

TRANSITIONING ONLINE: A STUDY OF THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY'S
DIGITAL EVOLUTION AND SELF-PORTRAYAL PRACTICES
IN AN ONLINE SETTING

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the incredible support system and each compassionate individual who allowed themselves to feel every ounce of stress and emotion I sustained this semester. Moreover, standing alongside me, or even accompanying me through unsettled times, has meant the world. You know who you are.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning
FTM	Female to male transgender
MTF	Male to female transgender

ABSTRACT

This 2-part study examined transgender individuals' use of social media and used a variety of attitude measures to capture their perceived social support, self-acceptance, and attitudes about deception and trust in social media. A national survey of members of the transgender community (N=131) found that high social media users were less trusting and more accepting of deceptive behaviors online; those who live in the South report less social support than those living in any other region of the country; many were reluctant to report how they “negotiated” their gender transition on social media and half (51.4%) reported abandoning their original social media personas and creating new ones after transitioning. This study makes unique contributions to the understanding of the role of social media in the lives of transgender Americans.

I. INTRODUCTION

Problem/Topic

Digital media tools and platforms have dramatically shifted the developed world's existence and are rapidly changing the media landscape of developed(ing) nations across the globe. Politics, social justice, and education in the form of information seeking are just a few of the many facets affected by the adoption of digital media, both in positive and negative manors. Social justice, privilege, equality, tolerance – whatever the word of choice may be - has been a popular concept for decades, only to be strengthened by the emerging/emerged marketplace and exchange of ideas within the digital media universe. Social justice is examined, within this paper, to be the process in which transgender individuals have ensured acceptance of their equal, unique societal roles and fulfill their duties, and receive equal rights from society in return.

The media market that was once dominated by traditional forms, often referred to as legacy media, including print, television, and radio, has evolved to being a multi-faceted industry with unconstrained options and highly specialized capability, (Noll, 2007; Bagdikian, 2004; Napoli, 2010). One such capability is the unification of mass media and interpersonal communication. Social media and the web have enabled users the ability to interact and respond to the message creator to foster, maintain, and break relationships (Neubaum & Krämer, 2017). As a result, mass interpersonal communication has challenged public opinion making and simplified individual opinion influence (Neubaum & Krämer, 2017, Noelle-Neumann, 1984. The various options introduced by digital media are consistent with the diverse usage and variety of implications of media by different societies throughout the world. In addition to the assortment of media

options, societal disparities greatly alter the media usage and traditional customs of each country's citizens. These include political regimes (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002; Shah et al., 2005; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003), geographic location, religious backgrounds and other cultural differences (Willnat & Aw, 2004), as well as education (Pew Research Center, 2017), and media freedoms (Bagdikian, 2004). These variations in digital outlets have dramatically evolved the ability to build relationships and communicate between individuals and groups, allies and opponents.

Measurements drawn from previous scholarship in this area were utilized to quantify social support gained by portrayals on digital media, including social support and self-acceptance. Punzalan and Caswell (2016) note that early interpretations of social justice in archival studies can be equated to basic human rights, including the right to life, privacy, and freedom of expression, such as that from Bell (1997). However, the ambiguous and contestable nature of social justice as a concept has offered frequent evolutions to the idea as applied to social science research. Duff et al. (2013) suggest that social justice be defined as an:

“ideal vision that every human being is of equal and incalculable value, entitled to shared standards of freedom, equality, and respect. These standards also apply to broader social aggregations such as communities and cultural groups.

Violations of these standards must be acknowledged and confronted. It specifically draws attention to inequalities of power and how they manifest in institutional arrangements and systemic inequities that further the interests of some groups at the expense of others in the distribution of material goods, social

benefits, rights, protections, and opportunities. Social justice is always a process and can never be fully achieved,” (324-325).

While this term may appear to be often elusive and broad, it is important to note that its application and corresponding conceptual framework is significant to this research. The processes of social justice, as aforementioned, are applicable to exercising inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized sectors of society, such as the transgender community. However, not every scholar feels social justice is appropriate for research due to the implication of ‘siding’ with a particular community. Green (2013) posits that remaining neutral is best for fulfilling professional obligations of researchers, and Jimmerson (2013) suggests social justice is a personal, rather than professional, obligation. While neutrality remains an important endeavor for research and professional implications, Caswell (2013) suggests neutrality is a perspective construct and cannot be determined as a homogenous and absolute consensus across a group. With this information considered, this research will be guided by the social justice concept of Duff et al. (2013) to determine if the marginalized population is successfully navigating the intricacies of social justice, including gaining benefits, rights, acceptance, protection, and opportunities.

A particular group that has been lobbying for reform of their specific social justices within society is the LGBTQ collective. According to the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)(2016), the acronym LGBTQ refers to the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer population; however, the groups can further be distinguished from one another. This body of research focused on the transgender community. For this study, specifically, the term ‘transgender’ is defined

as, “an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth,” (GLAAD, 2016). Though the struggles of this group’s mission to gain acceptance in society and secure equal rights likely goes without saying, the course of their agenda to gain progressions in society has been dramatically altered by the calculated use of social media. Specifically, the transgender community has already experienced marked improvements in terms of their acceptance and equal rights in American society. This paper is primarily motivated by the structural changes to gender evolutions within an online setting provoked by the adoption of digital media by both queer individuals and their virtual audience. “Queer” is recognized within this paper as an inclusive representation of the minority population that strays away from the social norms of heterosexuality, whereas transgender is an umbrella term for an individual whose gender identity contrasts with assigned sex at birth (GLAAD, 2016).

One issue LGBTQ individuals must navigate is the trepidation in response to suppressed rights and inequality. For societies that suppress these rights and refute positive coverage of marginalized groups on traditional media platforms, digital platforms have become instrumental in securing support and constructive exposure to a mass audience. To understand how digital media has been an effective tool for the transgender community’s reform of social acceptance, it is first pertinent to examine how individuals of this community use the digital tools at their disposal to represent their social status. There are many options for creating and maintaining an online identity, such as different platforms and different social groups, both for and against certain causes that exist within the digital realm. Comprehending the intricacies of digital usage to

promote social reform enables other minority groups and marginalized individuals to compare and contrast their own methods, potentially using the proven, successful guide of the transgender community's as a template.

The tactics that will be examined specifically are deceptive message strategies that can be utilized to the advantage of the transgender community within the digital setting. This research will distinguish how the transgender community is using social media to improve their acceptance rate within the heteronormative and gendernormative society, how deceptive messages are being fabricated to change their message and garner more sympathy, and how these messages are perceived by the transgender community.

This study examines several matters prior to addressing the specific research questions. The first is to deduce how transindividuals communicate online. This question is applicable to study within their community setting (between trans and trans), and as a study of dialogue between the transgender community and supporter/antagonist. Is there a connection between interaction with certain segments of the population and acceptance of the community? In addition to quantitative survey items, participants were asked a number of open-ended items in an effort to capture their real-world experiences in terms of support and acceptance.

Studying online persona and habits among transgender community members as a group helps delineate the differences between what is helpful and what is harmful to the progression of the transgender community's acceptance in our society. The study looks at what practices are deceptive and how these are beneficial to the end-goal of justice. Are transgender individuals utilizing disingenuous messages and claims to garner support and sympathy of individuals who do not identify as queer? How are these practices useful?

Lastly, a component of deception is examined relevant to how transgender individuals choose to conduct their online persona – specifically, how they evolve their digital brand in correlation with their physical transformation. Are transgender individuals, ceasing their previous existence as the opposite gender, recognizing their former life, then starting a new identity? Or are they evolving their online persona alongside their physical transformation? Which venture is more fruitful? The relationship between online and physical being will further demonstrate if transindividuals are deceptive and how these practices complement digital media platforms in securing social justice.

Significance

Pew Research Center statistics demonstrate the significance of digital media research. Social reform has progressed greatly alongside the developments of digital media, specifically within the past two decades. Over 96% of American teens and young adults use the Internet as of 2015, and today men and women are equally likely to be Internet users, (Pew Internet, 2015) a rather constant statistical observation over many years. Though the list of online activities is not exhaustive within this paper, some included are information seeking, content creation, online communication, and social networking, (Pew Internet, 2015; Lenhart et al., 2007). These online ventures will be studied as separate entities of the digital media experience, collectively creating a user persona. Additionally, 80% of online teens and young adults use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, which is a more passive use of technology than active information seeking, (Lenhart et al., 2011). Social media has adapted to the requests of users to serve as major resources for information seeking, in addition to creative efforts and personal

network forums, (Gasser et al., 2012). Given this knowledge, it is fair to suggest users' digital footprints have likewise changed as a direct result of the adaptations of social media.

Ideally, this study will provide an outline of useful social media tools and social practices that the transgender community has utilized to promote social change. Other marginalized communities and individuals can rely on this framework to adapt their online position and become more relevant in the public sphere. The deductive reasoning should provide future researchers with specific practices that the transgender community has adopted for additional research into motive and cause. The intent is that someone, somewhere, will find this information to be useful when navigating the complexities of the digital world, and perhaps find solace in knowing that others have experienced gains or losses in the process of using these tools. This study builds on previous research that denounces the negative connotation frequently attached to deception so that the term becomes a neutral term, in which the meaning and definition will depend on the context.

Justification

There is a recent expanse of published content regarding trans-identifying individuals' social media usage and the positive effect of digital media in the transgender community agenda. This, combined with the knowledge regarding the acceptance and inclusion experienced within an online setting, is suggestive of a positive correlation between beneficial digital media usage and marginalized communities. Prior to May 2017, there was very limited published research examining the intricacies of *what* transgender individuals are doing with social media, and *how* they are using the digital tools available to them to promote constructive change. Cannon et al. (2017) performed 5

one-on-one interviews with transgender individuals, finding that social media supplies transgender individuals with a resource and a path to self and authenticity. While many of their participants noted that anonymity was a benefit of social media, this research hopes to, in part, identify what practices, if any, may be utilized when anonymity is not favorable or available. Second, the current research expands on the Cannon study by examining what benefits in perceived social justice have been achieved since social media has been utilized as a popular tool for coming out as transgender. Third, Cannon et al. (2017) failed to examine specific tools, such as preferred social media platform, online transition or developing a new profile, and specific coming out strategy. By utilizing open-ended responses and a widespread survey, this research comprehensively responds to the aforementioned study by addressing how social media fits into the daily routine of the transgender community, how social media is utilized during the ‘coming out process’, and what values and norms the population assigns the technology through interacting with it. Overall, the current work responds to Cannon’s (2017) findings and broadens the examination to address location and online transition.

