversive representations of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram; how, like traditional forms of media, social media representations of gender-subversion have the power to influence dominant cultural notions of gender and can do so in positive ways by challenging the (e.g., male, cisgender) hegemony traditionally sustained by these notions (Andreasson, 2016).

Ethics

The virtual and often public nature of social media websites, coupled with the lack of face-to-face communication which characterizes them, has led to speculation around how to ethically approach social media websites as 'spaces' and 'environments' for conducting research (Hunter et al., 2018). The consideration of ethics in social media research is still in its infancy; methodological approaches and methods are currently being tested and explored, and ethical practices in social media research are being shaped and negotiated by the researchers themselves (Lafferty & Manca, 2018). Issues which were particularly challenging and relevant to my research concerned privacy, consent, and reflexivity.

Due to the lack of standardization regarding ethical practice for research on social media, including Instagram (Highfield & Leaver, 2016), I was largely left to my own devices to decide whether or not to seek consent from Instagram users for my use of their posts in my research. I found that, according to the Code of Human Research Ethics (2014), consent for observation of public behaviour is not required when those being observed "expect to be observed by strangers" (p. 25). Each of the profiles I observed on Instagram were public rather than private profiles; therefore, I decided not to seek consent from the female and male bodybuilders and trans men whose posts I discuss in the research articles. However, even when social media researchers are observing information available to the public, they still need to be careful and responsible with their research, and should consider seeking consent when possible (Highfield & Leaver, 2016), especially when it comes to using peoples images. After I submitted the first two articles (on female bodybuilding and male bodybuilding) for publication in two different academic journals, the publishing editor for the journal, *Feminism & Psychology*, where I submitted the article on female bodybuilders, requested photo permissions for some of the images depending on the

extent to which they were judged as meeting the fair dealing principle. Third parties can legally use people's Instagram images only if they qualify for fair dealing (Instagram, 2019); that is, if they are altered or discussed in ways that give the images enough additional meaning for use in, for instance, research, education, or news reporting. The editor-in-chief for the other journal, the *Journal of Gender Studies*, where I submitted the article on male bodybuilders, requested that I seek permission for all of the images. He was very serious about image rights and wanted to avoid using images in spaces and in ways that the images were not originally intended without the permission of the image owners (Burns, 2015; van der Nagel & Frith, 2015). In the case of the article on trans men, I took initiative and decided it would be safest to seek permission for each image. This variation in photo permission requirements and decisions point to the ethical ambiguity and lack of standardization which exist in research using other people's social media content, particularly images.

Another important ethical issue related to my research was reflexivity. Reflexivity occurs when a researcher is sensitive to the subject matter they are studying and engages in critical self-reflection to consider how their personal circumstances (e.g., gender identity) and level of familiarity with the subject matter might affect their analyses through biases, beliefs, and personal experiences (Berger, 2015). I am not a bodybuilder and I am a cisgender woman; therefore, I was in many ways an outsider observing and analyzing gendered practices that I have little personal familiarity with (Hayfield & Huxley, 2014). Additionally, because social media research can be conducted through observation and without actually talking to those being researched, it seems like an extremely convenient place to conduct research since it can be done without direct interaction with participants, which also makes ethics approval for research on social media easier to obtain (my ethics approval letter can be found in Appendix A). However,

researchers using social media should consider how the lack of face-to-face communication with those being observed might prevent accuracy and richness with respect to their research findings. Because I did not exclusively belong to the gendered subcultures that I was observing, and because I did not have direct communication with (most) of the people that I observed, I took several steps in my reflexive processes in order to help ensure that my research was as accurate and respectful as possible.

I was most comfortable observing and analyzing the gendered practices of female bodybuilders on Instagram. As a woman, I felt like I had some personal understanding of their struggles, particularly their struggle to reconcile how to assert their strength and independence in a culture that expects women to be relatively submissive and co-dependent, as well as their struggle with the pressure to be thin. As someone who is not a bodybuilder, however, I had to be careful to keep my analyses open-ended in part to allow for possibilities that I might not personally identify with. For instance, when analyzing their motivations for bodybuilding, I found that that the female bodybuilders I observed enjoyed the feelings and bodily projections of control that they harness through bodybuilding in addition to the feelings and bodily projections of empowerment. I could have easily likened this desire to harness and project self-control to symptoms of anorexia, something which has been done in research (e.g., Bordo, 2004). However, I carefully considered the specific ways in which these female bodybuilders framed their discussions of self-control, and noted that this self-control has an important feminist element in that the female bodybuilders experience and seek to represent empowerment through their practices and projections of self-control. When I sought image permissions from some of the female bodybuilders who appear in my study, I also sent these women my discussion of their

images as well as the article's abstract. They each expressed being grateful for my research and that they identified strongly with the claims that I was making about their experiences.

In the case of my article on male bodybuilders, I was required to engage in a higher degree of reflexivity. When I began reading the literature on male bodybuilding, I sometimes found myself buying into the idea that male bodybuilders are simply hegemonically masculine, and I planned to talk almost exclusively about how the hegemonic masculinities of the male bodybuilders in my study reflect and reinforce female oppression. However, my PhD supervisors are male and they expressed being offended by some of the literature on hegemonic masculinities and emphasized that men's experiences are often over-simplified in this literature. I agreed and subsequently started noticing how often men are unfairly demonized in the literature on masculinities. I also started noticing more that men's gender identities are often over-simplified as being either hegemonically or inclusively masculine in this literature. Additionally, I noticed that there is a lot of discussion regarding the ways that hegemonic masculine expectations negatively affect women at the expense of considering how they negatively affect men. Other gender scholars have taken note of these tendencies (Bartlett, Vasey, & Bukowski, 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005 Mahalik & Rochlen, 2006; Swami & Voracek, 2013). I had to constantly remind myself to think more critically about how men, particularly male bodybuilders, might interpret the existing literature as well as my own research, especially since it appeared that most gender scholars writing about male bodybuilding and masculinities are women. In thinking reflexively about the literature on male bodybuilders and masculinities, and how men might interpret it, I decided that I wanted to give voice to men's complex and multi-faceted identities. I also decided to consider how the gendered practices of the male bodybuilders I observed are constrained and limited by hegemonic expectations of masculinities in addition to how they

reinforce female oppression. Like the female bodybuilders, the male bodybuilders who I sought photo permissions from expressed appreciation for my research and agreed with the ways that I interpreted their experiences.

Reflexivity was particularly important for my article on trans male identities. Cisgender privilege and the overall lack of research which deconstructs normative identities has often prevented cisgender people from being expected to engage in critical self-reflection in their research on trans identities (Galupo, Mitchell, & Davis, 2015; May, 2015). This lack of reflexivity can also be attributed to the fact that cisgender people are often thought to be objective and unbiased in their research on trans identities (Galupo, 2017). However, it has been advised that cisgender scholars writing about trans experiences should talk directly to trans individuals, including those in their research, to get their input on the research aims and questions, and to invite them to reflect on the theories and methods being used in order to avoid insensitivity and inaccuracies in their research (Veale, Clark, & Lomax, 2012). When I was seeking photo permissions, I ended up having a Skype call with one of the trans men in my study, who is a well-known and very active advocate among Instagram's trans community. I had him read the article in order to get his input, and he advised me that trans people (and other gender-nonconforming individuals) are often uncomfortable with other people making assumptions about their trans identities and experiences without actually talking to them. He also expressed that trans people's identities and experiences are often misunderstood by others, including in the literature, and that they vary greatly from trans person to trans person. After our conversation, I decided to anonymize the Instagram names of the trans men in my study; I felt that doing this would take the focus of the article away from the individuals themselves and their personal experiences and towards a more generalized and nuanced discussion of trans men's

experiences negotiating and representing their gender identities and experiences on Instagram. I did this in order to avoid making specific and potentially inaccurate claims about how individual trans men in my study construct and experience their unique gender identities. I did include a few photographs of various trans men in my study; I received permission to use their photographs and, after showing them my discussion of them, as well as the abstract for the article, they agreed with my interpretations and expressed being grateful for my research.

In addition to anonymizing the trans men in my study, I re-worded my findings and interpretations to avoid making strong, definitive, and factual-sounding statements. This further allowed me to present a more sensitive, generalized, and nuanced interpretation of trans men's gendered negotiations and self-representation practices on Instagram. I also did this because, after reading the article, the trans man who I spoke to expressed concern about some of the statements that I was originally making regarding whether or not the trans men in my study were born in the 'wrong' bodies. He felt that my analyses were sometimes too dualistic and assertive, and pointed out that it is extremely difficult to discuss 'nature' versus 'nurture' debates when it comes to talking about how gender and bodies manifest for trans people. He also pointed out that these discussions can often be overly presumptuous and even offensive or invalidating for trans people no matter which argument you emphasize. For these reasons, I do not to make overly definitive claims about the naturalness or socially constructed quality of gender and bodies in my analyses of trans identities. My main goal in making these changes to the article on trans men was to be respectful and to avoid making specific assumptions about trans men I did not engage with significantly and whose gendered experiences are extremely complex and different from my own as a cisgender woman.

Transition into the First Research Article

In the first research article presented in this thesis, *Female bodybuilders on Instagram: Negotiating an empowered femininity*, I discuss the visual narratives presented by female bodybuilders on Instagram, whose muscular bodies have been shown to challenge stereotypical assumptions around women as passive, weak, and subservient. With this article, I sought to re-conceptualize "femininity from a symptom, effect, or product of patriarchal culture into an intensity exerting its own force" (Markula, 2006, p. 36). Once again, while expectations of femininity have been heavily scrutinized and problematized in feminist research, including through references to female bodybuilders, there has been a lack of acknowledgement regarding how femininities (and masculinities) are constructed and how they are implicated in patriarchal power. In this article, I demonstrate how the gendered practices of female bodybuilders (re)produce and challenge the patriarchal structure of society through their conformity to, and resistance against, expectations of femininity. In doing so, I give voice to the active feminist resistance which is being practised by female bodybuilders on Instagram, while also acknowledging the ways in which heteronormative surveillance constrains this resistance. The findings in the following article ultimately reveal micro-level ways in which patriarchal power is currently being challenged through the gendered bodies and practices of female bodybuilders on Instagram.

Female Bodybuilders on Instagram: Negotiating an Empowered Femininity

Abstract

Strength and femininity have in many ways been culturally constructed as two mutually exclusive phenomena. This article employs visual narrative inquiry to examine how Instagram facilitates female body objectification and surveillance through an examination of female bodybuilders whose muscular bodies represent both resistance against, and conformity to, dominant cultural notions around women as fragile, weak, and subservient. We reveal how surveillance over the bodies of female bodybuilders functions to constrain their gendered narratives on Instagram by repositioning their bodies as more (hetero)normatively feminine by encouraging them to present bodies which are ornamented, sexualized, and passive. We also reveal how female bodybuilders practise self-surveillance on Instagram by simultaneously resisting, and conforming to, this surveillance. In the process, these women manage to take control of their gendered narratives on Instagram by redefining femininity for themselves in ways which problematize dualistic notions around strength and femininity.

Introduction

The legacy of Descartes' mind-body dualism (Cottingham, 2013) lives on through the cultural understanding that the body and its spontaneous impulses, cravings, and desires threaten the mind's capacity for self-control, self-discipline, and willpower; the body continues to be viewed as something 'unruly' that must be controlled and enhanced in ways that enable it to project the morality of the 'self' encased within. Today, diet and exercise are commonly

presented as the first line of defense in maintaining control over our 'unruly' bodies (Coffey, 2013). The female body in particular has been culturally constructed as 'unruly' and, consequently, strict diet and exercise practices have become moral activities for women, prescribed to them as an essential way to achieve the ideal body of (hetero)normative femininity (Bordo, 2004).

In the current age of mobile communication and social media technologies, processes of bodily surveillance, objectification, and fetishization have intensified (Perloff, 2014). Social media websites, especially Instagram, are very popular platforms for the female bodybuilding community. Given its instantaneous nature and that it is a predominantly visual form of social media, Instagram is an ideal place for female bodybuilders to regularly display and discuss their bodies as they reshape them over time through diet and exercise. In this article, we consider the implications of Instagram in facilitating and perpetuating modern forms of surveillance over female bodybuilders, whose muscular bodies represent both resistance against, and conformity to, expectations around what constitutes a properly 'controlled' and (hetero)normatively 'feminine' body (Choi, 2003; Dworkin, 2001). We are interested in how the surveillance over the bodies of female bodybuilders on Instagram is enacted by other Instagram users who react to displayed bodies and encourage women to conform to bodily norms around self-control and (hetero)normative femininity. We are also interested in the unique ways in which female bodybuilders practise *self*-surveillance by conforming to and resisting these norms, as evidenced by the unique ways in which they present and describe their bodies, and how they respond to other Instagram users who react to their bodies.

The 'unruly' female body and social media.

It has been documented for some time that women's bodies are much more likely than men's bodies to be objectified, fetishized, and idealized, and that women are much more likely to diet and exercise in pursuit of culturally-prescribed bodily ideals (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014). Furthermore, contemporary expectations around what constitutes a (hetero)normatively 'feminine' body are notoriously strict and difficult to attain (Coffey, 2013). Feminist psychological literature on the body has examined these issues extensively, attributing them in part to the social construction of women's bodies as inadequate, or 'out of control', and thus in need of constant regulation, manipulation, and improvement (Bartky, 1998). Women are expected to improve and control their 'inadequate' and 'unruly' bodies through countless 'disciplinary practices of femininity', which include the application of makeup, hairstyling, skincare, and most relevant to the current investigation, strict diet and exercise regimes directed at containing and regulating the body (Cairns & Johnston, 2015).

The presumed 'unruliness' of women's bodies and the expectation that women engage in strict diet and exercise regimes are consequences of the increasing 'hardness' of the body ideal prescribed to both women and men (Bordo, 2004). Since the 1970s, the ideal body has become progressively leaner and more muscular for both women and men (Benton & Karazsia, 2015). This is in part due to the cultural notion that 'hard' bodies represent the self-control considered necessary for achieving success in an increasingly secularized, industrialized, and consumerist Western society (Cairns & Johnston, 2015). Indeed, both women and men who diet and exercise regularly have been found to be motivated by a belief that fit, 'hard' bodies increase their potential for workplace success because they symbolically demonstrate their ability to work hard (Waring, 2008). Women's bodies, however, tend to be naturally 'softer' than men's bodies with

more fat and less muscle (Tseng et al., 2014). Thus, the association between 'hard' bodies and self-control automatically constructs women's bodies as more 'unruly', or 'out of control', than men's bodies. This helps to explain why so many women are dissatisfied with their bodies, and why so many women engage in extreme diet and exercise practices; women must significantly transform their relatively soft, 'unruly' bodies in order to adequately project self-control.

The 'unruliness' of women's natural bodies is reinforced and perpetuated by dominant notions around the ideal body of (hetero)normative femininity, which require women to control their bodies through diet and exercise in strict and often paradoxical ways (Bordo, 2004; Scott, 2011). Contemporary dominant, gendered perceptions around fat and muscle maintain the 'feminine' body as a minimalist reflection of fragility and vulnerability – the smaller, submissive counterpart to the larger, more muscular, and dominant 'masculine' body (Scott, 2011). For instance, fat is paradoxically gendered such that women are expected to have less fat than men (Bordo, 2004). Muscle is also gendered in that, while women are expected to now, more than ever, possess some degree of muscularity, they face a 'glass-ceiling' in that they cannot be 'too' muscular and certainly cannot be as muscular as men (Choi, 2003; Dworkin, 2001; Wesely, 2001). For instance, Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Holmgren, and White (2004) found that both men and women tend to perceive 'hyper-muscular' women, in comparison to 'average' (less muscular) women, as having more masculine and fewer feminine interests, and as less likely to be good mothers, intelligent, socially popular, and attractive. These gendered constructions ultimately secure women's subordination (Bartky, 1998; Choi, 2003).

Foucault's (1977) theorization of power and surveillance has relevance for these issues. Foucault theorized power as not simply being possessed by and wielded over people, but as enacted through people: "power reaches into the very grain of individuals and touches their

bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). Moreover, Foucault attests that power is enacted through surveillance and self-surveillance; people are subjected to dominant discourses within a given society, they internalize them, and then they reproduce and normalize them through everyday (inter)actions. Though invaluable, Foucault's conceptualization of power and surveillance does not account for the patriarchal structure of society and the different ways in which women and men come to internalize dominant discourses through their uniquely gendered forms of interaction (Bartky, 1998; Silverman, 1992). Mulvey (1975) introduced the concept of male gaze, which can be understood as a potent form of (patriarchal) surveillance over women's (and men's) bodies (Gill, 2008). Through the surveillance of the male gaze, the female body becomes objectified, is prescribed stringent diet and exercise practices, and is ultimately constructed and sustained as 'unruly' (Bartky, 1998; Bordo, 2004; Choi, 2003). This surveillance is in part participatory and manifests through *self*-surveillance and the objectification of one's own body as inadequate and in need of transformation through disciplinary practices (e.g., diet and exercise). Accordingly, "Appearance may be controlled by a woman, but its intended meaning is established by discursive texts outside her control" (Smith, 1990, p. 182).

Traditional mass media (e.g., television, magazines, advertisements) are major sites for female body (self-)surveillance and the promotion of strict feminine bodily ideals (Perloff, 2014). However, relatively little research has explored how women's body-related issues are framed by social media (Adzadeh, Sharif, & Ong, 2017; Perloff, 2014). Recent research has argued that, given the identity-moulding and interactive nature of social media, they can facilitate constant (self-) surveillance, self-objectification, thin ideal internalization, eating pathology, and body dissatisfaction among women (Adzadeh, Sharif, & Ong, 2017; de Vries,

Peter, de Graaf, & Nikken, 2016; Meier & Gray, 2014). Associations between social media usage and women's body-related concerns have also been linked to appearance comparison (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), which can be understood as a form of self-surveillance through a tendency to compare one's appearance to the appearance of others (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Women are considered to be more likely than men to engage in social comparisons on social media (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012), and often do so by comparing their bodies to more normatively ideal bodies, leading them to become dissatisfied with their bodies (Meier & Gray, 2014). These social comparisons among women on social media may be understood as operating through a competition-oriented 'female gaze' (Riley, Evans, & Mackiewicz, 2016). Through this gaze, women evaluate and judge one another according to the extent to which they meet feminine bodily ideals. Accordingly, not only are these women appropriating the male gaze through their own disciplinary practices of femininity, they are also policing each other, contributing to the pressure to meet feminine bodily standards.

It has been argued (Cohen & Blaszczynski, 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015) that women are more likely to experience body-related issues by comparing their bodies to the bodies they view on social media, rather than to the bodies they view in other traditional forms of mass media. Researchers have attributed this distinction to the possibility that women judge bodies on social media less critically and believe them to be more realistic and, therefore, more comparable to their own bodies, than the heavily manipulated and idealized models presented in the mass media (Shen & Bissell, 2013). However, research has also shown that it is common for social media users to strategically manipulate how their bodies appear in photographs (e.g. by the use of digital filters, posing, lighting) so that they more closely resemble the idealized bodies presented in the mass media (Cohen & Blaszczynski, 2015). Therefore, the tendency for women

to judge the bodies on social media as relatively accurate and realistic may be unjustified, with implications for their body-related concerns.

Research on social media and women's body-related issues is being taken up in feminist research, mostly focused on Facebook (e.g., Fardouly & Vartarian, 2015; Mabe, Forney & Keel, 2014; Meier & Gray, 2014), with relatively little focused on Instagram. On Instagram, photograph-sharing is the primary activity; users share photographs on their Instagram profiles primarily through their mobile phones, and these photographs are often accompanied by textual captions and comments written by other Instagram users. Instagram users have 'followers' and can 'follow' other Instagram users; when a person 'follows' another Instagram user's profile, the photographs posted on that profile show up instantaneously on their newsfeed. Given its focus on photograph-sharing, Instagram is a characteristically self-objectifying social media form with countless photographs of self-mediated and idealized bodies. Unlike some other popular social media forms (such as Facebook), most profiles on Instagram are publicly accessible rather than restricted to select family members, friends, and acquaintances. This means that Instagram users are exposed to a plethora of photographs of bodies and, given that Instagram is so quickly and easily accessed almost exclusively through mobile phones, such exposure is regular and frequent.

Bodily ideals are also endorsed by specific campaigns on Instagram, such as Fitspiration. The stated philosophy behind Fitspiration (a combination of 'fit' and 'inspiration') is to 'inspire' women to become strong and empowered through healthy eating, exercising, and being 'fit'. The emergence of Fitspiration may be a response to the increasing 'hardness' of the feminine body ideal; it represents a movement away from the previous very thin feminine body ideal towards today's more muscular, or 'toned', ideal. In fact, a very popular slogan within Fitspiration is 'Strong is the new skinny'. Despite the positive philosophy behind Fitspiration, exposure to

Fitspiration images on Instagram have been argued to produce heightened negative mood and body dissatisfaction, as well as diminished self-esteem concerning appearance among young women (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). This is likely because Fitspiration promotes a very narrow and strict bodily standard that is difficult, even impossible, for most women to achieve. Clearly, women who use Instagram can be subjected to a high degree of body surveillance and are likely to regularly practise self-surveillance by comparing their bodies to other self-mediated and idealized bodies.

Conceptualizing the Present Study

The cultural preoccupation with self-control and the idealization of minimal fat and muscularity lend themselves to the widespread popularity of bodybuilding, a sport characterized by rigorous diet and exercise regimes in pursuit of muscle gain and fat loss (Bordo, 2004). Given its emphasis on ample muscle gain, bodybuilding is a male-dominated sport; however, more and more women are participating (Aspridis, O'Halloran, & Liamputtong, 2014). A number of feminist scholars have declared female bodybuilding to be a form of feminist resistance, pointing out that, through developing a considerable amount of muscularity, female bodybuilders challenge demeaning notions around the ideal body of femininity as one that is a minimalist, fragile, and purely aesthetic object of male gaze (Bartky, 1998; Rosdahl, 2014). However, other feminist scholars assert that female bodybuilding is a highly gender-encoded practice; they argue that the bodies of female bodybuilders remain under high surveillance of the male gaze, which objectifies them and ultimately repositions them to be more (hetero)normatively feminine (Bordo, 2004; Choi, 2003; Dworkin, 2001; St Martin & Gavey, 1996; Wesely, 2001). For instance, female bodybuilders can be penalized for being too muscular in bodybuilding

competitions, while the most muscular male bodybuilder is the most likely to win (Choi, 2003). Additionally, bodybuilding competitions are essentially beauty pageants for female bodybuilders; as Dworkin (2001) found, "the increasing size of the female bodybuilder is only acceptable once 'tamed' by beauty" (p. 335). Competing female bodybuilders are required to engage in feminine bodily ornamentation by wearing heavy makeup, embellished bikinis, high-heels, and by elaborately styling their hair. They are judged according to their "overall physical appearance including complexion, skin tone, poise and overall presentation" (Land, 2015). Furthermore, unlike male bodybuilders, female bodybuilders are required to engage in sexually suggestive poses, particularly by bending over to display their gluteus muscles (Land, 2015).

In this article, we take a critical, feminist approach to investigating how (self-)surveillance over the bodies of female bodybuilders operates on Instagram. We consider how this can promote conformity to bodily norms around self-control and (hetero)normative femininity. We also follow Foucault's assertion that, while (self-)surveillance is often oppressive, it can also be empowering (Weber, 2012). Moreover, while self-surveillance often involves conformity, it can also come in the form of resistance. Furthermore, unlike mass media messages, which present idealized images of bodies almost exclusively, "Social media messages have the potential to present much more diverse representations of female and male bodies because they are mostly produced and disseminated by individuals" (Andsager, 2014, p. 32). Indeed, Murray (2015) observed instances in which women deliberately and consciously subverted the male gaze on social media in photographs they post of themselves. In particular, the women in Murray's study would represent defiance, strength, and empowerment through their poses, facial expressions, and style of dress, in direct protest of the often passive and sexualized ways in which women have long been expected to represent themselves (Mulvey, 1975). Thus, we are also interested in

how female bodybuilders represent their bodies in unconventional ways on Instagram and how they use Instagram to (inter)actively resist bodily norms around self-control and (hetero)normative femininity.

