This Is Who I Am: The Selfie as a Personal and Social Identity Marker

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Prior studies have described selfies as narcissistic vehicles of self-presentation; by contrast, based on social identity theory, this survey of young adults (*N* = 472) examined how selfies signify forms of personal and social identity. Identity motivations for selfies, social capital affinity on social media, and racial identity were predictors of selfie intensity. Confirming other research, women were most likely to share selfies, but also reported differences to men in selfie identity motivations and contexts. Among LGBTQ participants, selfies for empowerment correlated with online activism.

Keywords: selfies, personal, social identity

Based on social identity theory, this study investigates the value of selfies among young adults—some of the most frequent selfie sharers. Of interest are identity motivations for selfies, the extent to which selfies relate to forms of social identity (with close friendship groups, gender, race, sexual orientation), how selfies represent performance of identity—doing/being who we are (Stets & Burke, 2000)—and how much selfies provide affirmation from valued others. Whether technological affordances and social media facilitate (or inhibit) these processes are also examined. Among young people, selfie-taking is often regarded as normative behavior (Pew Research Center, 2014; "Investigating the style of self-portraits," 2019; YouGov, 2017); however, an air of negativity surrounds selfie-taking, especially for women (Burns, 2015). Pamela Rutledge, director of the Media Psychology Research Center, stated, "Selfies frequently trigger perceptions of self-indulgence or attention-seeking social dependence that raises the damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't specter of either narcissism or very low self-esteem" (quoted in Barakat, 2014, para. 10). Prior research (e.g., Barry, Doucette, Loflin, Rivera-Hudson, & Herrington, 2017) does provide evidence for narcissistic motivations for selfies, but with Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010), it might be more insightful to see this "as a step toward self-reflection and self-actualization, rather than instances of uncontrollable self-absorption" (p. 30). Thus, the current study focuses on the positive potential of selfies regarding personal and social identity.

Some researchers (Hernández, 2009; Noland, 2006; Yefimova, Neils, Newell, & Gómez, 2015) have used self-photography to articulate the ways identity guides thought and activism by offering a method to build relationships within marginalized groups and allowing participants to speak for themselves. Tiidenberg

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and Gómez Cruz (2015) argue that selfies represent a practice of freedom. They are "narrative acts and signifiers of community belonging" (Tiidenberg & Tekobbe, 2014, p. 22). Posting selfies may teach community members new ways of seeing themselves or act as pleas for support (Tiidenberg & Tekobbe, 2014). In short, selfies can be forms of identity work in which the in-group of the individual is either implicit or clearly enacted. Identity motives for selfies may be particularly important among victimized groups, for example, women, racial minorities, and/or LGBTQ people (e.g., Wargo, 2017). For examples, see Figure 1. Therefore, using the theoretical lens of social identity theory, the current study examines the role of selfies in identity construction and maintenance among young adults and specifically among traditionally marginalized identities.

Figure 1. Examples of selfies as vehicles of empowerment or identification.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) posits that social identity stems from "that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). People construct group norms during interactions with valued in-group members and internalize and enact such norms as part of their social identity (Turner, 1981). Hogg, Abrams, Otten, and Hinkle (2004) contend that people possess many social identities and personal identities as there are groups they belong to or personal relationships they have. Context affects the salience and form of social identity. Thus, identities vary in subjective importance and value and situational accessibility (Kiang, Yip, & Fuligni, 2008). It is also important to note that these social groups (or categories) are not monolithic, but rather overlap with one another—a concept called *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989).

Via social media, personal and social identity cues are manifested. Stets (1995) describes person [*sic*] identity as a set of meanings tied to and sustaining the self as an individual. For social identity theorists, personal identity is "self-defined and evaluated in terms of idiosyncratic personal attributes and close personal relationships with specific other people" (Hogg, Abrams, & Brewer, 2017, p. 2). Selfie-takers may post shots relating to their personal identity, but also may include group markers (e.g., clothing, tattoos). Social media function as public displays of connection (Donath & boyd, 2004), very often involving pictures. Research indicates that, among young people, the camera is a frequently used mobile affordance for celebration of friends (Senft & Baym, 2015; YouGov, 2017). Instagram and Snapchat, both popular with 18- to 24-year-olds (Pew Research Center, 2018), provide opportunities to connect through pictures, including selfies.

Thus, we proposed the first hypothesis:

H1:   *Identity motivations (i.e., self-presentation, connection with others, feelings of empowerment, activism) will be positively related to selfie-taking.*

Selfies and Forms of Social Identity

In addition to how friendship group identity, gender, sexual orientation, and race identity relate to selfie-taking, loose affinity with like-minded others on social media was addressed: social capital affinity. Typically, people know the members of their social media networks (boyd, 2007), but many of these connections are not close, unlike family or friends. Also, some people are unknown offline. Prior research, outlined below, highlights the importance of social media connections regarding involvement with online content and in-group membership, specifically social capital affinity, friendship groups, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and activism.