Furthermore, while scholars have studied the perception of LGBT+ members (Heinz, 2012; McInroy and Craig, 2015; Shelley, 2008), there have not been comparisons made with the transgender individual’s *self-perception* and the societal perceptions of the transgender community, as impacted by online communication. This study delineate the consistency of between the marginalized individual’s perception of societal feelings toward their community and their self-perception, indicating whether digital media has played a role in securing consistency between the two. Additionally, comparing

perception with deceptive practice distinguishes if deceptive practices, if any, are beneficial and acceptable.

The scholarship on social media and various persuasive tactics used to gain acceptance and coverage of marginalized populations is highly nuanced. The ability for an individual to reach a large audience and effectively communicate an agenda without the use of traditional media is an obvious benefit of social platforms. Further, it is clear that there are different goals and corresponding tactics to distributing online content, thereby producing varied results and reactions, some of which are positive while others are less-than-desirable. Even so, digital platforms remain to be a promising option for individuals who are underserved by the mainstream media and government, as well as those that are seeking oppositional content to what is available in legacy media. Pertinent research includes the transgender population and identity, transgender media and celebrities, digital media usage, prosocial deception, and geographic factors in correlation to the transgender identity. A review of each is necessary to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the media-savvy transgender individual.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Transgender Population and Identity

The past century has ushered in marked advancements to the conceptualization that gender is a socially constructed performance. West and Zimmerman (1987) first coined the term “doing gender,” thereby redefining the idea of gender conformity by suggesting that gender and biological sex are not synonymous with one another. Further, according to Stryker (1994), the term transgender has been identified by two terms: (1) people who cross genders without seeking medical treatments; (2) an overarching term referring to “all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, more between or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries.” This research will focus on the latter interpretation. The terms gender-diverse and non-binary are also used to delineate differences in this population with the transgender community. Gender-diverse, non-binary, and even the occasional ‘cross-dresser’ are used frequently in literature to describe gender-variant individuals. These identifications fall under the umbrella term of transgender. Bockting et al. (2013) note, “transgender identities include male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals...cross dressers or transvestites (who dress in clothes typically worn by another gender as a means of self-expression...and other gender-variant individuals.” This guides the incorporation of all gender-variant identities within this study.

In 2011, Gates reported there were approximately 697,529 transgender individuals, which amounted to 0.2% of the general population. Following this research, in 2017, Meerwijk and Sevelius found that almost 1 million adults nationally identify as a transgender individual, which suggests a number of individuals accepting and

acknowledging their gender-nonconformity is likely expanding. Meerwijk and Sevelius (2017) studied 10 years of national surveys in PubMed, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature, and Web of Science to determine the number of self-identified transgender individuals in the country, whereas Gates (2011) utilized 11 US and international surveys of varied time frames to inform national statistics of the transgender population size. Gates (2011) noted that surveys, both in person and otherwise, may account for wide variation in overall percentage. Additionally, the 10-year timespan of Meerwijk's and Sevelius (2017) survey may account for the variability in the representation of the current state of population demographics.

However, it is suggested that between 0.5% and 2% of the population have strong feelings of being transgender, whereas between 0.1% and 0.5% actually take steps to transition (Conway, 2002); GLAAD 2016) notes while many transgender individuals may be prescribed hormones by their doctors or undergo surgery to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity, other may not take these steps if their transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance. Therefore, there is a divergence between identifying as being gender nonconforming and physically transitioning to be more 'consistent' with the gender with which they are identifying. These studies suggest that approximately 1 and 5 individuals who identify as transgender will transition. The following section of this paper details the correlation between the advancement of digital technology and the acceptance of transgender identities and disseminated personas by transgender individuals by which their virtual audience bases judgment.

To examine how social media has been instrumental in trans-identifying individuals' gained acceptance within the United States' society, it is important to look at the previous, and at times current, scholastic coverage of the transgender community curated by the negative relationship of societal standards and transgender individuals. Russell and Joiner (2001) indicated that queer youth are two to three times likelier to attempt suicide and accomplish it, than others. Sedgwick (1993) notes that numbers such as these are the makings of culture, which violently stifles the vibrancy of queer lives, turning members away from their supportive communities, other than the LGBTQ community, and suggesting that they are unwelcome within a heteronormative society. Challenging the status quo of conservative values and a cisgendered society is not always welcomed. Several agendas and campaigns, such as the "It Gets Better" campaign, which was started in September of 2010 by journalist Dan Savage and his husband Terry Miller, have attempted to reconcile the negative relationship between juvenile, queer, individuals, however, this has been criticized for suggesting that the bullying, pain, and despair are normative narratives of progress. Regardless of the wins and losses of these campaigns, there is research that suggests positive growth and acceptance of the transgender community due to the use of social media.

Understanding acceptance in society requires that gender identity and citizenship must be examined through a similar lens, as one concept. Mackie (2008) says that gender identity is intimately linked to citizenship, meaning that an ambiguous gender identity will create an environment conducive of struggle and hardship. However, the surge of mass media's coverage of transgender individuals and utilization of digital media by transgender individuals have garnered significant support and acceptance from the

general public. This suggests that visibility on popular mediums is helpful to marginalized groups that stray from the cisgender constructs of a socially acceptable way of life. Transgender individuals share the common experience of violence, harassment, and discrimination from fellow citizens that share adverse values and beliefs, (Kenagy, 2005, Stotzer, 2009, Xavier et al. 2005). These actions not only cause increased mental and psychological stress but also influence the individual perception of their position in society and result in the feeling of being ostracized, (Bockting et al., 2013, Coleman et al., 2012). While these individuals may be able to find comfort in knowing that they have a support system within their group, the expanse of the digital universe has provided the community with additional resources, allowing them to organize in larger numbers around common interests and goals. This research focuses on self-perception and self-acceptance, rather than audience perception and acceptance to determine what advances have been secured in terms of individual and collective goals of acceptance as pertaining to self-evaluation. Though audience feedback and reactions are not addressed directly, insights reported by transgender participants will be utilized to gain a broad understanding of their audiences' reactions.

McInroy and Craig (2015) suggest that while transgender coverage has experienced marked increases in both traditional and digital media, the LGBTQ perspectives remain underrepresented in contemporary research. Legacy media remains to be the predominant source of information for the general population of marginalized communities and individuals, yet this may not be the most accurate representation. Depictions of transgender individuals have a significant impact on how their lives and experiences are shaped, including the development of their gender identity (Heinz, 2012;

Shelley, 2008). Depictions can be individual-generated, such as that found on social media, produced by traditional media such as broadcast, print or radio, or be found in other media, such as film or book.

Another noteworthy objective of online participation is the ability to actively seek out and compare information through the channels of social media and search engines. Information seeking among digital media platforms has evolved the “coming-out” experience for queer individuals, which has led to more accurate information and concrete support systems for individuals within these groups, (Mehra & Braquet, 2006). These support systems and information seeking endeavors supply transgender individuals with greater confidence to publish their life and gender reassignment, surgical or otherwise, in a public and digital fashion. Adolescence is a particularly interesting phase of an individual’s life, transgender or otherwise, as it is an exploratory phase in which individuals search for their sense of belonging, working to integrate their sexual and personal identities, (Little, 2012) therefore results of this study may support the existence of variances between young adults (18-26) and others.

Furthermore, transgender youth who feel socially connected, supported and receive collective community advocacy experience improved wellbeing compared to their counterparts, (Bariola et al., 2015; Frost and Meyer 2012; Lev 2007; Sánchez and Vilain 2009; Testa et al., 2014). There is also growing empirical evidence that supports clinical consensus about the importance of psychological well-being of showcasing one’s gender identity through social, medical, and legal transitions when desired (Davis & Meier, 2014; Colton Meirer, Fitzgerald, Pardo, & Babcock, 2011). Therefore, self-disclosure and self-acceptance are principal concepts to gaining support and

understanding for gender questioning and transgender individuals. This can be addressed in a greater fashion than ever before due to the digital media available. In response, this paper will examine the “politics of transgender biography,” (Halberstam, 2005) and the complexities of developing a narrative for an audience within a digital media setting. This is contrast to the “local transgender,” which this study defines as a transgender individual geographically positioned in an unsupportive environment with little to no local resources in terms of support. It is likely true that these individuals will turn to digital media to find the support they need.

There is a significant amount of research that recognizes the negative representations of transgender individuals. These negative representations may dramatize or exploit these individuals in a problematic light, causing the positive reformation produced by digital media to skew from the anticipated outcome. Comical caricatures of transvestites and cross-dressers are common (Phillips, 2006), as are depictions of transgender criminals (Shelley, 2008), as well as transgender people being mentally ill or ‘unlovable,’ (Davis, 2009). Social media has expanded transgender individuals’ ability to produce their own material, factual and accurate if they choose, and publish it for their followers and global audiences to see. This provides the general public, in addition to members that identify as transgender, gender-diverse, or non-binary, to experience varied forms of depictions and messages on which they can base their perceptions and form opinions. This is classified within the “information seeking” component of possible online activities.