We utilized Instagram as a sort of 'magnifying glass' for exploring the conformity and resistance practised by female bodybuilders. Such processes are readily observable through the unique ways in which these women choose to display their bodies through photographs they post on Instagram. As Coleman (2005) points out, photographic images are symbolic representations; photographs are always mediated and never fully reflect material reality. Accordingly, we acknowledge that, relative to their material bodies, the photographed bodies of female bodybuilders on Instagram are consciously and deliberately self-mediated by them; "free […] from biological and physical inevitabilities" (Pitts, 2010, p. 230). Additionally, we considered the gendered ways in which female bodybuilders on Instagram discuss their bodies and associated diet and exercise practices with other Instagram users.

Methods

For our analyses, we employed visual narrative inquiry, which is a method derived from narrative inquiry, both of which rely on the notion that people understand and present their lives through stories. Our visual narrative inquiry into female bodybuilders on Instagram involved collecting images (e.g., photographs of bodies and related practices) and the descriptions of these images (e.g., captions) in order to construct an overall visual narrative regarding how the female bodybuilders selected construct gendered identities on Instagram. Our visual narrative inquiry also involved collecting data on people's reactions to these images (e.g., comments) and an analysis of how these reactions enable and constrain the gendered narratives presented by female

bodybuilders on Instagram. The specific data collection and analytic processes employed for our visual narrative inquiry are outlined below.

Posts were collected from the Instagram profiles of 50 female bodybuilders, which were located through searches of popular bodybuilding-related hashtags (e.g., "#bodybuilding", "#girlswithmuscle", and "#girlswholift"). Our criteria for selecting profiles were that posters regularly posted photographs of their bodies to document their bodybuilding progress and regularly described their bodies and bodybuilding practices in the captions of their posts. We gathered our data by taking screenshots of the images, captions, and comments in posts identified as relevant to our analysis. We were not required to seek permission for our use of certain images displayed as figures throughout this article, since these images qualified for fair dealing (e.g., were described and discussed in-depth in the accompanying text). These images are displayed in Figures 2, 3, and 6. We obtained permission for our use of the images displayed in Figures 1, 4, 5, and 7.

We conducted a preliminary analysis of the 50 profiles selected with intent to gain an overall understanding of the ways in which (self-)surveillance operates over the gendered narratives of female bodybuilders, particularly with respect to their bodily representations. In this analysis we categorized and analysed our data in order to determine the overall extent to which the bodies of female bodybuilders displayed on Instagram resemble the ideal body of (hetero)normative femininity, as well as the overall extent to which these women seek to conform to this ideal. We considered how much fat and muscle these women possess, as indicated in the photographs they post of themselves, and how much fat and muscle they express wanting to possess, as evidenced by how they discuss their bodies in the captions of their posts. We also undertook a more detailed analysis of our data by comparing the muscular bodies of the

female bodybuilders we observed to the thin and 'toned' feminine bodily ideal which is often presented in the mass media (Cairns & Johnston, 2015), and by identifying ways in which these women express or do not express dissatisfaction with their bodies because they do not meet this ideal. We also considered the particular ways in which the women in our study seek to influence other people's perception of them by showcasing their muscularity and fat in particular ways. We also identified and analysed ways in which these women objectify and sexualize their bodies through sexually-suggestive poses, styles of dress, and bodily ornamentation, such as makeup and hairstyling. We then explored the overall ways in which these practices may or may not be influenced by the opinions of other Instagram users, as evidenced by how other users critique and compliment the bodies of these female bodybuilders, particularly in regards to their muscularity and fat. For instance, we considered whether or not other Instagram users are more likely to criticise the muscularity of female bodybuilders if this is not objectified and sexualized, as this may enact a form of surveillance which encourages these women to objectify and sexualize their bodies. Finally, we identified the general ways in which female bodybuilders on Instagram demonstrate a conscious awareness of the surveillance being enacted over their bodies, and how they use Instagram to critique and discuss this surveillance. This involved analysing how these women respond to other Instagram users who react to their bodies in the comments sections of posts, and how they acknowledge past comments by others in the captions of later posts. We also identified more generally how female bodybuilders comment on the surveillance they experience on Instagram in the captions of their posts. To conduct our analyses, we categorized posts according to their relevance to the above themes. These posts were kept in separate files according to their relevant theme and reviewed several times in order to establish familiarity with the data. We then analysed our data by comparing similarities and differences

across the 50 profiles, identifying and interpreting trends around bodily self-representation and (self-)surveillance.

Following our preliminary analysis, 15 of the original 50 profiles considered were selected for the in-depth analysis. These 15 profiles were chosen primarily on the basis that the female bodybuilders who operate these profiles provided detailed information and comment regarding the analytical themes of interest (muscularity, fat, bodily representation, etc.) very frequently (daily or almost daily). Our in-depth analysis was similar to our preliminary analysis except that it involved a closer reading of the aforementioned themes; we examined each profile in its entirety, focusing on the specific ways in which female bodybuilders construct gendered narratives through representations of their bodies and related practices, how they interact with other Instagram users, and how these interactions shaped their gendered narratives on Instagram.

While conducting our preliminary analysis, we identified a relatively small, but growing, population of female bodybuilders on Instagram who openly identify as feminists and who actively engage in feminist critique regarding the surveillance being enacted over their bodies. While these women represent a minority group within Instagram's female bodybuilding community, we considered that much of the material contained on their profiles was invaluable to our research, and 5 of the 15 profiles selected for our in-depth analysis belong to these feminist female bodybuilders. We 'over-represent' overtly feminist female bodybuilders on Instagram primarily in an effort to emphasize that meaningful feminist change is happening throughout Instagram's female bodybuilding community.

We urge readers to keep in mind that our intent in displaying photographs of female bodybuilders in the findings section is not to invite a voyeuristic, objectifying gaze. Rather, our intent is to problematize this type of gaze. As will be discussed, the female bodybuilders in our

study often openly problematize female bodily objectification and sexualization. These women wish to have the strength of their muscular bodies appreciated and admired by those who gaze upon them, and we trust that readers will respect this and appreciate the feminist nature of their bodily displays.

Findings and Discussion

The presentation of our analysis begins with an exploration of how female bodybuilders challenge bodily norms of (hetero)normative femininity through their gendered narratives on Instagram, which redefine 'femininity' to include strength, independence, and empowerment, which they project through their muscularity. We then document various ways in which this feminist resistance is challenged on Instagram through the imposition of the male gaze, which encourages female bodybuilders on Instagram to minimize, and detract from, their muscularity. We also consider how female bodybuilders challenge the surveillance (Foucault, 1977) being enacted over their gendered narratives on Instagram by negotiating ways in which they can simultaneously conform to, and resist, bodily norms around self-control and (hetero)normative femininity. These practices allow female bodybuilders to take control of their gendered narratives on Instagram and to maintain their displays of female strength, independence, and empowerment.

Redefining femininity through muscularity.

Female bodybuilders on Instagram appear to adhere to the cultural notion that people's bodies reflect their capacity for self-control and success. They believe that lean and muscular

bodies represent high self-control and are, therefore, 'status symbols'. These beliefs are well-exemplified in a post by ashley_npc. She wrote:

> A well-built physique is a status symbol. It reflects the hard work you've put in. You can't steal it, you can't borrow it and you can't hold onto it without constant work. It's from dedication, discipline, self-respect and dignity.

Furthermore, these women assert that a lean and muscular body is a 'tool' that can be used to achieve success; they believe that they can control their lives through controlling their bodies. This belief is evident in that female bodybuilders constantly pair photographs of their lean and muscular bodies with generic, inspirational statements about success. For instance, missashleysarina posted a photograph (Figure 1, left) of herself in a gym, and in its accompanying caption, wrote:

> Fight for your dreams and goals. More importantly, fight for yourself. Never give up because you are built for this shit. #iamBUILT.

Here, missashleysarina equates being physically *"BUILT"* (e.g., lean and muscular) with being built for overall success in life; hence, her general references to unspecified *"dreams and goals"* and to being generally *"unstoppable"*.

Figure 1. A photograph of missashleysarina.

The self-control and capacity for success that female bodybuilders want to represent through their bodies have an important feminist element. As previously mentioned, women are expected to demonstrate self-control through their bodies in very specific ways; a properly controlled and feminine body is only somewhat muscular. This expectation functions ultimately to reinforce cultural notions around female fragility, subservience, and of women's moral inferiority via a lack of self-control. Female bodybuilders on Instagram frequently challenge these notions by openly critiquing them and by presenting bodies that are muscular. For instance, catvanbe writes:

> We talk about men PURSUING women, of men RESCUING a damsel in distress and how it is our duty as women to be captivated and rescued […] I am not a prize […] I am not looking to be rescued, or won over, or swooped off my feet […] Nothing or no one will stand in the way of my goals […].

catvanbe gives voice to women's frustration with dominant notions that they are subservient *"damsel*[s] *in distress"* who need to *"be captivated and rescued"* by men. catvanbe asserts that she is capable of taking care of herself and of controlling her life and achieving her goals independently. Many female bodybuilders on Instagram pair photographs of their muscular bodies with captions similar to the one posted by catvanbe in that they contain feminist testaments around female strength, independence, and empowerment. For example, zoelivelovelift posted a photograph of herself flexing with the following caption:

> […] when a guy says 'I'm not attracted to girls who lift', Do you really think that we lift to try and attract men like you? We do not [care] if you think it's attractive […] The world doesn't revolve around men, we don't live our lives to please you.

hipkiss32 commented on zoelivelovelift's post and said, *"A girl who lifts is a girl who can fight her own battles"*. While these bodybuilders practise conformity to the cultural notion that bodies reflect self-control and success, their bodies symbolize a *feminist* form of self-control and success. Through becoming muscular and presenting this muscularity on Instagram, female bodybuilders seek to construct gendered narratives that emphasize female strength, independence, and empowerment in a society in which a properly 'controlled' and 'feminine' body represents fragility, subservience, and 'unruliness'. These examples are in line with past research indicating that female bodybuilders report more confidence, empowerment, and feelings of control as a result of bodybuilding (Aspridis, O'Halloran, & Liamputtong, 2014).

Another important way in which female bodybuilders demonstrate feminist resistance through their gendered narratives on Instagram is by frequently challenging the cultural assumption that 'feminine' bodies must represent fragility and subservience in order to be considered heterosexually desirable. It is important to note here that each of the female bodybuilders we observed appeared to be heterosexual (e.g., had exclusively male partners, or spoke exclusively about their interest in men), and thus, were in direct negotiation of heterosexual desirability. jadesocoby stated:

> I've accepted [that I want to] get as strong as possible, [my] body is going to look a little different from societal norms [and I am] ok with it. My goal is to show women it's ok to be strong, to have muscle.

Like jadesocoby, many female bodybuilders on Instagram frequently assert that they want to be *"as strong as possible"* and that they are not seeking muscularity for only aesthetic reasons. ohilyssa said:

> […] please consider how and why your perceptions of femininity somehow don't include muscle and strength. Please consider not reducing your abilities in fitness or potential achievements to only the goal of a hot body (I think my body is hot AND I am strong!) Consider the possibility

> that society's obsession with female SMALLNESS is actually symbolic for female subservience […].

Notably, ohilyssa expresses that she thinks her muscular body is *"hot"* or, in other words, sexually desirable (*"I think my body is hot AND I am strong!"*). In fact, many female bodybuilders expressed a desire to be feminine and (hetero)sexually attractive. These women do not necessarily engage in feminist resistance by rejecting the cultural notion that women must appear (hetero)sexually desirable. Rather, they engage in feminist resistance by rejecting the cultural notion that female muscularity is not (hetero)sexually desirable. For instance, lanabananafitness said, *"Lifting heavy weights has made me feel more like a woman than any dress, makeup or hair-do could"*. These women refuse to accept that muscularity (and strength) and female attractiveness (and femininity) are mutually exclusive and choose to redefine for themselves what a (hetero)sexually desirable, feminine body looks like. Their posts support the findings of Grogan, Evans, Wright, and Hunter (2004), who argue that female bodybuilders practise bodybuilding in large part because being muscular makes them feel "feminine and sexual", and because they feel "more sexually attractive and more sensual when they [are] 'trained'" (p. 56).

In sum, while female bodybuilders on Instagram practise conformity to the notions that their bodies should project self-control as well as (hetero)sexual desirability, they ultimately demonstrate feminist resistance by presenting and endorsing an alternative representation of what self-control and (hetero)sexual desirability can look like for women. Their version of a controlled, (hetero)sexually desirable, and feminine body is one that, through being muscular, moves their bodies away from a symbolic representation of fragility, subservience, and

unruliness, and towards a more favourable symbolic representation of strength, independence, and empowerment.

Surveillance over muscularity and fat.

The feminist resistance practised by female bodybuilders on Instagram certainly does not come without contention. There is a high degree of surveillance on Instagram over the gendered narratives presented by female bodybuilders through which bodily norms of (hetero)normative femininity are imposed. This surveillance occurs primarily in the comments sections accompanying photographs of their bodies, and ultimately serves to undermine the feminist resistance that female bodybuilders evoke through their muscularity. Other Instagram users often express admiration for the muscularity of female bodybuilders and its representation of female strength, independence, and empowerment. However, this admiration is limited in that it is mostly reserved for the bodies female bodybuilders which are displayed in ornamented and sexualized ways – and which are, therefore, displayed as more (hetero)normatively feminine. Conversely, when female bodybuilders display their muscular bodies on Instagram plainly and without ornamenting and sexualizing them, other Instagram users are much more likely to criticize their muscularity by deeming it as masculine, excessive, and unattractive. A post (Figure 2) by missashleysarina offers an excellent demonstration of this perspective:

Figure 2. missashleysarina juxtaposed with a runway model.

In this post, missashleysarina presents a photograph of herself onstage during a bodybuilding competition next to a photograph of a runway model, whose body meets the criteria for the current thin, yet toned, ideal body of femininity. Aside from being considerably more muscular than the runway model's body, missashleysarina's body is similarly ornamented, with makeup, jewellery, and styled hair, as well as similarly sexualized. Both women are wearing very little clothing and posing in a (somewhat) sexually suggestive manner. Other Instagram users commented on missashleysarina's post to compliment her body and to exclaim that her body is *"better"* than that of the less muscular model. A few of these comments include, *"Left* [photograph] *all the way! Beautiful", "*[you're] *way hotter"*, and *"looking amazing like a much hotter healthier fit* […] *version of* [a model]*!"*. In contrast, catvanbe posted a photograph (Figure 3) of her muscular back while wearing simple workout clothing:

Figure 3. A photograph of catvanbe.

Other Instagram users criticized catvanbe's muscularity; one commenter said, *"she's so wide* […] *i don't like it. Its too much"* and another commenter said, *"it's kinda terrifying"*. Notably, missashleysarina's body appears to be just as muscular, if not more muscular, than catvanbe's body. However, missashleysarina did not receive criticism for her muscularity. We propose that this is because it is heavily ornamented and sexualized.

Female bodybuilders are more likely to receive compliments regarding the muscularity of their lower-bodies (e.g., gluteus muscles, thigh muscles) than they are to receive compliments regarding the muscularity of their upper-bodies (e.g., biceps, shoulder muscles, back muscles). When female bodybuilders display their muscular lower-bodies on Instagram, particularly their gluteus muscles, they receive compliments such as, *"BEAUTIFUL"*, *"Looking fantastic!!!!"* and *"Nice! Beautiful curves!"*. Conversely, when they display their muscular upper-bodies, they are more likely to receive criticism such as, *"too masculine"* and *"scary"*. This discrepancy is due to the fact that muscular upper-bodies are culturally constructed as more masculine than lower-bodies, in part because they indicate a more functional type of strength (e.g., lifting heavy objects). On the other hand, muscular lower-bodies are considered more feminine because, more

than indicating functional strength, they aestheticize and sexualize bodies. This further explains why missashleysarina (Figure 3) did not receive criticism for her muscularity, whereas catvanbe (Figure 4) did; the muscularity of missashleysarina's upper-body is much less emphasized in the photograph she posted of herself. Evidently, surveillance over the bodies of these bodybuilders operates in large part through other Instagram users who reserve their appreciation for female muscularity which is ornamented, sexualized, and therefore more (hetero)normatively feminine. Ornamentation and sexualization distracts Instagram users from the muscularity of female bodybuilders; therefore, we contend that the female strength, independence, and empowerment that female bodybuilders seek to represent through their muscularity become minimized.

Surveillance over the bodies of female bodybuilders in our study also operates such that their muscularity is much more likely to be admired if it is accompanied by very little body fat. This is particularly evident in the comments female bodybuilders receive when they display their bodies during a bodybuilding phase called 'bulking'. Bulking is a temporary period of several weeks or months during which bodybuilders increase their caloric intake to more effectively gain muscle, following the logic that muscle gain is difficult on a low-calorie diet. Bulking involves noticeable fat gain and is practised with the intent that the fat will be diminished through calorie restriction and exercise once bodybuilders have attained their desired amount of muscle, an alternative phase they refer to as 'cutting'. Female bodybuilders often receive criticism from other Instagram users for the fat they gain while bulking. For instance, ohilyssa posted a photograph (Figure 4) of her gluteus muscles during a bulking phase:

Figure 4. Photographs of ohilyssa during a bulking phase.

A commenter wrote:

> what woman puts her big ol ass on Instagram for the world to see [… when it is] not in shape […] keep working out good luck [you] need it.

This commenter's criticism is based on the cultural assumption that if a *"woman"* possesses more fat than the very minimal amount that the ideal body of femininity allows, she must *"not* [be] *in shape"*. Having minimal body fat is culturally understood as being indicative of high self-control, and women must display an unreasonably small amount of fat in order to project high self-control. To do otherwise is to let oneself go. As mentioned previously, the feminist resistance practised by female bodybuilders on Instagram is linked to their conformity to norms around self-control, in that they believe that their muscularity symbolizes to others that they have the self-control necessary to live as strong, independent, and empowered women. The expectation that they must possess very little body fat in order to project adequate self-control

continues to make it difficult for female bodybuilders to project this feminist resistance on Instagram.

Negotiating muscularity and maintaining resistance.

Female bodybuilders on Instagram internalize the surveillance described above and engage in self-surveillance. This was readily identifiable through the ways in which they choose to present and discuss their bodies, often conforming to the ideal body of (hetero)normative femininity by presenting ornamented, sexualised, and very lean bodies. These bodybuilders frequently pose, flex, and manipulate lighting to produce images which make them appear leaner and/or more muscular. They also frequently sexualize their images by choosing to display their gluteus muscles over any other muscle, and by posing in sexually suggestive ways. Additionally, these women often display as little fat as possible. They post copious photographs of their bodies when they are lean, and significantly fewer photographs when they are bulking. We also observed several instances in which female bodybuilders confess to their followers that they often avoid posting photographs of specific parts of their bodies which, as they claim, have 'too much' fat. For example, cadziie wrote that she normally prefers not to *"wear tank tops when* [she is] *bulking"* because she is self-conscious of the fat on her upper-body. For the same reason, she tends to post fewer photographs of her upper-body and more photographs of her *"legs which lean out the fastest"*.

Despite their conformity to the surveillance being enacted over their bodies, these bodybuilders are conscious of this surveillance and often critique it. They comment critically on the expectation that women need to attain a certain objectified aesthetic in order to appear as though they can control their lives, achieve success, and be (hetero)sexually desirable. For

example, fitnessdietitian_em re-posted an image (Figure 5) from an unknown Instagram user's profile and edited the image to include the word 'STUPID':

Figure 5. Repost by fitnessdietitian_em.

The original image is intended to motivate women to avoid having 'too much' body fat ('Processed food + Fat + low confidence') by listing various 'benefits' that they will supposedly achieve by doing so, including 'having confidence', '[getting] whatever guy you want', '[being] whoever you want', and 'knowing you can do or achieve anything'. fitnessdietitian_em clearly disapproves of this image (e.g., 'STUPID'), and in the accompanying caption of her post, she criticizes it:

> I swear some people really think they are better than the rest of the population because they have an aesthetic body… So what your saying is that if you are "fat" you cannot get "any guy you want?" […or] "be

> whoever you want" [?]. Shit like this makes me question humanity […
> People should] Workout to be healthy and fit.

Similarly, c0nmoney critiques the gendered surveillance being enacted over her body by challenging the expectation that women should have small and fragile bodies in order to be (hetero)sexually desirable. A male Instagram user commented on a photograph of c0nmoney's body and wrote, *"I don't really dig muscle on a woman* […] *she looks too masculine"*. c0nmoney replied:

> people don't realize it's a freakin compliment […] I'm trying
> to look strong. [do you] think I lift heavy objects into the air
> for no reason?

Here, c0nmoney engages the surveillance of the male gaze being enacted over her body and consciously resists it in an effort to preserve the strength and empowerment she achieves through her muscularity.

In addition to being aware of the expectations of (hetero)normative femininity to which they are subjected, these bodybuilders are also aware of how often Instagram users manipulate the appearance of their bodies in posted photographs so that they more closely meet these expectations. fitnessdietitian_em acknowledged this tendency in three of her posts, presented in Figure 6:

Figure 6. fitnessdietitian_em demonstrates how female bodybuilders self-mediate the appearance of their bodies in photographs.

In one post (Figure 6a), fitnessdietitian_em compares two photographs of her stomach to illustrate how flexing and posing in a particular way can make one appear leaner. In the caption of this post, fitnessdietitian_em wrote that both photographs were taken on the *"Same day. Seated* [versus] *flexed"*. She adds, *"Oh the illusion eh. Seeee don't compare* [your bodies] *with others because #illusion"*. Similarly, the other two posts by fitnessdietitian_em (Figure 6b, 6c) illustrate how flexing and posing in certain ways can make one's gluteus muscles appear larger. In addition to demonstrating how bodybuilders are aware that women tend to manipulate and idealize their bodies on Instagram, fitnessdietitian_em's posts point to the tendency for female bodybuilders to engage in social comparisons by comparing their bodies to other, idealized women's bodies presented in photographs on Instagram. Evidently, the male gaze is appropriated among female bodybuilders on Instagram through a competition-oriented female gaze, in that they monitor and evaluate each other's adherence to feminine bodily standards, use these evaluations as gauges for evaluating their own success at meeting these standards (Gamman, 1988; Riley, Evans, & Mackiewicz, 2016). However, these women are also often conscious of

these comparative and evaluative tendencies, and often encourage one another to avoid engaging in them; in doing so, they actively resist the male gaze that these tendencies appropriate.

Female bodybuilders engage in self-surveillance by taking control of their gendered narratives on Instagram and picking and choosing ways in which to project both (hetero)normative femininity as well as female strength, independence, and empowerment – concepts which have traditionally been mutually exclusive. Through consciously critiquing the (self-)surveillance being enacted over their bodies on Instagram, female bodybuilders are able to make negotiations which involve simultaneously conforming to the ideal body of (hetero)normative femininity while maintaining a sense of strength, independence, and empowerment through muscularity. These negotiations involve efforts to maintain an association between femininity and strength, independence, and empowerment. For instance, lanabananafitness posted a photograph (Figure 7) of her body in a bikini during a bulking phase:

*Figure 7***.** Photographs of lanabananafitness during a bulking phase.