Social Capital Affinity

Affinity is defined as sympathy marked by community of interest and likeness based on casual connection (Affinity, n.d.). Therefore, social capital affinity is the sense of community and likeness felt for

people online who are weak ties (Granovetter, 1983). Even though such people may be known only casually or not at all offline, their opinions may be of interest, and their presence may enhance the online experience by providing a sense of camaraderie. Walther and colleagues (2011) suggest that "social identification and peer group influence in computer-mediated communication should be a useful element in explaining a variety of influence effects in the new technological landscape" (p. 25). Related to this, Lange (2009) argues that affinity spaces exist online as social settings where people congregate to reinforce group connection or like-mindedness. Thus, it is expected that people are motivated by social capital affinity in posting selfies for intergroup communication (Katz & Crocker, 2015).

Friendship Group Identity

Group identity is particularly meaningful to young people (Williams & Thurlow, 2005). In terms of developmental tasks, late adolescence (17–21 years of age; World Health Organization, 2019) is partly associated with individualization from family, with an additional challenge in maintaining existing peer group identity (Manago, 2015) and simultaneously transitioning to new friendship groups. In doing so, young people invest a lot of time communicating on social media. In focus group discussions with young people, Walsh, White, and McDonald-Young (2009) found that such contact facilitated connectedness and enhanced feelings of belonging. They concluded that, because young people are developing their identity outside the immediate family, they rely on friends and peers to provide a sense of community. It is plausible to assume a relationship between friendship group identity and selfie-taking/posting.

Gender Identity

Gender identity is a person's experience of his/her gender (Human Rights Campaign, 2019; Morrow & Messinger, 2006). It may or may not be related to biological sex. Gender categories serve as a basis for social identity (Moghadam, 1992). Gender attributes are archetypally assigned to males and females, including expectations about masculinity and femininity, biological sex, and gender expression (Eller, 2015). Some people do not identify with specific, or all, of the aspects of gender assigned to their biological sex; they may identify as transgender, genderqueer, or nonbinary (Zastrow, 2013). It is possible, however, that gender identity might relate to selfie-taking because women are more likely to post selfies (e.g., Dhir, Pallesen, Torsheim, & Andreassen, 2016; "Investigating the style of self-portraits," 2019 Sorokowska et al., 2016).

Selfies and Gender

The dominant media discourse about selfies is that this is a "girl thing" (Burns, 2015; Mascheroni, Vincent, & Jimenez, 2015; Warfield, 2014; Williams & Marquez, 2015). A definition provided by the Urban Dictionary (Selfie, n.d.) states that selfies are

> stupid photos that 14-year-old girls take of themselves. They take these photos to let people know what they look like when nobody else is around. Tags are also used after the taking of a selfie when posted on a website of some sort. Some examples of these are: #nomakeup #twerk and other stupid words that girls think make themselves sound cool.

But research indicates that selfies are much more than that for women and girls. Katz and Crocker (2015) report that many of their interviewees felt that selfies told a story about their lives and elicited conversations within chosen in-groups: "Often selfies referenced shared experiences, favorite movies, people the users knew, or other ingroup referential images" (p. 1868). Also, Williams and Marquez (2015) show that women and men produce and consume selfies differently: Selfie poses conform to gender stereotypes, but also varying norms determine what is acceptable in selfies for men versus women.

Sexual Orientation Identity

Sexual orientation identity involves self-identification as a person enacting a specific sexual orientation with beliefs, traits, evaluations, group attachments, and behaviors connected with that group identification (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). A person who identifies as heterosexual likely experiences this form of social identity differently from other sexual orientations. Members of traditionally stigmatized sexual orientations face a challenge in developing positive, stable, and secure social identity within a cultural framework replete with negative stereotyping and treatment (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). But selfies may be used to gain affirmation from others who identify similarly; for example, Katz and Crocker (2015) mention that a participant reported "purposely using selfies to play with both male and female presentations of self and in general to identify as queer gendered" (p. 1866). Similarly, Duguay (2016) believes that selfies "reflect and propagate counter-discourses of sexuality and gender to oneself, peers, and publics" (p. 2).

Race Identity

Racial identity is often a frame wherein individuals categorize others based on skin color (O'Hearn, 1998). Skin color is one label that allows individuals to ally with or to distance themselves from those they consider like or different from themselves (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). By contrast, race identity may be treated as a social construction associated with sense of group belonging: the perception that individuals share a common origin with in-group members (Helms, 1993). Race identity is constructed in concert with in-group others and, in comparison to, out-groups, a point of connection that helps group members interpret the world and feel pride in themselves. Selfies may help in this process. Williams and Marquez (2015) found that Black and Latino respondents reported producing selfies more frequently than White respondents. In addition, Black and Latino women were fairly accepting of men in general taking selfies. By contrast, White women reported definitive rules about White men's selfies, favoring natural poses.

Accordingly, the second hypothesis predicted:

H2:   *There will be a positive relationship between levels of reported social identity (i.e., friendship group, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity identity, and social capital affinity) and selfie-taking.*

Aside from levels of identity, potential intercorrelations among demographic attributes, identity motivations for selfies, and selfie-contexts were of interest.

RQ1:   To what extent do gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity relate to selfie identity motivations and contexts?

Selfies, Empowerment, and Activism

Much selfie research targets self-presentation and impression management. However, Lindgren (2017) believes that "selfies, while in part reproducing social stereotypes related to power, can potentially be used to take control in various ways" (p. 119). As mentioned, extant research on selfies hints at showing solidarity, activism, and/or empowerment with an in-group. Other research about selfies and self-photography documents presence in ways that reinvent what it is to be, as in gender, disability, or societal status.