The Transgender Celebrity and Media Portrayals

On April 24, 2015, Caitlyn Jenner confirmed her gender identity on the *20/20 Special: Bruce Jenner- The Interview* with Diane Sawyer, securing the program's highest ratings in 15 years after attracting 16.9 million viewers (Levin, 2015). Following the interview on network television, the attention devoted to gender identity and, in particular, gender 'nonconformity' (GLAAD, 2016), surged and most individuals were provoked to choose a side of the controversial topic. Regardless of one's outlook on gender identity, the transgender community's media visibility was boosted to the highest possible extent after the 20/20 special and E! Entertainment Television series, *I am Cait* (Ford, 2015). In response to this acknowledgment of transgender and other LGBTQ issues due to coverage of Jenner's gender transition, particular attention has been devoted to the 'coming out' process and daily life of individuals of the community.

In particular, Jenner's public gender reveal has begun to evolve the transgender community's capability to form positive relationships with the general public and provide a forum for education about the complexity of transgender issues (Li, 2017). Regardless of what gender with which an individual identifies, if either, transgender individuals must navigate their social lives in an increasingly digital world in addition to their actual realities. While Jenner's gender transformation may have appeared seamless, the public majority may not have the resources of a glamorous marketing team at their disposal. Thus, navigating the coming out process in which an individual departs from the gender norms and/or binary may largely be successfully accomplished with the use of social media platforms.

This research builds on the importance of the increased visibility of transgender celebrities in aiding the ‘average’ transgender individual’s journey of coming out online. Many human rights activists believe pop culture icons who identify and celebrate their transgender identity in media will positively effect cultural and legal limitations the community faces, (Alcindor, 2015). Another popular culture icon in the realm of transgender celebrity spotlight is actress Laverne Cox. Cox initially appeared on VH1’s *I Want to Work for Diddy* in 2008 as the first African-American transgender woman to appear on a reality competition show (Breen, 2014). She subsequently became one of the first transgender women to *portray* a transgender woman on *Orange is the New Black*. Cannon et al. (2017) note that while many household names, such as Chaz Bono, Dr. Jamison Green, Janet Mock, and Jazz Jennings have increased the visibility of the transgender journey and struggle, discrimination and bullying is still prevalent. And so, the extent to which the transgender celebrity has aided, or perhaps inspired, other transgender individuals is a noteworthy examination.

Social Media’s Role in Transgender Life

Many scholars (Elkins & King, 2006; Ghazali & Nor, 2012; Heinz, 2012; Phillips, 2006) have suggested that the rise of the Internet and visible online media is the single greatest tool to advance the awareness and acceptance of the transgender community and supporting population. These critical mediums have allowed for diverse narratives and fruitful discussions, educating many individuals as a result. A likely reason this has occurred is due to the ability of the transgender community to become increasingly active producers of online knowledge about their lives and, in effect, gather more supporters. They also have the ability to refute incorrect claims and can devise

messages, deceptive or not, to be in favor of the cause in question. In this case, the cause is self-acceptance and equal rights for transgender individuals across the nation.

Furthermore, transgender individuals in the United States are able to communicate with international communities and devise strategies to enhance social justice in the United States based off of proven successes. While this “social” aspect of the Internet is different than the “information seeking” aspect, both are utilized to yield similar results.

McInroy and Craig (2015) found that media representations of transgender individuals both offline and online were multifaceted and influential. This implies that media’s representation of the transgender community, in addition to transgender individuals’ involvement in the social marketplace, is beneficial for different reasons: widespread coverage and accuracy, possibly alongside sympathy and other emotions. However, the question that must now be posed is *how* are transgender individuals utilizing the digital tools at their disposal to promote reform?

Offline media are also heavily researched as a frequent medium that people are first exposed to as the first representation of transgender individuals and communities, which is oftentimes more negative than digital media portrayals (Chiland, 2003; Heinz 2012). Negative depictions may have detrimental impacts, such as depression or shame, (Ringo, 2002). Therefore, the need for social media platforms as a method to offset negative coverage of the transgender community is imperative. Ghazal and Nor (2012) found that media, both offline and online, assists transgender youth in rehearsing and negotiating their identities.

Positive coverage and activism can be found following emotionally charged, and often tragic events. The Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida occurred on June

12, 2016, becoming the deadliest massacre of its time in America history. The support of the LGBTQ community flooded the digital universe by both marginalized individuals and their supporters, including the rainbow flag and “We are Orlando” profile photo overlays. Sympathetic movements such as this may be viewed as a sign of the country’s affirmation ‘of the dignity and worth of the LGBTQ community’, (Stults, Kupprat, Krause, Kapadia, Halkitis, 2017). If at all possible, the embracement of similar individuals in a collective effort to comprehend and reconcile the harrowing event may be regarded as a silver lining to such tragedies. Online platforms are frequently viewed as a tool of intervention for people experiencing distress, (Jackson, 2017; Stults et al., 2017; Croff, Hubach, Currin, & Frederick, 2017). These stressors may be extended to the daily struggles of transgender individuals.

Both in Europe and the United States, there was little formal transgender activism throughout the sexual liberation movements and the early 1990s, (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). What has adapted in the minority activism arena since then has been the expansion of online media, including social forums and information-based niche sites. According to Gasser et al. (2012), the increased amount of diverse speakers within the online realm, alongside the lack of traditional gatekeepers makes the digital ecosystem arguably more difficult to navigate, but enhances the user’s digital possibilities. Overall, online media has been crucial in developing transgender identities, accepting one’s own self, and allowing others (the audience) to understand motivations and biological processes for constructed identities (Ghazali & Nor, 2012; Ringo, 2002; Shelley, 2008).

Though transgender individuals’ portrayals may be a highly relevant topic to examine within the current media and political landscape, it is important to mention that

there are limitations to genderqueer studies. The lives found within the transgender community are still taboo to discuss, depending on the context, environment, and manner. Krueger and Young (2015) indicate that there is limited research on the health and social needs of transgender and gender nonconforming populations due to high levels of stigma, which may cause these individuals to avoid disclosing sensitive information for accurate interpretation. However, findings denote that whereas transgender individuals may not be willing to talk to researchers, they will often utilize social media, specifically Twitter within this study, to discuss and refute the health and social needs of the specific population. So, the marginalized group seems to have welcomed the advent of social media, both for seeking information and support from a virtual audience, as well as socializing within their population, and experienced beneficial results in return.

Deception on Social Media

Social media users are capable of creating, adapting, and presenting their message and information via more flexible mediums, leading to more crafted personal brands (George & Robb, 2008). This message fabrication and associated risks and benefits possibly have a direct influence on user behavior. These benefits and risks are aligned with the concept that deception can be utilized with prosocial or antisocial motives (Brockington et al., 2013). Other research has found that social media has amplified the tendency for users to compare themselves to others according to the comparison theory (Greitemeyer, 2016). Facebook users have the outlets to look at another user and compare themselves to others in either negative or positive attitude (Greitemeyer, 2016). If other users were perceived unsuccessful or undesirable this makes the other user have higher self-esteem in comparison, however, if the user finds another profile that is successful or

desirable, then the self-esteem of the comparing user is lower (Greitemeyer, 2016).

Research has found that use of photos is a way that people brand or self-present themselves online the way that they want to be perceived (Lang & Barton, 2014). There are different standards for both men and women. Women tend to take photos showing their face, while men tend to take photos of their bodies and with other people in the picture (Lang & Barton, 2014). Self-images of the user are important because that image is how the user projects himself or herself, and that plays into self-esteem (Lang & Barton, 2014). For example, on Facebook and Twitter social media platforms, people can tag others in photos. This means that in a photo where the user is tagged that does not match the identity the user wants, the platforms offer the option to have them untag themselves (Lang & Barton, 2014). The option that people can tag another user in any photo negatively affects the person's projection of their identity (Lang & Barton, 2014).

Misrepresentations such as these, including untagging oneself in a photo, using another's photo, or using an outdated photo, have the ability to shape virtual relationships. Seidman (2013) found that individuals might misrepresent themselves online to appear more desirable to others, such as possible mates. However, misrepresentations of oneself and turning to the Internet for meaningful social interactions are independent dimensions for the general population studied within Seidman's (2013) method. It is possible that there are differences in the cisgendered population's and transgender population's use of social media. According to the GLAAD website (2016) the term cisgender refers to people who are not transgender. Thus, this comparison of representations online will advise if positioning one's online self as cisgender or transgender is an effective form of misrepresentation. Stanton, Ellickson-

Laew, and Watson's (n.d.) study aiming to correlate "(1) misrepresentations of oneself to deceive others online and (2) seeking meaningful and lasting companionship through online relationships," will be the foundation off which this portion of the study will be based. Companionship is a term used to describe a mutual relationship with audience and transgender individual within this study. Further, self-acceptance and social support will be measured in correlation with deception.

A noteworthy mention about deception: literature is inconsistent, at best, regarding negative and positive effects of deceptive practices. Studies have alluded to negative interpersonal effects of deception (Brandt, Miller, & Hocking, 1982; Pollack & Bosse, 2014). However, several others have found that deception can be used to uphold or denounce social norms, as well as create and preserve relationships, (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Levine & Schweitzer, 2014; Levine, Kim, & Hamel, 2010). This is to say, deception is not conceptualized as an inherently negative practice within this study; a lie and the intent of a lie are not mutually exclusive with one another. Levine and Schweitzer (2014) posit that prosocial lies are "false statements made with the intention of misleading and benefitting" the receiver. However, deceiving with the intent to benefit one's self and the marginalized community at hand does not automatically suggest this 'form' of lying is antisocial over prosocial. This research does not attempt to side with one or the other, recognizing that prior research has found both being a possible motivation and result.

The Local Transgender

Geographic location of LGBTQ individuals has been identified as a predictor of heterosexist and transphobic discrimination. András Tilcsik (2011) found that West and

Northeast states (e.g., California, New York, and Pennsylvania) demonstrated little to no employment discrimination of homosexual men, whereas South and Midwest states (e.g., Texas, Florida, and Ohio) demonstrated greater discrimination. Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz (2009) reported that victimization of transgender youth was found to be more common in the South or the Midwest as well, reinforcing the notion that historically conservative regions of the United States have a greater likelihood of producing negative attitudes towards minority populations.