In the caption, lanabananafitness tries to negotiate how to feel feminine despite the fat she had gained. She wrote,

> I need to […] realize that it's a mere miniscule layer of fat that separates the me then to me now. I'm still strong still feminine still confident, just gotta remember that I need to give up some things (silly things like abs) in order to become stronger which in the end results in a bigger badass version of me […]

Here, lanabananafitness tries to remind herself that she is *"still feminine"* despite her *"miniscule layer of fat"* and indicates that she sometimes perceives her leanness and femininity as things that she needs to sacrifice or *"give up* […] *in order to become stronger"*. lanabananafitness associates leanness with femininity. However, she is aware of this and is making an effort to accept the fat she has gained, knowing that she needs to gain fat in order to develop muscularity and become *"stronger"* and *"more badass"*. Additionally, ashley_npc said, *"I can lift as heavy as you. I just do it with lip gloss and painted nails",* a comment that appears to be directed at men. ashley_npc claims that she is just as strong as men, but in a different way - a more *feminine* way. *"Lip gloss and painted nails"* are examples of bodily ornamentation which can detract from the muscularity of female bodybuilders. However, ashley_npc consciously acknowledges that she does not want to *detract* from her strength, given her claim to be "*just as strong*" as men, and instead seeks to *associate* her strength with her femininity. In an effort to represent strength and femininity simultaneously, female bodybuilders on Instagram construct their own version of what a feminine and (hetero)sexually desirable body looks like – one that includes muscularity.

It is in this way that female bodybuilders on Instagram successfully challenge harmful notions around women as weak, fragile, and subservient.

Conclusion

By proudly displaying their muscularity on Instagram, female bodybuilders challenge the dominant cultural notion that women's bodies must reflect fragility, subservience, and 'unruliness' in order to be considered feminine and (hetero)sexually desirable. Female bodybuilders on Instagram do this in particular becoming muscular and by using their muscularity to represent female strength, independence, and empowerment through their bodies. These feminist narratives are often challenged and constrained by the surveillance of the male gaze, which seeks to reposition their bodies as the relatively fragile, subservient, and 'unruly' counterparts to men's bodies. Other Instagram users express appreciation for the bodies of female bodybuilders when they are shown as ornamented, sexualized, and with little fat. Many female bodybuilders on Instagram are critical of this surveillance and its attempts to reposition them. As such, they are not merely passive – but active – subjects of male gaze. Furthermore, given that they have control over how their bodies are portrayed and described, female bodybuilders on Instagram can direct how other people perceive and evaluate their bodies to some extent (Kibbey, 2005; Weber, 2012). While they often choose to portray ornamented, sexualized, and lean bodies, these women actively take control of their gendered narrative by negotiating how to accomplish this while sustaining a representation of female strength, independence, and empowerment through their muscularity. Their femininity and their muscularity are not mutually exclusive.

Instagram has proven to be a useful site for female bodybuilders, as members of a gendered subculture, to gain exposure to large groups of people. Together, the 15 female

bodybuilders we observed for our in-depth analysis had over two million Instagram followers (July, 2018). The critiques of, and resistance against, harmful cultural standards around (hetero)normative femininity and the body declared by these female bodybuilders are likely to be inspiring for many women (and men). The strength, independence, and empowerment that female bodybuilders evoke through their bodies on Instagram are certainly an improvement from the weakness, submissiveness, and passivity that are associated with the ideal body of (hetero)normative femininity. However, we must also emphasize that the primary issue with cultural standards around (hetero)normative femininity and the body has less to do with the particular attributes they promote (e.g., extremely thin, not muscular), and more to do with their strict and obligatory nature, which continues to characterize the lean and muscular body that female bodybuilders on Instagram strive for. Moreover, like the extremely thin body of (hetero)normative femininity, the lean and muscular standard for female bodybuilders on Instagram is strict and heavily promoted as an 'ideal' throughout Instagram's female bodybuilding community (Bordo, 2004; Wesely, 2001). We noted that female bodybuilders on Instagram engage in rigorous dietary and exercise practices in their efforts to achieve their ideal body, which they view as normal and necessary for their participation in the sport of bodybuilding. Like the dietary and exercise practices required for the thin feminine bodily ideal (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), these practices have been shown to place female bodybuilders at greater risk of eating disorders and exercise addiction (Hale, Diehl, Weaver, & Briggs, 2013). Furthermore, despite the feminist quality of their muscularity, female bodybuilders on Instagram engage in social comparison (Tiggemann. & Zaccardo, 2015) by comparing their bodies to the bodies of other female bodybuilders on Instagram. They express feeling more dissatisfied with their bodies upon doing so, believing their bodies to be inferior. This is especially worrisome

given our demonstration of how often, and how easily, female bodybuilders on Instagram manipulate the appearance of their bodies in photographs so that they appear more lean and muscular, creating the impression that a lean and muscular body is more realistic and common than it actually is (Shen & Bissell, 2013). Female bodybuilders, and women in general, should not have to redefine what a feminine and (hetero)sexually attractive body looks like or to adhere to a particular bodily aesthetic (whether thin or muscular) in order to become empowered. Future research on female bodybuilding may want to further problematize the strict and obligatory nature of the lean and muscular bodily standard that female bodybuilders idealize, the often extremely rigid dietary and exercise practices required to meet this ideal, and the psychological consequences of trying to meet this ideal.

We maintain that the feminist resistance represented in the gendered narratives of female bodybuilders on Instagram is an excellent example of feminist progression regarding women's body-related issues. We must keep in mind that female bodybuilders on Instagram only find themselves faced with the difficult challenge of negotiating how to be strong and muscular, yet still feminine and (hetero)sexually desirable, because of the cultural tendency to heavily objectify women's bodies in the first place. The ideal body which the women in our study idealize remains an objectified standard which is difficult to reach and maintain. It is the demeaning and belittling nature of the dominant feminine bodily standard which female bodybuilders on Instagram manage to challenge in innovative ways.

Transition into the Second Research Article

In ways that are similar to how the male gaze is appropriated through the regulations of female bodybuilding competitions (Choi, 2003; Rosdahl, 2014), the male gaze is appropriated throughout the female bodybuilding community on Instagram. In the article just presented, I conceptualized how the male gaze is appropriated through heteronormative surveillance on Instagram, which operates such that the female bodybuilders I observed are judged, criticized, and admired by others according to the extent to which they subvert and/or meet feminine bodily ideals. Moreover, these women are criticized for their muscularity unless it is ornamented, sexualized, and accompanied by very little body fat. Somewhat ironically, female bodybuilders whose muscular bodies conform to these stereotypically feminine standards are admired for the feminist strength, independence, and empowerment that their bodies symbolize. Through their exposure to these processes of heteronormative surveillance on Instagram, these female bodybuilders learn that the feminist strength, independence, and empowerment symbolized by their muscularity will be dismissed unless they feminize it. This points to the relational aspect of gender; how our experiences of gender depend in large part on how other people react to, and engage with, us. In order to maintain the overall feminist nature of their gendered narratives on Instagram,– in order to prevent others from dismissing the feminist resistance represented by their muscularity – these female bodybuilders are compelled to conform to stereotypical bodily femininities. Rather than claiming that these negotiations negate the feminist resistance represented by the muscularity of the female bodybuilders I observed, I took the position that these negotiations function to *preserve* their feminist resistance. I concluded that these women take control of their gendered narratives on Instagram by re-defining femininity in ways that

challenge the weakness, passivity, and subservience which have traditionally characterized an 'appropriately' controlled and feminine body.

Like the gendered contradictions inherent in female bodybuilding, the gendered contradictions inherent in male bodybuilding have sparked debates among gender scholars over the sport's transgressive potential (Bartky, 1998; Wesely, 2001). As previously discussed, the contrast between the hyper-masculine appearance of male bodybuilders and the extreme nature of their stereotypically feminine self-objectification has led to confusion over whether male bodybuilding represents an attempt to evoke hegemonic masculinity or whether it can be better understood as an inclusive masculine practice (Richardson, 2004; Andreasson & Johansson, 2016). While completing my literature review on female bodybuilders, I became interested in the comparisons, similarities, and contrasts between the gendered practices of female and male bodybuilders. While female bodybuilders empower themselves through their muscularity, gender scholars have noted how the muscularity of male bodybuilders serves to preserve, or capitalize upon, the power and privilege that comes with being male (Magallares, 2013; Swami & Voracek, 2013). Additionally, because (self-)objectification is a stereotypically feminine position which functions to secure female subordination (Bordo, 2004), I was interested in how male bodybuilders negotiate their (self-)objectification, in addition to any other potential enactments of femininity. My interest in these processes was further bolstered by the fact that male femininity (or inclusive masculinity) is becoming increasingly normalized (Anderson, 2009; Clements & Field, 2014

In the next article presented in this thesis, I expand upon the analyses presented in the first article on female bodybuilders by exploring the ways in which male bodybuilders construct gendered narratives on Instagram, particularly how they negotiate heteronormativity on

Instagram from their privileged positions in society. In doing so, I demonstrate how, like the female bodybuilders from the first article, the gendered negotiations of male bodybuilders on Instagram function to challenge patriarchal power while simultaneously re-stabilizing it to some degree. However, unlike female bodybuilders, male bodybuilders negotiate gender from a position of privilege, where muscularity and anti-femininity are encouraged and serve hegemonic functions. As will be demonstrated, the gendered negotiations of the male bodybuilders I observed reveal unique, compelling ways in which heteronormativity is currently being (re)produced and challenged through men's modern, gendered self-representations on Instagram.

Male bodybuilders on Instagram: Negotiating inclusive masculinities through hegemonic masculine bodies

Abstract

Gender is an embodied performance. This is particularly apparent when we consider activities such as male bodybuilding, through which men pursue very muscular, hyper-masculine bodies. In this article, we examine the hybridized masculinities practised by male bodybuilders on the objectifying, image-based social media website, Instagram. Contrary to past research which has almost exclusively characterized male bodybuilders as hegemonically masculine, we reveal ways in which male bodybuilders practise inclusive masculinities on Instagram through emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and extreme self-objectification. We attribute these inclusive masculinities to the cultural movement towards softer masculine ideals, which has been argued to challenge male hegemony. However, we argue that male bodybuilders continue to project hegemonic masculine dominance, mental strength, and socioeconomic success on Instagram through representations of their lean and muscular bodies. We also conceptualize how these hegemonic masculine embodiments operate as forms of 'hegemonic masculine negotiation', in that they function to counteract, or compensate for, the inclusive masculinities practised by the male bodybuilders in our study. Our findings demonstrate contemporary ways in which the hegemonic function of dominant masculinities can adjust to, and endure in spite of, the cultural changes which threaten it.

Introduction

Contemporary research into masculinities is largely informed by Connell (1987)'s Hegemonic Masculinity Theory. This theory proposes that masculine identities are hierarchically stratified, and that at the top of this hierarchy are hegemonic masculinities, which are normalized and idealized. Hegemonic masculinities ultimately support patriarchal power, and have traditionally done so by encouraging men to exert dominance over others through stoic, aggressive, and competitive attitudes and behaviours.

It is argued that the most powerful tool used by men who subscribe to hegemonic masculinities has been to distance themselves from femininity and the subordinate status and supposed weakness that it represents (Dellinger, 2004; Plummer, 2001). Given the cultural association between femininity and homosexuality, these men have also been argued to actively differentiate themselves from homosexuality (Anderson, 2005; 2009). Importantly, Connell (1987) and others (e.g., Pascoe & Bridges, 2014; Kimmel, 1996; Messner, 2007) emphasize how hegemonic masculinities are continually shifting and adjusting in response to sociohistorical changes. For instance, the women's and gay movements of the 1980s have improved cultural perceptions of femininity and homosexuality (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2012; Messner, 2007), which has led masculinity scholars to re-consider the extent to which, and particular ways in which, men continue to evoke anti-feminine and homophobic masculinities (Adams 2011; Bridges, 2014; Bridges & Pascoe, 2016). It has been argued that men today are beginning to take up softer forms of masculinity which involve less stoicism, aggression, and domination over others, and more engagement in stereotypically feminine practices, such as emotional expressiveness (Clements and Field, 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messner, 2007). As such, Anderson (2009) argues that masculinities have become less reliant on the domination and

marginalization of others, and have thus become less hegemonic and more inclusive, which has the potential to challenge patriarchal power.

Masculinity scholars have approached the concept of inclusive masculinities cautiously, having found that men who adhere to inclusive masculinities often continue to assert male hegemony, albeit in more subtle ways than before (Arxer, 2011; Barber, 2008; Demetriou, 2001; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Hall, Gough, & Seymour-Smith, 2013; O'Neill, 2015; Wilkins, 2009). Anderson (2005) himself found that those who are not obviously sexist or homophobic and who claim to adhere to inclusive masculine perspectives often remain concerned about not appearing too soft, effeminate, or gay. For instance, men who claim to not be homophobic have been shown to engage in a mechanism termed 'heterosexual recuperation', which enables them to establish heterosexual masculine identities without being explicitly homophobic (McCormack & Anderson, 2010). Heterosexual recuperation includes a strategy called 'ironic recuperation', which occurs when men proclaim same-sex desire in a satirical fashion as a way to maintain heterosexual masculine identities. Interestingly, ironic recuperation allows men to adopt stereotypically feminine and gay practices, particularly emotional and behavioural intimacy with other men, without the perceived risk of being labelled effeminate or homosexual (Arxer, 2011).

Bridges and Pascoe (2014)'s Hybrid Masculinity Theory is useful for understanding how men construct masculine identities in simultaneously inclusive and hegemonic ways, and how these 'hybrid' masculine identities are implicated in broader processes of gender inequality. Bridges and Pascoe contest Anderson (2009)'s assertion that inclusive masculine ideals have the potential to challenge male hegemony. They contend that "hybrid masculinities may be best thought of as contemporary expressions of gender and sexual inequality" (p. 247); that hybrid masculinities are simply new ways of reinforcing patriarchal power (Arxer, 2011). In fact, these

masculinity scholars argue that men's stereotypically gay and feminine practices (Anderson, 2005) often function to obscure, or disguise, the hegemonic function of their anti-feminine and homophobic masculinities (Arxer, 2011; Barber, 2008; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001; Messner, 2007). While often absent of explicit anti-femininity and homophobia, men's hybrid masculinities continue to (re)produce male domination, and does so in ways that are relatively implicit and therefore difficult to identify and scrutinize (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messner, 1993; 2007).

Muscularity has long been a symbol of male dominance and has long been important for men's hegemonic masculine identity construction (Wamsley, 2007). In spite of the proposed increase in the inclusivity of masculinity, bodybuilding, which is a sport geared towards developing extremely large muscles, has been growing in popularity since the 1980s. It has been argued (Swami & Voracek, 2013) that male bodybuilders construct exaggerated hegemonic masculine identities in order to (re-)assert male hegemony in the face of increasing gender equality. Conversely, others (Andreasson & Johansson 2016; Richardson, 2004) have challenged this position through assertions that bodybuilding is an inclusively masculine activity. They argue that male bodybuilding subverts hegemonic masculinity since male bodybuilders often objectify their bodies to extreme degrees in pursuit of an aesthetic ideal, which is a stereotypically feminine orientation. Further research is needed to clarify existing debates regarding the hybrid masculinities practised by male bodybuilders, and to consider how these hybrid masculinities interact in ways that correspond with the overall cultural (re)production of patriarchal power.

(Self-)surveillance over bodies on social media.

Social media websites are compelling sites for observing how people construct gendered identities, including through representations of their bodies (Marshall, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2018; Barry & Martin, 2016). Social media enable users to be heavily selective about how they present themselves, with users tending to present idealized versions of themselves and their bodies through carefully staged communications and photographs (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). These modes of self-representation spur feelings of judgment by others and exacerbate one's desire to achieve cultural expectations, including expectations of appearance (Sorokowski et al., 2015). Foucault (1977)'s theorization of power and surveillance is useful for understanding such processes. According to Foucault, we are active agents in the (re)production of cultural expectations and we (re)produce them through our everyday thoughts, behaviours, and (inter)actions, which act as forms of (self-)surveillance. Social media have been found to facilitate constant (self-)surveillance, including with respect to appearance (Mitrou, Kandias, Stavrou, & Gritzalis, 2014). For instance, social media users often monitor and critique their own bodies and those of other social media users, and compare their bodies to the idealized bodies of other social media users (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012). Through this (self-)surveillance, social media users appropriate cultural expectations of the body and, in doing so, actively (re)produce them.

The majority of research on links between social media and bodily (self-)surveillance focuses on women (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). The very limited research on men who use social media for self-presentation has found that men's engagement with social media compels them to think critically about the appearance of their bodies and to value their bodies for the purpose of public viewing (Penny, 2013). Furthermore, men who use

social media have been found to compare their appearances to narrow male beauty standards presented in the mass media and to compare their bodies to the idealized bodies of other men on social media (Barry & Martin, 2016).

Instagram is a photo-based social media website with countless photographs of bodies, making it a particularly potent site for bodily (self-)surveillance (Marshall, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2018). Instagram is also one of the most popular social media websites today, hosting around 800 million users as of June, 2017 (Balakrishnan & Boorstin, 2017). Users access Instagram primarily through their mobile phones and other mobile devices (e.g., tablets), where they can instantly share photographs, other images, and videos on their Instagram profiles and view the Instagram profiles of others. Instagram posts also often contain captions and comments by other users. Users can also include 'hashtags' on their Instagram posts (e.g., #malebodybuilding); when users click on these hashtags, they open a page containing each publicly accessible Instagram post containing that hashtag. Users also 'follow' each other on Instagram in order to have the posts of the people they follow appear instantly on their newsfeeds. Additionally, unlike most other social media websites, most Instagram profiles are not private and are accessible to anyone who uses the internet. For these reasons, people's exposure to images of bodies on Instagram is vast, as well as regular and frequent.

Conceptualizing the Present Study

Given that men are increasingly constructing masculine identities on social media (Barry & Martin, 2016), men's methods of self-display on social media are invaluable for understanding current ways in which male bodybuilders perform hybrid masculinities, including through representations of their bodies. However, research on how male bodybuilders construct their

gendered identities on social media is extremely scarce (Andreass on & Johansson, 2016), and there is virtually no research which focuses on male bodybuilders on Instagram. This is despite the fact that male bodybuilders are avid users of social media (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016), where they can readily display and discuss their bodies and related bodybuilding practices. The hashtag '#bodybuilding' generates over 92,000,000 posts (May, 2019) on Instagram, a large portion of which are posted by male bodybuilders and contain photographs of their bodies and discussions of their bodybuilding practices.

In this article, we take a critical, feminist, and social constructionist approach to examine ways in which male bodybuilders practise hybrid masculinities on Instagram through self-representations of their bodies and related bodybuilding practices. We also aim to reveal how surveillance by others on Instagram corresponds with the self-representations of male bodybuilders. Moreover, we aim to identify and analyze how other Instagram users react to the self-representations of male bodybuilders on Instagram through, for instance, criticisms and compliments. We are also interested in how male bodybuilders internalize the surveillance they experience on Instagram and engage in *self*-surveillance by either conforming to it or resisting it. In doing so, we take into account the relational nature of gender identity construction (Goffman, 1959; Phillips, 2009); how people's experiences and expressions of gender depend on, and manifest through, their interactions with others (Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013).

We are particularly interested in potential ways in which the hegemonic masculinities of male bodybuilders function to, or do not function to, compensate for their inclusive masculinities (Bridges & Pasco, 2014). We propose that a primary reason why gender scholars continue to debate the seemingly 'contradictory' nature of male bodybuilding is because they have falsely assumed that male bodybuilding and its related practices are either gender-conforming (e.g.,

hegemonic) or gender-subversive (e.g., inclusive) (Wesely, 2001). We employ Hybrid Masculinity Theory in order to address the complex and multi-faceted ways in which male bodybuilders construct masculine identities, and seek to reveal how these men's inclusive and hegemonic masculinities correspond and interact.

Methods

In this research, we employed visual narrative inquiry, which is a branch of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is based on the idea that people live, understand, and portray their lives like stories. To conduct our visual narrative inquiry, we collected various images presented by male bodybuilders on Instagram, particularly photographs of bodies and related practices (e.g., photographs of them working out in the gym). We also collected the captions contained in these posts, which most often contained descriptions of the images, including the related thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the male bodybuilders we observed. We used this information to construct an overall visual narrative regarding the ways in which male bodybuilders construct gendered identities on Instagram through self-representations of their bodies and related practices. Additionally, we collected the comments that other people have left on the posts of the male bodybuilders in our study in order to understand how other people react to their bodies and related practices, and how these reactions enable and constrain their gendered narratives on Instagram. Below, we detail the specific processes we employed for data collection and analysis.

We began with a search of popular bodybuilding hashtags on Instagram ("#bodybuilding", "#bodybuilder", "#fitnessmotivation", "#gym") in order to locate, and collect posts from, the Instagram profiles of 50 male bodybuilders. Our selection of these profiles was based on the requirement that the male bodybuilders operating these profiles regularly post

photographs of their bodies, and regularly discuss their bodies and related bodybuilding practices in the accompanying captions and comments sections. We also narrowed our selection by choosing male bodybuilders who had relatively large followings since their self-representations have more exposure, and therefore more surveillance and impact. We then conducted a preliminary analysis of the images, captions, and comments contained on these profiles in order to gain an overall impression of how male bodybuilders evoke hegemonic masculinities and inclusive masculinities. Screenshots of these materials were taken and were organized and analyzed according to the following analytic themes: first, we examined how these male bodybuilders engage in hegemonic masculinities and inclusive masculinities. We identified and analyzed how they construct gendered narratives on Instagram through stereotypically feminine and/or anti-feminine and homophobic forms of bodily display and behavioural practices in their Instagram posts. Secondly, we identified and analyzed how these male bodybuilders frame their representations of hegemonic and inclusive masculinities in order to get a sense of the particular ways in which they desire to be viewed by others. For instance, we examined how these men discuss their bodies, particularly their muscularity, in the captions contained in their posts. Thirdly, we examined instances of surveillance (Foucault, 1977) whereby other Instagram users encourage and discourage the hegemonic and inclusive masculine practices of the male bodybuilders in our study, as evidenced by how they react to (e.g., criticize, admire) their posts in the comments sections.

Following our preliminary analysis, we selected 15 profiles from the original 50 profiles for an in-depth analysis. We selected profiles of male bodybuilders who post daily or almost daily and whose posts often contain photographs of their bodies and detailed captions in which they discuss their bodies, their bodybuilding practices, and related thoughts, feelings, and

motivations. Our in-depth analysis of these profiles involved a closer reading of the posts and a more detailed analysis of the three analytic themes discussed above. Additionally, we identified and analyzed potential ways in which the inclusive and hegemonic masculine practices of the male bodybuilders we observed may or may not represent forms of self-surveillance produced in accordance with the surveillance being enacted over their gendered narratives by others on Instagram. We then considered potential ways in which these instances of self-surveillance may represent methods of what we term 'hegemonic masculine negotiation'. We introduce hegemonic masculine negotiation to conceptualize ways in which men (e.g., the male bodybuilders we observed) evoke anti-femininity and homophobia to compensate for their inclusive masculine practices. In particular, we sought to identify whether or not the male bodybuilders who enact hegemonic masculinity the most are also those who are most likely to enact inclusive masculinity. Correspondingly, we sought to identify whether the male bodybuilders who enact hegemonic masculinity the least are also those who are least likely to enact inclusive masculinity. Such discrepancies might suggest that the hegemonic masculinities practised by male bodybuilders on Instagram function to counteract their inclusive masculinities.

Findings and Discussion

We begin with an exploration of ways in which the male bodybuilders in our study construct gendered narratives on Instagram by evoking inclusive masculinities on Instagram through emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and self-objectification. Then, we explore how surveillance by others over the bodies of male bodybuilders on Instagram influences their gendered narrative by successfully encouraging them to distance themselves from femininity and homosexuality through bodily displays of masculine dominance, mental

strength, and socioeconomic success. We outline how these hegemonic masculine displays represent forms of hegemonic masculine negotiation, which function to compensate for the inclusive masculinities of the male bodybuilders in our study, and to enable them to construct and maintain overall hegemonic masculine identities. We also present evidence to support our assertion that the hegemonic masculine negotiations practised by male bodybuilders on Instagram ultimately function to reconcile various conflicting ways in which men are expected to perform masculinities today. While the male bodybuilders in our study are expected to construct masculine identities in softer and more inclusive ways, they can only do so to a certain degree before they are stigmatized as effeminate and/or gay.

Doing inclusive masculinity.