Karadimitriou and Veneti (2016) argue that selfies present opportunities for new forms of interaction between citizens and politicians. They suggest that political selfies are something apart from traditional media, that they provide a sense of intimacy, and, ultimately, may gain mainstream media attention. By attracting wider public interest, selfies can garner support for a cause. Eler (2017) cites the Standing Rock protests (see Figure 1, upper right photo), where Energy Transfer was to build a massive oil pipeline. Standing Rock selfies evidenced what was taking place there. When news circulated that law enforcement was using Facebook check-ins to track who was at the protest camp, more than a million people "checked in" at Standing Rock in support.

Consequently, the possible intercorrelation of selfie-taking, political/activist events, sense of empowerment, and reported online activism is investigated.

RQ2:   Are selfie-taking, forms of identity, gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity related to online activism?

Selfies and Social Media

Hess (2015) sees selfies as an assemblage of dimensions. The selfie is a version of self. The place where the selfie is taken is significant, whether it be at home, a vacation spot, or a restaurant. The perspective and the pose also speak about performance of self. Finally, the networked audience (on social media) that is invited to like or share the selfie also supports the motivation behind the selfie. Selfies posted on Snapchat versus Instagram versus Facebook convey something different and may be perceived differently by different publics.

Katz and Crocker (2015) found that, on Snapchat, the rapid exchange of selfies formed a dialogue. Snapchat facilitated interaction with friends where selfies depicted shared experiences, acquaintances in common, or other in-group images. For Duguay (2016), Instagram's affordances and content generation tools were said to encourage users to focus on aesthetic appearance, whereas Vine's limited editing tools and support of creative sharing allowed users to highlight personal experiences. These findings generate the final research question:

RQ3:   Are types of identity motivations for selfies linked to specific social media platforms?

Method

Survey participants (N = 472) were recruited online via Sona Systems, which provides subject pool software for universities. Students earned extra credit points for participation in Spring 2018. The sample was 53% White (n = 260). The remaining participants identified as Hispanic/Latino/Latinx (25%) = 117, African American (6%) = 26, Asian American (20%) = 95, and Pacific Islander (8%) = 39. Some participants reported more than one ethnicity. Most of the participants were female (73%; n = 343; male = 125, transgender = 1, other = 2). Fifty-one participants identified as LGBTQ (10.8%). Participants' average age was 20.69 years (range = 18–63; SD = 3.90).

Measures

Measurements included demographic information (age, gender, race, sexual orientation) and estimates of social media use. Scales measured selfie intensity (i.e., selfie-taking frequency, frequencies of selfie editing, use of filters); level of friendship group identification, a diagrammatic gender, race, sexual orientation identification measure, and a measure of affinity with others on social media (social capital affinity); measures of identity motivations and perceptions' of other people's motivations for selfies; selfie contexts and liking for other people's selfie contexts; and online activism. The participants' scores were the overall means of the scale items. Questions were closed-ended, and participants typically responded on a 5-point range (e.g., 1 = *very strongly disagree*, 5 = *very strongly agree*). The background and explanation of the scales appear below.

To measure social media and phone apps usage, two groups of items asked participants for their estimates of frequency of use. This allowed for face comparison with data from representative samples (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2018) and an opportunity to determine whether specific platforms/apps correlated with selfie motivations/contexts.

Frequency of Social Media Platform Use

Using measures adapted from Gil de Zúñiga, Garcia-Perdomo, and McGregor (2015), participants estimated their frequency of use of seven platforms (7-point scale). The most popular platform was Instagram, followed by Snapchat, YouTube, and Facebook. See Table 1.

Frequency of Phone Apps Use

Seven items adapted from Auter (2007) measured frequency of phone app use (7-point scale): camera, text messaging, games, music, utility (e.g., calculator) three-way calling, and voicemail. The most frequently used apps were texting, music, and camera use.

Table 1. Frequencies of Use: Social Media and Mobile Phone Apps.

How often do you use the following social media platforms? (range = 1–7)	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Tumblr	YouTube	Snapchat	WhatsApp	
Mean (*SD*)	4.13	3.66	5.78	1.77	4.81	5.75	1.87	
	(2.06)	(2.39)	(1.85)	(1.47)	(1.93)	(1.87)	(1.67)	
How often do you use the following options on your mobile phone? (range = 1–7)	Camera	Music	Voicemail	Texting	Games	Utility	Three way	Selfies
Mean (*SD*)	5.43	6.02	3.04	6.34	3.04	4.59	1.77	3.03
	(1.53)	(1.56)	(1.75)	(1.26)	(1.83)	(1.64)	(1.31)	(1.08)

Selfie Intensity

        This scale captured the effort invested in constructing selfies. Hess (2015) observed that, in composing selfies, people often add "filters and other digital manipulations to the image before disseminating them via social networks" (p. 1639). Selfies are re-presented and enhanced; thus, how often people take selfies is only a part of selfie intensity. Two additional items (5-point scale) asked how often participants edit and use filters on selfies. These items posted an alpha of .84.