These regional divisions can be further divided to delineate differences in national rural, urban and suburban areas. Swank, Fahs, and Frost (2013) examined the different perceived stigmatization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals in rural and urban settings within the United States. LGB respondents of rural locations reported higher frequencies of verbal harassment in housing and discrimination both in housing and employment. Lee and Quam (2013) found that the urban experience of LGBT baby boomers was superior to that of their rural counterparts, as rural participants reported higher levels of guardedness and lower levels of outness. Another study by Oswald and Culton (2003) found that rural LGBT community members reported greater community homophobia, inadequate social support, and more frequent civil rights discrimination than their urban counterparts. Expanding on these studies to incorporate psychological stress of transgender individuals corresponding with regional variations, Sinnard, Raines, and Budge (2016) found that transgender individuals living in the West South Central division of the United States (e.g., Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas) reported higher levels of anxiety and depression than in other locations.

Earlier research has identified possible reasons for the varied gender and sexual role attitudes within the United States. Southern residing individuals have been found to endorse more conservative, traditional values toward these roles than other areas in the nation, (Carter & Borch, 2005). It is possible that these values contribute to the opposition and hostility towards the transgender community and consequent anxiety and depression. However, social support, self-acceptance, and integration of minority identity can stimulate emotional stability to combat anxiety and depression. And so, a community of like-minded individuals and individuals with which one can build identification can curb the desire to compare themselves with the majority culture and instead base self-perception through the lens of a non-stigmatized setting. Therefore, those gender-diverse individuals within a rural and oftentimes unsupportive setting can seek a supportive network of variant identities in a digital reality. Meyer's (2013) minority stress model posits that marginalized individuals face substantially greater amounts of chronic stress and comparatively poor mental health in response to social stigma and discrimination. This theory suggests that minority stress is an additional burden that marginalized individuals frequently carry, in addition to the stressors felt by individuals of the majority community. These stressors, caused by both enacted and felt stigmas (Meyer, 2013), can possibly be refuted by community involvement with like-minded individuals. This may be made more accessible with digital media. When a transgender individual or other LGBTQ member perceives scarce local resources and limited support, the distance to emotional and informational support groups is likely lessened by the stroke of a few keys and an Internet connection.

International comparison

Nadal et al. (2011) note that few states in the United States offer legal protection for individuals based on their sexual and gender identity expression. However, while citizens of the United States and other societies with relatively lenient media freedoms may not be privy to the struggles of intense media regulation and scrutiny of marginalized populations, many countries within Southeast Asia are not as fortunate. Take Singapore, for example. While a technologically advanced society may act as a convincing façade, suggesting the government is highly-functioning and each citizen has procured a lavish and fair life, this is not always the case. The LGBTQ group is highly marginalized with limited recognition and no guaranteed societal rights. Though the struggles of this group's mission to gain acceptance in society and secure equal rights likely goes without saying, the course of their agenda to gain these progressions in society has been dramatically altered by the calculated use of social media. And so, to understand how social media has been an alternative, yet effective tool for these marginalized community members, one must examine each digital platform available in comparison to the coverage found on traditional media.

Statistically speaking, Singapore is the wealthiest, most economically developed country in the Southeast Asia region (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Unfortunately, financial success does not translate to success within the social equality realm, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) Singaporean individuals have found themselves often times marginalized and disassociated from the community. According to the Penal Code 377, LGBT individuals who are self-proclaimed as queer and publicly acknowledge their sexuality as incongruent with the social norm is punishable by life in

prison (Penal Code of Singapore, 2008). In addition to homosexuality being a crime, gender expression is not an equal right protected by the government. Many scholars believe that this is due to the idea that Singaporean families are encouraged to adhere to the typical mold of a nuclear heterosexual family to achieve national economic success, (Tan, 2001; Tan & Jin 2007; Wang, 2016, Loong, 2012). The goal of criminalizing this ‘behavior’ as illegal signifies the importance of the agenda to pass on traditional Asian values to maintain the stability of the economic success and prided national identity; opposing liberalization equates to societal triumphs in this case.

Further, the media operates under intense censorship and is prohibited from broadcasting liberal media that could advance the agenda of the LGBT community, (Wang, 2016). This includes advertisements that advocate for the freedom to love, social movements, seemingly ‘gay’ sitcoms, and even advertisements to encourage and educate individuals on safe-sex practices in hopes of lowering HIV transmission rates. Singapore’s Media Development Authority (2011) enforces these guidelines, which advise that plots and advertisements should not promote, justify or glamorize the lifestyles of individuals within the LGBT community. Given this information, the treatment of queer individuals by political authorities, the suppression of rights that perpetuates the stigma of inequality within society, and misrepresented media portrayals/coverage of the community, the following question must be posed: where can advocates go to disseminate their messages of support?

The answer may be digital media. According to Chang, Yu, and Lu (2015), social media is an important part of any marketing strategy and a highly complex network capable of many different strategies. Regardless of traditional media freedom within a

country, social media is influential method utilized in building relationships, information diffusion, and message cohesion (Cheung & Lee, 2010). Therefore, the existence of social media used for marketing and advertising efforts has a positive effect on the product or community subset in terms of awareness and coverage, regardless of the presence of traditional outlets. Chauhan and Shukla (2016) posit that social media has been instrumental in accelerating changes within social justice and moral issues by increasing awareness. The Singaporean LGBT community falls within this realm as they are in a currently attempting reformation of their collective rights and media freedoms.

A relevant comparison of marginalized populations' use of social media to gain awareness and support is Chauhan's and Shukla's (2016) publication regarding India's LGBT community's persuasive communication on social media. According to Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (2009), homosexuality is a criminal offense, just as in Singapore. Through surveys, the researchers found that if LGBT issues were discussed more openly in India's media marketplace a reverberated effect would include a sense of empowerment for the community. So, personal agendas in the formation of social media content can essentially be viewed as an advertisement. Chauhan and Shukla (2016) note that advertisements popularize a product and attract customers, be it shampoo, a website or government policy. As online browsing time increases, so does the time of exposure for community messages, or self-promoted advertisements. However, what form of message construction is the most effective in procuring acceptance, support, and acknowledgment?

Theoretical Framework

The domestication theory (Silverstone et al., 1992) will serve as the framework for this study, in which media will be examined as a powerful text that has been ‘tamed’ and adapted to the audience’s practical needs. In this case, the needs are self-acceptance, acknowledgment, and support for the transgender community, and the text is content published by trans-individuals on social media platforms including, though not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and personal blog-type websites. Has the American transgender population ‘tamed’ their media outlets to adapt to their needs of support, and self-acceptance?

Lohnes, Watulak, and Whitfield (2016) suggest that the ‘digital youth’ or ‘digital natives’ are likely to react to sharing and responding to life events in a unique manner do to technology being an active part of their entire lives. Specifically, the use of social media has evolved to being a primary place for educating and learning alike, such as being utilized for increasing academic standing and grade point averages (Karpinski & Duberstein 2009, Junco 2015). Other research suggests that social media platforms play integral roles in communication used to make and/or break relationships (Pempek et al., 2009, Subrahmanyam et al., 2008, Yang et al., 2014). These findings demonstrate the varied differences in use of social media depending on a user’s need, such as learning, teaching, and forming relationships with known and unknown individuals across a digital medium. The transgender population is likely no different, however, what proves to be most beneficial for marginalized individuals may not be consistent with the general population.

A noteworthy and recent use of ‘domestication theory’ (Berker et al., 2005) is by Watulak and Whitfield (2016). Their study, which addressed the use of Facebook in the everyday lives of college students, found that their respondents ‘sought control over their Facebook use by articulating a moral space of norms governing interactions with parents, friends, and strangers; through selective and temporary de-domestication of the technology; and through non-use,” (Watulak and Whitfield, 2016). Findings of this study suggest that ‘de-domestication’, non-use, and altered use of social media are all possibilities of the domestication process. Berker et al. (2005) note the definition of ‘domestication’ is to “describe and analyze processes of (media) technology’s acceptance, rejection and use. And so, the simple act of neglecting a social platform can be visualized as a form of domestication, just as well as frequent and infrequent use. This study provides a foundation for possible findings and guides the method section of this study.

Silverstone et al. (1992) first introduced this theory to the media research market to examine the relationship between media use in household, though the framework has been widely accepted to study the intricacies of technological advancements in relation to consuming units. According to Silverston et al. (1992), there are four components to adopting and domesticating new media into an individual’s life, household, work, etc. These include appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion. First, appropriation occurs when a device of technology, medium or application, leaves the market of commodity and becomes widely accepted. This is applicable at an increasingly rapid rate due to the nature of social applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, being available at little to no monetary cost to the consumer. Secondly,

objectification happens when the product adopts a physical shape or a constructed environment, such as a product that can be placed in a home or the user-friendly application interface for social media. Incorporation, the third phase, implies that the user has begun to integrate the medium into their life in a functional manner. Lastly, conversion occurs when members of a household, or marginalized group for this research purpose, and the outside community. This aligns the new medium and corresponding user with the rest of society. Thus domestication provides an understanding of the relationship between community subsets and technologies.

Just as technology is ever changing, so is media theory. Berker et al. (2005) expanded on domestication theory by suggesting that new media (digital platforms) can be further domesticated by the decision to ‘accept and reject’ a technological product. While the majority population is subscribed to the primary social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube), the smaller population that opts out of this social medium is also positioning themselves in a manner that is conducive to their own form of domestication. However, results may suggest which practices operate in the moral ‘space of social norms’ for digital media domestication and what practices contradict popular practice. And so, a framework guided by domestication theory (Silverston et al., 1992; Berker et al., 2005) may suggest how the marginalized population is effectively taming their media options (digital media) to gain support and self-acceptance.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the relationship between social media and the transgender community in gaining online support and self-acceptance?

RQ2: Is there a difference in perception of online support between transgender individuals who transitioned online and transgender individuals who did not?