Male bodybuilders tend to be quite emotionally expressive on Instagram; they often openly and adamantly express their love for, and emotional dependence on, others. This contrasts with past findings on male bodybuilders which suggest that these men are particularly reluctant to express their emotions and dependence on others because they want to maintain a strong sense of hegemonic masculine rationality, dominance, and autonomy (Hunt, Gonsalkorale &, Murray, 2013). For instance, drewbishopfitness frequently posts photographs of his daughter and expresses his adoration for her in captions such as, *"This little beauty is teaching me just as much about life as I am teaching her!*". The male bodybuilders we observed also often discuss the importance of positive and emotionally intimate relationships. For instance, kingobi46 posted an image with the quote, *"Choose a partner who is good for you. Not good for your […] image or your bank account. Choose someone who is going to make your life emotionally fulfilling"*. Our finding is in-line with recent research which has shown that men in general have begun to

feel more comfortable openly expressing emotions and vulnerability because they are less likely to fear being labeled effeminate or gay (Adams, 2011; Anderson & McCormack, 2015; Pascoe & Diefendorf, 2018).

Related to the emotional expressiveness of the male bodybuilders we observed are the close and affectionate friendships that they often develop with one another. For instance, notorious_ifbb posted a photograph (Figure 1) of himself and another male bodybuilder who he regularly exercises with:

Figure 1. notorious_ifbb (left) and his workout partner.

In the accompanying caption, notorious_ifbb wrote:

> shoutout to the best training partner a guy could ask for, [he is] always there to push me to my limits, [and is] with me at all of my [bodybuilding] shows […] #bromance.

Additionally, patwarner65 presented a photograph (Figure 2) in honour of joelmatyna's birthday:

Figure 2. A photograph of patwarner65 (far right) and his friend, joelmatyna (far left).

In the caption of this post, patwarner65 wrote:

> Happy birthday to joelmatyna [who is] one of the most genuine and loyal friends anybody could have […] love you loads man […] respect always.

Our finding is contrary to past research which has shown that heterosexual men avoid developing close emotional bonds with other men in order to maintain heterosexual, hegemonic masculine identities (Bank & Hansford, 2000). Rather, our finding is consistent with recent research which proposes that cultural declines in homophobia have led heterosexual men to feel more comfortable being emotionally intimate with one another because they are less likely to fear

being socially perceived as gay (Pascoe & Diefendorf, 2018; Robinson, Anderson, & White, 2017).

In addition to being emotionally expressive and emotionally intimate with other men, these male bodybuilders exhibit inclusive masculinity on Instagram by engaging in extreme levels of (self-)objectification. Male bodybuilders frequently post photographs of their bodies – often without showing their faces – with little to no reference to the functional aspects (e.g., strength) of their bodies. This aesthetic-oriented form of self-objectification is historically feminine (Bartky, 2001; Bordo, 2004). Two such posts are presented in Figure 3:

Figure 3. A photograph of the milesoneill (3a) and a photograph of tjstucke (3b).

themilesoneill presented a photograph (Figure 3a) of his bare upper body to illustrate his weight gain with a caption that reads, *"Pleased my abs are still noticeable".* Additionally, tjstucke presented an old photograph (Figure 3b, left) of himself with very little fat next to an older photograph (Figure 3b, right) of himself with noticeably more fat. In the accompanying caption, tjstucke wrote, *"Left picture 200 lbs, right picture 185 lbs".* He then proceeded to ask his followers if he should *"Bulk or shred?"* (gain fat or lose fat). Clearly, the male bodybuilders in our study appear to be much more concerned with achieving, displaying, and discussing an

aesthetic bodily ideal on Instagram rather than some functional bodily ideal; these men heavily objectify their bodies.

We somewhat expected the male bodybuilders in our study to engage in extreme self-objectification given the aesthetic-oriented nature of bodybuilding (Richardson, 2004) and past findings on male bodybuilding (e.g., Andreasson & Johansson, 2016). Surprisingly, however, we found that others did not criticize the self-objectifying behaviours of the male bodybuilders in our study. This is unlike past studies which have shown that others tend to openly criticize the extreme and stereotypically feminine ways in which male bodybuilders objectify themselves (e.g., Klein, 1993). We also did not find any instances in which other Instagram users criticized the emotional expressiveness of the male bodybuilders in our study or the emotionally intimate ways in which they engage with one another. This is also unlike past studies which have shown that men learn to avoid being too emotionally expressive and emotionally intimate with other men due to fear that others will insult them for being effeminate and/or gay (Bank & Hansford, 2000). We propose that the increased level of acceptance regarding the emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and extreme self-objectification of the male bodybuilders in our study helps to explain the frequency with which these men engage in these inclusive masculine practices. We also propose that this acceptance can ultimately be attributed to the cultural decrease in the stigmatization of male femininity, which has led to the emergence of softer and more inclusive masculine ideals (Anderson, 2009; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

Doing hegemonic masculinity.

While the male bodybuilders in our study appear to be practising inclusive masculinities to a greater extent than past studies on male bodybuilding have shown, we also found that these

men are subjected to surveillance which successfully limits their gender-transgressive narratives on Instagram by encouraging them to conform to various hegemonic masculine ideals. This finding led us to question whether or not the overall gendered narratives presented by male bodybuilders on Instagram can be considered inclusive, which we will discuss further in the next section. Male bodybuilders on Instagram often receive compliments regarding their bodies and bodybuilding practices, the majority of which involve praise for the hegemonic masculine dominance and mental strength that (very) muscular bodies symbolize. For instance, attila posted two photographs (Figure 4) of himself and several men commented, *"Great arms, Looking like a beast brother"*, *"Looking lethal [...] bro! "*, and *"Powerful "*:

Figure 4. Two photographs of Attila.

In another similar instance, tjhoban posted a photograph of himself and a man commented:

> This is what it look[s] like when a man becomes one with his mind. [I'm] trying to get there! Looking absolutely flawless my brother.

Interestingly, the compliments that male bodybuilders often receive on Instagram tend to contain references to their male/masculine status (e.g., *"bro"*, *" man"*). This suggests that the men giving the compliments associate the dominance and mental strength that they praise with the maleness/masculinity of the male bodybuilders they are complimenting. Evoking dominance is considered one of the most important components of men's hegemonic masculine identity construction (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 1987), with muscularity being an important means by which men have been found to evoke dominance (Wamsley, 2007). Additionally, men have been found to emphasize rationality and mental strength to maintain an air of hegemonic masculine disembodiment, which distances them from stereotypically embodied and irrational femininity (Norman, 2011). We contend that these compliments function as forms of surveillance which encourage the male bodybuilders in our study to pursue muscularity because it projects valued and admired hegemonic masculine dominance and mental strength (Rich & Evans, 2013).

Corresponding with the compliments that male bodybuilders often receive through surveillance on Instagram are the jokes that they often make about male weakness. Male bodybuilders make jokes that stigmatize male weakness by equating it with femininity and homosexuality. For instance, patjohnson_cf posted an image (Figure 5) depicting the singer Justin Bieber flexing his bicep:

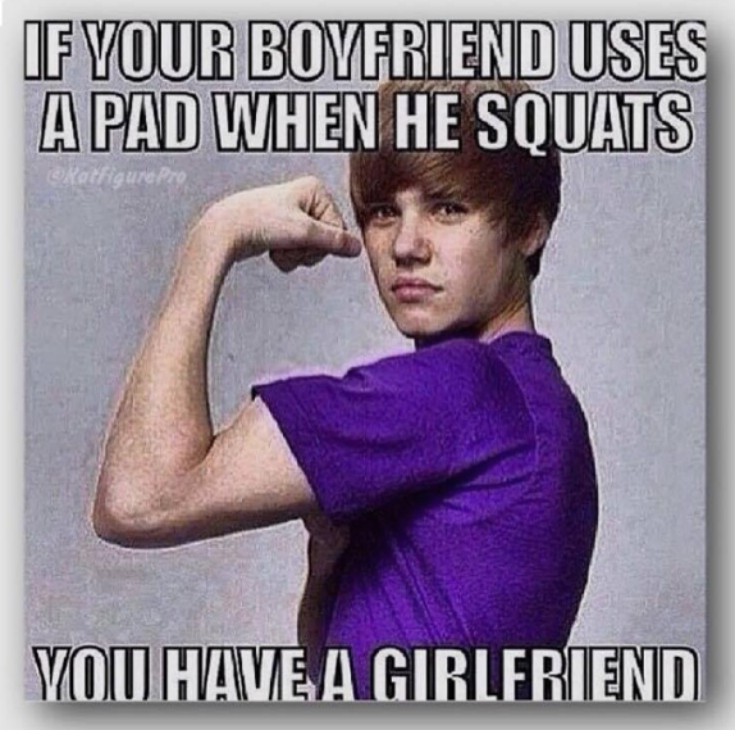

Figure 5. An image posted by patjohnson_cf.

In the caption for this image, patjohnson_cf says, *"Don't use the Maxi Pad! "*. The 'pad' that patjohnson_cf refers to in this post is a cushion that can be placed on a barbell while performing squat exercises to avoid any potential pain. patjohnson_cf feminizes this pad by referring to it as a *"Maxi Pad"* (a female hygiene product) and shames men who use it for being too feminine. Notably, Justin Bieber's body is much smaller (e.g., weaker) than the very muscular body that male bodybuilders idealize. As such, patjohnson_cf associates weakness with femininity. Additionally, nio_ink_fit posted an image (Figure 6) to illustrate his thoughts on male bodybuilders who need a 'spotter'. A spotter is a person who watches someone as they perform a weighted exercise in case the weights become too heavy and they need assistance.

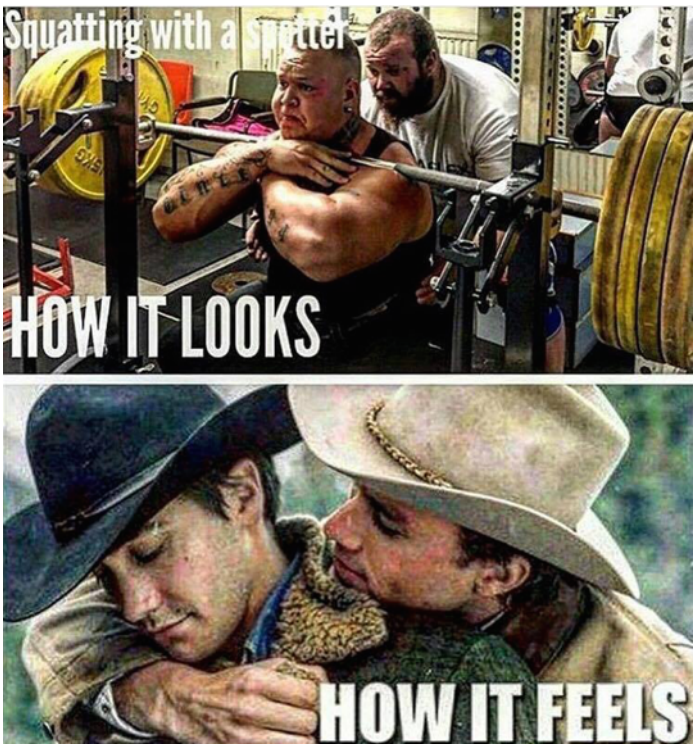

Figure 6. An image posted by nio_ink_fit.

In this post, nio_ink_fit compares male bodybuilders who use spotters to homosexuals; in doing so, nio_ink_fit associates male weakness with homosexuality. Jokes such as these, along with the compliments that male bodybuilders often receive on Instagram, represent forms of hegemonic masculine surveillance. This surveillance appropriates the assumption that men who are muscular are not feminine or homosexual, and as such, are superior to, and dominant over, women, gay men, and men who are not muscular.

The male bodybuilders we observed on Instagram internalize the surveillance described above and (re)produce it through self-surveillance. They often express a strong desire to embody dominance and mental strength. For instance, joeyswoll describes his shoulders as *"BOULDERSHOULDERS ",* and dallasmccarcver said he *"smashed some chest [exercises]"*

and that he was *"in the gym busting shit up"*. These male bodybuilders also constantly reference the mental strength that is required to achieve and maintain their lean and muscular bodies. This is well illustrated in a post (Figure 7) by ianmbodybuilding:

Figure 7. A photograph of ianmbodybuilding.

In the caption of his post, ianmbodybuilding wrote:

> [my biceps are] 50 cm [in circumference and I am] 19 years old. We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into [reality], it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort.

Interesting to note are the general ways in which ianmbodybuilding and many other male bodybuilders on Instagram discuss the mental strength that they harness through bodybuilding.

These men constantly associate their mental strength with other *"dreams"* and goals that they have in addition to lean and muscular bodies. Our observations suggest that a lot of the non-bodybuilding related goals that male bodybuilders refer to on Instagram are socioeconomic in nature. This was evidenced firstly by the incredible frequency with which these men glorify, flaunt, and express a desire for, socioeconomic status symbols. For example, meeks_mode posted a photograph (Figure 8) of himself standing proudly in front of his expensive car. In the accompanying caption, he wrote, *"Improved so much the old me seem like another person #blessed […] #e550coupe"*.

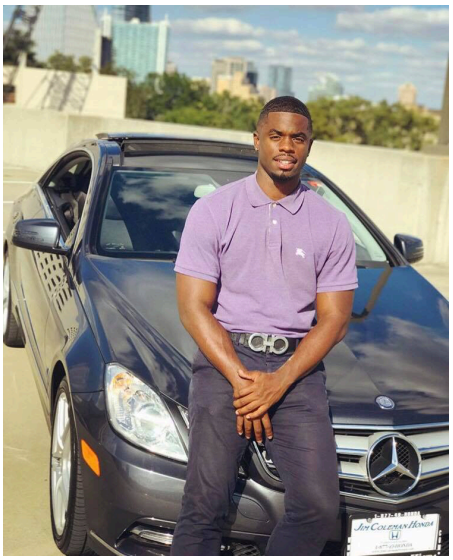

Figure 8. A photograph of meeks_mode.

Furthermore, such posts by male bodybuilders often include photographs of their muscular bodies. For example, momo_izad posted the following photograph of himself and his expensive-looking motorcycle (Figure 9):

Figure 9. A photograph of momo_izad and his motorcycle.

We propose that male bodybuilders pursue muscular bodies in large part because they believe that, much like cars and motorcycles, muscular bodies are status symbols. Because they represent mental strength, the muscular bodies of male bodybuilders on Instagram reflect their capacity to achieve socioeconomic success. joeyswoll strongly alluded to this concept when he posted a photograph (Figure 10) of himself:

Figure 10. A photograph of joeyswoll.

In the caption of his post, joeyswoll wrote:

> People always ask me ‘what’s the secret to success?’ My answer? […] You can ALWAYS work harder […] Many of you will say ‘don’t you need sleep to grow [your muscles?]’. Yes. But my goal isn’t to be [a bodybuilding champion], it’s to walk into my parents house one day [to] tell them they never have to work again.

Past research has shown that male bodybuilders adhere particularly strongly to the hegemonic masculine notion that men should be powerful and dominant earners and providers (Pompper, 2010). Past research has also shown that regular gym-goers, particularly men seeking to build

their muscularity, are motivated to work out by a belief that fit bodies demonstrate their capacity for hard work and, in this way, improve their potential for obtaining careers and promotions (Waring, 2008). We argue that male bodybuilders on Instagram are motivated to practise bodybuilding so that, in addition to embodying dominance and mental strength, they can embody their capacity for socioeconomic success.

Negotiating inclusive masculinity.

We contend that the self-surveillance practised by the male bodybuilders in our study represent forms of hegemonic masculine negotiation; that these men's conformity to hegemonic masculine ideals functions to counteract their inclusive masculine practices. The compliments and jokes which are so prevalent in the Instagram posts of male bodybuilders play a role in compelling them to value muscular male bodies for the hegemonic masculine dominance, mental strength, and socioeconomic success that they evoke. These compliments and jokes also serve to devalue small and weak male bodies through associations with femininity and homosexuality. These processes contribute to the belief among male bodybuilders on Instagram that if they become muscular, they can evoke hegemonic masculinities which allow them to distance themselves from stigmatized femininity and homosexuality. We contend that, by achieving very large muscular bodies and displaying them on Instagram, the male bodybuilders in our study are afforded more freedom to integrate stereotypically feminine and gay practices into the gendered narratives they present on Instagram. This was evidenced primarily by the fact that, the more muscular the male bodybuilders in our study appear in their photographs, the more likely they are to be emotionally expressive, emotionally intimate with other men, and self-objectifying on Instagram. Those who appear less muscular speak less about their emotions, are less likely to

express emotional intimacy with other men, and are less likely to objectify their bodies. Importantly, we also contend that the hegemonic masculine negotiations practised by the male bodybuilders we observed represent efforts to reconcile conflicting cultural expectations of masculinity. While men are relatively more comfortable being emotionally expressive, emotionally intimate with other men, and appearance-focused than they were in the past, they continue to risk being stigmatized as effeminate and/or gay if they do not simultaneously maintain some display of hegemonic masculinity (Norman, 2011).

Firstly, we argue that, by becoming muscular, male bodybuilders are able to rely on their bodies to project dominance, which compensates for the softer and more emotionally expressive ways in which they engage with others on Instagram. This is consistent with research by Edwards, Tod, and Molnar (2014), who found that muscular men feel entitled to broadening and softening their understandings of what it means to be a man by, for example, taking on more parenting duties, and by openly expressing their love and affection for their children and female significant others.

Secondly, we argue that, by embodying mental strength and socioeconomic success, the male bodybuilders we observed compensate for what would otherwise be primarily aesthetic-oriented, and thus feminine, self-objectification. In other words, these male bodybuilders can be said to masculinize their self-objectification. Rather than displaying their bodies as primarily aesthetic and thus feminine objects of gaze (Mulvey, 1975), these male bodybuilders' embodiment of mental strength and socioeconomic success maintains an air of hegemonic masculine rationality and disembodiment. Indeed, men have been found to compensate for their self-objectification by (re)positioning their bodies as active and performative, which is a traditionally masculine position, rather than aesthetically important (e.g., beautiful), with is a

traditionally feminine position (Wright, O'Flynn, & MacDonald, 2007). For instance, men have been found to masculinize their use of beautifying bodily practices (e.g., working out, cosmetic surgery) through claims that they are independent and rational decisions which enhance their heterosexual desirability, rather than direct efforts to conform to particular beauty ideals (Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005).

We also contend that the male bodybuilders in our study embody mental strength and socioeconomic success in order to reconcile unrealistic masculine expectations around wealth, status, and prestige. Men have begun to feel pressure to flaunt consumer power in what has become an extremely market-driven, consumerist, and individualistic cultural landscape (Meisenbach, 2010; Rosenmann et al., 2018). While the ideal masculine man from previous generations was characterized by earning and providing for his family, today's masculine ideal is characterized by owning and consuming (Pompper, 2010; Rosenmann et al., 2018). Men are finding it difficult to construct hegemonic masculine identities in these unrealistic ways (Meisenbach, 2010). In fact, we observed a compelling amount of instances in which the male bodybuilders we observed express such frustrations. For example, nolan.ritter posted a photograph of himself at his university graduation, and in the caption, wrote:

> […] most employers say that I lack experience or the job simply doesn't pay enough […] I've had friends who say they can't find a job […] But really America is this what we have come down to? Go to school, go to college, get into student debt and you can't even promise us a fucking job! I'm tired of it! Employers say we lack experience but I just spent 4 fucking years in school to do this same job your telling me I lack

> experience in […] Luckily I'm ambitious enough and I will fight back and WIN!

The male bodybuilders we observed on Instagram want to be the independent masters of their own (socioeconomic) fates, and they long for financial freedom and independence, and see these goals as unreasonably difficult to attain. We propose that, in place of achieving actual socioeconomic success, male bodybuilders on Instagram embody it. This strategy enables these men to construct hegemonic masculine narratives on Instagram despite their inability to reach today's hegemonic masculine standards of wealth. As alon_gabbay (Figure 11) claims, *"It's not what car you drive, it's the size of the arm hanging out the window!"*:

Figure 11. A photograph of alon_gabbay.

Conclusion

We assert that the the gendered narratives of the male bodybuilders we observed on Instagram point to an overall cultural shift towards softer and more inclusive understandings of

masculinity. While it has traditionally been assumed that women are naturally more emotional than men (Beasley, 2008; Hruschka, 2010), our findings support the assertions of gender scholars (Pascoe & Diefendorf, 2018) who attribute men's relative stoicism to hegemonic masculine expectations which require men to distance themselves from stereotypically feminine irrationality and emotionality. The male bodybuilders in our study are much more emotionally expressive and emotionally intimate with other men than previous studies on male bodybuilding have shown, and we argue that this is because men today have more liberty to enact stereotypically feminine practices (Bank & Hansford, 2000). However, this liberty is limited and conditional; the male bodybuilders we observed are compelled to negotiate their inclusive masculine practices through continued adherence to hegemonic masculine ideals, and this can be attributed in part to the hegemonic masculine surveillance they experience on Instagram. By displaying and emphasizing large, lean, and muscular bodies which evoke hegemonic masculine dominance, mental strength, and socioeconomic success, the men in our study afford themselves the liberty to express their emotions, their intimacy with other men, and appearance-concern. Their gendered narratives on Instagram, particularly with respect to their muscularity, often involve repudiations of femininity and homosexuality. As such, the hegemonic masculine negotiations practised by the male bodybuilders we observed function to preserve and (re)produce male domination, and does so in more subtle ways than before. We ultimately attribute the hegemonic masculine negotiations practised by the male bodybuilders in our study to the conflicting cultural pressure put on men to adhere to inclusive masculine standards while simultaneously maintaining evocations of dominance and (socioeconomic) power.

We contend that the extreme self-objectification of male bodybuilders on Instagram is evidence of the overall softening of masculine ideals. However, we must emphasize that, unlike

emotional expressiveness and emotional intimacy with other men, self-objectification does not in and of itself improve masculinities. In fact, self-objectification has detrimental effects on men (Grogan & Richards, 2002). For instance, idealized media images of men's bodies have been linked to body image concerns and depression symptoms among men because they feel unable to meet these expectations (Arbour & Ginis, 2006). Additionally, most of the body image problems men experience are due to not feeling muscular enough (Davey & Bishop, 2006). Future research may want to extend upon our findings by examining how the extreme self-objectification of male bodybuilders on Instagram contributes to any potential body image issues.

Evidently, there is still much room for change with respect to diversifying and softening cultural expectations of masculinity. Through their hegemonic masculine negotiations, the male bodybuilders in our study compensate for their inclusive masculinities to some degree and continue to contribute to the stigmatization and marginalization of feminine and gay identities. Our findings point to hegemonic masculinity's capacity to adapt to the cultural changes which challenge it (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Messner, 1993; 2007). While male hegemony can certainly be confronted and challenged by the idealization of softer, more inclusive masculine ideals, it can also be re-stabilized. As we have demonstrated, one way in which male hegemony is re-stabilized is through the hegemonic masculine negotiations practised by male bodybuilders on Instagram.

Transition into the Third Research Article

Like the female bodybuilders from the first article presented in this thesis, the gendered narratives presented by male bodybuilders on Instagram are governed by heteronormative surveillance by others, which requires them to maintain an overall impression of heteronormative bodily conformity. Given that muscularity and strength have been traditionally associated with maleness and masculinity, the female bodybuilders from the first article are encouraged to negotiate – or detract from – their muscularity by feminizing it. The male bodybuilders, on the other hand, are compelled to use muscularity to negotiate – or detract from – their stereotypical femininities. Moreover, these male bodybuilders are encouraged to compensate for their emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and (self-)objectification through the hegemonic masculinization of their bodies. The more muscular these men are, the more permission they are given to integrate softer, more feminine, and therefore more inclusive, masculinities into their gendered narratives on Instagram. In other words, other people's acceptance towards the inclusive masculinities of these male bodybuilders is conditional upon the requirement that their bodies evoke a sense of hegemonic masculine power and dominance.