Identity Motives for Selfies

        Prior qualitative and quantitative research (e.g., Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017; Krämer et al., 2017; Mascheroni et al., 2015; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015; Tiidenberg & Tekobbe, 2014; Warfield, 2014) has investigated selfies as symbols of self disclosure, self-presentation, self-promotion, signs of belonging, and sense of community. However, Hess (2015) found that "the same networked audiences that celebrate sharing selfies also lambaste those who somehow do not fit the technological and cultural decorum found online" (p. 1643). Similarly, Diefenbach and Christoforakos (2017) report that people are often critical of other people's selfies compared with their own. These findings reveal a disconnect between what people report about their own selfies and what they believe about other people's selfies. Therefore, participants were asked about their own selfie motivations (and contexts; see below) and those of others.

        Reflecting extant research, nine items (5-point scale) measured identity motivations for selfies. These included items assessing self-presentation motivations and connection with others. Factor analysis (see Data

Analysis section) indicated that these items formed a unidimensional scale posting Cronbach alphas of .89 for participants' motivations and .92 for other people's motivations. Analysis of separate items revealed that, for participants, "to illustrate something about me" (M = 3.51, SD = 1.08) posted the highest mean and "to manage others' opinion of me" (M = 2.70, SD = 1.19) posted the lowest mean. For participants' assessments of other people's motivations, the highest mean was "to receive positive feedback" (M = 4.21, SD = 0.90) and the lowest mean was "to identify with others like them" (M = 3.68, SD = 1.02).

Selfie Contexts

Where people photograph themselves affects how others perceive them (Lobinger & Brantner, 2015). Consequently, the context for the selfie is worthy of investigation "either in everyday situations or during special moments and events (such as travels)" (Lobinger & Brantner, 2015, p. 1854). Thus, participants were asked to evaluate how often (5-point scale) they take selfies in eight contexts: family occasions, holidays, vacation spots, bathroom, graduation, political event, activist event, or other (write in). Vacation spots posted the highest mean (M = 3.72, SD = 1.23); political events posted the lowest mean (M = 1.65, SD = 0.10). In addition, participants reported how much they liked seeing other people's selfies in these settings (7-point scale). Again, vacation spots posted the highest mean (M = 5.48, SD = 1.29); other people's bathroom shots posted the lowest mean (M = 3.25, SD = 1.58). Overall, participants did not particularly like to see other people's selfies (range = 1–5; M = 2.43, SD = 0.90).

Social Identity Measures

Friendship group identification. Research shows that for young people, members of their immediate peer group are important and influential (e.g., Larson, Whitton, Hauser, & Allen, 2007). Close friends, of comparable age and who exhibit similar ideas, allegiances, clothing styles, and other group markers, help young people to individuate from family and acquire a sense of strong in-group connection. According to social identity theory, social identity involves the value and significance attached to group membership—collective self-esteem. Thus, there is an element of social comparison in assessing social identity. Friendship group identification was assessed using six items adapted from the 16-item Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale to provide a measure of self-evaluation of identity with participants' closest group of friends. Luhtanen and Crocker conducted three initial studies to validate the scale, where it was found to positively correlate with collectivism scales. Because of space considerations, eight negatively worded items were omitted. Of the remaining eight items, two were excluded because they were a differently worded repetition of others in the scale. The remaining six items were representative of the original dimensions of the scale and have been effectively employed in prior research. The items were (1) "The group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am," (2) "I'm glad to be a member of my group," (3) "Others respect my group," (4) "I feel good about the group I belong to," (5) "I participate in the activities of my group," and (6) "Others consider my group good." In the present study, the scale showed high internal reliability (.91) and the overall mean was high (M = 4.14, SD = 0.68, range = 1–5). The means did not differ across gender, White/non-White, or sexual orientation (each median = 4.00). Also, the scale was positively related to the other identity measures (see Table 2).

Table 2. Scales.

Selfie intensity: *never/rarely/sometimes/often/very often* (α = .84; *M* = 3.00, *SD* = 1.10)

    How often do you take selfies?

    Edit your selfies?

    Use filters on your selfies?

Identity motivations for selfies: I take selfies to . . . (*strongly disagree–strongly agree*)

Participant (α = .89; *M* = 3.14, *SD* = 0.88)

Perceptions of others' motivations: I think other people take selfies to . . . (α = .92; *M* = 3.95, *SD* = 0.75)

    Show achievement

    Illustrate something about me

    Feel better about myself

    Identify with others like me

    Keep others up to date with my life

    Feel empowered

    Receive positive feedback

    Manage others' opinions of me

    Other (please write in)

Online activism: How many times have you performed the following activities? (*never/once/twice/three or more times*; α = .78; *M* = 1.70, *SD* = 0.62)

    Sent an e-mail to a political official when requested by a group you support

    Sent an e-mail to a political official under my own volition

    Signed an online petition

    Donated money to a political organization

    Followed or liked a political figure on social media

    Tweeted or commented about a political official using social media

    Asked a question of a political figure using social media

Friendship group identification: Please say how much you agree with following statements about your closest group of friends: (*strongly disagree–strongly agree*; α = .91; *M* = 4.13, *SD* = 0.68)

    The group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am

    I'm glad to be a member of my group

    Others respect my group

    I feel good about the group I belong to

    I participate in the activities of my group

    Others consider my group good

Social capital affinity–social media: Thinking about the social media platform you use most, say how much you agree with the following statements: (*strongly disagree–strongly agree*; α = .88; *M* = 3.58, *SD* = 0.75)