RQ3: What role does deception play in transgender self-portrayal on social media?

RQ4: What is the relationship between social media platform and transgender perception social support, self-acceptance, and deception?

RQ5: How does geographic setting relate to transgender individuals' use of social media and perceived social support, self-acceptance, and deception?

III. METHODOLOGY

Participants

131 transgender identifying individuals were surveyed for this study. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 70: 8.8% of participants were between 18-20 (n=11), 31.3% were between 21-30 (n=41), 17.6% were between 31-40 (n=22), 16.8% were between 41-50 (n=21), 13.6% were between 51-60 (n=17), 8.8% were between 61-70 (n=11), and 1.6% preferred not to say (n=2). 71% (n=93) of respondents were recruited through a national survey panel and were compensated for their participation: 29% (n=38) of respondents were recruited through a snowball sampling initiated by the primary researcher (see Table 1). Respondents of the snowball sampling were not compensated for their participation.

Participants were also asked about their gender identity. 21.4% of individuals (n=28) identified as gender queer/fluid, 25.2% (n=33) identified as transgender male (FTM), 34.4% (n=45) identified as transgender female (MTF), 14.5% (n=19) identified as other, and 4.6% (n=6) did not answer. Regional demographics were also obtained for this study. 20% (n=26) of respondents were from the Northeast, 40% (n=51) were from the South, 20% (n=26) were from the Midwest, and 20% (n=26) were from the West. Further, 37% of respondents (n=46) indicated being from an urban community, 50% (n=62) were from a suburban community, and 13% (n=17) were from a rural community. (See Table One).

Table 1: Percentage of Demographics

Age	18-20 8.8%	21-30 32.8%	31-40 17.6%	41-50 16.8%	51-60 13.6%	61-70 8.8%
Gender	Gender Flu 21.4%	FTM 25.2%	MTF 34.4%	Other 14.5%		
Region	Northeast 20.0%	South 40.0%	Midwest 20.0%	West 20.0%		
Community	Urban 35.1%	Suburban 49.6%	Rural 13.6%			
To whom are you out?	Family 58.0%	Friends 77.0%	Coworkers 33.6%	None 6.9%		

Procedures

A mixed method approach was implemented to study the relationship between social media and the American transgender community. This consisted of an online survey with Likert-type scales, open-ended, and multiple-choice questions. A transgender identifying individual (female to male) at a large US university provided the primary researcher with the opportunity to interview and test the validity of the adapted scales. Results of the interview informed and amended the survey prior to it being disseminated.

The online survey (Appendix A) commenced on October 12, 2017 and remained open through October 27, 2017. The survey was a convenience sample of transgender individuals, beginning with a pre-identified contact at a large US university. The survey was emailed to this individual for completion, at which point the survey's 'thank you' message requested that the respondent forward the survey link to other potential survey

candidates within that individual's personal network. This pattern continued until the survey link closed and results only included completed responses (n=38).

The recruitment email included the secured IRB approval information and a link to the survey, which, when clicked, implied consent of the individual to take the survey. Responses were anonymous. The survey could be completed on any device with Internet capabilities, such as cell phone or laptop, and was anticipated to take less than 20 minutes. Personal information is kept private and confidential in the password-protected Texas State computer of faculty advisor, Dr. Kelly Kaufhold. Participant names are not be used in any written reports or publications that result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study's completion date and then destroyed. The secure location is located in a locked faculty member's office.

In a successful effort to increase enrollment, a separate, identical survey sent to a national research panel launched on October 23, 2017 and closed on October 27, 2017. A qualifying question at the start of the survey, "Do you consider yourself to be a member of the transgender community?" was applied to ensure that only transgender identifying participants completed the survey.

The multiple-method approach was utilized to gather a holistic understanding of the relationship between social media and transgender personal perception of self-acceptance and online support. The adapted scales and other quantitative questions provided an idea of the initial relationships between social media usage and the transgender community, which were expanded upon through the open-ended responses. Because of researcher efforts to keep identifying information confidential, participants should not have faced more risk than in everyday life. There was no direct benefit to

participants partaking in the convenience sampling, however, respondents gathered through the national research panel were compensated for their time.

Responses from the convenience sample and national research panel were merged. Data was exported from the survey-building program and uploaded to SPSS to run statistical analyses of quantitative questions and scales. Qualitative results were reviewed and coded into similar themes by the primary researcher. Incomplete datasets, for both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the survey, were removed prior to running analyses.

Measures

Social Support

To measure virtual social support, participants completed a set of 7 questions using a Likert-type scale ranging from (1) *Agree* to (5) *Disagree* regarding their perception of social support on social media. This adapted scale is based on Liang et al. (2011). The reliability of the Social Support Scale, as well as the two subscales, Emotional Support and Informational Support, were tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The 7-item Social Support Scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=.940$) is comprised of four items asking about Emotional Support (Cronbach's $\alpha=.914$) (people on my digital media platforms are: on my side; comfort and encourage me; listened to me describe my private feelings; concern for my well being) and three Informational Support (Cronbach's $\alpha=.887$) (people will offer suggestions; give me information to help me overcome my problem; help me discover the cause and provide me with suggestions).

Self-Acceptance

The Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (Chamberlain and Haaga, 2001) was utilized to measure perception of self-acceptance of transgender respondents. This 20-item scale addressed unconditional self-acceptance, regardless of behavior, achievement, approval, respect, or love from others (Ellis, 2005). The Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire was scaled into two separate items after a factor analysis was conducted. Unconditional Self-Acceptance (Cronbach's $\alpha=.773$) (I feel worthwhile even if I am not successful in meeting certain goals that are important to me; Making a big mistake may be disappointing, but it doesn't change how I feel about myself overall; I believe that I am worthwhile simply because I am a human being; I feel that I am a valuable person even when other people disapprove of me online), and Introspective Tension (Cronbach's $\alpha=.845$) (Sometimes I find myself thinking about whether I am a good or bad person; I think being good at many things makes someone a good person overall; When I receive negative feedback online, I find it hard to be open about what that person is saying about me; Being bad at certain things makes me value myself less; I compare myself to others to decide if I am a worthwhile person; When I am criticized online or when I fail at something, I feel worse about myself as a person).

Social Equality

Responses of qualitative portions of the survey (open-ended response) were used to measure perception of social equality gains gathered through the exploitation of social media. Prepared open-ended questions included topics of their process of coming out online, personal perception, and basic demographics. "Could you tell me a bit about your transition (specifically digital) that took place alongside your physical transition? Did you

transition electronically on social media, or terminate your existing digital persona and begin anew?” and “Is the benefit of social media for marginalized groups that one can be *themselves* publicly, in the safety of their personal space, or that one can craft their persona and present themselves in a way that may garner more support?” are samples of questions included in the survey.

Deception

An adapted version of Stanton, Ellickson-Larew, and Watson’s (n.d.) deception scale was utilized to determine in the transgender community use of deceptive messages on social media. These items were used in conjunction with the other scales to determine what online social behaviors and attitudes impact the digital mindset of the transgender individual. A factor analysis was conducted on the deception questionnaire and several items were removed. Two scales were created based on the results of the analysis. The 17-item deception scale became a 6-item scale of Romantic Deception (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.889$) (Presenting personal information online that is not accurate is okay; It is okay for people to lie about who they are online; It is okay to maintain multiple personal relationships online; It is okay to misrepresent yourself online to attract friends or romantic partners; It is okay to use photos or information of other people to appear more desirable; It is okay to continue to misrepresent themselves even if doing so caused another person to feel hurt or victimized) and a two-item scale of Online Trust (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.581$) (Exclusively online relationships are not real relationships; It is not important to portray oneself accurately to others they meet online).

IV. FINDINGS

Perceived Support in relation to Self-Acceptance and Location

To answer RQ1, Spearman's Rho rank-order correlations was run to examine transgender individual's use of social media as a predictor of social support and self-acceptance. Respondents from the South reported significantly less social support on the three support scales: Social Support ($r_s=.195$, $n=131$, $p<.05$); Emotional Support ($r_s=.196$, $n=131$, $p<.05$); and Informational Support ($r_s=.184$, $n=131$, $p<.05$). Recall that the scale for this item was 1 Agree to 5 Disagree so a positive relationship indicates less support. None of the other regions were significant on the 3 social support items (see Table 2). Age, gender, community type, and to whom the individual is out were not found to be significant predictors of social support.

Table 2 also demonstrates results of location and community type in relation to unconditional self-acceptance and introspective tension. There was no significance relationship found.

Table 2: Means and Correlations of Information Support by Region (1 Always 5 Never)

	Social Support	Emotional Support	Informational Support	Unconditional Self-Acceptance	Introspective Tension
South	.195*	.189*	.184*	.007	.003
Northeast	-.145	-.158	-.105	-.074	-.107
Midwest	-.087	-.089	-.081	-.064	-.062
West	-.006	.014	-.039	-.024	.165
Urban	.009	-.061	.067	-.032	.016
Suburban	.018	.092	-.044	.041	-.049
Rural	.011	-.005	.015	-.017	.041

*= $<.05$; **= $<.01$ (Spearman's Rho rank-order correlations)

This research question was intended to examine the relationships between a transgender individual's perceived online social support and self-acceptance. To examine this, a Spearman's Rho rank-order correlation was conducted. All three Social Support items related positively to a transgender individual's self-acceptance; Emotional Support and Informational Support both positively related to Unconditional Self-Acceptance and Introspective Tension (see Table 3).

Table 3: Correlations Between Social Support and Self-Acceptance Items

	Social Support	Emotional Support	Informational Support
Romantic Deception	.167	.147	.152
Online Trust	.090	.051	.132
Uncond. Self-Acceptance	.294**	.345**	.190*
Introspective Tension	.364**	.302**	.406**

*= $<.05$; **= $<.01$ (Spearman's Rho rank-order correlations)

Transitioning Online versus Creating New Persona

Participants were asked three questions (Did you use social media during your transition; As you progressed through your transition, did you document your progress on social media; When you began transitioning, did you terminate your existing digital persona and create a new one with your new gender identity) about digital media usage throughout their physical transition. Three in four (76.3%) responded yes to using social media during their transition, whereas 22.1% said no; 1.5% did not respond. In response to the second question regarding documenting transitional progress, 45.0% said yes, they did document their progress, whereas 30.5% said no, they did not; 24.4% did not respond. Lastly, the third question, did you terminate your existing online persona, yielded 14.5% indicating yes, and 13.7% indicating no; 71.8% of respondents did not answer this question.