When considering the similarities and differences in how female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders negotiate gender through gendered narratives on Instagram, I noted how the muscularity of female bodybuilders does not yield the same power which is yielded by the muscularity of the male bodybuilders. Put differently, heteronormative surveillance over female and male bodybuilders on Instagram ensures that female masculinity remains unable to accomplish hegemony in the way that male masculinity does. I also noted how heteronormative surveillance over the bodies of female and male bodybuilders in particular succeeds at repositioning these people to their respective positions within the current patriarchal gender

system. While the female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders I observed are quite diverse in their social behavioural practices (e.g., proclamations of independence, emotional expressiveness), they are ultimately encouraged to reconcile these transgressions through conformity to heteronormative notions of the body. The female bodybuilders limit the feminist empowerment that they evoke by adhering to bodily standards associated with female subservience. Conversely, the male bodybuilders limit the softness and inclusivity of their gender expressions by emphasizing the hegemonic masculine power and dominance symbolized by their muscularity. These male bodybuilders are given space to fully indulge in the power and dominance which muscularity accomplishes; female muscularity cannot accomplish hegemony, or dominance, like male muscularity can. By maintaining the impression that women and men are bodily distinctive and, furthermore, that men are more powerful than women, heteronormative (self-)surveillance over the bodies of female and male bodybuilders on Instagram maintains an overall narrative of male hegemony and female subservience among the female and male bodybuilders I observed. However, I also conclude that expectations around feminine and masculine expression are diversifying. In their own, respective ways, the female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders I observed re-define masculinity and femininity to be more inclusive. However, heteronormative expectations regarding what constitutes male versus female bodies, and masculine versus feminine bodies, continue to be powerful forces in the reinforcement of gendered power differentials represented among the female and male bodybuilders I observed on Instagram.

In order to further develop the findings and conclusions outlined above, I chose to shift my focus to the gendered narratives presented by trans men on Instagram who, along with other trans people, have been argued to be the most extreme transgressors of heteronormativity

(Butler, 1993b; West & Zimmermann, 1987). Trans men challenge the expectation that all men are born with stereotypically male bodies, and have been shown to express masculinity and femininity in diverse ways (Abelson, 2014). Trans men also move from marginalized to privileged positions in society when they physically transition from female to male (Halberstam, 1998). With these processes in mind, the following article sheds light onto various ways in which trans men negotiate heteronormative expectations around female versus male bodies, as well as masculinity versus femininity, and how these negotiations are influenced by the heteronormative surveillance they experience on Instagram. In particular, this article sheds light onto cultural assumptions around male versus female bodies, and the automatic privilege that comes with being male. With this final piece of research, I obtain a fuller picture of the ways in which heteronormative assumptions function to reinforce gender inequality. While the first two articles were focused on how dominant expectations around gender expression (masculinity and femininity) reinforce male hegemony and female subservience, this article extends this analysis further by including an examination of how expectations around biological sex and gender identity reinforce gendered power relations. As will be demonstrated, the gendered narratives of trans men on Instagram are remarkably transgressive; however, these narratives are governed by heteronormative surveillance, which limits this transgression in uniquely revealing ways.

Trans men on Instagram: Negotiating validation through masculine male bodies

Abstract

Transgender people have been argued to be the most provocative disrupters of heteronormativity. In this article, we reveal ways in which trans men challenge heteronormativity through active trans visibility and advocacy on the social media website, Instagram. We also reveal how these trans men challenge heteronormativity through inclusive masculine behavioural practices, including emotional expressiveness. However, we also discuss various ways in which heteronormative surveillance by others on Instagram functions to invalidate the male identities of trans men who appear to have stereotypically female-appearing and feminine bodies. Additionally, we demonstrate how trans men are more likely to have their male identities validated by others on Instagram the more they are perceived as 'passing' as stereotypically male. We discuss how this surveillance by others might reinforce problematic, dualistic, and essentialist assumptions about gender and the body.

Introduction

Heteronormativity denotes that only two gender identities exist (male/female) and that these two gender identities naturally follow from biological sex; that men have male bodies, and that women have female bodies. Heteronormativity also denotes that only two gender expressions exist (masculinity/femininity), and that men are naturally masculine while women are naturally feminine (Halberstam, 1998). These assumptions contribute to gender inequality between the cultural categories of 'men' and 'women', particularly through the (re)production of stigmatized femininity and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Schippers, 2007). Women are

encouraged to construct feminine identities by 'doing' submission through displays of passivity and weakness (Bordo, 2004). Conversely, hegemonic expectations of masculinity encourage men to distance themselves from stigmatized femininity and to construct masculine identities by 'doing' dominance through displays of strength and aggression. These heteronormative notions reproduce male privilege and female subordination by maintaining an overall impression that men and masculinity are separate from, and superior to, women and femininity (Bordo, 2004; Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Gender scholars have recognized that the women's and gay movements of the 1980s has led to a cultural decrease in the stigmatization of femininity and a corresponding decrease in the hegemonic function of masculinities (Anderson, 2009; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Messner, 1993; 2007). Men have begun to feel more comfortable integrating stereotypical femininities into their masculine identities, such as emotional expressiveness, because they are less likely to fear being stigmatized as effeminate (Clements and Field, 2014; Kozlowski, 2010). Therefore, it has been argued that dominant expectations of masculinity have become less anti-feminine and more 'inclusive' (Anderson, 2009). However, it has also been shown that men today are practising hybrid masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) which consist of a dynamic combination of inclusive as well as hegemonic masculinities, and that men's continued adherence to hegemonic masculinities actually functions to counteract, or compensate for, their inclusive masculine practices (e.g., Arxer, 2011; Messner, 1993; 2007); that inclusive masculinities obscure, or disguise, men's continued adherence to hegemonic masculine ideals (Messner, 2007; Pascoe, 2007; Schippers, 2000; Ward, 2008; Wilkins, 2009). As Bridges and Pascoe (2014) assert, contemporary, hybrid masculinities "are not necessarily undermining systems of dominance or hegemonic masculinity in any fundamental way" (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 248).

The transgressive potential of trans maleness.

Transgender people provocatively challenge heteronormativity by identifying with the gender opposite to that which is culturally assigned to the stereotypically male or female bodies they were born with (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Some transgender scholars reject the notion that transgender people are born in the 'wrong' bodies because it reproduces heteronormativity and the false assumption that gender is pre-social. Rather, in following Butler (1990)'s proposal that biological sex is "always already gender" (p. 7), these scholars assert that trans people's natural bodies (e.g., the culturally deemed female or male anatomies they have been born with) should be incorporated into dominant cultural understandings of gender (Bishop, 2016). Other transgender scholars (Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998) argue that this line of thinking invalidates the deep and intrinsic desire that many trans people have for a differently sexed body. Overall, there is a lack of consensus among transgender scholars over whether transgender people are born in the 'wrong' bodies, and an overall lack of understanding regarding how biology and culture interact to determine gender identity.

Halbertsam (1989) was the first to propose that it is possible to 'do' masculinity without stereotypically male bodies by pointing to the masculinities enacted by butch lesbians, tomboys, and drag kings. By de-linking maleness and masculinity, masculine women expose the performative nature of masculinity, and in this way, challenge the male privilege that naturalized, hegemonic masculinity sustains (Butler, 1990). However, women who enact masculinity continue to lack access to male privilege because heteronormativity often renders masculine women awkward, peculiar, and unintelligible (Halberstam, 1998). Moreover, a stereotypically male body is a requirement for what is culturally deemed to be 'true' masculinity, and thus, is a requirement for masculine hegemony and male privilege (Jefferson, 2002). Unlike butch

lesbians, tomboys, and drag kings, trans men often have a deep desire to physically 'pass' as male and live as men (Gardiner, 2013). Trans men have also been found to gain male privilege upon being physically recognizable as male through, for example, testosterone treatment and breast removal surgery (Aboim, 2016). In fact, the more that a trans man physically passes as male, the more male privilege he receives (Schilt, 2010).

For the reasons discussed above, many feminist and transgender scholars (Halberstam; Jeffreys, 2003; 2014) consider trans men to be irrelevant to feminist causes; they argue that, because trans men reject their stereotypically female bodies in pursuit of stereotypically male bodies, they conform to heteronormativity and join the patriarchy. It has also been proposed that, to the extent that trans men enact anti-feminine, hegemonic expectations of masculinity, trans men contribute to the stigmatization of feminine identities, and thus, to the broader processes of gender inequality which rely on this stigmatization (Koenig, 2003; West & Zimmerman, 1987). However, it has been shown that trans men enact hybrid masculinities that are overall more stereotypically feminine (e.g., 'softer') and thus more inclusive than the hybrid masculinities practised by cisgender men (Abelson, 2014; Green, 2005). Trans men's experiences are useful for exposing the performative and culturally-determined nature of femininity and masculinity, and for exposing potential ways in which heteronormativity and associated gender inequalities are being challenged through trans men's inclusive masculinities.

Heteronormative (self-)surveillance on social media.

Following Foucault (1977), heteronormativity can be understood as a 'gender truth regime' (Rahilly, 2015); a set of discourses that members of a society come to accept and (re)produce as 'true' through their everyday interactions. People 'do' gender in interaction (West

& Zimmerman, 1987); gender is not simply a role people take on, but something which is accomplished in tandem with how people react to and engage with each other (Martin, 2003). Moreover, our gendered interactions act as forms of (self-)surveillance (Koenig, 2003). Put simply, heteronormative (self-)surveillance operates such that people are motivated to enact gender in normative ways in order to gain acceptance and avoid discrimination (Butler, 1993a; Koenig, 2003). Important to note, however, is that people are often active in their heteronormative self-surveillance, in that they can consciously critique and resist the surveillance they experience by others by refusing to enact gender in heteronormative ways. As Koenig (2003) argues, "It is in the gaps, the failures of heteroperformativity to approximate itself, that the 'originality', the 'naturalness', of heteronormative categories of 'man' and 'woman' are challenged" (p. 148).

Social media websites have been found to be profound sites for heteronormative (self-)surveillance, particularly with respect to bodily appearance (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012). Methods of self-display (e.g., photographs, videos) on social media lead users to focus on how others might judge their appearance (Hum et al., 2011) and increase their desire to meet cultural standards of appearance (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). Surveillance over bodily appearance is especially prevalent on the image-based social media website, Instagram (Mitrou, Kandias, Stavrouu, Gritzalis, 2014).

Research on gender and social media has focused primarily on cisgender individuals, with an extremely limited amount of such research focused on trans people (McHale et al., 2009). Members of the LGBTQ+ community, including trans people, have been shown to be avid users of social media, where they can gain exposure to much more diverse representations of gender and sexuality than that which appears in the mass media (Andsager, 2014; Wakeford,

2002), and thus can connect with similar others (Drushel, 2010; Fox and Ralston, 2016; Shaw, 1997). Gender scholars have even argued that social media websites play an integral role in facilitating the gender identity construction, management, and expression of LGBTQ+ people (Harper et al., 2009; Hillier et al., 2012). Social media research would be useful for understanding how heteronormative (self-)surveillance operates on social media to influence how trans people and other LGBTQ+ individuals construct, manage, and understand their gendered sense of selves.

Conceptualizing the Present Study

On Instagram, users post photographs, other images, and short video clips, which are usually personal in nature. Instagram users provide captions for the photographs, other images, and videos that they post, and other Instagram users can publish comments on these posts. Instagram users can 'follow' each other in order to have the posts of the people they follow show up on their newsfeeds. Instagram users can also add hashtags (e.g., #transgender) to the captions of their posts; when Instagram users click on a hashtag, they are redirected to a page which includes every publicly accessible Instagram post containing that hashtag. The Instagram hashtag '#transgender' and '#trans' yield notable numbers of 7 million and 5 million posts, respectively (September, 2018). A large portion of these posts belong to trans men and contain photographs and discussions of their gendered bodies and related practices. Given that Instagram has been shown to be a profound site for gendered (self-)surveillance, and given that it is a primarily visual, image-based social media form with a considerable amount of content posted by trans men, it is an ideal place to observe and understand how others enact heteronormative

surveillance over the gendered bodies and related practices of trans men, and how this surveillance influence the ways in which trans men represent their gendered selves on Instagram.

In this article, we follow Cromwell (1999)'s argument that those who ignore the transgressive potential of trans men and who accuse trans men of joining the patriarchy fail to acknowledge these men's agency and diversity in constructing their gender identities. We took a critical and feminist approach to uncovering the various ways in which trans men (actively) conform to, as well as how they (actively) resist, heteronormative surveillance, as demonstrated on Instagram (Butler, 1990). Our primary focus was to analyze how heteronormative surveillance on Instagram influences the particular ways in which trans men approach, and make sense of, their physical transitions from female to male, which we discovered are highly documented on Instagram. We were also interested in how the trans men in our study discuss the heteronormative surveillance they experience on Instagram as well as outside of Instagram, and how they may or may not conform to it.

Methods

Our preliminary analysis involved perusing through many of the millions of posts yielded by hashtags which are frequently used by trans men on Instagram, including #transgender, #trans, #transman, #transboy, and #transisbeautiful. This enabled us to gain an overall impression of how trans men represent their bodies and gender identities on Instagram. We then selected 50 profiles of trans men on the basis that the trans men operating these profiles regularly display their bodies in photographs and frequently talk about their bodies and gender identities in the accompanying captions. Moreover, we selected trans men who post on Instagram about their bodies and gender identities at least once every few days. We also narrowed our selection by

ensuring that most of the profiles we chose were being followed by large numbers of people; we wanted to examine profiles which had more exposure and thus more surveillance (e.g., comments by other Instagram users) and more potential impact.

We examined each of the selected profiles in their entirety. Data was collected by taking screenshots of relevant posts, and then classifying them according to the following analyses: Firstly, we identified and analyzed ways in which the trans men we observed (mis)represent heteronormative expectations around the body. In particular, we determined the extent to which these trans men desire to physically pass as stereotypically male. This was evidenced by their discussions about transitioning/not transitioning through testosterone treatment and gender reassignment surgeries (e.g., breast removal). Their desire/lack of desire to physically pass as 'male' was also evidenced by how they express hegemonic masculinities and/or inclusive masculinities through their clothing, hairstyles, poses, mannerisms, and behavioural practices (e.g., emotional expressiveness). In other words, we determined the extent to which, as well as the ways in which, the trans men we observed pursue stereotypically male and masculine bodies and how these practices might align with their desire to 'pass' as stereotypically male. Secondly, we determined the overall ways in which other Instagram users enact surveillance over trans men both on and off Instagram, as evidenced by how Instagram users engage with trans men in the comments sections accompanying their Instagram posts, and trans men's discussions of this surveillance. In particular, we determined the overall extent to which, and the particular ways in which, others accept and support the trans men we observed, as well as the overall extent to which, and the particular ways in which, others critique these trans men's desire, or lack of desire, for a stereotypically male-appearing and/or masculine body.

For an in-depth analysis, we selected 15 profiles from the 50 profiles chosen for our preliminary analysis. We based our selection of these profiles on the requirement that the trans men operating these profiles display and discuss their bodies and trans identities daily or almost daily. We also based our selection of these 15 profiles on the requirement that the trans men operating these profiles frequently discuss the heteronormative surveillance they experience both on and off Instagram. Our in-depth analysis involved examining each profile in its entirety, and a closer reading of the themes analyzed in our preliminary analysis. Additionally, we identified and analyzed potential ways in which the gendered displays of the trans men we observed might represent forms of self-surveillance which correspond with the surveillance they experience by others both on and off Instagram. Moreover, we examined how these men's adherence/nonadherence to heteronormativity may or may not be influenced by other people's criticisms and/or compliments regarding their gendered bodies and practices. Furthermore, given the especially conscious (Green, 2006) ways in which trans men have been shown to construct their gender identities, we identified and analyzed ways in which the trans men in our study actively question and resist the heteronormative surveillance they experience. This was evidenced by how they discuss this surveillance in the captions of their posts, and how they engage with Instagram users who comment on their posts. Our goal was not to contribute to the 'nature' versus 'nurture' debate which is sometimes spoken about in the literature regarding whether or not trans people are born in the 'wrong' bodies; rather, we wanted to consider the nuanced and complex ways in which heteronormativity might influence trans men's experiences with their male identities and their desire to pass as stereotypically male. Finally, our preliminary analysis involved determining how trans men engage with the male privilege that they may or

may not encounter both on and off Instagram. This was demonstrated by how they discuss male privilege in the captions of their posts.

Findings and Discussion

We begin by outlining ways in which the trans men we observed on Instagram successfully challenge the heteronormative notion that male-identifying people cannot be born with stereotypically female bodies. They do this firstly by deliberately making their trans identities and experiences extremely visible on Instagram. Additionally, the trans men in our study challenge heteronormativity by openly advocating for the normalization of trans identities. Generated in part by these acts of visibility and advocacy, the trans men in our study are much more likely to receive support, encouragement, and validation on Instagram than they are to receive criticism and rejection. Next, we consider how the trans men in our study, despite receiving a great deal of overall support, encouragement, and validation on Instagram, appear to be constrained by the heteronormative assumption that men are *supposed* to have male-appearing and masculine bodies. Without making any definitive claims regarding whether or not trans men are born in the 'wrong' bodies, we demonstrate how heteronormative surveillance (Foucault, 1977) might contribute to trans men's decisions to pursue stereotypically male bodies, and to masculinize their appearance. Finally, we demonstrate how, despite their conformity to male and masculine standards of appearance, the trans men we observed frequently evoke inclusive masculine behavioural practices on Instagram, including emotional expressiveness. The trans men in our study challenge heteronormativity in compelling ways; meanwhile, heteronormative (self-)surveillance on Instagram continues to (re)producs dualistic notions about gender and the body, particularly by rendering male-identifying trans individuals who have stereotypically

female and feminine bodies unintelligible. We discuss various ways in which this (self-) surveillance is implicated in the continued (re)production of various forms of gender inequality.

Resistance through visibility and advocacy.

Trans men find a generally accepting, supportive, and validating environment on Instagram. Many of the trans men we observed had a very high number of Instagram followers (e.g., supporters), many of whom did not themselves appear to identify as trans and who were likely cisgender. For instance, at the time of research, Sam* had over 72,400 followers, Jed* had over 22,600 followers, and Logan* had over 43,600 followers. Travis* had the most followers at over 421,000. These numbers were growing exponentially throughout the course of our research. The trans men we observed also often receive dozens, and sometimes even hundreds, of comments on their Instagram posts. Many of these comments appear to be from cisgender individuals, and most of them are extremely supportive and affirming. However, a large majority of the posts we observed also contained at least one or two comments from cisgender people who refused to accept that men can be born with stereotypically female bodies. Cisgender people sometimes poke fun and laugh at the trans men we observed, express shock and even disgust at their physical transitions, and passionately proclaim that only those born with anatomically male bodies can be men. Each of the aforementioned trends were observed in a post by Sam*, in which he has two side-by-side photos showing his physical transition from female to male. Sam* received 109 comments on this post, and 104 were positive. Two positive comments include, *"This is unbelievably inspirational. To have the courage to […] be yourself […] I'm just speechless […]*" and "*I can't imagine what it's like and it truly is so incredibly amazing! Thank you for helping those who feel they don't have a voice*". Five comments on Sam's post were

extremely negative. These comments include, "*HAHAHAHAHAHAHA get help girl. Seriously. I feel bad for you (laugh face)*", "*Stupid*", and "*Sick*", "*[Oh my God], How Could You Do This ??????",* and "*Should have stayed with what you were born with. You will never be male. It's not in your DNA*". Evidently, while negative comments such as these appear to be relatively infrequent, they are notably harsh. These negative comments represent forms of heteronormative surveillance which serve to dismiss, disqualify, and invalidate the male identities of the trans men in our study.

Most of the trans men we observed are very conscious of the heteronormative surveillance they experience both on and off Instagram. They often make their trans identities and experiences very visible on Instagram in a deliberate effort to combat it, and will often directly challenge Instagram users who invalidate their male identities. The trans men in our study often express their belief that, by posting frequently and by being very open and honest about their experiences as trans men, they can promote more understanding and acceptance of trans identities. This is well illustrated in a post by Jed*, in which he said:

> I've been called Frankenstein, hairy woman, circus freak, girl without tits […] and so much more. I've been told I'll never be a man and that children shouldn't be exposed to who I am. All of this does nothing but push me to keep sharing my story in hopes that one day every human will be loved and accepted no matter their differences.

We found reason to believe that the high visibility and advocacy practised by the trans men we observed are quite successful. This was evidenced in part by the many accepting, validating, and supportive comments that we found on posts like those of Jed* and Sam*. Jed* received 34 comments on his post, including, "*Wow the world is cruel. I think your amazing*", "*Wow…people actually called you all those things???!!! That's so stupid! Keep doing you*", and "*I can't believe anyone would have to go through so many insult's… Just to be who they are meant to be. Stay strong*".

In addition to spreading awareness and acceptance of trans identities, we found that the high visibility and advocacy practised by the trans men in our study encourages other trans men, and trans people in general, to become more understanding and accepting of themselves. The trans men in our study also often do this deliberately. For example, Logan* posted two photographs of himself to illustrate his physical transition and in the caption, said:

> #TransDayOfVisibility […] be visible for those who can't be!! Other [trans] guys being visible on social media was the only way that I could gain the courage to come out and truly be myself.

Additionally, Harry* posted a photograph of himself after undergoing top surgery (which involves the removal of breasts), and a young commenter said:

> Im 13 and you give me courage […] i [know] deep inside
> That i was [meant] to be a boy but my mom keeps telling me
> to stay as i am but to me it feels wrong i get bullied in School
> for being a boyish Girl and deep down inside i cry.

Harry* responded to commenter and said:

> I am so so sorry you have to go through that […] people can
> be extremely mean. I promise you a day will come when you
> can start being who you are […] Stay strong, you are a boy,
> no matter what anyone tells you.

We argue that the visibility and advocacy spread among the trans men in our study compels others on Instagram to deconstruct their taken-for-granted, dualistic, and essentialist assumptions about gender. Through their exposure to the trans men in our study, many people on Instagram appear to become more understanding and accepting of trans identities, whether these identities belong to others, or to themselves. Our findings are consistent with research by Singh (2013), who found that trans people often use social media because they can readily connect with similar others, feel affirmed, and learn strategies for coping with trans prejudice and discrimination. We extend upon these findings by revealing ways in which trans men use Instagram as a platform for widespread visibility and advocacy regarding the reality and validity of being transgender. By encouraging others to understand and validate trans male identities, the

trans men in our study successfully challenge the heteronormative notion that male identities must always accompany genetically male anatomies.

Negotiating validation by 'passing' as male.

While the trans men we observed successfully promote more acceptance of the notion that those born with genetically female anatomies can have male identities, we found that the heteronormative notion that a genetically male body is *supposed* to accompany a male identity continues to be heavily reproduced through (self-)surveillance on Instagram. The majority of the trans men we observed appear to believe that they were born in the wrong bodies. Moreover, they believe that there is a 'misalignment' between the genetically female bodies they were born with and their identification as male, and that this misalignment is due to some biological mistake. Almost all of the trans men in our study have undergone, are currently undergoing, or are planning to undergo, gender reassignment in an effort to physically 'pass' as male. In this section, we outline our argument that the trans men we observed may be compelled to transition their bodies to male at least in part because heteronormative (self-)surveillance, which is pervasive on Instagram, has rendered the notion of men with female-appearing bodies unintelligible. In doing so, our aim is not to disqualify the understandable desire that trans men have to possess bodies which appear stereotypically male; rather, our discussion is meant to illuminate the cultural unintelligibility of trans men with stereotypically female bodies and to question its validity.

The trans men we observed often discuss physically transitioning to male as though it is a form of freedom – a way to escape the female bodies that they feel trapped inside. For instance, Ethan* posted two photographs (Figure 1) of himself to illustrate his physical transition:

Figure 1. Ethan*.

In the accompanying caption, Ethan* wrote:

> Being transgender wasn't a choice. I was born in the wrong (female) body and now I'm taking the necessary steps to feel more comfortable in my own skin. Others may never understand how I feel or felt in the past years, having to "hide" my true gender. But here I am proud to say that every day my body is one step closer to my mind and soul.