    The opinions of those visiting this platform interest me

    Interacting with people visiting this platform makes me feel like part of a community

    When visiting this platform, hearing what others say enhances the experience

    Communication with the people visiting this platform raises points of interest for me

    Being with people visiting this platform makes me want to follow up on things

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Intercorrelations for social identifications				
Identification	1	2	3	4
1. Race/ethnicity				
2. Gender	.36**	.58**		
3. Sexual orientation	.27**			
4. Friendship group	.14**	.24**	.24**	
5. Social capital affinity–social media	.12*	.12*	.15*	.30**

Note. Identification measures: range = 1–7; race identification: *M* = 4.40, *SD* = 1.71; gender identification: range = 1–7; *M* = 5.58, *SD* = 1.58; sexual orientation identification: range = 1–7; *M* = 5.67, *SD* = 1.77. Friendship group identification: range = 1–5; *M* = 4.13, *SD* = 0.67; social capital affinity–social media: range = 1–5; *M* = 3.58, *SD* = 0.75.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Gender, sexual orientation, race identification. "When individuals categorize themselves as group members, the ingroup becomes included in the self and individuals recognize the characteristics of the ingroup as representing part of themselves" (Tropp & Wright, 2001, pp. 586–587). The current study assessed gender identification as distinct from actual gender. Participants were asked how much they identify with their gender without reporting at that point how they categorize themselves in terms of gender. The inclusion of in-group in self-measure separately assessed identification with gender, sexual orientation, and race (as ascribed groupings). It consisted of seven pairs of circles varying in degree of overlap. Participants selected the pair of circles that best represented their level of identification with a specific in-group. Its visual representation captured in-group identification as the interrelationship of self and group. This measure provided data on how salient an individual's identity was relative to gender, sexual orientation, and race; however, it did not measure intersections of all three. Identities, specifically social identities, do overlap with one another (Crenshaw, 1989). Some evidence for this was present in the current data in that each identity measure was intercorrelated with the others (see Table 2).

Social capital affinity (SCA)–social media. Social media feature heavily in the lives of young adults. This scale measured sense of affinity with like-minded individuals who may be weak ties (Granovetter, 1983) on social media. Five items measured affinity with others on the participants' favorite platform. For example, they were asked how much they agreed that "interacting with people on this platform makes me feel like part of a community." The scale posted a Cronbach alpha of .88.

Online activism. Participants were asked to evaluate the frequency with which they performed seven activities (1 = *never*, 2 = *once*, 3 = *twice*, and 4 = *three or more times*), for example, followed or liked a political figure on social media and tweeted or commented about a political official using social media. The scale posted a Cronbach alpha of .78 and correlated with reported selfies taken at political (*r* = .33, *p* < .001) and activist events (*r* = .35, *p* < .001). Measures are summarized in Table 2.

Data Analysis

Scale items were coded positively: A high score indicated higher race identification, identity motivations, and so forth. To detect latent factors among identity motivations for selfies for participants and

for participants' perceptions about other people's motivations for selfies, we employed factor analysis using principal axis factoring and Oblimin rotation. Regarding participants' responses about themselves, one major factor accounted for 52.8% of the variance; however, a lesser factor emerged accounting for 6.8% of the variance in motivations. Inspection of the rotation revealed that there were strong cross-loadings for all of the variables. Thus, a unidimensional scale was constructed for participants' identity motivations. For the participants' perceptions of other people's motivations for selfies, only one factor resulted. This accounted for 58.8% of the variance in selfies. A paired sample t test revealed a significant difference in scores for participants' reported selfie-taking motivations (M = 3.10, SD = 0.88) compared with their perceptions about other people's motivations for selfie-taking (M = 3.95, SD = 0.75), $t(457)$ = −19.00, p = .0001. Subsequently, bivariate tests using Pearson's correlation coefficients were performed, followed by analysis of variance (ANOVA) testing to assess differences among groups of participants. Regression analysis determined the relative value of selfie intensity correlates..

Results

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between identity motivations for selfies and selfie intensity. The bivariate correlations between selfie intensity and the identity motivations were positive and statistically significant (see Table 3).

Table 3. Correlations: Identity Motivations for Selfies and Selfie Intensity.

Identity motivation	r
Feel better about myself	.46
Feel empowered	.45
Receive positive feedback	.42
Keep others up to date with my life	.40
Identify with others like me	.39
Illustrate something about me	.38
Show achievement	.35
Manage others' opinion of me	.32

Note. All relationships significant at p < .01.

Hierarchical linear regression with stepwise entry evaluated the relative strength of each of the identity motivations. The dependent variable was selfie intensity and the independent variables were identity motivations for selfies (including other people's motivations). Four identity motivations remained in the model: to feel better about myself (β = .23), keep others up to date (β = .16), receive positive feedback (β = .17), and to illustrate something about me (β = .13). These four predictors explained 34% of the variance in selfie intensity, $F(4, 459)$ = 45.77, p < .0001. However, when the

identity motivations scale (average composite score for all the identity motivations) was added to the model, the other variables were excluded (β = .53), $F(1, 462) = 181.78$, $p < .0001$. Hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that forms of social identity would be positively related to selfie intensity. Each of the social identity measures was intercorrelated with the others. These intercorrelations did not indicate multicollinearity (see Table 2).