Qualitative responses regarding transgender feelings that social media are a catalyst for gaining support and self-acceptance suggest that the majority of respondents agree it is helpful.

“There are no other transgender people in my area or they don’t feel safe coming out so social media behind a computer screen is safe.”

“Being online is helpful these days to the young children. I am 67, an elder leader in San Francisco’s transgender community, and have been featured in a few documentaries. Being online is helpful to me to reach out to others in need or that have questions about themselves or when support is needed.”

“I think social media as a whole is helpful. It helps people feel that they are not alone, weird, or unusual. The problem is that you can also get negative comments online.”

Deception and Support

This research question was intended to examine the relationships between a transgender individual’s perception of Social Support, Emotional Support, and Informative Support in relation to Romantic Deception and Online Trust. Higher levels of perceived Romantic Deception online was positively related to decreased amounts of perceived Social Support ($r_s = -.177$, $n=131$, $p=.05$) and perceived Informational Support ($r_s = -.183$, $n=131$, $p=.05$). Online trust was not significantly related to any of the three support items in this study. See Table 3.

Suburban residents felt significantly more accepting about online romantic deception ($r_s = -.235$, $n=131$, $p<.01$) than rural resident ($r_s = .256$, $n=131$, $p<.01$), indicating that rural transgender individuals have a more negative opinion of romantic

deception online. Suburban respondents also reported a significant, negative relationship with online trust ($r_s = -.235$, $n = 131$, $p < .01$). There was no urban significance with romantic deception or online trust. Table 4 shows the descending means for each item of the deception scale. There was not a significant relationship found between urban residents and romantic deception or online trust.

However, findings of thematic groupings of the qualitative suggest that deceptive practices may be common among respondents, latent or otherwise. Recall that previous research on digital deception included concepts such as altering information, negating information, and electing to not participate in social media.

“I only share enough information to get my needs met and questions answered.”

“I think my business is my business, so I avoided sharing anything that would directly out me to people I hadn’t already told but I wasn’t too shy about sharing pictures with rather androgynous clothing on, or with a little bit of makeup on if I felt it wasn’t too noticeable.”

“I haven’t fully come out on social media but have to people I know in real life. But I’ve massively hinted about how non-binary I am and talked about how my shorter hair cut made me feel closer to how I should have been all of my life.”

Table 4: Means of items about online deception

Statement	Mean
It is okay to represent oneself online using photos or information of other people to appear more desirable to others online.	3.89
It is okay for people to misrepresent themselves online to attract friends or romantic partners.	3.88
It is okay for people to continue to misrepresent themselves online in some way, even if doing so caused another person to feel hurt or victimized.	3.87
It is okay for people to lie about who they are online.	3.61
Presenting personal information online that is not accurate in order to attract friends or romantic partners online is acceptable.	3.57
It is not important to portray oneself accurately to others they meet online.	3.36
It is okay to maintain multiple romantic relationships online.	3.27
Exclusively online relationships are not real relationships.	3.26
I trust that personal information I receive from others online is accurate.	2.90
I am willing to maintain online relationships as long as they serve my needs.	2.90
I am willing to share personal information with others online.	2.82
Sometimes I view others I meet online to be ideal romantic partners before ever meeting them face-to-face.	2.78
Relationships where the interaction was entirely online or via technology and social media can be romantic relationships.	2.60
I would consider a person I met online, but never in person, a friend.	2.59
It is easy for people to let their guard down in exclusively online relationships.	2.44
I find it easy to be my 'real' self online.	2.34
People can feel an emotional connection or bond with someone in an exclusively online relationship.	2.19

Social Media Platform and Transgender Use

Facebook, with 2 billion users, was the dominant platform among respondents, with nearly four out of five respondents reporting regular use (see Table 4). While YouTube was the second-most used platform reported in this study, it appears to serve as a one-way street of content delivery, in that respondents didn't show any interaction with high YouTube use and the attitude scales. The more conversant, interactive social media platforms, however, were a different story.

Table 5: Means of social media use frequency (1 Never to 5 Multiple Times a Day)

Social media platform	M=
Facebook	3.84
YouTube	3.21
Instagram	2.61
Snapchat	2.51
Reddit	2.47
Twitter	2.45
Tumblr	2.07
Pinterest	2.05
Other	1.69

Qualitative responses gathered support these findings, with the majority of respondents reporting Facebook to be the most popular. Respondent reported:

“Facebook because people comment and show support.”

“I have had the best luck with Facebook because I can see who is commenting before I review their comments.”

“Facebook has more friends of the community and is more supportive.”

Many responses did demonstrate a preference for other platforms or felt unsure:

“Reddit best supports group goals.”

“Instagram because they like my pictures and I feel special.”

“I am not sure yet. None of them really stand out.”

Social media use across nine platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat, Reddit, YouTube, Pinterest and Other) was recoded into high users (Multiple times a day and every day), which were then correlated against the attitude scales. Both high Tumblr and high Twitter users showed a relationship with the Social Support Scales, with high Tumblr users relating negatively with all three (Social Support, $r_s = -.251$, $N=131$, $p < .01$; Emotional Support, $r_s = -.277$, $N=131$, $p < .01$; Informational Support, $r_s = -.177$, $N=131$, $p < .05$). Twitter users related negatively with only the Social Support scale ($r_s = -.176$, $N=131$, $p < .05$). None related significantly with the Unconditional Self-Acceptance scale, suggesting that self-confidence is an independent predictor of resistance to social media influence. However, high social media users had multiple, significant – and often negative – interactions with measures of deception, trust and confidence on various social media platforms. Recall that the response set for the Deception items was 1 Agree to 5 Disagree; the response set for the Self-Acceptance items was from 1 True to 5 Untrue. A negative relationship shows more support. High social media users were significantly more accepting of deception on social; were less trusting; and, for users of Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest, were more susceptible to self-doubt, responding negatively on the Introspection Tension scale. High Twitter and Facebook users showed the least online trust; high Twitter users were most supportive of Romantic Deception. High users of Reddit and YouTube did not relate with any of the attitude measures. (See Table 5).

Table 6: Correlations between High Social Media Users and Attitude Scales

Social Media Platform	Romantic Deception	Online Trust	Introspection Tension
Twitter	-.364**	-.280**	-.203*
Instagram	-.290**	-.219*	-.209*
Pinterest	-.287**	-.357**	-.311**
Snapchat	-.206**	-.087	-.157
Tumblr	-.227**	-.079	-.093
Facebook	-.229**	-.276**	-.109
Other	-.209**	-.206*	-.187*

*= $p < .05$, **= $p < .01$ (Spearman's Rho rank-order correlations)

Additional Findings

More than three in four respondents reporting being “out” to their friends (77.1%), meaning they had discussed their gender considerations. A little more than half (58.0%) were out to their family members and a third (33.6%) were out with their co-workers. Interestingly, 13.8% were either not out or chose to not answer this item. Being public with a discussion of being transgender did not relate significantly with any of the attitude measures.

V. DISCUSSION

The current study sought to describe the relationship between social media usage and transgender individual's perception of support and self-acceptance. Additionally, factors of location and deception were examined to distinguish what role these play in predicting a relationship between transgender individuals and social media. This study served to test the domestication of media theory in relation to transgender individual's use of social media and to examine the importance of social media in the digital age used by marginalized populations to gain support and self-acceptance. Practically, this study suggests ways in which transgender individuals and, possibly, other marginalized communities, can utilize digital communication to enhance self-acceptance and social support.

Overall, the current study has found support for the domestication of media theory prediction that social media platforms have been heavily adopted into the lives of the transgender community. Likewise, the transgender respondents have demonstrated that the methods of utilization of social media, regardless of goals, is varied and user dependent. Common themes of the qualitative responses can be grouped to suggest what practices are perceived to be the most effective, however, these do not necessarily hold true for the entire community. A relationship was identified to exist between many of the transgender respondents and social media (RQ1). Social Support through social media was positively related to a transgender individual's self-acceptance and Introspective Tension; Emotional Support on social media was positively related to Unconditional Self Acceptance and Introspective Tension, and Informational Support on social media was positively related to Introspective Tension. There was also a difference found between

transgender individuals who transition their online persona and transgender individuals who deleted their old social media profiles and created a new one (RQ2). Romantic Deception was found to be an unpopular concept among the transgender respondents, though online trust was high (RQ3). High social media use was found to oftentimes negatively relate with Introspective Tension and Online Trust but seemed to fuel support for Romantic Deception (RQ4). Lastly, location was found to relate to transgender social media usage and perceptions of Social-Support and Introspective Tension (RQ5). Southern respondents reported having greater amounts of Introspective Tension alongside negative perceptions of Social-Support. Further, rural respondents noted they feel negatively about Romantic Deception online (it is not okay), whereas suburban respondents felt more positively about Romantic Deception (it is more okay). Suburban respondents also reported significant online trust. It is heartening to see that most members of this community are not supportive of deception through social media – especially if it is harmful or potentially harmful to others. At the same time, though, high social media users seemed to suffer more with Introspective Tension – essentially self-doubt in the face of perceived lack of support online. This suggests that social media *can* be a source of support – but that doesn't necessarily mean it always *is* a source of support.