Like most other trans men we observed, Ethan* views physically transitioning to male as a way to correctly align his body with his mind and soul so that he no longer has to hide his male identity within the "*wrong*" stereotypically female body. In another example, Hutch* posted a photograph of himself wearing a binder, which is a very tight garment that trans men wear to

flatten their chests. In the caption accompanying this photograph, Hutch* wrote, "*a new binder is nice but freedom would be so much better (sad face) top surgery link in bio*". Here, Hutch* informs his followers that there is a link on his Instagram profile to a website where they can donate money towards his top surgery. He claims that having a flat chest without the help of a binder would give him a sense of freedom from his body.

We argue that the trans men in our study may be compelled, at least in part, to transition because of the current cultural landscape which privileges and normalizes dualistic understanding of femaleness and maleness; because a stereotypically male-appearing body increases the likelihood that others will recognize and acknowledge their male identities. One way in which this finding was supported was by the fact that other Instagram users are much more likely to accept, validate, and support the trans men we observed the more they physically pass as male. Out of the trans men we observed, the trans men who most appear to 'pass' as stereotypically male also have the most Instagram followers. Relatedly, we noted that the trans men we observed who make themselves most visible on Instagram are those who appear to most pass as stereotypically male. The trans men who are less physically recognizable as male on Instagram post less frequently and are less likely to openly advocate for the increased acceptance of trans identities. We argue that, because they are more likely to be accepted, supported, and validated on Instagram, the trans men who appear to more physically pass as male may feel relatively more comfortable being visible and voicing their resistance. Thus, while the trans men in our study are often quite successful at defending the notion that they are men, this success appears to be conditional on the requirement that they *look* like men in a heteronormative sense. Our argument is further supported by the fact that, while almost all of the trans men in our study had either undergone, or desired to undergo, testosterone treatment and/or top surgery, none

claimed to have had sex reassignment surgery (which would technically involve constructing a penis), and very few expressed a desire for it (Bishop, 2016). We argue that this may be in large part because male secondary sex characteristics (e.g., facial and body hair) and flat chests are often sufficient for encouraging people to validate the male identities of trans men since genitalia are not readily visible in every day, non-private social situations (Aboim, 2016; Irni, 2017; Schilt and Westbrook, 2009). A post (Figure 7) by Ian* supports this contention. Ian* presented two photographs of himself (one old and one current) in his underwear, and in the caption of this post, Ian* wrote:

> on the left picture I'm wearing underwear under my underwear […] I was terrified of being in a situation where someone would pull down my pants (people [were] curious about my genitalia because they often had a hard time figuring out my gender, so this could and has happened) […] It's so calming for the mind to see this progress, to see my body finally fits my mind a lot better, it feels so peaceful.

Here, Ian* states that he was once "*terrified*" of people pulling down his pants to expose his genitalia because they "*had a hard time figuring out* [his] *gender*". This is presumably because he had not yet experienced the physical effects of testosterone treatment and, therefore, did not perceive himself as passing as stereotypically male. Since Ian* now feels that he physically passes as male, he claims that others are less likely to question whether or not he is a man.

These findings point to the importance of social interaction in determining people's experiences of gender – "the relational aspect of gender performance, and how presentations of the self are intricately intertwined with readings by others" (Zitz, Burns, & Tacconelli, 2014). Given the currently heteronormative cultural landscape, it can be argued that the trans men in our study are more likely to solidify and experience their male identities if others recognize them as having a stereotypically male body and treat them accordingly. We assert that, if a recognizably 'male' body was not required for other people's acknowledgment and validation of male identities – if the trans men in our study could live as male/men despite having stereotypically female bodies – they might be less compelled to physically transition to male. This is not to say that these men's desire for a stereotypically male body is invalid. Rather, our intention is to point to the current (albeit challengeable) inescapability of heteronormativity's power to determine our gendered experiences, and how its profoundly dualistic and essentialist characterization serves to invalidate the natural variability of people's gendered bodily experiences.

We observed two trans men on Instagram who appeared to openly express an awareness of the above argument: Ellis* and Sam*. Ellis* posted the following photograph (Figure 2) of himself:

Figure 2. Ellis*.

In the accompanying caption, Ellis* wrote:

> I am constantly torn [with] accepting this [body. I am] fighting to be who i am, but no one sees [who i am…] my frame and voice to others scream female […] but my mind changes […] even making an appointment to finally get on [testosterone] i just stare at my phone […] since i was a kid there has been this masculine and more authentic version of myself that […] i perfectly saw, but no one else did. it didn't always reflect back […] my perception is the most important.

Here, Ellis* expresses a great deal of indifference regarding whether or not he wants to negotiate other people's validation of his male identity by physically transitioning to male. While Ellis* expresses that his own perception of his gender is more important than how others perceive his gender, he is troubled by the fact that others do not acknowledge his male identity due to his stereotypically female body. Additionally, Sam* posted two photographs of himself to illustrate the results of his top surgery, and in the caption, wrote:

> a l i g n m e n t […] 'I am not trapped in my body, I am trapped in other people's perceptions of my body.' – Ollie Schminkey […] I do not regret top surgery for a millisecond, because it brought me peace from a part of me that had hurt since before they started growing […] I wish us to break this idea that body parts are gendered – that parts or chromosomes must scream boy or girl […] My body is not wrong – it has never been wrong – it is only what society has assigned to it that is wrong.

Here, Sam* quotes Ollie Schminkey, who is a transgender poet, musician, and artist, to emphasize his belief that he was not born in the wrong body. Sam* acknowledges society's power to determine whether or not his body can be considered 'male', and argues that bodies should not have to be gendered – that what is culturally deemed to be a 'male' or 'female' body should not be required in order for others to acknowledge someone's gender identity.

Negotiating validation through masculine bodies.

In addition to desiring a stereotypically male body, we found that most of the trans men we observed are much more likely to describe themselves as masculine rather than feminine. However, these hegemonic masculine tendencies apply in particular to their appearance rather than to their behavioural practices, which tend to be relatively inclusive. In this section, we outline our observation that the trans men in our study may conform to hegemonic expectations of masculinity in part in order to further establish their recognizability – and thus, their validation – as male. Again, this negotiation is linked to heteronormativity's power to constrain and facilitate people's experiences of gender in various ways.

Our finding was first and foremost evidenced by the fact that some of the trans men in our study adopted an exclusively masculine appearance only after they began their physical transitions to male. Before physically transitioning, some of the trans men appeared to conform to feminine appearance expectations by having long and styled hair, and by ornamenting their bodies with jewelry and makeup. Upon transitioning to male, they cut their hair short and began to avoid ornamenting their bodies, and furthermore, began to develop considerable muscularity. Examples of these differences are illustrated in a post by Aaron* (Figure 3):

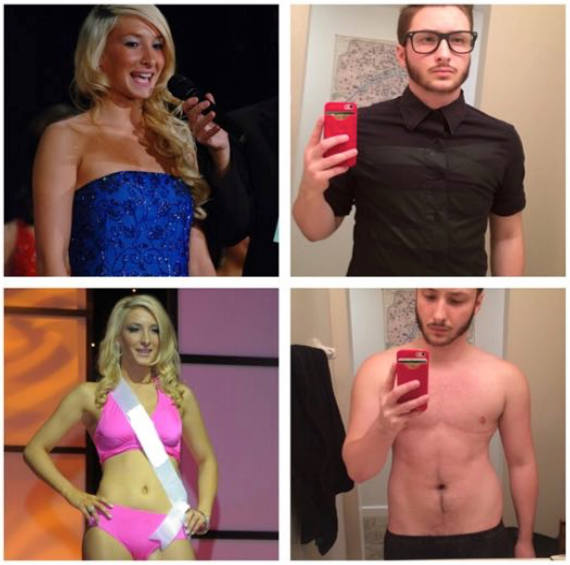

Figure 3. Aaron*.

The ornamentation which characterizes a stereotypically feminine appearance serves to objectify women (Wright et al., 2007). Conversely, the lack of ornamentation of a stereotypically masculine appearance maintains the hegemonic masculine impression that men are relatively disembodied and therefore more rational than women (Norman, 2011). Additionally, while women are discouraged from developing considerable muscularity so as to evoke relative fragility and weakness, men are encouraged to develop their muscularity as a way to evoke hegemonic masculine dominance (Woodward, 2006). Such discrepancies in how men and women are expected to engage in appearance practices function to enhance dualistic,visible differences between men and women, as well as the stigmatization of femininity, male hegemony, and ultimately, the gender inequalities which rely on such processes (Bordo, 2004; Bartky, 1998). However, we argue that, rather than being directly motivated by a desire to evoke hegemonic masculinity, the aforementioned men in our study may have adopted a stereotypically

masculine appearance at least in part in order to increase the likelihood that others will recognize and validate their male identities.

Indeed, the trans men in our study who appear stereotypically masculine (in addition to having physically transitioned to stereotypically male) are much more likely to receive comments which validate their male identities than their less masculine-appearing counterparts. For instance, Travis* posted a photograph of himself flexing his large muscles, and someone commented, "*You look more like a man than most men (laugh face, heart eyes)*". Additionally, a cisgender male bodybuilder commented, "*I wouldn't wanna arm wrestle you […] Looking great man*". Conversely, Arbor*, who is the most stereotypically feminine-appearing trans man we came across, rarely receives such validating comments. While he identifies as male and uses male pronouns, Arbor* often posts photographs of himself wearing stereotypically feminine clothing. In the caption of one post, Arbor* wrote, "*let trans people express themselves without invalidating their identity !!!*". In the comments section accompanying this post, someone was compelled to ask, "*Are you girl or boy?*", presumably because they were confused by Arbor*'s stereotypically feminine style of dress (in addition to his stereotypicall female-appearing body). Again, we argue that some of the trans men we observed may be compelled to adopt a stereotypically masculine appearance (in addition to male appearance) at least in part because they want to prevent such confusion. Rather than desiring to achieve male hegemony (Connell, 1987), these men simply want to consolidate their physical transitions and make it clear to others that they are, in fact, men – a reasonable and valid desire.

Our argument is further supported by the fact that the trans men in our study do not evoke a strong sense of hegemonic masculine rationality and dominance in their Instagram posts. Rather, these men are quite sensitive and emotionally expressive, which are stereotypically

feminine behavioural practices which hegemonic masculine expectations require men to avoid (Seidler, Dawes, Rice, Oliffe, Dhillion, 2016). As can be observed in the many posts already discussed, the trans men in our study are often very gentle, comforting, and encouraging towards others on Instagram, and often demonstrate a great deal of emotional vulnerability by openly discussing the hardships and struggles they face as trans men. This argue that this may be in part because a heteronormatively male and masculine appearance is much more important than hegemonic masculine behavioural practices when it comes to other people's willingness to recognize and validate the male identities of the trans men we observed.

The trans men we observed also challenge hegemonic masculine standards by consciously critiquing the expectation that men should be aggressive and emotionally stoic. Notably, even the trans men who adhere to hegemonic masculine expectations of appearance engage in these critiques. For instance, Ian*, who is a muscular bodybuilder, wrote:

> I don't want to be a part of your or others definition of what I'm supposed to be like as a man. No I'm not killing that spider because 'I'm a man now' – and No I'm not going to 'man up and have no feelings" because 'I'm a man now and men don't show feelings', No I'm not playing this game with you.

Additionally, a few of the trans men we observed openly questioned the concept of male privilege in their posts. In another post by Ian*, he presented two photographs of himself before and after his physical transition. He also wrote:

> Tho being trans is not a privilege, being a white man is, and sadly I can tell you that the person on the right gets way more respect than the person on the left […] the person on the right is […] assumed […to be a] heterosexual cis male […] who thinks with his dick, as simple as that, because that's the norm and that's his new 'not self chosen' label in society.

Despite his active pursuit of a stereotypically male and masculine appearance, Ian* insists that he does not want the male privilege which accompanies such an appearance (Rubin, 2003). Similar to our observations regarding their physical transitions, we suggest that the trans men in our study may be less likely to adopt a hegemonic masculine appearance if heteronormative surveillance did not require them to do so in order for them to be recognized and validated as men. Our findings are consistent with those of Rubin (2003), who found that trans men often 'over-compensate' for their female appearance by performing hegemonic masculinities in exaggerated ways. However, Rubin also found that this was mostly true for trans men who were in the beginning stages of physically transitioning from female to male; once they were recognizable by others as male, the trans men in Rubin's study adopted much more inclusive forms of masculinity.

Conclusion

The trans men in our study successfully challenge the notion that men cannot be born with female bodies, and furthermore, challenge hegemonic masculine expectations around

dominance and emotional stoicism. However, we argue that their often profound desire to physically transition to stereotypically male represents, at least in part, an effort to align with the heteronormative notion that only those with male bodies can truly possess male identities. Additionally, many of the trans men we observed are encouraged – through heteronormative surveillance – to (re)produce heteronormative and hegemonic masculine expectations of appearance. We argue that the trans men we observed on Instagram do not pursue stereotypically masculine and male bodies due exclusively to some inherent, biologically-derived 'mistake', and not because they desire male privilege (Halberstam, 1998). The trans men in our study are compelled to conform to heteronormative expectations of the male and masculine body at least in part because this conformity is required in order for others to grant them the male status they deeply and rightfully desire.

The active and conscious visibility and advocacy practised by the trans men in our study, along with their inclusive masculine behavioural practices, represent important and meaningful challenges to heteronormativity. By openly showcasing and discussing their trans male identities, the trans men we observed on Instagram successfully discredit the notion that all men are born with male bodies. By openly expressing their emotions and vulnerability, the trans men in our study challenge hegemonic masculine expectations around male dominance and emotional stoicism, which have traditionally been responsible for reinforcing male hegemony and female subordination (Aboim, 2016; Peetoom, 2009; Schilt, 2010). However, it is also important to reiterate how men's inclusive masculinities have been shown to counteract their inclusive masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Future research may want to further examine the hybrid masculinities practised by some trans men on Instagram in order to understand potential ways in which their hegemonic masculine appearance practices function to obscure, or compensate for,

the inclusive masculine ways in which they express emotions and vulnerability (Arxer, 2011; Messner, 1993; 2007).

Our findings also point to the stable and automatic nature of male privilege; how "men (regardless of biology) remain at the center of power" (Jefferson, 2001). Moreover, a recognizably male body is required for male privilege. While expectations of masculinity are becoming more inclusive (Anderson, 2009; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014), our findings point to how this may be particularly true with respect to behavioural expectations rather than to appearance expectations. Visible maleness (in the heteronormative sense) continues to take precedence as the ultimate signifier of male hegemonic power. As long as we rely on essentialist and dualistic understandings of the body to read gender, and as long as we stigmatize one gender (female) and uphold the other (male), gender inequality will continue to be reinforced. Our findings point to how cultural understandings of gender are diversifying, particularly with respect to transgender identities and masculine behavioural expression. However, the potent heteronormative surveillance which is enacted over the bodies of the trans men in our study suggests that considerably more diversification is needed with respect to how we understand gendered bodies, particularly with respect to biological sex, if we are to successfully combat the broader processes of gender inequality which operate through such surveillance.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I revealed how a variety of gendered bodies and practices are implicated in the (re)production of heteronormativity and the unequal power relations that it sustains. I demonstrated how heteronormative expectations are prescribed to female and male bodybuilders and trans men through surveillance on Instagram, and how they govern and restrict the ways in which these individuals embody and perform gender on Instagram. This heteronormative surveillance functions to (re)position the bodies of female and male bodybuilders and trans men to their respective positions within a patriarchal gender system. However, I also highlighted the gender-transgressive potential of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram; these groups manage to confront and negotiate the heteronormative surveillance they experience in ways that enable them to preserve relatively diverse and inclusive visual narratives regarding their gendered bodies and practices on Instagram. Cultural notions around gender and the body are currently diversifying through online social practices, and this diversification, while limited, represent micro-level challenges to broader processes of patriarchal power.

By giving voice to the ways in which female and male bodybuilders and trans men transgress heteronormativity on Instagram alongside their gender conformities, I move away from the tendencies of previous gender scholars to dismiss their transgressive potential through claims that their conformities neutralize or outweigh their resistance (Aboim, 2017; Jeffreys, 2014; Bartky, 1998; Magallares, 2013; Rosdahl, 2014; Swami & Voracek, 2013). Moreover, there has been a scholarly tendency to focus on whether or not female and male bodybuilders and trans men lack or possess heteronormativity, or both. There has been little attention given to the complex and nuanced ways in which these groups manage to preserve gender diversification

while also simultaneously (re)producing heteronormativity. There has also been little examination of the ways in which these micro-level negotiations are implicated in macro-level processes of gender inequality. Through my critical, feminist, and social constructionist approach, I took the position that heteronormativity, rather than simply being prescribed to bodies, manifests through bodies and interaction (Coleman, 2005; Grogan et al., 2004; Gill et al., 2005). Heteronormativity manifests itself through the bodies and (inter)actions of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram; however, these individuals are active agents in their gendered practices and the processes of patriarchal power that heteronormativity upholds (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1977; West & Zimmerman, 1987). These groups choose not to fully embody or enact heteronormativity; in doing so, they threaten heteronormativity's cultural legitimacy as the only 'natural', 'normal', and 'correct' way to do gender (Butler, 1993b; Wesely, 2001).

I conceptualized the heteronormative conformities and resistances of female and male bodybuilders and trans men as micro-level reflections of various ways in which heteronormativity is dissolving, persisting, and re-stabilizing at the macro-level of society. I discovered that the primary ways in which the female and male bodybuilders and trans men I observed successfully transgress heteronormativity is through their social behavioural practices; where they are much more constrained by heteronormativity is in their physical, bodily representations of gender. This led me to conclude that bodies in particular continue to serve as important cultural tools for (re)appropriating essentialist, dualistic, and oppositional assumptions about femininity and masculinity; women and men (Bartky, 1998; Bordo, 2004). Moreover, heteronormative bodily expectations continue to tightly secure the impression that men and

women occupy opposite gendered positions in society, and furthermore, that men are naturally superior to women and thus entitled to their privileged status (Rahilly, 2015; Ridgeway, 2011).

In the sections below, I begin by discussing my findings regarding how female and male bodybuilders and trans men transgress heteronormativity on Instagram, and how these transgressions contest broader processes of gender inequality. I also discuss ways in which heteronormative surveillance on Instagram compels these female and male bodybuilders and trans men to negotiate their transgressions through conformity to expectations of masculinity and femininity, as well as expectations of maleness and femaleness. This includes a discussion of how the micro-level conformities performed by these groups reflect and reinforce unequal and gendered power relations. Additionally, I emphasize how the heteronormative bodily conformities of the female and male bodybuilders and trans men I observed function to *preserve* their heteronormative transgressions to some degree. I then move on to discuss how the heteronormative surveillance which operates over these groups on Instagram succeeds in particular at re-appropriating heteronormative notions of the feminine versus masculine body, and the male versus female body. In doing so, I weave together the findings from each article, establishing a broad and complex picture of the ways in which female and male bodybuilders and trans men, through their visual narratives on Instagram, simultaneously challenge and appropriate three major components of heteronormativity (Butler, 1993b); that is, gender expression, biological sex, and gender identity. Following these discussions, I argue for the effectiveness of Instagram as a site for feminist advocacy, as supported by the findings presented throughout this thesis. I then outline my suggestions for future research. Finally, I conclude this thesis with a summary of my major findings and contributions to critical feminist literature on gender and the body.

Negotiating Gender Diversity

In this section, I discuss the major findings regarding the gender-transgressions of female bodybuilders, whose visual narratives on Instagram involve a re-definition of femininity to include notions of strength, independence, and empowerment. I then move on to discuss the gender-transgressions of male bodybuilders, who present visual narratives that evoke relatively soft masculinities through emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and self-objectification. I also compare and contrast the ways in which female and male bodybuilders are compelled, through the heteronormative surveillance they experience by others on Instagram, to counteract their transgressions through conformities. I outline how their conformities secure their complementary positions within the heteronormative dualism. However, I also emphasize how their conformities function in part to preserve their gender diversity.

Then, I move on to discuss the negotiated transgressions of trans men who, like female and male bodybuilders, negotiate diverse expressions of masculinity and femininity through the visual narratives they present on Instagram. Where these trans men are particularly transgressive, however, is in their nonconformity to heteronormative expectations around biological sex and gender identity. I compare the negotiated transgressions of the trans men I observed with those of the female and male bodybuilders I observed. I do this in particular by examining the processes involved in trans men's physical transitions from having stereotypically female bodies to having stereotypically male bodies. I discuss how the trans men I observed who physically transitioned to male moved from the subordinate (female) positions occupied by female bodybuilders to the privileged (male) positions occupied by male bodybuilders. The processes involved in their transitions expanded upon the findings presented in the first two articles by revealing how cultural assumptions around biological sex and gender identity interact with expectations of

masculinity and femininity in ways that bolster male hegemony and female subordination. I also emphasize how, like the female and male bodybuilders I observed, the heteronormative conformities of the trans men in my study serve in part to uphold their transgressions.

In line with previous studies, I found that the female bodybuilders I observed on Instagram aim to challenge notions around women as fragile, weak, and subservient by becoming muscular (Bolin, 1992; Choi, 2003; Daniels, 1992; Rosdahl, 2014; Schulze, 1997). Also in line with past studies on female bodybuilding, I demonstrated how these female bodybuilders compensate for their muscularity by ornamenting and sexualizing their bodies, and by striving to achieve minimal body fat (Bartky, 1998; Dworkin, 2001; Gruber, 2007; Heywood, 1998; Lowe, 1998; Obel, 2002). However, through my conceptualization of Instagram as a site for heteronormative (self-)surveillance, I was able to uncover important and previously overlooked complexities within these mediated social practices. These complexities bring light to current debates around whether female bodybuilding is a gender-conforming or gender-subversive practice. In particular, I demonstrated how the female bodybuilders I observed do not simply negate their empowerment through conformity to dominant expectations of femininity. Rather, these women actively negotiate their own, empowered definition of femininity; one that challenges heteronormativity and the female oppression that it functions to secure in various ways.

Firstly, I identified how the female bodybuilders I observed project feminist empowerment through their visual narrative on Instagram by emphasizing the self-control and capacity for success that their muscularity symbolizes. Past studies on female bodybuilding have not conceptualized this connection. Rather, these studies have focused primarily on how the strength and power symbolized by female muscularity challenges the notion that women should

appear weak and vulnerable (Daniels, 1992; Rosdahl, 2014). As I have demonstrated, the nature of the strength and power that female bodybuilders evoke through their muscularity is tied to the notion that these women have the ability to control their lives and achieve success independently – that they are not, in the words of one of the female bodybuilders I observed, "*damsels in distress*" who are "*waiting to be captivated and rescued*" by men. The female bodybuilders in my study constantly pair photographs of their muscular bodies with passionate proclamations that they are strong, independent, and empowered; that they are "*unstoppable*" and "*badass*" women who can "*fight their own battles*".

Secondly, I revealed every day ways in which female bodybuilders are held accountable to heteronormativity on Instagram, and how this accountability is produced through their interactions with others. Most research on female bodybuilders has not explored their everyday gendered experiences in large part because of its focus on competition settings. Relative to Instagram, the male gaze is more overtly and institutionally imposed on the bodies of female bodybuilders in competition settings; rules and regulations literally require competing female bodybuilders to be heteronormatively feminine (Bolin, 1992; Bordo, 2004; Dworkin, 2001; Land, 2015; Wesely, 2001). Most current findings on female bodybuilding, therefore, have less to tell us about the everyday lives of female bodybuilders, or female bodybuilders who do not compete in bodybuilding competitions. Such findings also have less to tell us about the particular ways in which female bodybuilders actively resist and reproduce heteronormativity. On Instagram, I was able to observe the everyday, 'backstage' forms of heteronormative surveillance which are imposed by others and then conformed to, and resisted by, female bodybuilders. These processes of heteronormative (self-)surveillance were readily observable through the reactions that female bodybuilders receive from other Instagram users, how actively female bodybuilders

respond to these reactions, and how displays and discussions regarding their bodies and bodybuilding practices correspond with these interactions.