The bivariate tests revealed positive relationships between selfie intensity and closest friendship group identity ($r = .13$, $p < .01$), race identity ($r = .15$, $p < .01$), and SCA-social media ($r = .30$, $p < .01$). Again, regression analysis with stepwise entry was conducted with the dependent variable as selfie intensity and the independent variables as race identity, closest friendship identity, and SCA-social media. Two forms of identity remained in the model: SCA-social media (β = .28) and race identity (β = .11). These variables explained 9% of the variance in selfie intensity, $F(2, 461) = 25.13$, $p < .0001$. Hypothesis 2 was partially confirmed.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 inquired about the relationship among gender, race, and sexual orientation, and selfie motivations and contexts.

Gender Differences

A one-way ANOVA test revealed that women ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.04$) posted the highest mean for selfie intensity; men posted $M = 2.28$ ($SD = 0.98$), and transgender and other posted $M = 2.5$ ($SD = 2.12$), $F(3, 466) = 24.83$, $p < .0001$.

To assess gender differences in identity motivations and contexts, we employed two multivariate analyses of variance with gender as the independent variable (see Table 4): In the first test, the dependent variables were the identity motivations scale, other people's identity motivations, and the motivation items composing the identity motivations scale, overall $F(9, 445) = 32.18$, $p < .0001$. In the second test, the dependent variables were the selfie contexts (see Table 4). The results indicated that, for motivations, there were statistically significant differences on the means (higher for women) on all items except for other people's motivations and "to manage other people's opinions of me." For selfie contexts, all of the means were statistically different (women higher) except for political and activist events, overall $F(7, 457) = 10.30$, $p < .0001$.

Table 4. Gender Differences: Selfie Identity Motivations and Contexts.

Variable	Men M (SE)	Women M (SE)
Motivation		
Overall identity motivations	2.70 (0.076)	3.30 (0.047)
Overall other people's motivations	3.82 (0.067)	4.00 (0.041) ns
Achievement	2.97 (0.10)	3.38 (0.062)
Something about me	3.20 (0.094)	3.65 (0.058)
To feel better	2.53 (0.11)	3.30 (0.065)
To identify with others like me	2.61 (0.10)	2.92 (0.062)
Keep people up to date	3.12 (0.10)	3.60 (0.06)
Feel empowered	2.50 (0.10)	3.36 (0.063)
Get feedback	2.72 (0.11)	3.36 (0.067)
Manage other people's opinions	2.57 (0.11)	2.78 (0.066) ns
Contexts		
Holidays	2.63 (0.11)	3.59 (0.063)
Vacation spots	3.06 (0.10)	3.96 (0.062)
Bathroom shots	1.68 (0.11)	2.37 (0.064)
Graduation	2.68 (0.12)	3.48 (0.072)
Political event	1.66 (0.09)	1.66 (0.054) ns
Activist event	1.70 (0.10)	1.94 (0.063) ns

Note. Range = 1–5. Statistically different at $p < .0001$.
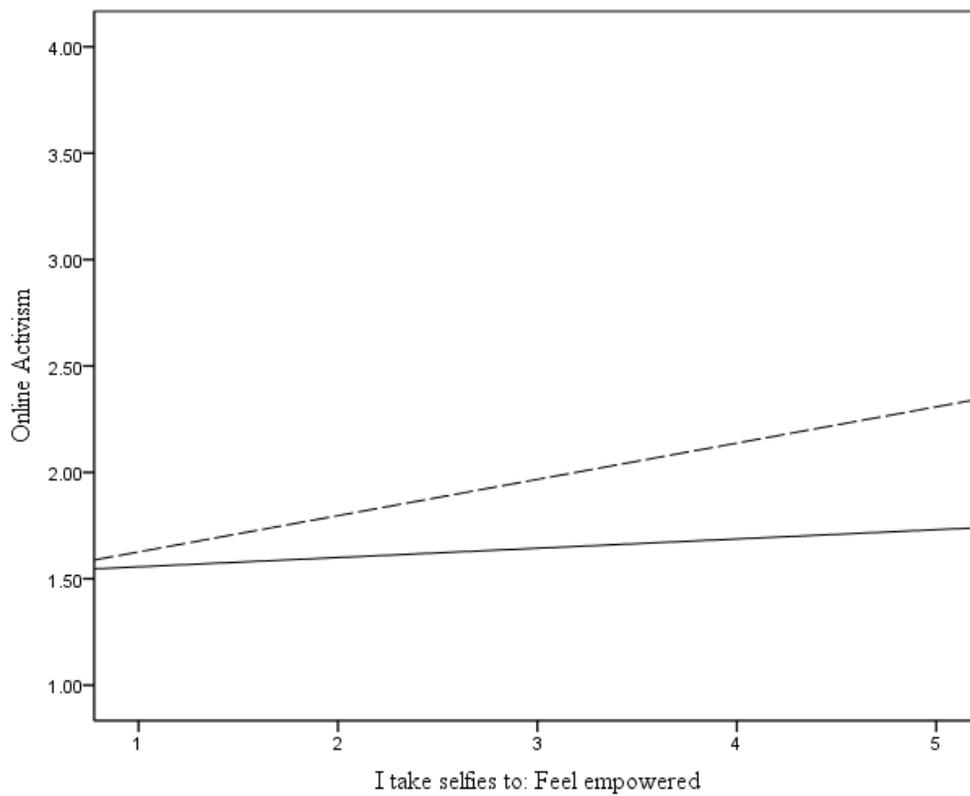
Race and Sexual Orientation

Identity motivations. Bivariate tests indicated that Black participants were more likely to report the motivation to take selfies to "identify with others like me." A one-way ANOVA confirmed the bivariate relationship, $F(1, 468) = 6.90$, $p < .001$ (Black: $M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.10$; other race: $M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.12$).