Perceived Online Support in relation to Acceptance and Location

Significant Introspective Tension was related to decreased levels of perceived online Social Support. Thus, the more Introspective Tension (I am not confident in the way I see myself), the less transgender respondents reported Social Support. It is possible that the dissonance and minority stress with which a transgender individual identifies

may be responsible for this relationship. Additionally, results suggest that an increased level of Introspective Tension was related to decreased levels of perceived online Informational Support with transgender respondents. The less internal confidence a transgender respondent reported, the less they perceived access and availability to Informational Support through social media. This research has not identified causation of this finding. It is not clear if less Informational and Social Support causes a transgender individual to have less internal confidence, or the contrary. Previous literature alluded to minority stress and variant gender identities resulting in high levels of internal conflict and less confidence in the ability to fit in with social norms. There was no relationship between location and transgender self-acceptance.

Perceived Online Support in relation to Location

This research aimed to discover how location related to the various uses of social media within a transgender individual's life. Respondents from the south reported less amounts of perceived Social Support, Emotional Support, and Informational Support than any other region within the U.S. This result was expected and consistent with previous literature findings that location is a predictor of minority stress. Recall that scholars have formerly identified the southern region of the U.S. as perpetually conservative, which likely instigates feelings of limited supporting resources. It is curious, however, that the southern respondents did not report higher levels of informational, emotional, and social support online due to being a minority in a largely conservative area. One could argue that having limited local resources to would lead to efforts to secure a larger online support system. However, it is not fair to assume that the desire to secure informational, emotional, and social support online is not present in southern transgender individuals. It

is likely that the online community a southern transgender individual has created is based largely off of the former identity, mostly consisting of individuals with conservative values that are consistent with the majority southern population. Another possibility is that southern transgender respondents feel insecure about interacting online due to high levels of perceived Romantic Deception and low levels of Online Trust, so they are not reaching out to find a support system for fear of being hurt or deceived. In any case, southern transgender individuals have been seemingly unsuccessful in domesticating social media to be advantageous in securing social, emotional, and informational support.

Transitioning Gender Online

There were three items within the survey asking about gender identity disclosure and social media usage. A noteworthy finding is that the questions, each more intimate and personal than the next, received fewer respondents than the previous one. Did you use social media during your transition was answered by 129 individuals (76.3% yes 22.1% no), did you document your transition on social media was answered by 99 individuals (45.0% yes and 30.5% no), and did you terminate your existing digital persona was answered by just 37 individuals (14.5% yes and 13.7% no). The descending frequency of respondents may suggest that transgender individuals do not yet understand their feelings about that time in their life or are uncomfortable with the process of negotiating gender identity online. This is interesting when compared to qualitative responses about social media being a catalyst to gaining support and self-acceptance. While responses were varied with valence, the majority suggested that social media is beneficial to the transgender community. The juxtaposition suggests that transgender respondents may have a positive association with social media's ability to provide

support and assist with self-acceptance *in general*, personal experiences seem to seriously impact the ability to respond to personal questions and recall intimate experiences. The minority stress and what may be sometimes described as traumatic experience of coming out online may still be a taboo subject, even for anonymous surveys such as this.

Deleting Social Persona and Creating a New Digital Identity

Regarding social media profiles and new gender identity, 14.5% of respondents indicated that they deleted their profile, rather than evolving their digital identity alongside their physical transition. This poses the question of motive, which cannot be answered within this study. It is a possibility that individuals with a more supportive and transition-positive network are more likely to evolve their profiles than deleting their existing social media accounts. This, again, is likely the result of location and upbringing; those with supportive individuals growing up have supportive networks online. Nevertheless, both deleting a profile and evolving a digital identity uphold the constructs identified in the domestication of media theory. Recall that non-use of media is a form of domestication. This is the user, in this case transgender individuals, acknowledging social media as a potential tool, considering their options, and deciding to not participate in that form of media. Creating a new profile is also a form of domestication of the media to serve the transgender individuals best interest. It is unclear which produces superior results based on this survey alone.

Deception and Transgender Portrayal on Social Media

A large portion of this study and guided literature was designated to examine deceptive messages used by transgender individuals to create and maintain online relationships. A reminder, the term deception, though frequently used and referred to

with negative intent, is not inherently unconstructive. Previous research has demonstrated the use of deception to be prompted by prosocial motivators; this paper does not attempt to stray from this concept or suggest otherwise. Means gathered from the adapted 20-question deception scale suggest that an overwhelming majority of respondents have negative opinions of deception. (See Table 4) The prompt, “I would continue to misrepresent myself online in some way, even if doing so caused another person to feel hurt or victimized,” resulted in a 3.89 mean on a scale of 1 (agree) to 5 (disagree). Thus, while deception can be useful for prosocial movements, it is an unpopular concept to many transgender-identifying individuals. This erasing of history of sorts, suggests that deception is at play on a subconscious level for many transgender individuals regardless of it being an unpopular concept, generally speaking.

Deception, Trust, and Community Type

Comparing location and community type of transgender respondents with Romantic Deception and Online Trust yielded interesting results. Suburban transgender were significantly more approving of romantic deception and online trust scales than urban transgender respondents, who had no significant relationship with either scale. It is curious what creates this distinction. Could it be that stable upbringing and economic status of individuals located in the suburbs are frequently privy to? There is likely a subconscious, possibly inherent, personality trait that suburban transgender individuals possess that promotes higher levels of online romantic deception and higher levels of online trust. Additionally, suburban transgender respondents have likely been exposed to different populations within their community, some of which may belong to the LGBTQ

community or are allies, whereas rural and urban transgender respondents may not have been.

Rural transgender respondents reported negative feelings about romantic deception online and about online trust. It is interesting that transgender individuals in a rural community type are the only respondents that reported negative feelings about romantic deception online and low online trust. Recall the mention of the local transgender, the concept that transgender individuals with limited local resources and support will turn to their computer, tablet, or phone to find informational, social, emotional support. However, this search for external support may not be initiated if rural transgender individuals have rarely, or never, been exposed to that kind of support before, during, and after their transition. Previous research has questioned the power of having like-minded, similar individuals within a marginalized individual's life. These community members are more supportive and empowering, and growing up around them or being exposed to them later on in life is likely an invaluable privilege.

Platform and Transgender Use

Facebook (m=3.84) was found to be the most popular platform used by transgender respondents, followed by YouTube (m=3.21). This finding is expected due to the 2 billion Facebook users worldwide.

Further, when asked what recommendations respondents had for gender-questioning individuals, many recommended avoiding social media during the transitional phase of the transgender life. A noteworthy qualitative finding was that Facebook is frequently viewed as the most supportive platform, as well as safest to use because of customization settings and filtering capabilities. In a related question

regarding what transgender individuals shared on social media, responses varied from ‘*nothing*’ to ‘*everyday feelings, struggles, and images*’. Regardless of preferred platform and what was posted during respondents’ own transition, many recommended staying away from digital media.

“Make sure your privacy settings are reviewed before posting.”

“Don’t use social media.”

“Stay off social media.”

“Don’t do it. You don’t need to broadcast yourself to millions to love yourself.”

“It is important to keep in mind that this information is public, so be prepared for at least some negative interactions.”

These findings are interesting because they imply a negative relationship between the transgender community and social media. While many of these respondents noted that they *did* use social media while transitioning, introspective reflections suggest that online transitioning should be met with caution, at best. An interesting juxtaposition is that many respondents described social media as a catalyst for coming out and said it offers more informational, emotional, and social support than face-to-face communication. Recall the 67 year-old transgender San Franciscan, who noted that using social media to help and support other transgender and gender-questioning individuals is beneficial. Additional responses included:

“Yes, it is a catalyst. You don’t feel alone in these feelings.”

“It was a way for me to reach out beyond my specific geographic area to get support.”

“Only put what you feel comfortable showing or saying online. Some people have nefarious traits. If you updating, doing a timeline of your transition is great for others to reference.”

“Come out on social media before making the transition as it's easier to show what you're going though when you're not hiding who you are from others.”

And so, it seems that regardless of preferred social media, transitioning online or not, social media is a frequently popular and positively regarded tool for gaining support and self-acceptance. In any case, both the use and nonuse of social media during a gender transition is a deliberate choice of that individual. Media is, in fact, entrenched in daily life and the transgender respondents within this study have demonstrated their domestication of social platforms.

Practical Implications

It was the intent of this study to answer questions regarding the relationship between transgender individuals and social media. Results have indicated that social media may be a powerful tool for the transgender community to use in attempt to gain social, informational, and emotional support, as well as more confidence and self-acceptance. It is clear, however, that location and community type can play a significant role in the perception of online romantic deception and online trust. This research hopes to demonstrate to rural and southern transgender individuals that securing an online support system is a possibility, regardless of their perceptions of online trust being low.

It has also been made clear that there is a relationship between introspective tension and perceived levels of online support. Perhaps understanding that low levels of

confidence often relates to negative perceptions of online support will enact positive change and promote transgender individuals to secure an online support group.

Lastly, it is hoped that individuals of other marginalized communities can use this information as a foundation to begin their domestication process. It is likely that transgender and other LGBTQ members have to *re-domesticate* their media and develop new digital habits that are aligned with their new gender identity and goal. So, this research largely examines the domestication of media theory in relation an evolved persona and asks how gender variant individuals navigate the complexities of societal expectations on social media. Previous literature has not alluded to re-domestication being a prospect in the life of a digital native. However, this research suggests that re-domestication may be necessary in certain circumstances. Transitioning to a new gender identity is likely one such circumstance.