On Instagram, the male gaze is imposed upon the bodies of female bodybuilders in ways that are similar to competition settings where bodies are also constructed for display (Land, 2015; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996). People compliment and criticize the bodies of female bodybuilders on Instagram in ways that also encourage them to feminize their bodies – to make their bodies more (hetero)sexually appealing to the male gaze. These findings demonstrate how the heteronormative surveillance over female bodybuilders on Instagram and in competition settings are interlinked. While appropriated differently, they serve a similar purpose – to feminize and thus minimize female muscularity. Like it does in competition settings, heteronormative surveillance on Instagram ultimately serves to counteract the feminist strength, independence, and empowerment symbolized by the muscularity of female bodybuilders to some degree. However, I also found that people on Instagram express admiration and appreciation for the muscularity of female bodybuilders; other people often praise the feminist strength, independence, and empowerment that this muscularity symbolizes. Again, due in part to its focus on competition settings, previous studies on female bodybuilding have not been able to fully capture the specific, everyday ways in which people admire and appreciate female muscularity while also simultaneously limiting it. Using Instagram was extremely useful for understanding the specificities and ironies inherent in the ways in which people endorse transgressive female muscularity while simultaneously appropriating heteronormative restrictions on this muscularity.

People on Instagram are much more likely to admire and appreciate the feminist quality of female muscularity if it is ornamented, sexualized, and accompanied by very little body fat (Dworkin, 2011). Moreover, the common appreciation for female muscularity which is found on

Instagram is conditional; it tends to be reserved for muscularity that is heteronormatively feminized. My findings also demonstrate how female bodybuilders internalize the conditions imposed on their muscularity; realizing that their strength, independence, and empowerment might otherwise be dismissed as "*sick*", "*terrifying*", "*scary*", and "*too much*", these women express feeling pressure to 'tone down' their muscularity by becoming more heteronormatively "*Beautiful*" and "*hot*".

The ways in which the female bodybuilders I observed are compelled to negotiate their muscularity serves to reposition their bodies as the unruly and inadequate counterparts to men's bodies. The expectations around ornamentation, sexualization, and minimal body fat which are imposed on their bodies represent disciplinary practices of femininity (Bartky, 1998) which ultimately serve to objectify women's bodies and paint them as weaker and as more inadequate than men's bodies. Unlike women's bodies, men's bodies are expected to be large and indicative of utility and strength (e.g., non-objectified and non-sexualized) (Coffey, 2013; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014). The disciplinary practices of femininity which are imposed upon the bodies of the female bodybuilders I observed on Instagram successfully repositions them to their respective positions within the heteronormative dualism to some degree; as different from, and inferior to, men's bodies.

Past research on female bodybuilding competitions has often concluded that the disciplinary practices of femininity which are required of female bodybuilders renders the feminist potential of their muscularity largely ineffective (Bartky, 1998; Heywood, 1998). These studies have not engaged adequately with the relational aspect of gender – how people's enactments, and experiences, of gender are influenced and constrained by their interactions with others. How female bodybuilders (and all people) come to experience and express gender is

intricately interwoven with readings by others. The effectiveness of the empowerment represented by female muscularity depends in large part on the extent to which other people recognize and acknowledge it. I argue that, in order to prevent others from overlooking and dismissing the feminist resistance symbolized by their muscularity, the female bodybuilders I observed are compelled to preserve it to some extent by feminizing their bodies. While it may detract from the feminist potential of their muscularity, this negotiation certainly does not negate it and, in fact, functions to maintain it.

In making sense of how the female bodybuilders negotiate their muscularity, I concluded that these women *re-define* – rather than reject – stereotypical femininity by becoming muscular. These women want to be "*hot AND […] strong*"; their femininity *includes* muscularity as well as the strength, independence, and empowerment that this muscularity symbolizes. Through this re-definition of femininity, the female bodybuilders from the first article are able to have their feminist resistance recognized and affirmed; by becoming muscular, these women successfully challenge the weakness, dependence, and passivity which characterize a 'properly' controlled and (hetero)sexually desirable feminine body.

Similar to the first article, the second article on male bodybuilders sheds further light onto current debates around whether bodybuilding is a gender-conforming practice (Magallares, 2013; McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005; Swami & Voracek, 2013) or a gender-transgressive practice (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Bjornestad, Kandal, & Anderrsen, 2014; Richardson, 2004). Like debates around female bodybuilding, debates around male bodybuilding have been mostly overly simplistic or dualistic. Gender scholars (Connell, 1987) have often assumed that all men, especially male bodybuilders (Pompper, 2010), idealize anti-feminine, hegemonic masculinity to some degree. My findings suggest that this is not always the case. Gender scholars

have not fully acknowledged the complex ways in which men negotiate gender by enacting a plurality of masculinities, as well as femininities (Arxer, 2011; Pascoe & Birdges, 2014). In the second article, I examined a number of diverse and hybridized ways in which male bodybuilders construct visual and gendered narratives on Instagram through conformity and nonconformity to hegemonic expectations of masculinity. Also unlike past studies on male bodybuilding, I acknowledged how the male bodybuilders I observed do not necessarily benefit from enacting hegemonic masculinities. I emphasized how the male bodybuilders I observed are constrained by narrow hegemonic masculine standards, which have traditionally strongly deterred men from being feminine (Anderson, 2009; Gardiner, 2002; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Pompper, 2010).

The male bodybuilders in my study – in addition to engaging in inclusive masculinity through self-objectification (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Bjornestad, Kandal, & Anderssen, 2014) – engage in inclusive masculinities on Instagram by being quite emotionally expressive and emotionally intimate with other men. The first article demonstrated how the masculinities enacted by female bodybuilders are becoming more accepted and normalized, as evidenced by the appreciation that other people express for their muscularity; similarly, the femininities enacted by the male bodybuilders from the second article are becoming more accepted and normalized. I concluded that these men's enactments of femininity point to the cultural increase in the inclusivity of masculinity (Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2009). These findings also point to the corresponding cultural decreases in homophobia and the stigmatization of femininity in general (Anderson & McCormack, 2015; Clements & Field, 2014; Kozlowski, 2010). The male bodybuilders I observed feel comfortable expressing their emotions and being emotionally intimate with other men in large part because they are less likely to fear being stigmatized as

effeminate or gay (Anderson, 2009; Pascoe & Diefendorf, 2018). This was evidenced by the fact that I did not observe people on Instagram criticizing the emotional expressiveness of the male bodybuilders in my study or the emotionally intimate ways in which they interact with other men. Past studies on male bodybuilding have shown that people openly criticize male bodybuilders through references to their self-objectification (Klein, 1993) and potential emotional softness (Bank & Hansford, 2000). I concluded that the softening of masculine ideals has extended somewhat into the world of male bodybuilding (at least on Instagram) – a world which has previously been assumed to be dominated almost exclusively by hegemonic masculinities.

The second article also contributed to the literature on male bodybuilding by demonstrating particular ways in which male bodybuilders are compelled, through heteronormative (self-)surveillance on Instagram, to convey hegemonic masculine power and dominance through their visual and gendered narratives, as well as socioeconomic success, through displays of their very large muscular bodies. Past studies have not identified how male bodybuilders are held accountable to the pressure to meet hegemonic masculine ideals through their day-to-day interactions with others, and how male bodybuilders internalize this accountability and apply it to their bodybuilding practices. I found that other people on Instagram tend to reserve their compliments for the most muscular male bodies, and furthermore, that they tend to praise the power and dominance that very large muscular bodies symbolize. I also found that male bodybuilders openly devalue male physical weakness by associating it with femininity and homosexuality. They often poke fun at and shame men who are physically weak by suggesting that they are feminine or gay. Male bodybuilders encourage each other to become very muscular by spreading the anti-feminine and homophobic notion that if men are physically

small and weak, they are too feminine and 'gay'. The male bodybuilders I observed appear to learn, in part through the heteronormative surveillance they experience on Instagram, that the larger their muscularity, the better, and that the value of their muscularity is tied to anti-feminine, hegemonic masculine power and dominance.

It has been shown that, while idealized forms of masculinity are becoming more inclusive, men nevertheless continue to feel pressure to evoke masculine power and dominance (Arxer, 2011; Barber, 2008; Demetriou, 2001; Hall, Gough, & Seymour-Smith, 2013; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Wilkins, 2009). This is reflected in my research on male bodybuilders. The pressure to evoke dominance, appropriated in part through surveillance on Instagram, compels the male bodybuilders I observed to continue to distance themselves from femininity and homosexuality on Instagram. This was particularly evidenced by the fact that the male bodybuilders who were the most emotionally expressive, emotionally intimate with other men, and self-objectifying on Instagram also appeared to be the most muscular. I conceptualized this phenomenon as a form of 'hegemonic masculine negotiation', a concept which I have introduced into the literature on masculinity. By becoming very muscular, male bodybuilders are able to negotiate their inclusive masculine emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and self-objectification. Those who are less muscular appear less dominant and powerful and, therefore, experience less freedom to engage in stereotypical femininities. Another form of hegemonic masculine negotiation that I identified among the male bodybuilders I observed operates through their embodiments of socioeconomic success. For the female bodybuilders I observed, their bodily representations of mental strength and success act as forms of feminist resistance against the traditional assumption that women are weak and dependent on others. However, with respect to the male bodybuilders, I argued that these bodily representations serve

as a way to negotiate how difficult it is to achieve today's hegemonic masculine standards of wealth, status, and prestige.

Through my conceptualization of hegemonic masculine negotiation, I attributed the anti-feminine and homophobic self-representations of the male bodybuilders in my study to broader processes of heteronormativity which constrain and limit men's capacity to enact femininities. Rather than assuming that their evocations of power and dominance on Instagram represent attempts to re-assert male hegemony, I argued that the male bodybuilders in my study are compelled to negotiate their femininities through maintaining an overall projection of masculine power and dominance. Just as the female bodybuilders from the first article cannot be 'too' masculine, the male bodybuilders from the second article cannot be 'too' feminine. In order to have others recognize and appreciate their relatively soft gendered enactments, the male bodybuilders I observed learn, in part through the surveillance they experience on Instagram, that they must counterbalance these enactments through continued conformity to hegemonic masculinity.

Previous studies have consistently linked male bodybuilding to the pressure put on men to evoke power and dominance and appears to have only alluded to a potential connection between male bodybuilding and socioeconomic success (e.g., McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005). I conceptualized how the male bodybuilders in my study are motivated to build muscular bodies and display them on Instagram because they believe that these bodies are socioeconomic status symbols. I found that, in addition to valuing their muscular bodies for the power and dominance that they evoke, other people on Instagram tend to value the muscular bodies of male bodybuilders for the hegemonic masculine mental strength that they symbolize. Many of the compliments which male bodybuilders receive on Instagram praise the "*Great work*" and

"*integrity*" required to achieve their bodies. Like the female bodybuilders discussed in the first article, these male bodybuilders believe that their muscular bodies are status symbols which represent the mental strength that is necessary to achieve success.

The first two articles demonstrated complementary ways in which expectations of femininity and masculinity can be re-stabilized through gendered surveillance and negotiations on Instagram. Unlike the female bodybuilders from the first article, the male bodybuilders from the second article are encouraged to become as muscular as possible, and to emphasize (rather than minimize) the power that their muscularity represents. Moreover, the male bodybuilders I observed are given more space to represent power through their bodies and their overall visual and gendered narratives on Instagram; consequently, they evoke dominance (over others) in ways that the female bodybuilders I observe cannot. Taken together, the limitations imposed on the masculinities of the female bodybuilders I observed, along with the limitations imposed on the femininities of the male bodybuilders I observed, reinforce male hegemony and female subordination in complementary ways.

The first two articles also demonstrated complementary ways in which expectations of femininity and masculinity are diversifying. Given the relative lack of heteronormative surveillance over their muscularity, the female bodybuilders are given an unprecedented amount of space to enact masculinities than previously found. Given the relative lack of heteronormative surveillance over their emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and self-objectification, the male bodybuilders are given an unprecedented amount of space to enact femininities than previously found. I argue that these findings point to a cultural movement away from dualistic expectations of gender; particularly the traditional assumption that women are essentially and exclusively feminine, and that men are essentially and exclusively masculine.

With the space they are given to become muscular, the female bodybuilders I observed are able to harness and embody the strength, independence, and empowerment that they desire. With the space they are given to express softer masculinities, the male bodybuilders I observed are able to embrace more inclusive masculinities.

As women, the female bodybuilders move away from their traditionally feminine and subservient cultural position towards one that is more masculine and therefore characterized by strength and power – a position which has traditionally been assumed to be occupied by men. Conversely, the male bodybuilders move away from their traditionally masculine and hegemonic cultural position towards one that is more feminine and therefore characterized by softness – a position which has traditionally been assumed to be occupied by women. In these ways, the female bodybuilders and the male bodybuilders challenge broader processes of female subservience and male hegemony to some degree. Their negotiations of gender diversity, while limited, successfully transgress the taken-for-granted cultural assumption that only *female* femininity and *male* masculinity are normal and natural. In doing so, the female and male bodybuilders I observed present challenges to the broader processes of gender inequality which rely on these cultural assumptions.

The third article presented in this thesis offered valuable insight into the transgressive potential of trans men, something which has largely been overlooked by feminist and gender scholars. Again, this lack of acknowledgement can be attributed to the assumption that, by physically transitioning from stereotypically female to stereotypically male, and by evoking hegemonic masculinities, trans men reinforce heteronormativity and contribute to patriarchy (Halberstam, 1998; Jeffreys, 2014; Koenig, 2003). Most transgender research has focused predominantly on trans women, who are more likely than trans men to experience trans

misogyny, trans prejudice, discrimination, and violence (White & Jenkins, 2017), with very little research into the unique experiences and struggles of trans men. I demonstrated how trans men subvert heteronormative expectations around biological sex and gender identity by openly and candidly identifying as trans male on Instagram, and by openly discussing the unique hardships they have faced as trans men. I also revealed various ways in which trans men on Instagram, like the female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders I observed, express both masculinity and femininity in diverse ways. These gender-subversive practices challenge the essentialist and dualistic cultural assumptions that male identities can only follow from stereotypically male bodies, that only women are feminine, and that only men are masculine. Like the gender-subversive practices of the female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders I observed, the gender-subversive practices of the trans men I observed threaten heteronormativity's cultural legitimacy and, in doing so, offer various challenges to patriarchal processes of power.

I found that the most powerful ways in which trans men transgress heteronormativity on Instagram is through their high visibility and openness with regards to discussing their trans identities and experiences with others. This visibility is also often practised in the form of advocacy; the trans men I observed often intentionally make their trans identities and experiences visible in an effort to contribute to the increased acceptance and normalization of trans identities. I also found evidence to indicate that trans men's visibility and advocacy on Instagram are indeed successful at generating more understanding of, and acceptance for, trans male identities and trans identities in general. Trans men receive an incredible amount of support, encouragement, and validation from others on Instagram. Most of these supporters are cisgender, and these supporters often claim to have become more informed about, and more accepting of, trans identities through their exposure to trans people on Instagram. The success of

trans male visibility and advocacy on Instagram is especially compelling and important given the immense lack of trans representation in traditional forms of media (e.g., TV, movies) (Andsager, 2014; Bond, 2015; Gross, 1991).

Another way in which the trans men I observed challenge heteronormativity is by integrating femininities into their male and masculine identities in progressive ways. These men are often very gentle with their followers, particularly their trans followers, with whom they are warmly supportive and encouraging. They are also very emotionally expressive; much of their visibility on Instagram involves openly discussing the struggles and hardships they have faced. The relatively 'soft' masculinities which are evoked by the trans men I observed are similar to those which are evoked by the male bodybuilders from the second article. However, the trans men appeared to have considerably more feminine forms of gender expression than the male bodybuilders. This is consistent with past studies which have shown that trans men are more likely to integrate femininities into their masculine identities than cisgender men in part because they were not policed by anti-feminine hegemonic masculine expectations prior to transitioning (Abelson, 2014).

In addition to openly expressing femininity and masculinity in diverse ways, several of the trans men I observed transgress heteronormativity by openly questioning the male privilege they have found themselves with upon physically 'passing' as male. They also openly question the problematic, anti-feminine nature of hegemonic masculine expectations. These trends were not found among the male bodybuilders from the second article. The conscious ways in which the trans men I observed question male privilege and hegemonic masculinity are likely due in part to the fact that they had previously lived their lives as women. Trans men have experienced patriarchy from a position of female oppression and are therefore more aware and critical of

male privilege (Green, 2005). Additionally, the fact that male-appearing trans men receive male privilege very abruptly – usually during adulthood when they transition – likely contributes to their conscious awareness of male privilege (Abelson, 2014). The ways in which the trans men I observed actively and consciously subvert essentialist and dualistic expectations around biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression, in addition to the conscious ways in which they critique male privilege, were compelling. The third article clearly demonstrates that the transgressive potential of trans men cannot be denied.

In addition to highlighting the transgressive nature of trans men's self-representations on Instagram, I identified potential ways in which heteronormative (self-)surveillance on Instagram is implicated in trans men's decisions to physically transition from stereotypically female to stereotypically male and to masculinize their appearance. These findings in particular contribute somewhat to the lack of consensus among transgender scholars regarding whether or not trans men are born in the 'wrong' bodies – debates which often appear to be too simplistic and dualistic and which are often not representative of the incredibly complex ways in which bodies and gender manifest, particularly for trans people. I argued that, to some extent, heteronormative surveillance on Instagram compels the trans men I observed to (re)produce the heteronormative notion that men are *supposed* to have male bodies. They often discuss feeling trapped in their female bodies, which they believe they were 'mistakenly' born with. I demonstrated how heteronormative (self-)surveillance – rather than some biological mistake – might contribute to these men's desire to physically transition to male. Other people on Instagram are significantly more likely to validate their male identities the more they physically 'pass' as male, and this acts as a potent motivator for transitioning. My purpose in making this argument was not to discredit trans men's desire to transition their bodies to stereotypically male, or to ignore biological bases

regarding how trans men experience their gendered bodies; rather, I wanted to highlight how heteronormativity functions to limit the possibility of nonbinary bodies and identities.

Relatedly, I found that the trans men I observed are much more likely to have their male identities validated by others if they masculinize their appearance; as such, they often adopt hegemonic masculine appearance practices, including building their muscularity. Similar to how the male bodybuilders compensate for their feminine gender expressions (e.g., emotional expressiveness) through hegemonic masculine appearance practices (e.g., muscularity), the trans men compensate for their female appearance (e.g., lack of facial hair) through hegemonic masculine appearance practices (e.g., muscularity). Both groups attempt to distance themselves from femininity and femaleness, which have consistently been shown to be important mechanisms for reinforcing male hegemony (Connell, 1987). Once again, a hegemonic masculine appearance serves to reinforce the notion that men are distinct from and superior to women (Bartky, 1998, Bordo, 2004). As I suggested, the trans men I observed are at least in part compelled to reinforce this notion through evocations of relative disembodiment (e.g., lack of ornamentation) and dominance (e.g., muscularity).

Like the female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders from the first two articles, the trans men from the third article are encouraged, through heteronormative (self-)surveillance, to negotiate their transgressions through conformity to heteronormativity. Also like the female bodybuilders and male bodybuilders I observed, these trans men negotiate their transgressions through adherence to heteronormative bodily standards. Rather than assuming that the trans men I observed pursue male and masculine bodies because they desire male privilege (Jeffreys, 2014), I problematized how the surveillance that they experience over their bodies on Instagram might compel them to conform to heteronormativity in various ways. I emphasized the relational

aspect of gender performance through my assertion that trans men on Instagram may transition to male and masculinize their appearance in part because these practices enable them to have their male identities recognized and validated by others. I also chose to emphasize how, despite the heteronormative surveillance which compels them to conform to heteronormativity in certain ways, the trans men I observed remain remarkably transgressive in their active visibility, in their active advocacy for the normalization of trans identities, and in their diverse behavioural expressions of masculinity and femininity.

(Re)producing Heteronormativity Through Bodies

While I have emphasized the transgressive potential of female and male bodybuilders and trans men, I have also demonstrated how surveillance over these groups on Instagram encourages them to engage in conformities to heteronormativity, and how these conformities act as micro-level reinforcements of male privilege and female subordination. In each of the articles, I concluded that heteronormative surveillance succeeds in particular at repositioning the bodies of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram to their respective positions within a patriarchal gender system. These groups are particularly transgressive in their gendered behavioural practices (e.g., proclamations of strength, emotional expressiveness). However, heteronormative (self-)surveillance over their bodies on Instagram successfully imposes the overall impression that men and women are naturally and categorically distinct from one another, and furthermore, that men are superior to women. In order to have their feminist strength, independence, and empowerment recognized and validated by others, the female bodybuilders feminize their bodies. In order to have their soft masculinities recognized and validated by others, the male bodybuilders masculinize their bodies. In order to have their male identities

recognized and validated by others, the trans men transition their bodies to stereotypically male and masculinize their bodies. These micro-level negotiations ultimately serve to uphold broader processes of patriarchal power.

In this section, I outline how heteronormative surveillance over the bodies of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram (re)stabilizes patriarchal power in various ways. I do this firstly by comparing and contrasting the complementary ways in which the female and male bodybuilders conform to heteronormative expectations of the feminine versus masculine body on Instagram. I further detail how surveillance on Instagram appropriates these conformities. Then, I move onto trans men's negotiations of heteronormative surveillance on Instagram, particularly how this surveillance regulates their conformities to heteronormative expectations around biological sex and gender identity. I also compare and contrast this surveillance with the surveillance experienced by the female and male bodybuilders I observed. In doing so, I paint a comprehensive picture of ways in which cultural expectations around gender expression, biological sex, and gender identity interact to reinforce patriarchal power.

I chose to focus on female and male bodybuilders in order to problematize the essentialist and dualistic ways in which femininities and masculinities are prescribed to female versus male bodies. I was interested in the similarities and differences in how female and male bodybuilders conform to, and resist, heteronormativity, and what these comparisons could tell me about current ways in which heteronormativity and gender inequality are being challenged and reinforced. One important similarity between the female and male bodybuilders I observed is that they have a strong desire to evoke power through their muscularity. However, because heteronormativity prescribes muscularity and power to male bodies rather than to female bodies,

the power projected by female and male bodybuilders are accomplished in very different ways, and in turn, accomplish very different things.

For female bodybuilders, who evoke power from marginalized positions in society, their muscularity serves to *em*power them. For male bodybuilders, however, who evoke power from privileged positions in society, muscularity serves a traditionally hegemonic function; it reinforces and capitalizes on the patriarchal power they have been born with. By becoming muscular, the female bodybuilders confront oppressive notions of femininity, and successfully empower themselves. While the male bodybuilders assert hegemonic masculine dominance through their muscularity, they soften it by enacting inclusive masculinities. Notably, however, the particular ways in which heteronormative (self-)surveillance compels female and male bodybuilders to negotiate their power on Instagram succeeds at maintaining the heteronormative assumption that women are naturally feminine, and that men are naturally masculine. The empowerment of female bodybuilders is halted by the ongoing assumption that only men can truly be muscular and masculine; as my research demonstrates, it remains that only men can fully access the power which muscularity serves to evoke and accomplish.

Again, in negotiating an empowered femininity, the female bodybuilders realize that the empowerment symbolized by their muscularity will only be recognized and validated by others if their bodies are feminized. Female bodybuilders are compelled to ornament and sexualize their bodies, and to have very little body fat. In other words, these female bodybuilders learn that their muscular bodies cannot be "*too much*", or in other words, "*too masculine*". The heteronormative surveillance over their bodies on Instagram serves to maintain the dualistic impression that female bodies are distinct from male bodies, and furthermore, that they are inferior to male bodies. Additionally, the ornamentation, sexualization, and minimal fat which characterize the

ideal female bodybuilder's body require disciplinary practices of femininity which reflect and reinforce the notion that women's bodies are more 'out-of-control' than men's bodies (Bordo, 2004); that in comparison to men's bodies, women's bodies are insufficient in their natural state, and thus in need of constant manipulation and improvement (Bartky, 1998).