Selfie contexts. Non-White participants were more likely than Whites to report taking selfies at family occasions, $F(1, 468) = 7.0$, $p < .01$ (non-White: $M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.08$; White: $M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.08$); graduation, $F(1, 468) = 4.38$, $p < .05$ (non-White: $M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.09$; White: $M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.09$); and activist events, $F(1, 468) = 6.72$, $p < .01$ (non-White: $M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.08$; White: $M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.07$). Black participants were more likely to report taking selfies at activist events, $F(1, 470) = 4.00$, $p < .05$ (other race: $M = 1.84$, $SD = 1.14$; Black: $M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.41$). For Black participants, Twitter use and using activist events as selfie contexts were correlated (Twitter: $r = .12$, $p < .05$; activist event: $r = .09$, $p < .05$).

LGBTQ participants were more likely to take selfies at political events, $F(1, 471) = 4.91$, $p < .05$ (heterosexual: $M = 1.62$, $SD = 0.96$; LGBTQ: $M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.19$), and activist events, $F(1, 471) = 8.61$, $p < .01$ (heterosexual: $M = 1.81$, $SD = 1.28$; LGBTQ: $M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.30$).

Research Question 2 asked about relationships among selfie-taking, gender, race, sexual orientation, and online activism.

LGBTQ participants were more likely to take selfies to feel empowered, $F(1, 467) = 4.63$, $p < .05$ (heterosexual: $M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.20$; LGBTQ: $M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.18$). Similarly, LGBTQ participants were more likely to say that they take part in online activism, $F(1, 460) = 18.70$, $p < .01$ (heterosexual: $M = 1.65$, $SD = 0.58$; LGBTQ: $M = 2.04$, $SD = 0.77$). Overall, online activism was related to feeling empowered via selfies ($r = .13$, $p < .01$). Therefore, we used analysis of covariance to investigate a possible interaction regarding sexual orientation in the relationship between selfie empowerment and online activism. The results confirmed that LGBTQ participants who feel empowered by selfies are also more likely to report online activism, $F(1, 460) = 20.12$, $p < .0001$ (heterosexual: $M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.58$; LGBTQ: $M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.77$). See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Sexual orientation interaction for selfie empowerment and online activism.

------- LGBTQ, R^2 Linear = .07
_____ Heterosexual, R^2 Linear = .008

Research Question 3 investigated the relationship between identity motivations for selfies and social media platforms. Table 5 illustrates the bivariate relationships between identity motives for selfies and selected social media platforms. Instagram posted the strongest correlations with identity motivations for selfies and selfie intensity.

Table 5. Correlations: Social Media Platform Use and Identity Motivations.

Variable	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Snapchat
Show achievement	.14**	.12**	.19**	.13**
Illustrate something about me	.13**	.11*	.15**	.20
To feel better	.06	.21**	.25**	.16**
Identify with others	.08	.12**	.22**	.13**
Keep others up to date	.12*	.14**	.22**	.17**
To feel empowered	.06	.25**	.23**	.14**
To get positive feedback	.02	.19**	.26**	.14**
To manage impressions	.03	.14**	.15**	.11*
Selfie intensity	.16**	.24**	.36**	.27**

$*p < .05. **p < .01.$

Discussion

Based on social identity theory, this study investigated correlates of selfie-taking among young adults: identity motivations for selfies and forms of social identity (friendship group, gender, sexual orientation, race identity, and social capital affinity–social media).

Participants reported that they take selfies to say something about who they are, connect with others, feel better about themselves, feel empowered, and to a lesser extent, identify with others like themselves. The highest single-item selfie motivation correlates of selfie intensity were to feel better and to feel empowered. However, it was clear that all of the assessed motivations contributed to form a holistic contribution to selfie-taking. Selfies can be used as tools to communicate multiple identity dimensions. The group is one foundation for identity (who one is) and what one does (role vis-à-vis significant others) is another, both of which complement the self as an individual with idiosyncratic personal attributes (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Race identity contributed to selfie intensity in this sample. Race identity speaks to the inclusion of in-group in self. Both off and online, race is a group marker and can be celebrated in a variety of ways: language, clothes, hair, music, tattoos. People can see and compare others who are like them and those who are not via selfies. However, race identity was not correlated with any racial group in our study; thus, it may simply be that those who are high identifiers with their racial group feel the need to celebrate it via selfies. Interestingly, the item "to identify with people like me" was statistically related to identifying as Black. This is consistent with findings from Williams and Marquez (2015) who reported that African Americans regard selfies as a positive way to present to others of their race. Also, being Black, Twitter use, and use of activist events as selfie contexts were intercorrelated. Other research (e.g., Florini, 2014) highlights African American use of Twitter for "signifyin'" Blackness, which involves "millions of Black users

on Twitter networking, connecting, and engaging with others who have similar concerns, experiences, tastes and cultural practices" (Florini, 2014, p. 225).