This is not to say that the transgender community is *less than* or *worse at* domesticating social media, rather suggest that sometimes a domestication process may be disrupted and change course, or even be deleted and restarted. Even so, these process, conventional or otherwise, are ways in which digital audiences have made media adapt to their needs rather than adapting to the needs of media.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study has several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. First, sampling and compensation of transgender individuals were inconsistent, with a majority of respondents being recruited and compensated through a national survey panel. Sample size is also small, from a statistical standpoint, even though it contains data from a hard-to-reach and understudied population. Second, this

study was cross-sectional in nature, and although responses to research questions can be assumed based on theoretical predictions, the data cannot actually suggest causation. However, this research has established several relationships between these variables and this is an important first step before moving forward with research that involves longitudinal data. Future research may be able to suggest causal relationships between self-acceptance and introspective tension, with social, emotional, and informational support. Additionally, future research can examine the reason that southern and rural transgender individuals have negative feelings of online support. This research has speculated various reasons based off of previous literature, however, a qualitative examination of specifically rural and southern transgender individuals may defend or refute these suppositions. Lastly, in regards to the domestication of media theory, future research should examine how re-domestication is, if at all, comprised of different processes than initial domestication. Although the current research cannot answer this question, it is possible that re-domestication is very much so an active process, in which the individual navigates the process considering historical contexts within their life and responds appropriately, whereas initial domestication may be more of a subconscious endeavor.

In any case, it seems apparent that the domestication process will continue to evolve alongside digital media. This research has found that social media is a generally welcomed and utilized within the transgender community. Nevertheless, how the media evolves will continue to be the product of its users' manipulation alongside the nuances of societal standards. Perhaps there will come a time when this study is no longer useful to marginalized individuals and re-domestication is no longer a concept researchers

discuss or attempt to identify in communities that must recreate their digital reality. Until then, this study hopes to demonstrate that re-domestication is possible and support will always be available to those who are seeking. Though this is just one of the intricacies a member of the LGBTQ community must learn to navigate, it is possible. Because research says so.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: (SURVEY)

Social support on digital media has been characterized as positive and affirming messages. In the following items, please indicate how frequently you have received messages of support on a scale with 1 meaning agree to 5 disagree.

(1) Agree (2) Mostly agree (3) Neutral (4) Mostly disagree (5) Disagree

1. ____ When faced with difficulties, some people on digital media platforms are on my side with me.
2. ____ When faced with difficulties, some people on digital media platforms comfort and encourage me.
3. ____ When faced with difficulties, some people on digital media platforms listened to me describe my private feelings.
4. ____ When faced with difficulties, some people on digital media platforms expressed interest and concern for my well-being.
5. ____ On digital media platforms, some people will offer suggestions when I need help.
6. ____ When I encounter a problem, some people on digital media platforms give me information to help me overcome my problem.
7. ____ When faced with difficulties, some people on digital media platforms help me discover the cause and provide me with suggestions.

Some people feel their self-acceptance has been improved by the use of digital media platforms. Some people do not. Please indicate below how often you feel each statement is true or untrue *of you*. For each item, indicate from (1) true, to (5) false.

(1) True (2) More true than false (3) Equally often true than untrue
(4) More False than true (5) False

1. ____ Being praised online makes me feel more valuable as a person.
2. ____ I feel worthwhile even if I am not successful in meeting certain goals that are important to me.
3. ____ When I receive negative feedback online, I take it as an opportunity to improve my behavior and performance.
4. ____ I feel that some people have more value than others.
5. ____ Making a big mistake may be disappointing, but it doesn't change how I feel about myself overall.
6. ____ Sometimes I find myself thinking about whether I am a good or bad person.
7. ____ To feel like a worthwhile person, I must be loved by the people who are important to me.
8. ____ I set goals for myself with the hope that they will make me happy (or happier).

9. ____ I think that being good at many things makes someone a good person overall.
10. ____ My sense of self-worth depends a lot on how I compare with other people.
11. ____ I believe that I am worthwhile simply because I am a human being.
12. ____ When I receive negative feedback online, I often find it hard to be open to what the person is saying about me.
13. ____ I set goals for myself that I hope will prove my worth.
14. ____ Being bad at certain things makes me value myself less.
15. ____ I think that people who are successful in what they do are especially worthwhile people.
16. ____ I feel that the best part about being praised is that it helps me to know what my strengths are.
17. ____ I feel that I am a valuable person even when other people disapprove of me online.
18. ____ I avoid comparing myself to others online to decide if I am a worthwhile person.
19. ____ When I am criticized online or when I fail at something, I feel worse as myself as a person.
20. ____ I don't think it's a good idea to judge my worth as a person.

Some people feel it is easier to act or appear different online than portraying their actual self. Some people do not. Please indicate below how you feel about these statements on a scale of (1) agree, to (5) disagree.

(1) Agree (2) Mostly agree (3) Neutral (4) Mostly disagree (5) Disagree

1. ____ I have several friends online I have never met in person.
2. ____ I have had a romantic relationship where the interaction was entirely online or via technology and social media.
3. ____ I have presented personal information online that is not accurate in order to attract friends or romantic partners online.
4. ____ Exclusively online relationships are not real relationships. (reverse keyed)
5. ____ I have many Facebook friends I have never met in person.
6. ____ It is not important to portray myself accurately to others I meet online.
7. ____ I would enter into an online relationship without ever meeting the other person
8. ____ I enjoy meeting people online or through social media.
9. ____ I trust that personal information I receive from others online is accurate.
10. ____ I am willing to share personal information with others online.
11. ____ It is okay to lie about who I am online.
12. ____ I find it easier to be my "real" self online.
13. ____ I occasionally maintain multiple romantic relationships online.
14. ____ I sometimes misrepresent myself online to attract friends or romantic partners.
15. ____ I enjoy meeting new people online.
16. ____ I generally trust personal information I receive from others online.

17. ____ I am willing to represent myself online using photos or information of other people to appear more desirable to others online.
18. ____ I sometimes feel a strong emotional connection or bond with someone in an exclusively online relationship.
19. ____ I am willing to enter into an online romantic relationship before meeting the other person face-to-face.
20. ____ I find a sense of excitement in misrepresenting myself to others online.
21. ____ Sometimes I view others I meet online to be ideal romantic partners before ever meeting them face-to-face.
22. ____ I get a sense of thrill in misleading others online.
23. ____ It is easy for me to let my guard down in exclusively online relationships.
24. ____ I would continue to misrepresent myself online in some way, even if doing so caused another person to feel hurt or victimized.
25. ____ I scam or con others online.
26. ____ I am willing to maintain exclusively online romantic relationships or friendships for several weeks or more just for the sake of companionship or emotional support.
27. ____ I would never intentionally deceive another person online. (reverse keyed)
28. ____ I am willing to maintain online relationship as long as they serve my needs.

Do you use social media to interact with the LGBTQIA community?

- Yes, I read national blogs and news sources (please list in comments)
 - Yes, I read local/regional blogs and news sources (please list in comments)
 - Yes, I interact with my LGBTQIA friends on social networking sites
 - Yes, I use LGBTQIA forums on various sites like LinkedIn (please list in comments)
 - Yes, it is my primary source of LGBTQIA information
 - Sometimes. This is not my primary use of social media.
 - Sometimes. I have to be careful to protect my privacy.
 - No, I rarely look at LGBTQIA sites/media.
 - No, I maintain a low profile online.
 - No, I am concerned about being 'connected' to sexual content so I avoid it.
 - Other. Please list the sites you visit or explain your answer
-

The following 10 questions ask for open-ended responses. Please answer with as much or as little information as you feel comfortable. You are not required to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable. All responses are anonymous.

Tell me a bit about your transition (specifically digital) that took place alongside your physical transition? Did you transition electronically on social media, or terminate your existing digital persona and begin anew? Please be as specific as possible.

For the transgender, non-binary and gender diverse populations, do you find social media to be more helpful or hurtful in terms of gaining acceptance, equality, and social justice? Consider those who may be questioning or seeking support.

Would you describe social media as a catalyst to accepting oneself and coming out?

What kind of audience do you have online? Mostly support? Talk about your different profiles.

What platforms are most commonly used for seeking support within the transgender community? Why is it the most popular? (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr, other?)

What recommendations would you have to questioning individuals regarding social media? Is honesty the best policy when posting for their audience?

Could you compare and contrast audiences in person to online audiences? Which social media platform has the best audiences (allies) for those who are seeking support?

Is the benefit of social media for marginalized groups that one can be *themselves* publicly, in the safety of their personal space, or that one can craft their persona and present themselves in a way that may garner more support?

Do you find that being deceptive online may be more beneficial at times than being honest? Or is honesty the best policy for achieving support and equality?

Anything you want to add regarding social media in correlation with transgender communities?

To which social media platforms do you subscribe? Check all that apply:

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Tumblr
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Reddit
- ☐ Other _____

How often do you use social media? By use, we mean ‘consume’ and ‘respond’ – tweet, link, comment, publish, promote, etc.

- ☐ At least once daily
- ☐ At least 3-5 times per week
- ☐ I ‘look’ often, I ‘respond’ less than daily
- ☐ Less than once a week

- Only when prompted to look at something specific
- Other, please specify _____

On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is 'never' and 5 is 'everyday', choose how much you use the following social media platforms:

- Facebook: 1 2 3 4 5
- Instagram: 1 2 3 4 5
- Twitter: 1 2 3 4 5
- Snapchat: 1 2 3 4 5
- Tumblr: 1 2 3 4 5
- Pinterest: 1 2 3 4 5
- YouTube: 1 2 3 4 5
- Reddit: 1 2 3 4 5
- Other _____ 1 2 3 4 5

How important to you are each of these social media tools?

- Facebook: 1 2 3 4 5
- Instagram: 1 2 3 4 5
- Twitter: 1 2 3 4 5
- Snapchat: 1 2 3 4 5
- Tumblr: 1 2 3 4 5
- Pinterest: 1 2 3 4 5
- YouTube: 1 2 3 4 5
- Reddit: 1 2 3 4 5
- Other _____ 1 2 3 4 5

About how many of your 'friends' on social networks have you met in person?

- All of them
- Most of them
- About half of them
- A few of them
- None of them

What is your age group?

- Under 18
- 18-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71-80
- 80+
- Prefer not to say

What is your gender?

- Transgender (Female -> Male)
- Gender diverse/queer
- Transgender (Male -> Female)
- Other _____

In what region of the United States do you reside?

- Northeast
- Midwest
- South
- West

How would you describe your community?

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban

Who are you out to?

- Friends
- Family
- Coworkers
- None of the above
- Not applicable/No response

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