For the reasons outlined above, the female bodybuilders from the first article lack full access to the power, or privilege, that muscularity affords the male bodybuilders from the second article. The discrepancy in the power accomplished by female muscularity versus male muscularity reflects Halberstam (1988)'s recognition that women cannot receive the same privileges as men when they enact masculinities. Too much female masculinity is currently unintelligible in our culture. The muscularity of the female bodybuilders I observed cannot symbolize dominance (e.g., over men) in the way that the muscularity of the male bodybuilders I observed can symbolize dominance (e.g., over women). The particular ways in which the women I observed are required to negotiate their empowered femininity ultimately serve to maintain their subordination. The essentialist and dualistic notion that women are physically and naturally distinct from, and ultimately inferior to, their male counterparts successfully limits the transgressive potential of the female bodybuilders I observed on Instagram.

Unlike the female bodybuilders, the male bodybuilders secure their privileged statuses in society through their gendered negotiations. They compensate for their inclusive masculine emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and self-objectification by discussing and displaying their muscular bodies in ways which emphasize power and dominance. With these findings, I contributed to gender scholarship on masculinity, which has not yet adequately theorized ways in which inclusive masculinities correspond with the patriarchal structure of society (Anderson, 2015). By conceptualizing the hegemonic masculine negotiations

of the male bodybuilders in my study, I demonstrated how their inclusive masculinities are counteracted and limited by the heteronormative surveillance they experience over their bodies on Instagram. By encouraging male bodybuilders to evoke power and dominance on Instagram, heteronormative surveillance maintains the impression that men are distinct from, and superior to, women. Like the female bodybuilders, the gender-subversions of the male bodybuilders are conditional. The masculine and feminine conditions imposed on the bodies of female and male bodybuilders on Instagram are centered around maintaining the heteronormative impression that women and men are naturally superior to women and thus deserving of their privilege.

The findings presented in the third article were particularly revealing with respect to how the essentialist, heteronormative notion that men are naturally superior to women reinforces patriarchy. My observation that trans men receive male privilege only once they physically pass as stereotypically male points to how it is ultimately the male body – or at least the presumption of a stereotypically male body – which grants men 'male' privilege. In the first two articles, I demonstrated how masculinizing the body can be empowering for female bodybuilders, and how it can reinforce male privilege for male bodybuilders. Unlike male bodybuilders, however, the power projected by female bodybuilders is limited by the fact that they have female bodies; because they have female bodies, people's reactions to female bodybuilders compel them to feminize their muscular bodies and to thus minimize the power that their muscular bodies symbolize. The third article on trans men extended upon these findings by explicitly demonstrating the fact that stereotypically male bodies are required for male privilege. Like the female bodybuilders, the trans men who do not physically pass as stereotypically male cannot access the full extent of the power afforded to men first and foremost because their bodies do not read male. While the masculinization of their bodies helps to solidify their male identities, only

once trans men appear to be biologically male in the heteronormative sense, do they receive male privilege. Again, these findings point to the automatic nature of embodied male privilege. As long as we assume that the body is extremely important for reading gender, and as long as we assume that one bodily reading (male) is automatically superior to the other (female), gender inequality cannot be fully eradicated. The negotiations practised by the men and women discussed throughout this thesis reflect and reinforce these cultural assumptions.

As previously discussed, female and male bodybuilders and trans men experience unprecedented freedom to enact both femininity and masculinity simultaneously. This is evidence that essentialist and dualistic cultural assumptions about gender are dissolving to some degree. Furthermore, trans men experience unprecedented freedom to identify and be recognized by others as men even when they openly identify as transgender. This points to how essentialist and dualistic cultural assumptions around gender identity and the body are dissolving to some degree. Accordingly, I have presented evidence of micro-level ways in which patriarchal power is currently being challenged through contemporary and self-mediated gender-subversive narratives on Instagram. However, I also demonstrated how patriarchal power is currently being re-stabilized on Instagram in various ways, particularly through the ongoing essentialist assumption that men (with stereotypically male bodies) are distinct from, and superior to, women (with stereotypically female bodies). The ways in which the bodies of female and male bodybuilders and trans men are scrutinized by others on Instagram function to maintain the current reality that female masculinity is not as powerful as male masculinity; that women are not as powerful as men.

The Power of Gender-Transgression on Instagram

Social media have contributed substantially to the mobilization and democratization of feminist activism. As I demonstrated throughout this thesis, the interactive and widespread nature of social media platforms enable seemingly minute, every day enactments of feminist resistance to reach up to millions of people, which can potentially influence understandings of gender at the macro-level of society. We see the mobilization and democratization of feminist resistance with hashtag campaigns like #metoo and #imwithher, which are largely used to promote widespread awareness and scrutiny regarding the overrepresentation of women as victims of sexual violence. These campaigns are particularly popular on Twitter, where people 'tweet' texts of up to 280 characters. On Instagram, however, where content is image-based, feminist campaigns around body image and body positivity take precedence. The hashtag #feminism alone is included in almost 9 million Instagram posts (July, 2019). Additionally, a search of the hashtag campaign #bodypositive also generates 10.4 million posts (July, 2019). Below, I consider the ways in which female and trans men in particular may be contributing to widespread feminist movements for gender equality through diverse gendered representations on Instagram, to which millions of people are exposed.

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, feminist resistance and advocacy are quite prominent among female bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram. The inclusive masculinities of the male bodybuilders I observed may also be considered acts of feminist resistance in some ways, although these men do not overtly engage in feminist resistance or advocacy for gender diversity in the ways that the female bodybuilders and trans men do. The diverse and transgressive representations of gender and the body practiced by the female and male bodybuilding and trans male communities on Instagram confront and transcend the narrow

representations of gender which are found in traditional forms of media (Mitrou, Kandias, Stavrou, & Gritzalis, 2014; Perloff, 2014). This diversity in representation on Instagram in itself has value for challenging heteronormativity and for contributing to the diversification of cultural notions of gender and the body**.** In fact, today, social media are often deemed to be more ubiquitous and influential than traditional forms of media (Andsager, 2014). The hashtag #bodybuilding generates an extraordinary 95.8 million posts (July, 2019), while the hashtag #transgender generates an impressive 8.7 million (July, 2019), pointing to the pervasive visibility of these gender-subversive groups on Instagram. While heteronormative (self-)surveillance over the bodies of female and male bodybuilders and trans men is prevalent on Instagram, millions of people follow these bodybuilders and trans men and openly support and encourage their gender transgressions. In other words, these gender-subversive groups can be thought to successfully 'recruit' others in support of their feminist causes – whether these causes are deliberately advocated (e.g., female bodybuilders, trans men) or not (e.g., male bodybuilders).

A search of the feminist hashtag #girlswholift – popularly used by female bodybuilders – generates an astonishing 27.3 million posts (July, 2019). At the time of my research, the fifteen female bodybuilders from the first article whose profiles I examined for my in-depth observation had over two million followers in total (September, 2018). This number indicates that there is currently ample support and appreciation for these women's empowered re-definition of femininity, which has not been identified in previous studies on female bodybuilding (Bartky, 1998; Choi, 2003; Dworkin, 2001). Given that the women I observed make up only a small fraction of the vast number of female bodybuilders who clearly use Instagram, the feminist resistance represented by the muscular bodies of female bodybuilders on Instagram is certainly prevalent. In fact, the female bodybuilders discussed in the first article appeared to be the most

deliberate in their advocacy and defiance against heteronormativity and gender inequality on Instagram. This is likely due in large part to the fact that women in general are the most *obviously* subordinated by patriarchal power. In addition to proudly showcasing their muscular bodies as symbols of feminist empowerment, female bodybuilders on Instagram consciously, deliberately, and actively promote female empowerment in their Instagram posts. They frequently and openly proclaim to their followers that "*the world doesn't revolve around men*" and that they "*do not live [their] lives to please [men]".* They also often encourage their followers to consider "*why [their] perceptions of femininity somehow don't include muscle and strength*".

Millions of people on Instagram are exposed to the inclusive masculine representations of male bodybuilders, as evidenced by the fact that the male bodybuilders included in my in-depth observation had over 3 million followers at the time of my research (September, 2018). Clearly, male bodybuilders have high visibility on Instagram. Again, unlike the female bodybuilders and trans men I observed, the male bodybuilders I observed did not explicitly advocate for more inclusive understandings of masculinity. Relatedly, I also did not observe any instances in which people openly expressed support for the inclusive masculinities of male bodybuilders on Instagram. However, I did conclude that the lack of negative reactions to their emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and self-objectification indicates that softer forms of masculinity are indeed becoming more normalized than previously shown. I would argue that the emotional expressiveness, emotional intimacy with other men, and self-objectification practised by male bodybuilders on Instagram themselves not only reflect, but contribute somewhat to, the widespread normalization of inclusive masculinities, especially given the relatively high number of people who observe and engage with them on Instagram.

It is important to note here that the potential for male bodybuilders, and men in general, to enact inclusive masculinities and overt feminist resistance is likely limited by the fact that they lack access to the feminist language which contextualizes their gendered experiences. Feminist understandings of hegemonic masculinities are certainly implicated in the ways in which male bodybuilders construct gender. However, feminist scholarship has focused much more heavily on how hegemonic masculinities negatively affect women rather than men. Generally speaking, gender scholars have not fully acknowledged the ways in which anti-feminine and homophobic masculinities negatively affect men because they over-rely on the position that men hold privileged statuses in society. Men certainly wield more power than women overall, and women in particular tend to be negatively affected by patriarchy. However, as I have emphasized, men do not necessarily benefit from the hegemonic masculinities they enact. Feminist research on the ways in which narrow hegemonic masculine expectations stigmatize and constrain men is growing and promising. I am proud to contribute to the enhancement of this knowledge. However, this knowledge has not fully entered global consciousness. I argue that, if male bodybuilders on Instagram had more access to feminist language and information to understand and contextualize hegemonic masculine expectations, they may be more likely to resist and promote resistance against hegemonic masculinity more fully and overtly.

Unlike the male bodybuilders from the second article, the trans men from the third article frequently acknowledge their subversions of hegemonic masculinity and frame these subversions in critical and sometimes even feminist ways. Again, several of the trans men I observed openly question male privilege and the fact that femininity is exclusively assigned to ‘women’ (with female bodies) and that masculinity is exclusively assigned to ‘men’ (with male bodies). Furthermore, the trans men I observed actively use Instagram as a site for spreading visibility

and awareness regarding trans issues. In doing so, they successfully contribute to the increased acceptance and normalization of trans identities.

Remarkably, the current literature on LGBTQ+ persons has largely neglected to address trans people's experiences on social media, including trans advocacy on social media. I have contributed to scholarship in these areas by revealing ways in which Instagram operates as an extremely useful site where trans visibility and advocacy can promote meaningful change. Simply by virtue of openly disclosing and discussing their trans male identities on Instagram, trans men encourage cisgender people to understand and accept trans men (and women). Furthermore, such disclosure and discussion encourages other trans men (and women) to understand and accept themselves. Trans men's high visibility and advocacy on Instagram is especially compelling given that trans identities and experiences are scarce in traditional forms of media (Andsager, 2014; Bond, 2015; Gross, 1991). On Instagram, the hashtag campaign #transisbeautiful generates 980,000 posts (July, 2019). Most of these posts appear to be published by trans people and to contain images of themselves and/or discussions of their trans identities. Together, these processes of visibility, advocacy, and education on Instagram are likely to have extremely important implications for improving the livelihoods of trans people, particularly because they encourage more understanding and acceptance of trans identities.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings presented throughout this thesis are most revealing with respect to how heteronormative surveillance operates over female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram, how these gender-subversive groups resist and are compelled to reproduce this surveillance, and how these practices are implicated in broader processes of gender inequality.

Gender scholars may want to further scrutinize the consequences associated with the bodily practices of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram, and some intersectional issues.

Firstly, it would be useful to examine the strict and ritualized diet and exercise regimes practised by female bodybuilders, since these are highly documented in their Instagram posts (Bartky, 1998; Bordo, 2004; Wesely, 2001). Future research into female bodybuilding would be wise to address how the high self-control required to achieve the body which female bodybuilders idealize may lead to psychological distress. The relatively muscular ideal sought after by female bodybuilders on Instagram is certainly a more empowering and overall more favorable alternative to the thin, non-muscular ideal; however, it is still an aesthetic ideal which is difficult to achieve and maintain without constant regulation and manipulation of the body. Past research on female bodybuilding has noted the potentially problematic nature of female bodybuilding, having linked its strict, ritualized dieting and exercise practices to symptoms of anorexia (Bordo, 2004; Hale, Diehl, Weaver, & Briggs, 2013; Wesely, 2001). Unfortunately, the fact that female bodybuilding is an organized sport has normalized the dieting and exercise practices required for it, and scholars appear to have not yet addressed the potentially harmful nature of these practices in-depth.

Secondly, gender scholars may want to engage directly with male bodybuilders on Instagram in order to uncover their thoughts and feelings around the pressure to meet restrictive expectations of hegemonic masculinity, especially since they do not overtly discuss this on Instagram. Once again, unlike female bodybuilders and trans men, male bodybuilders do not openly express awareness of the ways in which they are constrained by heteronormativity on Instagram. For this reason, it was more difficult for me to make inferences regarding the

potentially conscious ways in which these men transgress hegemonic masculine expectations. Future research may want to engage directly with male bodybuilders on Instagram (e.g., interviews) to uncover their thoughts and feelings around the pressure to evoke power and dominance through their muscularity, as well as their thoughts and feelings around the overall restrictive nature of current masculine expectations. Relatedly, most research on masculinity appears to have been conducted from a macro-level perspective, and has focused predominantly on ways in which hegemonic masculinities contribute to the subordination and oppression of women. Less research has engaged directly with men to address the personal, micro-level ways that hegemonic masculine expectations constrain and negatively affect men. There is currently a need to conduct more micro-level research on men to uncover the specificities of their gendered experiences and practices, especially given the increasingly hybridized and sometimes contradictory ways in which men are expected to practice dominant masculinities. The second article of this thesis addresses this need by demonstrating ways in which men negotiate hegemonic and inclusive masculine expectations through gendered and bodily practices on Instagram. However, by engaging directly with male bodybuilders on Instagram, future research could extend upon these findings by uncovering the potentially conscious ways in which male bodybuilders negotiate hegemonic and inclusive masculine expectations.

Thirdly, gender scholars may want to examine the effects and potential consequences involved in the physical transitions of trans men on Instagram, since these men often discuss their processes of transitioning in detail on Instagram. Transitioning is often a physically and psychologically profound experience which can be liberating but also difficult and painful (Aboim, 2016). Insight into some of the negative effects of transitioning might shed further light on whether or not trans men should be expected to transition, especially since, as I have

demonstrated, this may be done largely in an effort to conform to socially constructed and contestable heteronormative expectations. Additionally, gender scholars may want to uncover ways in which to capitalize upon the extensive visibility and advocacy practised by trans men on Instagram in order to further perpetuate cultural understanding and acceptance towards trans identities. Researchers could implement more organized forms of trans advocacy on Instagram. For instance, they could create Instagram pages which are aimed explicitly at educating people on the problematic nature of heteronormativity, and how it delegitimizes trans identities. It appears that there are currently only a handful of Instagram pages run by organizations which seek to inform and educate people in this way (Batchelor-Warnke, 2018). Finally, my research on trans men on Instagram points to the need to talk directly with these men in order to understand their feelings about the potential pressure to transition, especially since the majority of the trans men I observed appear to claim that their bodies are 'wrong'. Future research could engage directly with trans men in order to more fully understand the complex relationships that they tend to have with their bodies, and in what ways they might attribute the self-perceived 'wrongness' of their bodies to biology and/or the heteronormativity which delegitimizes nonbinary bodies and identities.

Lastly, more work needs to be done to examine how the gendered identities of female and male bodybuilders and trans men intersect with other components of their overall identities (e.g., racial, sexual, socioeconomic). This would paint a more complex picture of the ways in which gendered embodiments are implicated in a number of cultural power differentials. For instance, the bodies of Black female bodybuilders have been shown be more sexualized than, for instance, the bodies of White female bodybuilders (Josephs, 1981; Williams, 2000). Researchers may want to consider potential ways in which the feminist muscularity of Black female bodybuilders

on Instagram becomes more minimized than that of White female bodybuilders. Additionally, gay men have been shown to build their muscularity as a way to compensate for the femininity which is culturally associated with their gay identities (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005). Consequently, it would be useful to understand how heteronormative surveillance operates over the muscularity of gay male bodybuilders on Instagram, particularly since heterosexuality is such an important marker of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Gay male bodybuilders may (or may not) be more compelled to engage in hegemonic masculine negotiations by building their muscularity, and are likely to do so in a variety of different ways.

Future researchers may also want to take a more intersectional approach to examining the different ways in which trans men experience heteronormative surveillance on Instagram. For instance, future researchers could examine how trans men's racial identities correspond with the heteronormative surveillance they experience on Instagram. Trans people of Colour have been shown to be less likely than White trans people to have familial support (Garofalo et al., 2006) and to be more likely to commit suicide (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007). Trans youth of Colour in the United States are also more likely to experience racial slurs from staff and fellow students at school in addition to trans prejudice and discrimination (Gretak et al., 2009), and are more likely than White trans youth to experience community and police harassment outside of schools (Reck, 2009). Because they are less likely to receive support from others, and because they are more vulnerable to harassment and trans prejudice and discrimination, trans men of Colour may feel less comfortable disclosing and discussing their trans identities on Instagram than White trans people. In fact, I only came across one trans man of Colour on Instagram when conducting my preliminary analyses. Future researchers may want to consider potential reasons why trans men of Colour are less visible than White trans men on Instagram, and how their racial identities

correspond with the unique forms of prejudice and discrimination that they are likely to face on Instagram.

Closing Remarks

Cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity, maleness and femaleness, are diversifying at the same time that many inequitable power relations remain prominent today. This thesis demonstrated how such changes are apparent in the ways in which female and male bodybuilders and trans men actively negotiate the heteronormative surveillance they experience on Instagram. Female bodybuilders enjoy an unprecedented amount of empowerment through their enactments of strength, power, and independence. Correspondingly, male bodybuilders enjoy an unprecedented amount of freedom to be emotionally expressive and emotionally intimate with other men. Trans men enjoy an unprecedented amount of freedom to openly express and discuss their trans identities with others. I also conclude that the 'contradictions' inherent in the gendered practices of the bodybuilders and trans men I observed do not negate, discredit, or eliminate their transgressive potential. Gendered discourses transform, fluctuate, and evolve in complex ways; social progression towards diversifying and equalizing cultural understandings and individual experiences of gender is not a linear process. Bodybuilders and trans men are compelled to 'pick their battles' with respect to how they represent gender on Instagram. I contend that, while limited, their resistance against heteronormativity remains effective and meaningful for the overall feminist movement which is aimed at abolishing the gendered power differentials sustained by dualistic and essentialist understandings of gender.

This thesis offers insights into how female bodybuilders *re-define* femininity for themselves in ways which ultimately enable them to maintain the feminist resistance symbolized

by their muscularity. In doing so, I avoided previous tendencies to dismiss the feminist resistance of female bodybuilders through references to processes of bodily objectification. Rather than focusing on how heteronormativity constrains female bodybuilders and how it limits their transgressive potential, I gave voice to their feminist resistance and credited their success at negotiating a fascinating, dynamic, and ultimately empowered version of femininity.

My examination of male bodybuilders on Instagram was also important in particular because of the tendency for past scholars to pass these men off as simply wanting to re-assert male hegemony. As I have demonstrated, male bodybuilders on Instagram practise an overall softer and complex masculinity than previous studies on male bodybuilding have suggested, and this finding is important for future scholars who should avoid over-stating these men's hegemonic masculine tendencies. Additionally, through my conceptualization of these men's hegemonic masculine negotiations, I was able to problematize the incredibly narrow range of gendered practices which men are culturally allowed to engage in. I was also able to problematize how these negotiations serve to re-stabilize the hegemonic function of dominant masculinities.

While trans men somewhat (re)produce heteronormativity through their physical transitions from female to male and the masculinization of their bodies, these practices do not negate their visibility, advocacy, and the inclusive ways in which they enact gender on Instagram. Rather than claiming that these heteronormative conformities represent attempts to exploit the privilege which comes with being male, I attributed them to heteronormative surveillance and its (re)appropriation of the dominant notion that all men must have stereotypically male bodies. The third article also enabled me to explicitly demonstrate how it is ultimately the presumption of biological maleness which grants men male privilege.

Overall, the findings presented throughout this thesis point to how heteronormative expectations of the body remain particularly influential in the (re)production of gender inequality. While female and male bodybuilders and trans men transgress heteronormativity in remarkable ways, they are compelled to negotiate these transgressions through heteronormative bodily conformities. However, I maintain that the negotiated gendered practices of female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram point to a widespread diversification of cultural understandings of gender. People possess the power to resist and abolish heteronormativity and the gender inequality that it sustains, and the gender-subversions practised by female and male bodybuilders and trans men on Instagram represent successful, albeit limited, attempts to wield this transgressive power.

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Appendix A

Ethics Approval Letter

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
ALBANY

22 December 2014

Kayla Marshall
[redacted]

Dear Kayla Marshall

Re: Bodybuilding and Body Sculpting: Constructing online identities within Instagram's fitness culture

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 18 December 2014.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

You are reminded that staff researchers and supervisors are fully responsible for ensuring that the information in the low risk notification has met the requirements and guidelines for submission of a low risk notification.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

> *"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*
>
> *If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".*

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

J. O'Neill

John G O'Neill (Professor)
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Director (Research Ethics)

cc Prof Kerry Chamberlain & Professor Darrin Hodgetts
School of Psychology
Albany campus

Professor Mandy Morgan
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Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa
Research Ethics Office
Private Bag 102 904, Auckland, 0745, New Zealand Telephone +64 9 414 0800 ex 9539 humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

Appendix B

Statements of Contribution to Doctoral Thesis Containing Publications

DRC 16

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality.*

Name of Candidate: Kayla Marshall

Name/Title of Principal Supervisor: Kerry Chamberlain

Name of Published Research Output and full reference:
Marshall, K., Chamberlain, K., & Hodgetts, D. J. (Forthcoming). Female bodybuilders on instagram: Negotiating an empowered femininity. Feminism & Psychology.

In which Chapter is the Published Work:

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate: 80%

  and / or

- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:
  This article was written primarily by the candidate for the purpose of her PhD thesis and was edited/co-writte n by her supervisors, Kerry Chamberlain and Darrin Hodgetts.

Candidate's Signature — 12/09/2018 Date

Principal Supervisor's signature — 12/09/2018 Date

GRS Version 3– 16 September 2011

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION TO DOCTORAL THESIS CONTAINING PUBLICATIONS

(To appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as an article/paper or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis)

We, the candidate and the candidate's Principal Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of Candidate:

Name/Title of Principal Supervisor:

Name of Published Research Output and full reference:
Marshall, K., Hodgetts, D. J., & Chamberlain, K. (Under consideration). Male bodybuilders on Instagram: Negotiating hegemonic and inclusive masculinity. Body & Society.

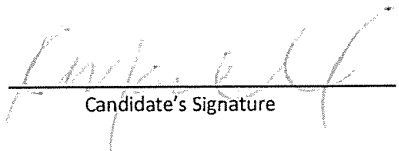
In which Chapter is the Published Work:

Please indicate either:

- The percentage of the Published Work that was contributed by the candidate: 80%

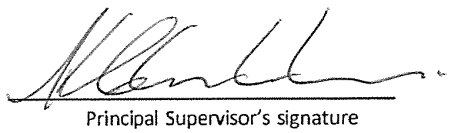
  and / or

- Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the Published Work:
  This article was written primarily by the candidate for the purpose of her PhD thesis and was edited/co-written by her supervisors, Darrin Hodgetts and Kerry Chamberlain.



Candidate's Signature

12/09/2018
Date



Principal Supervisor's signature

12/09/2018
Date