Although closest friendship group was a correlate of selfie intensity, the strongest predictors were gender (women) and social capital affinity–social media. All three of these variables were intercorrelated; therefore, this may provide evidence of intersecting identities among women. Women reported stronger feelings of close friendship identity and affinity with those in their social media networks, some of whom are close and others who are not well known although like-minded and similar. Also, women, when compared with men, reported differing estimates of motivations for selfies and contexts for taking them. In fact, men's estimates for motivations and for contexts were low. This may indicate that men have motives and contexts for selfies not included in the survey. Conversely, it may be that young men just do not choose to take selfies. Selfies may be more of part of being a woman in a cultural sense, especially as women show a greater presence on social media and report relational reasons for doing so (Krasnova, Veltri, Eling, & Buxmann, 2017).

Women and LGBTQ participants were more likely to report taking selfies to feel empowered. LGBTQ participants were also more likely to use activist and political events as selfie contexts and to engage in online activism. This, then, is something apart from the narcissism that is often associated with selfies. Instead, it appears that selfies can be used to make a personal and/or political statement. Indeed, the findings suggest a complexity behind this apparently simple act. This is not to deny evidence of ambivalence about posting selfies, as demonstrated by the disconnect between estimates about participants' own motives for selfies and others' motivations. That aside, the data imply that social media users value the opportunity to tell others something about themselves and to engage with others in the process by posting selfies. Arguably, this is productive on a personal level in terms of enacting identity, but also on a wider network level in connecting with others whether the common denominator is gender, race, and/or sexual orientation, or all of these. Considering the #MeToo movement and the push to prohibit transgender people from serving in the military and even to eradicate the definition altogether (Green, Benner, & Pear, 2018), online empowerment, affirmation, and activism via selfies require further research.

Although not directly tested, the results suggest that issues of intersectionality are at play (Crenshaw, 1989). Individuals who are Black, LGBTQ, and women may negotiate between and among their personal and social identities and use selfies to reify group belonging. Identities interact to inform the experiences of each individual. Women of color, transwomen, and LGBTQ members tend to be disproportionately oppressed in society. In addition to this structural intersectionality, issues of political intersectionality—conflicting political agendas—also invoke additional negotiation. For example, White feminism has long excluded women from racial and ethnic minority groups and women who are economically disadvantaged (Watters, 2017). How does the intersectionality of these identities influence selfie-taking, posting, and social identity salience? Further research on intersectionality, identity, and selfies is warranted.

Social capital affinity on social media was another significant predictor of selfie intensity. Social capital affinity relates to sense of online community. Senft and Baym (2015) describe a selfie as a gesture that can send and may be intended to send different messages to different individuals, communities, and audiences. Duguay (2016) also conceptualizes selfies as part of a conversation, stating, "Messages

communicated through selfies can feature in conversations reinforcing dominant discourses within existing publics or form counterpublics, gathering people around alternative and opposing discourses" (p. 2). The selfie, then, acts a tool of connection and community-building via social media.

Duguay (2016) describes social media as "non-human actors" (p. 2) in communication interactions. Social media form part of the selfie assemblage (Hess, 2015) whereby they provide a networked audience that is invited to like, comment, and/or share the selfie. As is typical of this age cohort, most participants reported taking selfies at least sometimes. Instagram and Snapchat were the most popular platforms. Instagram posted the strongest relationship with selfie intensity; however, the data provide evidence that specific social media platforms are outlets for specific types of identity motivations for selfies. For example, Instagram potentially allows selfie producers to receive positive feedback, Twitter is a platform on which one may feel empowered by posting a selfie, and Snapchat offers selfie-takers opportunities to say something about themselves. Other research might investigate platform attributes that encourage certain types of selfies, conversations about selfies, and solidarity with selfie producers.

As a cross-sectional study using a convenience sample, no claims are made about causal relationships or external validity. However, the sample was typical in terms of social media use and selfies (Pew Research Center, 2018). The findings form a basis for understanding trends about identity and selfie-taking among young adults. Regarding the subsamples, however, there was a clear gender bias (women), the racial composition of the sample was not reflective of minorities in the wider population, and, in fact, the LGBTQ presence was greater than that estimated in the U.S. population. Gallup (2017) estimates that approximately 4% identify as LGBTQ; here, about 11% identified as LGBTQ. Regardless, the statistical outcomes reflect existing research in this domain. Overall, the scale reliabilities were good, but future research should expand the measurement of selfie motivations, contexts, and types of activism. Experimental designs could manipulate contexts, poses, and software involving selfies. In addition, qualitative research such as focus groups would add depth to these findings.

Maddox (2018) suggests that selfies negotiate between lived experience and mass media and allow individuals to say, "This is in fact how I look, and this is how one should understand me" (p. 32). Selfie-takers craft their identities online and communicate them to others in their chosen audiences/communities. This study sheds light on the ways in which online practices such as selfies enhance people's lives. As well, the findings indicate that potentially marginalized groups can use selfies to say something about who they are and, in doing so, feel a sense of affirmation, connection, and empowerment. This goes against the perception that taking selfies is a frivolous, narcissistic practice with little meaning or value.

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